

Rural Housing Enablers in Wales

Mapping activity and outcomes

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Introduction

- 1.1 Solutions to the affordable housing crisis in rural Wales are getting harder to find. Cuts in budgets mean more attention is being given to the kinds of initiatives being taken and supported by organisations which have a role and responsibility to find these solutions. The network of ten Rural Housing Enablers hasn't escaped scrutiny and the organisations which support them are even more interested in the effectiveness of the RHE service and the value of its role. This report summarises the findings of an exercise aimed at mapping their work across Wales and highlights some of the key issues raised as a result.

Background and context

- 2.1 Over the last twenty five years there have been a series of inquiries and reports into rural housing issues and potential solutions to meet the growing housing needs of rural towns and villages. The Welsh Government had first funded a pilot RHE post in south Powys and north east Monmouthshire in 2003, drawing on the experience of RHEs in England where the concept was more developed. By late 2006 Wales had 4 RHEs in place and in October that year the Hughes-Isherwood report¹ was commissioned to reflect on their work so far and to suggest a way forward. The report's authors concluded their recommendations as follows:

There is a case for considerable expansion of the Rural Housing Enabling service across most of Wales to provide more affordable housing within or on the edge of the established smaller settlements in the next few years. All the current planning, housing and rural development policies support such an initiative; all the evidence that we have gathered from other experience supports it; authoritative figures that have been examining rural housing issues in depth extol the virtues and effectiveness of RHEs; and in our experience effective and efficient regeneration is increasingly a matter of broad-based and locally driven partnerships dependent on competent, dedicated, and well supported staff. The Client Steering Group sees as the best way forward a new National RHE Network with 12/13 RHEs plus a 2 person 'Central Support Unit, a Chair/Champion and a Board. We would urge the key interests who would need to agree a funding package for this – the WLGA, WFHA, and WG - to go a small step further and add a part-time, specialist Regeneration Advisor....as we believe that the service needs a strong injection of already-honed regeneration skills and experience to effect swifter (than the English) progress in delivering affordable housing units and wider rural regeneration. That extra skill would help to ensure that a new National RHE Network in Wales was fully 'fit for purpose'.

- 2.2 In June 2008 the Joseph Rowntree Foundation Commission on Rural Housing in Wales published the report of its independent analysis of the levels and causes of housing need in rural Wales. Amongst its proposals for changes in policy and practice it recommended 'the Assembly Government and local planning authorities should create a national network of at least twelve rural housing enablers.' The Commission considered rural housing enablers (RHEs) provided a valuable role in responding to housing needs in rural Wales.

¹ 'Wales – Rural Housing Enablers - Report on the current and future arrangements; Hughes-Isherwood Regeneration Consultants' October 2006

- 2.3 When the new Welsh Government published 'One Wales' in June 2007 it acknowledged the support it was already providing for four RHEs. In partnership with the Welsh Local Government Association and Welsh Housing Associations (individually and with Community Housing Cymru), the Rural Housing Development Fund was established to support six additional RHE posts and to support the promotion of Community Land Trusts in Wales via 'Land for People'. In July 2008 the Welsh Government's Deputy Housing Minister launched the network of ten RHEs to increase the supply of affordable housing in rural Wales – which would become the Welsh network of RHEs (WREN).
- 2.4 Just a year later another research report² recommended the Welsh Government should 'continue to ensure that funding is available to support Rural Housing Enablers and Affordable Housing Officers'. And in the few years which have followed Wales' network of ten RHEs have collectively built up a significant body of knowledge, skill and experience in finding solutions to the affordable housing crisis in rural Wales.
- 2.5 Community Housing Cymru (CHC), the Welsh Government (WG) and the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) commissioned this exercise in order to map progress and identify the challenges facing ten RHE services across Wales. Its timing coincides with the end of the initial three year WG SHMG funding for the network and 'carry over' funding for a number of RHE services. Although WG announced further funding until 2013 in its latest budget, for many of the individual housing associations and local authorities it's a time when the pressures on budgets mean tougher questions are being asked about the costs and value of all sorts of activities and with the reduced availability of Social Housing Grant (needed to fund all the RHE housing projects to date) it was felt by CHC, WG, and WLGA that now was an appropriate time to gather evidence on performance and the views of stakeholders on the impact of RHE services.
- 2.6 The changed financial and economic environment since WG first funded the pilot RHE post is fundamental to any understanding of the role of RHEs and to the context for their work. Less revenue and capital funding forces more creative thinking and innovation and whilst it's tempting to see this context as a significant additional barrier to success a number of RHEs and Steering Groups are seeing this as a challenge which presents new opportunities.

