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for a stronger third sector



# *THE IMPACT OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT WORK IN TELFORD & WREKIN*

*A report about the work alongside the Rural Voluntary &  
Community Organisations in Telford & Wrekin*

*April 2006 - March 2008*

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*TELFORD & WREKIN CVS*

## **Summary**

This report is a record of the work carried out by Telford and Wrekin CVS to actively discover and engage with the organisations working in rural Telford.

It aims to draw attention to the findings uncovered as a result of the proactive work carried out and make some recommendations for future work.

The report draws some conclusions that issues discovered in Telford run parallel to some of the national issues for rural communities.

Essentially, the report highlights a need for organisations to consider resourcing and working with rural communities as part of their commitment to addressing equality.

**The aims of this report are to:**

- Highlight that proactive, focussed work has contributed to encouraging the development of the organisations operating in the more rural areas of Telford & Wrekin between the period April 2006 – March 2008.
- Make recommendations based on information uncovered by the work.
- Reflect upon national information about rural issues.

“We would like a village hall forum and legislative e-bulletins for halls”

*Village Hall Committee*

“It’s hard to get out and meet others when your last bus is at 6pm”

*Rural Resident*

## Introduction

Rurality appears high on the present Government's agenda of priorities.

The Rural Development Programme for England aims to safeguard and enhance the rural environment, improve competitiveness of agricultural and forestry sectors and foster competitive and sustainable rural businesses and thriving rural communities.

These communities can be "hard to reach" and the project was an attempt to reach out to these communities. This would offer some means for them to access equality of service, so their capacity to operate would be strengthened.

The funding for this project was awarded by the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs ( DEFRA) and Capacity Builders.

The CVS aim for the work with rural communities in Telford was to explore and discover organisations operating in the outlying areas, listen to their specific issues and attempt to address the gaps in provision that they are experiencing. Many of the small communities rely very heavily on volunteer services because other services do not make appropriate provision to cater for their needs.

The project provided an opportunity to proactively contact the rural organisations and intended to give them a point of contact to link to, to provide a more permanent support for their volunteer work.

This project began with a "mapping" exercise to discover as many voluntary rural organisations as possible. From this exploration a number of organisations were discovered and a proactive programme of work began to emerge to enable improved access to information and services for those organisations.

"The hidden and scattered nature of rural deprivation means it can be all too easily overlooked, masked by apparent affluence and the averaging of statistics"

*Report of the Rural Advocate, Commission for Rural Communities  
by Dr Stuart Burgess 2007*

**The areas covered by the project include:**

Church and Chetwynd Aston

Edgmond

Eyton and Preston Upon the Weald –Moors

Tibberton and Cherrington

Little Wenlock

Newport

High Ercall

Kynnersley

Lilleshall

Rodington

The Gorge

Waters Upton



Rural areas are shaded green

## **Facts and Figures**

### **What has happened?**

#### **I. Mapping Rural Organisations**

The initial identification of organisations operating in the outer areas of Telford presented a challenge. Without having intimate knowledge of the community activities it is unlikely that they advertise what they do, as anyone interested probably discovers this information via word of mouth.

The Parish Council Clerks were an obvious point of reference to approach for local community activity information. This information varied. Some clerks had a good knowledge of local group activity, some had little or no information.

Some community venues have an updated website which contains everything about local group activity. This proved to be another point of reference for information.

The advice surgeries held in community halls and venues, also provided an opportunity to gather group details from notice boards and displays.

Partnership meetings with local rural Police Officers provided additional details about local volunteers to contact about community activities.

Village Hall committees in some areas were an invaluable information resource about local volunteer activity. Some acted as a conduit to reach groups, providing important information which enabled contact to be made.

**During the period covered by this project we established and developed a data base containing 98 rural voluntary & community organisations that operate services in rural Telford.**

Groups were encouraged to affiliate to the CVS. The benefits of this were two-fold:

- It enables CVS to collect more extensive information about the groups which in turn allows CVS to disseminate appropriate information in a more efficient and effective way
- Groups receive a packages of support from CVS, including a good practice manual and free training.

**At the end of the project 52 rural voluntary and community organisations were affiliated to CVS**

## **II. Communication With Rural Voluntary & Community Organisations**

Most of the small settlements in Telford have a community meeting place. Some are village halls, some church halls and a minority are village shops.

As we uncovered information about the areas and carried out the rural surgeries it became obvious that the village venues were a public point of contact and a good place to target to share information with communities.

**We established a database of 27 rural venues which included a primary contact to support the dissemination of information to rural communities.**

**8 rural organisations attended the CVS quarterly Voluntary & Community Forum**

**16 rural organisations attended as delegates at CVS training workshops**

## **III. Consultation With Rural Venue Representatives.**

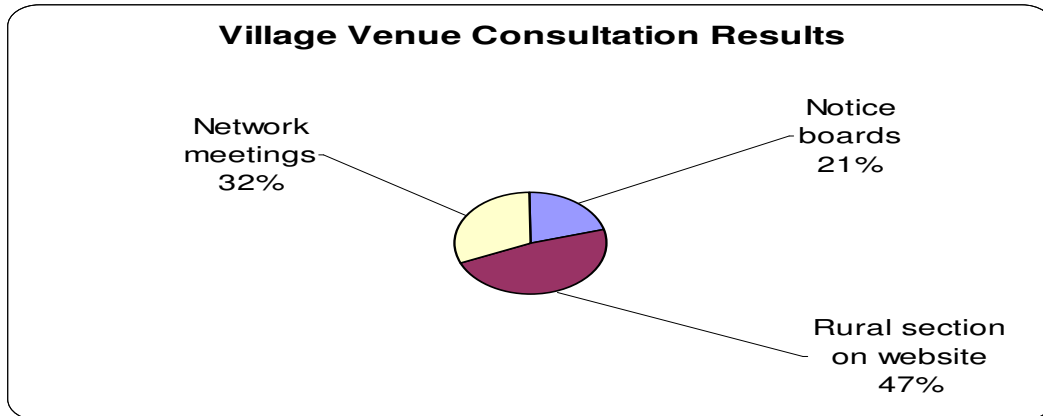
Following on from the contacts made with individual village venues, we sent out a brief questionnaire to all the village venue contacts asking how CVS could best communicate with them.

