



**AGENDA FOR SPARSE RURAL AND RURAL SERVICE
NETWORK
EXECUTIVE AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE RURAL
SERVICES PARTNERSHIP LTD MEETING**

Venue: - City of Westminster Archives Centre, London
SW1P 2DE

Date: Monday 13th March 2017

Time: 11-30 a.m. to 2.30pm

Please note change of venue as the LGA is not available for meetings for the coming months .

The meeting is being held at the City of Westminster Archives, 10 St Ann's St, Westminster, London SW1P 2DE. Visitor information and a map for the venue can be found in the links below:

[City of Westminster Archives Centre Visitor Information](#)

[City of Westminster Archives Centre Map](#)

1. Apologies for Absence

2. Notes of the Previous Meeting

Held on Monday 9th January 2017 to consider any relevant items.
(Attachment 1)

3. Notes of the Main SPARSE-Rural Meeting

Held on 30th January 2017 to consider any relevant items.
(Attachment 2)

4. Budget

To consider the attached papers.

(a) Budget situation Paper (Attachment 3)

(b) Report on the Service Level Agreement with the National Rural Crime Network

5. Communication Strategy

(a): **Draft “Toolkit” arising from the Lexington Workshop** (Attachment 4 (a)).

Key Messages:

Providing a voice for rural communities and service providers

David Inman, Director Kilworthy Park, Tavistock, Devon PL19 0BZ

Tel: 01822 813693

www.rsonline.org.uk email: admin@sparse.gov.uk twitter: @rsonline



Health and Wellbeing

Key Message:

Despite its idyllic image, rural communities often experience difficulties in accessing health and support services. This is becoming increasingly difficult as specialist services are centralised to remain resilient and poor transport links reduce access.

There are recruitment and retention issues amongst medical staff in rural areas. Rural residents are therefore vulnerable to isolation and poorer health outcomes in the long term.

Public Sector Funding

Key Message:

Central Government has historically and systematically underfunded rural areas giving them less grant per head than urban areas – despite the fact that it costs more to provide the services. Rural residents earn less on average than those in urban areas and therefore pay more Council Tax for fewer local government services. Government policy, implicitly, is that council services in rural areas are more reliant on funding through council tax than their urban counterparts. We demand fairer funding for all public services serving rural areas.

(b) **Social Media Communication Strategy** (Attachment 4 (b))

(c) **Position Generally**

6. Final Local Government Settlement 2017/18.

Verbal Report

7. Business Rates Retention.

(a) Pixel Briefing Note on latest Consultation (Attachment 5):

To agree the RSN response

(b) Verbal report re meeting of RSN/CCN/DCN Working Group held on 22nd February

8. Schools Funding (F40 Group Briefing Note to MPs)

(Attachment 6)

9. Update on “Vulnerability” discussions with Energy and Water Providers

10. Update on BREXIT discussions held on 20th February

(Attachment 7)

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11. Rural Health Conference – Report on Conference held on 28th February

12. Annual Rural Conference in 2017 – What should the theme be?

13. Agendas for the coming meetings :-

- (a) Rural Social Care Health and Vulnerability Committee (10th April a.m.)
- (b) Rural Assembly (10th April p.m.)
- (c) SPARSE Rural (which members have indicated will be in effect a finance conference for Finance Officers and Finance Portfolio Holders) – (10th July)

14. Total Involvement of Rural Areas with the Rural Services Network

To consider a strong recruitment approach to all non members. This is suggested to be a communication signed by all Councillors on the Executive and sent to all Councillors on all of these authorities (Attachment 8)

15. Industrial Strategy White Paper: Briefing Note

(Attachment 9)

16. Any Other Business.

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MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE OF THE RURAL SERVICES NETWORK OF MONDAY 9th JANUARY 2017.

Held at City of Westminster Centre London.

Present:- Councillor Cecilia Motley (Chairman), Councillor Gordon Nicolson , Councillor Peter Stevens, Rev. Richard Kirlew.

Graham Biggs CE, David Inman, Director.

1. Apologies for Absence

Cllr Robert Heseltine- First Vice Chair

Cllr Sue Sanderson – Cumbria County Council

Cllr Derrick Haley – Mid Suffolk District Council

John Birtwistle – First Group

Cllr Janet Duncton – West Sussex County Council

Stewart Horne – Federation of Small Businesses

Cllr Peter Thornton – South Lakeland District Council

Christina Watson – UK Youth

Andy Dean – RSN

Cllr Lewis Strange – Lincolnshire County Council

Cllr Adam Paynter – Cornwall County Council

2. Notes of the Previous Meeting

Held on Monday 26th September 2016 – Confirmed as a correct record

3. Notes of the Main Meetings

RSP AGM -Confirmed as a correct record

RSN AGM; Sparse Rural ; Rural Assembly held on the 21st November 2016, – minutes not back from the LGA Secretariat at the time of the meeting

4. Budget

The Chief Executive presented a report showing the position in relation to the 16-17 budget and an anticipated budget for 17-18. Members were satisfied with the current position and accepted the 17-18 budget.

5. Lexington - Communications Strategy. Latest Position

The Chief Executive said this meeting had been set up in response to member's comments at the Blue Sky meeting with a view to establishing a stronger communications strategy.

Lexington would facilitate discussion and present their views and then it was for members to decide what was affordable. Discussions were also being had with Johann Tasker about amendments to his overall brief.

The Lexington meeting would be held on Tuesday 31st of January. It would last for an anticipated four hours. A good cross section of the Executive and the office consultants had been invited.

6. FAIRER FUNDING

Provisional Settlement-

The position was outlined by Dan Bates of Pixel Consultancy and Graham Biggs. It was clear that under the Government proposals the gap per head of government funding between what urban received and what was received by his/her rural equivalent was widening again.

The Executive were subsequently given details of the meeting with the Minister when it was said that the Government would use the new Business Rate system to seek to create equity between the urban and rural position. Dan's sides would be circulated to all members.

Rural Fair Share Campaign by MPS

James Heapey and Steve Double had taken over as respective Chair and Vice Chair of rural Fair Share Group. They were concerned that the government were looking to widen the gap on grant and council tax levels still further and meetings were to be had both involving the full group (10th January) and later it was hoped with the Secretary of State.

Update on Business Rates

Dan Bates and Graham outlined the position as they saw it currently. There was continued feeling by the Executive that the position should no longer be influenced by a Density Factor on which no proper and detailed research had ever been undertaken while the Government continued to understate in the formula the Sparsity Factor where they had in fact accepted studies presented to them. Officers were asked to continue to emphasise this point.

7. Update on matters from Blue Skies Decisions

Graham Biggs ran through items that were the main components of the Future Directions report.

(a) Wider Financial Brief

Discussions in the Office had taken place. Work on other topics would commence shortly but the position sought could only be to compare headline figures on grant per head and how rural fared in comparison with other areas. Although some representation through the Rural Fair Share Group was hoped for, detailed research work was not possible unless specific new resource was forthcoming from members or groups of members to take it forward.

(b) Rural- Urban Comparison Work

A diagrammatic and illustrative backbone for this work was on the Agenda from Dan Worth and Jane Hart. It was decided this backbone would be published on the RSN website and would be incrementally taken forward as resources permitted.

(c) Vulnerability.

David Inman detailed the anticipated rural position by 2039 when rural which currently had 25% of its population above 65 years of age would move up to a 1 in 3 ratio with one third of those people being over the age of 80. Although people were living longer generally the rural position would be twice as older person heavy than the national norm. Although many people might continue to enjoy good health the number who were vulnerable for either long or short term periods would increase considerably

The Executive agreed that it was really important that the group took a lead role here and sought to establish a number of initiatives. One that might be in conjunction with the Energy and Water industries was outlined.

It was also decided that the intended Social Care and Health Group which under the new timetable was to meet twice a year would have Vulnerability added to its title and terms of reference.

Councillor Nicholson promised to give an introduction to Social Inclusion initiatives that Eden were undertaking towards this area.

(d) Brexit

(e) Rural Overall Consensus Group

It was felt the need for such a mechanism became more important as events unfurled around Broadband and other major issues. Discussions were planned next month initially with DCN, CCN, ACRE and NALC.

8. APPG Update

Two meetings of the APPG would take place this year. They would be chaired Jo Churchill MP with Rebecca Pow as the Vice Chair..

