



6 August 2010

Contributing to the 'Big Society' – call for evidence

You will have seen in the media that the Government recently launched their 'Big Society' initiative. We, at the Commission for Rural Communities, are keen to show that rural communities and organisations have already embraced the community approach to identifying and tackling their needs that lies at the heart of the 'Big Society' approach. However, we also want to ensure that central and local government recognise, celebrate and more importantly support the continuation of your efforts, for the benefit of rural people.

Accordingly we are commencing a project, designed to enable us to advise departments and their Ministers how to fully embrace the contribution and needs of rural communities in the development of their Big Society agenda. We will have several opportunities to do so over the next six months.

One of the first opportunities, with your help, is to put something to the Rural Affairs Minister in early September, about the effect of the economic climate and current and planned changes in public spending on civic society organisations working with rural communities.

We shall follow this up at the beginning of October when we plan to issue a fuller report. It is because of this early opportunity to inform Defra Ministers of the impact of public spending cuts on civic organisations working in rural communities that we would ask for your help in answering some of the questions below.

- Can you describe briefly your organisation?
 - Name
 - Type (e.g. charity, social enterprise)
 - Size
 - What areas you work in
 - Main sources of income (e.g. public sector grants, contracts, fundraising)
- What are your principal activities in rural areas, e.g. care, environmental conservation, working with young people, employability etc, or which group(s) in rural areas are your main customers?
- To what extent have your organisations been affected/are expecting to be affected by the current economic climate including funding cuts?
- Have you experienced any recent change in demand for your services?
- If you are being affected by these economic conditions or changes in demand, how have you responded/are planning to respond? (e.g. cuts in activities, alternative sources of funding, cooperation with other organisations etc.)
 - Can you share with us any examples/case studies where reduction in income has

affected/ is likely to affect your operation in rural areas?

- Can you share with us examples/case studies where you have managed to continue delivering services?
- How have the lives of the communities that you serve been affected, or would you anticipate them being affected?
- Are you facing specific (or additional) challenges when operating in rural areas? What are your expectations for the future?
- How do you think your organisation can contribute to or benefit from the 'Big Society'? Do you think you have for example the resources and the capacity to have a greater role in the running of community or business services?
- What kind of response or support do you need from the government (local/central)?
- Do you have any other issue that you would like to raise with government departments?

We understand that summer holidays will put a strain on your ability to offer substantial information and evidence this month but we hope you can offer us some of your current experience and concerns, as we want to take full advantage of early opportunities to inform government action. For this reason we would greatly appreciate if you could e-mail us to elif.skinner@ruralcommunities.gov.uk your experience and views in two time periods.

Any information you can provide us by the Bank Holiday weekend will be used to inform our report to the Rural Affairs Minister in early September. For this first short report, we would particularly welcome the experience of organisations working to improve economic opportunities and viability of rural areas and people. This might include for example organisations who are working to improve the employability of young people or the unemployed, that undertake training, represent local businesses, or who are working on community development or regenerating rural and community assets. This will allow us to alert Defra ministers to current experience and views of how the Big Society will help this work.

By the w/c 13 September we would welcome information from organisations which work with any issues and communities in rural society to improve their environmental, social or economic wellbeing and future. This should include those from the first group who found that meeting our August deadline too challenging.

I hope that you are able to help us with these opportunities to communicate your experience to central government departments. Thank you in anticipation.

Roger Turner
Head of Rural Economies
Commission for Rural Communities