

## **East Sussex Rural Forum: Decentralisation and Localism Bill – impact on local communities**

### **Two events held on 10 March and 15 April 2011 with 112 attendees from rural communities**

#### **Feedback from discussion groups – overall summary**

Those attending the Rural Forum were asked in their discussion groups to consider three questions. These were:-

1. What is required to happen if the whole concept of localism and the provisions within the Localism Bill are to be successful from a rural community point of view?
2. What support do rural communities need in order to be able to participate and support the concept of Localism and the provisions of the Localism Bill?
3. What could be achievable, what will success look like or what are the possible outcomes that rural communities could achieve?

With regards to the events themselves the feedback was overwhelmingly positive. People felt that they went away better informed and had knowledge that they could share. They felt that knowing what to expect and having had a chance to discuss this with others had been beneficial.

#### **Question 1**

One of the main conclusion was that more information and detail about the Localism Bill and its provisions is required. People felt that Central Government had a key role in this but also local authorities, AirS and SALC could help to interpret, support and develop it locally.

It was felt that communities will need more detail in order to participate and saw this in terms of meetings, seminars, briefings, training and the provision of tools like Community21.

Communities felt that the resources (funding and expertise) would need to be provided if the Localism provisions are to be implemented.

Communities felt that more publicity was needed to encourage more people to get involved. They felt that the Government and media (TV, radio) had a part to play in this.

They saw an opportunity for a different and better relationship with District and County but that this would need a culture change. They also saw the opportunity for closer working between parishes with similar issues or to gain economies of scale for service delivery.

On the negative side overcoming apathy is seen as a major issue, Getting people involved, encouraging more volunteers to come forward are seen as current barriers to more active communities. Reducing the amount of red tape or reducing the risks for local volunteers would help but it was commonly felt that many people would shy away from the greater powers and responsibilities provided by the Localism Bill without the greater support and resources also being provided.

## **Question 2**

Training and practical support with associated tools were seen as key to any community getting involved. Again resources, funding and incentives were also key factors. In particular it is felt that access to advice and to particular types of expertise is essential if this is to be successful. Planning, housing, legal, financial, IT and marketing advice were all mentioned. Also it was felt that business planning and organisational advice would be required across the board whatever the project or initiative.

Information on the Localism Bill, particularly 'how to' guides in plain English would be needed.

Access to broadband and IT tools and advice were also seen as essential.

Support and assistance from local authorities, AirS and SALC as well as learning from each other, as demonstrated by Community 21, were seen as important if particular projects are to be implemented across the County.

## **Question 3**

There were many comments about what could be the positive outcomes from getting involved in the Localism agenda.

- First and foremost was the positive effect that this could have on local democracy, the role of local councils, encouraging volunteering and involvement in local issues from a broader sector of the community. Motivated by having a greater influence over local matters it was felt that this would result in more active and engaged communities.
- The ability to provide better and more efficient local services / facilities was seen as the second major outcome. Services named were affordable housing for local people, transport, addressing speeding, involving local businesses, growing the local economy, meeting the needs of young people, older people and minorities, toilets, better broadband and improved roads.

These positive comments were tempered with concerns about continued apathy and increased workload for local volunteers and representatives.

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