

**Evaluation of the RCC (Leicestershire and Rutland)
Community Consultation and Capacity Building
Project**

Final Report

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Karen Kellard and Leighton Mitchell

**BMG Research
Holt Court
Heneage Street West
Aston Science Park
Birmingham B7 4AX**



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BMG Research was commissioned by Leicester Shire Economic Partnership (LSEP) to conduct an evaluation of their Community Development and Capacity Building Project. The aims of the study were to review and evaluate the project, providing an analysis of the achievements and areas where success may not have been forthcoming, the effectiveness of the Consultation Protocol and setting out options for future delivery.

The methodology adopted was primarily qualitative in nature, comprising in-depth discussions with the RCC staff and the project team members, funding and non-funding partners, other stakeholders and community group members who had been through the parish planning stage.

The projects' Community Development Officer's (CDO's) were praised for their vast knowledge, commitment and tenacity (though this could be seen sometimes as a 'negative effect'), and their critical liaison role between community members and other stakeholders including district and county council service providers. They were also noted as being particularly valuable at the questionnaire development and finalisation stage, though some suggested that too much emphasis was placed on this stage of the process.

Generally, communities were aware of the project through their existing experiences with village appraisals or, more often than not, through 'word of mouth' (although the RCC have now begun to target priority areas identified under the LAA). This, some suggested, raises concerns over 'usual suspects' who were more able to articulate their needs were likely to initiate the parish plan process at the expense of less 'vocal' communities.

The consultation process adopted by the project is a 'tried and tested' series of distinct stages, which with a few exceptions are implemented in each parish. Considering these issues, concerns were raised regarding: the timescale of the current process (too long?); the appropriateness of the questions in the consultation exercise (too bottom-up?); engaging communities in the process, and encouraging representativeness (involvement of 'usual suspects'); technical difficulties with the process (software issues); the methodology for the consultation process (more innovative techniques?); reviewing the evidence base for targeted areas; eliciting responses to the action plan from service providers; and the effectiveness of the Consultation Protocol.

In terms of project outcomes, in the main, respondents were positive about the project. The project was praised for the vast knowledge the CDO's have, and promoting a sense of community within those that had been consulted. Concerns were raised, however, regarding methodologies (mentioned above), the definition, capture and dissemination of outcomes, and the variable engagement levels between stakeholders.

Evidence for the projects achievements include: engaging communities (60 at the time of writing); improving settlements; increasing skills and capacity; new social networks and engaging new groups; economic development; and triggering funding. Specific examples are given in the main body of the report.

Whilst respondents' reasons for getting involved varied, communities' *expectations* of becoming involved in a community planning exercise were centred around four issues: the time it would take (the process took longer than originally anticipated), the input it would require (generally than expected), the

help they would receive (expectations of core questions and varied levels of help) and the outcomes it would achieve.

Some particular concerns emerging from the stakeholder interviews were centred on communities' unrealistic expectations of the service providers' '*powers*' to change things and also the raising of community hopes.

Generally, relationships with partners were positive, and the RCC project staff were well-respected both for their local knowledge and for their commitment to working with rural communities. However, there were some respondents who felt that relationships between the project and other organisations (particularly in the voluntary sector) could be improved, for the benefit of the communities they seek to support.

Some respondents felt that some members of the project staff could be '*resistant to change*' and this included in the way they worked with other organisations operating in the voluntary or community sector who also represented the interests of, or worked with, rural communities on the ground. Within this, there was a view among some that the project needed to move towards new models of working and new partnerships to work together to tackle some of the rural issues, particularly those that affected disadvantaged communities.

Currently the funding for the project can be seen as relatively short-term, with no core funding. The majority of stakeholders expressed their concern of the difficulties this presents, and also of the tensions that arise from having different *sources* of funders with different (and sometimes competing) priorities.

The report concludes by suggesting a number of areas for improvement which can be grouped under the headings of:

- *Improvements to the process and delivery of the project*: improvements to current methodology (increasing engagement of service providers, work on district basis, event showcasing and better community project planning); alternative methodologies for consultation (equality proofing, 'pick n mix' methodologies, innovative consultative techniques, focus on 'quality of life'); unified questionnaires/central database/comparable data; reviewing projects aims and objectives (keeping pace, and reconciling, with newer economic and empowerment focus and objectives, targeting communities); project funding (measures to secure longer term funding); and improving awareness of the *detail* of the Consultation Protocol.
- *Improvements to the project 'outcomes'*: reviewing the Parish Plan stage (too much emphasis on this stage?); improvements to the action plan stage (and repositioning it as the beginning rather than the end product); more systematic collection and recording of 'outcomes' (on the part of all stakeholders); and targeting communities and working in partnership.

The Community Consultation and Capacity Project is currently in a strong position and has built up a body of local knowledge and expertise and developed an effective consultation methodology. Nevertheless, the project needs to make progress with regard to clarifying and agreeing its aims and objectives with its wider stakeholders, demonstrating and disseminating outcomes and working in partnership with others working to improve the lives of those living in rural Leicestershire and Rutland.

1 INTRODUCTION

In 2006, BMG Research was commissioned by Leicester Shire Economic Partnership (LSEP) to conduct an evaluation of their Community Development and Capacity Building Project. This report provides the findings of the evaluation.

Rural Community Councils (RCCs) are county-based charities working to improve the quality of life of local communities and particularly disadvantaged people in rural England. Until recently, the Countryside Agency funded each RCC (through three year Service Level Agreements) to provide direct support and advice to rural communities and organisations. From April 2005, responsibility for funding shifted to Defra, managed on behalf of Defra by the Government Offices for the Regions.

There are 38 Rural Community Councils across England, providing a network of people working to promote the welfare of local communities through providing support, information and practical guidance on improving rural services. RCCs advise on a wide range of community issues including transport, banking schemes, available grants, retention of village services, best practice advice for village halls and youth issues. Although each RCC operates independently, they work under the umbrella of a national network, ACRE.

The Rural Community Council (Leicestershire and Rutland) is based in Leicester, and has as its aim

“To ensure that all those who work and live in rural communities are provided with access to a range of opportunities, services and facilities which are sustainable and inclusive to all and are empowered to influence and manage their own future” RCC Corporate Plan 2006-09

Operating with 19 staff, it provides support to rural communities, through a range of services including community consultation, capacity building and community development, funding information, supporting village competitions, rural centres projects (providing ‘health checks’ in rural areas), rural business support, village halls service and the production of various guides and information ranging from production of ‘village voice’ to guides on local walks. The organisation also provides advice and guidance on rural stress and social inclusion issues. Specific projects are identified through consultation with statutory and non-statutory bodies, some of which also provide core or project-specific funding. These organisations include Leicestershire Rural Partnership, Leicestershire Economic Partnership, Government Office East Midlands (GOEM) and local government authorities.

As well as funding from GOEM, core funding is also received from Leicestershire and Rutland County Councils and from the six district councils within the area. This core funding supports the salary costs of the RCC infrastructure staff (Director, Deputy Director, Rural Officer, Community Development Officer team leader *partial*, Finance Officer, PA and Finance Assistant). However, the funding of the Community Development and Capacity Building Project is not covered through core funding but through project funding. This means that the funding for the project has to be secured on an annual basis, primary through a bidding process to a range of external funding organisations.

The Community Consultation and Capacity Building project has been in existence for over ten years, and at the time of writing the staff complement was at its largest ever (6 staff) – partly in reflection of its success to date in attracting

project funding and its demonstration of its ability to achieve change and develop communities. The project supports the current government's commitment to giving a greater 'voice' to local communities to enable them to identify their own needs and priorities and to make representations to service providers who hold the resources to support those needs include AA possibly. The project utilises a consultation methodology to enable communities to carry out village appraisals, parish plans and village design statements, primarily through designing and conducting a survey of local views and priorities, and producing an action report which is presented to key agencies.

One of the main funders of the project, the Leicester Shire Economic Partnership (LSEP), has provided funding to carry out an independent review and evaluation of the project to reflect on its achievements to date and how it can best meet future needs of funding partners, communities and other stakeholders. This report is the result of the review.

1.1 Research Aims

The principal aims of the study are to review and evaluate the project, providing an analysis of the achievements and areas where success may not have been forthcoming, the effectiveness of the Consultation Protocol (a guidance document for all parties involved in the parish plan process) and setting out options for future delivery. The research objectives are therefore to assess:

- The value of the project to communities involved in the consultation process
- The value of the project to key partners (funding and non-funding)
- The effectiveness of the Consultation Protocol
- Options and recommendations for future delivery.

1.2 Methodology

The methodology adopted was primarily qualitative in nature, comprising in-depth discussions with the RCC staff and the project team members, funding and non-funding partners, other stakeholders and community group members who had been through the parish planning stage (see Table 1). Discussions were mostly on a one-to-one face-to-face basis¹, and were guided by the researchers using an interview schedule (see Annex A). All discussions were digitally recorded (with the agreement of the respondent) and data from the recordings was analysed using a thematic analysis grid.

The community group representatives were purposively selected by the consultants to ensure a geographical spread across Leicestershire and Rutland, as well as to include those who had commenced the consultation in 2006, 2005 and 2004 to ensure that they reflected different stages within the process (two were selected from each year).

Funding and non-funding partner interviewees were selected on the advice of staff from the RCC, the LSEP and the county council.

¹ A few were conducted by telephone, and a few were conducted as paired interviews.

Table 1 Respondent

Respondent group	Interviewees
RCC staff	Chief Executive Rural Officer Project team leader Community Development Officers (4)
Community members	Representatives of community groups undertaking community consultation (6)
Funding and non-funding partners and other stakeholders (referred to as 'stakeholders' in the report)	LSEP County Council representatives (transport, adult learning, community ICT, rural issues, planning, policy) (8) District Council representatives (4) Primary Care Trust District CVS (2) Parish Council Police Nottingham East Midlands Airport Youth Development worker

1.3 Report Structure

The next chapter (Chapter 2) describes the operation and staffing of the Community Development and Capacity Building project in more detail, including the roles and responsibilities of the Community Development Officers, and perspectives on the staffing and operational arrangements.