Methodology

- 3.1 The exercise involved gathering information from individual members of RHE Steering Groups, host organisations and RHEs themselves. Telephone surveys were carried out with seventeen individuals and face to face meetings were held with two RHEs, the Chair of two Steering Groups and a host employer. The survey questions were agreed in advance and emailed to key contacts identified in consultation with the commissioners. The telephone and face to face interviews were based around the questions but weren't restricted to them. A number of documents were submitted to supplement the interview content. A copy of the interview questions and a list of contributors to the exercise are attached as appendices.

² "A Study to Examine Local Barriers to the Delivery of Affordable Housing in Rural Wales; A Report to the Welsh Assembly Government; Sheffield Hallam University" September 2009.

Findings

The nature of the job

- 4.1 Despite our awareness of the need for affordable housing and the availability of solutions, the task gets harder: the NIMBYs are alive and well in rural Wales, and in some places making progress on affordable housing very difficult; there's less SHG to go around and the difficulty in making small rural schemes viable in particular areas under the SHG regime continues; the problem of landowners 'hope' value on exception sites isn't easing; infrastructure investment issues (particularly in relation to water and sewerage) are a significant impediment to feasibility; the availability of suitable land in the right place at the right time isn't improving; lower levels of house-building mean fewer affordable homes are generated by the private sector; there's also the added uncertainty created by the LDP process, reduced access to mortgage finance, people not registering their need, apathy and some communities not wanting to take things further.
- 4.2 Recession, the impact of the UK Government's plans to reduce the deficit and the consequent implications for jobs and services suggest opportunities for improvements in the supply of affordable housing are likely to be harder to find.

Outcomes

- 4.3 There is broad agreement that the test of success for RHEs is the creation of more affordable homes. However there is a clear distinction between those who interpret this as 'new housing projects completed' and those who see achievement representing something wider.
- 4.4 These views are quite different and all of those I spoke to, fell into one of two camps when it came to taking a view about whether they thought the RHE service they were funding was delivering the outcomes they expected and wanted. I heard some very positive views and also discovered that some funding partners are reconsidering their commitment to invest in individual RHE services. Typical comments were:

'It's such a fantastic opportunity, working with communities; affordable housing is such a big issue – the role needs to continue and engagement with rural communities has to be more of a priority' (Local Authority Director)

'We've realised the value of a wider role for the RHE in community regeneration....it's so much more than just about housing' (Local Authority Director)

'If the Welsh Government and other partners pulled their funding now we'd have to find other ways of continuing the work of the RHE because of the difference the role is making' (Housing Association Chief Executive)

'All the RHEs we fund are wonderful, they're proactive, take initiative, find solutions and their work is very encouraging' (Housing Association Director)

'We're just starting to see the evidence of their activity coming through now – over the next 3 or 4 years you'll see more affordable housing'. (Housing Association Director)

- 4.5 Set against these views I also heard comments such as:

'I think some of the questions beat around the bush. The questions I think should be more along the lines of - what is the purpose and role of the RHEs and is this clear? Do they deliver this purpose? Is there value for money in this role? Are they outcome or process focussed? What is their role in a world of less Social Housing Grant (SHG)?' (Housing Association Director)

'RHEs are well-meaning but funding would be better used elsewhere....and I can't see more time making a difference' (Housing Association Director)

'We're not seeing any new housing – are there any more houses provided than if they (the RHEs) didn't exist? (Local Authority Director)

'The project has never really moved on from its information-gathering stage, with only a few units genuinely attributable to the project in 4 years and there's a lack of impetus'. (Local Authority Director)

- 4.6 In the discussion of achievement there appears to have been more of a focus on process and outputs and less on outcomes. Both are important, but it appears as if there has been less discussion and agreement on the kinds of outcomes funding partners want to see as projects progress.
- 4.7 RHEs and steering group members are very clear about the reasons behind success where it has been achieved. Lots of hard work within communities; linking with the strategic ambition of funding partners, especially where support for the Welsh language and culture has been a priority. In some places it's also been about working closely with developers to help identify need to support development. Many of those who took part in this exercise cite the value of a targeted approach to working with communities, rather than any attempt to reach everyone. All RHEs feel that raising awareness amongst local communities, helping to explain the options and choices available has improved people's understanding and helped to deal with the many misconceptions about affordable housing. One RHE stressed the importance of engagement with communities to gain their trust and help them 'express their voice' and cited transparency (in terms of knowing where decisions are being made) and 'helping communities to accept things' as important outcomes. He felt that some of his funding partners 'forget about the value and importance of community engagement'.
- 4.8 RHEs have identified housing need to support projects, to persuade those who need persuading and to help support local lettings policies. A number of RHEs and steering group members mentioned one measure of success is getting more people onto the housing register and getting them to understand why registering is important.
- 4.9 The number of rural exception sites has been increased and there's been an improvement in rural housing data resources. A number of RHEs are providing valuable input to the Local Development Plan process (especially in relation to Affordable Housing policy and the identification of candidate sites) and into the development of both housing and planning policy at a national level.
- 4.10 Completed developments are clearly the ultimate measure of success but RHEs see themselves as one cog in the machine in this respect. The advantage of having a completed development is it becomes somewhere other communities can see as a tangible example of a solution. Some

RHEs referred to the trial and error of working with communities and how it's possible to improve each time, with each completed development helping their understanding of the process and outcome.

