

Alternative Service Delivery Models in Rural Areas

The aim of this project was to identify how ‘alternative’ approaches to rural service delivery are developing, what forms they are taking, what conditions are required to make them successful and what barriers prevent further expansion. We also offered lessons to be learnt (from both successes and failures) as part of sharing experiences.

The 2010 coalition government has prioritised giving citizens, communities and local government the power and the freedom to help themselves and to build the spaces that they want through coming together and solving problems. Part of developing this ‘Big Society’ has been to encourage community and voluntary sector organisations (CVS), and others, to develop innovative approaches to the delivery of rural services, best suited to their local needs. This research examined these ‘alternative’ services during the spring and summer of 2013 and involved policy, literature and technical reviews. A survey of local authorities and CVS groups also was conducted and 12 in-depth case studies were carried out.



What sort of alternative models are being developed?

Eleven different models of service delivery were found to be used in a variety of combinations.

MODEL OF DELIVERY	ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS
Commissioning services externally	Local authorities use contractors
Social enterprise	Delivery by businesses with social or environmental objectives
Partnership	Local authorities working with others
Shared services	Local authorities work across administrative boundaries and join up departments
Co-operative councils	Co-operation between authorities, communities and service users/providers: everyone becomes active
Mutual and co-operatives	The service is provided by organisations that are owned and controlled by their members
Internal transformation	Redesign of services or activities currently provided in-house
Outsourcing	Subcontracting processes, services and/or whole operations to a third party organisation while retaining overall ownership
Direct delivery by local authority	Where outsourced services are returned to direct provision
Private companies	The service is provided by a sole trader, company or franchise
Co-production	Designing and delivering services in an equal and reciprocal relationship between all stakeholders

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Successes and barriers

Successful projects make use of funding innovations, work across sectors and develop independent governance. This gives increased power and autonomy, improves community cohesion and makes services more 'bespoke' to their locality. The range of services broadens from social to include cultural and environmental. Publicity and community 'buy in' are key but the most important characteristics of success were found to be:

- capacity, leadership and governance arrangements
- assets that are fit for purpose
- adequate financial, business and needs planning
- involvement with the Council.

The main barriers were seen to be:

- inflexible procurement and commissioning processes
- finance – finding the right mix of funding
- the gap between what people say and what people do
- a need to provide services that people want to use
- reluctance to partnership working
- lack of community skills
- blurring of boundaries between sectors.

The main report is available on the Defra web site:

<http://randd.defra.gov.uk/Default.aspx?Menu=Menu&Module=More&Location=None&Completed=0&ProjectID=18554>

Lessons to be learnt

Technical expertise and experience are critical to successful projects particularly in terms of mapping local assets; developing local assets; understanding community needs; Neighbourhood Planning; understanding limited resources; stimulating creative ideas; identifying the right champions; being transparent; accessing infrastructure support; learning processes and using broadband effectively. The intervention of the local authority also is important, particularly as a broker rather than a provider and Government support also helps, particularly in assisting with asset transfer and speeding up bureaucratic processes.

