

Chairman's Update: 4th June 2007

Steering Group and Vice-Chair selection

The biggest news is that I have selected the Steering Group and Vice-Chair through the process agreed at our meeting in Riccall - full details of those appointed are here under the relevant web-page. Firstly, can I thank all those who were nominated. I did need to think hard about the process and was guided by your advice at the Riccall meeting. I feel the Steering Group now represents rural economic, social and environmental elements and covers a mix of funders, deliverers and receivers, including LEADER experience. I have also tried to ensure a regional spread, and except for South Yorkshire, have achieved this. I have changed the Defra /GOYH input to secretariat level to reflect our 'independence'. I would thank David Fraser of GOYH for all the support to date and of course we will still be liaising as he is Chairman of the Practitioners Group.

Having selected them I will be putting them to work to help ensure the RAF is doing its job and representing the rural customer voice. To concentrate the mind I have asked that the 10 Rural Priorities from the Y&H Framework are added to the website so that we can double-check our work against these. I will be discussing with the new Steering Group members that they take the lead for sub-groups within the wider membership related to these, so your membership forms will be consulted to see which priorities are most relevant to you and your organisation!

My next job was the Vice-Chair selection. This was very difficult, but I have asked Shelagh Marshall to take on this role (her profile is also on this site). Shelagh will give us a connection to the Y&H Assembly and to the sub-regional democratic structures. She will become a member of the Steering Group and act as first reserve to attend formal meetings in my stead. My first job after returning from holiday is to go and see her and I may ask her to contribute to the website.

Thus the team is in place and we are off!!

Working with the Sub-Regions

Whilst previous Chair, John Napier, did a marvelous job sorting out the top line structures, I think we will need to try to do the same now at sub-regional level and also work out how we 'rural customer proof' the local delivery groups (sorry about jargon). We are not auditors, we are there to keep asking and nagging on behalf of the customers and making sure the bureaucracy and systems do not allow top down agendas to override with distant ideas. With her experience I am hoping Shelagh will help us with these structures so we ensure we are in contact all through the chain. How Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP) and Local Area Agreements (LAA) fit in aggregating delivery streams will be a major clarification exercise for me. Maybe a 'Eureka' moment is due!! The wider membership has a major role to ensure we are getting our foot into these more local structures, so please think about RAF and customer when you go to these meetings.

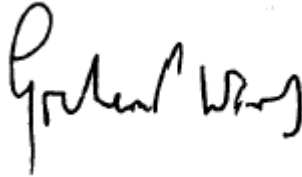
Meetings and Events

To get myself informed I have been visiting the membership and going to meetings. I will continue to do this so if you want to see me please contact the secretariat. Most recently I have had discussions with Howard Petch from the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) about our relationship with them. The CRC are basically a national rural advocate particularly on the social side of rural communities, but have limited resources regionally and even less below these levels, so we are an important partner and I will be developing our relationship with them. Stuart Burgess, CRC Chairman, is visiting the region later in June so if you are involved please champion how RAF can help his objectives.

Last week I attended a launch event of the Rural Access to Services and Intervention Framework and Practitioners' guide. This was commissioned by Y&H Assembly (event chaired by Wendy Bundy) and the RAF have contributed funds. This was about a practitioners' guide to sorting out the thought process when looking at services. It basically brings together a lot of on the ground experience so some deliverers will say 'I know all that'.

However it is a logical way to approach problems and gives a framework to use when working with local groups. It removes thinking in silos (more jargon) and makes those with a specific interest widen processes to develop partnerships. How often have you seen the school mini-bus parked all day when it could be used for other groups? It is called 'Getting the Solution Right' and I can recommend it. The guide and framework are available via the links page.

Thank you

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Graham Ward". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'G'.

Graham Ward