- 4.11 One RHE suggested that there needs to be clarity of definition in looking at achievement as affordable housing can be defined in so many different ways: *'Would empty homes brought back into use count? Would intermediate rented homes fit the definition? And what if people's stigmatised views of affordable housing have been changed? But it's very difficult to measure'.*
- 4.12 The regular monitoring returns completed by RHEs for the Welsh Government so far place an emphasis on process and outputs which some argue are outcomes especially if you consider the development of affordable housing as a linear process, with movement through the stages of development dependent on completing one stage at a time. These hard 'outcomes' are identified as:
- 4.13 Homes completed and occupied; homes under construction; projects where full planning permission has been gained; projects where outline planning permission has been gained; land where planning applications have been made or where planning applications are in preparation; identified sites / land / empty homes / buildings; housing need surveys completed; housing need surveys being considered; open days held; Community Councils presented to / engaged; priority areas identified etc.
- 4.14 The softer 'outcomes' are seen as: Improved co-operation & communication between partners; joint policy development e.g. S106 agreements; new initiatives – shared ownership / rent first, self-build with a housing association, Community Land Trusts, empty properties; raised awareness with the public & particular communities; a raised profile of housing & planning amongst members & communities (community development); an improved public image for housing associations (challenging myths and stigma); improved communication between communities, planners and housing people; the production of important data to feed into policy development.
- 4.15 However outcomes are defined, one of the messages emerging from the mapping exercise is that the role of the RHE is seen by many as more than just about development and bricks and mortar. Some organisations really value the community development role which RHEs are clearly performing – going beyond finding one solution to one set of housing needs but beginning to get involved in finding solutions to the growing list of issues which could be termed the 'rural regeneration agenda'. This is a difficult area as it raises questions about how closely local authorities, housing associations and national parks want to be working with local communities and to what extent they are already supporting this activity through existing services, posts and activities. Because solutions to housing needs connect with access to other services such as health, schooling, employment, transport, and energy there is a realisation that the work of RHEs has to connect with the work of others seeking to find solutions to these issues
- 4.16 Hughes-Isherwood picked up on the wider potential of the RHE role in their 2006 report:

At the same time as pursuing the RHE model, our reading, discussions, and previous experience in promoting regeneration in urban and rural areas leads us to think that the rural

development agenda, even that being pursued by housing associations, should be broadened to tackle rural 'sustainable communities' in the round in Wales. One route would be to integrate RHE efforts into developing other aspects of village life as is being attempted in France – looking at their economic, social and cultural needs as well as their housing needs.

- 4.17 It's an obvious challenge for all of the current funding partners to be clear about how and when they should evaluate the effectiveness of the RHE services they fund. If outcomes are seen purely in terms of affordable homes developed then a decision is needed on whether the current action plans will achieve that outcome and how long they need to be supported for. For those who see a wider regeneration or community development role, thought may need to be given to widening the funding base for these RHE services in addition to time horizons.

Funding pressures

- 4.18 Continued funding of the network of RHE services has reached an important threshold. A number of local authorities reported on the level of savings they have to make to their budgets over the next three years and how that's making them critically evaluate all of the various activities and projects they support. For a number of housing associations there are new pressures on their business and certainly on their tenants (with for example changes in the benefit system) so they too are asking whether their investment in an RHE service represents best value. Not only are many housing associations making a regular commitment to funding a share of the costs of the RHE service they are incurring significant abortive costs on projects which for various reasons fail to achieve viability or gain planning consent – this for some has been a significant 'hidden' cost. WG itself faces funding pressures and needs to justify its investment in supporting the RHE services, demonstrating value for money and showing that its support is helping to make a difference.
- 4.19 The risk of individual funding partners pulling out of an RHE service places pressures on other funders and it might be appropriate to consider whether the funding model for RHE services is sustainable. Regional solutions are being considered (certainly in west Wales) and the invitation to new transfer associations to support RHE services (if they agree to fund) will help to spread the burden. Some RHEs suggested a national funding solution might be a better way forward – something which might help project the identity of RHEs, recognise their value in the delivery of more affordable homes and remove some of the funding uncertainties. Is there any appetite for revisiting the Hughes-Isherwood recommended approach – a network of RHEs with a central support unit, champion/chair and board?
- 4.20 This mapping exercise has prompted some to think that WG is about to withdraw funding support for the RHE network. Indeed some saw the announcement of support in WG's latest budget as a cut – when the hope had been that the message of continued funding albeit at a reduced level would have been recognised. One Steering Group Chair said '*please give WG a clear message, now isn't the time to pull the plug*'. Whatever the message or the intention, there is a real opportunity for better communication and dialogue about the future funding of RHE services across Wales – something WG and the various funding partners need to grasp.

