

Rural Services APPG

All-Party Parliamentary Group on Rural Services
15th June 2016 at 9:00am
Room O, Portcullis House, Bridge Street, London, SW1A 2LW

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

PRESENT

Graham Stuart MP – Beverley & Holderness
Rebecca Pow MP – Taunton & Deane
Cat Smith MP – Lancaster & Fleetwood
Lord Crathorne KCVO (HofL)
Eleanore Hughes (representing Michelle Donelan MP, Chippenham)
Angela Smith MP (Penistone & Stocksbridge)
Antoinette Sanbach MP (Eddisbury)
Jo Churchill MP (Bury St Edmunds)
James Heapey MP (Wells)

Cllr Paul Carter CBE, Leader of Kent CC and Chairman of CCN - Guest Speaker

Graham Biggs – RSN – Secretariat
David Inman – RSN - Secretariat

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Neil Parish MP (Tiverton and Honiton)
Sir Oliver Heald QC MP (North East Hertfordshire)
Holly Jago (Calor Gas Ltd)
The Rt Rev'd, the Lord Bishop of St Albans (HofL)
Dr Sarah Wollaston MP (Totnes)
Victoria Prentis MP (North Oxfordshire)
Richard Benyon MP (Newbury)
Lord Cameron of Dillington (HofL)
Rosie Cooper MP (West Lancashire)
Tom Tugendhat MBE MP (Tongate & Malling)
Nigel Huddleston MP (Mid Worcestershire)
Mark Prisk MP (Hertford & Stortford)
Kevin Hollinrake MP (Thirsk & Malton)
Eleanor Laing MP (Epping Forest)

Alberto Costa MP (South Leicestershire)
Caroline Ansell MP (Eastbourne)
Bill Wiggin MP (North Herefordshire)
John Glen MP (Salisbury)
Maria Caulfield MP (Lewes)
Rory Stewart MP (Penrith & The Border)
The Rt Hon Sir Greg Knight MP (East Yorkshire)

2. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

AGREED

That the following members be elected for the next year:-

Chairman – Graham Stuart MP

Vice Chairmen:-

Helen Goodman MP

Rebecca Pow MP

Cat Smith MP

Secretary – Jo Churchill MP

Treasurer – Lord Crathorne KCVO

3. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The Minutes of the last AGM (9th June 2015) and the Meeting held on 19th January 2016 were both accepted as correct records

4. IMPROVING STANDARDS IN RURAL PRIMARY EDUCATION

The group received remarks on this topic from Councillor Paul Carter, the Leader of both Kent County Council and the County Council Network. Councillor Carter said that prior to becoming Leader of Kent County Council he had held the Education Brief for Kent for 8 years.

Before discussing education Paul commented on some of the “big things” in the world of local government at present:-

- The financial constraints were very severe and next year will be the worst ever. Some Districts would have seen 40% - 45% cut out from their revenue budgets. He expressed thanks to Graham Stuart and the Rural Fair Share Campaign group of MPs without whom, he said, the Transitional Relief gained in the Final Settlement would not have been forthcoming.
- Concessionary Bus Fares was a significant cost pressure.
- Adult Social Care was a huge driver of costs and increased demand was outstripping available funding, year on year.
- School Transport was another significant cost pressure.
- The loss of the Sustainable Transformational Fund was, in his view, a mistake.

- He further commented that many of the proposed Devolution Deals may fall apart and the imposition of Directly Elected Mayors was “going down like a lead balloon”.
- He expressed the view that local government is able to make a dramatic and meaningful contribution to the Health & Wellbeing agenda at much less cost and with much better outcomes if allowed to do so.
- He stressed the importance of the Needs Led Review of the funding formula for local government stating the Inner London was currently over funded by circa £1BN a year.

On the subject of Rural Primary Schools, Paul Carter made the following introductory comments:-

- It was possible at present, through the Schools Forum, for LEA's to set additional amounts of monies for primaries.
- Most of the small primaries were rated very highly by OFSTED.
- Many services were provided by the LEAs to primaries including a maternity cover pot of funding.
- The dice will be weighed against community schools. He outlined the concept of County Clusters or Academies and Multi Academy Trusts sponsored by the Local Authority.
- In the context of the School Funding Review which is on-going he praised the work of the F40 Group and reminded members that London authorities get 45% more funding per pupil. There was concern that under the new Schools Funding Arrangements LEAs could lose the ability to top up primary school funding.

There then followed a general discussion.

Graham Stuart raised the issue of the Schools Forums. He felt that perhaps too many factors were being included in local formulae. He commented that only time would tell if the resultant fund would be fair and needs led. But he also felt that more factors should be included in respect of Special Needs funding. He expressed concern that the new national formula would not be flexible enough and may result in Schools Forums being redundant.

Discussion took place, with members explaining the issues in their Constituencies regarding School Transport, Early Years/wrap around care, and Post 16 Transport. Paul Carter referred to an example in his area where the Council had identified a need for more school places and had identified a site. However the School's Commissioner decided the site was too expensive and had the new school build the other side of the town where there was no need but had created transport issues and costs

Graham Stuart asked Paul Carter to say what he thought the current “big rural issues were”

Paul said that the Total Transport Pilots and the Buses Bill along with post 16 transport were main issues. The schools Funding Review and the Needs led Fair Funding Review generally were also of major importance.

Graham Biggs said that he would contact the County Council's Network and seek a briefing note for members on the education and transport issues raised.

5. NEXT MEETING

To be notified.