



SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Review of International Best Practice in Service Delivery to Remote and Rural Areas

Land Use and Rural Policy



**REVIEW OF INTERNATIONAL BEST PRACTICE IN
SERVICE DELIVERY TO REMOTE AND RURAL AREAS**

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CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	I
CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION	1
AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT	1
BACKGROUND	1
METHODOLOGY	3
IDENTIFICATION OF GOOD PRACTICE	4
FOCUS OF THE REPORT	5
CHAPTER TWO CASE STUDIES	6
AUSTRALIAN RURAL TRANSACTION CENTRES	7
THE HANTS REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY – ENTERPRISE CENTRE OF HANTS COUNTY	10
LEGAL AID QUEENSLAND	12
LOCAL COMMUNITY NET, FINLAND	15
MULTI-SERVICE RURAL SHOPS, EUROPE	18
CHAPTER THREE LESSONS AND CONCLUSIONS	20
BIBLIOGRAPHY	22
ANNEX ONE	23
EXAMPLES OF SERVICES DELIVERED VIA INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)	23
EXAMPLES OF MOBILE SERVICES	25
EXAMPLES OF SERVICES DELIVERED VIA ONE STOP SHOPS	26
EXAMPLES OF SERVICES DELIVERED VIA PARTNERSHIPS	27

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report reviews international examples of good practice in service provision to remote and rural areas. The review examines cases from English-speaking countries, and also from European countries including Scandinavia, and describes a number of examples of best practice which may be transferable to remote and rural areas of Scotland.

2. The key areas of good practice include initiatives which:-

- embrace a partnership approach
- integrate a number of different services under the same roof, or through joint operating procedures
- demonstrate innovative solutions for commonly recognised problems.
- can be transferred to other localities and cultures.

3. The priority areas for investigation were: -

- Advice and Counselling
- Mobile Services
- One-stop-shops
- Partnerships.

4. Five case studies highlighting rural service provision are examined. These case studies are the Australian Rural Transaction Centres; The Enterprise Centre of Hants County, Canada; Legal Aid Queensland; Local Community Net, Finland and Multi-Service Rural Shops, Europe.

5. Drawing on information available on the WWW, and from international contacts, a number of shared themes relating to best practice in rural service delivery can be found.

- i. The early establishment of formal partnerships between the various local interest groups (government, the local community and local business) seems to provide the best mix of combining long-term stability with ongoing innovation and local entrepreneurial activity.
- ii. All 'best practice' case studies demonstrated an early commitment to the use of community survey techniques, local consultation, and an open involvement in the planning process for the design and implementation of service delivery.
- iii. Most examples of good practice made strong connections between the need to support local (regional) economic and social development and the demands for local training and education.
- iv. All projects had an explicit general commitment to reducing local socio-economic exclusion, with some projects targeting access for agreed priority sectors of the community.

- v. The most successful projects have secured ongoing support from government (start-up costs, teleworkers, networked distribution of information etc.) while identifying local ownership and management as fundamental.
- vi. Most initiatives, even those with no specific economic role, recognised the desirability of the involvement of the business and commercial sector in supporting service infrastructure and delivery.
- vii. A recurrent theme is the recognition of the need for a physical centre within the rural community, around which the service provision can be supported. This centre may be owned by the community, or leased from a public organisation and could be a community hall, tele-service centre, or other public building. As the defining priority is ‘a place where people normally meet’, it may include the local shop(s), local library, medical centre, and schools. Ideally some buildings will have more than one function, and all should be networked (hence the growing importance of ICT supported services).

6. It is clear that Scotland is ahead of many comparable countries in the innovative development of rural services. That is not to say that there is nothing to learn, but many ‘innovative’ projects in other areas can be found to have favourable comparisons in Scotland.

7. One particular area in which Scotland can improve however, is in the dissemination of information on innovative service provision. Though documentation on paper and on the web appears better in Scotland than many comparable countries, Scottish examples of good practice are greatly under-represented in the documentation in proportion to the level of initiatives on the ground. Considerable opportunities exist for electronic community networking of information and services, which may inspire further development of innovative provision of services in rural and remote areas of Scotland.

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to review, at an international level, examples of best practice in service provision to remote and rural areas. The review investigates best practice in English-speaking countries and in European countries including Scandinavia.

1.2 The report identifies and describes a number of examples of best practice and attempts to assess the transferability of each example to the remote and rural areas of Scotland.

1.3 The report aims to:

- i. Establish criteria for the identification of good practice
- ii. Identify the geographical extent, locality, and scope of service provision to remote and rural areas, using relevant international examples.
- iii. Evaluate the impacts of different cases study examples in order to identify aspects of good practice.
- iv. Assess the potential transferability of these case study examples to the Scottish rural context.

1.4 The report begins by providing some background to the issues surrounding the provision of services in rural Scotland. It goes on to outline the research methods used in gathering the information used in the report, and also discusses some limitation of those methods. Case study examples of five models of services delivery from different European and English-speaking countries are also described. The potential transfer of these models to the Scottish context is assessed in this section. The report concludes by drawing out recurrent themes from the case studies that are likely to be important in the provision of service in remote and rural areas in Scotland.

BACKGROUND

1.5 The delivery of services to remote and rural areas of Scotland has utilised both low and high technology solutions to address the difficulties of low population density, difficult topography, and economies of scale for certain specialist services. Low-tech solutions include local and regional partnerships to share accommodation, equipment, and staff. In some localities this has resulted in a more integrated structure to the planning process for rural development, and the adoption of innovative approaches to service provision through contract agreements, greater community involvement, and closer community-agency planning.

1.6 High tech solutions include the use of information and communication technology (ICT) such as for example, the delivery of further and higher education to remote sites, the use of telemedicine techniques, and the application of internet transaction facilities for the marketing, sales, and purchasing of retail commodities. The use of such technology facilitates the provision of services that may otherwise be unavailable in rural locations. The spread of internet-based technology beyond computing and business applications has provided opportunities for a greater engagement by individuals, small businesses, and community

groups in educational and entrepreneurial activities outwith their local region. The reduction in the costs of computer hardware and software has resulted in greater affordability and a greater awareness of the possibilities of using ICT to exchange data, engage in retail transactions, and place information in the public forum. Widespread adoption of ICT practices is now largely restricted only by the technical infrastructure and by training for operatives.