Finding new solutions

- 4.21 *'The uncertainty of the future of the RHE services in Wales makes it less obvious to focus on longer term strategies. In my opinion the role of an RHE carrying out housing needs surveys, finding sites and gaining community support to pave the way for SHG subsidised housing association homes is changing into a more universal role. Namely bringing opportunities of land/properties, funding, communities and developers together on the assumption there is, although sometimes small, a need for any kind of affordable homes everywhere, at the moment.'*
- 4.22 This was one comment from an RHE. Some RHEs have followed an approach based on a well understood process of Community Council contact, housing need surveys and site finding through to the development of a completed housing project – the linear approach. Others have realised that this can sometimes have its limitations and so have pursued approaches which attempt to focus in on priorities and opportunities. Whilst his predecessor carried out a number of housing need surveys, the RHE in south Powys and north Monmouthshire hasn't completed any – indeed his experience is that the surveys can be counter-productive as they become dated, people lose heart in the process and the diminishing returns set in. *'Surveys are great but they don't help you to deliver – and NIMBYs jump on out-of-date surveys - finding sites and developers are key'*.
- 4.23 A number of RHEs and steering groups have also realised that there needs to be more creativity and innovation in finding solutions that are not dependent on the availability of SHG. Some of the opportunities being exploited by RHEs include:
- Finding empty homes which could be brought back into use – though it's acknowledged that this is a time-consuming process and may produce only a few realistic opportunities;
 - Work with landlords in the private rented sector who are unaware of the help available and the role they can provide. In one case this has involved working with a private owner to improve an empty property to create flats – the local authority is providing an interest free loan, local tradesmen are being used to carry out improvements, affordable homes are created, an empty building is brought back into use and so there are broader social enterprise benefits.
 - Investigating the potential of self-build. A number of RHEs and steering group members report interest in Shropshire CCs 'Build your own Affordable Home' single plot exception policy. Their record is impressive - 45 homes built under the scheme, 120 more with planning permission and not one is a result of a housing need survey.
 - Work with private developers to help them deliver the affordable housing on projects with planning conditions - imaginative ways of putting together deals so housing associations receive land/finished homes from developers at discounted prices. This means the developer is relieved of risk and can get on and develop market homes – it's a way of dealing with 'stuck' housing schemes which have planning approval but where developers are worried about selling affordable homes which they have to develop first. One RHE also reports on work with a private developer and community where she has been able to persuade the developer to deliver more affordable homes than were planned as a result of challenging the negative perceptions about what affordable homes might lead to.

- Exploring the potential of Community Land Trusts (CLTs) – a number of RHEs have found interest in CLTs amongst communities and though the viability of this approach isn't certain there are opportunities for RHEs to assist and signpost these communities to the CLT Network resource.
- Carrying out consultancy work which may lead to more affordable housing – helping with surveys and analysis on housing for older people, looking at the potential for enabling older people to move out of larger homes into more appropriate housing, thereby releasing their home for a family in housing need.

Understanding 'affordable housing'

4.24 Affordable housing is complicated and it means different things to different people. There are many myths, lots of prejudice and therefore ignorance. A number of issues emerged in the mapping exercise around the importance of good quality information and the need for better communication on such things as: understanding what affordable housing means; who provides it; who has access to it; how access is controlled; how best to challenge the negative experience of social landlords to date; what local lettings policies, Section 106 agreements, and exception sites are; and helping to explain what RHEs actually do! This has been an issue even within some host organisations (this is especially true when there has been significant staff turnover and new staff are unaware of the RHEs purpose). There is a need to find better ways of responding to these information and communication needs and there's potential for doing this collectively.

