Rural Proofing – Notes from Community Partnership Board workshop, December 2023

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Rural proofing is a process of reviewing policies through a rural lens, to make them fit for purpose for those living and working in rural communities

Why should Community Partnerships use a rural proofing approach?

All decisions made by the Community Partnership will have an impact on rural areas as all Community Partnerships have rural areas. It is important that these decisions impact fairly on rural areas taking into consideration the challenges they face and their unique assets. Rural proofing helps to

- enable the achievement of the Community Partnership's stated priorities through delivery of impactful projects;
- understand the scale of that direct and indirect impact and what actions need to be taken for the best outcome for rural areas;
- contribute to local growth by achieving good economic, environmental and social solutions;
- demonstrate understanding of the area, encourage collaboration and commitment to equity for all;
- provide a framework to work with which supports opportunities to discuss, reflect and evidence whether the Community Partnership's priorities and subsequent projects are equally accessible to all
- influence the development of stronger projects/services to ensure equity.

Table Discussion:

- Is your Community Partnership **actively** Rural Proofing?

- What more could you do?

Notes from table discussions:

Overall, while there are elements of Rural Proofing going on across Community Partnerships and a definitive acknowledgement of rural concerns and challenges, notes highlight that more could be done in an **active** manner to make it more visible and prioritised. For some, this workshop was the first time they had heard the terminology as there have been changes in Board membership.

There was a good knowledge of the challenges and issues faced by rural communities - transport/accessibility was specifically referenced by each table and the associated costs, including discussion on equity of funding for rural areas being a key concern. Also noted was recognition that challenges are constant and that to measure success, logic modelling and outcomes focused approaches could prove useful.

Challenge was noted where rural residents have to travel to urban centres for provision of activities/groups. It was felt that taking services to communities could be beneficial - mobile provision, hubs and digital inclusion all cited as key, and that understanding volunteering data/trends would be useful to pursue a collective drive for volunteers where needed. One CP cited that attracting volunteers from parishes to attend meetings was difficult to give a rural perspective.

Various notes were recorded for activity/ideas that could be explored to solve some of the rural challenges:

- Making people aware what is available (Connecting Communities, Katch, Buzzabout)
- Explore bike/moped schemes
- Engagement – go to them
- Ask the right questions
- Look at costs – e.g. comparison of £3 single from Campsea Ashe to Wickham market v. £2 single from Beccles to Norwich
- Accessibility – where do they actually want to go?
- Impact on young people getting to education
- Santander offer for travel
- Transport Hub – Suffolk on Board
- Promote in a way that people understand
- Reliable alternatives to cars
- Entertainment – Young People
- 21st century Community hubs
- 'Box Up' – lots of potential
- BT Adastral Park apprentices
- Accommodation – Elizabeth Court, Aldeburgh – visiting students
- Asset mapping
- Employer Supported Volunteering (ESV)

It is important to capture these notes as they could prove useful to identify specific schemes of work to take forward/prioritise. However, while many of these are potential solutions to specific rural challenges, each Community Partnership should consider **how to apply a rural lens** to all the work they do. For example, if an activity is set up to address social isolation in an urban area, how could residents in surrounding rural villages also access it with equitable ease to those in the urban area? Or do they need to – could the activity travel into the rural areas on a regular basis or something be set up in mirror in the rural area if social isolation is also a concern there?

It's not to say every action/decision should be replicated, duplicated or extended; however, it is about showing the consideration of rural pressures has been made.

Commitments:

3 commitments were made by the board to take forward.

1. To seek/gather data on rural issues and gaps and use this to 'Pitch to Parishes' so they understand why engaging is important and what it can do for their rural community.
2. To coordinate information on what is available for, to and in, rural communities.
3. To nominate a Rural Champion at Board level and in each Community Partnership to drive this work forward.

Summary:

The board have clearly identified where the gaps are and have shown support to continue and increase Rural Proofing. The 3 commitments made, if actioned, would be good steps toward building a foundation of rural proofing in the community partnerships based on data and local intelligence/expertise. It will require coordination, monitoring and regular review at Board level which could be led by the Board Rural Champion. I would also highly recommend each community partnership commits some time to reconsider their individual rural proofing toolkits.