1.7 Scotland has had an early engagement with the use of ICT in helping to provide services in rural areas, through such initiatives as the Community Teleservice Centre project of the Highlands and Islands Enterprise that attempted to extend different models of community and business user access in rural areas, and more recently with the spread of Local Learning Centres through the Scottish University for Industry (SUFI) and the UHI Millennium Institute. Early Teleservice Centres in rural areas were based upon the model of the Swedish Telecottage network, and many of these initiatives still function as rural business centres and provide local training and/or development facilitation. There have also been some recent experiments with telemedicine and e-learning, that is the delivery of health and educational services to localities distant from the specialist provider.

1.8 Though there has been a division in perspective between voluntary or community provision of services, the (often free) delivery of public services, and the range of services offered by entrepreneurial operations, in practice the divisions have become increasingly blurred. Following the privatisation trend of the 1980's there have been a range of initiatives by a number of governments to decentralise and distribute services from administrative centres to more rural outreach offices. In some cases this has been accompanied by devolution of decision-making, but more commonly it results in a service agreement and/or formal partnership that ensures national/regional provision and local delivery. In some cases the boundaries between voluntary/community organisations and local micro-business has also become blurred as not-for-profit groups seek to cross-subsidise their running costs by securing service-level delivery contracts.

1.9 A number of rural regions have sought to achieve economies of scale, while at the same time promoting synergy, by fostering multi-purpose service centres. These range from local information provision (sharing by local government and local/regional campaigning groups) to commercial telecottage facilities (e-commerce workers sharing local office space and equipment). Increasingly, educational opportunities are being made available at-a-distance, whether this is from a regional educational campus or from an international provider. Two areas of service provision seem poised to make great inroads across remote and rural regions, as both cultural issues and technological opportunities seem particularly well placed to benefit from distance-independent factors of production. In particular, the growth in popularity of eco-tourism and cultural tourism has produced a great many initiatives that seek to market local distinctiveness of rural and remote areas by using new technology applications to advertise, provide information, and enable e-commerce transactions from a local to a global scale.

1.10 Much of the current dialogue with regard to rural service provision centres round the unresolved issues of sustainability, local accountability, and political equity, which by definition are issues which are viewed from widely different perspectives at an international level.

1.11 The combination of local community involvement and the better use of technology have already transformed the range and quality of services provided within many rural areas in Scotland. However, there may be opportunities to learn from good practice in the international arena and develop more innovative approaches to service provision in rural and remote areas of Scotland in future.

METHODOLOGY

1.12 The research carried out in preparation of this report comprised mainly of an internet search for examples of service delivery in rural areas. To supplement the basic data found through this search, e-mail, telephone and fax were used to gather more substantial evidence of good practice and originality. The research also involved contacting academic colleagues with interests in rural development in relevant countries by e-mail.

1.13 The research attempted to identify examples of good practice in English-speaking countries including USA, Australia, Canada and New Zealand, and in European countries including the EU Member States, Norway and Iceland.

Main Limitations

1.14 Using the internet as the main approach to the research gave rise to a number of methodological difficulties. These included: -

- **Poor documentation** – successful results were constrained by services with no web presence, and/or sketchy and inadequate information on their web site. This was reduced, in part, by the success of personal contacts who were able to identify ‘low-profile’ service initiatives which might otherwise have been missed. It was also the case that many of the projects found on the web were out of date, or had sites that had not been updated.
- **Loose definition of rural benefits** – It was difficult to ascertain whether some sites were specific to the rural context due to the loose definition of the term “rural”. In many cases it was difficult to distinguish the local impact of national programmes, and the relative benefits of service delivery in the rural context.
- **Problems with definitions** – In some cases it proved difficult to differentiate between ‘public good’ services, those that are marketed for a consumer cost, and those which are (perhaps arms-length) Government departments. Many projects declared themselves to be “innovative”, but such statements had to be treated with caution, as many of the service initiatives which are marketed as ‘innovative’ were only innovative for that specific geographical area.
- **Consistency of project evaluation** – The evaluation of projects found on the internet proved to be problematic, as different approaches were used to evaluate the programmes. In addition, many of the evaluations reported were not independent or objective.

1.15 Other issues evident in the course of the research meant that the follow-up of personal contacts as a supplement to the internet search was vital.

Private businesses

1.16 The brief included an investigation. We had to restrict our enquiries into services offered by the private sector since companies can be assumed to continuously try and provide better and improved services to their customers, and influence of the local government on these is often limited to business support services and watchdog activities.

Categorisation of services

1.17 As described earlier, the services were divided into several categories that remained loosely defined but provided a working basis. The categories are not mutually exclusive, and in some cases it might have been possible to put a particular project under more than one category, e.g. “partnership” and “one-stop shop”, or “young people” and “women”. Of course, categorising the projects differently would have been possible as the chosen divisions are only arbitrary.

Structural environment

1.18 Development projects are embedded within their national or regional support structures, e.g. telecommunications infrastructure, national education provision, and local government responsibilities. These vary from place to place. For evaluation of transferability of services to Scotland these structures need to be fully and reflectively considered.

Hidden Services

1.19 There are a great number of exemplary “neighbourhood services” on a small personal scale happening in rural communities, that are based on social bonds between the members of that community and would not lend themselves to being scaled up or institutionalised. If, for example, the milkman helps an old lady by bringing out the heavy dustbins, this is a favour that is unlikely to develop into a full-scale service. Small communities are based around such mutual favours, but these remain undocumented and unsupported.

IDENTIFICATION OF GOOD PRACTICE

1.20 The aim of the research project was to identify good practice in the provision of services to rural and remote areas. For the purposes of the report good practice has been taken to include:

- a) Initiatives that embrace a partnership approach, particularly those that empower the community and user groups in decision-making or planning.
- b) Initiatives which attempt to integrate a number of different services under the same roof, or through joint operating procedures.

