

Rural Partnership Plus



Project Report

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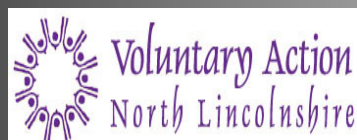
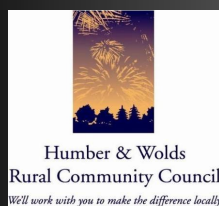
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Executive Summary

This report sums up the three years that the Rural Partnership Plus (RPP) Project offered services to rural Community and Voluntary groups in the East Riding of Yorkshire, North and North East Lincolnshire.

History and Background

Rural Partnership Plus started in July 2009 and ran until June 2012. It was funded by the Big Lottery BASIS fund. The project was delivered by a partnership of three local infrastructure organisations; Humber and Wolds Rural Community Council (HWRCC), Voluntary Action North Lincolnshire (VANL) and Voluntary Action North East Lincolnshire (VANEL).

The aims of the project were to improve access to support services, especially in the most rurally isolated areas, for voluntary and community organisations; to strengthen mechanisms that enable identified priorities and needs to be reflected in policy at a local, national and regional level; to develop effective communication channels within, and for, the voluntary sector.

Partnership Working and Stakeholders

The RPP project was conceived as a partnership at all levels; internally between the organisations running the project; locally working with other infrastructure and support projects to support the groups; and regionally and nationally to share good practice and build the case for changes in policy and legislation.

Project methodology

RPP ensured that rural groups were not disadvantaged by seeking them out, establishing their needs and linking them into other, existing support organisations to meet those needs. The support and development side of the project was primarily signposting groups onto other services which would then give them more in depth support. This was achieved by:

- A health-check process was used with groups to identify their needs and to put together a tailored support package
- Events and road-shows were used as ways of outreaching services to groups and meeting larger numbers of groups at one time. They were often arranged in conjunction with other partner organisations
- The “Humber Rural Network” Facebook page was set up in March 2011, this networked groups, disseminated information quickly and was used for consultation
- Consultation was undertaken with groups, networks and communities to obtain their views on the needs and priorities at a local level

- The RPP Co-ordinator ensured that the three BASIS project Co-ordinators met regularly to ensure that gaps in provision were filled and that there was no duplication of services

The Groups

In excess of 400 groups and organisations have been contacted, and they have been as diverse as the area they cover. They have included: village hall committees; playing field associations; recreation groups; older people; community groups; parish councils; networks and associations of groups; church and faith based groups; young people's groups; community forums and residents associations; health and wellbeing groups; and informal groups and informal volunteers.

Research

Two major pieces of research were completed: the Northern Lincolnshire Rural Gap Analysis and Rural Equity (which looked at rural areas of The East Riding of Yorkshire).

Evaluation

An independent evaluation was carried out at the end of the project, which concluded that:
"... the evidence indicates that RPP staff have worked hard to make a success of the project. The services they have provided have been highly valued and many groups have benefitted as a result of their advice and support. They have developed excellent links with colleagues from other BASIS-funded projects, whilst accepting that working arrangements with one of these projects could have been better."

Legacy and Way Forward

The project aimed to enable rural community and voluntary groups to be sustainable and thrive and, for many, the support they have received will help them to achieve this. The project is leaving resources that it is hoped will continue to support groups such as the renewables tool kit. The East Riding and North East Lincolnshire have been successful in securing Transforming Local Infrastructure funding for the next 18 months which will build on the partnership RPP has already built.

Conclusions

It has been a busy three years running this project and it has been fulfilling to see so many volunteers now feeling that they are equipped to help to deliver services needed in their local communities. Along the road we have met many inspirational individuals; people who have identified a local need and found ways to provide for that locally. There will still be a need for ongoing support for rural groups, especially as the voluntary sector finds itself taking on more service provision.

History and Background

Rural Partnership Plus brought together the voluntary sector infrastructure organisations which cover the rural areas of the Humber sub-region to deliver a holistic service, covering all elements of support required by rural voluntary and community organisations throughout the East Riding of Yorkshire, North and North East Lincolnshire.

The idea for the project came from FoLDA (Federation of Local Development Agencies) which is made up of the key voluntary sector infrastructure organisations that are working to support communities in the region. They felt there was a need for a more bespoke support service to be available for rural voluntary and community groups. This would ensure those who wanted to improve their local community truly felt they were equipped to help make a difference through accessing support tailored to their specific needs.

This was part of a “suite” of complementary projects developed by FOLDA members, funded through the Big Lottery BASIS Fund; the others being Money Matters Plus hosted by CERT and offering groups support and advice to better manage their finances and Fundraising Plus which supported groups to become more financially sustainable through funding advisors based in each of the local CVS's.

