

Consultation Response Draft Rural Development Plan 2007 – 2013

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Speaking Out is a partnership between the National Council of Voluntary Child Care Organisations (NCVCCO) and the National Council of Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS) to build a voice for the children and young people's voluntary and community sector across Government. The project will develop closer links between a range of Government departments (Home Office, Ministry of Justice, Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs, The Treasury, Cabinet Office, Department for Communities and Local Government) and the Voluntary and Community sector in delivering cross departmental plans such as Every Child Matters and in the direct implementation of initiatives which affect children and young people.
- 1.2. The project aims to support the children and young people's voluntary and community sector to better understand the aims and impact on their users of a wider range of government policies and provide routes to influence them. We are funded by the Office of the Third Sector part of the Cabinet Office.
- 1.3. The views and comments below reflect our common child centred approach to issues of welfare, and our commitment to the articles and principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, where the best interests of the child are paramount.

2. Structure of the response

- 2.1. We first give our general views on the document, and then, in more detail, discuss some of the issues which are of particular concern to us in the children and young peoples sector.

3. General Comments

- 3.1. As a partnership representing children's services and youth organisations Speaking Out is well placed to voice the concerns of organisations representing the early years to age twenty-five range in rural areas. We are limiting our response to issues affecting the ability of children and young people, their parents and carers, and voluntary organisations offering services to these groups to make a positive contribution to the development of sustainable rural communities.
- 3.2. The draft programme is focussed on the economic development and diversification of businesses operating in the rural economy as the rural economy moves away from an agricultural based economy into tourism and other services. Although the draft programme does not specify any particular actions required to meet the priorities mapped out in the four axes within the programme, we would like this opportunity to raise concerns that the barriers facing some groups living in rural areas are neither acknowledged nor addressed. Two groups in particular need to be included in any plan to develop the rural workforce along the lines developed in the draft Rural Development Programme: lone parents, and young people in transition to adulthood looking for employment in their rural area.
- 3.3. Children and young people are an important part of the rural community as future members of the rural workforce. As such it is an essential component of any plan seeking to create sustained rural development through a diversified workforce that young people can access the education and training required to make a positive economic contribution to rural areas – this is both a key outcome of the cross-departmental Every Child Matters programme and a practical requirement to ensure that families can continue to contribute to their communities.

4. Social Exclusion of Young People and Quality of Rural Life

- 4.1. Section 3.1.4.4. of the draft programme Provision of Services in Rural Areas draws a favourable comparison between the accessibility of services in rural and urban areas, and highlights the lower overall rates of deprivation affecting rural communities. As a basis on which to develop rural development plan for rural economies we feel that by focussing only on the comparative rates of deprivation with urban counterparts the draft Rural Development Programme masks the realities for many rural families who need to access services if they are to make a positive contribution to the rural economy.

- 4.2. While rural areas do have overall lower rates of deprivation compared to urban areas across a range of indicators the nature of rural social exclusion means that some families will be unable to engage with the strategy outlined in the draft development plan. A core part of the Government's strategy to raise the living standards of children in poverty is to increase the opportunities for parents and lone parents in particular, to enter the workforce. This is a significant problem as in rural areas classed as 'remote' 11% of children live in workless households (the equivalent figure for 'accessible' rural areas is 8%)¹. The continued influx of young migrant workers and the inevitable formation of migrant worker families in poor accommodation and on low wages will continue to pose a growing challenge that needs to be addressed.
- 4.3. Transport, training, child-care and housing are all essential if the most marginalised groups in rural areas such as lone parents, young people in transition to adulthood and workless households with children are to contribute to the development and sustainability of their communities. We would like to see in the Rural Development Programme a continuation of the commitment made in the Rural Strategy 2004 (Defra, 2004) to accessibility planning as part of the solution to the social exclusion of children and families.

5. Transport

- 5.1. Transport is an issue that the Government has recognised is central to increasing the chances for rural households and children and young people, both in their development and during transition to adulthood and entry into the workforce. Transport planning guidance issued by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM)² in 2001 recognises the place of the car in rural areas as often the only means for transport, but notes:

"A key planning objective is to ensure that jobs, shopping, leisure facilities and services are accessible by public transport, walking, and cycling. This is important for all, but especially for those who do not have regular use of a car, and to promote social inclusion ... local authorities should give particular emphasis to accessibility in identifying the preferred areas and sites where such land uses should be located, to ensure they will offer realistic, safe and easy access by a range of transport modes, and not exclusively by car" (PPG13: Transport, para 19, ODPM, 2001).