- c) Initiatives that demonstrate innovative solutions for commonly recognised problems, including but not exclusively the use of ICT for service delivery.
- d) Initiatives which are not 'hefted' and which therefore demonstrate their ability to be transferred to other localities and cultures while adhering to their general operational rationale.

FOCUS OF THE REPORT

1.21 Services in rural Scotland and elsewhere can be categorised under a wide range of headings. However, this report focuses on case study examples in the following areas:

- Information, Advice and Counselling
- Financial and Legal
- Economy or Retailing
- Others.

1.22 Services provided for each of these groups are also provided in a range of different formats. The report focuses on the following approaches to services provision:

- Advice and Counselling
- Mobile Services
- One-stop-shops
- Partnerships

CHAPTER TWO CASE STUDIES

2.1 This section of the report provides an in depth description and assessment of five case studies in rural service delivery. The case studies found in this section are:

1. The Australian Rural Transaction Centres
2. The Enterprise Centre of Hants County, Canada
3. Legal Aid Queensland
4. Local Community Net, Finland
5. Multi-Service Rural Shops, Europe

AUSTRALIAN RURAL TRANSACTION CENTRES

What is a Rural Transaction Centre?

A Rural Transaction Centre (RTC) provides rural communities with access to a range of government information and services, private sector services and products, and office space for community uses. The primary objective of the programme is to assist small rural communities to establish locally run and self-funding centres that improve access to basic government, financial and other services, which may have been lost or never available to that community. Each RTC is individual, responding to the needs of the specific community. The range of services that may be offered through an RTC includes:

- Commonwealth Government services, such as Centrelink, Medicare Easyclaim, Australian Taxation Office, Department of Veterans' Affairs, Job Network employment services
- Financial services – through a Bank, Credit Union, Building Society or Australia Post (*giroPost*)
- State and local government services (e.g., state government one-stop shops, roads/ motor vehicle/ traffic services, libraries, rail bookings, Council rates payments, etc)
- Post, phone, fax, Internet and video conference
- Rooms for seminars, training and community group meetings
- Facilities for visiting professionals (accountants, medical practitioners, lawyers, allied health, etc)
- Business, printing and secretarial services, and secure storage for valuable documents
- Tourism information and booking services
- Insurance
- Private businesses (e.g., cafe, gift and clothes shop, laundromat, and commercial booking agency for events, accommodation and transport)
- Courier service (prescriptions, photo developing, dry cleaning etc)
- Local news and weather, and harvest / market reports
- Community newspapers.

Background

The origins of the initiative emerged from the Australian Federal Government who believe that access to services in the health, education and telecommunication areas needed to be improved in rural and remote Australia in order for these areas to prosper. The Programme also emerged as a direct response to community concerns about the withdrawal of banking services from regional Australia. The project started in March 1999 and the Federal Government has committed up to £26 million to it over a five-year period.

Administration of the programme

Each rural transaction centre varies in the number of people it employs, ranging from 1 part-time employee to 4 full time staff.

The programme has two elements to it. First, assistance is available from an RTC field officer to undertake community consultation and business planning to determine the community's needs and the feasibility of establishing a Rural Transaction Centre. Second, Rural Transaction Centre project assistance funding is available for the capital costs of establishing a RTC, and to subsidise its operating costs during its early years of operation, if necessary.

The Commonwealth Government provides all the funding for the initiative and the management is carried out by the Commonwealth Department of Transport and Regional Services. Funding is provided to Local Government and non-profit incorporated community groups, either set-up specifically to manage an RTC or who establish sub-committees to manage RTC. These sub-committees are usually made up of interested stakeholders. The initiative is linked with a range of State Government initiatives including Western Australia Telecentres, Queensland Government Agencies Offices, Service South Australia, Online Access Centres, Service Tasmania and NSW Government Access Centres

Evaluation and Monitoring

In response to a questionnaire sent out to the Rural Transaction Centre Headquarters, the following information was received with regard to evaluation and monitoring.

An evaluation of the whole programme will commence next year and is not yet available. At present Regional Transaction Centres are required to provide four progress reports that cover the RTCs operations over approximately three financial years. These reports contain the following information:

- A summary of progress on the Project against milestones set in the deed of grant between the RTC Programme, and the individual RTC.
- A statement of receipt and expenditure of funds for the period covered by the report.
- A summary of progress on the Project for the total period since the previous progress report; and
- A copy of the audited financial statement for the preceding financial year.

The results are fed back into the programme, which responds to the assessments, reviews the guidelines within which it allocates funds and re-works forms for submission.

The Programme set four performance targets when they embarked on the initiative initially:

These were:

- *Effectiveness:* Enable small communities to develop their own financial and communication centres providing services such as banking, postal, phone and fax, and Medicare claim services.
- *Quantity:* Up to 500 centres over five years.
- *Cost:* \$23.633 million.
- *Location:* Regional, rural and remote communities of less than 3000 residents.

The Programme has since broadened to include applications that include other services that are not necessarily straight transaction services.

Programme staff also indicated that one of the main problems encountered was the length of time between planning an RTC, and its actual opening is sometimes up to 18 months. This requires a large amount of time to be given by the community. However the Programme is considered to be innovative because it is community driven, responsive and flexible.

Transferability to the Scottish Context

This is a very promising initiative from the Scottish perspective, providing a single rural centre for mixing the information and support roles of the State, the private (commercial) sector and the NGO's. The project puts the onus on self-funded facilities (although start-up and early years of the RTC can be fully funded by the federal government), managed by the local community, but provides a framework for the involvement of all other parties interested in providing and using these services. The initiative ensures ongoing support for delivering local and national government basic services and information, while using this as a means to "bolt-on" a wide range of retail, and community services. This is a very advanced example of public-private partnership for development in rural and remote areas, with an ongoing commitment from the State towards the capital costs of start-up and also for the provision of business planning, feasibility studies, and basic management tasks. This model may operate well in Scotland due to the strong tradition of grassroots involvement, and close public-private-community sector co-operation. It is also an advantage that Scotland has many potential local access points (Local Authorities, Councils of Voluntary Service, Local Learning Centres etc.) Difficulties may exist in the plethora of agencies and organisations that might become involved, so a clear operational remit is required, along with core responsibilities of participants. The model will require careful co-ordination of the network, and this will have some core costs, though the integration of services between agencies, together with a good and constantly improving internet coverage, may ease start-up difficulties.

