

Cross Party Group in the Scottish Parliament on Rural Policy 2016-17

Tuesday 7th March 2017 5.45-7.30pm, Committee Room 4

Tackling Mental Health Issues in Rural Scotland

Minutes (approved)

Attendees

Prof Sarah Skerratt (speaker)	SRUC
Jim Hume (speaker)	Support in Mind Scotland
Sarah Allison (speaker)	Scottish Association of Young Farmers' Clubs
Tom McEvoy (speaker)	Scottish Churches Rural Group
Colin Smyth MSP (chairman)	Co-Convenor
John Scott MSP	Co-Convenor
Jane Atterton	SRUC
Joshua Bird	SRUC
Finlay Carson MSP	Scottish Parliament
Kris Chapman	YouthBorders
Peter Chapman MSP	Scottish Parliament
Rea Cris	RSPB
Hazel Dempsey	NHS Grampian
Sandy Fraser	Open University
Andrea Gilmartin	NHS Grampian
Sharon Glendinning	SRUC
Mags Granger	RSABI
Alan Hampson	Scottish Natural Heritage
Liz Hawkins	Scottish Government
Nicola Hill	Dumfries and Galloway Council
Ian Macdonald	
Michelle Macdonald	
Fiona Mackenzie	Carleton University
Catriona Maclean	Scottish Government
Elaine McGregor	Scottish Government
Zoe McGuire	Audit Scotland
Kyle McIntyre	
Laura McIntyre	Alchemy Film and Arts
Ross McLaren	Scottish Rural Churches Group
David Miller	James Hutton Institute
Penny Montgomerie	Scottish Association of Young Farmers' Clubs
Gavin Mowat	Scottish Land and Estates
Sarah-Anne Munoz	University of the Highlands and Islands
Ann Packard	
Dave Roberts	SRUC
Frances Simpson	Support in Mind Scotland
Clare Slipper	NFUS
Sarah Stocks	Northern Star
Harriet Warman	Alchemy Film and Arts
Nadine Weiland	Moray Wellbeing
Shirley Windsor	NHS Health Scotland
David Wright	Acumen

Apologies

Mark Aitken	SEPA
Dion Alexander	
Rebecca Audsley	SRUC
Jackie Baillie MSP	Scottish Parliament
Frank Beattie	Scottish Enterprise
Graham Blythe	European Commission in Scotland
Anna Brand	RSPB
Michael Bonaventura	Cutters Pool
Andrew Brough	Buccleuch
Alex Burnett MSP	Scottish Parliament
Finlay Carson MSP	Scottish Parliament
Lindsay Chalmers	Community Land Scotland
Helen Chambers	Inspiring Scotland
Peter Chapman MSP	Scottish Parliament
Nina Clancy	RSABI
Kerry Clark	NFUS
Andrew Copus	James Hutton Institute
Karen Dobbie	SEPA
Harriet Donald	Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park
Catherine Eadie	MH Scot Consultancy
Hew Edgar	RICS
Alison Elliot	
David Gass	Upper Quartile
Priscilla Gordon-Duff	Drummuir Estate
Stephen Graham	Highland Council
Rhoda Grant MSP	Scottish Parliament
Wayne Grills	British Association of Landscape Industries
Ffion Heledd	Audit Scotland
Anne-Michelle Ketteridge	Forth Valley and Lomond LEADER
Iain Laidlaw	FCS
Ann MacSween	Historic Environment Scotland
Davy McCracken	SRUC
Eva Milroy	Crichton Institute
Hugh McNish	FCS
John Mitchell	Anderson Strathern
Lorna Murray	Scottish Churches
Christina Noble	
Lorna Philip	University of Aberdeen
Martin Price	Perth College – UHI
Madhu Satsangi	University of Stirling
Ninian Stuart	Centre for Stewardship
Kelvin Thomson	
Roger Turner	Advocates for Rural Enterprise
Christiane Valluri-Nitsch	University of Edinburgh
David Walls	Lothian Broadband
David Watts	Aberdeen UCU
Michael Wilson	University of Stirling

1. Welcome, introduction, and apologies

Colin Smyth MSP (chair) welcomed everyone to the meeting. Submitted apologies are recorded above. It was noted that several MSPs were in attendance.

