

Wednesday 16 September 2009

National Farmers Union
Agriculture House
Willie Snaith Road, Newmarket
Suffolk CB8 7SN

East of England Rural Forum

“Health & Well-Being”

Minutes

Attendees

Ann Lovesey	Anne Marie Hamilton	Brian Goodwin
Brian Hayes	Cheryl Rose	Cindy Winn
Claire North	Cllr Hazel Williams	Cllr Judith Watson
Cllr Mick Page	Cllr Stuart Pile	David Wood
Frances Bedding	Jo Collins	John Buchanan
John Mullen	Karen Livingstone	Kate Sayer
Lynne Byrne	Lynn Collison	Mags Lambert
Marie Francis	Michael Mack	Mike Appleyard
Mike Render	Ruth Gibson	Phil Bennett-Lloyd
Philip Wilson	Rachel Carrington	Sheila Childerhouse
Suzanne Harris	Charles Taylor	Claire North

Apologies

Caron Britton	Cllr John Goodwin	David Thompson
Ed Gregory	Jacque Grant	Graham Hedger
Greg Luton	Jasmine Joolia	Jim Gledhill
John Barker	John Carrick	John Day
John Yates	Kate Belinis	Keith Brown
Kirsten Bennett	Louise Hobbs	Martin Collison
Michael Bond	Mike Carter	Nick Phillips
Nicola Currie	Pam Forbes	Philip Hayes
Richard Woolley	Sarah Hughes	

Speakers

Ruth Gibson, Senior Policy Advisor, Commission for Rural Communities
Karen Livingstone, Director of Strategic Partnerships, NHS East of England
Sheila Childerhouse, Chair of Norfolk PCT Board
Brian Goodwin, Rural Community Council of Essex
Mike Render, Forestry Commission

1. Welcome

In the absence of John Yates, Pat Holtom chaired the meeting. Pat welcomed the members and told them that their feedback about the Rural Forum and its meetings were always appreciated but that it was a two-way process and it would be useful if the Rural Forum meetings were widely disseminated to members' respective agencies..

2. Matters arising from meeting 10 June

The minutes of the meeting held in Swaffham on 10 June 2009 were **agreed** unanimously.

3. **News and Reports**

The next RAF Chairs meeting will be held at Westminster with the new Rural Affairs Minister, Dan Norris, on 24 September 2009. The topic for the meeting is Access to Benefits and the members were asked if they had any views on the topic to make them known to David Wood to enable the Chair of Chairs, John Yates to take those opinions with him on behalf of the EERF.

The Housing Sub Group was meeting next week so there was no report.

The Learning and Skills Sub Group met the previous evening (15 September) and the report which had been handed to the secretariat that morning will be circulated with the minutes of this meeting.

Anne-Marie had asked that the recent information and rate relief proposals from the Federation of Small Businesses be added to the EERF Steering Group Agenda. The next Forum topic is the Recession & Rural Economy and the FSB will be invited to present on how small rural businesses are coping with the recession and what would help them. David Birch was suggested as a good FSB representative to make such a presentation.

4. **East of England Rural White Paper**

A scoping document for the proposed White Paper had been prepared on behalf of the Rural Forum. The Steering Group backed the proposal as long as it was understood that it complimented and referred where appropriate to the Rural Development Framework. David Wood made a presentation to explain the key objectives and the process involved in gathering the evidence and consultation through to the launch of the final document. Funding for the paper was still to be guaranteed but it was important to make our Rural White Paper public in order to bring influence to bear on the rural agenda for all three political parties prior to the election.

After a brief discussion, the following proposal was **agreed** unanimously by the members

“The EERF accepts the recommendation of the Steering Group to produce a regional Rural White Paper and supports actions for its delivery.”