Telling the RHE story

- 4.25 It would be good to bring together in one place all of the examples of where RHEs have made progress including details of successful projects. Each success story is likely to have a different mix of ingredients but steering groups and hosts don't really have any idea of progress being made by other RHEs and more importantly, the availability of good practice examples are an important part of showing community councils what success looks like. It would also be useful to explain what RHEs do – there is still a lack of understanding amongst housing and planning professionals about the role of RHEs. More could certainly be done at a Wales-wide level to promote the work of RHEs but admittedly interest in doing this might be greater if there had been wider progress to report on.
- 4.26 There appears to be little use of the opportunities offered by new communication technologies and social media and this is an area worthy of exploitation because of the untapped potential to inform, involve and collect information from communities. There is some use of Twitter and individually hosted websites. These opportunities could be linked to an expanded and updated **rhewales.co.uk** website as the existing site contains little useful information beyond contact information for individual RHEs, a news site (which doesn't appear to be regularly updated) and a page of links to other organisations. Leaflets and some good practice do exist along with a video of a successful project but little appears to have been done collectively. There is a real opportunity to make the website a comprehensive record of collective RHE activity and a dynamic resource describing the kinds of initiatives RHEs are involved in, the outcomes from their work, results for local communities etc. The message from the mapping exercise is that RHEs are not making time to provide and update information like this. Understandably, lack of

time and resources are cited as reasons and it may be that the collective value of this isn't being recognised by steering groups and individual RHEs. Some see this as an obvious role for WG. Indeed a number of contributors commented that they see real value in having someone in WGs administration who understands the RHE service and has some responsibility for its future.

Time

- 4.27 A constant issue raised is the time it takes to achieve outcomes. RHE investment has always been seen as a long term one. According to Hughes-Isherwood RHEs in England typically took 4-11 years to deliver finished schemes on the ground. In Wales the 'hard outcomes' would suggest the longer an RHE is in post the more is achieved. Gwynedd's RHE took three years to achieve his first success. By March 2011 a total of 132 completed and occupied homes had been built as a result of the RHE projects and detailed in their returns to WG - part of the 144 which have started being built. These have been completed in 4 of the 10 RHE service areas. With planning approval secured on a number of sites more homes are clearly in the pipeline but achieving success depends on building trust amongst communities, finding the right sites to develop and navigating the maze of planning, housing and funding rules before – all of this takes time. Some of the funding partners may however need persuading that more time will bear fruit and they may wish to see a revised approach to the RHE action plan before being persuaded.

Independence

- 4.28 To an extent the independence of all RHEs is compromised. They are all employed by and/or hosted by one of their funding partners and whilst half of them have independent email contact addresses half of them don't. A number reported on how they have been seen as representatives of a local authority or housing association or have been prevented from taking a particular course of action as it wasn't supported by the host. Some RHEs described difficulties in challenging some of the policies of the local authorities and national parks who fund their service. Two were told 'remember who pays your salary' when they openly questioned the reason for a proposed change in policy. Whilst this is disappointing to hear, this wasn't felt to be a significant problem. Part of the trust-building process with local communities involves RHEs explaining the way their posts are funded and hosted. Some comments were also made about whether the RHEs role sometimes gets confused with or overlaps with the role of an Affordable Housing Officer.

Governance

- 4.29 The Steering Group approach appears to work well. There are many similarities between all of the RHE services: in the approaches, the membership, frequency of meetings, agenda of business, support for the RHE and in the relationship between the groups and the other formal and informal structures that impact on the affordable housing agenda – partnerships, affordable housing working groups, liaison meetings between authorities and associations etc.
- 4.30 There were a couple of comments about how some steering groups never seemed to successfully create change in the work programme for some RHEs, to reflect the changing financial environment and opportunities. This had led to some frustration at a lack of progress. It's not clear to what extent steering groups' measure and evaluate value for money for the investment being made. Apart from this there doesn't appear to have been any major

difficulty in the way the steering groups work. One Steering Group chair said she didn't know what would happen if there was ever a disagreement, which suggests perhaps that there's often a desire to reach a consensus.

- 4.31 Membership is mostly at senior officer level with only a few councillors and association board members involved. There is little involvement by representatives of community councils and there was a mixed response as to whether this should be encouraged. A number of RHEs felt that there were occasions when those attending meetings to represent funding partners didn't have sufficient experience and/or authority to make decisions.
- 4.32 There is little formal reporting of RHE activity to local authority committees and boards, save for an annual report which is usually incorporated within a wider report on housing or affordable housing. This may be a result of the maturity of the RHE service and the kinds of strategic agendas of these committees and boards. Limited awareness of the RHEs is an issue however and the Powys RHEs were making arrangements at the time of this exercise to make presentations to the Boards of the housing associations which fund their services.

