

Rural Services APPG

Annual General Meeting All-Party Parliamentary Group on Rural Services

Tuesday 18th June 2013, 9.00am – 10.30 am
Dining Room D

In attendance:

Members:

Graham Stuart MP – Chairman
Lord Dear (Vice Chair)
Baroness Byford (Secretary)
Lord Cameron of Dillington
Rt Revd Anthony Priddis
Andrew Bingham
Duke of Montrose
Mark Spencer
Sir James Paice
David Ruffley
Neil Parrish
Dan Rogerson (Vice Chair)

Rural Services Network (RSN) (Secretariat):

David Inman – Director
Dan Bates- Finance Director

Speakers:

Campaign for Better Transport

Martin Abrams

Ofcom

Adam Higgitt

Northamptonshire Fire

Martin Emberson

Also in attendance:-

Matthew Conway- Ofcom

Apologies

Damian Hinds, Tessa Munt, Mark Garnier, Rory Stewart, Gavin Williamson, Damian Collins, Cllr Roger Begy (Rutland), Andrew Tyrie, Holly Sims (Calor), George Eustice, Roger Williams CBE, Lord Crathorne, Rt Hon Nicholas Soames, Simon Reeve

1. Election of Officers:

The following members were re-elected to committee positions:

Chairman: Graham Stuart MP
Vice-Chairmen: Grahame Morris MP
Dan Rogerson MP
Lord Dear QPM
Treasurer: Rory Stewart MP
Secretary: Baroness Byford DBE

Lord Don Curry of Kirkhall had asked to join the Group and receive papers. That apart the membership of the Group remained unchanged.

2. Notes of Previous Meeting

5th March 2013

3. Matters Arising from the last meeting

Minutes of previous meeting confirmed as an accurate record

4. Presentations

a. Campaign for Better Transport

A presentation was given by Martin Abrams the Chief Executive of this organisation. The organisation were extremely concerned that the austerity measures would lead to the incremental removal of many bus services and that as a result there would be a roll on impact of both the life of many rural residents but also impacts in relation to educational and job opportunities and the viability of firms in rural areas who were reliant on people being able to travel to their work places.

It was felt that government departments needed to work together in a more holistic fashion to see how this problem could be looked in a special way. This would require a pooling of available resource. The campaign had written to the Chancellor in the following fashion and it was hoped the various departments could look at this matter in a coordinated way.

Dear Mr Osborne,

Funding for buses must be protected for our economy's sake

We are writing to express our concern about the threats to bus funding in June's spending round. Below, we spell out why buses matter not just for transport, but for the economy, employment, education and communities. We also suggest how funding for this essential part of the transport mix can be maintained.

Buses offer great value for public money. Nearly 5 billion bus trips are made each year and bus commuters help generate over £64 billion of economic output. Every £1 of public investment in buses provides between £3 and £5 of wider benefits to local economies and social and environmental wellbeing. – a return that is often higher than for many transport infrastructure schemes.

Buses are essential for the quarter of UK households without a car. Over half of households on the lowest incomes fall into this category and bus use rises as income falls. Bus users including young and disabled people need reliable and affordable bus services in order to take up opportunities in education and employment, whilst providing a vital lifeline to access public services. For people in rural areas, buses are often essential not just for work and education, but for independence.

Cutting bus funding in June's Spending Round would be in stark contrast to Government commitments to restore the economy and get people working. Evidence shows that many people who want to work are unable to take jobs, or are forced on to benefits, because of insufficient and expensive bus provision. A third of jobseekers say poor transport options are the biggest barrier to finding work. Local businesses depend on customers getting to the shops and services on the bus. High streets up and down the country will be damaged if bus services are cut, causing unemployment and holding back economic recovery. Redundancies in the bus industry, and the associated negative social and economic impacts, will also be felt as a result of bus cuts.

Bus services are essential to the objectives of a number of government departments. Spending on buses benefits Department of Work and Pensions, through reducing welfare spending by providing, jobseekers with access to employment, the Department of Health, through long term independence and access to healthcare, the Department for Education through providing access to schools and colleges and of course transport and the wider economy. Because of this, we are calling on the Government to recognise the cross-departmental benefits of bus spending and maintain support for BSOG and local authority grants via pool funding from across relevant departments. This innovative solution would protect bus services and keep the wheels of the economy moving.

The last spending review in 2010 resulted in cuts to local authority transport funding and from 2012 a 20% cut in bus service operators grant, the only funding that goes direct to all bus services. Local authority supported services declined by 10% in non-metropolitan areas in 2011/12. Evidence from our surveys of bus services suggests that commercial services are now also under server pressure as the BSOG cut has come in. Please use the Spending Review to protect these vital services and avoid funding cuts which would tip many services over the edge and fundamentally weaken the network of services across the country.

Yours sincerely

The letter had been backed by a wide range of organisations and it was very much hoped something could be done for what was a unique problem.

Mr Abrams was thanked for his suggestions which it was hoped would be fully looked at by the Departments involved.

b. Ofcom

A presentation was given by Adam Higgitt the Head of Government and Parliamentary Business at Ofcom and Matthew Conway the Director of Public Policy.

Ofcom had done a recent investigation into the availability of communication services in the UK. Obviously there was serious concern about the position in a lot of rural areas. The solution in most cases would have to rely on wireless and not fibre. The work done by Ofcom was detailed and is attached. Particular attention was drawn to the successful approach being undertaken in Northern Ireland. It was felt lessons could be learnt from the approach taken and the results achieved by other home countries.

It was felt that unless further governmental measures were taken there was going to be a hard core of areas where the technological advances taking place would not reach at economic cost.

Ofcom were thanked for their report and their attendance.

c. Northamptonshire Fire

Martyn Emberson the Chief Fire Officer of Northamptonshire gave a presentation following the report on the Fire Service by Sir Ken Knight which was now out for consultation. He detailed the approach which had been taken in Northamptonshire trying to link as much as was practically possible under present disciplines and regimes the work of the Police, the Ambulance Services

and the Health Service. He expanded (paper attached) that in his view strategic linking of these four services had to be the answer if local operation (which the public favoured) was to be continued at a cost which obviously needed to fall given the austerity cuts. He felt this solution was effective from both an economic and an operational viewpoint.

Mr Emberson was thanked for what it was considered to be a very interesting report.

5. Next meeting - Tuesday 8th of October