

**Yorkshire and The Humber Rural Affairs Forum
Management Group**

Minutes of Meeting on 22nd June 2010 at NFU Offices, York

Present

Tony Pexton	Yorkshire and The Humber Rural Affairs Forum (Chairman)
Cllr Symon Fraser	Humber Rural Partnership / Functional Sub-Region
Katy Calvert	West Yorkshire Rural Partnership / Leeds Functional Sub-Region
Cllr Peter Sowray	North Yorkshire Rural Partnership / York & North Yorkshire Functional Sub-Region
Kelly Jevons	Local Government Yorkshire and Humber
Pauline Teale	Yorkshire Forward
Mike Feist	Government Office Yorkshire and The Humber
Steve Willis	Food and Farming Forum
Cath Lee	Federation of Small Businesses
John Hoare	Council for the Protection of Rural England
Janet Thornton	Rural Action Yorkshire & Humber & Wolds Rural Community Council
Graham Ward	Sustainable Development Board
Mike Newby	Audit Commission
Helen Wright	Yorkshire and The Humber Rural Affairs Forum (Executive Manager)
Helen Reynolds	Yorkshire and The Humber Rural Affairs Forum (Support Officer)

Apologies

Chris Barnett	Humber Rural Partnership / Functional Sub-Region
Dave Melling	West Yorkshire Rural Partnership / Leeds Functional Sub-Region
Gary Fielding	North Yorkshire Rural Partnership / York & North Yorkshire Functional Sub-Region
Howard Petch	Commission for Rural Communities
Peter Nottage	Natural England
Richard Ellison	National Farmers' Union
Shelagh Marshall	Social Sector

	<p>noted that the Food and Environment Research Agency (FERA) is providing Accountable Body status for the Yorkshire Forward money and East Riding of Yorkshire Council is providing support in respect of the finances generally. In respect of funding - YF has confirmed its agreement to carry over the remaining £18.5K into the 2010/11 financial year. Together with the £25K already allocated, this will make a total of £43.5k to spend in 2010/11. MF confirmed that the full allocation of £20K from Defra was now in place for 2010/11.</p> <p>Action: Executive Manager to convene a first meeting of the Finance Sub-Group.</p> <p>Minute 4 - South Yorkshire Rural Partnership HW has taken very preliminary soundings. It is not a straightforward issue - and may be better looked at once new government agendas have bedded down. It is possible that <i>rural</i> may not be a priority for South Yorkshire at this time. Peter Mirfin from Barnsley / Bill Cross from Rural Action Yorkshire are possible contacts in respect of this area.</p> <p>Action: Chairman and Executive Manager to revisit issues around a Rural Partnership in South Yorkshire in the Autumn.</p>	<p>Executive Manager</p> <p>Chairman / Executive Manage</p>
5 / 16	<p>Rural Affairs Forum - Review of Membership</p> <p>HW updated on the review of the RAF membership which is currently taking place (paper circulated) - pointing-out that it is still work in progress. It was felt that local authorities should have the opportunity to be members of the Forum - particularly in light of the new government's agendas. It was felt that there were some gaps in organisation representation and that these needed to be filled. Members were asked to identify groups which they felt should be included.</p> <p>Action: Groups and organisations not already included on the Rural Affairs Forum to be identified; details to be forwarded to the Secretariat.</p> <p>The Terms of Reference state that all new membership applications should be put to the Forum for consideration. It was proposed that a more open-door policy may be more appropriate. It was agreed that it is vital to have a balance of public and private sector members, including those involved in delivery. It was felt important that YHRAF retains its strong voice. It was agreed that a more open-door policy should be adopted.</p>	<p>All</p>
6 & 7 / 17	<p>The Government's Programme - Some Implications for Rural Areas & the Government's Spending Review Framework - Criteria for Public Spending and Implications for the Work of the Rural Affairs Forum</p>	

A paper was circulated which provided a brief overview of the potential impacts for rural areas of the Government's Programme. Discussions took place around relevant issues.

Details from the Spending Review Framework were circulated. Attention was drawn to the criteria identified by the Government to ensure value for money in respect of public spending. Discussion followed as to how the RAF / rural issues fair against the Framework.