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THE HANTS REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY – ENTERPRISE CENTRE OF HANTS COUNTY

What is the RDA?

The Hants RDA is located in Nova Scotia in Canada and was created in 1994.

The idea originated from The COOPeration Agreement on Economic Diversification which was designed to coordinate regional economic development programmes. The goal of this agreement was:

“To help communities within identified regions of the province, mobilize and coordinate local development efforts to support the work of local development groups including the streamlining of services to business and community groups and to help in the pursuit of common economic development objectives within and among regions of the province”.

Previous to this, the Province had been supporting economic development undertaken by regional groups such as industrial commissions and downtown business organisations. Thirteen Regional Development Authorities were set up and each equally funded by three levels of government: municipalities, the Province and the Federal government. Local Government makes decisions based on community needs and the Hants County region is recognised as a unit by both federal and provincial governments. A streamlined municipal government has facilitated a community plan for the integrated economic, social, and environmental development of the County. This has led to greater local control of the decision making process for the benefit of all residents and has fostered a sense of cooperation, pride and loyalty.

Responsibility for the core funding for the Hants RDAs is equally divided between the federal, provincial and municipal levels of government. The yearly budget is around £132,000 of which £44,000 comes from ACOA, £44,000 comes from NS Economic Development. The remaining £44,000 is divided on a per capita basis between the four municipal units. Project funding has sometimes been available through the Canada Nova Scotia Cooperation Agreement on Economic Diversification. The Strategic Plan Implementation Fund, familiarly called SPIF, has made available between £22,000 and £44,000 per year to each RDA. Funding for specific projects has come from community and business and from all levels of government.

The Board and staff endeavour to stimulate economic activity by partnering with various communities and/or businesses in order to achieve common goals and objectives of the community as directed by a strategic economic development plan.

What is the Enterprise Centre?

The Hants County Enterprise Centre was created in 1994 as part of the Hants Regional Development Authority Programme and is an example of how partnerships seek to provide the community with entrepreneurship, employment, education and economic development. It provides a base for a number of agencies that provide services such as employment assistance, business counselling, computer training and workshops for personal and career development. Since they began in 1998, there have been more than 12,000 client visits each

year to the Centre, more than 60 business start-ups since September 1999 and hundreds of workshops with thousands of participants. There are six staff working from this office – a Business Development Officer, the Community Development Officer, an Administrative Assistant, the Trails Coordinator, the Marketing Manager and the Marketing Assistant.

The main theme of the centre is about working together and building on the strengths of the local community. In a recent analysis of the 2001 Census population data, East Hants has experienced the largest percentage of growth in Nova Scotia. In 1996, the population for East Hants was 19,767, whereas in 2001, the population had grown to 20,821.

Transferability to the Scottish Context

This initiative is narrower in focus than the Australian RTC's, with a stronger focus on entrepreneurship, education for business, and employment creation. There are strong positive suggestions of transferability to the Scottish context in the basic infrastructure, which is a combination of local Teleservice Centres (CTC) and Local Learning centres, both already established in various Scottish locations. There are links too in the partnership combination of Federal, Provincial, and Municipal levels of government, which might correspond to UK Parliament, Scottish Executive, and Regional Authorities. Using equal support from these main partners, a framework is established for enterprise support that can be tailored to the very local situation. It could be envisaged that training might be provided through these local CTC by colleges, universities, and other trainers; with business support and career guidance provided in the same venue by Local Enterprise Companies and Local Authorities. Added to this is the element of telework, in which relevant agency staff are based in these CTC and scattered around the Region. This has parallels with recent Scottish initiatives to decentralise core administrative functions to work bases outwith the main office. In the initiative described, there has been a noticeable economic and social impact gained by locating staff and a range of support services in local offices within a Provincial infrastructure. This model offers a considerable potential in Scotland, building upon previous initiatives such as regional business incubation units, the Initiative at the Edge, and the Duthchas Project. The structure of Local Enterprise Companies, and the extension of links between LEC's and local training providers, possibly in relationship to the process of local Community Planning, would seem to provide a strong basis to progress a similar model in Scotland. Potential obstacles include the need for a greater emphasis than at present on proactive development in relationship to strategic planning, and the current inconsistency of quality of high-speed internet access in rural Scotland.

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LEGAL AID QUEENSLAND

What is Legal Aid Queensland?

The main purpose of the Legal Aid Queensland initiative is to improve access for people including, in particular, women and indigenous people, living in rural Queensland (Australia) to legal information and legal advice. It evolved from the recognition by the State and Federal Government that socially and financially disadvantaged people need to have access to financial and legal services. The first Legal Aid Office was set up in 1979. It deals with family, criminal and civil law. A free client information service is available for the cost of a local call and the service also provides information via a website, a selection of publications and touch screen kiosk facilities which can be accessed in Rockhampton, Southport and Brisbane. The programme is made up of three initiatives: The Women's Justice Network, the Western Queensland Justice Network and the Rural and Regional strategy.

1. The Western Queensland Justice Network (WQJN), started in 1998 and is a community legal service connecting rural and indigenous communities to legal information and advice through video conferencing technology. They have situated video conferencing facilities in 9 community organisations throughout Central West Queensland. In the case of Western Queensland Justice Network, community legal centre funding is ongoing. The Western Queensland Justice Network is a community legal centre and has an advisory committee with representatives of local groups in the region.
2. The Women's Justice Network, started in 1999 and is a pilot project connecting rural and indigenous women to legal information and advice through technology. It uses a network of PC videoconferencing sites at community agency sites in eighteen towns in the south west of the state. Start-up assistance was obtained and the initial sources of funding for the Women's Justice Network came from a specific commonwealth funding program "Networking the Nation" pilot project funding. The Women's Justice network works in partnership with the community sector (aboriginal legal services and community legal services). The initiative aimed to increase the number of people accessing legal advice and to increase the number of community education sessions provided.
3. The Rural and Regional Strategy was initiated in 2000 and is a state-wide strategy that has regional Legal Aid Queensland offices working in partnership with the communities in their regions to expand access to legal information and services. The main areas of the strategy are:
 - Identifying groups who are disadvantaged either by distance or circumstances.
 - Working together with local/state government legal service suppliers and community agencies to address needs.
 - Providing access points in Community selected locations to provide information and referral to appropriate legal services.