Chapter 3 examines the project methodology and consultation processes that the project operates. In Chapter 4 a review of the project's outcomes is provided.

In Chapter 5 the project's relationships with communities is reviewed, followed by the relationship with other funding and non-funding partners in the project (Chapter 6).

Chapter 7 examines the current funding of the project, and the final chapter (8) provides some recommendations for the future organisation and delivery of the Community Consultation and Capacity Building project.

Throughout the report verbatim quotations have been used. These are used for illustrative purposes and should not be interpreted as indicative of perspectives as a whole.

2 PROJECT STAFFING AND ORGANISATION

This chapter provides an overview of how the Community Consultation and Capacity Building project is organised within the RCC, and the roles and responsibilities of the staff that are involved in the project. Respondent perspectives on the staffing arrangements for the project are also presented.

2.1 The Community Development Officers – roles and responsibilities

The project comprises a Team Leader and five Community Development Officers. The project operates a patch-based system, with each half time Community Development Officer (CDO) covering one of the seven districts. Two of the CDOs are full-time, which enables them to cover two districts each. The remaining two CDOs are part-time (18.5 hours a week each) with one vacant post. At the time of writing, the CDOs were supporting in the region of 60 communities who were at various stages of the consultation process or involved in projects following the consultation, mostly through the parish planning process.

The CDOs tend to work to a monthly timetable, as most community groups meet on a monthly basis and the CDOs endeavour to attend these meetings to guide the process and to provide any help that is needed. The CDOs endeavour to attend most of these meetings, although their ability to do this does in part depend on other commitments. A CDO can be working with a relatively large number of communities at any one time, which can mean that during particularly busy periods they are not able to offer the same level of support (for example, attending meetings) as they can at slacker periods (for example, over the summer holidays). However support is always available by email or telephone.

Outside of attendance at meetings, contact with local communities tends to be by phone or email and can be both proactive on the part of the CDO and reactive (with the community contacting the CDO when advice or support is needed). The CDO input was perceived by both communities and stakeholders to be particularly valuable at the questionnaire development stage, serving to accelerate what was often a slow process with many iterations of questionnaires as well as to give ideas about questionnaire wording and technical advice on using the questionnaire design software.

CDOs saw their main roles as promoting the project as widely as possible, starting up the group, and encouraging momentum (particularly at the start of the process but also throughout), encouraging enthusiasm among community members about the project and what it might be able to achieve (often using examples of what had been achieved elsewhere) and in managing initial expectations (in terms of what the CDO role is and what support the RCC and others are able to provide). In addition, a key role perceived by the CDOs was the development and finalisation of the questionnaire, although some stakeholders felt that the CDOs could place too much emphasis on this, and insufficient emphasis on pursuing, identifying and recording outcomes.

It was evident that CDOs also played a critical liaison role between community members and other stakeholders including district and county council service providers. Communities reported that they were particularly reliant on the CDO's knowledge of how local, district and county councils operated, and who the key individuals and departments were in different organisations.

2.2 Current Resources and Competencies

The current staff complement is perceived by staff to be at an optimum level, enabling them to have a wider coverage of parishes and districts than they have been able to in the past. Certainly the view among stakeholders is that their visibility is greater now than in the past when there were fewer in post. Nevertheless, there was a perception among many that the CDOs were overcommitted in terms of their workload, which could impact on the amount of time they were able to invest in the range of activities that they were involved in or could result in them having to spread themselves thinly across the different communities with which they working. There were reports from some community members that it could be difficult to contact CDOs directly and immediately because of the transient nature of their job – although messages left were generally actioned.

The commitment of the CDOs was also unquestioned in all of the interviews 'I've always had the sense that the CDOs were overworked, partly because they are overly enthusiastic, they do more than what they are paid to do'. Across the board – with reference to both experienced and newer CDOs - their tenacity was noted, in their ability to drive forward the communities' agendas. In a few cases, however, this could be viewed negatively by stakeholders, with a perception that the CDOs' views may not always be objective and at the extreme could potentially be seen as a 'negative force' in some settings.

The CDOs role as the 'eyes and ears' of the community was highly valued by respondents, and some felt that not enough use was made of their expertise. It was reported that in some cases, this was because CDOs were too busy to take part in wider activities, although in others there was a perception that they were too 'protective' about their own work and their own organisation, and so may be unwilling to share information with other partners.

The RCC's recent recruitment of relatively new graduates to the roles of CDOs was noted by some. Whilst this was applauded by some as an excellent career development opportunity (reflected also in comments from the new recruits themselves - '*a brilliant first job*'), there was concern that less experienced staff by default may not have the necessary local contextual knowledge that others with many years' of experience had. Whilst not a prerequisite requirement for potential applicants, it was recognised that CDOs do require a large amount of local knowledge and links into local networks. For new staff this can be very difficult, and there may be a considerable reliance on more experienced members of the team. Whilst the induction process was viewed positively by the newer members of the team, the knowledge transfer process can be both resource intensive and onerous. Others reported that because the CDO posts were relatively low paid, this could make it difficult to retain junior staff, reportedly exacerbated by the limited opportunities for career progression within the RCC (the inability to offer better pay or more development opportunities was said to be hindered by the lack of core funding or long term funding for the project). However, information from the RCC itself suggests that this is *not* a primary reason for staff departures, which are reportedly more related to the suitability of the hours, or leaving employment completely. The potential difficulty of retaining newly qualified entrants may mean that the constant repeating of the knowledge transfer and induction process becomes a considerable drain on precious resources

3 PROJECT METHODOLOGY/PROCESS ADOPTED

The first part of this chapter examines the operation of the Community Consultation and Capacity Building Project, by outlining the different stages in the process, beginning with the initial interest from the communities. The second part reflects on the effectiveness of the methodology adopted by the project, by highlighting examples of good practice and identifying possible areas of improvement.

3.1 How and why do communities get involved in the project?

Generally, the RCC is approached by communities who want to conduct a parish plan². The initial contact tends to come from a Parish Council representing a community who are interested in conducting a parish plan. Sometimes they are aware of the process from a neighbouring community, or they may have been made aware of it from a district or county council official. Occasionally, parishes may have previously conducted a village appraisal. Evidently, therefore, 'word of mouth' from other community members plays an important role in advocating the process and is an important communication tool.

As noted by both RCC staff and stakeholders, parishes often first approach the RCC because they have a single issue or '*threat*' within their local community, and undertaking a community consultation is seen as a way of highlighting the issue. Typically, these single issues involves planning or traffic management. From the community perspective, the approach is made to the RCC with an understanding that conducting a Parish Plan process can be an opening to getting additional funding for their community, and getting their '*voice*' heard at a local, district and county level. There was a certain view among some community respondents that if they were known, as a community, to have produced a parish plan then their views were more likely to be listened to at a district and county level.

In essence, therefore, the current onus is on the communities presenting themselves to the RCC. There was a view among the majority of the stakeholders that more could be done to encourage the less '*vocal*' rural communities to become involved in a community consultation process and there was a perception that in the past the project has been predominantly focused on the more affluent and articulate communities and individuals – indeed both staff and stakeholders spoke about the '*usual suspects*' (both in terms of individuals and community members) being involved and that there was a need to explore ways of working with more marginalised communities. Furthermore, there was a view that some of the communities that the project works with are not necessary those who need the most support from the RCC and that there are other more marginalised or less '*vocal*' communities that may actually be more in need of the support and advice provided through the CDOs. Although it was recognised that current CDO commitments (in terms of the numbers of parishes they were currently working with) prevent proactivity, there was a view among a few stakeholders that the RCC could, and *should*, be more selective about which parishes they work with.

² Subsequent to the fieldwork for this project, current staffing levels have meant that the project is able to work towards targeting priority areas, as identified under the Local Area Agreement.

'The RCC needs to concentrate on working over a longer period with communities, but with less communities and have the capacity to say to some "we don't have the capacity to work with you".'

There was an understanding among stakeholders that the current process means that they do not turn parishes away, although they may in fact delay involvement until there is a reduction in their 'parish' caseload. A preferable approach, according to some stakeholder respondents was prioritising support on the basis of need, and becoming a more '*targeted*' service as opposed to a universal service. The example was given of some communities who had already completed a village appraisal or other consultation process had returned to the RCC for further support, but support for these communities – who already had an understanding of the techniques and processes involved – should be seen as minimal to enable the project to focus on communities that had never done any of these kinds of activities. However, a counter argument to this was that if communities are 'put on hold' because of resourcing capacities, they could continue with the process without the support of the project and be less effective as a result – and indeed examples were given of where this had been the case.

The RCC is currently taking steps to encourage communities who have yet to conduct a parish plan, through writing to the Parish Council to ask whether the community may be interested in it. Although it is not clear on what basis parishes are selected for approach, care needs to be taken in appropriate selection, and following up those that do not respond. A more recent development, which began after the consultations for this research, is preparations to work with the others involved in the Safer and Stronger Communities element of the Local Area Agreement to prioritise areas of deprivation that fall into rural neighbourhoods.