Three methods of communication were offered, asking for a preference.

1. Provision of a notice board and posters from CVS, about contacts and services/ funding opportunities for voluntary & community groups.
2. Creation of a rural section on the CVS website.
3. Network meetings for village venue committees facilitated by CVS.

**We received 16 responses to the information improvement consultation and provided 3 notice boards for village venues as requested.**

(Also see Appendix 1)



#### **IV. Roving Advice Surgeries**

The geographical spread of the rural areas in Telford and Wrekin covers a considerable area.

In order to try to encourage organisations to access information, we set up monthly advice surgeries in various community venues.

These were:

- Rodington Village Hall
- Newport Youth Café
- Little Wenlock Village Hall
- Water's Upton Village Hall
- Coalport Village Hall
- Cosy Hall
- The Royal Oak –Ellerdine Heath

Surgeries were advertised a week in advance, asking for organisations to ring CVS and book a place. This booking mechanism ensured that we didn't waste valuable resources travelling unnecessarily to areas if no one was free to attend. In practice, we found some people booked and some people turned up on the day for information.

In general, the information requested was on an individual basis about developing projects and planning ahead. Requests to advise on appropriate sources of funding came from everyone attending the surgeries.

At least 2 members of staff were always available at the surgeries, as individual work with group representatives is fairly intense and time consuming.

**We hosted 7 rural advice surgeries attended by 14 organisations in various village venues- this was an opportunity to meet with organisations and offer support , advice and information to compliment their work.**

**Funding achieved by the rural voluntary & community organisations during the project totalled £ 40,720.**

“I was repeatedly told by people active in their community how much they valued the support and advice available to them from rural development workers”

*Rural Development Worker*

#### **V. Health Check Questionnaire.**

Increasingly the requirements and demands on small voluntary organisations to provide services in communities are becoming more complicated.

Organisational planning is crucial, particularly if funders are being approached for money to support developments. These issues cut across all organisations, rural and otherwise.

As part of the work we developed a “health check “ questionnaire to try to help groups to assess where they are and what they may need to do next to plan a development strategy. The health check points out some of the risks attached to not carrying out requirements, particularly if they are legislative.

**We developed a health check questionnaire to help organisations assess where they may need to focus their future development planning.**

## Recommendations and Financial Implications for Future Work

CVS has built some trust and contacts with the rural organisations in Telford who are now beginning to contact the organisation for support.

**1. It is vital that funds remain available to serve the communities of rural Telford and continue the work which has been started.**

*† "Traditional ways of working do not meet the needs of rural communities. Some alternatives include: -*

- *Multi-service outlets*
- *Providing transport*
- *Home visiting*
- *Telephone and internet contact*
- *Working in partnership with a local organisation*

**2. Rural work is closely monitored and contributes to the CVS evaluation programme, leading to future planning.**

*† "It is important that you monitor and evaluate the progress of rural work as part of your organisations evaluation programme so you can build these into your future plans."*

**3. The need for network meetings and a rural sector on the CVS website is met.**

*† “Because people living in rural areas are spread out over larger areas than people in towns and cities, it can cost more time and money for people to meet.”*

**4. Health checks continue to be conducted to give groups a structured approach to identifying their developmental needs.**

“It was clear that easy access to small amounts of money could make a tremendous difference in encouraging local voluntary and community activity.”

*Rural Development Worker*

**5. All organisations consider Rural Proofing in their strategy plans.  
(See appendix 2)**

“Policies and funding mechanisms should be rurally proofed to make sure they are capable of targeting people in need, rather than places”

<sup>1</sup> *Access All Areas Meeting the Needs of Rural Communities, NCVO January 2007*

## **A final note**

During the course of this project there was a change in Telford's local government with the new Council leaders publicly voicing a specific commitment to improve services to Telford's rural communities.

As part of CVS commitment to the benefits of working in partnership, we jointly planned a rural event to take place in Meeting Point House alongside Telford and Wrekin Council. The event was intended to facilitate an opportunity for members of Telford's rural communities to share their views and needs. Unfortunately, the take up for attendance at the event was very low and a decision was made to postpone the event, pending the creation and appointment of a Council Officer to manage rural affairs locally.

The difficulty in reaching rural communities and the diverse nature of the issues of rural voluntary & community groups is also reflected in national reports:

*"Rural voluntary and community groups can be essential to the viability of rural communities. But they heavily rely on volunteer support and often lack resources such as money and staff. However, there is no such thing as a typical rural area: it could be a "chocolate box" village or a former industrial village, so it is important that you are aware of the local needs"*

*Report of the Rural Advocate, Commission for Rural Communities  
by Dr Stuart Burgess 2007*

Dr Burgess reflects: -

"I have been struck by the diversity within rural England. Within areas of affluence and prosperity it is clear that there is a significant proportion of people who are struggling in need of support. I have witnessed how their vulnerability is sometimes triggered by external and unforeseen events, sometimes exacerbated by the remoteness, sparsely and economic characteristics of the rural area in which they live; and sometimes hidden by apparent wealth and a perceived image of the countryside as a rural idyll.