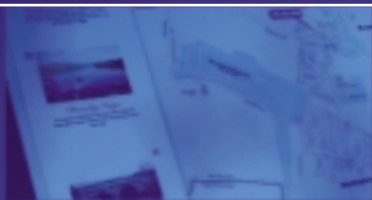




Getting the Solution Right

A Guide for Improving Access to Services for Rural Communities



YORKSHIRE AND HUMBER ASSEMBLY

The Regional Strategic Partnership

Foreword

As a region we are striving to ensure each and every one of us has a good quality of life. Access to services is an essential part of our every day life and how we access a service can affect that quality of life.

However, in parts of our rural areas some people still have difficulty accessing some of the most basic services such as shops, healthcare, banking, and employment.

Many considerations need to be taken into account on access issues – the need of an individual or community; the type of service and who delivers it; the type of rural area or community. Solutions to these problems can vary greatly and need to be determined at the local level.

This guide provides a seven-step approach to assessing, analysing and considering a particular access challenge to help deliver the most appropriate solution for that problem.

It also allows you to ask all the relevant questions, can be applied by any organisation (i.e. local authority, service deliverer or community organisation) and can be used to identify both transport and non-transport solutions.

I hope the guide will provide both a helping hand and a common understanding and approach to ensure the most important, appropriate, and sustainable services are delivered to residents and communities in our region.

Peter Box
Chair
Yorkshire and Humber Assembly



Getting the Right Solution

A guide for improving access to services for rural communities.

Fair access...

Fair access to health and social care, education and training, banking, shops and cultural facilities is recognised as an essential part of every day life in the UK. The fact is that some people enjoy better levels of access than others. The reasons for this are complex but relate to the types of place that people live, the way that they live and very often the ability of people to travel to the surgery, school or shop.

The things that stop people getting fair access to services begin with the individual; how far away is he/she from the place that delivers the service, how easy it is for him/her to cover that distance, does it rely upon a bike, a car or a bus? Will the individual be able to get to the service outlet at a time when the service is available? These issues are the same for everybody, regardless of whether they live in the city or in the country, in a market town or a remote hamlet.

Where an individual lives **does** make a difference to their ability to secure fair access to services however; not because their needs are any different necessarily, but because of the distances involved, the relative availability of public transport and the limited choice of alternatives in more rural and sparsely populated areas.

Quality of life

It is not just the sort of place that you live in that dictates how good access to services will be. After all, everybody that lives in a small village theoretically experiences the same level of access to the nearest GP's surgery – it is a similar distance away, its opening hours are constant, the bus service that connects the village and the market town is the same. What matters is not the level of access experienced, but the *quality* of that experience.

This quality is best measured in terms of the impact that accessing the service has on the individual's quality of life; what impact will making the journey have, what impact will failure to access the service have? Those denied access, and those for whom it represents a major physical, mental or financial challenge should be considered to be disadvantaged, especially in comparison to those able to exercise personal choice in the manner and place that they enjoy access (to the same services).

Improving access – Why develop a guide?

Evidence shows that communities and individuals across rural areas of Yorkshire & Humber often suffer from poor access to basic services, and can be inherently disadvantaged by the way in which publicly funded services are delivered. The factors that influence rural accessibility across rural Yorkshire & the Humber have been considered in detail in two regional documents, A Strategic Rural Transport Framework and A Rural Access to Services Framework¹.

These Guidance Notes build on those two documents and set out a common approach to understanding access problems, to identifying and where necessary developing, an appropriate solution. They offer a common approach that all those involved in improving access can use to ask **what is the problem, and what can we do to fix it?**

The notes set out a 7 step approach towards building, assessing or reviewing an access solution. This approach can be applied by any organisation, (i.e. local authority, service deliverer or community organisation), and can be used for both transport and non-transport solutions. It is not prescriptive, and does not seek to advise whether it will be more appropriate to move the 'service to the people' or the 'people to the service'. Rather the approach allows you to determine how best to address a specific access challenge based upon all relevant circumstances.

¹ Available in the rural research section www.yhassembly.gov.uk/library



Step One:

What is the problem?