Support for RHEs

- 4.33 Some steering groups appear to be more proactive, working with RHEs to develop and adapt action plans, with individual steering group members working closely with the RHE to introduce contacts, build networks and join them in key meetings. This has helped not only with the agenda of work for RHEs but also in their personal development. Being an RHE is lonely and it's been important for RHEs to network with their fellow RHEs on an individual basis and through the Wales Rural Enabler Network. RHEs have been able to attend relevant conferences and courses to extend their knowledge and boost their skills. In particular, links to the English RHE network, English RHEs, ACRE events, Gwynedd's annual Rural Housing Conference and CLT events were mentioned.
- 4.34 Whilst many RHEs found their induction brief and their early period in the post a challenge, none suggest that it caused them a problem. RHEs are a diverse group of people. Their skills, knowledge and experiences help to mould their approach and in an environment where it's getting harder to find solutions RHEs will need to tap reserves of patience, persistence and personality as familiar routes to success close off. The diversity of approaches to getting more affordable homes means there is value in sharing experience. There is interest too in doing more to bring together policy makers and practitioners in planning and housing across Wales and from further afield – to consider approaches from across rural Europe – to find out more about solutions.
- 4.35 RHEs report lots of support from colleagues, steering group members and staff in the host organisations. Despite the risk to their independence, some RHEs report on the advantage of being part of a local authority and how this enables them to get access to services, admin, and information such as the housing register.
- 4.36 RHEs reported on the problem of job insecurity as financial support for their service nears its end. This becomes a distraction as RHEs inevitably begin to spend time looking for their next job.

Barriers to success

- 4.37 So many of the difficulties to more affordable housing are beyond control. However RHEs suggest that there are issues over which key stakeholders have much more influence. Section 106 agreements are suggested as being too stringent in their wording and whilst some local authorities might want to describe their agreement as effective, when it's not possible for people to borrow and where banks are reluctant to lend, it's hard to see what measure of effectiveness is being used.
- 4.38 Some RHEs suggested value in developing a standardised local lettings policy so everyone could be clear on their role and purpose.
- 4.39 RHEs report a continuing need to bring planners and housing people together to better appreciate what it is they are trying to achieve and how policy, guidance and interpretation can help or hinder delivery.

Developing the RHEs role

- 4.40 RHEs identified a number of areas for development but in acknowledging the need for a new phase in their development, posed questions themselves about whether they have the right skills:
- Becoming a champion to encourage participation, empower communities, contact hard-to-reach groups, supporting community planning, involving everyone.
 - Finding ways to enable two RHEs to work together in unison – to enable the sharing of ideas and mutual encouragement, to inspire, assist expansion and to offer support.
 - Gaining a better understanding of communities and the way they work, achieving bottom-up decision-making, and how to ensure this features in discussions between housing and planning officials.
 - How to help people register their housing need and to understand the housing choices they have.
 - Carrying out more effective PR and publicity
 - How to bring greater financial expertise around the table – so people can understand the implications of tax, investment, the role of new funding mechanisms such as the Welsh Housing Investment Trust etc.
- 4.41 It wasn't clear how useful the guidance³ had been for steering groups and RHEs. Some thought it had been helpful as part of the induction for new RHEs. Others hadn't known of its existence and a few suggested it might be time to revisit it and revise it to acknowledge the changed environment within which RHEs are working.

³ Enabling Affordable Housing in Rural Wales – A Good Practice Manual for Rural Housing Enablers and RHE Steering Groups, RHE Network Task & Finish Group 2008

Ingredients for success

- 5.1 It's tempting to draw a relationship between the time an RHE has been in post and success in the completion and occupation of homes which are a direct result of the RHEs work. The evidence would suggest this isn't always the case. What's clear is that success, however it's defined, is a product of a number of ingredients which ideally need to be in place. These include having:
- a strategic policy framework at local authority level which places the active development of affordable housing in rural communities as a priority
 - a recognised and active affordable housing partnership of the key organisations with a remit and resources to make a difference
 - legal documents which are designed to help improve the delivery of affordable housing rather than make it harder (e.g. having Section 106 agreements which stakeholders understand and which encourage rather than discourage lenders to lend)
 - an effective steering group comprising members with the authority to make decisions which meets regularly, has an agenda focussed on meeting clear outcomes (rather than reviewing process), regularly reviews progress and knows when to change tack when required
 - Steering group members willing and able to support RHEs between steering group meetings
 - RHEs with the right blend of skills, knowledge and experience who can network, be proactive, are open to ideas and who know when and how to respond to opportunities and to challenge.
 - The right mix of resources – land (or buildings), infrastructure, sufficient subsidy etc.
 - Evidence of need supported by appropriate proof
 - Communities which want and are willing to support a solution