The intention was this might give capacity for a specific day and possibly a campaigning group on vulnerability and possibly if parliamentary support could be gained an APPG or campaigning group on Rural Brexit.

9. Rural Health Conference

This was this year being undertaken on the 28th of February jointly with GOVDIRECT at the National Audit Office in London (11 a.m. to 4 p.m.)

10. Launch of Rural England's State of The Rural Services Report

Although this was now essentially Rural England work the items arising out of the report needed to be considered by the RSN in its representational role. The launch was to be on the 17th of January in the House of Commons and it was hoped some sixty people

would be present on that occasion. It was also the opportunity to detail the Rural England initiative to all.

It was decided that the Executive would look at the report in more detail at their next meeting in March.

11. Agenda for next Main Group Meetings

The next main meeting would be a Sparse Rural one and a lot of the meeting would be taken up by discussion on the financial items detailed above. It was also intended that Rural Vulnerability would be given detailed consideration.

12. Any Other Business.

It was subsequently decided by the Chair that Philip Saunders (Devon CC and West Devon BC) would be asked to come on the Executive.

Notes of SPARSE Rural Special Interest Group meeting 30 January 2017

Title: SPARSE Rural Special Interest Group

Date: 30 January 2017

Venue: City of Westminster Archives Centre, London

Attendance:

An attendance list is attached as Appendix A to this note.

Apologies for absence:

A list of apologies is attached as Appendix B to this note.

Minutes from SPARSE Rural SIG AGM (21 November 2016)

The notes of the AGM were approved.

Minutes from Executive meeting (9 January 2017)

The notes of the Executive were approved.

Provisional Settlement

Dan Bates reprised a presentation given to MPs in Parliament House earlier in January. The following points were noted:

- Rural taxpayers will pay higher costs and endure higher council tax.
- The move by the government to include the Council Tax base had resulted in higher cuts in rural areas compared to urban.
- Transition grant had so far remained the same this year and the Rural Services Delivery Grant (RSDG) is falling. This means that the gap is bigger with rural authorities suffering a larger reduction than urban authorities.
- The cumulative loss due to the factoring of council tax into grant far outweighs RSDG – a loss of £242 million across predominantly rural Local authorities.
- The effective government policy is that:
 - **rural** taxpayers will pay much higher and increasing levels of Council Tax to fund local services;
 - **rural** taxpayers will pay for a much greater proportion of the additional resources required to address the Adult Social Care crisis.
- Individual analyses will be available from RSN for each local authority over the coming days and will be sent to both members and Fair Share Group MPs.
- Additional Social Care resources – Improved Better Care Fund, Adult Social Care Support Grant (diverted from New Homes Bonus) and additional flexibility on Adult

Social Care Council Tax Precept – have resulted in funds flowing into urban areas whilst in rural areas this will be funded largely from increased Council Tax. The effective government policy is that:

- **rural** taxpayers will pay for a much greater proportion of the additional resources required to address the Adult Social Care crisis.

At the end of the ensuing discussion it was concluded that whilst many local authorities are approaching the generation of increased income and reduced costs with great innovation, the fact remains that available funds from government should be distributed fairly. This point should be pursued vigorously by everyone with their local MPs.

Rural Fair Share Group

Graham Biggs updated the meeting on the progress made with the Rural Fair Share Group. Following the appointment of Graham Stuart as a whip, a new chair and members had been appointed in October. The RSN chair and officials met with James Heappy (chair of Fair Shares Group) and Steve Double on 9 January 2017 followed by a meeting of the Group attended by 20 MPs/MP researchers. MPs noted that this year they were receiving little pressure from their respective local authorities with regard to the provisional settlement.

Other meetings had also taken place including a meeting between the RSN chair and officials and the Local Government Minister and there was a forthcoming meeting of several conservative MPs with the Secretary of State to which Graham Biggs and Dan Bates had been invited to attend.

It was agreed that following the success of last year – Transition Grant for 2 years and RSDG front end loaded – 2017/18 should be used as a period to identify where cuts will fall next year and paint a clear picture of the consequences of these cuts. This would require the provision of information from member local authorities. It was noted that, in some cases, this information may be provided on an anonymous basis due to need to address different audiences with these key messages.

It was agreed that this form the main topic for the July SPARSE meeting and that local authority treasurers also be invited to this meeting.

Future Directions report

It was agreed that regular updates are provided to the group with regard to progress with elements of this report with a focus on specific issues at each meeting (within the scope of resources available).

The Sparse Rural meetings would in future look at the public finance situation across the spectrum of public sector services but clearly detailed work to try to improve any position could only be undertaken if resource became available to take such work forward. Kerry Booth and Dan Worth would be involved in this overview work.

Meetings were taking place with the University of Gloucestershire about a possible 'Rural Meeting' very two years to arrive at consensus views on issues affecting rural areas. Reports would be given to the Rural Assembly on this work.

It was noted that a meeting had been set up with CCN, DCN, ACRE & NALC to explore whether a collective view can be achieved to provide a strong single rural voice in relation to Brexit. If successful, there will be a second round of discussions with the CLA, NFU and other potential partners. West Lindsey's Chief Executive has kindly offered support with this work.

Business Rate retention

It was noted that a number of pilots have gone forward (all involving administrations involved in devolution). These are the forerunners of the full business rate retention system. Revenue Support Grant, RSDG, Highways maintenance, Integrated Transport Block, Bus Operators Grant are all transferring as part of the pilots (mostly transport funding) along with other elements including Local Growth Fund.

It was further noted that the Local Government Finance Bill has been published and that there is currently no planned joint work with DCN/CCN on the business rates issues at present.

Vulnerability

David Inman introduced this report emphasising the huge impact on rural areas of both an ageing population whilst at the same time a reduction in the number of young people remaining in rural areas.

It was suggested that focussed discussion concerning rural vulnerability takes place twice per annum prior to the Rural Assembly meetings at the Health and Social Care Meetings and that a 'Rural Vulnerability day' is sought to be organised in parliament each year.

The need to build on 'safeguarding' work which already takes place on a limited basis with utility companies supporting Rural England was emphasised. Far more detailed proposals (and accompanying leaflet illustrating them) were circulated. These it was considered would achieve a concentrated programme of work with Power Distributors, Power Providers and Water Companies as the right way for this increasing problem to be tackled. The proposals were formally agreed. It was acknowledged however that the scale of work able to be undertaken would have to be determined by the level of resource raised from the utility companies but every effort would be made to make this a successful appeal.

Any Other Business

- The chairman raised concerns regarding the impact of cuts on schools with small numbers and it was acknowledged that the picture with regard to education was very uneven across local authorities.

- It was noted that many rural businesses were suffering significant increases in business rate charges, an issue recently highlighted by a Countryside Alliance press release. It was agreed that Graham Biggs draft a press release from RSN after the meeting.
- It was agreed that RSN support a motion developed by West Lindsey District Council requesting a rural weighting in relation to rural GPs.
- It was also noted that £47 million of the £60 million Community Housing Fund announced by government on 23 December 2016 had been allocated to RSN member local authorities.

Dates for next meetings

RSN Executive	– Monday 13 March
Social care & health group	– Monday 10 April
Rural Assembly	– Monday 10 April
Executive	– Monday 12 June
SPARSE Rural	– Monday 10 July
Executive	– Monday 25 September
Social care & health group	– Monday 20 November
RSN, Rural Assembly & RSP AGMs	– Monday 20 November

APPENDIX A: Attendance for Sparse Rural Sub Sig Meeting

30th January 2017

Name	Organisation
CLlr Cecilia Motley	RSN Chair
Graham Biggs	RSN
David Inman	RSN
Andy Dean	RSN
CLlr Cameron Clark	Sevenoaks District Council
CLlr David Ireton	Craven District Council
William Jacobs	South Oxfordshire District Council
CLlr Janet Duncton	West Sussex County Council
CLlr Owen Bierley	West Lindsey District Council
CLlr Peter Stevens	St Edmundsbury Borough Council
Ian Knowles, Director of Resources	West Lindsey District Council
CLlr Roger Phillips	Herefordshire Council
CLlr Sue Sanderson	Cumbria County Council
CLlr Glynn Gilfoyle	Nottinghamshire County Council
CLlr Jeremy Savage	South Norfolk District Council
CLlr Peter Thornton	South Lakeland District Council
Paul Over	Chichester District Council
Malcolm Leeding	NALC
Dan Bates	Pixel