Rural Partnership Plus started in July 2009 and ran until June 2012. HWRCC was the lead organisation for the project, working in partnership with two other key infrastructure organisations working within rural communities, VANL and VANEL. HWRCC delivered the project in the East Riding of Yorkshire and VANL and VANEL in North and North East Lincolnshire.

The aims of the project were threefold:

- To improve access to support services for voluntary and community organisations, within the East Riding, North & North East Lincolnshire especially those in the most isolated rural areas
- To improve and strengthen mechanisms that enable identified priorities and needs to be reflected in local, regional & national policy
- To develop efficient and effective communication channels within and for the voluntary sector

And there was an equally clear set of objectives:

- To signpost voluntary and community sector organisation (VCSOs) to appropriate support
- To develop a mechanism through which the profile, views, needs and priorities of VCSOs can be voiced to enable these to be reflected in future policy and strategy
- To develop effective partnership working between infrastructure organisations
- To undertake research to identify issues and gaps in provision in order to influence the commissioning of rural services:

In September 2009 three staff were employed to work on the Project: Carole Johnson, as Project Co-ordinator, based at HWRCC in Howden who co-ordinated the project and provided support to East Riding of Yorkshire groups; Celia Wangler, employed by VANL and based in Barton and Grimsby, supporting groups in North and North East Lincolnshire; and Shirley Roberts as the Project Administrator based in Barton. Sadly Shirley left the project in September 2010, to be replaced by Jodie Day who worked from the VANL office in Scunthorpe and Karen Weeks based with HWRCC at Howden, each working 6 hours a week. Carole Johnson left at the beginning of June 2012, as the project drew to an end, to take up another post within HWRCC.

Partnership Working and Stakeholders

The RPP project was conceived as a partnership at all levels; internally between the organisations running the project; locally working with other infrastructure and support projects to support the groups; and regionally and nationally to share good practice and build the case for changes in policy and legislation.

Steering group

One of the strengths of the project has been its steering group made up of the project staff and senior management from HWRCC, VANL and VANEL. The Steering Group has met quarterly to review progress and plan ahead. The group has been able to resolve differences and worked together to ensure the project went to plan.

Money Matters Plus and Fundraising Plus

The RPP project was designed to work alongside the other two BASIS projects Money Matter Plus and Fundraising Plus, with a formal target of making referrals to them and with the intention that there would be a seamless service for groups.

Money Matters Plus (based at Cert in Immingham) provided support to groups to better manage their finances. Fundraising Plus aimed to increase the income-generating capacity of voluntary and community organisations by offering funding advice, plus much more. Fundraising Plus had three part time funding advisors; one based at VANEL, one at VANL and one at ERVAS.

The RPP staff not only referred groups to them with funding issues but also worked alongside them to organise events and training sessions for the groups. These included: funding fairs in Scunthorpe, Waltham and Immingham; community road-shows in Goole, Bridlington and Pocklington; writing successful funding applications training in Crowle, Winterton and South Killingholme; “A Bid in a Night” where groups came together to complete their Awards for All bids; “Marketing Magic” (how to attract funding volunteers and promote your organisation); and training on employing staff for East Riding Community Buildings.

Regional Rural Network

At regional level RPP worked with the Yorkshire and Humber Regional Rural Network which is another Basis project hosted by Involve Yorkshire and Humber. The Network staff provided feedback on the views of groups collated at local level to a regional and national audience.

In addition RPP worked with other bodies across the region, i.e. Rural Action Yorkshire who delivered a similar project in North Yorkshire, in order to bring together evidence (case studies) from across the different regions, thus building the case for change.

The Network also organised a number of joint events with which RPP was involved. These were: a residential for young people; stalls at the Great Yorkshire Show in 2010 and 2011; a series of consultations and information sessions about the Localism Bill in April 2011; and a series of Parliamentary Outreach sessions in December 2012.

The main role of the Network was to represent and give voice to the views of rural community and voluntary groups. This was achieved by consulting the groups which RPP and other “sister” projects in the Yorkshire and Humber Region have contacted, and representing these groups through its links to ACRE and by producing reports. RPP has contributed to:

- **The Rural Lifelines Report**, which demonstrates the role of the voluntary and community sector in reaching out and supporting disadvantaged residents of rural areas - <http://www.involveyorkshirehumber.org.uk/resources/reports/rural-lifelines/>
- **The Rural Priorities Report**, which showcases some of the most significant contributions of rural voluntary and community sector organisations on key issues - <http://www.involveyorkshirehumber.org.uk/resources/reports/rural-priorities/>

The Network produced an “e”-newsletter and has a Twitter account with over 500 followers onto which all the news from the Humber Rural Network Facebook is automatically posted.