- Negotiating with community legal centres and preferred suppliers regarding the complementarity of the roles of service provision by Legal Aid Queensland, community legal centres and preferred suppliers.
- Implementing collaborative community education strategies.

How is it funded?

Funding comes mainly from the Queensland and Commonwealth Governments. The Commonwealth funding (almost £7 million per year was agreed as an allocation in 1997) is used mainly for family law matters. In addition, Community Legal Centres were granted over £1 million in 1999/2000.

State funding also comes from the Queensland Government who gave them almost £7 million in 1999/2000.

Evaluation

Legal Aid continually conduct user needs analysis and surveys to ensure that their funding is directed at those who need it most. One of these focussed on the legal needs of indigenous women and their families who live in the more remote northern regions of Queensland. It examined the access to legal aid of women who have been victims of violence and sexual assault. Some of these communities are inaccessible by road for five months of the year during the wet season.

Legal Aid found that there is a gap in the provision of services in some regions and regular and sustained services because of tied funding or limitations in scope. The report produced, therefore, highlighted the need for closer working relationships with other legal services in the region.

Other remote areas needed access to information about tenancy disputes and consumer protection matters, where there were reports of the high incidence of customers being “ripped off” over purchases, and there was a higher risk of exploitation from unscrupulous operators.

The Women’s Justice Network, was evaluated by a consultancy between May and August 2000 and some valuable recommendations were made as a result.

The results concluded, that despite the commitment and enthusiasm of the project team, the levels of awareness of the network in the communities were quite low and therefore the take-up of services was less than expected. The project was fairly unorthodox in that it leant towards feminist equality and demanded a move away from the more traditional legal services which everyone has access to. There was a recommendation made that Legal Aid Queensland needed to develop effective promotion and communication strategies. In addition women in rural areas were not always ready to define problems as legal problems and this attitude has affected take-up of the service. Also discussed in the evaluation report were issues concerning confidentiality and sensitivity in the rural community.

Transferability to the Scottish Context

This initiative attempts to provide a range of employment, entrepreneurship, and social services to rural communities through a slightly different route than most Scottish participants would be familiar with. The initiative is targeted at women and indigenous people, and though it uses technology to provide appropriate advice and assistance (e.g. Legal Aid) a number of different working practices are used to disseminate information and support. Common features with the RTC and the Enterprise Centre are the partnership approach, and the strong involvement (and consultation) with local communities in the creation and development of the operational plan. A comparison with Scotland would include the strong involvement of the local Citizens Advice Bureaux, Voluntary Action Agencies, and local training providers in the delivery of a joint socio-economic development strategy. In these cases as in the case of Legal Aid Queensland, the partners maintain their respective networks and funding sources, but share premises and technology in the local support offices as far as possible. Similar such initiatives may work well in Scotland due to the well-development national networks that currently provide advice at a local level, but there are considerable challenges in the provision of co-ordination and streamlining of services. Adoption of the model would build well upon existing access points and the availability of appropriate technology at a local level, e.g. libraries, offices of voluntary service organisations etc. but it would require a wider and more flexible approach to the partnership share of resources than is currently found in most localities.

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LOCAL COMMUNITY NET, FINLAND

What is the Local Community Net?

The Local Community Net Project was a pilot project which aimed to provide a service to the local area which would encourage the establishment of a community network based upon computer conferencing, e-mail, and web-based communications. As an information society project, the initiative had particular social objectives to prevent social exclusion, to support social innovation, and to improve services and living conditions in the pilot area. The project also aimed to actively engage local municipalities, schools, and business enterprises but this aspect of the project has been slow to take off.

Towards the end of the pilot project the operation of the community network was transferred to a new project (Learning Karelia Hills) that has extended its activities to include three additional, neighbouring municipalities. The project has also started to transfer its expertise to other local communities, and has established a new enterprise (Glocal Ltd.) for this purpose.

The project aimed to offer the following services:

- Creation of a local community electronic information network
- Training in information and communications technology use
- Cost effective access to communication, teleworking, and e-learning
- Public services information electronic bulletin board
- Consultancy in ICT set-up and access for individuals and businesses
- Internet access points in public spaces
- Official documentation for the local municipalities
- Local business advertising space

Objectives

The project listed its objectives as: -

- the promotion of local knowledge and preparedness for the information society.
- the creation of new jobs
- the prevention of displacement
- to offer new channels for distance learning
- to create new possibilities for telecommuting.

Background and Administration

The Learning Upper Karelia Project began as a two-year pilot project, jointly financed by the Finnish National Fund for Research and Development, together with three local municipalities, the district labour office, and the North Karelia Regional Council. The region suffered from a characteristic variety of rural problems, including a persistent high rate of unemployment, declining income from agriculture and forestry, the out-migration of young people, and cuts in public spending on rural services and infrastructure. Though there was a

small resurgence of economic activity due to the formation of businesses engaged in the mining and manufacture of soapstone, the closure of a local agricultural school provided an impetus for action.

The project began with an understanding of the specific context of the regional situation, including their distant location from mass markets. The pilot operated across several centres and scattered small communities, although there is a good communications infrastructure, including high speed lines to the local training centre. The project set out to have a strong focus on 'bottom-up' development, including the recruitment, training, and employment of local people as project workers, and this is regarded as a major reason in its successful operation.

The local vocational training centre and the district labour office were key activists and participants in the project, and though the three relevant local municipalities were also involved, these did not appear to have been fully engaged until towards the end of the pilot. The pilot began by recruiting 21 local unemployed people, who then took part in a six-month training course, financed jointly by the project and the district employment office, on which they were trained to become trainers and support staff of the community network. Following this, free training of users of the community network commenced, using more than 30 computer kiosks that gave free access. These were located in public spaces, such as libraries, youth centres, local restaurants, shops and banks, as well as the homes of local unemployed people. Training and advice was made available at village meetings, local computer classes, kiosk access points, and in homes. Special attention was paid to involving young people in the project, with a special 'youth zone', an 'adult-free' message board, and the specific involvement of 4th Grade classes from each area of the pilot project.