3.2 The consultation process

The process adopted by the project is a 'tried and tested' series of distinct stages, which with a few exceptions are implemented in each parish³

3.2.1 Presentation and open meeting

Once the initial contact has been made, the representative CDO will arrange to visit the parish to make a short presentation on the parish plan process. Once a parish has agreed to go through the planning process, an open meeting will be organised. The CDO provides assistance for this, organising leaflets, advertising in local press etc. The CDO attends the open meetings, and again gives a presentation about what a parish plan is, why they should 'bother' and examples of what outcomes other groups have achieved, and leaves a selection of reading material etc. They also run a brainstorming session about likes and dislikes of a community group and perceived strengths and weaknesses of the community and then they seek volunteers for the parish plan steering group. The CDO then gets the group up and running (including nominating the chair), attends the group, circulates minutes, and continues to promote the activities to as wide an audience as possible (using for example, leaflets, posters and notices on the RCC website).

³ . Full guidance on the current process is available via the RCC's website (see <http://www.ruralcc.org.uk>).

3.2.2 Community consultation survey

Communities are then encouraged to carry out a community survey, to collect data on what community members think about their community, and what their concerns are. The specific issues are informed by the outcome of the initial open meetings and presentations described above, although the parishes are encouraged to include a range of generic questions (indeed there are at the time of writing plans to introduce a set of core questions - prepared by service providers - that will be included in all surveys). The project provides support at this phase by providing access to questionnaire design software as well as practical assistance. The parish group circulate drafts of the questionnaire to service providers and other stakeholders for comments and feedback.

Once the questionnaire has been finalised by the steering group (taking into account feedback from service providers, where received), the group arrange for the distribution of the questionnaire to all residents. This is typically done by volunteers (local residents, local scouts etc). Completed questionnaires are returned to the steering group (usually via local collection points).

3.2.3 Report launch and action plan

Once the data has been analysed (by the parish planning group members) and the report and action plan written by the parish plan group, the report is launched at a local community event. The report is circulated to service providers along with an invitation to the launch event. At the launch event, the group may highlight to service providers key actions that they may help with. This event also gives the wider community the opportunity to hear the findings of the consultation exercise. Typically, the event is attended by county and district, council representatives and other service providers (although attendance is reported to be variable, and particularly low among district council representatives), who will make a presentation supporting the plan and giving initial service provider responses.

The action plan is drawn up (by the community group with the CDO's support) following the launch of the report, and identifies the key actions arising from the report, the service provider(s) allocated to the action plan and, if possible, timescales

3.3 Effectiveness of the current methodology

A key consideration about the current approach and methodology adopted for the parish planning and consultation process is the extent to which it is the best way to capture the views of the community about the area in which they live. This means considering whether the approach makes the best use of existing resources (time – both CDO and volunteer time, money, expertise etc), whether the approach is as inclusive as possible (who might be excluded from the process and why?) and whether the approach collects both valid and reliable data (for example, is the data collected 'fit for purpose'? does it answer the questions it set out to answer?).

In considering these issues, we can identify a number of concerns:

The timescale of the current process

This element, as noted by many, is the most time consuming part of the process, typically taking up to a year – in some cases much longer - from the initial survey

design stage to the analysis and reporting. Both stakeholders and community respondents raised the length of this process as an issue – particularly in the questionnaire design stage (although one could assume that this will be accelerated through the introduction of core questions) and was a source of frustration among some. However, others stressed the importance of ensuring that the right data was being collected and that the questionnaire reflected the concerns of the community – both of which took time to establish and agree.

The appropriateness of the questions in the consultation exercise

There was also a view that the current process (whereby communities were effectively free to ask whatever they wanted to in the questionnaire) was too *'bottom up'* and that the CDOs could do more to steer the content of the questionnaires. Some stakeholders questioned the value of including sections in the survey which might lead to communities having unrealistic expectations about what they might be able to achieve through the parish plan process, or including questions that collected unnecessary data, or data which was of little relevance. However, others felt that this *'bottom up'* approach was the great strength of the project, and one that might be lost should the priorities of funding bodies shift to more tangible or *hard* outcomes.

Engaging communities in the process, and encouraging representativeness

The Community Development Officers noted that it was sometimes difficult to get community members involved in the parish plan process.

'There is sometimes a lack of enthusiasm among local residents.... Everyone wants something doing but no-one wants to do it. It's not unique . its just throughout life' (CDO)

What could start out as a relatively large parish planning group in a community could sometimes dwindle to a relatively small group of six to eight people (or less) (although it apparently increased in some groups as community awareness was raised). This was a frustration, and some were concerned about the representativeness of such a group, in terms of reflecting the diversity of the community itself. That said, the time individuals needed to invest in the process could be onerous, making it difficult for those with existing commitments. In some areas this had been managed by having, for example, two chairpersons or two secretaries.

There was also some concern that the community members who became involved in the process were the *'usual suspects'* – retired people, those already active in the community, people who were well educated etc. CDOs had made gallant efforts to ensure that the *'net'* was cast as widely as possible to get people involved, and to ensure that the process was as inclusive as possible. Nevertheless, they did appear to be constrained – certainly by resources and possibly by innovation (according to some). Among some stakeholders, there was a view that the approach needs to be more inclusive, and to consider different approaches to engaging with those who historically have been unwilling or unable to participate in community driven initiatives (see bullet point below on methodologies for the consultation process).

Some CDOs felt that people may have been *'put off'* from becoming involved because of feeling that everyone else knew each other, or that it was an extension of the parish council. Others felt that some community members perceived that they did not have the right skills (for example, communication, speaking at public meetings etc) or knowledge to participate in such events. It

was suggested that more could be done to raise the '*social capital*' of some community members by equipping them with the necessary skills (and possibly confidence) to encourage them to participate in the process.

It was also noted that response rates to the surveys could vary widely, from around 25 to 30% in some communities to over 80 per cent in others (notably the smaller communities). This also led to concerns among some about representativeness.

Technical difficulties with the process

A few comments were raised with regard to the software used to design the questionnaire and analyse the data. One community respondent had redesigned the questionnaire using a different software package, which in his view made the questionnaire look more professional, and another had wanted to analyse the data using Excel or something similar that was more familiar. Others reported finding it difficult to analyse the data, or to structure the report. Although CDOs were able to provide support for this, it is possible that this could become an onerous task and one that may not make the best use of constrained resources. According to the RCC, the software used for the questionnaires also enables online completion, but community members can be reluctant to engage with this option (and it was not raised during the interviews with community members).

The methodology for the consultation process

Many of the stakeholders consulted for the evaluation felt that the project could make more use of innovative consultation techniques (examples were given of workshops, interactive handsets, online surveys) to complement existing methodologies. This, they felt, could have the benefit of accelerating the consultation process (especially where there was a single dominant issue of concern to the community) as well as encouraging responses from 'harder to reach' groups that may not respond to the standard survey methodology (for example, those with poor literacy skills, young people or speakers of other languages). One concern was that some communities could suffer from consultation fatigue, through having being consulted on a range of other initiatives – particularly the case if they were deemed to be disadvantaged in some way. The project is able to offer a variety of approaches to consultation for communities to use in addition to the standard survey approach (including using village maps, video, village walks, photography and art), but ultimately it is the choice of the group itself – and most appear to opt for the survey. There may be merit in further promotion of some of the more innovative methodologies, particularly in areas where there are concerns about inclusivity.

Reviewing the evidence base for targeted areas

A few stakeholder respondents felt that the CDOs could benefit from seeking more advice or information from others about a local parish, prior to commencing work with a community group. Examples included examining local census data to review the demographic information about the local environment, and talking to voluntary sector organisations already working in the area about local initiatives and local issues of concern for the community. Although the RCC practice is to notify service providers and the local CVS at the start up of new groups, it was evident that in some cases they are not aware, and as a consequence do not feel that they are involved from the start.

Eliciting responses to the action plan from service providers

The consultation protocol specifies that the partners do have to give a response (to a plan (both initial responses as well as subsequent actions), but it was apparent that some stakeholders were more responsive than others, with particular variations evident among districts. According to respondents, this depended very much on individual people in post, as well as internal restructuring in some organisations.

Responses to the action plan from service providers was patchy. Among community members and RCC staff, there was a view that some stakeholders were '*better*' than others at responding to the action plan (despite having signed up to the consultation protocol), and in some cases responses were simply not received, or had to be '*chased*' by the CDO (a task which was greatly valued by the communities themselves).

In most cases, stakeholder respondents reported that the timeframe they were given to respond to the action plan was too short (at anything between a few weeks to two months) – despite this timescale having been agreed through a joint stakeholder consultation. Responses from different service providers often required co-ordinating before they could be returned to the community, which in itself could also take time. In addition, some responses required cabinet approval which again to add time to the process. It was felt that the response time should be extended, and that advance warning could be given to the service providers that a plan was due from a particular community on a certain date, which would help with forward planning. Although the project does advise designated service provider co-ordinators of group start-ups, it appears as though this information may not always filter down to relevant individuals.

A recent service co-ordination event (which are networking events designed to help organisations and local people to work together to address service issues based on community needs to foster joint working and improved communication between agencies) has been held which focused specifically on a draft action plan produced by a community group. This appears to be a positive step to improving early dialogue.

Effectiveness of the Consultation Protocol

The protocol, which has recently been updated, provides clear guidance to parish plan groups, service providers and project staff about their respective roles and responsibilities within the parish planning process and as a document appears to work well among those who are familiar with it. Nevertheless, it was apparent that awareness of the specific content varied among respondents and that key messages (for example about the 'fullness' of required responses, about the timescales for responding) had not always filtered through within organisations. Furthermore, communities themselves were generally reluctant to 'chase' service providers for responses or ask for further clarification, preferring communication and 'chasing' to be made by the CDOs.

4 PROJECT OUTCOMES

The previous chapter outlined the current project protocol and *processes* currently employed to facilitate the parish planning process and the production of the 'action plan', together with an assessment of the effectiveness of the methodology. This chapter now reflects on respondents' assessment of the *outcomes* of the process, beyond the post-action plan stage. The first part of the report considering perspectives on overall benefits of the project to the different stakeholders and the second part reviews the evidence on project outcomes.