Project Methodology

RPP had a two pronged approach to working with Rural Community groups. Firstly, ensuring that the groups were supported to thrive and develop and, secondly, giving them a voice.

The methodology of the project was laid down in the original business plan. The project was designed to ensure that rural groups were not disadvantaged by seeking them out, establishing their needs and linking them into other, existing support organisations to meet those needs. The support and development side of the project was only ever envisaged as primarily signposting groups onto other services which would then give them more in depth support. With targets of meeting 320 groups and 300 groups benefitting over three years, there was never time to give in depth support to all of these groups.

Over the life of the project contact has been made with 466 groups, 418 have benefitted from support and 203 have participated in the network.

Work with groups

The first issue was how to signpost effectively. All three Basis projects adopted a generic health-check process with groups to identify their needs. This ensured that the needs of the groups were highlighted and a tailored support package was developed that met their specific needs. The health-check could be shared with project partners and cross-referrals made. As a rural project, staff have been as flexible as possible when working with groups and have, when appropriate, met groups in their communities and at times suitable to them, which have often been evenings and weekends. One of the issues rural groups often identify is that they have to travel long distances to access help and support and this may not be possible if their members are working, are without transport or have other responsibilities.

However, how this health-check was used varied between groups and over time. It involved the use of a form which acted as a check list and a record of baseline for the group as well as forming the basis of an action plan.

In reality, the groups met had a variety of different needs and levels of skill, knowledge and confidence. Some groups needed very little support and were quite happy with one visit from the project worker and the information they were able to give, they were equally happy to make contact with other agencies suggested and pick up the support they needed from there. At the other end of the scale there were groups who clearly needed longer term and more in depth support to meet their aims and which, despite ongoing contact and attending events, training sessions etc. were not able to achieve their goals with the light-touch support available from RPP.

Road-shows and Events

One of the most successful ways to meet groups in the numbers needed to match the project outcomes has been to put on workshops, training or other events. This has taken place since the beginning of the project in different ways and it has been found that a format which works in one area may not work in another. For instance, in the East Riding using a bus to take services out to the villages has been very successful, but when this was tried in North and North East Lincolnshire in conjunction with the Northern Lincolnshire Rural Partnership very few people showed any interest.

Events were mainly run in conjunction with other projects and organisations and were a way to bring services out to communities. These included: funding fairs in Scunthorpe, Waltham and Immingham; community road-shows in Goole, Bridlington and Pocklington; writing successful funding applications training in Crowle, Winterton and South Killingholme; and training on employing staff for East Riding Community Buildings.

Facebook

One of the ways the project workers chose to contact some of the groups was by establishing a page on Facebook called "Humber Rural Network". This page was intended to network groups, disseminate information quickly and be a vehicle for consultation. While the workers were aware that some rural areas have no or very slow broadband coverage, it was felt that this would be yet another tool to make contact with groups. It was set up in March 2011 and by June 2012 had "likes" from 133 people and 87 "pages". Interestingly the majority of these are from people and organisations with which the workers have had no other contacts, and while it is not possible to identify everyone, the vast majority do appear to either live in or have connections to the rural parts of the East Riding, North and North East Lincolnshire. The "pages" are a spread of rural community groups, other infrastructure support which is either covering other areas of the country or has a national brief and a fair number of small rural businesses.

Consultations

Through the Rural Network (a brand used by RPP for the representation element of the project) there is now a clear communication mechanism to identify priorities and needs of rural groups that also allows the groups to be much more involved in consultations. For example, groups in the region have been provided with summaries of new agendas (Localism, Giving Green Paper) and they have had their say on the proposed changes.

The Rural Network has undertaken surveys, worked with groups, networks and communities to obtain their views on the needs and priorities at a local level. There have been a number of events to gather local people together held across region. Survey monkey, social media (Facebook and Twitter), and other online forums and e-bulletins are all mechanisms that have been used to obtain information. The information has been analysed and reports produced. Two detailed research reports have been completed, the Northern Lincolnshire Rural Gaps Analysis and Rural Equity.

All this has taken place against a background of considerable political change at a national level and, in some parts, locally. When the project was originally designed regional structures were important and this project was expected to feed the voice of groups into this via the Regional Network, but this has now changed and in the timescales of this project new structures such as the LEPs have still not become fully functional.

Effective Partnership Working, the BASIS Co-ordinator's Forum

The Co-ordinators from all three BASIS projects have met on a regular basis to review outcomes, overcome any gaps in service delivery or duplication and ensure the most cost-effective methods of delivery. This has been driven by the RPP Co-ordinator as part of the RPP outcome of reducing duplication and gaps in services.