In order to fix something you have to know what the problem is. Very often problems around access to services are described at a very 'high level' i.e. improving access to health and social care for elderly people in rural areas or getting more young people into training.

This level of description is too vague to allow a solution to be found; you need to be able to be far more specific about what **exactly** the problem is.

In order to work this out you need to know:

- Q Who are the people that you want to get to?
- Q What is the service that you want to improve their access to?
- Q Why is the failure of these users to access this particular service a 'bad thing'?
- Q What are the implications or consequences?

For a healthcare related scenario, rather than seeking to improve access to health and social care for elderly people the problem needs to be more specific, i.e. how to reach those patients with diabetes that have stopped attending regular check ups (across a particular Primary Care Trust) in order to prevent them becoming high dependency and reliant upon home visits.

Focus on the specifics of the problem; ask yourselves:

- Q What is the issue?
- Q Who does the issue affect?
- Q Why is this a problem?

Step Two:

Why does the problem need addressing by the public sector?

If you want public sector intervention to improve access then you must show why this is necessary and appropriate. There are number of ways that you can do this:

- a) Show that the problem relates to a service or group of people that have been identified as being important (a priority) within relevant policy documents (i.e. a Parish Plan, Community Strategy, Local Area Agreement or Accessibility Strategy).
- b) Provide evidence to show that the problem that you have identified exists; you can do this through existing data (your local authority should be able to point you to a team that can help), using information provided by the service provider or community, or by asking people why they are not able to access the service.
- c) Show what will happen if the problem is not addressed, and explain why this is a 'bad thing'. If you can link this to the service provider's objectives; so much the better.
- d) Explain why the problem will not get fixed without some form of specific and publicly funded solution.

Prove that the problem matters:

- 1 Show it is important to the public sector and where they said that this was so.
- 1 Prove that the problem is real (using evidence)
- 1 Explain why the public sector needs it fixing – it is stopping them achieving something that they have said they want



Step Three:

Explain the sort of place(s) you are dealing with.

You inherently understand the sort of place that you are dealing with, but those further removed may not. You may for example be dealing with an area that has two distinctly different parts within it (i.e. accessible commuter villages and more remote dispersed settlements).

It is extremely difficult to describe the place(s) that you are dealing with, and the way that this contributes to 'the problem' in enough detail to allow people at regional level, or in other parts of the region, to fully understand the complexity of the situation.

You need to be able to do this for yourselves of course, but that comes later. For now, you need to be able to give enough information (about the place(s) that you are dealing with) for people more distant from it to understand how it works and how geography affects it. In order to help you do this we have prepared two sets of information, one which considers the area and one which considers the places within your area that people go to access services.

All you have to do is decide which of the descriptions best fits the place(s) that you are dealing with, and record this.

The choices are set out on the next page.

- Q What sort of place(s) are you dealing with?
- Q What sort of places(s) do people use to access services in your area?
- Q Which descriptions fits best?

Step Four:

Getting to grips with the problem.

Any problem around access to services has three key dimensions:

- ! the **People** who need better access
- ! the **Place(s)** these people live in
- ! the **Service** that you want to improve access to

In order to work out the best solution you have to understand these three dimensions in detail. You need to ask a range of questions for each dimension...here are some ideas.

- Q What sort of people are we dealing with?
- Q Where and how are they used to accessing this service?
- Q Do they want to access this service or is this something that you want them to do for another reason?
- Q Where is the best place to bring the service and the people together? How easy is it for them to move about? How easy is it to get the service to this place?
- Q What sort of public transport facilities are there?
- Q What sort of facilities are available where (or near to where) these people live?
- Q What are the objectives of the service provider, do they want to reach these people? What is their imperative for doing so, how hard is it likely to be, why should they do so?

As you ask these questions, consider how you can get hold of the information you need to arrive at the answers. If you do not have that information, you will need to make contact with the people that do have access to it. These may be the people that you want to reach, the people that deliver, pay for or even host the service.

In order to get the information that you need, you will probably have to ask questions of all the people involved in delivering, paying for and accessing the service. These are the people that you need to work with to decide on the best solution to your problem, and to help deliver it.