Before moving to the substantive sections of this report, it is useful to consider here some definitions and concepts relating to 'outcomes'. Clearly, for any project to be effective, it needs to demonstrate its achievements, which can include:

- Initial 'impacts' or results, which clearly demonstrates the effect of an intervention, in this case the Community Consultation and Capacity Building project (an example here might be the provision of a new bus route)
- Longer term, or broader 'outcomes', which can include the consequences of a specific intervention (an example here might be increased employment opportunities as a result of the provision of a new bus route).

Outcomes, therefore, are much wider than what might traditionally be associated with impacts. Considering the outcomes of a project such as the one under observation here, requires both a review of measurable and tangible (but perhaps shorter term) impacts as well as of more qualitative and by definition harder to measure achievements or benefits of the project, such as increase in community capacity, in quality of community life or in civic participation.

4.1 Overall assessment of the project's benefits

Respondents from all of the key groups (RCC staff, parish members and stakeholders) were asked about the *overall* benefits of the Community Consultation and Capacity Building (CCCB) project. In the main, respondents were positive about the project, and about the benefits it *could* bring.

'We know that the project is doing good things but we know it could be better'

'They get to the people and build the capacity and build good working relationships... I see their role as empowering people which they do very well'

The knowledge of those working in the project was known to be thorough, and the CDOs ability to be '*in touch*' with local community views on the ground was invaluable.

As noted earlier there were some concerns about the current methodologies employed, the communities targeted and the definition, capture and dissemination of outcomes.

In terms of the benefit to the communities who had been involved in the project by way of undertaking a parish plan, their perspective was that without the RCC they would have not been able to undertake the consultation. Among the stakeholders, there was a view that communities who had undertaken the parish

plan process had a stronger sense of community than they had prior to the consultation.

Some stakeholders appear to be more engaged in (and hence gain more from) the process than others. Those involved in rural planning and issues such as rural transport were more positive about the benefits of the project than those who appeared to be less involved. Among the latter group, there were two themes – those who were less involved because they did not see the parish planning process as a priority to their area of work (notably, health) and those who felt that the project had not positively encouraged their involvement (notably the CVS) . It appears, therefore, that despite efforts to date from the project to promote involvement and engagement on the part of current (and potential) service providers, more needs to be done, or a different approach needs to be adopted to further engage these groups.

4.2 Defining and Measuring Project Outcomes

Across all public, private and voluntary sectors, there are clear requirements to demonstrate outcomes, and the RCC Community Consultation and Capacity Building project is no exception. During the early days of funding the demonstration of outcomes was predominantly linked to the number of parish plans or consultations achieved – and indeed a few respondents still assumed that these were the outcomes that the project was required to demonstrate. Increasingly, however, funding partners – particularly the LSEP and GOEM – are requiring evidence of economic outcomes, relating to, for example, jobs created or sustained, businesses supported or the facilitation of social enterprises. This presents a clear challenge for the Community Consultation and Capacity Building project, because of the nature of the work and because of the way that outcomes are currently defined, measured and disseminated.

Nevertheless, there was a general view that the project was currently too focused on the production of parish plans and action plans, and a perception that both staff and communities could see the production of these as the end result or outcome rather than the start of the process. It was evident from the project staff interviewees that newer CDOs tended to be more focused on assisting communities to carry out consultations and to produce parish plans and action plans than they were on the identification of outcomes (however defined), although this may in part be a reflection of their limited opportunity to date of working with projects at the post-action plan stage. Nevertheless, there is a need to refocus the objectives of the project more towards the achievement of outcomes. Where outcomes are collected and reported, they tend to be embedded in detailed progress and action reports rather than being lauded as direct outcomes of the project's intervention.

Being able to identify outcomes may in part depend on how outcomes are defined. Outcomes may be both soft and hard, and may be easy or difficult to both define and measure. For example, defining increased social capital or community capacity is far more difficult to define, and to measure any change in, whereas increasing economic development through employment creation is both easier to define and easier to measure. One of the difficulties that is evident in the Community Consultation and Capacity Building project is that the definition of outcomes is not universally understood or defined. Clearly part of the funding has historically been linked to quite defined outcomes – the completion of a certain number of parish plans, for example, when the Countryside Agency funded part of the project, and demonstrating a positive impact on the economic capacity of rural communities (through jobs created and jobs safeguarded), which is part of the LSEP's current required project outputs.

Nevertheless, raising community capacity is also at the core of the project – and indeed its priority is reflected in the project title - yet the concept and definition of capacity building does not readily emerge clearly from the evidence gathered for this evaluation, and so it follows that there do not appear to be clearly identified desired outputs or measures with regard to capacity building. Certainly it did not emerge as a highly salient issue from the RCC staff interviews. Furthermore, a few stakeholder respondents were unaware (and somewhat surprised) that the project had the term 'Capacity Building' in its title. Currently, the outputs identified and disseminated (through the quarterly activities summary produced by the RCC) does not include evidence of 'capacity building' (despite the fact that there are clearly examples within communities of where this has occurred). This suggests that more could be done to highlight capacity building it as a priority, to adopt a workable definition across all stakeholders and to link in examples to demonstrate how capacity may have been raised through the project. One way of doing this could be to instil the importance of building community capacity with the community groups, by giving them examples of what this might mean, and encourage them to reflect on the extent to which this has been done throughout the process (for example, by including it as part of the launch or post-action plan reporting, or including it as a regular planning meeting agenda item).

4.3 Project Outcomes

After considering the issues of the definition and measurement of outcomes of the Community Consultation and Capacity Building project, this section now reviews some of the achievements of the project. Evidence for this section is taken from the qualitative interviews, as well as from a review of the documentary evidence made available to the evaluation team, and the focus here is on demonstrating outcomes that extend beyond the numbers of consultations undertaken.

This section does not seek to provide a full account of all outcomes of the project but, rather, serves to illustrate the wide range of outcomes currently being achieved (section 4.4 below carries this forward by discussing the dissemination of outcomes). A fuller review of the RCC's activities over the previous 3 years is available through the three year district 'summary of activities' produced by the RCC and quarterly summary of activities. Whilst both cover the overall activities of the RCC, each contains details of activities under specific areas of work, including community consultation and development.

4.3.1 Engaging communities

One of the primary objectives of the project is to provide support to rural communities to help them to become involved in decisions that affect their local community. At the time of writing, the CDOs are working with around 60 parishes across the seven districts of Leicestershire and Rutland. According to the community respondents, becoming 'engaged' in this process brought with it a sense of achievement, and feeling that they were contributing something to their community and that they were helping to give their community a voice at district and county level which had not previously been heard. In some cases, evidence from the parish plan process had been adopted at council level as Supplementary Planning Documents – a clear demonstration of the ability of the consultation outcome to have a direct impact on the policy making process.

4.3.2 Improving settlements

The parish plan process clearly identifies the issues that communities feel are important and want to improve or change, and there are many examples of tangible changes or improvements to communities as a result of the parish planning process, including:

- Improvements to traffic (traffic calming, new signage, traffic lights);
- Recreation and play (play areas created/improved, benches installed);
- Improvements to the physical environment (site clearance, installing litter bins, improved lighting, repairs to pavement); and
- Improvements to local information and advice (installing notice boards, production of new residents' information packs, community newsletters)

4.3.3 Increasing skills and capacity

Some community respondents felt that their own skills had developed, particularly in relation to running meetings and to facilitating consultations – although others had utilised their existing skills gained through their area of employment. Specific examples of increased skills and capacity included:

- Improved IT skills of those involved in the parish planning process;
- Ability to conduct further consultations with community members;
- New courses for community learners (eg, IT, maths);
- Progression of parish planning group members (eg, to parish council member).

4.3.4 New social networks and engaging new groups

Those involved in the parish planning group had met many new contacts through the process. New social networks had also developed as a result of the actions developing from the process, including:

- New clubs starting (for example, history, dance, bridge, rambling, luncheon club);
- New volunteers (some of which were identified through the survey);
- New networks with neighbouring parishes;
- New neighbourhood watch groups; and
- New 'thematic' groups to take forward some of the specific issues arising from the action plan (such as heritage, transport).
- Sustained engagement with young people (such as the establishment of youth forums).

4.3.5 Economic development

The development of the local economy is important to enable a vibrant sustainable community – this can be through enabling the growth of local businesses, encouraging retail spending within the community or enabling community members to participate in the local economy whilst remaining in their communities (for example, by the provision of good transport networks). Examples of outcomes related to the parish planning process included

- Launching a Farmers' market;
- Re-opening of village shop/Post Office;
- Regular visiting of a mobile shop;
- Parish council employing a local 'street orderly';
- New community support offices in place;
- Fund raising activities to pay for improved local services;
- Establishing a Business Forum to put local businesses in touch with one another;
- Improvements to commercial bus service (to enable workers to get to their place of work)
- Opening a weekly tuck shop for children and young people.

4.3.6 Triggering funding

The Community Development Officers also have a key role in highlighting possible funding opportunities to planning groups (via the RCC Funding Officer) and providing assistance with applying, and there have been some major grants awarded to settlements as a direct result of this. In the period July 2003 to July 2006, in addition to the total of £164,166 of grants awarded to parishes to help the parish planning process, over £1.3 million in grants, across the six Leicestershire districts, was secured. Whilst not all are directly attributable as project outcomes, they are a recognition of the involvement of the project and the RCC as whole with communities, and it gives an indication of the large amount that has been levered into local communities, much of which was driven by the momentum gained from conducting the parish plan process. Examples of funding sources include:

- Crimebeat
- Awards for All
- Community Roots
- Welland Catalyst
- Big Lottery

- Lafarge
- Astra Zenica

Funding has also been generated through community funding raising activities as well as other sources of support such as donations of equipment for community use from local businesses (for example, snooker tables for local youth groups).

