

Rural Excellence is a support programme and network for local authorities facing the unique challenge of delivering services to communities in sparsely populated areas.

Rural Excellence helps rural councils develop solutions and provides a mechanism for 'rural practitioners' to support one another and share best practice.

The programme delivers a range of activities including mentoring, action learning, conferences and an online community of practice.

The programme is funded by Defra, CLG, IDeA and the participating authorities.

Following a pilot run by eight rural beacon councils in 2004, the IDeA has delivered two phases of the programme:

- Phase One completed in April 2007 looked at a range of service delivery challenges associated with rural communities
- Phase Two started in autumn 2006 and will focus on providing support to rural councils and their town and parish councils in strategic housing provision.



'The Rural Excellence Programme gave us the opportunity to learn directly from the knowledge and experience of our peers, through a focussed, supportive and non-threatening process. We have all learnt a lot from the programme and have come away with clear priorities and actions for improvement, coupled with the impetus to deliver what we set out to achieve.'

Head of Organisational Development
Bridgnorth District Council

Images provided courtesy of
South Somerset District Council

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improving places
through partnership

rural excellence programme

mentoring

Rural Excellence mentoring projects help rural councils to build capacity and deliver service improvements for their communities. Improvements are based on local priorities chosen by the participating councils. A team of mentors work to guide and challenge each council. The mentors are politicians and senior officers from rural councils who have been accredited as IDEa peers. The teams also include mentors with experience of working with rural communities and of regional government including Rural Development Agencies and Government Offices.

Over 40 rural councils have received mentoring support under the programme.

'This mentoring scheme provided a wake up call on some of our priorities from our partners. It has resulted in a set of tangible outcomes – not another strategy document.'

Head of Support Services
Bassetlaw District Council



action learning

Rural Excellence Action Learning is a new offer in Phase Two of the programme. It will provide support and personal development to rural practitioners by bringing them together with others facing similar challenges in strategic housing over a series of meetings. The meetings are facilitated to encourage group members to share real problems, explore solutions and to decide on the action to take, thus providing an opportunity for individuals to receive targeted support whilst using their knowledge to support others.

For details on how to sign up to take part in an action learning set and for specific dates of the meetings visit www.idea.gov.uk/rurallearning

community of practice

The Rural Excellence Community of Practice allows rural practitioners who are geographically dispersed to share information and knowledge. Individuals who are involved in Rural Excellence mentoring and action learning are all encouraged to take part, as are all other interested parties.

To join our community of practice, visit us at www.idea.gov.uk/rural

conferences

Rural Excellence conferences are an opportunity for participants of the programme to meet and network with each other, attend relevant workshops and hear from experts in the field regarding innovations and policy developments.

For more information about Rural Excellence events, visit us at www.idea.gov.uk/rural

'In this case it was particularly useful for local authority mentors to work close with those from Government Office and Defra. This brought a much closer understanding and a valuable additional insight to all into rural issues.'

Corporate Director Environment
South Somerset District Council