- 5.2. The Draft Rural Development Programme's strategy for the creation of a diverse and flexible workforce rests on the availability of flexible travel options. Making the Connection: The Final Report on Transport and Social Exclusion (SEU, 2003) introduced a new framework of 'accessibility planning' to guide

¹ Figures from ILO sourced from New Policy Institute website: <http://www.npi.org.uk/>

² Planning and Policy Guidance 13: Transport, OPDM, 2001.

http://www.communities.gov.uk/pub/138/PlanningPolicyGuidance13Transport_id1507138.pdf

development of an integrated transport plan within rural areas. Inclusion of this guidance into the final strategy outlined in Axis 3 would allow the programme to bring together housing and transport within a social exclusion framework to capitalise on the development of the rural workforce.

- 5.3. The Rural Strategy (Defra, 2004) commits the government to rural-proofing of policies with a potential rural application. We would also like to have a clear commitment in the programme to the principles contained in the Government's cross-departmental policy on children in Learning to Listen, in particular to the principle that:

“Special care should be taken to include children and young people not traditionally involved, for example ... those living in rural areas”.³

- 5.4. If the programme is to have a lasting impact through out the period 2007 to 2013 then the strategy outlined in Axis 3 need to address the barriers posed by a lack of transport for the younger people who will be entering the employment market or undertaking training towards the end of the programme. Often for young people accessibility of training is dependent on the availability of public transport; however, in some remote areas this is limited to the car - the number of rural parishes without any bus service having increased from 14% to 22% throughout most of the 1990's.⁴ By 1997 almost 20% of villages and towns with up to 2,000 inhabitants had bus services classed as 'below subsistence' level and according to the Countryside Agency three-quarters of parishes have no daily bus service at all.
- 5.5. Services in rural areas offered through existing service hubs such as Children's Centres, Sure Start, and extended schools will not always reach the families who need them. In rural areas 28% of children in remote rural districts, and 19% in accessible rural districts, live in low income households where private travel costs take up a disproportionate amount of household income.⁵ If services are to reach those who require them then the Regional Development Programme needs to recognise the extra cost per child for outreach services compared to the co- location of services in schools and other existing centres.

Issues that the department might need to consider include:

- The need for mobile services to reach remote areas, which children and young people's organisations have experience providing on behalf of local authorities
- The remodelling of extended services to reflect the different needs of rural families and young people
- The role of the Third Sector in developing and delivering flexible models

³ Learning to Listen: Core Principles for the Involvement of Children and Young People (DfES, 2001) p16

⁴ Cabinet Office, PIU, 1999

⁵ New Policy Institute

- based around a variety of community resources in addition to schools
- The role that VCS organisations can play in a diversified rural economy

Addressing this need now will produce benefits throughout the life of the existing strategy as more young people enter the rural workforce and address some of the underlying reasons why the unemployment rate for 18-24 year olds in rural district is three times higher than that for older workers, currently 60,000 young people.⁶

6. Development of a rural workforce

- 6.1. Young people in employment are far less likely to receive job-related training than their urban counterparts. Figures from the New Policy Institute reveal that a quarter of young people in rural districts do not have a basic qualification (classified as NVQ2 or an equivalent) which will negatively effect the ability of planners to develop strategies to create a diverse rural economy as young people are increasingly excluded from the rural workforce.
- 6.2. We would like to see the rural programme include two key groups in the strategy to develop the rural workforce:
- 6.3. The first group, young people themselves, have a number needs which must be included across the four Axes if the rural programme is to have a long term impact. Children approaching school leaving age will need to have opportunities to access training opportunities requiring action across agencies such a Regional Development Agencies and the Sector Skills Councils to ensure that they have the skills to contribute to the rural workforce.
- 6.4. The second groups are existing lone parents and households with low incomes who require accessible child care to allow both dual- and single- parent households to enter the workplace.

We would like to see the inclusion of plans to support local authorities in taking forward their duty under the Childcare Act 2006 that from April 2008 local authorities will be required to take reasonable steps to secure sufficient childcare for working parents, paying particular attention to the needs of parents of disabled children.

⁶ Figures from ILO sourced from New Policy Institute website: <http://www.npi.org.uk/>

7. Housing

- 7.1. Any long term plan for the sustainability of rural communities has to include affordable housing if young people are to remain in their communities and part of the rural workforce. Research into the issue of rural housing needs carried out by the Centre for Housing Study at the University of York discovered that almost two thirds of young people in the study expected to leave their communities because of the poor availability of affordable housing, the need to look for suitable work elsewhere, and greater social opportunities.⁷ A finding from this report is that many of the 83 VCS organisations working in the rural housing field are unable to address the long term needs of young people in rural areas, focusing instead on emergency or temporary accommodation needs for short periods of time.⁸ Because of the long lead times for planning and building housing we feel the strategy contained in the draft programme needs to address housing to ensure adequate provision for young people now.

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⁷ Young People and Housing, Janet Ford, Deborah Quilgars and Roger Burrows with Nicholas Pleace, Centre for Housing Studies, University of York. <http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/chp/ruralneed.htm>

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