5. **Health Service provision to rural communities**

Ruth Gibson, Senior Policy Advisor, Commission for Rural Communities, presented on the work she and the CRC does to support rural communities and identify good practice. She explained about CRC's response to the recent NHS consultation and the major life events project they have been working on. CRC was reviewing its plans for commenting on the provision of health services in rural areas and would welcome any views from the Forum.

Comments from the floor included recognition of the role of carers and the support they needed and ignorance of what support was available and how to apply resulting in lack of take-up.

6. **Regional health strategy and rural communities**

Karen Livingstone from the strategic health authority presented on this topic. She explained the shift in emphasis towards prevention and healthy life-styles and the work they are doing in trying to reduce the numbers of premature deaths and trying to improve the health and well being of rural communities by working with partners. An important factor was how people can help themselves at home too especially regarding smoking and obesity. She recommended looking at the Erpho website for more information.

Karen was asked about the difficulties of obtaining dental care services especially to the house bound. She described the creation of personal health care plans for those people with long term illnesses.

7. Provision of health care by a rural PCT

Sheila Childerhouse, Chair of Norfolk PCT Board, presented on health issues facing rural communities and how they are addressing the key ones to ensure that the rural population receive as good a service as possible. The challenge was achieving the right balance between centralised specialist resources (eg hospitals) and availability of more local health care for straightforward services by GPs (eg diagnosis and simple surgery procedures). Another example was the use of schools to reach young people regarding health advice.

8. Linking services and people in remote rural areas

Brian Goodwin of Rural Community Council of Essex talked about a pilot Village Agents project that they have recently started. There will be 12 agents employed to contact communities in three different areas in Essex. The aim of the project is to improve their well being and quality of life through linking people and services in isolated rural areas.

Brian was asked about the danger of the agents creating a lot of additional reactive activity that would be costly for public sector to respond to. He pointed out that by resolving problems on the spot and removing inappropriate enquiries, the agents would help public bodies to improve their response.

9. Future of Forestry Commission Wood and Forests Consultation

The Forestry Commission's Mike Render explained the link between obesity, ageing and well being and the opportunities for exercise and enjoyment provided by the natural environment. He discussed a consultation the Forest Commission have launched regarding the future of the public estate and forest lands.

10. Discussion and Key Points

Cllr Stuart Pile raised the issue of the problems of transport in rural areas to reach hospitals, doctors, dentists, etc. In Hertfordshire, a new project called Travelwise provides free trips to and from appointments for those entitled to free transport and advise on routes and costs for those who do not qualify. It is a model that can be used elsewhere and that the cost incurred by no-shows or late cancellations is much greater than the cost of providing the transport and therefore makes a viable option. The web address for this and other information for the Travellink programme is www.hertsdirect.org/travellink and the contacts are: Trevor Mose 01707 369517 (NHS Herts) or David Neilan 01992 588652 (Herts County Council).

Philip Wilson expressed his surprise that, with the improving technologies in the home – broadband, digital revolution, etc – this issue had not been raised. Karen Livingstone explained that there were some advances in telemedicine as a method of assistance and is in fact on the increase. There is a “doc at home” system that can send information back and forth eg you can input blood pressure or temperature statistics or be reminded to get the patient to take pills, remember to drink water, etc. The small business community had been asked for ideas on how they can help people with health issues at home in rural communities. PCTs are trying to bring care closer to people who need them by providing say health visitors in village halls, etc.

In answer to a question from David Wood, Karen recognised that there was at present an emphasis on “opening hours” availability of health care services and that the NHS needed to look at physical access (distance) regarding availability which was pertinent to rural communities.

11. Summary, Actions and Close

Pat thanked the speakers for their very interesting and wide ranging presentations. Life expectancy is often linked to people's social habits (smoking, alcohol, etc) and deprivation levels. Models such as Herts' Travelwise would be of huge benefit to the rural communities and hopefully more like them will appear.

12. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next Forum is **9 December 2009** and the topic will be The Rural Economy.

Members were asked for suggestions for suitable venue to be given to Mags Lambert of the Secretariat.