APPENDIX B: Apologies for Sparse Rural Sub Sig Meeting (30th January 2017)

Name	Organisation
Cllr Adam Paynter	Cornwall Council
Cllr Bob Adams	South Kesteven District Council
Revd Richard Kirlew	Sherborne Deanery Rural Chaplaincy
John Birtwistle	First Group
Cllr Blake Pain	Harborough District Council
Cllr Jane March	Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
Dominic Bradley	Horsham District Council
Cllr Yvonne Peacock	Richmondshire District Council
Cllr Ian Threlfall	Richmondshire District Council
Cllr Louise Gittins	Cheshire West & Chester Council
Cllr Gwilym Butler	Shropshire Council
Sophie Hosking	West Devon Borough Council & South Hams District Council
Steve Jordan	West Devon Borough Council & South Hams District Council
Cllr Richard Sherras	Ribble Valley Borough Council
Terry Collins	Durham County Council
Cllr Elizabeth Sneath	South Holland District Council
Cllr Heather Bainbridge	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr Brian Robinson	Forest of Dean District Council
Cllr Leigh Higgins	Melton Borough Council
Duncan Ellis	North Norfolk District Council
Cllr Simon Edwards	South Cambridgeshire District Council
Kerry Booth	RSN
Cllr Aaron Spencer	Boston Borough Council
Cllr Gonzalez De Savage	Northamptonshire County Council
Nicky Lovely	Newark & Sherwood District Council
Cllr Edward Baines	Rutland County Council
Mr Jack Hegarty	Malvern Hills District Council & Wychavon District Council
Cllr Peter Bedford	Boston Borough Council
Cllr David Godfrey	Shepway District Council
Cllr Michael Hicks	South Hams District Council
Rachel North	West Sussex County Council
Cllr Lindsey Cawrey	North Kesteven District Council
Cllr Derrick Haley	Mid Suffolk District Council
Stewart Horne	Business Information Point
Angela George	Stroud Council
David Stanley	Stroud Council
Cllr Margaret Squires	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr Samantha Dixon	Cheshire West & Chester Council
Cllr Lewis Strange	Lincolnshire County Council
Cllr Jane Mortimer	Scarborough Borough Council
Gillian Keegan	Chichester District Council
Cllr Gordon Nicholson	Eden District Council

RSN (INCOME & EXPENDITURE) 2016/17 WITH							
ACTUAL TO END FEBRUARY AND							
ESTIMATES FOR 2017/18							
				ACTUAL TO	ESTIMATE	ACTUAL TO	ESTIMATE
				END	2016/17	END	2017/18
				2015/16	(March 2016)	FEBRUARY	
INCOME				£	£	£	£
Balances at Bank B/Fwd net of o/s cheques				19388	12304		20449
DEBTORS FROM PREVIOUS YEAR (NET OF VAT)							
Seminar Fees				205			
Rural Crime Network					8012	8012	
Infrastructure Group				500			
Rural Health Network					0		
Housing Group Related					1100	1100	
Coastal Communities Alliance (Gross)					1037	1037	1037
Fire Group					100	100	
RHA Websire Development Contributions					1300	1300	
Subscriptions							
SPARSE Rural/Rural Assembly				241414	256321	241400	281110
SPARSE Fighting Fund Levy				4150			
SPARSE Rura/RA held by NKDC at Year End				5250			
SPARSE Rural/Rur Assbly/ held by NKDC at Month end						14921	
VOL CONTRIBS held by NKDC at Month end						20902	
Contribs to Business Rates Campaign				1000			
2016 VOLUNTARY CONTRIBS re BUSINESS RATES					45402	24500	
CCN Contrib to Finance Study					3863	3863	
RSP				17166	10537	10042	10500
Commercial Partner First Group Buses				10000	10000	10000	10000

					ACTUAL TO	ESTIMATE	ACTUAL TO	ESTIMATE
					END	2016/17	END	2017/18
					2015/16	(March 2016)	FEBRUARY	
					£	£	£	£
Subscriptions from Rural Health Group					1975	0		
Income from Rural Housing Group					5134	6895	6895	7115
Income from Fire & Rescue Group					1390	2480	2480	2975
OTHER INCOME								
Conferences/Seminars								
Rural Conference Income					13304		16365	
Rural Conference Surplus						4967		5000
Rural Health Conference					3959		2739	
Rural Health Conference Surplus					1710	0		0
Service Level Agreements								
Recharges ro Rural Crime Network@					19500	25000	18750	0
Contras re RCN@					32484		34283	
Recharges to Rural England CIC (Back Office Support £1200)					600	1200	1200	1200
Coastal Communities Alliance (Gross)					3113	4149	3113	4149
Contributions to costs of Parish Guide to Affordable Housing					500			
Contributions to RHA Website Development					1700	450	450	
Miscellaneous								
Contras					215	1747	2547	
VAT								
VAT Refund					13240	706	20337	
VAT Received					12870		11528	
TOTAL INCOME					410767	397570	457864	343535

				ACTUAL TO END 2015/16 £	ESTIMATE 2016/17 (March 2016) £	ACTUAL TO END FEBRUARY £	ESTIMATE 2017/18 £
EXPENDITURE							
VAT Paid on Goods & Services				27421		29714	
CONTRACTS FOR SERVICES ACTIVITY BREAKDOWN (EST)							
Corporate Management		DI,GCB, & AD1 100%. KB 40%	55662	60775	57461	63114	
Finance/Performance and Data Analy		, DW, 100%, KB 20%	29508	28836	26429	29456	
Communications (incl Seminars)		Rose Regen,JT, AD3 100%	6831	8510	5885	8570	
Additional Comms Activity by RuralCity Media							8263
Administrative and Technical Support		RI, WI,WC,BA,MB 100%	46694	47865	43732	50311	
Research and Monitoring		BW, JH, 100%	14990	11837	11732	11843	
Service Group Networking		KB40%	3100	8181	7492	8540	
Economic Development Service		AD5 100%	5000	5001	4584	5100	
Coastal Communities Contract				3650	3650	3650	3650
Rural Health Network				3000	750	750	
Rural Crime Network		NP 100%	17000	20200	18517	0	
Rural Communities Housing Group		AD2 100%	6500	6500	5958	6630	
Rural Transport Group		AD6 100%	2000	2000	1833	2040	
OTHER EXPENDITURE				265			
Budget for Brexit Project							12000
Communications Strategy Support					4800		
Rural Fair Shares/Business Rates "Campaigns"							
Rural Fair Shares Campaign etc.				22376	9500	9500	9500
Pixell Financial Service (core Annual Service)					13500	10500	10500
Fair Sharesand Other Campaign Media Relations				1868	0		6000
SPEND FROM VOLUNTARY CONTRIBS (BUSINESS RATES)					49265	38846	
Conferences/Seminars							
Rural Conference				9394		11398	
Rural Conference Drinks Reception					1144	1144	1300
Rural Health Network & Conference				1388		288	
Rural Housing National Conference				1262	0		
Seminar Costs				662	600	535	600



LEXINGTON
COMMUNICATIONS

Rural Services Network Communications toolkit

February 2017



RURAL
SERVICES
NETWORK

Introduction

This communication toolkit provides information, checklists, and other modules designed to facilitate coherent messaging for RSN. It should give RSN and its partner organisations a solid footing from which to respond rapidly and in a focused way to planned or unexpected news developments.

The toolkit:

- provides a clear mission statement to guide all activity
- designates four core priority areas to focus on for 2017
- offers guidance on key messages
- documents key contact details of media spokespeople
- helps to agree simple sign-off procedures for communications
- highlights key assets to boost the quality of information you can offer
- provides advice on how to respond clearly, speedily and usefully to breaking news



Priorities and key messages

Mission statement

RSN is the national champion for rural services, ensuring that people in rural areas have a strong voice. We are fighting for a fair deal for rural communities to maintain their social and economic viability for the benefit of the nation as a whole.

Top priorities

Successful media handling commonly relies on distilling your assertions and evidence into key messages which encapsulate RSN's broad position on critical issues. These should be general enough to be deployed in response to a range of tough questions, without avoiding them, and simple enough that they stick in an interviewee's mind even when under pressure. The key messages will ensure that you always have a starting point and fall-back position.