If you cannot find the answer to any of your questions you have probably not asked the right person; work out who that person is and how to find them. It may be that they are not interested, in which case they are unlikely to be part of the solution – they may in fact be part of the problem!

Top Tip: Information from Parish Plans and Resident Information Surveys will add to your evidence



Step Four:

Getting to grips with the problem (cont.).

Once you have the answers to all your questions, or at least know which questions are still unanswered, then you will have the sort of information that you need to start thinking about possible solutions. You must then ask the 3 key questions (see Step 5).

Area profiles.

Accessible rural areas within a 'City Region' context which have relatively good connectivity, where social and economic indicators are generally positive. Equality of transport opportunity for those without personal mobility and commuter pressure on the sustainability of communities are key issues affecting accessibility.

Remote, (and/or) sparsely populated rural areas with a high quality environment; these have generally poor (local) access to a range of basic services and facilities and rely on key service centres. Protection of high quality environment; equity of accessibility for those without 'personal mobility' and hidden disadvantage are key issues affecting accessibility.

Pennine and rural coalfield areas – with relatively high incidence of economic and social deprivation; poor access to employment opportunities and limited access to a range of basic services and facilities across small settlements. Protection of high quality environment, capacity and culture within communities are key issues affecting accessibility.

Coastal areas, where disproportionately older residents, low household income, limited personal mobility and problems due to peripherality mean that the accessibility profile and issues differ significantly from other "upland" areas. Consistent incidence of economic and social deprivation; poor access to employment opportunities; poor access to a range of basic services and facilities; protection of high quality environment are key issues affecting accessibility.

Service centre profiles.

Urban connections: the rural areas have strong links (travel to work, cultural and leisure) with urban areas – many services are accessed within the neighbouring urban areas with only community facilities and limited other basic services available in smaller settlements and villages.

Rural Key Service Centres: the rural area includes Key Service Centres (market towns) where there is a good level of service provision. People from the surrounding rural area tend to use the Key Service Centres as a focus for accessing services. Smaller settlements and villages tend to have a limited range of service provision requiring residents from these settlements to travel for services.

Self contained settlement and villages: there is no overriding connection with an urban area or service centre, rather each settlement and village has a certain level of service provision. Some settlements work in a network, with a range of services being available across the combination of settlements.

Very limited service centre provision: the area is remote and its settlements have very limited service provision. There is no obvious connectivity to an urban or key service centre and people are pretty much left to fend for themselves.

Notes:

Step One: What is the problem?

Who are the people you want to get to?

What is the service that you want to improve their access to?

Why is the failure of these users to access particular service a 'bad thing'?

What are the implications or consequences?

Step Two: Why does the problem need addressing by the public sector?

Has this problem been identified as important (ie parish plan, community strategy)?

What evidence shows that the problem exists?

What are the consequences if problem is not addressed?

Why will it not get fixed without public sector intervention?

Step Three: Explain the sort of place(s) you are dealing with.

What sort of place(s) are you dealing with?

What sort of place(s) do people use to access services in your area?

Which description from choices in Step Three best fits?

Step Four: Getting to grips with the problem.

Where and how are they used to accessing this service?

Do they want to access this service or is this something that you want them to do for another reason?

Where is the best place to bring the service and the people together? How easy is it for them to move about?
How easy is it to get the service to this place?

Step Five: The three key questions

What is your 'must have' list?

What existing services could help?

What can you learn from?

Options For Solutions

Step Six: Work up and challenge your options

Efficient and cost effective?

Customer focus?

Sustainable?

Future proofed?

Step Seven: The best solution

Notes:



Step Five:

The three key questions.

Q1 What is on your 'must have' list when searching for the right solution?

What are the key elements of the solution that are needed to make it work?

Think about this in an entirely open way; try not to be restricted by how things used to be done, or how that particular service provider operates. Ask 'why' and 'so what' when barriers emerge – make sure that they are properly tested.

Do not ignore real barriers however; instead ask what can be done to get round them.

At the end of this questioning process try to list the five or six key things that you absolutely have got to have to address the problem.