Recommendations

- 6.1 This exercise has suggested a number of areas of support to enable the improved delivery of outcomes.
- 6.2 **Funding** - clarity on the current position with funding for the RHE services – from WG and also (where this isn't happening) from individual funding partners – to deal with the uncertainty expressed by a number of steering group members and RHEs
- 6.3 **Outcomes** - clarity on the outcomes steering groups expect to see being achieved and how progress is best measured – enabling individual RHE services to be clear on realistic expectations of the RHEs role. This might mean some tough decisions but it's important that the sustainability of the individual RHE services is clear and not fudged – funding partners need to know what's worked and is working, what hasn't and isn't working and what's the best way forward. It's surprising to see the limited progress made by some RHE services and it's important to understand why but it's just as important for those RHE services which have achieved more success than others.
- 6.4 **Communication** – reviewing, resourcing and updating the **rhewales.co.uk** website, bringing together information on (for example) what we mean by affordable housing (including the

various routes to providing it and the roles of the key providers), the role of RHEs in its provision, details of the success achieved by RHEs so far etc. It will be important to consider how this is resourced and managed - a number of those who responded to this exercise felt this was an obvious role for WG but it should be a product of partnership between all of the partners in the RHE services across Wales.

- 6.5 **RHE futures** – bringing together in an appropriate event, steering group members, RHEs, funders and other stakeholders to discuss what's been achieved to date, share learning about solutions which work, debate and discuss ways forward for RHE services collectively and identify the most effective role for WG and other partners. One of the suggestions at the time WG put funding in place for the network of RHE services was for the provision of a 'central support unit' (recommended by Hughes Isherwood) – whilst this didn't have widespread support then, it's important to clearly identify the support RHEs and steering groups would value and which WG can realistically provide
- 6.6 **RHE support** – extending the support for individual RHEs offered by steering groups, bringing them together with acknowledged experts (for example John Lancaster, Senior RHE) in sessions which focus on developing skills in responding to the opportunities presented by new challenges to affordable housing delivery and which help to identify how to employ effective strategies to overcome barriers
- 6.7 **Improved liaison** – certainly in the short-term, improve dialogue between WG and the steering groups on the progress being made by the individual RHE services, expected outcomes and realistic timescales for achievement
- 6.8 **Celebrating success** – creating opportunities to use a number of the recommendations listed above to celebrate success, perhaps developing a communications strategy to ensure the story is being told in a consistent and effective way and that the limited resources available to do this are used to best effect

Appendices

1. A list of contributors to the mapping exercise
2. A list of mapping exercise questions to contributors
3. Table showing summary statistics on affordable housing delivery as at March 2011

Appendix 1 - List of contributors to the Mapping Exercise

RHE Area	RHE	Phone contact	email contact	Steering Group chair	Host	Line Manager	Contributors
Anglesey/ Ynys Môn	Mary Sillitoe	01248 752234/ 07747 118433	marysillitoe@anglesey.gov.uk	Carina Roberts Tai Eryri	Anglesey CC	Shan Williams Anglesey CC	RHE, Carina Roberts & Shan Williams
Ceredigion	Digby Bevan	01545 574129	digbyb@ceredigion.gov.uk	Revolving	Ceredigion CC	Sue Thomas Ceredigion CC	RHE, Sue Thomas, Shane Perkins and Aidan Ackerman (Mid Wales HA)
Carmarthenshire/Sir Gâr	Lynne Beer	01267 228921	LABeer@carmarthenshire.gov.uk	N/A	Carmarthenshire CC	Matt Miller Carmarthenshire CC	RHE & Matt Miller
Conwy & Denbighshire/ Conwy a Sir Ddinbych	Cerian Evans	01745 818412	cerian.evans@rhe-denbighandconwy.com	Revolving	Tai Clwyd	Alwyn Llwyd Tai Clwyd	Alwyn Llwyd & Simon Kaye (DCC)
Gwynedd	Arfon Hughes	01766 831083	arfon@taieryri.co.uk	Carina Roberts Tai Eryri	Tai Eryri	Carina Roberts Tai Eryri	RHE & Carina Roberts
Mid Powys (Brecon & Radnor)/ Canolbarth Powys (Brycheiniog a Maesyfed)	Susie Abson	07825 145453	rhemidpowys@googlemail.com / susie.hobby@powys.gov.uk	Dafydd Evans Powys CC	Powys CC	Dafydd Evans Powys CC	RHE & Dafydd Evans
Monmouthshire & South Powys/ Sir Fynwy a De Powys	David James	01873 854526/ 07736 098103	david.james@rhe-monandpowys.co.uk	Shirley Wiggam Monmouthshire CC	Melin Homes	Adrian Huckin Melin Homes	RHE, Shirley Wiggam and Adrian Huckin
North Powys (Maldwyn)/ Gogledd Powys	Henk Jan Kuipers	01938 551308/ 07917 172854	rhenorthpowys@gmx.co.uk	Dafydd Evans Powys CC	Powys Council	Dafydd Evans Powys CC	RHE & Dafydd Evans
Pembrokeshire/Sir Benfro	Matthew Owens	01437 774769	matthew.owens@rhe-pembs.co.uk	Matthew Owens	Pembrokeshire Housing	Graham Holmes Pembrokeshire Housing	Graham Holmes & Lyn Hambidge (PCC)
Rural Wrexham & Flintshire/ Wrecsam Gwledig a Sir Fflint	Catherine Kirkham	01745 536864	Catherine.Kirkham@pennaf.co.uk	Deiniol Evans Pennaf	Pennaf	Deiniol Evans Pennaf	RHE