The co-ordinators forum has enabled:

- partners to share resources through joint events e.g. community road-shows
- the rural proofing of delivery methods
- gaps in provision to be addressed by providing bespoke locality based training e.g. employing staff, funding workshops

The Groups

The area the project has covered is large and diverse: the project has supported groups in small towns (e.g. Pocklington, Brigg, Immingham); small, isolated villages like Eastoft or Catton; industrial villages like South Killingholme; agricultural settlements like Burton Fleming; suburban villages like New Waltham; and affluent areas as well as more deprived ones.

In excess of 400 groups and organisations have been contacted, they have been as diverse as the area they cover. They have included: village hall committees; playing field associations; recreation groups; older people; community groups; parish councils; networks and associations of groups; church and faith based groups; young people's groups; community forums and residents associations; health and wellbeing groups; and informal groups and informal volunteers.

They have brought us a variety of issues reflecting the differing needs of their communities and the stage of development of their groups. They have been working on issues such as: access to broadband (sometimes they have had no access or in other villages it has not been fast enough to carry out basic tasks); setting up Oil Co-ops (to buy heating oil in bulk to keep down rising costs); Renewable energy to make community buildings sustainable; Heritage projects; traffic issues in growing villages; services for older people; facilities for young people and children; recreation facilities and access to other services for isolated communities; and parish and community led plans.

The groups have asked for help and support to: get more members of their communities involved; raise funds either by applying for grants or more traditional fundraising; ensuring they have the right policies and procedures; recruiting and keeping volunteers; gathering evidence to back up their funding bids; ensuring their groups or community is sustainable; marketing their services; and governance (running their group robustly and legally).

Despite the diversity they do have a lot in common. They employ very few staff (although there have been some exceptions to this), and those that do employ staff are often village halls or community buildings which employ a part time cleaner or caretaker. The volunteers are community members who often wouldn't think of themselves as volunteers in a formal sense, and they are often "busy" people, (it's not uncommon to find that the same person is on the village hall committee, parish council and neighbourhood watch group!). And finally, some groups are informal, they do not have a constitution or rules of any sort, and they have often grown out of groups of friends or neighbours (a good example is the bulk buying of heating oil in Alkborough, which grew out of a few friends wanting to keep their costs down and now serves over 150 households).

These groups tend to be small and run on relatively small amounts of money most of which they raise themselves locally, from: community events (village fetes, jumble sales, craft fairs

etc...); fees (including hiring out their premises); subscriptions and membership fees; help in kind and sponsorship from local businesses; and also small grants from their Parish Council. However they do sometimes need outside support in the form of grants, especially when they have larger projects such as building new facilities or renovating existing ones. Then they rely on small grants (to buy small equipment, such as a new cooker for the village hall) or larger fundraising projects for new facilities and renovations which have been supported by grant funding from: their local authority (a rapidly declining pot); European money from Leader Funds (this has been especially so in Northern Lincolnshire); Landfill tax money from funders such as WREN; and Big Lottery money from the Reaching Communities and Awards for All programmes.

Over the three years Rural Partnership Plus has tried to address the needs that groups have brought to us by: putting groups in contact with existing support and training (such as the local CVS); putting groups in contact with other BASIS projects; road-shows to outreach services to isolated communities; organising funding fairs and events; networking with other similar groups (including through the Humber Rural Network Facebook page); providing bespoke training, with partner organisations, on issues such as employing staff, trustee training, renewable energy, writing successful funding applications and how parliament works; and by consultations on changes in government policies and legislation.

In many ways what still needs to be done is more of the same, because the membership of groups change, or they start new projects and new groups emerge – all of which leads to the groups wanting more of the same type of support. And the landscape changes around them; in the time the project has been running the government has changed leading to new legislation, guidelines and ways of working and the removal of some structures and agencies and the introduction of others. Small local groups often only keep up with changes when they need to or come across a problem.

Research

In order to more fully understand the communities, establish a baseline for its work and be able to advocate for them, RPP has undertaken a number of research projects. The following are the two major ones completed:

Northern Lincolnshire Rural Gap Analysis

This was undertaken on behalf of the Northern Lincolnshire Rural Partnership and looked at the issues for the rural communities of North and North East Lincolnshire. It covered aspects such as:

- population trends, especially the aging population of many of the rural communities;
- access to services, with many villages losing their pubs, shops and post offices (this is an increasing issue);
- digital inclusion, which is increasingly important for: social reasons; study; business; and to counteract the distance from other services;
- deprivation issues, this includes issues such as whether there is affordable housing and fuel poverty in areas with no access to mains gas;
- and the other issues important to communities themselves.

A full copy of the report is available to download at:

<http://www.vanl.org.uk/images/stories/publications/rural-gap.pdf>

Rural Equity

The report highlighted the limitations of mainstream statistical information when attempting to understand where rural inequalities lie, as it hides the deprivation experienced by rural communities in the East Riding of Yorkshire.