4.4 Dissemination of Outcomes

Among the stakeholder respondents, there was a general view that project outcomes were poorly disseminated. Those that were familiar with the Summary of RCC Activities, which is circulated every quarter by the RCC to a range of statutory and voluntary organisations, found that it was too large a document to digest, and that it was difficult to identify clear outcomes from the evidence contained within. The original intention of the Summary of Activities was, at the request of District Councils but now circulated to all partners, to present an overview of activities in each area. Indeed, the document, which is typically around 30 pages in length, tends to focus predominantly on activities (as the title suggests) and although it provides a comprehensive assessment of all activities that the RCC (and its parts) has been involved in, the current format does not readily identify outcomes or achievements.

Nevertheless, there are clear demonstrable outcomes interwoven throughout the summaries as well as attached to individual parish plans, such as the provision of a play area or additional funding secured for a community event or facility, which can be directly attributable to the parish plan/action plan process. These need to be showcased to give a higher profile than is currently the case.

There are also clearly non-tangible benefits or impacts of the project, such as enhanced confidence and social capital, individual progression on to other activities (such as a Parish Council representative or borough councillor) which are not currently systematically collected, recorded or disseminated.

5 PROJECT RELATIONSHIPS WITH COMMUNITIES

This chapter explores the interactions between communities undertaking community consultation and parish planning exercises, drawing on the interviews with individuals from the six case study communities selected for the evaluation (see Chapter 1 on methodology).

The first part of the chapter describes the community expectations with regard to carrying out a parish consultation, followed by respondents' views on the communication they subsequently had with the RCC's Community Consultation and Capacity Building project team members (Section 5.2). Section 5.3 highlights the type of support sought, and received from the project and the final section (5.4) highlights examples of good practice and suggests areas where there may be room for improvement.

5.1 Expectations from communities

Respondents' reasons for getting involved varied. One group member stated that the whole politics of the process, in giving an opportunity to give a *bottom up* opinion of what the community wanted to change, enthused him. Another in a different parish voiced concerns that if they did not go through the parish plan process, and gain ground roots '*evidence*' to add weight to their concerns, they may be at a disadvantage and miss out on some opportunities:

'Unless we had that kind of evidence why should the service providers take any notice of us?'

In another community, however, there had initially, there had been signs of consultation fatigue within the community, whereby people that attended the initial meeting stated '*we've done this all before and nothing has got done*'.

Community expectations of becoming involved in a community planning exercise were centred around four issues: the time it would take, the input it would require, the help they would receive and the outcomes it would achieve.

A particular concern that emerged in the stakeholder interviews was that communities could have misconceptions or unrealistic expectations about service providers' '*powers*' to change some things. In addition, there were concerns that because the consultation process (in terms of the questions asked) was essentially grounded in what the community wanted there was a danger in the process '*raising hopes*' about things that could never be achieved. Nevertheless, a counter argument to this might suggest that the plans provide useful evidence for nature of services in the future, even if they are not currently feasible or realistic.

One respondent commented

'The groups ask questions that are never going to get anywhere... Its raising hopes and not informing them of what can be achieved – it's the opposite of capacity building'

In reality, there are very clear demonstrations of what can be achieved, but evidently the dissemination of these 'outcomes', either in the method used or the channels used, could be more effective (see earlier chapter).

Time scales

All of the community group respondents that had launched their reports stated that the project had taken them much longer than first anticipated and had also taken up more of their personal time than expected. This echoed the concern among some of the stakeholders. Though the *anticipated* time varied between 6 and 18 months, the actual time taken from the initial start-up meetings to what the groups perceived to be the 'end' (the launch of the report) actually took approximately 2 years.

However, half of the parish plan groups still stated that, with hindsight, they were happy for it to take as long as it did *'because we found things that we didn't expect to find, therefore the process works'*.

Input required

The amount of time spent on the plan by individuals within the groups was again more than originally anticipated.

'I was doing a good two full days a week, more sometimes. More than I anticipated and wanted to give'.

In some cases, this had led to a lull in activity once the parish plan had been produced. This in turn meant that the process of action planning and the pursuit of outcomes was perhaps not given sufficient priority, as community members were simply fatigued by the entire process and needed to have a *'break'* from it.

Expectations on help received

A couple of the groups had expected that there be a set of standardised 'core' questions to use and/or an easier way of having plans that had been carried out before made available to them earlier on in the process. Potentially, they felt that this could have speeded up the process, which had already taken more time than they had planned. Nevertheless, others wanted ownership of the process themselves, which involved them developing their own sets of questions. In a few cases, communities appeared to be over-reliant on the CDOs, and when the CDO was unable to provide the assistance they felt that they needed (because of other commitments to other communities) this held up the process and these communities appeared to be reluctant to move forward without the CDO input. However, in other cases communities soon became relatively self-sufficient.

Some of the groups spoken to indicated that their reason for securing assistance from the RCC was primarily to get additional funding support to help to maintain and develop their community. In such cases, one may question the usefulness of conducting a full parish plan consultation.

5.2 Access to the project staff

Overall, community respondents spoke positively about the availability and frequency of contact between themselves and the RCC CDOs, including the 'generosity of time and professional expertise in managing meetings', among other things.

Most stated that they received an appropriate level of communication with the project. The respondents were happy that the CDOs were in attendance regularly at early meetings and then let them have somewhat of a 'loose rein', but were

there on the phone, or would try to attend if needed. The confidence and the drive of each of the groups were such that they 'didn't feel like they needed the RCC terribly' – although this is in contrast to the views of the CDOs who felt that the support needs from communities at the start of the process were fairly high. Furthermore, from the CDO perspective, their role at the outset in encouraging inclusivity in their approach avoids the risks of the group becoming focused on their own 'agenda'

The only exception came from a parish plan group that was one of the first groups to go through the process and as a result they felt that their CDO did not have a sufficient amount of background knowledge and experience to provide the help that was necessary. They suggested that it would have been beneficial to have someone sharing their experiences of other parish planning processes.

A weakness highlighted among some community respondents was a perception of a high turnover of CDOs during their parish plan process which they felt had had a negative effect on communication and organisation, and therefore on the length of time taken to complete the plans. One group in particular reported having had a total of four different RCC staff working with them and commented on the varying approaches and knowledge they had, and also on the lack of 'continuity of service' saying that they felt abandoned at times. As noted elsewhere, the short term nature of the CDO funding, plus the relatively low salary levels offered, can work against the retention of staff, making it difficult to offer a sustained service at times. The availability of a full time team leader, who can ensure sustained cover for communities if needed, helps to minimise any potential gaps in support. It is worth noting here that figures from the RCC indicate that the average turnover of staff for this project is 1.5 per annum.

5.3 Types of support from CDOs

Views on the support received from the CDOs centred on general help, advice and information and access to funding.

5.3.1 General help, advice and information

According to the community respondents, the CDOs played a pivotal role in stimulating interest within the community and setting up the initial meetings so that steering groups could form. Most were happy with the arms-length level of support that the CDOs gave them after this stage saying that '*they were there if we needed them*' with regards to funding, directional, contacts or general administration help. CDOs also played an important role in providing an introduction to service providers.

The experience that the RCC staff have has been invaluable to the groups

'The regular RCC contact stopped us falling into the elephant trap of repeating parishes mistakes. If we are discussing something the RCC are likely to have come across similar issues elsewhere then point us in the right direction.'

The level and frequency of help appeared to vary depending on which of the RCC project staff the communities they were working with, and their respective workload. As mentioned earlier, varying levels of disruption to the plan processes were apparent, and were attributed to a perception of frequent project staffing changes at the RCC .

Each of the groups stated that they wanted, and indeed expected, examples of questions from previous parish plan questionnaires so that they had something to work towards, and being shown examples of carefully worded questions from other successful consultations was helpful. It was argued that the significant time spent on thinking of questions to suit the community could have been reduced in a process that had already taken longer than they had initially expected. One group member expressed caution, however, on the topic of standardised questionnaires

'Its difficult to know whether a set of standardised questions would help because every village is different. We would like to put our flavour on it'.

CDOs felt that many communities required considerable help at the questionnaire stage (although some groups – notably those that included retired professionals - needed far less support). This could also extend to helping with analysing and interpreting the data, and structuring and writing up the report. Providing such intensive support could be a considerable drain on already pressured CDO time. It may be that alternative ways of providing this support should be considered. For example, with the new generic set of questions that are currently being designed through the project in conjunction with service providers, a web-based toolkit or guidance could provide information on how a report should be structured, how quantitative data should be presented, and how to avoid common pitfalls in presenting data of this nature (some information is contained in the consultation leaflet given to all groups).

Some community respondents reported that they still had contact with the RCC post launch and stated that the RCC were there for them if they needed general updates, possible funding options and advice, which they found to be beneficial.

5.3.2 Access to funding

In some cases the funding for the project was the main catalyst in generating interest from the villages to go through the parish plan process. Most groups stated that without the funding from the RCC the project would not have been possible.

'We couldn't have done it without the money and therefore couldn't have done it without the facilitation of the RCC'.

The short-term nature of funding post-Countryside Agency was said to have made the relationship between the communities and the RCC even more critical.

'Then you really do need somebody like the RCC to get involved. The amount of time and effort 'civilians' have to spend on paper work makes it quite hard'.

