



Community Action Group

Wednesday 30th May 2012, commencing at 10:00am

RCCE Offices, Threshelfords Business Park, Feering CO5 9SE

MINUTES

Present:

John Brown (Chair) (JB)
Suzanne Harris (SH)
Daisy Martlew (DM)
(Minutes)
Ken Edwards (KE)

Darren Smart (DS)
Julie Nelson (JN)
Sheila Jackman (SJ)
Paul Williams (PW)
Philip Wilson (PhW)

Chris Rust (CR)
Rachael Price (RP)
Paul Murphy (PM)
Brian Goodwin (BG)

1 Welcome & Introductions

1.1 Apologies

Apologies had been received from: Melanie Rundle, Gary Raynor, Judy Cuddeford, Don Gibson, Joy Darby, Linda Riley, Pooneeta Mahadeo

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting on 21st March 2012

2.1 Accuracy

Approved for accuracy

2.2 Matters Arising

PM – Item 3.1 Good for Essex: progress is encouraging. The team are looking at how volunteer centre information can be included on the website to provide up-to-date opportunities.

DM – Latest figures from GR are that over 90 groups/activities and 250 people are registered on the website.

3 Village Agents Project: an update (Brian Goodwin)

There are now around 2500 registered users across mid-Essex, since October 2009, and about 7500 things have been done for those people, with approximately three things per person. The service continues to grow, including both new customers and returning customers. We are two and a half years into the project but people are still learning about us and looking for support. We have funding from ECC until the end of March 2013. We have a carry-over from last year – a mix of ECC and NHS money – which ECC have topped up. ECC will put together a plan for the longer term and wider service delivery. We are concerned that they are keen to put the project out to competitive tender. The benefits are seen as multi-agency so ECC are keen to see others invest in the project. ECC wants to take the lead and are now actively seeking contributions from organisations. The future and concept

looks good, but we want to make sure that the independence of the service is protected.

PhW – Are there any opportunities in the procurement process? Expand the geographical spread and include more organisations, which will attract more funding and achieve an economy of scale?

BG – We could comfortably cover at least three more areas without increasing our overheads. The concept applies to both urban and rural areas, but the delivery mechanism might be slightly different. In Gloucestershire the service is countywide, with a mixture of village agents and community agents (urban areas). Most of Essex is rural.

PM – There is a lack of clarity about when to fund and when to commission.

KE – Combined budgets should help

BG – We've done a lot of work with GP surgeries and there could be money coming from the new commissioning groups. ECC have their eye on District Council funding but have agreed that if they can't get the funding programme completed by the end of July they will come back to us. The project has been mentioned in the Whole Essex Community Budget and our concept is secured. We've been very open about our performance and the benefit to society, but unsure whether we can afford to be that open if it goes to competitive tender. We will need to protect our interests – both RCCE's and the service integrity – these are key issues for us over the coming months.

ACTION: BG to keep CAG informed

BG

4 The Localism Act – a follow-up to ERP meeting of Jan 2012

SJ – We are trying to persuade parish and town councils to contribute to their Local Plan. All Local Plans are at different stages and all parish/town councils need to think about their own area and contribute ideas. If their ideas are accepted they may not need to do a Neighbourhood Plan.

SH – The community engagement team at RCCE are trying to get across the differences between Neighbourhood Plans and Parish Plans, what you achieve from each and what's more appropriate. There is a sense that Neighbourhood Planning is more suited to the north and very rural parts of the UK that want development. The majority of Essex is more resistant to development and wants more control over it.

SJ – EALC arranged Neighbourhood Planning training earlier in the year – 140 people registered on the first course so we had to have two days. RCCE's presentation made the difference between the community led plans very clear. The Government is implementing new code of conduct protocols for parish and town councils on 1st July. A working group and monitoring officer will prepare the protocol which will be sent to all parish and town councils to hopefully adopt. All will then have a formalised code of conduct and the process of disputes will be resolved. If the councils do not make a decision by July then they will be left out of the system, but can opt in later.

JN – Sarah Sapsford and I are looking at putting together a training event in the Autumn.

SH – Gareth Bradford’s presentation from the January ERP meeting is very useful, available on the [ERP website](#), Q&As available in the [minutes](#) on the website.

5 Volunteering in Rural Areas

DS – We found 24 voluntary groups in Braintree that we knew nothing about and have put them in contact with 19 funding streams. Groups are often very small and don’t know what help and support is available. Many don’t see themselves as volunteers just good neighbours.