In the current, challenging financial climate, Rural Equity explores the difficulty of understanding and responding to the needs of rural communities and how services are delivered in this area. The informative research highlighted the immense diversity and prevalence of the voluntary and community sector in providing cost effective community support, and investigates how the sector can play a significant role in providing local solutions for service delivery.

To order a copy of the Report contact Karen.Weeks@hwrcc.org.uk .

The findings from both of these reports were launched at conferences with audiences made up of local authority officers, elected members and members of other local organisations.

Evaluation

This section is taken from the final Evaluation Report written by Ian-Paul Ashworth, which can be downloaded from www.hwrcc.org.uk.

Scope and Purpose

HWRCC's tender document for the evaluation of RPP set out the six areas to be covered by the final evaluation report:

1. The effectiveness of the models used in the delivery of the project;
2. The partnership working methodology;
3. The end benefit to VCSOs which have received support;
4. The impact on sustainability of rural VCSOs;
5. The effectiveness of the influencing mechanisms for rural VCSOs; and
6. Recommendations for future project delivery models.

Methodology

The evaluation of partnership working was undertaken through a facilitated workshop involving the members of RPP's steering group; and via structured phone interviews with key partners from the other BASIS-funded projects.

The evaluation of the effectiveness of the RPP project for rural VCSOs was undertaken through a structured questionnaire which was sent to 50 randomly selected groups. The response rate was 36% (18 organisations).

Findings

Data received from RPP staff at 29th March 2012 indicated the following:

Outcome Number & Targets		Actual
1	Establishment of Rural Network	Network established
	240 VCSOs to have participated in the network and to have increased representation	269 VCSOs participated in the network (107 members)
2	320 rural VCSOs (with a minimum of 80 from isolated areas) will be contacted, of which 300 will benefit from increased infrastructure support	456 groups contacted – 38% (172) from isolated areas
	60 referrals made to Money Matters Plus	91 referrals made
	60 referrals made to Fundraising Plus	57 referrals made
3	Establishment of voluntary and community sector	Forum established

	infrastructure forum	
4	300 rural VCSOs (with a minimum of 75 from isolated areas) will benefit from a greater range of coordinated services at sub-regional and regional level through links with other regional priority projects	403 groups received support – 35% (140) from isolated areas

i) The effectiveness of the models used in the delivery of the project

- Overall, the RPP partnership delivery model has worked well. Partners have demonstrated flexibility in working together to accommodate their different working arrangements.
- There was agreement that some aspects of the proposed benefits and outcomes outlined in the RPP business plan were too vague and therefore not realistic.
- Some RPP partners expressed the view more could have been made of the opportunities provided by the project structure in relation to joint-working arrangements. However, RPP exceeded its target of referrals to the Money Matters Plus project and is only three short of meeting the target in respect of Fundraising Plus.

ii) The partnership working methodology

- RPP’s work had a firm basis as a result of the needs analysis undertaken by the Federation of Local Development Agencies at the start of the work. This piece of work was extremely useful and helped partners to define their reasons for engaging in the project.
- Service users have tended to identify the support received with the project’s host organisations, leading to a lowering of RPP’s profile. However, project staff thought it was more important for beneficiaries to receive a seamless service, rather than to establish a short-term RPP brand.
- The steering group has been instrumental in facilitating effective working between staff members from HWRCC, VANL and VANEL, both in terms of resolving day-to-day issues and with regard to strategic matters.
- There are indications that the inter-relationships with one of the other BASIS-funded projects have been difficult at times, despite the best efforts of RPP staff to make the arrangements work.
- It is clear that partners understood that different approaches were required in different areas of the sub-region in order to engage service users.
- There is a view that an opportunity has been missed to build up an evidence base, since FoLDA did not stipulate which reports or data each BASIS-funded project should supply.

iii) The end benefit to VCSOs which have received support

- Responses from service user questionnaires were overwhelmingly positive. In ranking the services provided to rural VCSOs, 82% of people scored RPP very highly.