Appendix 2 - A list of mapping exercise questions to contributors

For Steering Groups

Determining the nature/size/role of the group and the following:

- What organisations fund the project (WG has this information) and are represented at group meetings (and at what level is the representation - Chief Executive/Chief Officer or other)?
- How often the groups meet?
- What meetings discuss?
- What support is available to the RHE from the group?
- Does the RHE have contact with the steering group outside of meetings? If so, in what way and to what effect?
- How does the group ensure it meets RHEs support needs?
- Does the group have a strategy for future funding the RHE service?
- How does the group think/feel the service should work in future?
- What does the group feel has been the biggest success of the service to date and what does it perceive as the main barriers to success in their locality?
- Is an annual work/project plan agreed and monitored, or are there any other mechanisms in place to monitor progress?
- How is progress reported to group member's Boards/Committees?
- Are all members familiar with the Good Practice Manual?
- Is there a Housing Partnership (similar to those in Gwynedd and Powys) in the County? If so, what is the relationship between the Partnership and the group? Does the RHE attend meetings of the Partnership?
- Has the group co-opted a representative of community councils?
- Is the local authority represented by both officers and elected members?

For Host Organisations

Identifying the host, services & support provided and how it views its role:

- What support does it provide to the RHE (e.g. admin, hot desk, phone etc)?
- How does it secure and support the independence of the service which has already been proved to be a critical part of its success?
- How does its role as the service host fit with the integrity and mechanics of the wider steering group?
- How does it ensure that RHE development and support needs are met?
- How often does it report progress to its SMT/Board, Cabinet/Scrutiny Committee?

For RHEs

Establish what the RHE has achieved to date (e.g. better relationship with planning authorities and influence on their development plans and control procedures, trust and relationship with the community via town and community councils, support to RSLs by providing robust schemes to secure grant, affordable housing units completed/started/about to start (this information is collected by WG); contributions to the development of planning and allocation policies which will increase the supply of affordable housing in rural areas for people who meet defined local connection criteria).

- what's been the biggest barrier the RHE has encountered in trying to do their job?
- what's has been the most useful action, work, support mechanism for them?
- what are their duties?*(in order to enable any differences in the duties each RHE undertakes)*
- what process does each RHE use for working with a community?
- what other activities away from "core" affordable housing do they find they get involved with and why?
- how does the RHE see their role developing in the future ?
- what, if anything, do RHEs think would improve their success in the role?
- does the RHE feel that her/his independence is understood and respected by the host employer and other steering group funding members?
- have allocation policies been an issue/problem?
- have the local authority and partner HAs adopted a common Local Lettings Policy to give priority to people with defined local connections?
- does the Local Planning Authority require HAs to enter into S106 agreements restricting occupation on Rural Exception Sites or all rural HA developments.

All - Is there anything steering groups or RHEs think they should be doing that is not currently within the role? If so what and should this be in addition to or instead of one of their current activities?

- Are there any other issues the groups, hosts or RHEs would like to raise?

Appendix 3 - Table showing summary statistics on affordable housing delivery as at March 2011

Affordable Housing Delivery Stage	Ynys Mon	Mid Powys	North Powys	Ceredigion	Gwynedd	Carms	Wrexham/ Flint	Pembs	Mons + S.Powys	Conwy + Denbigh	Totals
RHE start date	2009/10	2008/9	2008/9	2009/10	2004/5	2009/10	2009/10	2005/6	2003/4	2008/9	
Age of RHE service	1	2	2	1	6	1	1	5	7	2	
Housing needs surveys completed	4	5	3	1	24	6	6	44	22	35	150
Housing needs surveys underway	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	5
	5	6	4	1	25	6	7	44	22	35	155
Planning applications submitted	2	0	0	0	10	2	0	5	9	3	31
Planning applications granted	1	0	0	0	9	0	0	3	8	3	24
Planning applications refused	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	4
Homes started	10	0	0	0	89	0	0	0	34	11	144
Homes completed (with SHG)	10	0	0	0	77	0	0	0	34	11	132
Homes completed (without SHG)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Source: Welsh Government – RHE Project Monitoring returns