Your current priorities are as follows:

1. The planning system
2. Affordable housing
3. Local Government funding
4. Public transport
5. Access to key health facilities and services
6. Older people's services
7. Fuel poverty
8. Viable village services
9. Broadband and connectivity
10. Rural economy

These can be further narrowed to four key priority areas:

1. Barriers to access (especially broadband and transport)
2. Future of rural areas
3. Funding
4. Health and welfare

1. Barriers to access

Spokespeople: Graham and Kerry

Transport

- Lack of public transport
- Reduced funding for community transport
- Impact on access to FE / lack of concessionary fares
- Fuel prices
- Public subsidy
- Uneconomic routes
- Congestion
- Road and winter maintenance

Broadband / connectivity

- Last five per cent
- Speed and access
- Lack of desire or ability to learn digital skills
- Rural connectivity keeping up with the pace of change

Key message:

Rural residents and businesses face multiple barriers in terms of access to key services, including transport and broadband. Yet councils providing services to rural residents receive less money from government, pay disproportionately more for fewer services and typically earn less than people in urban areas. As a result rural residents suffer multiple disadvantages.

2. Future of rural areas

Spokespeople: Graham and Andy

- Viable villages
- Rural economy
- Lack of affordable housing and housing generally
- Infrastructure
- Young people leaving – ‘brain drain’
- Young people living with parents (inability to get on the housing ladder)
- Access to jobs and training
- Low-wage economy
- Demographics (depopulation)
- Poor communications
- Importance of rural economy for the national economy
- Threats to green belt
- Media preoccupation with food and farming

Key message:

Rural communities contribute a great deal to the national economy but are facing threats to their future. This is due to a combination of chronic underfunding, demographic challenges, diminishing resources, with the needs of rural areas being systematically overlooked. Without action conditions in rural areas will deteriorate further. It is in the national interest that we all work together to revitalise this fundamental national asset.

3. Local Government Funding

Spokesperson: Graham

- Rural-urban comparison
- Most underfunded councils
- The need for a fair share in the distribution of funding
- Cuts
- Impact on council tax

4. Health and welfare

Spokespeople: Jane and David

- Ageing population
- Social care (non-funding issues)
- Mental health
- Vulnerability
- Recruitment of health staff
- Specialisation of hospital facilities
- Ambulance waiting times
- Cost of health services in rural areas
- Resilience of services
- Isolation
- STP plans
- Community health provision
- Specialisation and centralisation of hospital facilities

Spokespeople

It is useful to have a set of designated spokespeople who are equipped to communicate the key messages, and likewise it would be helpful for them to 'own' a particular issue, as flagged above. The list below offers a directory of key spokespeople.

It is however important to remember that this needs to be refreshed regularly, with all spokespeople briefed on any new research or analysis. Likewise, there may be instances where none of the spokespeople are available, and another member of staff has to step in at the last minute.

Name	Title	Email	Landline	Mobile
Graham Biggs	Chief Executive, Rural Services Network	graham.biggs@sparse.gov.uk	01588 674922	07966 790197


Media inquiry form

In some cases your media engagement will be planned, for example a launch of a report. More frequently, it will be reactive – either a comment on a developing news story, or in response to a journalist inquiry.

On receiving an inquiry, remind all staff that no immediate comment should be made. Instead, media inquiries should be politely recorded using the Media Inquiry Form and forwarded to Graham Biggs and other spokespeople.

Below is a template to capture all relevant information from a media enquiry (including nature of inquiry and information on journalist / media outlet).

Media Inquiry form



- **INQUIRY TAKEN BY (Name):**

Date/ Time enquiry taken: _____
Name of media outlet: _____
- **JOURNALIST CONTACT DETAILS:**
Name _____
Phone _____ Mobile _____
E-mail _____
- **NATURE OF INQUIRY:**
 positive negative neutral

- **JOURNALIST DEADLINE:**

Deciding whether to comment

RSN's policy should in the main be to always accept broadcast interview invitations or provide comment, in order to ensure that your point of view is put across and give you a chance to highlight key issues. That said, there are circumstances where this would be inappropriate and, naturally, RSN is not in a position to respond to all media inquiries. In order to prioritise whether to issue a comment or provide an interview, the following questions should be considered:

1. Does it relate to one of your four priority areas?
2. Have you previously commented on a similar or related issue?
3. Is the issue likely to be covered by national publications?
4. Are your 'competitor' organisations likely to comment?
5. Do you have spokespeople available should there be a broadcast opportunity?

It is still possible and potentially advantageous to comment even if the answer to any of the above questions is no, but this should help you assess whether to do so.

With regard to a broadcast opportunity, be aware of the following considerations:

1. Do you understand the topic and have a clear position?
2. Are you in possession of all of the facts?
3. Do you have an appropriate spokesperson available?
4. What is the programme and what is its agenda?
5. Is it clear who else will be speaking on the programme or providing comment?
6. Is a competitor being interviewed? Or could they be invited to speak instead?

Whether or not you do comment or agree to an interview, it is important to respond to a journalist quickly. If they have asked for information by a specific deadline and you will not have it by then, contact them to check whether they will be able to extend their deadline.

Sign off procedures

Should you choose to comment, speed is off the essence. To that end it is key to have smooth sign-off processes, as detailed below. Remember, it does not matter who drafts the comment, as long as it is signed off and attributed to the correct spokesperson.

Sign off procedure:

1. Initial enquiry / news development
2. Graham Biggs to confirm whether a response is needed
3. If it is decided that a response is needed:
 - a. A statement should be drafted with the agreed mission statement and key messages kept in mind.
 - b. This should be attributed to the relevant spokesperson and signed off by them and Graham Biggs
 - c. This should be sent to the journalist / to wider press lists if it is a reactive statement
4. If it is decided that a response is not needed:
 - a. This should be conveyed to a journalist
 - b. If possible, they should be sent research or data relevant to their topic, under the clear proviso that this is background information rather than an official comment

To extend the life of your comment, it is worth considering the following questions:

1. Are other publications likely to cover the same issue – could you send it to them too?
2. Have you shared it on your social channels?
3. Is there a follow up activity, such as a letter to an editor or pitching for an op ed, that you should consider?
4. Is the journalist interested in this topic on a longer-term basis? If so, why not suggest meeting up for a coffee to brief them?

Proactive Activity

In addition to responding to journalist queries, it is important to identify proactive opportunities to comment or issue a press release on a particular topic. These can be in response to set piece events such as a Government announcement, or to highlight a piece of research in light of a news story, or indeed to sell in reports or studies that you have produced. Such proactive activity is absolutely vital in order to get your name out there and ensure the media is aware of your position on key issues and your ability to contribute to the ongoing conversation.

To simplify the process, we would recommend having a template for a press release or statement (within the body of an email) ready to go, including a notes to editors section. This will allow you to simply drop in your statement and the spokesperson quickly and efficiently. We would also recommend having a one line cover email pre-prepared that can be tailored, saying something along the lines of: 'Please find below a press statement from the Rural Services Network responding to today's announcement / speech / report.... Please do let me know of any questions or if you would like to arrange an interview on this topic'.

In order to speed up your ability to respond, we would suggest maintaining a grid of past press statements or comments, separated by topic. This will allow you to efficiently review your position and check that any new comment is in line with what has been said previously. It is important to remember that each time you issue a comment you can, within reason, use similar or even identical language to previous remarks on the subject, assuming your position remains the same. There is not necessarily a need to find a new angle. An example of the grid is below:

Date	Subject	Comment issued	Spokesperson
17/01/17	Rural service provision	The State of Rural Services 2016 Report collates and lays out recent evidence about the provision of services to residents and businesses in rural England, with worrying findings across transport, education, social care and retail. When it comes to access to further education and skills development, rural areas are suffering due to difficulties and poor transport services.	Margaret Clark CBE, Chair of Rural England's Stakeholder Group

It is also worth considering how you can extend the life of your statement or press release beyond an initial sell-in. Opinion pieces, blogs and letters to newspapers provide good ways to further a conversation and ensure RSN's perspective gets across. All publications have slightly different requirements, but when pitching it is best to send a bullet point outline of the proposed piece, setting out who would write it and what each paragraph would argue. With regard to letters, these should be no more than 200 words and should be submitted by 12pm for consideration.

Media handling - Tips and reminders

Below is guidance on how to interact with the media should an issue arise.