- There was only partial evidence about success in reducing service duplication or filling of gaps in provision. Some BASIS partners identified community accountancy services as the main area of duplication and noted that the two infrastructure organisations providing such services had worked together to ensure that they focussed on different aspects of this area of support.
- With regard to filling gaps in service provision, the co-organisation of events involving several BASIS partners was seen by many people as a good idea, but one which had not been developed enough.

iv) The impact on sustainability of rural VCOS

- There was some evidence that the local voluntary and community sector is now stronger as a result of the work of the BASIS projects. RPP's role has involved signposting a high number of clients to partners for specialist support, as well as jointly organising advice and information events.
- More than 40% of the representatives of community groups who participated in the service user survey felt that support for frontline groups had improved over the last two years (during which time the availability of infrastructure support services nationally has been affected by budget cuts). These perceived improvements cannot be attributed entirely to RPP, but survey participants did ascribe at least some of the changes to the project.
- When RPP's work ends in June 2012, existing connections made through signposting will ensure that groups still have access to support from partner organisations beyond the life of the project. Information will also remain available on the partners' websites.

v) The effectiveness of the influencing mechanisms for rural VCOS

- At a strategic level, there is some evidence that the BASIS work has enabled more robust data to be provided to RPP's regional partner, which has resulted in the views of frontline groups being gathered, collated and represented in a more consistent and effective manner.
- In terms of RPP's legacy, HWRCC plans to continue the Rural Network, meaning that VCOS will still receive information and have the opportunity to be involved in consultation at a local and national level through HWRCC's links to Action with Communities in Rural England. There are also plans to align the Regional Rural Network with the East Riding of Yorkshire Rural Partnership to enable direct consultation with VCOS on key issues.

vi) Summary

Overall, the evidence indicates that RPP staff have worked hard to make a success of the project. The services they have provided have been highly valued and many groups have benefitted as a result of their advice and support. They have developed excellent links with colleagues from other BASIS-funded projects, whilst accepting that working arrangements with one of these projects could have been better.

Recommendations

1. The needs analysis undertaken by FoLDA was extremely useful in preparing the RPP bid. It would therefore seem prudent to undertake similar analyses for future collaborative work.

2. The creation of the RPP steering group has been instrumental in facilitating good communication links and could be used to steer the work of any future projects.

3. Whilst the sometimes chaotic nature of submitting funding applications is understood and acknowledged, evidence from this evaluation demonstrates that better results would be achieved if:

a) Links between projects are better defined at the start.

b) The potential outcomes and benefits of projects are worded in a way which renders them more achievable. SMART outcomes should be employed and baseline data collected.

c) Data collection and monitoring processes are agreed by all partners at the start of the project and adhered to throughout.

4. Putting more emphasis on establishing systems to collect monitoring data from service users throughout the life of the project would enable project outcomes to be more rigorously evaluated. This could be facilitated through a simple service user questionnaire which is issued in each six-month period.

5. RPP's Facebook page has been very effective at providing information for groups. Future projects could continue to make use of new media platforms such as this to promote their work, both via the internet and through applications for mobile phones.

6. Legacy: ways should be found to ensure that lessons learned from the project are preserved.

Legacy and Next Steps

As with many projects funded to support communities for a short time one of the issues is always the legacy of the project. The project aimed to enable rural community and voluntary groups to be sustainable and thrive and, for many, the support they have received will help them to achieve this.

As well as this, the project is leaving resources that it is hoped will continue to support groups such as the renewable tool kit with local case studies of community buildings using renewable energy to keep down their bills and be environmentally friendly.

Supporting Change

In March 2012 HWRCC were successful in securing some extension funding for the project under the Supporting Change Programme; all work on this has to be completed by the end of August 2012. This will mean working more intensively with 3 groups in the East Riding and 3 in North and North East Lincolnshire to achieve a developmental goal agreed with the group. This will be negotiated between the development worker and the group's governing body. The groups will be allocated a set amount of development worker time (typically three days) and an action plan will be agreed upon with actions for the groups and the worker. This way of working will be evaluated to look at the difference between offering a group a set amount of support time as opposed to signposting them to another agency or worker.

Transforming Local Infrastructure

Transforming Local Infrastructure is a £30 million fund from the Office of Civil Society, announced in July 2011. It is a short-term fund, to provide better support for front line civil society organisations by transforming local infrastructure services. Funding from this runs from March 2012 to September 2013. Transforming Local Infrastructure funds partnerships of local infrastructure organisations to rationalise and transform the support services which they provide to front line civil society organisations.

The East Riding of Yorkshire and North East Lincolnshire were both successful in securing this funding. In many ways the experience of the Basis projects, especially RPP, with its emphasis on partnership working laid the paths for this new way of working.

The North East Lincolnshire TLI programme is a partnership between VANEL, HWRCC and CERT and includes a full time Rural Advisor Post (held by Lisa Gibson who began work in June 2012). Lisa will be working to strengthen rural community groups, particularly by ensuring they are tied into the other aspects of the North East Lincolnshire TLI project which are about supporting and developing community assets and community buildings (including

encouraging joint working and co-location) and promoting good practice in the use of volunteers.