2. Approval of the minutes of the previous meetings (on supply chains and rural Scotland, held on Tuesday 13 December)

The unapproved minutes of this meeting were circulated by SRUC on 20 December. The minutes were proposed as a true record of the meeting by Ian MacDonald and seconded by Ross McLaren. These approved minutes can be found [here](#).

3. Presentations (circa 10 minutes each)

Each of the presenters gave a brief introduction to their topic. Their presentations are available to download via the web page for this CPG meeting [here](#) but short summaries of their presentations are provided below:

- **Prof Sarah Skerratt (SRUC): “*Rural mental health: reporting people’s experiences from across rural Scotland*”**
 - Prof Skerratt presented the findings of a Scotland-wide study aimed at exploring how people with mental ill-health experience rural life. The research was carried out by SRUC in partnership with Support in Mind Scotland, a national mental health charity that works extensively in Scotland’s rural areas. Respondents came from all over Scotland (with Dumfries and Galloway having the most respondents), and were mostly female. The top five self-reported mental health issues were: depression, generalised anxiety disorder, suicidal thoughts and feelings, social anxiety disorder, and self-harming behaviour. The presentation stressed that whilst people are generally positive about living in rural areas, there are significant differences between *feeling* remote and living in a geographically remote area. This latter point is often exacerbated by inadequate public transport in these areas. There needs to be a focus on what is not working for people, as well as openness about mental ill health in local community.
 - SRUC/SiMS will be publishing the findings of the rural mental health survey around Easter 2017.

- **Jim Hume (National Rural Mental Health Forum): “*What is the Forum and how will it support those with mental ill health in Scotland’s rural areas?*”**
 - Jim’s started by lauding Sarah’s presentation because such a study has not been conducted before in Scotland, which underlies the need for more research in this area. Further mental health organisations have the empirical and anecdotal evidence on key issues, but struggle to reach stakeholders in rural Scotland. In response, Support in Mind Scotland set up a forum for

mental health organisations that includes Moray Wellbeing, NFUS, RSABI, SLE, Audit Scotland, RSPB, SG, YFC, and others. Their main aim is to act as a conduit for organisations to foster outreach to prevent mental ill health, or provide early intervention resources. The Forum has been active, influencing the forthcoming Mental Health Strategy to have a rural focus, and the Scottish Government's Rural Policy Team is generally supportive of these ambitions. The Forum has just received 6 months' worth of support from the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity (on 07.03.17), and will be present at the Royal Highland Show in June 2017. Overall, the aim is to destigmatise talking about mental health, as well as influence policy.

- Frances Simpson, Chief Executive from Support in Mind Scotland explained that, whilst they know the issues, there needs to be a body of evidence to support the provision of new services. These services should be focused in rural areas but also across Scotland, and SG's support has gone a long way in ensuring that the 'lived experience' of rural mental ill health is at the heart of this work.
- **Sarah Allison (SAYFC): “*Breaking the stigma surrounding mental wellbeing: Are Ewe Okay?*”**
 - Sarah talked through the “Are Ewe Okay?” campaign that was launched in May 2016. SAYFC, which represents farmers aged 14-30 across rural Scotland, saw a need for such a campaign because:
 - Life in the countryside creates diverse problems for young people, most of which are missed by other campaigns;
 - Farming is a 24/7 job that is hard to 'switch off' from;
 - Rural areas can be very isolating, with a lack of public transport and accessibility to sport/recreation services;
 - Young farmers also face other issues such as self-employment, which makes them not eligible for statutory sick pay. Accessing treatment and specialist professionals is likewise an issue because of geographical distance as well as the implications of taking time off work. SAYFC will continue to invest in members and strengthen the Association, especially in remote areas. They also intend to invest in training which will encourage people to take a step back and seek help, and they likewise will be at the Royal Highland Show to bolster the message and ensure that people can identify with it.
- **Dr Tom McEvoy (Scottish Churches Rural Group): “*How rural churches can help people in terms of mental health/well-being*”**
 - The Scottish Churches Rural Group (SCRG) sits under the auspices of Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS), which brings nine churches across Scotland together for a variety of reasons. A key advantage of such a group is that it is already present; meaning it already has something to offer in terms of providing resources and personnel. By virtue of being there already, SCRG may provide opportunities to address key points previously made by both Sarah S. and Sarah A. Namely, it encourages people to solicit help without being stigmatised because whilst it may be difficult for someone to go to a mental health clinic, it may be easier for someone to attend a social function held by a church; they are welcoming places where people can access help