Answering inquiries

- Establish the issue before answering any questions, using the media inquiry form:
 - who they are and where they are calling from
 - why they want to speak to you
 - who else they are speaking with to develop their story
 - their copy deadline
- If you already have a response on this issue, agree to send it over.
- If you do not have a response and need to confirm this with colleagues / the spokesperson, offer to come back to the journalist later.
 - NEVER give out information which is not 100 per cent correct in order to meet a deadline

Simplicity is key

- Keep your responses simple
- Ensure you only communicate three to four key messages at most
- Too much detail might confuse the journalist and negatively affect the story

Help the journalist develop the story

- Use language the journalists will understand / do not use jargon
- Explain the implications for their readers / listeners / viewers / visitors and the importance of a balanced article
- Provide relevant information (key facts and figures, data, spokespeople etc.)
- Do not overpromise information or interviews, as failure to provide these could negatively impact the resulting coverage

Assets

It is vital to provide journalists with a full package of information on any given topic, in order to act as a useful source and ensure your key messages get across. The assets you should have banked and ready for use with media include:

Case studies

For example, a rural pensioner, a rural family, a rural business owner. These should be written up for sharing with journalists along with high resolution photographs of them. Ideally, these case studies should be willing to speak to media (print or broadcast) and should be equipped to communicate your topline messages.

Topline facts document

This should be a one-page document that collates internal and (if necessary) external evidence on your priority issues, so that in the event of a journalist inquiry you have concrete evidence to hand and can send them extracts or the full document. Information should be fully sourced and as up to date as possible. This will also enable you to contribute to the conversation in a way that a journalist would find useful and that will set you apart from your competitors.

Media list

An up to date media list, with local, regional and national contacts (print, online and broadcast) listed is absolutely imperative. Given that you cover particular sectors, it will be important to have current lists tracking sector journalists and publication, such as health, transport and education. Contacting the right person is half the battle when it comes to getting media coverage.

Third party stakeholders

In many cases it will be useful to have your arguments consolidated by third party stakeholders, such as MPs involved in RSN, or relevant sector organisations such as Age UK or the Association of Colleges. If you are putting out a press release on a piece of research, this is a crucial step to make your offer to a journalist more robust.

Member surveys

As a member organisation, you have access to a cohort of rural residents who you could survey on key issues. As well as the more comprehensive research you undertake, it may be useful to gauge the opinions of, for example, parish councillors on a relevant topic.



LEXINGTON
COMMUNICATIONS

Lexington Communications
198 High Hoborn
London
WC1V 7BD

+44 (0)20 7025 2300
@lexcomm
www.lexcomm.co.uk



RURAL
SERVICES
NETWORK

The Rural Services Network
Kilworthy Park
Tavistock, Devon
PL19 0BZ

01822 851370
admin@sparse.gov.uk
@rsnonline.org.uk
www.rsnonline.org.uk

Social Media Strategy for Rural Services Network

Mission statement for the Rural Services Network:

The RSN is the National champion for rural services, ensuring people in rural areas have a strong voice. We are fighting for a fair deal for rural communities to maintain their social and economic viability for the benefit of the nation as a whole.

We have four priority areas for action where we will target our work:

- Barriers to access
- Future of Rural Areas
- Public Sector Funding
- Health and Welfare

This Social Media Strategy sits alongside our overall Communication Strategy and will address the ways in which we aim to achieve our goals by using social media more effectively to support our overall mission.

Our goals include:

- Providing a voice for rural areas
- Raising awareness of issues within rural areas
- Providing networking opportunities
- Sharing best practice

Current approach

RSN currently has a Twitter account www.twitter.com/rsnonline a Facebook page, www.facebook.com/ruralservicesnetwork and we also have a You Tube Channel, www.youtube.com/ruralservicesnetwork.

Facebook Page – This has 16 likes, very few posts and has not been actively used since it was established. In effect it is a dormant page.

Twitter Account – RSN has 1281 followers.

Over the last 28 days, tweets earned 18,389 impressions. These are the number of times our posts appeared on other peoples twitter pages. The top tweet about the potential revolt for Theresa May from rural MP's earned 2,068 impressions from being retweeted or liked.

In January, the top mention that @rsnonline got was by Edward Leigh MP and this resulted in 50 engagements. Engagements are when tweets are fully opened, liked or retweeted.

Our current approach is to mainly tweet news stories and occasionally big news commentary or when promoting events.

You Tube Channel – this has four videos uploaded, the latest before 3 years ago. The videos are generally excerpts from Government debates on Fairer Funding. The most popular video has 258 views.

Future approach

In order to help achieve our overriding mission, we plan to change the way that we use social media. This should also enable us to achieve our goals for example, a higher profile on social media for the RSN should enable us to be more effective at providing a voice for rural communities and services.

Our future approach will be very proactive on social media. There is no cost to using this approach aside from the staff time and therefore it is a very cost effective way of sharing messages.

There are a number of key areas of work which will be developed in more detail by the RSN team:

Action	Purpose
Target key influencers within the 'rural' media world to follow our Facebook/Twitter pages	If key media contacts follow us, they will see our press releases and comments directly
Ensure that we promote our Facebook/Twitter page on all newsletters/emails/publicity material	Ensure that all members and partner organisations are aware of our social media pages and can follow us
Target key influencers within the 'rural' practitioner and academic world to follow our Facebook/Twitter pages	This will raise the profile of our work with people who are able to promote it, or highlight it to other key contacts.
Respond proactively to tweets that mention @rsnonline and to comments received on Facebook page	Start to engage in two way conversations with people and organisations that namecheck RSN
Use key messages established in Communication Strategy in social media when there are national news stories which focus on our four priority areas.	Consistent and clear messages to the priorities will enable other organisations to be clear on our approach
Retweeting and sharing on Facebook of key rural stories that are relevant to priority areas	Consistent and clear messages to the priorities will enable other organisations to be clear on our approach
Develop number of key metrics to measure the success of proactive approach to Social Media. These will include a more detailed current assessment on which to build.	With Social Media there are a number of areas that can be measured and it is important to choose the right metrics to measure not only followers but reach and impact.
Develop short videos for You Tube Channel explaining key areas of work for example Fairer Funding Campaign or developments in Local Government Funding	These can be easily shared with members and are more engaging and effective than briefing notes for getting across key messages
Ensure that You Tube Channel is promoted on other key publications and media when relevant	All of the channels are linked together and provide a seamless approach to our publicity and promotion.
Develop policy about how we respond to comments to ensure consistent approach	RSN will maintain professional image and not get involved in lengthy arguments with individual users
Use 1 or 2 generic hashtags on social media for our work. #ruralvoice and #ruralfairshare	RSN will have clear social media presence and this will help to promote RSN and its priorities

Rural Services Network

100% Business Rate Retention: Latest developments

1. The Government has issued its latest technical consultation paper on the implementation of 100% business rate retention. We have identified the rural issues as they arise within the consultation paper. In some cases there will be a common view for rural authorities; in others, the individual local circumstances will dictate how an authority wishes to respond to the consultation. A more important issue for rural authorities is likely to be the Fair Funding review, on which a consultation will be published shortly, and the transfer of Rural Services Delivery Grant to be funded from business rates.
2. The consultation document can be found here:
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/59192/8/100_Business_Rates_Retention_-_Further_Consultation.pdf
3. In its latest **technical consultation paper** on 100% business rates the Government develops its thinking on how the system will work in detail, in particular:

Proposal	Rural commentary
<p>Transfers of responsibilities. Decisions have been made now to transfer Revenue Support Grant, Rural Services Delivery Grant, Public Health Grant, and Greater London Authority Transport Grants have already been confirmed for transfer. These transfers cover about half of the increase in quantum (c.£12.5bn), with the remainder to be announced over the next year or so.</p>	<p><i>For rural authorities, the transfer of RSDG is important: it will effectively become a baselined grant that is funded from retained rates. This approach is already being trialled in Cornwall in their 100% pilot from 2017-18.</i></p> <p><i>RSN will want to ensure that the RSDG funding is as high as possible by the time it is baselined in 2019-20 or 2020-21.</i></p>
<p>Quantum. There is a clear indication in the consultation paper that the Government will reset the quantum to year-one plus inflation. In effect, this will mean that local government as a sector will not be able to retain any it's above-baseline growth since 2013-14 when the baselines are reset.</p>	<p><i>This is an important issue that should have the support of the whole sector, and does not have a particular rural angle. It is important to maximise the quantum available for local government as a whole.</i></p>