During the second year of the project the use of the community network increased steadily and some schools built internal message zones of their own. The municipal councils became more involved and posted details of council agendas and minutes, as well as general public information. An online register of business enterprises was established, and there was some development of commercial advertising space.

Evaluation

An independent evaluation of the project was conducted (available online at <http://www.joensuu.fi/ktl/projsoc/infosoc/upperkar.htm>) which found the project a success and the main objectives of the project had been realised. However, it was noted that the networking of municipalities, schools, and enterprises was not realised. The initiation of electronic marketing and the creation of teleworking jobs was also less than had been anticipated, and these objectives have been carried through into the operation of the new project.

Transferability to the Scottish Context

This initiative has a firm focus in the ICT aspects of knowledge-sharing, employment creation, and vocational training. The strength of this case study was its use of existing technology and services in an innovative combination to create a cluster of activities that are greater than the sum of the parts. The establishment of a local information network, using

computer conferencing, bulletin boards, world wide web resources, and e-mail, is at the core of the initiative. This is combined with public investment in training in the use of ICT, which is accessible not only through local Teleservice centres and learning centres, but also in homes, shops, public spaces, and through customised service kiosks. Crucial to the success of this initiative is the commitment of local authorities to make information available through the network, and for local business to become involved in advertising and retail supply. A key element of the project has been the combination of the use of ICT to support local education and employment creation, including teleworking, and on-site training in the use of ICT as a local development tool. An initiative such as this is possible in a number of localities in Scotland that have been improving ICT structure and internet access in recent years. There is a strong institutional commitment to the general concept by some local authorities, development agencies, and the Scottish Parliament, and this enthusiasm can be harnessed. There may be some initial difficulties in a) enabling universal equality of internet access (due to inconsistent development of the infrastructure), b) a major re/training effort in ICT operation among small/micro businesses and community groups, and c) the design and hosting of sufficient volume of good quality, easy-to-use contents of general public interest. Several national and regional initiatives have recognised these problems and are attempting to resolve them, but overall improvements are sporadic.

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MULTI-SERVICE RURAL SHOPS, EUROPE

What is a multi-purpose shop?

The primary purpose of a multi-service shop is to provide a range of quality goods and services for the population of the locality. Additional objectives are to enhance the quality of life for the inhabitants, to discourage rural depopulation, to contribute to the improvement of employment and to encourage economic diversification.

Multi-service shops frequently offer a combination of the following services and facilities: -

- a “full range” of food products
- products from regional agricultural & horticultural suppliers
- non-food goods and convenience articles, (household supplied etc.)
- post office services
- petrol and fuel services
- basic banking services
- home-delivery services (especially for the sick or elderly)
- integration with regional authorities public services
- telecommunication facilities (fax, e-mail, internet)
- regional tourism information service
- training information point
- market-day stalls
- sale / repair / hire of (e.g. farm) machinery
- spare parts supplier
- fishing & hunting equipment and licences
- paper, glass, etc. recycling depot
- common advertising campaigns
- co-operative for the sale of local produce

Background

There are a wide number of initiatives throughout Europe that are designed to support and improve the viability of rural shops. Many of these initiatives are designed to support rural development in the area, for example to help stem depopulation by the provision of facilities, to increase economies of scale by combining retail goods and services, and to help with rural economic diversification. These shops vary with the local and national context.

In some European countries, e.g. France, Germany, and Finland, there have been specific government initiatives aimed at creating and supporting rural multi-service outlets. In some respects these can be considered as a form of one-stop-shop, while in others the emphasis is upon the creation or combination of retail goods and services primarily as a focus for other rural development activity. Often the **process** of development of these facilities is just as important as the facility itself.

In most of the cases examined the multi-service shops were formed as a local partnership, usually between the local government and/or local development agency and with the participation of local community organisations. In some circumstances local consumer

organisations were stakeholders, and in others there were strong links with national government development programmes and/or national chains of retail suppliers or wholesalers. In some cases the local authority owned the shop premises and rented space to operators. Frequently the process entailed a number of village meetings and discussion groups, followed by a community appraisal or other survey of the local population to determine the level of support, types of demand, and local market analysis. In many cases a feasibility study and/or a business plan for the development was carried out. In the cases where a new facility was to be provided, a process of advertising and contracting an operator occurred. In some cases the facility was simply an extension or combination of existing businesses interests.

Transferability to the Scottish Context

Multi-service shops are deceptively simple in that they provide a combination of rural services, however, the support framework and promotion of the initiative is an important element. As in the other examples, a partnership approach appears important, and the issues of community consultation and participation are emphasised from the start. Many local shops in rural Scotland have already adopted a wide range of retail products and a multi-facility role in their community, but few appear to progress as far as some of the best examples studied here. The combination of retail goods, together with banking, postal services, training information, and the links with local authority and/or tourism information, offer a comprehensive service facility for rural communities. Some shops also offer telecommunication facilities, fulfilling in part the CTC or community office role, again a familiar feature in rural Scotland, though not generally in combination with the retailing of food & household goods. A key factor in the success of these initiatives has been the proactive approach of the local authority and/or local development agency, which has helped to facilitate the planning process, assist with start-up funding, and also supplemented the services offered by the private sector through various levels of integration with their public services activities and information roles.

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CHAPTER THREE LESSONS AND CONCLUSIONS

3.1 The case studies identified in this report illustrate best practice in rural service delivery. It is apparent that there is no single 'best practice' model for many of the combinations of service provision for which local communities have expressed a demand. There are, however, an identifiable range of 'menu' options which appear regularly in a variety of permutations. These menus should form the basis of the starting agenda for local community planning which would decide the combination of core and customised functions optimal to each service sector in the community.