Also related to funding, was the expectation that the RCC could help access funding for communities to produce their parish consultation report. Communities often wanted to produce a high quality colour report and for it to be distributed as widely as possible, but often found that their district council would not help with printing costs. Although the RCC project could help with the printing of flyers, but could not produce the reports for the communities (although could do photocopying for a cost). Often, however, access to additional support for the production of the report was limited, and this could be a source of frustration to communities. Nevertheless, the RCC view is that a few copies distributed to key public community places (such as the local church, library or village hall), along with electronic and/or online copies for service providers and others is sufficient, and makes the best use of scarce resources for report

production. Clearly, a balance needs to be struck that enables communities to produce what they feel is a high quality 'glossy' report but does not focus resources away from follow-on action planning work. This needs to be balanced with the planning groups' evident pride in what they have achieved, and wanting to ensure that the report is of a high quality presentation, and that it is circulated widely among the community it represents.

5.4 Overview

In summary, the six community respondents consulted for this evaluation generally spoke very positively of their involvement in the parish planning process and the support they had received from the CDO and the project team. There was a consensus that the work of the RCC was invaluable in promoting rural England, and in enabling and empowering communities to conduct the parish plan process, which they felt was invaluable in bringing rural and community issues to the forefront of local and regional agendas. Community groups generally had a positive relationship with the CDOs, despite some historic difficulties with a perception that in some areas there had been relatively high CDO turnover

There are a number of examples of good practice that emerged from discussions with the parish groups. One parish sent a draft report to the service providers *before* the launch and then they were asked to attend an early meeting to see what their opinions were and whether they understood it. Just the Steering group, chair of Parish Council and the service providers were present. This was reported as a very useful exercise.

This was echoed by another group who said that they decided not to have a launch event with '*all the frills*'. They suggested the money that is spent on this was better spent on the actions that the community want out of the plan process (although it should be recognised that one of the purposes of the launch event is to move on to the next stage of the process and to encourage volunteer involvement in projects that evolve from the action plan – and in actual fact the cost of the launch event is relatively low).

Another group, with the support of their CDO, enabled a youth representative to be part of the steering group, which proved to be beneficial to the whole community.

Community respondents also identified some areas for possible improvement in the process. These centred around:

Funding

Some parishes have more than one village in the area and were concerned that they would get less funding or support than parishes with only one.

Software

Improvements to the usability of the software was raised by some, and others had not liked the look of the questionnaires that were produced by the software and had chosen to design their own.

Examples of past projects

Some community respondents stated that it would have been helpful to have examples of what had gone before being made available to them and would have speeded up the process somewhat. A mentor group and/or a central depository were suggested.

The launch event

The purpose of the launch night was also questioned by some, and others commented that they did not feel it was the best use of resources.

In summary, the RCC played an effective pivotal role in;

- Helping groups to secure additional funding
- Initiating the Parish Plan process by giving informative and stimulating presentations and organising start-up meetings
- Providing a list of service providers contacts so that parish groups can initiate contact themselves when needed
- Utilising their experiences in guiding the groups past possible pit falls and ensuring that they are pointed in the right direction
- Providing general admin support and the questionnaire, analysis and report writing stage.

The RCC project staff as facilitators and supporters of the community consultation and parish plan process were highly valued by the communities consulted. It was stated that it would be difficult to 'push' any issues that arise in the local communities without the project, indeed most issues '*wouldn't have ever even came to consciousness*' without the consultations.

6 RELATIONSHIPS WITH FUNDING AND NON-FUNDING PARTNERS

This section explores the funding and non-funding partners' perspectives on their relationship with the RCC project and its staff. During the discussions, respondents often spoke more generally about their relationship with individuals within the RCC rather than with the specific Community Consultation and Capacity Building project, and this should be borne in mind by the reader. Nevertheless, it provides a useful insight into how the both the organisation and project are viewed externally, and where there might be areas to develop to foster joint working for the benefit of the communities within rural Leicestershire and Rutland.

Overall, relationships with the project staff and the RCC as a whole were very positive

'The relationship is good, and I respect what they are doing'.

'I've heard that this is the best RCC in the East Midlands re partnership working'.

The following sections provide further perceptions of relationships from different respondent perspectives and observations.

6.1 Relationships with service providers and other statutory organisations

Key to the success of the liaison between the parish plan action planning and service providers is 'engagement' with service providers. This works best when there is a nominated point of contact, via whom information can be channelled, queries raised and responses (eg, from different departments at a district or county level) co-ordinated. It was clear from the research that this worked better in some areas than in others. Nevertheless, CDOs had made great strides to form links at a district and county level, and much work had gone into highlighting the role of the protocol and building contacts and effective working relationships.

At county council level, there is a nominated county council co-ordinator, who ensures that all questionnaires and reports are directed to relevant individuals within the council (such as housing, planning, transport, environment etc), and chases and co-ordinates responses. This meant that most statutory service providers liaised primarily with the nominated officer rather than the RCC directly. This procedure appeared to work well, insofar as good lines of communication were evident between the project and the nominated officer. However, it was apparent that some service providers were more engaged in the process than others – particularly at the action planning stage, and responses from service providers to the co-ordinator were not always immediately forthcoming. This often appeared to be related to competing priorities or changes in staffing structures and responsibilities as well as, in extreme instances, a perception that it was not relevant to their area of work (for example, health). This could result in nil responses in the specified time period, or insufficiently 'full' responses (which was occasionally raised in the community interviews)

'to be honest we don't really see it as a key piece of consultation in the community, we don't particularly use it in our planning process.. due to the limited engagement in the process and a lack of certainty about the validity of what goes in to the parish plans... it sometimes seems as a wish list which isn't achievable'

The need for Service Co-ordination events was identified by Leicestershire County Council as a way of improving communication between the different service providers to reduce duplication and to help focus on service provision at a community level. It provides a networking event for organisations to address the service issues that have been identified by the community (for example, through a consultation process or through information gathered by the RCCs Rural Services Co-ordinator). The aim is that all sectors of the community – voluntary, statutory, private, health, police etc – to identify practical solutions to issues raised and to develop action plans. The initiative appears to be gaining momentum and positive outcomes are being achieved such as the joint provision of community training, the provision of grant information and joint discussions about new transport schemes. Nevertheless, it has been recognised that some service providers have been *'slow to engage with the process'* (Service Co-ordination Events Evaluation Report, 8th February 2006), and others who may not naturally consider themselves to be service providers are not. Closer links and co-ordination with the current parish planning process may help with this and minimise any potential duplication of effort, making the best use of people's time, which is often constrained (indeed, this may increase as service co-ordination events increase throughout the county).

Districts have a key role to play in the project, particularly at the project plan/action planning stage. Districts can also have considerable benefit from the process, which provides clear evidence on priority issues and concerns for their communities. Nevertheless, their *'buy-in'* appeared to be variable. Drafts of the questionnaire are circulated to the relevant district, and Parish planning groups provide a copy of the completed parish plan report and the action plan to the district four weeks prior to the launch. However, according to community members, district response was sometimes insufficient, and there was a feeling among the community members that responding to parish plans is not always seen as a priority at district level. Nevertheless, the extent to which districts did engage in the process did vary, and it was evident that there had been significant recent improvements in some areas. Often it appeared to depend on whether there is a named contact in the district (which in some districts there had not been), staffing capacity at the district level and the efforts made on the part of the CDO working within that district.

6.2 Relationships with the voluntary sector

Some stakeholders thought that the project's relationship with other voluntary sector organisations could be improved. There was a concern that the provision of services to rural communities could be improved if more steps were taken to co-ordinate services through more partnership and joint working. There was a risk, it was felt, that some communities will become disengaged through over consultation or through being confused over the different voluntary sector organisations that were working in their community and that this could be divisive.

Activities for strengthening relationships were being undertaken by some, including involving the RCC project staff in, for example, the Stronger Communities element of the Local Area Agreement. However, it was felt that there was more scope for closer working, to ensure the best use of resources, shared knowledge and expertise and gaining the best 'value for money' in terms of delivery. An example was given of when the CDOs begin working in a new area, they could contact other voluntary sector organisations to find out what other activities are occurring, and any particular issues that are affecting the community. Whilst the Consultation Protocol does require that all service providers and the voluntary sector are informed of a new group starting, the

perception among some was that this was not always happening. There were opposing explanations as to why this might be – some felt that others may be too busy to become engaged in the project, others thought that the competition for funding worked against joint working and others felt that the voluntary sector organisations were predominantly urban based and had little capacity for involvement in rural outreach work.

- As mentioned earlier, there was a view among some that the RCC could be perceived as '*protective*' of their own organisation, and of the '*special*' relationship that they felt they had with the rural communities within Leicestershire and Rutland. This, it was perceived, could lead to a duplication of effort as different organisations replicated the same kind of work.

6.3 Overview

Generally, relationships were positive, and the RCC project staff were well-respected both for their local knowledge and for their commitment to working with rural communities. However, there were some respondents who felt that relationships between the project and other organisations (particularly in the voluntary sector) could be improved, for the benefit of the communities they seek to support.

Some respondents felt that some members of the project staff could be '*resistant to change*' and this included in the way they worked with other organisations operating in the voluntary or community sector who also represented the interests of, or worked with, rural communities on the ground. Within this, there was a view among some that the project needed to move towards new models of working and new partnerships to work together to tackle some of the rural issues, particularly those that affected disadvantaged communities.

7 PROJECT FUNDING

This chapter examines the funding of the Community Consultation and Capacity Building project within the RCC.

Currently the funding for the project can be seen as relatively short-term, with no core funding. At the time of writing, the main funding for the project comes from the Leicestershire Economic Partnership and Leicestershire County Council. Only one district council provides any funding for the project (£4,000), with the others contributing to RCC core costs only. The remainder of the RCC activities and staff are core funded through Government Office East Midlands, Leicestershire and Rutland County Council and the six districts that form Leicestershire and Rutland.

This funding is used to cover the costs of the six CDOs, which effectively means that these staff are not core RCC staff, but are project staff linked to short-term external funding. As a result it was evident that it was difficult to plan the strategic development of the project and of the CDOs because of fragility in terms of the sustainability of the project over the longer term. Comments from respondents outside of the RCC highlighted the limitations of the current short-term funding regime on the ability to plan the future direction of community consultation activities, in light of current developments in terms of an increased focus on community led initiatives, community 'ownership' and neighbourhood models of governance and civic participation.