<p>Baseline resets. DCLG is supporting the proposal for baseline resets every 5 years, although it is not clear how much above-baseline growth any authority will be able to keep. We are still expecting any authority below its baseline to be brought back up to baseline (i.e. any losses between resets are wiped out at the reset).</p>	<p><i>For rural authorities, each authority will have its own views on how the baseline resets will operate. Some rural authorities who have suffered significant appeals, others have experienced reasonable growth. On balance, we would suggest that rural authorities want to support a balanced reset: that is, one that brings authorities below baseline back to their baseline; and allows 50% every 5 years.</i></p>
<p>Business rates pools. The Government is taking powers to allow the Secretary of State to designate pools following a consultation with the affected authorities. There will be incentives (e.g. Local Growth Zones) to encourage authorities to put forward coherent groupings.</p>	<p><i>Whilst this is not a “rural issue”, it will affect many rural authorities, particularly those in two-tier areas. Rural authorities should be looking to maximise the share of rates that can be included in a Local Growth Zone.</i></p>
<p>Loss payments (appeals). The Government is developing its proposals to centralise the cost and risk of appeals. Losses for individual authorities arising from appeals will be funded nationally via a top-slice from overall local government resources. Those authorities who will benefit from this change will be those with higher levels of appeals.</p>	<p><i>Appeals have tended to be lower in rural areas, and so this change will represent a transfer of funding from rural areas to urban areas. Unfortunately, data is not published nationally and we have had to rely on a relatively small sample of authorities.</i></p>
<p>Tier splits. No clear guidance is given on how tier splits will be handled in two-tier areas. It is, however, possible to infer from the text in the consultation paper that the Government is looking to balance up risk and reward, and that this can be achieved by reducing top-ups and tariffs (i.e. by reducing gearing).</p>	<p><i>There is no clear line for rural authorities to take on this issue. In two-tier areas, districts and county councils will need to draw their own conclusions about the split that would suit their circumstances.</i></p> <p><i>In two-tier rural areas with business rates growth, there will potentially be disagreement about which tier should keep the largest share of growth.</i></p>
<p>Safety net. DCLG is proposing a safety net set at 97% of Funding Baseline Level</p>	<p><i>There is no particular rural angle on the safety net.</i></p>

and funded from a top-slice on overall retained rates. Currently it is funded from the levy payments.	
Central List. The consultation paper does not give us any new insights into how the central list will be managed, or how it will interact with baselines in the retained rates system. It does tell us that area lists are not going to be developed.	<i>Those rural authorities with large hereditaments in their area will want to take a view about whether it should be placed on the central list: growth from these properties can be significant, but so can the risks of change.</i>

4. The most important announcement for rural authorities remains the **Fair Funding** consultation, which will be published shortly. Interestingly the comment about this document is that it will “[seek] views on the broad approach and cost drivers that could form part of a new relative needs formula”. Without wishing to pre-judge the consultation paper, the use of the words “cost drivers” suggests that the Government is interested in using this approach to developing a new needs assessment. *Such an approach is likely to lead to a simpler formula, and one that favours low-need authorities and it will largely benefit rural authorities as well. Rural authorities will have to be vigilant and ensure that rurality or sparsity is properly represented in the funding model.* More on this, though, when the consultation paper comes out.
5. For the first time, DCLG is indicating that it wants there to be clear and transparent transitional arrangements, with authorities moving to their new baselines within 4 years. For any authority receiving large amounts of damping now, such a proposal could mean massive changes in funding baselines over a relatively short period of time. *For most rural authorities, and certainly for RSN members as a group, the phasing-out of damping will be hugely beneficial. In 2013-14 damping was used to remove the increase in sparsity in the settlement; the unwinding of damping will, in most cases, help to reinstate those sparsity allocations, all other things being equal. It should be noted that some rural authorities are gainers from damping because they lost-out from other formula changes.¹*
6. A summary of the responses to the **previous technical consultation paper** (published in September 2016) has also been released.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/self-sufficient-local-government-100-business-rates-retention>
7. Alongside these developments, the **Local Government Finance Bill** continues to make its way through Parliament. The Bill provides the broad framework for the rate retention

¹ The net gain from damping in the 2013-14 settlement was £164m. 83 sparse authorities lost-out from damping, and 35 gained.

scheme, whilst the detail of the scheme will be developed through secondary legislation (which in turn will flow from a series of technical consultations). To supplement the passage of the Bill, the Government has published a series of “factsheets”.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-government-finance-bill-policy-factsheets>

8. In addition to these publications, the **House of Commons Library** has published a fascinating briefing note on business rate retention for local government, “Property taxation and revenue incentives”. <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-committees/communities-and-local-government/Property-taxation-and-revenue-incentives.pdf> It cuts across the policy rationale for allowing local authorities to retain 100% of local business rates. The paper presents evidence to show that there is very little relationship between economic growth (as defined by something like GVA) and growth in business rates. It further states that much of the variation in business rate income is caused by factors outside local authorities’ control. *It mentions that growth in rateable value has been greatest in rural areas (something we identified in one of our earlier reports) but does not explain how reliefs can impact on income in rural areas.* This type of analysis is unlikely to affect the development of the 100% rate retention scheme because the scheme is entrenched in Government policy and now in a Bill that is progressing through Parliament.
9. The **revaluation** of business rates in 2017-18 is a major and growing political pressure on the Government. Although broadly neutral nationally for businesses as a whole, the change for individual businesses is in some cases enormous, especially for certain sectors and for businesses in London. *Broadly, the impact on rural businesses is positive, with valuations falling, but there are some rural areas and rural businesses that are facing large increase in their business rates bills.* Media pressure is growing, with articles in much of the national press. The Government is very sensitive to the impact of business rates (e.g. growth in number and scope of reliefs to support businesses, switch from RPI to CPI in 2020-21). Cancellation of the revaluation is very unlikely indeed (not least because there are more winners than losers from revaluation). But some form of additional support for businesses with the largest increases in their valuations is a distinct possibility, with the most likely time for an announcement the Budget next month. Local government needs to ensure that support for businesses does not reduce its future yield from business rates.

Adrian Jenkins

Funding Advisory Service (FAS)

21 February 2017

adrian@pixelfinancial.co.uk



School Funding Briefing Paper – February 2017

This Briefing Paper outlines the f40's view of the current school funding situation

1. The f40 group represents 41 English local authorities with historically low funding for education. We have been campaigning for a fairer system for the allocation of funding for schools for over two decades. Our aim has been to influence a change in the way the government allocates funding to local education authorities and schools. We maintain that:

- The existing funding model has no rationale and is clearly unfair. Mainstream school funding has become more and more of a 'mess' with a tangle of funding caught up in the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) and capping. There is no rationale for the funding of Early Years or High Needs either. A new start is needed.
- The inconsistencies in funding for individual schools with similar characteristics across the country are too great.
- A national funding formula allocating the same funding for all mainstream pupils nationally would resolve the problem of a child attracting very different levels of funding if they attend a school on one side of a local authority boundary rather than another.
- Schools in low funded areas have inevitably had to prioritise meeting their core costs and have struggled to improve outcomes for vulnerable pupils as a consequence. Fair funding will enable schools to be judged fairly on the outcomes their pupils achieve.

2. The case for fair funding for schools has been won: the government has agreed that the existing system is unjustifiable and unfair. It initially promised a new national funding formula for 2017-18 but this was delayed for a range of reasons. A first stage consultation on the principles of fair funding was held in the Spring of 2016 and a second stage consultations containing proposals for change was announced in December 2016. The implementation date has now been delayed until 2018-19.

3. f40 welcomes the stage 2 consultation and commends the government for honouring its manifesto commitment to introduce fairer funding for all children in state funded schools in England. We also acknowledge that the proposed funding formula indicates a total gain of £183 million for f40 member authorities once the national formula is fully implemented from 2019-20. But that has to be tempered by an outcome that none of us really anticipated: that some poorly funded authorities will not gain and that many schools, both primary and secondary, within poorly funded authorities will lose out.