So for the example given earlier around diabetic patients you would need:

- A qualified practitioner.
- The engagement of the PCT or GP practice.
- The willingness of the patients to attend a clinic or meet with the practitioner.
- Somewhere for practitioner to meet patient.
- A means of getting practitioner and patient together at the same time.

Q2 Are there any other service delivery solutions which already exist that we could work with?

It is vital that you do not invent something new if there is a way that your problem could be addressed by something already in place. This is important for several reasons; you are unlikely to get funding to replace or duplicate something. Just as importantly any local service outlet or initiative that already exists might be able to help, and could be improved or its viability increased by delivering additional services.

Always look for a way of joining up with an existing service as the first option. Ask the following questions....

- Q Can the existing service provider be persuaded to change the way they are working in order to address the problem?
- Q Could any other service provider that is already involved in the place or with the people be persuaded to work together to tackle the problem?

- Q Are there any other (existing) facilities in the place or used by the people that might be appropriate?

Make sure that you have exhausted these and related questions before moving on to question three; considering lessons from other solutions.

Q3 If we need to work up a new way of doing something, what is out there already that we can learn from?

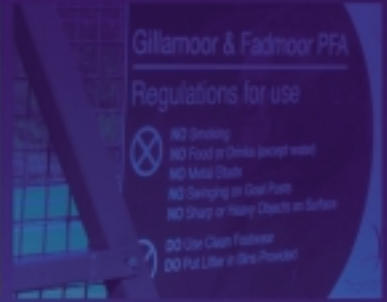
It is highly likely that somebody somewhere will have already addressed a similar problem. It is of course not likely that all the issues around the problem will be identical – access to service issues are too specific, but it is likely that there will be valuable lessons to be learned from looking at existing good practice.

The two Regional Frameworks offer some information on existing practice, and it is hoped that as these notes are used it will be possible for practitioners across the region to share their experiences. Meanwhile other places to look for practice examples are:

- Via the service provider (i.e. PCT) or others of that type around the region and country
- Via your local Accessibility Partnership and / or Local Authority
- Via your Local Strategic Partnership
- Via the local Rural Partnership
- Via your local Rural Community Council
- Via the Regional Rural Practitioners Group
- Via the Regional Rural Affairs Forum
- Via the Commission for Rural Communities
- Via Defra

When you have found some practice examples, you need to understand just how relevant they might be, and what they might bring to your problem. It is very unlikely that you will be able to simply replicate the approach and solve your problem – access to service solutions are too site specific! Even if another PCT has already addressed the non-presenting diabetic issue, the issues which they faced will not be identical to yours, you are in a different place and dealing with different individuals.

You need to know what it is about the example that makes it work, or perhaps even what went wrong. What you are interested in are the key pieces of the machine without which nothing happens.



Step Five:

The three key questions (cont.)

Thinking about our diabetic example again; all those points around practitioner, a place to meet, the ability to get patient and practitioner together will of course be critical. A solution that works might however rely upon someone locally to co-ordinate with the patients and make sure that they know when and where the clinic will be each month. It might rely on a volunteer driver to collect and take home the patients. It might rely on a village hall with an appropriate room and a broadband connection.

These are the things that you need to know, so as well as asking about how the solution works, make sure that you find out what would stop it from working.

! Top Tip:
Keep a record and notes from conversations;
these are your evidence.

NEARLY READY TO WORK OUT THE ANSWER TO YOUR
ACCESSIBILITY PROBLEM!!

By this stage you should have worked out exactly what the problem is, and have a good idea of all the things that you need to consider when working out what the best answer is. You should also know which people you need to get involved.

Time to double check.

- Q** Is there anything that you need to know that you feel you don't know? If so, what is it and who has the answer?
- Q** Is anyone missing from the team that are going to fix the problem? If so who and why? Are they part of the problem? What are you going to do about it?
- Q** Are you sure that there is not already something going on locally that can help fix the problem? What sort of services do your target group engage with? Where do they go and when? Can you work within the way they live their lives?
- Q** Do you absolutely have to invent something new?