KE – We’ve recently completed a Parish Plan in my village (Galleywood) and one of the recommendations for the parish council is to seek someone to act as a volunteer liaison officer to be a voice for voluntary groups and support them.

DS – Networking works really well. Libraries do this by organising events to match people up and we are also able to find out and record all the voluntary groups this way. We do rely on the groups to provide us with up-to-date information though. A contact point is essential – people need to know where to go to get advice.

PM – The more we’ve tried to stimulate and formalise volunteering the more formal it becomes and ends up destroying the appeal of volunteering, so perhaps we should leave the good neighbours alone. There is a trend towards accessing support services online, although the danger for rural areas is that there is no face-to-face contact. We should use existing networks, libraries and different organisations working in the community to get across the message.

BG – Lots of people need support and many are willing to help, but making them meet is difficult. A broker who is a trusted voice is needed as the individual needs to feel comfortable and confident. Once you get people engaged it is easy for them to start volunteering, but over time they come across difficult questions they can’t answer etc. and they need someone to go to for support to stop them just walking away.

PM – It is very resource-intensive to sit on a library bus or CVS and wait for people to come to you.

KE – Perhaps there is a solution, but it is inefficient and ineffective – it is about priorities.

JN – Perhaps organisations could get together to have working lunches? This is a good way to share information.

PM – Work needs to be done about the nature of volunteering opportunities. The roles are not developed enough to attract those seeking employment and

they don't want to make a long-term commitment, so the roles need to be flexible.

DS – An increasing number of volunteers have to be CRB checked and trained which doesn't suit short-term roles. CRB checks are now done online though, so the process is much quicker. Silver End community magazine has an extremely comprehensive list of local groups in the back. Perhaps the CAG could ask parish and community magazines to run a simple piece about grant opportunities and where to go for help?

ACTION: SH and DM will draft an article to be distributed to magazines, using contacts from the magazine competition and Rural Services Survey.

**SH
DM**

6 Future Direction

6.1 CAG Terms of Reference

All to consider (document attached) and discuss at next meeting

All

6.2 Priority issues/Future meetings

SH – Three areas from the strategy primarily come under the CAG's remit – Active and Caring Communities, Improved Access to Services and Affordable Housing.

PM – Two things that I have picked up from this meeting have been Village Agents and volunteering – perhaps there is a lobbying role here for us?

JB – I see this group's role is to stimulate and promote activities to groups out there and from time to time invite them to us.

SH – We have no statutory authority to tell anyone what they should be doing. Our historic purpose is to share information and add value with potential to initiate new projects. The resource of the ERP as a whole is what members have to offer and in terms of dedicated resources, this is part of DM and SH's time. There are potential actions we can take, but we need to be supporting what others are doing and not 'reinventing the wheel'.

DS – For me the CAG is about networking. We have impacted on things but don't have the evidence to support it.

SH – The meeting on 31st July will highlight what the ERP has achieved and plans for the future.

PW – We need more emphasis on 'rural' and rural proofing decisions for communities.

ACTION: DM and SH will look at an action plan for the CAG and circulate before the next meeting

**DM
SH**

6.3 Community visits

SJ – Formalised visits to Wimbish Passivhaus development have ceased

BG – Thurrock has a vibrant volunteer centre, active in the urban areas but not rural. It might be interesting to find out why that is the case?

DM – We've been contacted by Sue Mitchell, a lady that set up and runs a community café in the new Highwood village hall. It's a monthly café for local and nearby residents to meet, enhancing community spirit and friendship. The local police, village agent and Council Information service also attend every month. Sue has invited us to come and visit the café to meet the people and see how it is run.

ACTIONS: DM will liaise with Sue and JB to arrange a date to visit, and then circulate to the CAG. Visit to Nazeing to be arranged for July. Thurrock in Oct/Nov

DM

7 AOB

7.1 Forthcoming events/information sharing

SH suggested that we invite a representative from the Health and Wellbeing Board to come and present at a full ERP meeting.

PhW suggested that it would be helpful to have case studies on how GP commissioning works across the county.

ACTIONS: DM/SH will invite a representative from the Health and Wellbeing Board to the full ERP meeting in October. DM will work on getting three clinical commissioning case studies.

**DM
SH**

RP – Doddinghurst and Herongate have established a parish funded community bus service. A £2.5m project in the Dengie peninsular is also underway. A working group was established to identify needs and priorities. Getting representation was difficult but every parish responded. It has now gone out to tender and will save a significant amount of money plus parishioners will get an improved service.

7.2 Date of next meeting

Wednesday 29th August, 2:30pm at RCCE Offices, Feering

DM will circulate meeting dates post August

DM