

EERF Steering Group: Minutes

9th March 2011 at 2pm
NFU Newmarket

Present

Pat Holtom (Chairman & Norfolk)
Suzanne Harris (Vice Chairman & Essex)
Martin Collison (Vice Chairman & L&S Subgroup)
Frances Bedding (Suffolk)
Anne Marie Hamilton (Bedfordshire)
Kate Belinis (Hertfordshire)
John Simmons (EEDA)
David Wood (Secretariat)

Apologies

Martin Aust (Housing Subgroup)
Mick Carr (GO East)
Kirsten Bennett (Cambridgeshire)

1. Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 18th January 2011 November were **agreed**.

2. Review of Actions

OECD

Attended by Fran who reported that report demonstrated to Defra importance of its role and extent of rural activity. Defra would be adopting a 'Rural Champion' role linking with other departments such as BIS on POs, DCMS on tourism, DfE on schools. Recent statement by government, included its recognition of fuel poverty, broadband, access to services, transport and affordable housing as priorities for rural.

Noted that number of business bank accounts may be a better indicator of rural businesses and start-ups than VAT registrations which missed many small rural businesses.

LEPs

- BIS was resourcing (£4m) which included creation of evidence base by LEPs (~£20k/county)
- LEPs would lead on bids to Euro programmes for their areas
- Focus on employment and economic growth but unclear how this included micro and home based businesses
- SE Midlands plans had no rural content
- Essex, Kent and East Sussex had received rural paper and was considering rural BB as a priority
- A Rural Board was being considered by New Anglia in which Martin was actively supporting David Lawrence (Norfolk) and Tim Passmore (Suffolk)
- Gt Cambs and Peterborough still forming but appears to be urban driven.

Vital that EERF ensured LEPs understood and included rural areas in their plans. This must be argued objectively from value of GVA and jobs. Rural remoteness compounds social issues caused by financial deprivation.

Action Point: **John** to distribute information on structures and people for EE LEPs.

Farming (FAB)

Pat and Marie Francis were discussing informally but FAB wished to maintain its own direct route to Defra because of importance of food production to EE.

3. Rural White Paper

Action Planning Events

John was pursuing EEDA purchase order for workshops.

4. EERF Development

Financial

David had not had chance to pursue funding, which included writing to top tier authorities. Fran (SCC), Philip Wilson (ECC) and Derek Ashley (HCC) were identified as key contacts.

Links to local rural forums/partnerships would be important. Suzanne offered to synchronise Essex RP with EERF for a joint event.

Broadband

Activity across region with desire to use BB Delivery UK capital with ERDF/RDPE funding to support local plans. Needed Defra to act on de minimus limit (€200k) to enable better use of RDPE 'Songbird' funds.

The desirability of a BB sub-group was discussed and agreed in principle. Specific individuals should be asked to join rather than via open invitation. Suggestions included Nicola Currie (CLA), Peter Martin (FSB), Penny Wallace (Writtle College via SH) and Keith Brown (Essex FSB via SH).

John will alert RDPE team of plan to form sub-group.

Action Point: **Fran** to discuss BB sub-group idea with David Sillet

L&S Subgroup

Martin reported future of sub-group uncertain given end of EEDA

Housing Subgroup

Recognised the continued importance of this topic for rural communities and need for EERF to continue to be active. A new chairman and reinvigorated membership was required. This included need to include private landlords which led to suggestion of Nicola Currie (CLA) and Tim Isaac (Quantity Surveyor).

Action Point: **David** to pursue renewal of housing sub-group

5. EERF Planning

Need to plan events around priorities expressed in RWP Action Plan, which could be BB or housing.

Need to use events to derive input for LEPS.

Consider food and farming as topic for September jointly with FAB which could provide update on progress of 2020Vision.

Next Meeting, 8 June

Agreed to return to topic of BB and use to drive forward this RWP number one priority.

Action Point: **David** to plan BB meeting for 8th June

6. EERF Secretariat and Finance

David reported on expenditure and progress to date. SG approved expenditure to date and forecast to end of year 2010/11.

All believed that the work of EERF and its continuation was beneficial but recognised challenges in current financial and policy climate.

7. DONM & AOB

The RWP working party were meeting at **2pm on 23rd March** to sign-off RWP Action Plan

The Steering Group **agreed** to meet on **8th June** after morning meeting of members at NFU offices.

Meeting Closed