The East Riding of Yorkshire TLI programme is a partnership between Humber and Wolds Rural Community Council (HWRCC), East Riding Voluntary Action Services (ERVAS), Humber Learning Consortium (HLC), Community Economic Regeneration Team (CERT) and three “community hubs” - The Courtyard in Goole, Bridlington Resource Centre and South Holderness Resource Centre (SHORES). The project coordination will be undertaken by Carole Johnson based at HWRCC, the lead organisation for the project.

The project aims to strengthen the leadership of Civil Society organisations (previously referred to as Voluntary and Community Sector) and improve their access to high quality, redeveloped support, training and volunteer brokerage. Establishing new partnerships with the private business sector is a key theme that runs throughout the projects activities e.g. setting up of an employee supported volunteer brokerage scheme, the development of a trustee pool and the development of sustainable Corporate Social Responsibility pro bono arrangements. Two of the infrastructure partners will undertake a rationalisation programme that will amalgamate back office and senior management functions and co-office location.

Conclusions – a personal view from Carole and Celia

As this report illustrates it has been a busy three years running this project and it has been fulfilling to see so many volunteers now feeling that they are equipped to help to deliver services needed in their local communities. Often through road-shows and face to face meetings this has literally been provided 'on their doorstep' on many occasions. For instance after attending one of our events, one lady felt inspired to take her service (which at that time was only being delivered in an urban area) out to rural parishes within her locality. This is just one of many examples of how the project has raised the awareness of rural need.

Along the road we have met many inspirational individuals; people who have identified a local need and found ways to provide for that locally – needs as diverse as the people:

- The people who went along to the AGM of their village hall to be told that the previous committee were all resigning and who then took up the challenge and within a year had raised enough money for a complete renovation
- The young man who is campaigning for super-fast broadband in his village
- The Residents Association trying to make their village roads safer and more friendly for their community, and now researching the views of the villagers using Planning for Real®
- The lady who has saved her village many hundreds of thousands of pounds by running a bulk buy scheme for heating oil for the past 25 years
- The gentleman who has set up an oil cooperative in his village that is saving local residents money on their heating costs which have increased dramatically so making a significant contribution to the reduction in fuel poor families in his area.
- The village hall committees in rural areas who ensure that communities retain a central hub within their communities from which services are delivered and other voluntary and community sector groups operate.

Finally it is true to say that this was written as a signposting project, that is contacting large numbers of groups and bringing them into the fold, and passing them on to other colleagues for more in depth support. It hasn't always worked like that. There have been some groups we have worked with more intensely and other groups for whom it has not worked because what they needed was someone who would be by their side and hold their hands all along their journey.

Although the RPP project is at an end, there will still be a need for ongoing support for rural groups (especially as the voluntary sector finds itself taking on more service provision to replace the services once provided by the statutory sector), and hopefully more of the groups now know where to go when they need help and support and are able to pass on their knowledge to the next generation of community activists.

Name of Project Worker		Date	
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Rural Partnership Plus Organisational Health Check

1. Contact Details

Name of group			
Address			
Tel:		Fax:	
Email:			
Contact details are public		Contact details are private	
Name of key contact person and role in organisation			

2. Area of Work

2.1. Briefly describe the mission or main aim (purpose) of your organisation			
2.2. How long ago was your organisation/group established?			
less than 1 year		3-5 years	
1-3 years		over 5 years	
Date of incorporation			
2.3. Which geographical area does your organisation/group's work cover?			
2.4. Which of the following areas of work does your organisation/group cover?			
Arts/music/culture		Health & Wellbeing	Rural issues
BME		HIV/sexual health	Social Enterprise
Carers		Housing	Social Inclusion
Children/families		IT/Technology	Social services/ activities
Community Centre		Learning difficulties	Sport and recreation
Community Work		Mental health	Substance Misuse
Counselling/advice		Older people	Training/consultancy
Crime/Community Safety		Poverty/disadvantage	Transport
Disability/Access		Refugees/Asylum Seekers	Village Halls/Parish Councils
Education and Training		Regeneration	Volunteering

Employment and Labour		Religion/faith/culture		Youth	
Environmental		Other			

3. Governance

3.1. What is the organisation's current legal status?					
Un-constituted		Unincorporated Association with constitution			
Company (Ltd by guarantee) No.		Other company No.			
I&P Society No.		Other incorporated			
Registered Charity No.		Trust			
Other					
3.2. Governing Document (please can we see a copy):					
Constitution		Memorandum & Articles of Association		Trust Deed	
Other					
3.3. Is your organisation a:					
Voluntary Organisation			Social Enterprise		
Community Group			Other		
3.4. How is your organisation governed?					
Management Committee			Directors		
Trustees			Other		
3.5. What training has your current Management Committee, Trustees or Directors received?					
3.6. Do you have the following roles within your group or organisation?					
Chair		Secretary		Company Secretary	
Vice Chair		Treasurer			
3.7. Is the governing document					
Signed?			Dated		
Amendments also signed, dated and incorporated or appended					
3.8. Does the governing document set out					
Clear objects			Provisions for appointing the governing body		
Area of benefit			Provisions for calling general meetings		
The powers to act			Provisions for managing the finances		
Provisions for amending the governing body			A statement restricting the use of funds for the objects alone		
A rule about payments to members of the governing body			A dissolution clause		
Power to hold property			Power to take out loans		
Restriction on payments to committee			Power to undertake trading		