3.2 Many of the case studies have common elements, which appear to be essential for the successful provision of services to remote and rural areas. These include the following themes:

- i. Formal partnerships between (various levels of) government, the local community (frequently represented by voluntary agencies) and local business interests seem to provide the best mix of combining long-term stability with ongoing innovation and local entrepreneurial activity.
- ii. All 'best practice' case studies demonstrated an early commitment to the use of community survey techniques, local consultation, and an open involvement in the planning process for the design and implementation of service delivery.
- iii. Most examples of good practice made strong connections between the need to support local (regional) economic and social development and the demands for local training and education. Approaches differed in the delivery of education (online or more 'conventional') and in the subjects (vocational and/or academic Continuous Professional Development) but stressed the needs to improve local access.
- iv. All projects had an explicit general commitment to reducing local socio-economic exclusion, with some projects targeting access for agreed priority sectors of the community.
- v. The most successful projects have secured ongoing support from government (start-up costs, teleworkers, networked distribution of information etc.) while identifying local ownership and management as fundamental.
- vi. Most initiatives, even those with no specific economic role, recognised the desirability of the involvement of the business and commercial sector in supporting service infrastructure and delivery. This is especially noticeable in rural and remote areas where economies of scale and difficulties with ongoing revenue funding are normally exacerbated. Several projects have emphasised the importance of employment creation in the establishment of new ways of service delivery, both as a target of the new service, and also as an economic driver producing the need for better services.
- vii. A recurrent theme is the recognition of the need for a physical centre within the rural community, around which the service provision can be supported.

This centre may be owned by the community, or leased from a public organisation and could be a community hall, tele-service centre, or other public building. As the defining priority is 'a place where people normally meet', it may include the local shop(s), local library, medical centre, and schools. Ideally some buildings will have more than one function, and all should be networked (hence the growing importance of ICT supported services).

3.3 It is clear that Scotland is ahead of many comparable countries in the innovative development of rural services. That is not to say nothing can be learned from international initiatives. However, many 'innovative' projects found internationally have favourable comparisons in Scotland.

3.4 One particular area in which Scotland can improve however, is in the dissemination of information on innovative service provision. Though documentation on paper and on the web appears better in Scotland than many comparable countries, Scottish examples of good practice are greatly under-represented in the documentation in proportion to the level of initiatives on the ground. Considerable opportunities exist for electronic community networking of information and services, which may inspire further development of innovative provision of services in rural and remote areas of Scotland.

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ANNEX ONE

EXAMPLES OF SERVICES DELIVERED VIA INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

Health Services

Canada

Health Canada Online

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/index.htm>

Canada

Innovations in Rural and Community Health Program

<http://www.schoolnet.ca/aboriginal/>

Canada

Youthnet

Interactive website based in Newfoundland and Labrador providing 24 hour professional counselling, information, and support for youth. Aims to be anonymous, accessible, accurate, and interactive in the provision of assistance with relationships, alcohol, sex, drugs, and other health-related subjects.

<http://www.discoverysmartgroup.com/youthnet.html>

Norway

Digital Doctor. Including mobile advice via text messaging. Anonymous question form to doctors. Specialist information is available on various subjects, including sexual abuse, allergies such as asthma, Women's health, pregnancy help, eating disorders, etc. There are links to pharmacies.

<http://www.helsenett.no/index.html>

USA and Canada

An online, one stop shop for rural women. Includes area about violence against rural women, discusses difficulties with anonymity and isolation. Other projects involved include the rural homeless, emergency assistance for the medically needy, migrant and minority community organisation and teenage pregnancy prevention. The women involved in the site are involved in non-profit service delivery on the local level including service delivery to women who have suffered domestic violence and sexual assault.

<http://www.ruralwomyn.net/domvio.html>

USA – University of Maine

Secondary Prevention of alcohol problems in rural areas and a family based alcohol and drug prevention programme to American Indians. The intervention aims to study the processes of change involved in the provision of a self-help manual which focuses on awareness of drinking behaviour, along with a telephone motivational interview, or a telephone motivational interview and six telephone therapy sessions.

<http://www.muskie.usm.maine.edu/rhsr/scripts/Abstract.asp?Project=287>

Information and advice services

University of Michigan, USA

Drinkwise is only for people with mild to moderate alcohol problems, not severe. It takes information and counselling web-sites further, however, by providing self-evaluation forms. The confidentiality aspect is high and if a person decides to, they can continue on the programme which includes accessing professional staff from anywhere in the United States by telephone **or** meeting counselling staff in person.

<http://www.med.umich.edu/drinkwise>

USA

ATTRA – Appropriate Technology transfer for rural areas. This is a resource site which provides technical assistance, publications and resources to farmers regarding sustainable farming practices.

<http://www.attra.org/>

England

The Home Office- online crime reduction toolkit – includes section on rural crime. Toolkit contains evaluated good practice.

<http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/toolkits/>

Australia

The Rural Women's telephone counselling service offers counselling by appointment for women in rural areas. Aims to overcome some of the disadvantages experienced by rural women including the need to travel to obtain services, privacy issues in small communities and lack of alternatives.

Australia

Women's Health Statewide is a Rural Women's confidential telephone Counselling service. A service for South Australian women who can ring and ask for counselling. Their call will be returned, options discussed and support provided or referrals made, if appropriate.

http://www.whs.sa.gov.au/index_4.htm

Financial and legal services

Tasmania

Rural Support Tasmania – financial information and advice for farmers. The site provides free and confidential financial support to rural farmers, including preparation of budgets and cash flows and business financial analysis. Farmers can e-mail or telephone counsellors who are experienced in the problems which rural farmers face. They also provide help for those wishing to exit agriculture.

<http://www.southcom.com.au/~rurals/>

Australia

Legal Aid Queensland in Australia is using ICT technology to provide legal services for people living in remote and rural areas in the bush. The Women's Justice Network and the Western Queensland Justice Network formed a partnership with local community organisations to establish videoconferencing links in 26 rural communities. Local information workers are trained at each site to help people, who are then left in private to

speak to their solicitor or other professional. The Women's Justice Network recently won a Queensland Premier's award for excellence in Public Sector Management for Services to Regional and Rural Queensland, recognising the service's role in providing equitable access to legal services that people in urban areas take for granted.