and creating a feeling of self-worth in a non-judgmental environment. Churches are often overlooked by people seeking mental health treatment, and cannot do much for people with long-term issues, but this calls for changes in perceptions of what a church can do because they can help someone who is just starting to experience mental ill health, underlying the importance of early intervention.

4. Key issues raised in discussion:

- *Rural mental health issues are fundamentally different from urban issues.* Geographical isolation, insufficient transport infrastructure, broadband inaccessibility, and other factors have sizable implications for delivering mental health services in rural Scotland, which requires a different approach from urban interventions.
- *Online support (via e.g. Skype).* Physically accessing support is not always possible for people in rural areas due to geographical distance, but (in the Islands for example) video conferencing has been used as a way for people to get help. However, inadequate broadband provision amplifies the negative effects of isolation.
- *There is lots of scope for more organisational partnership, especially targeted at young people.* The Scottish Youth Parliament launched their 'Speak Your Mind' campaign, which garnered over 1,000 responses from across Scotland. Other organisations such as Youth Borders, Youth Scotland, and YouthLink Scotland are also supporting related programmes, so more discussion is needed about how this work can feed into, and add value to, the information that is already out there.
- *The focus must remain on rural areas and issues.* As explained by Jim Hume, the Forum is one way to flag up rural issues and it has done a lot of work to get these issues on the agenda. However, we must ensure that rural voices don't get lost. This will entail making use of the networks that are already out there, linking mental health issues with related issue (i.e. premature death), and bringing things closer together through low-level and informal ways of working.
- *Further engagement will be key going forward.* The emphasis on building upon already-existing networks and communications is a positive and necessary step, but isolation is more real than ever before. Thus, there needs to be a constituted effort to reach people that have not engaged with this work, i.e. 'hidden populations' in rural Scotland (young people, transgender). They need to hear about the services available to them and why it's important to seek treatment. Doing this is a key step in tackling this issue because this information will empower people to start seeking out the resources they need. On a related note:
- *Stigma stigma stigma.* Destigmatising mental health and accessing treatment was repeatedly cited as a major issue for tackling this problem, and this is especially the case in rural areas where people not only don't understand the issues, but they don't know what services are available to them. Further, the fact that many rural communities are tight-knit is a double-edged sword because while familiarity may foster some level of support, it also may put people off taking the first step. There is clearly an appetite in rural areas for more information, but what is the best way to start tapping into these groups? One way would be for representative bodies (e.g. NFUS) to communicate more directly with their members. In any case, we must not

overlook the importance and value of nonclinical ways of connecting. It may be a simple matter of language (i.e. 'mental health' v. 'are you ok?')

- *There needs to be a shift from crisis to preventative care.* Resources are already stretched thin in rural areas, which means they tend to focus on acute mental health care. However, preventative mental health treatment would address many issues discussed at this meeting. De-stigmatisation is an important step here because by acknowledging that mental well-being lies on a 'spectrum' rather than being a simple binary opposition, service providers will recognise that some people's needs may require less care than others. This may also indirectly ameliorate other issues as well (for example, not having to take a whole day off work to seek treatment) .
- *Reallocating responsibilities.* Making better use of third/voluntary organisations and other non-governmental bodies would go a long way to taking pressure off the NHS, as they have their own networks and personnel on hand.
- *We need to recognise rural more generally.* It is often the case that research evidence bases in rural areas are smaller than those of urban areas, but that does not diminish the authenticity of responses gathered. The relatively small numbers in rural Scotland underscores the need to present the evidence in compelling ways to ensure that it is not dismissed.

Colin Smyth MSP concluded the discussion by thanking all of the presenters for their excellent presentations and all contributors from the floor.

5. Next meeting: 6th June

The next meeting will take place on Tuesday 6th June and will be on the subject of 'Successful policy and delivery for rural Scotland – learning from elsewhere'