Now find the answer

It is now time to start thinking about a solution.



Step Six:

Work up and challenge your options.

Aim to generate as many ideas as possible. This is often done best by a small team of people. Make sure that for each option you work out how it addresses the issues that you identified to do with the people, the place and the service.

Once you have worked up some possible solutions, it is time to test them – time to ask some more questions. These questions must focus on the solution and not the problem – you need to try and look at your solution through the eyes of a number of people that are not you!

Think about it from the point of view of:

- the people that will use the service
- the people that will deliver the service
- the people that will 'sell' or 'promote' the service
- the people that will pay for the service
- the people that will assess the impact of the service
- the people that will host the service

In order to help you do this (its not easy asking questions from a view point other than your own) there are a number of key challenges (yes more questions).

These are set out in the facing column.

Make sure you keep a record

- ❗ If you are looking for public funding or trying to persuade a public sector body to support your proposal it will be important that you write down your answer to these questions. They will help prove your case, and also help people reviewing the success of the solution in the future.
- ❗ Keeping a record of your decision making process will also help others that follow in your footsteps work out a solution to their own problem.
- ❗ Apart from anything else, each time you record something you help build the local store of practice examples.

Challenge Process

Will the proposed solution be?

Efficient and cost effective?

- ❗ Will it do what you set out to do?
- ❗ Does it represent value for money?
- ❗ Could it be delivered more efficiently and effectively if integrated with other services?
- ❗ How might existing service delivery and resources be used?

Customer focused, will it meet the needs of the people, will it fit with the way the community works?

- ❗ Does it meet the needs of the target users?
- ❗ Will it be used by target customers?
- ❗ Does the solution match the culture and capacity of the community?
- ❗ Does it provide other (spin off) benefits for the community?

Sustainable?

- ❗ Financially sustainability - will it be viable without short-term funding?
- ❗ Operationally sustainable - who will own and run it - how will it be supported and sustained in the medium to long term?
- ❗ Environmental sustainability – how does it help to reduce journeys, encourage use of sustainable transport and minimise the use of natural resources?

Future proofed?

- ❗ Have future risks and opportunities been identified which could impact on efficiency, effectiveness, communities or sustainability?
- ❗ Does the solution take account of changing demographics and influences on the future demand for services?



Step Seven:

Decide which is the best solution.

AND THE ANSWER IS...

Once you have been through the challenge process, you should then be able to compare each of your options and decide which is best. You should also be able to demonstrate how you reached this decision to anyone that asks, whether you need money from them or not!

Quite how you decide which solution fits best is up to you; only you can know all the crucial detail, can weigh up one factor against another. No one can tell you that you have got it right, but if you have followed these 7 steps, no more can they tell you that you have got it wrong.

The proof, as they say, will be in the eating.

Good Luck!!!

The 7 Steps – An Example

Step One: What is the problem?

Persistent non attendance at diabetes clinic by elderly men leading to worsening of symptoms and the requirement for in-patient treatment.

Step Two: Why does the public sector need to be involved?

Improving the health of elderly people, and supporting more people to live at home is a key objective of the Primary Care Trust and a target of the Local Area Agreement.

Step Three: Explain the sort of place(s) you are dealing with.

Choose the Area Profile and Service Centre profile that fits best: Coastal, Rural Key Service Centre & Self contained settlements and villages.

Step Four: Getting to grips with the problem.

People: Elderly diabetic men; 17 men in 6 parishes; 8 are unable to drive.
Place: Rural villages and hamlets; very limited bus service.
Service: Blood test; urine sample; sight test, dietary advice and medication.

Information needed to work out a solution.

Step Five: The three key questions.

Q1: What is on your 'must have' list when searching for the right solution?

Q2: Are there any other local service delivery solutions which already exist that we could work with?

Q3: If we need to work up a new way of doing something what is out there already that we can learn from?

Options for solutions.

Step Six: Challenge the options.

Q1: Is the solution Efficient & Cost Effective?

Q2: Is the solution Customer Focused?

Q3: Is the solution Sustainable?

Q4: Is the solution Future Proofed?

Step Seven: The best solution.

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