<http://www.Legal.Aid.qld.gov.au/>

Canada

Aboriginal Canada portal

<http://www.aboriginalcanada.gc.ca/abdt/interface/interface2.nsf/engdoc/0.html>

Canada

The Aboriginal Youth Network

http://ayn-0.ayn.ca/band_home.asp

Other services

Canada

Business support. The Genesis Centre.

<http://www.genesis.mun.ca/>

Canada

SchoolNet – One stop shop for education in Canada. Includes distant databases, libraries and online courses

<http://www.schoolnet.ca/home/e/>

Canada

First Nations Schoolnet

<http://www.schoolnet.ca/aboriginal/>

EXAMPLES OF MOBILE SERVICES

Health Services

Germany

A mobile medical service for people with HIV. This service provides special ambulance/medical services to enable HIV positive people in rural areas to be treated in their own locality rather than having to spend an extended time in hospital.

<http://lv-gesundheit-sh.lernnetz.de/ebene2/konsilar.htm>

Sweden

Collaboration in First Aid between emergency services. This involves extended responsibility for all services so that if one service is in use, then another can be contacted.

<http://www.nynashamn.se/Ankaret/2000/ank2b-00-13.htm>

USA

Initiative for Rural Emergency Medical Services

<http://www.uvm.edu/~irems/index1.htm>

Other services

The African Telecentre Experience

Fantsuam, Ghana. Aimed at alleviating poverty amongst rural women, this is a mobile community telecentre project. It uses a van which carries 4 computers between rural communities in a 20 mile radius. It is mainly an educational project which provides access for secondary school pupils, for teachers and for community health workers.

There are a number of interesting projects on these pages, with emphasis on the need for managers to train volunteers who in turn train their neighbours on computer usage.

An example of access is cited where a telecentre is situated in the middle of an African open market that is guaranteed to be busy on a regular basis.

<http://www.agricta.org/afagrict-1/telecentres.htm>

South Australia

Networks for You – is a mobile project that improves rural community understanding and use of the internet. Young people learn how to communicate with people in other rural parts of Australia using webcam link ups. They also learn the basics of communicating via e-mail and how to search the Web for useful information. Crucial to the success of this project was the use of volunteers.

<http://www.iepo.sa.gov.au/networks/networks/>

Germany:

Free minibus and vans to community groups (e.g. sport club, fire brigade) sponsored through advertisements and publicity of local companies.

http://www.mobil-werbung.com/index/body_index.html

EXAMPLES OF SERVICES DELIVERED VIA ONE STOP SHOPS

Retailing Services

Warwickshire and Worcestershire, England.

Vital Villages is a six year project to help 400 villages in Warwickshire and Worcestershire to improve local shopping. The project provides grants to make small investments to local shops that enhances the attractiveness of the local shop and therefore benefits the community. The Village Hub is an example of where new services can be brought into a village hall, school, church or local club. The hubs are often run by volunteers and the concept can be adapted according to local needs and what already exists in the village. The project also offers training and support and new ideas. To date 118 villages have been helped.

Another example, Village Direct is all about delivering produce when and where people need it. Under the scheme a local collection point can be set up in villages without a shop, perhaps at the pub, village hall or even in a garage or outbuilding, where orders for food and groceries can be delivered and collected weekly.

<http://www.vitalvillages.org.uk/default.htm>.

Rural Leicestershire and Rutland, England

Post office government information one-stop shop that provides touch screen computers, face-to-face sessions, leaflet dispensers and telephone hotlines. The principles could be adapted for other types of information. <http://www.publicnet.co.uk/publicnet/01080701.htm>

France

The LEADER funded Bazois group in Burgundy in France has set up a project intending to provide specific help for the last remaining businesses in villages. The project is aimed at preserving, developing or creating neighbourhood shops that supply all basic essentials such as groceries, bread and newspapers. This is only one example of projects mentioned on these pages that are specifically services for people in rural areas. These include support for bakeries, village cafes, telemedicine and the provision of a telelibrary in the Netherlands.

<http://www.rural-europe.aeidl.be/rural-en/biblio/activ/art05.htm>

Germany

The“Nachbarschaftsladen 2000” (Neighbourhood Shop 2000) was developed for the German Federal Ministry of Regional Planning, Construction and Urban Development and is intended to combine small services within one shop e.g. groceries, post office, mail order services, catering etc. These projects are located in villages with less than 1,000 people and no other existing shop within 5 kilometres.

<http://www.rural-europe.aeidl.be/rural-en/biblio/activ/art02.htm>

EXAMPLES OF SERVICES DELIVERED VIA PARTNERSHIPS

Health Services

Canada

Healthy Community Coalition – health promotion, education, outreach and prevention.

<http://www.fchn.org/hcc/hcchome.htm>

Germany

Partnership strategy for the prevention of addiction, involving schools, churches, youth clubs, rehabilitation centres, self-help groups.

<http://www.drobs-online.de/pages/koord.htm>

Queensland, Australia

The Aboriginal community Rural Domestic Violence. The objective of this programme was to work with key people in the local communities to identify domestic violence issues and to work with communities to provide local solutions. This included awareness raising by local women talking about their experiences, discussing local options and formulating responses, involving the community to a greater extent by the use of videos, contact people and regular meetings of women’s groups.

http://dynamic.dotrs.gov.au/regional/approved_grants/grants_detail_all.cfm?ID=812

Information and advice services

Eastern Maine

Incubator without Walls Project.

EMIWW is a business incubator project targeted towards micro businesses (businesses with 5 or fewer employees) operating in Eastern Maine.

A traditional business incubator is typically a building occupied by a number of businesses. The businesses often share the overhead. Participating businesses benefit from the opportunity to network with other businesses and draw from each other's customer base.

The intent of this Incubator Without Walls is to provide participating businesses with many of the same advantages of a traditional Incubator, but without being in the same building.

This allows you to keep operating your business in your present location, but still receive the benefits associated with a Business Incubator.

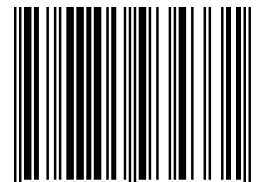
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