4. f40 believes that the government's proposals fall short of what was expected, will not deliver true fairness and, therefore, are in need of substantial revision. There are four key elements of the proposals that f40 is unhappy about and will be asking the government to consider, namely:

- The proportion of weighting given to additional needs rather than basic entitlement
- The 3% funding floor, which 'locks in' historical differences
- The amount invested in education funding and the cost pressures facing all schools.
- The weakness of evidence used to support the proposals

F40 will be happy to work with the government and the Department for Education to improve the formula. However, we do not wish to see further delays in the implementation of a new formula.

5. In consultation with its member authorities, f40 is continuing to develop its detailed response to the government's consultation. The deadline for submissions is 22 March.

Here's more detail about the four main elements of concern.

Weakness of evidence used to support the proposals

As we pointed out in the first stage of the consultation, there is a basic weakness in that there is no clear definition of what the government is actually funding. Clearly, we wish to see a formula where the emphasis is on redistributing money more fairly, but without some clarity on what level of service the money can purchase, there is a danger that the proposed new system will not take us much further forward.

It is disappointing to see the continued use of averages, which reflect what local authorities can currently afford to do, rather than a needs-based model which can evidence that the proposed funding levels are sufficient to cover the required costs of operating schools of different sizes and levels of needs wherever they are in the country. As part of the ongoing strategic approach to schools funding f40 would urge the DfE to undertake to analyse and assess activity-led funding to be factored into the funding formula rates prior to the implementation of the hard formula in 2019-20.

The funding formula model developed by f40 and presented to the Department for Education twelve months ago attempted to do this based on analysis of staffing ratios and associated school level costs. We would urge the department to again consider each element of that model to ascertain the true cost of operating a school and to ensure the proposed funding rates are sufficient.

Without a clear understanding of what the government is funding it is difficult to grasp the rationale for the basic entitlement compared to the additional needs. The proposals state that there has been a deliberate movement of funding into additional needs [cf pp20-28 of [Schools national funding formula government consultation - stage 2](#)], partly to support those "just about managing" families, but we don't consider that the additional needs indicators do support those families and therefore by reducing the basic element of funding this could be having the opposite effect to that intended.

The proportion of weighting given to AEN rather than basic entitlement

The group question the extent of the transfer of funding into additional needs at a time when schools are struggling to meet their core responsibilities, as evidenced by the National Audit Office report (December 2016) which indicated cost increases of around 8%. Our initial reaction is that too much funding is directed towards deprivation and that when Pupil Premium is also taken in to account this could be considered as double funding. The basic funding percentage under the existing proposed formula – approximately 72.5% - is simply too low. It creates distortions which risk replacing one unfairness with another.

We seek more clarity between what the deprivation funding in the main funding formula and pupil premium are supposed to support.

The 3% funding floor, which locks in historical differences

One of the key principles set out in Stage 1 of the consultation, supported by f40, was that pupils of similar characteristics should attract similar levels of funding wherever they are in the country (allowing for the area cost adjustment). When the funding formula to be

implemented is deemed fair, it should be applied to all schools on a consistent basis. However, the proposed 3% funding floor “locks in” some of the historical differences for those schools which have been overfunded for several decades. Equally the cost of this protection limits the redistributive impact and will result in the continuation of different funding levels for pupils across the country. Stability for schools in funding is important, but not at the expense of never reaching a fair formula and outcome. In practice, schools in lower funded areas will be subsidising those in better funded areas who will not lose more than 3%.

The amount invested in education funding and the cost pressures facing all schools

f40 understands that the current consultation is about finding a fair funding methodology and not about the quantum of funding available. But, schools in lower funded areas have been making cuts for many years now and have reached the limit of where cuts can be made. We recognise the work that the Department for Education has undertaken in supporting schools in making efficiencies, but we are struggling to understand where more cuts can be made in the lowest funded authorities. On top of this, all schools are facing significant additional costs which the government does not intend to pay for, including the removal of the Education Support Grant later this year.

ENDS

February 2017

1. f40 is a cross-party group which has the support of MPs, councillors, education directors, governors, head teachers, parents and teaching union representatives. The group has 41 member authorities representing over 3 million pupils in over 9,000 schools
2. The members are: Bedford Borough, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Central Bedfordshire, Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Derbyshire, Devon, Dorset, East Riding of Yorkshire, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Herefordshire, Kent, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, North Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, North Yorkshire, Northumberland, Nottinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Plymouth, Shropshire, Solihull, Somerset, South Gloucestershire, Staffordshire, Stockport, Suffolk, Swindon, Torbay, Trafford, Wakefield, Warrington, Warwickshire, West Sussex, Wigan, Wiltshire, Worcestershire and York.

Brexit meeting 20 February 2017

Representatives present:

- Rural Services Network (RSN)
- Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE)
- District Councils Network (DCN)
- County Councils Network (CCN)
- National Association of Local Councils (NALC)

The following points were agreed:

1. The case for a strong rural voice was unanimously agreed. If urban areas with devolution deals get further devolved powers – including post BREXIT – the rural voice risks becoming even weaker. Need to work with the LGA (as far as possible).
2. RSN, CCN and DCN each agreed to input £2000 to fund the initiative going forward.
3. A short list of major issues where we may have greatest impact should be agreed – this to address the positives.
4. An 'Asset Based' approach, locally led, should be advocated and subsidiarity is a key principle. Should seek "triple devolution": EU – Whitehall – Local Government – parish & community.
5. It will be important not to replicate the work of others, including the Rural Coalition.
6. A facilitated roundtable session should be organised as a next step to involve:
 - All those present at the meeting (RSN, ACRE, NALC, CCN and DCN)
 - Local Government Association (LGA)
 - National Farmers Union (NFU)
 - Country Land and business owners Association (CLA)
 - Margaret Clark (as chair of the Rural Coalition and the Rural England Stakeholder Group)
 - Federation of Small Businesses (FSB)
 - Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE)
7. RSN would prepare a brief for the roundtable session for agreement across the organisations present at the 20 February meeting, clearly setting out the proposed outcomes of the roundtable.
8. Based on the agreed brief, RSN would approach Professor Mark Shucksmith (Newcastle University) to prepare a background paper and facilitate the roundtable session and to explore a potential longer term relationship on the matters identified for further work. The themes should be around:
 - "What will rural communities look like in the future
 - Opportunities and solutions of BREXIT and helping the government to achieve its aims (in the Industrial Strategy etc.)
9. A list of potential MPs and parliamentary groups would begin to be compiled as potential rural champions.

ATTACHMENT 8

TOTAL INVOLVEMENT OF RURAL AREAS WITH THE RURAL SERVICES NETWORK

Report to the RSN Executive on recruiting new members

The organisation is as strong as its membership.

Those authorities in membership are relatively loyal.

However new memberships are now ceasing so numerically the Network will go backwards, probably for the first time as Aylesbury Vale (Sparse), Bradford,(Assembly) Dover (Assembly), East Hampshire (Assembly), Winchester (Sparse) and Wyre Forest (Assembly) all fall out next year.

Attached at the rear of this report is the list of the authorities with sizeable rural areas who could assist but don't. In effect they are asking others to assist with their rural area problems. That is a major weakness for us both logistically and financially.

There is over £40,000 a year that we lose out on as a result. That's one fifth of our budget. If we really are to tackle rural under funding (including Business Rate Retention and needs based review for Local Government), BREXIT, rural vulnerability, rural broadband and phone and rural isolation issues we need every penny of that.

As members of the Executive we are asking you to put your names to the attached letter and leaflet which it is intended to send to the councils listed.

Dear Councillor,

We are writing to all councillors who represent rural wards in areas who have not yet been involved with our services.

The attached leaflet explains why we need your support now.

A rural network that achieves total rural cohesion and joint working is now absolutely essential. Very obviously we can't achieve that unless ALL relevant authorities are involved.

*We realise times are extremely tricky but that is why **a total and fully responsive rural network** is needed at this time. This initiative is the only way this can happen and we do achieve this at minimal cost.*

Please ensure your council assists.