There was therefore an overwhelming recognition of the difficulties the general short-term nature of the current funding presented to the RCC.

'Where it falls down in the current economic climate is that they are constantly scratching around for funding...needs to have a stronger commitment to funding these types of projects. Pressure needs to be put onto GOEM to ring fence some money for community projects'

Concerns were raised about the pressures of future uncertainty (for example in being able to retain the current number of CDOs), about the low salary levels that the project is able to offer to its CDOs, and about the negative effect (including on morale, on feelings of vulnerability and on staff 'fundraising' time at a senior level) of having to secure future funding on an annual basis to ensure that the project continues to be sustainable over the longer term.

'All of this work should be mainstream funding ... it doesn't make sense to have short term interventions for anything around community development... it should get proper funding'

In recognising that there is a finite 'pot' of money for this kind of community work, there was a view that the project could see itself as being in competition with other organisations in the voluntary sector, and it was suggested that other organisations could, *in theory*, deliver the same kinds of services that the Community Development and Capacity Building project does. Nevertheless, as noted by one respondent, the depth of expertise in the RCC would put them at a distinct advantage.

'If the project went out to tender I would expect the RCC to put a tender in for it. From my experience of it they would be best placed to do it. They have the involvement, experience and respect of the community which would take another organisation a very long time to gain.'

There was also evidently a tension between the different sources of funding for the project, with some supporting the project with a relatively broad remit, for example in terms of developing the community and enabling them to set their own agenda but with other funders, notably the LSEP, having a much more economically focused remit which requires the project to demonstrate clear economic benefits to communities and the local economy. This, some felt, pulled the RCC project in different directions and put them under considerable pressure to reconfigure the project away from being a community led development project to being a much more economically driven initiative to ensure that they continue to attract funding. The priorities of the project clearly needs to reflect those of its funding partners as well as fitting with the ethos of the project and the RCC as a whole, in supporting the needs of rural communities. This has important implications for the future purpose and priorities of the project.

8 RECOMMENDATIONS

This final section of the report brings together the evidence from the preceding chapters to highlight some considerations for the future organisation and delivery of the Community Consultation and Capacity Building project. By default, therefore, the chapter focuses on areas for improvement, rather than reflecting on issues relating to good practice and effective project delivery. This, however, should not be taken as any indication that the project, as it currently stands, is ineffective in any way. Indeed, as the research evidence has indicated in the earlier chapters, the project makes a significant contribution to the development of rural communities and to achieving outcomes that would not have otherwise been achieved at a local level.

Nevertheless, the evidence from the interviews suggests a number of areas for improvement. These can be grouped under two main headings:

- Improvements to the *process* and *delivery* of the project
- Improvements to the project *outcomes*.

8.1 Improvements to the process and delivery of the project

The considerations for future delivery of the project relate to the methodologies adopted, improvements to the questionnaires and the project aims and objectives,

8.1.1 Improvements to the current methodology

The issue of engaging service providers in the process prior to the questionnaire design phase and beyond was raised by some. Whilst most service providers agreed that it would not be appropriate to meet with communities on a one to one basis because of constraints on resources, there was support for work on a district basis so that events combined for a number of parishes (and this has already been successful in some areas through service co-ordination events). The disadvantage of such an approach was raised as (aside from the practical difficulties if parishes are at different stages in the process) shifting the focus to district from local parish level which could move to far away from the localisation of the process. Nevertheless, it may lead to improved efficiency and higher turnout as the number of events increase over time.

Whilst existing events were recognised as positive, it was thought that more could be done to celebrate successes of the parish planning process, and to showcase where it had 'made a difference' and achieved outcomes both in the short and long term.

Parishes themselves may benefit from better 'project planning' for the consultation. Assistance could be provided with developing project timetables with key milestones and target activities for community groups to work with (for example, through gantt charts).

8.1.2 Alternative methodologies for consultation

From the stakeholder perspective, there was a general consensus that the project could benefit from considering expanding its current methodological approach to consultation. As raised earlier in this report, although it was felt that the process generally worked, there were concerns about its inclusiveness, as well as the time it could take to complete the process (typically around 18 months to two years or more) and that, in some cases, the community may benefit from an alternative approach to seek the views of their community. This might be particularly effective when the community has a single issue of concern or when there are clearly sections of the community that are not participating in the adopted consultation process. With regard to the latter, communities may be encouraged to 'equality proof' their approach, perhaps by developing a 'checklist' tool to ensure that they are as inclusive as possible.

Similarly, some felt that not all communities needed the same approach – depending on their own skills, confidence and 'vision' of what they needed.

The following suggestions were made by stakeholder respondents:

- Promoting a 'pick n mix' approach whereby the methodology and type of help given to parishes depends on what type of community they are and their 'capacity' (including skills and resources).
- Being innovative in adopting different methods of consultation, rather than sticking to the rigidity of the parish plan process. It was suggested that this could be a one day event, which could be a quicker '*win*' to build trust in the local community;
- There should be a shift of focus from action plans and 'what do you want?' approaches, to include more 'quality of life' questions like 'what's it like to live in your village?'

The project staff have a wealth of information from previous consultations that are retained at the RCC offices, as well as the breadth of experience between them. Consideration of some form of parish planning 'clinic', which operates on a drop-in basis may be worth considering.

8.1.3 Unified questionnaires/central database/comparable data

The majority of stakeholders stated that the utilisation of some form of standardised 'core questions' by the parish plan groups would be highly beneficial (and indeed are being developed at the time of writing). According to stakeholder respondents, this would ensure that:

- questions are of more relevance to the service providers in terms of what they *are able* to do as opposed to receiving lists of actions that they have already told other parishes they cannot pursue.
- action plans are less like 'wish lists' and therefore be of more relevance and use providers.
- services or activities that would not normally come to the mind of the parish groups when doing the plans, but nevertheless play an important role in the

community, would be able to have questions included (an example here is volunteering, or local employment);

It was suggested that as part of the funding being given the parish groups would be required to use those core questions, which would incentivise communities to use them. However, some of the respondents urged caution to this approach, stating that it could be detrimental to the communities by stifling their creativeness and ownership of the project, as well as leading to less chances of them communicating with the service providers. As one of the parish groups stated, they '*would want to put their flavour on it*', and felt that it was important for them to be able to tailor the questions to their own community. Furthermore, there is a risk that the core questions developed do not reflect the areas of enquiry of the communities, which could impact both on willingness to conduct such a survey (if they feel that questions are being 'imposed' upon them) as well as response rates (if community members feel that the questions are not appropriate to them). The appropriateness and universality of core questions therefore requires careful consideration.

Related to this point is to ensure that sufficient community profiling is undertaken prior to commencing a consultation process. This might include a review of census data and other information to gain a clear understanding of the parish profile and characteristics.

8.1.4 Project aims and objectives

Some felt that the RCC had had some historic stability from longer term funding from the Countryside Agency, but with project funding moving to more sporadic and short-term funding, this has increased demands and expectations that have arisen from the funders. However, some respondents felt that the main aims and objectives of the project had not kept pace with the newer focus and objectives of the communities and its wider stakeholders, both in pursuing economic goals (for example, related to local enterprise, development and raising employability skills) as well as strengthening and empowering whole communities. Despite the evident success of the RCC in attracting continued funding to enable the project to evolve and expand, it was felt that there was a need to reposition both the project and the organisation to best meet the needs of its communities and its wider stakeholders. That said, the general view was that the work that they had done to date had been excellent. However, further consideration needs to be given as to how to reconcile different project priorities that are evident among different stakeholders. One way of doing this will be to work with key stakeholders to define and agree different types of outcomes – over the short, medium and long term (see later section on project outcomes).

Respondents often felt that, historically, the project had been too focused on completing parish plans, and viewing the launch of the plans as a start rather than an end point. There followed, therefore, a desire to ensure that there was a shift to prioritising communities and pursuing outcomes beyond the planning stage. This is being taken forward in part through the targeting of three priority areas as identified through the Local Area Agreement (as mentioned earlier in this report). Nevertheless, this prioritisation of communities could present difficulties for those communities who, against whatever criteria used, do not meet a 'priority' category but are keen to go ahead with the process. The view from the RCC is that the project support, guidance and information is vital to making the process a success and without that, communities will find it difficult to engage with service providers or to achieve any of their desired outcomes. Careful consideration needs to be given to how communities may be prioritised, and what help can be offered to those who do not meet priority status.

8.1.5 Project funding

As outlined earlier, the current project funding regime can be viewed as relatively short-term. Unlike other parts of the RCC, the Community Consultation and capacity Building project has no core funding. Currently, the main funders are the Leicester Shire Economic Partnership and the Leicestershire County Council, with one District providing a small amount. The main difficulty with this regime is that the funding is relatively short-term, but the initiatives and activities it funds are longer term. This potentially creates difficulties in sustaining the current levels of staffing, services and support for communities as well as an insecure funding base and continued (and considerable) resources to 'source' further funding. In terms of what the project delivers, however, its success is both compelling and far reaching. Nevertheless, as noted elsewhere in this report, the view is that project does not currently do enough to demonstrate what it delivers to its stakeholders or the community at large. If the project is able to pin down different stakeholder's priorities, and demonstrate how the project contributes towards these, then it should be in a stronger position to bid for longer term, and potentially core, funding.

Increased security of project funding may also encourage project staff retention and enable quicker vacancy filling. The current staffing structure and organisation enables each district to be covered by a half time CDO post, which works well. However, gaps in staffing levels if a CDO leaves can place a considerable additional workload on remaining CDOS, and the current uncertainty with regard to funding can mean that the post remains vacant.