Points raised in relation to the RAF were:

- The need for closer engagement with local authorities (they will be in a pivotal position) and rural communities.
- There are positive opportunities for rural areas ie social enterprise initiatives, housing and renewable energy.
- It is important to keep up-to-date.
- Allocation of resources - is it needed / is it cost-effective?
- Can it be done locally?
- A mature and constructive approach is the best way forward.
- Working within constraints - is the Manifesto sound and fit for purpose?
- The need to collate and demonstrate good practise in the Region - projects that have impact.
- Need for an effective local evidence base, linking in needs and opportunities - to push the case for *rural* with Local Enterprise Partnerships.
- Important to log tangible outcomes of the RAF's activities.
- The RAF will need to show that it does add value and can enhance the work of local authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships.
- On the face of it, there are potentially some positive opportunities for rural areas.

It was noted that the Chair has drafted a letter to regional MPs and chief executives of local authorities reinforcing the needs and importance of rural issues. It was also felt that a conference in the Autumn reflecting the key agenda points should be considered.

There was a discussion around the issue of *community* - and the RAF's role in respect of the *local level*. It was agreed that the RAF is well-placed to support communities in rural development activity, through, for example, disseminating best practice. It was agreed that this should be looked into further.

YHRAF is and has always been very effective in communicating the rural voice. A recent Chairman's away-day had proved very useful and the Chair suggested that the Executive Managers do the same - to ensure that all the RAFs are singing from the same hymn sheet in respect of new government agendas. Members were urged to ensure that they kept themselves updated on developments.

	<p>It was agreed that the RAF should respond to government documents as appropriate.</p> <p>MF reported that food production, climate change and a resilient economy are uppermost in the Government's mind. Defra's line on rural affairs is not yet clear - greater clarity is expected soon.</p> <p>Things are still in a state of flux and there is a degree of uncertainty about the future role of the RAFs. It was agreed that for the time-being it remains business as usual.</p> <p>Action: Consideration be given to convening a conference in the Autumn to look at the implications of new government agendas for rural areas.</p> <p>Action: Issues around enhanced engagement by the Rural Affairs Forum with local communities to be addressed through the Task & Finish Group currently being set-up by Janet Thornton.</p> <p>Action: Executive Manager to investigate the possibility of an Away-Day being organised for RAF officers.</p>	<p>Chairman / Executive Manager</p> <p>Janet Thornton / Executive Manager</p> <p>Executive Manager</p>
<p>8 / 18</p>	<p>Audit Commission - Rural Issues</p> <p>Mike Newbury from the Audit Commission outlined the background to the Audit Commission and its work around the now expired Comprehensive Area Assessments (CAA). He also gave details of the emerging picture in respect of the Audit Commission in the light of the Government's new agendas. Mike reported that the Audit Commission will be 30% smaller over the next year with inevitable cuts / job losses. The Commission is currently in talks on how audits will be undertaken in the future. Inspection will be less. There will be more of a <i>Sector-Led Improvement</i>. The Commission will continue to work with the Communities & Local Government Department but focusing on the highest risk as a regulator. It is thought that data will be open and freely available.</p> <p>The Audit Commission is currently working with the Commission for Rural Communities which has produced a response to the Audit Commission's report on rural dimensions in respect of CAAs. The Commission's approach to rural issues is currently under review - but it is recognised that there still needs to be some regulation and focus on rural policy.</p> <p>Discussion took place about <i>rural-proofing</i> and the benefits of transferring good practice. It was agreed that closer links with and input to Local Development Frameworks is important. Similarly, it will be important to have an input into activity taking place in the</p>	