3.9. Does the organisation follow its own rules?			
Appointing the governing body		Producing annual accounts	
All activities meet the objects		Holding meetings	
Anything else			

Governance Actions

For worker	For Group
Date completed	Date completed

4. Financial Resources

4.1. What was your organisation's <u>Gross income</u> during the last financial year?			
Don't know		over £10K and less than £50K	
less than £1K		over £50K and less than £100K	
over £1K and less than £5K		over £100K and less than £250K	
over £5K and less than £10K		over £250K	
4.2. Can you provide us with your annual accounts?			
4.3. Does your organisation have a bank account in the name of the organisation requiring 2 signatures on any transaction?			
4.4. What other accounts does the organisation have?			
4.5. What assets does the organisation hold (e.g. property/investments)			
4.6. Over the past year what were your main funding sources?			
Local Authority		Health Authority	Trusts
European		Private donation	National Lottery
Trading/Fees		Fundraising	Subs from members

Other, please specify			
4.7. Is the organisation paying back any loans?			
4.8. Do you receive Gifts or Contributions in Kind?			
Buildings with Peppercorn Rent		Free room hire	Professional Services
Equipment		Other, please specify	
4.9. Does the organisation have a trading arm or subsidiaries?			
4.10. How does your organisation or group monitor financial activity?			
Manual Income and Expenditure Sheets		Spreadsheets	
Computerised Accounts Package		No proper system in place	
Other, please specify			
Accounts are audited annually		Accounts are independently examined	Accounts are signed by committee
4.11. What are your main items of expenditure?			Costs

Financial Resources Actions

For worker	For Group
Date completed	Date completed

5. Human Resources

5.1. How many people work in your organisation/group?			
Paid full-time		Unpaid full-time	
Paid part-time		Unpaid part-time	
On what basis are they employed?			
5.2. Do you have appropriate policies and procedures in place relating to			

Staff		Health and safety	
Volunteers		Child protection	
Equal opportunities		Vulnerable adults	
Other			
5.3. Do you undertake CRB checks where applicable for your organisation?			
5.4. Do your staff or volunteers take advantage of local or regional training opportunities?			
5.5. Is your organisation registered with the Volunteer Centre?			

Human Resources Actions

For worker	For Group
Date completed	Date completed

6. Delivery of Activity

6.1. Does your organisation have a business plan or activity plan?				Yes	
If Yes, how long is this for?				No	
Up to 6 months		The Financial Year		2 – 3 years	Longer
Details:					
6.2. How does your organisation make people aware of the activities or services you deliver?					
E-mail		By post		Word of Mouth	
Posters and leaflets locally		Paid-for Advertising		Web Site	
Other, please specify					
6.3. Does your organisation hold a Quality Standard e.g PQASSO, Matrix, Investors in People?					
Which?				Accredited?	
				Y/N	
6.4. What insurance does your organisation hold?					

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Delivery Actions

For worker	For Group
Date completed	Date completed

7. Current Projects

7.1. Are you currently seeking funding for a specific project? If yes, please give Details				
7.2. What do you require funding for?				
General running costs	One off project costs	Equipment		
Building	Vehicle	Publication		
Replace statutory funding	Salaries	Other?		
7.3. When will the project start and finish?				
7.5. How much will the project cost?				
7.6. Do you already have funding for part of the project?				

Current Projects Actions

For worker	For Group

Date completed	Date completed
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8. Networking and Support

<p>8.1. Does your organisation or group use local or regional networking opportunities? If Yes, please specify</p>
<p>8.2. Is your organisation a member of or currently receiving support from infrastructure organisations e.g. your local CVS/Voluntary Action?</p>

8.3. Immediate Issues or Concerns for Organisation/Group

Please outline the issues that are causing your organisation immediate concern.

Networking and Support Actions

For worker	For Group
Date completed	Date completed

Progress to be reviewed

Approximate hours of support required

Signed on behalf of Rural Partnership Plus project :

Name	
Date	

We would like this health check to be shared with other agencies that will be able to support our organisation

Signed on behalf of Group:

Name	
Date	



Disclaimer

The findings from our health check are intended to provide you with general information only, and are not intended to be a substitute for professional or legal advice.