8.1.6 Improving awareness of the *detail* of the Consultation Protocol

As noted earlier in the report, the Consultation Protocol was a key guidance document. However, there was a notable lack of detailed knowledge on the roles and responsibilities of different parties among some respondents. This suggests that more needs to be done to ensure the messages reach those that it needs to reach. Further attention may need to be given to the way in which the messages are communicated (for example, in the layout of the document or in the different communication channels used).

There was also a view from some that the project needed to have a better '*fit*' with other neighbourhood strategies for engagement and development, both at a local delivery level and national policy level.

8.2 Improving project 'outcomes'

As noted earlier in the report, the definition of outcomes requires further clarification and both the capture and dissemination of outcomes needs improving in the project, if it is to continue to deliver a clear message about the impact the project can have on local rural communities. This section highlights four possible areas to consider.

- The role of the parish plan
- The action planning stage
- The recording and collection of 'outcomes'
- Targeting communities and partnership working

In addition, of mention here is the role of the Consultation Protocol. Whilst most respondents agreed that it was a useful document, that clearly set out roles, responsibilities and aims, its content was less salient to some than others (particularly for those who were relatively new in post). Furthermore, there were some concerns about the timescales for various stages (for example, in providing comments on questionnaires), despite these having been previously agreed by a representative working group. The reason for this apparent inconsistency appeared to stem from those who had not been directly involved in the revised protocol (perhaps because of time).

8.2.1 The role of the parish plan

The community representatives who took part in the research had a clear sense of pride and achievement in the production of their Parish Plan, including both the content and the final copy, which was often produced in colour and could include photographs of the settlement. To them, the plan was a great achievement and something that the group were clearly very proud of. However, the stakeholder view was somewhat different, with a general agreement that too much emphasis was given to this document, and not enough on the subsequent actions (see 8.2.2 and 8.2.3).

8.2.2 Improvements to the action plan stage

There was widespread agreement that more needs to be done at the action planning stage to ensure better post-action plan delivery and also to improve the capture and dissemination of outcomes. At present the launch of the project was seen by many as the main goal to work towards and thus the action plans could sometimes be perceived as a by-product of this process and not given the priority they should be. This no doubt is related to the legacy of funding being linked to the targets for producing parish plans.

It also may be due to the process from initial start up to launch taking longer than the communities had initially expected (up to two years longer in cases). As noted earlier, the resultant 'fatigue' in the process could be detrimental to the pursuit of actions

It was also apparent that there is minimal direct contact between the action groups and the service providers at the action plan stage. Community members reported feeling that, despite having contact details for providers they did not '*wish to bother*' them with their requests. Some service providers were disappointed at the lack of follow up contact from communities and felt that there was more to be done to facilitate this ongoing contact.

Some service providers suggested that if the recently introduced service coordination events could be incorporated more into the parish plan process that might help. Others suggested the introduction of an intermediate stage prior to the launch of the report to highlight the key areas for discussion about what can realistically be delivered to meet community needs. This, it was suggested, could perhaps prevent unrealistic, unworkable action plans being sent to service providers.

For future delivery, a reliable model for monitoring post action plan delivery is needed so that the RCC are able to track the success of hard and soft impacts and outcomes, and drive the actions that are still needed. An example of how this may implemented, which has been adopted in at least one area, could be to make action plans a standing item on the monthly parish council meeting, with a

regular report of progress and achievements. Highlighting the ongoing availability of 'aftercare' support to communities from CDOs could also be beneficial.

Comment has been made earlier about post-action plan 'fatigue' that could be experienced by parish planning group members. If this is the case, assembling a new post-action plan group may help to revitalise the process to enable a renewed focus on outcomes.

8.2.3 More systematic collection and recording of 'outcomes'

A general lack of ownership for action planning, and taking these forward to outcomes was evident in the research. Where outcomes were being achieved – and they undoubtedly were – these were not systematically recognised or recorded (either on the part of communities, service providers or the project itself). Clearly the project is reliant to some degree on being informed of outcomes from either parishes or service providers, and currently it does not appear as though there is a systematic way of doing this. The RCC has a clear role in disseminating outcomes, but there is a need to find an appropriate channel for the collection and collation of evidence of outcomes.

Section 4.4 highlighted the difficulty of defining and identifying project outcomes. Further consideration should be given to identifying the different types of outcomes what might expect from a project of this nature (examples have been given in Section 4.3).

8.2.4 Targeting communities and working in partnership

The general consensus among the service providers was that the project should focus more on targeting communities who clearly have the greater needs, and may be less able to articulate their needs. It was said that the 'harder to reach'/'harder to work with' communities may not be getting the help that they need, and these are the communities that are most in need of support to increase their self-sufficiency, their community capacity, and their social capital. This, it was felt, would allow the achievement of outcomes that could be clearly attributed to the RCC project, and to the parish planning process. Some felt that there were instances where some communities would have achieved some of the outcomes in any case, although there were no clear examples of these.

Clearly the projects CDOs are engaged with a wide range of statutory, voluntary and community groups, and there were many examples of informal but effective partnerships (such as with youth work, police and education).

However, those that were interviewed were unanimous in highlighting the fact that the RCC need to increase their partnership working if they are to continue to work effectively and efficiently – particularly at a district and county level. Many stated that a 'joining up of activities' is needed so that duplication of services between themselves and others, most notably the CVS, is avoided and therefore the dangers of consultation fatigue is lessened.

Nevertheless, it was felt that this was not without difficulty, as organisations could effectively be competing for the same pot of money and be working to achieve similar targets. This in itself can work against joint and partnership activities and requires a considerable amount of thought with regard to the longer-term strategy of delivering better services to local rural communities and

those who live in them. Furthermore, competing priorities among some voluntary and community sector organisations may have an impact.

The RCC have now begun to work with the LAA on priority areas that have been identified by the LAA. Some of these areas are rural, and there is a general view that the RCC project staff and others working within these disadvantaged areas will make the best progress if they combined their knowledge and effort to tackle the issues, and that this joint working on priority areas is an excellent opportunity to bring together different sectors and service providers. However, there was a view among some that there was some reluctance on the part of some members of the project staff to take this process forward. The extent to which this is the case warrants further exploration.

In summary, the Community Consultation and Capacity Project is currently in a strong position. Since its inception almost ten years ago, it has built up a body of local knowledge and expertise and developed an effective consultation methodology, and has been able to extend its work across all districts in Leicestershire and Rutland though its success in securing continued funding from a variety of sources. Nevertheless, the demands of local stakeholders are changing, and the project needs to make progress with regard to clarifying its aims and objectives, demonstrating and disseminating outcomes and working in partnership with others working to improve the lives of those living in rural Leicestershire and Rutland.

ANNEX A EXAMPLE TOPIC GUIDE (STAKEHOLDERS)

Evaluation of the Community Consultation and Capacity Building Project

Topic Guide (September 2006)

Objectives

- To explore awareness and understanding of RCC Community Consultation and Capacity Building Project and its role within the region
- To explore perspectives on process, impact and outcomes of project, both at a local and regional level
- To highlight areas of good practice and areas for improvement
- To explore awareness of funding regime, and perspectives on that
- To elicit views on the future role, direction and organisation of the initiative

Note: questions will be tailored according to whether funding or non-funding partner,

1. Introduction

- About BMG Research, independent evaluators etc
- Research funded by Leicestershire Economic Partnership
- Confidentiality/permission to record
- Any questions?

2. Background and Context

- Current job – roles and responsibilities
- Understanding of role and function of RCC
- Links with RCC and CCCB project – what, how, when? At what stage do you get involved – is this the right stage?
- How does it link in with your current role? And with your organisation?

3. Project Organisation and Staffing

- Views on current staffing and organisation/fit within RCC
- Do they feel the current staff complement is right (team leader, 5 CDOs, overseen by Rural Officer)?
- Currently each CDO (working half time) covers one district (or 2 if ft) – views?
- How effective is the current process of engagement with communities
 - what does it depend on?
 - Could it be improved? *Probe for resourcing issues, community characteristics etc*

4. RCC Community Consultation and Capacity Building Project Funding

- awareness of how project is currently funded (*prompt if needed – currently LSEP, LRP, Defra (through GO EM)*)
- is this an appropriate mix? Why/why not?
- does the programme provide value for money? How is this demonstrated?
- Should/will the way the project is currently funded change in the future?

5. Assessment of Impacts and Outcomes

- Awareness of activities following consultation process? Prompt – *Organisations are sent a summary of RCC activities every quarter – do they see it? How useful?*
- What benefits would you say the project brings:
 - To the settlements/communities?
 - To the organisation you represent?
 - To the district/region/county as a whole?
- How important is community ‘ownership’
- How effective is the post Action Plan delivery (ie, service providers’ delivery, barriers to project implementation etc)
 - Extent to which organisation is involved with delivery of action plan
 - Effectiveness of links between communities and service providers
 - Implementation of action planning
 - How could this be improved?
- Views on Consultation Protocol – is it useful, any areas that could be improved.?
- Can you identify any specific impacts and wider outcomes?
 - How are these captured/demonstrated?
 - How do these fit into the wider social, political and economic context?
- What about less tangible benefits
 - prompt, raising capacity, community engagement/cohesion – explore for definitions and measurement of etc)

6. Recommendations/options for future delivery

- How would you like to see the programme developing in the future?
- How should it ‘position’ itself? *Probe – future LAA involvement? Mainstreaming? As a service that can be ‘sold’?*
- Could there be further links/involvement with a wider stakeholder group?
 - If so who and how
- What benefits would you expect there to be, for you/your organisation?
- How do you see the project fitting in with future policy priorities? *Eg, as model for community engagement*
- Any other thoughts/comments?