	<p>Functional Sub-Regions.</p> <p>The Chairman thanked Mike for his presentation.</p>	
<p>9 / 19</p>	<p>Management Group -Task & Finish Groups</p> <p>A paper was circulated on Task & Finish Groups, outlining the current situation and putting forward some proposals. The following proposals were agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) The Rural Practitioners' Group does not continue. Its functions and activities are delivered through affiliated partnerships and groups, task & finish groups and the Functional Sub-Regional Rural Partnerships' Sub-Group. (ii) A Sub-Group of the Functional Sub-Regional Rural Partnerships is established - to provide locally-based evidence. It can draw other organisations in if / when appropriate. (iii) In addition to the Food and Farming Forum - the Regional Rural Network and the Regional Rural Transport Forum are included as affiliated groups to provide expertise. Other 'distinctively rural' partnerships can be added if / when appropriate. (iv) Task & Finish Groups are set-up to address matters as necessary. (v) A Finance Sub-Group is established to oversee financial matters. <p>Members felt that it was important not to lose the expertise of the Rural Practitioners' Group and to maintain the focus on delivery. It was agreed that it will be important to draw the expertise in through the various Task & Finish Groups.</p> <p>Progress on the following Task & Finish Groups was reported -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) <i>Functional Sub-Regional Rural Partnerships</i> <p>The first meeting of the Group was held on 14th June 2010. A summary of the meeting outlining the role of the Group was tabled. The Functional Sub-Regional Rural Partnerships are well placed to become a delivery arm for the RAF in the light of new government agendas. In particular they can collate evidence of need at the local level and also evidence of good practice. A proposal was made that the Group should meet quarterly (in place of the Practitioners' Group). This was agreed. It was also agreed that it would be reviewed as necessary.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (ii) <i>Yorkshire and Humber Regional Strategy</i> <p>HW reported on work done by the Group to provide comments on the Integrated Appraisal of the Regional Strategy (paper previously circulated).</p>	

	<p>KJ confirmed that under the Government's Programme regional strategies no longer exist. Work done to date will not be lost; it is currently being disseminated and the evidence which be used as appropriate.</p> <p>Action: The proposals contained in the paper on Task & Finish Groups to be adopted.</p>	Executive Manager
10 / 20	<p>Commission for Rural Communities - <i>High ground, high potential - a future for England's upland communities</i> (summary attached).</p> <p>The Summary to the Commission for Rural Communities' report on the uplands had been circulated. TP summarised the Report and drew attention to the importance of the findings to the work of the RAF, in respect of indentifying, pursuing and acting as a catalyst to tackle issues. Discussions took place -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The need for integration at all levels is unclear - what is the uplands strategy, what is now needed? - If was felt there was a weakness in the Report in respect of areas other than farming, ie tourism, housing, economy, services, communities - all have an effect on the landscape. - Is there a possible lack of direction? It was felt on the whole that the Report raised more questions than answers. - Must use Report to demonstrate why rural matters in the Region. - RAF could raise awareness of the Report. - Will Government respond to the Report? <p>Link to Report Commission for Rural Communities Upland Communities</p>	
11 / 21	<p>Rural Affairs Forum - Communications</p> <p>This item was on the agenda at the last meeting but got lost in the discussion on the Terms of Reference. Effective communication is vital to the RAF's work. HW updated on the different channels currently in use - dedicated web-site, Rural Matters, leaflet, forums, seminars and lobbying. It was agreed that a media contact within local radio and television would strengthen the communication link further. Members agreed that it was not necessary to produce a formal Communication Strategy at this stage.</p> <p>Action: Local radio and television contacts to be identified and used to promote the work of the Rural Affairs Forum.</p>	Executive Manager
12 / 22	<p>Rural Affairs Forum - Meeting on 11th May 2010 / Future Meetings</p> <p>A paper capturing the key points from the meeting of the Forum on 11th May was circulated.</p>	

	<p>A proposal was put forward by the Chairman and Executive Officer that expert help be secured to capture the views and findings from forum meetings and embed them within a report backed-up by research and evidence. The RAF would then have a structured report which could be circulated widely and used to influence emerging policies and programmes. It was felt that this would add value to the RAF's work. It was agreed in principle to trial the proposal.</p> <p>Action: Produce trial report capturing the findings from a meeting of the Rural Affairs Forum, using external support.</p>	Executive Manager
13 / 23	<p>Any Other Business</p> <p>None.</p>	
14 / 24	<p>Date of Next Meeting</p> <p>14th September 2010.</p>	