Chair (Unitary)	Cllr Cecilia Motley	Shropshire Council
1 st Vice Chair (Without Portfolio)	Cllr Robert Heseltine	North Yorkshire County Council
Vice Chair (County 1)	Cllr C Lewis Strange	Lincolnshire County Council
Vice Chair (County 2)	Cllr Philip Sanders	West Devon Borough Council/ Devon County Council
Vice Chair (East)	Cllr Peter Stevens	St Edmundsbury Borough Council
Vice Chair (North) Vice Chair (South West)	Cllr Gordon Nicolson OBE Cllr Adam Paynter	Eden District Council Cornwall Council
Vice Chair (South East)	Cllr Janet Duncton	West Sussex County Council
Vice Chair (Without Portfolio)	Cllr Peter Thornton	South Lakeland District Council
Vice Chair (Without Portfolio)	Cllr Derrick Haley	Mid Suffolk District Council
Vice Chair (Without Portfolio)	Cllr Sue Sanderson	Cumbria County Council

THE INCONTROVERTIBLE CASE FOR THE RURAL AREAS OF ENGLAND TO COME TOGETHER

- Rural areas are historically underfunded by Government
- It is clear that with a local population aging at well above the national average rate and with reducing and/or more distant services rural areas have particular difficulties.
- Government policy of reductions in Revenue Support Grant will result in greater reliance on Council Tax to fund services. This is already higher in rural areas; your residents are paying more from these Government Policies.

What have we done for you?

- Established Rural Fair Share cross party group of MP's that campaign on your behalf for fairer funding for rural areas
- Secured added weighting in the formula for sparsity – although an average 75% was lost through damping the other 25% has increased your grant (beyond what it otherwise would have been) every year since 2013/14

- By 2019/20, under current proposals, in rural areas, 71% of Spending Power will be funded by Council Tax and 29% will be Government Funded. In contrast Urban Spending power will be funded 57% by the government and 43% by Council Tax.
- Rural Areas also lose out when compared to the rest of England in such services as Public Health Grant, Child Care, Adult Social Care Support, Transport Support, Police Grant and Fire Grant.
- In rural areas one in 4 people are currently over 65 and that statistic is increasing so that by 2030 it will be nearing 1 in 3 people. This will be towards twice the national pattern
- In rural areas by 2039 some, one in eight residents will be aged 80 or above.
- Hourly rates for home care provision on the other hand costs over 13% more to provide in rural areas compared to urban areas
- Rural areas get less per head of population back from government in Westminster but more than the national average from Brussels. Brexit is therefore a massive threat to rural economies and rural needs must be represented during the transition.
- Statistics show that fifteen year olds in rural areas are more likely to have a long term illness, disability or a medical condition than the national norm. Rural Vulnerability is not confined to older people and it needs to be tackled.
- If rural areas have poor access to broadband and mobile phone provision, the country will not be able to capitalise on the large numbers of small businesses that are developing in rural areas, to the detriment of your area, your rate take and the whole economy.

We must continue our campaign for rural fairer funding with the new regime of business rates to ensure Rural areas do not lose out.

We want to campaign not only for Local Government but also other public sector funding too

We need to set up cross national support systems that assist rural vulnerable people and we need to start NOW.

We can work on your behalf to help lobby MP's and gain national recognition for the rural crisis.

We can only do this with the support of all Councils with areas support

The DCN and CCN represent classes of authorities and the LGA all local authorities. However, we at RSN, are the only body to represent your specific rural issues. **We can only work to maximum effect if we all work together.**

THE CASE IS OBVIOUS FOR RURAL JOINT ACTION AND CROSS RURAL CONSIDERATION. However it can only happen if we, as community leaders and representatives of rural areas help ourselves.

The RSN is self-funding by its members. To act in what is clearly the best interest of your rural areas and your authority the charge for your Council's involvement with us is £ XXX per year to include your rural areas and your rural councillors and your relevant officers in our services.

Ideally, of course, we would prefer to invoice you for that sum from the 1st of April so that we can all pull together in what are clearly difficult times. However, if necessary, we are prepared to offer 2017/18 operation without charge so that you can really see first-hand the benefits of our operation to your rural areas. If we don't hear from you, or hear that is the route you wish to go down, that is what we will do. If you then choose for us not to work with you by the first two months of 2018 all we would ask is at that stage you send us a letter setting out in some detail why you do not consider our work is right for your authority.

Please help us to help you.

We await hearing from you.

INVOLVEMENT WITH RSN

The following authorities comprise the current Rural Services Network.

Sparse Rural

Name of Authority	Name of Authority
Allerdale	Isles of Scilly
Ashford	King's Lynn & West Norfolk
Babergh	Lancashire
Bassetlaw	Leicestershire
Boston	Lewes
Braintree	Lichfield
Breckland	Lincolnshire
Broadland	Maldon
Cherwell	Malvern Hills
Cheshire East	Melton
Cheshire West and Chester	Mendip
Chichester	Mid Devon
Copeland	Mid Suffolk
Cornwall	Mid Sussex
Cotswold	New Forest
Craven	Newark and Sherwood
Cumbria	Norfolk
Daventry	North Devon
Derbyshire	North Dorset
Derbyshire Dales	North Kesteven
Devon	North Lincolnshire
Dorset	North Norfolk
Durham	North Somerset
East Cambridgeshire	North Warwickshire
East Devon	North West Leicestershire
East Hertfordshire	North Yorkshire
East Lindsey	Northamptonshire
East Northamptonshire	Northumberland
East Riding of Yorkshire	Nottinghamshire
East Sussex	Purbeck
Eden	Ribble Valley
Essex	Richmondshire
Fenland	Rother
Forest Heath	Rugby
Forest of Dean	Rutland
Hambleton	Ryedale
Hampshire	Scarborough
Harborough	Sedgemoor
Harrogate	Selby
Herefordshire	Sevenoaks
Hinckley and Bosworth	Shepway
Horsham	Shropshire
Huntingdonshire	Somerset
Isle of Wight	South Cambridgeshire

South Derbyshire	Teignbridge
South Hams	Tewkesbury
South Holland	Torridge
South Kesteven	Tunbridge Wells
South Lakeland	Uttlesford
South Norfolk	Vale of Whitehorse
South Northamptonshire	Warwickshire
South Oxfordshire	Waveney
South Somerset	Wealden
South Staffordshire	West Berkshire
St Edmundsbury	West Devon
Stafford	West Dorset
Staffordshire	West Lindsey
Stratford-on-Avon	West Oxfordshire
Stroud	West Somerset
Suffolk	West Sussex
Suffolk Coastal	Worcestershire
Tandridge	Wychavon
Taunton Deane	Wyre Forest

(126 Member Authorities)

Rural Assembly

Name of Authority	Name of Authority
Barnsley	Oxfordshire
Bath & North East Somerset	Redcar & Cleveland
Blaby	Rotherham
Bradford	Solihull
Bromsgrove	Sunderland
Calderdale	Surrey
Canterbury	Swindon
Chorley	Telford & Wrekin
City of York	Tendring
Dartford	Wakefield
Gateshead	Warwick
Gedling	Wellingborough
Guildford	Wycombe
Lancaster	

(27 Member Authorities)

It is essential all of Rural England is covered if a total network is to be achieved.

Rules of Operation:

1. The charge is based on rural population and the extent of the services you will receive.
2. If receiving Rural Services Delivery Grant (RSDG) – Fee is usually at (£2145 or £1850)

3. If not receiving RSDG and over 130 rural output areas - £500 Rural Assembly Fee is quoted.
4. If less than 130 rural output areas – 1p per rural resident and an Associate member basis.
5. No involvement if less than 20 rural output areas or less than 3000 rural residents as there has to be a cut-off point.

Note:

The table excludes any authority with less than 20 rural outputs areas or less than 3,000 rural inhabitants

No:	Authority	Number of Rural Output Areas	Rural Population	Contribution £
1	Amber Valley	79	23,764	237
2	Arun	85	25,666	256
3	Aylesbury Vale			500
4	Barrow	80	22,773	227
5	Basingstoke & Deane	148	45,289	500
6	Bedford	151	51,735	500
7	Blackburn	23	6,860	68
8	Bolsover	115	36,155	361
9	Bracknell Forest	9	23,340	233
10	Brentwood	68	21,0121	210
11	Brighton & Hove	5	5,589	55
12	Broadland	201	61,205	500
13	Bromley	12	3,490	34
14	Bromsgrove	63	19,914	199
15	Buckinghamshire	547	165,740	500
16	Bury	12	5,089	50
17	Cannock Chase	34	10,644	106
18	Carlisle	93	29,161	1,850
19	Chelmsford	104	33,617	336
20	Cherwell	132	44,530	500
21	Chiltern	289	25,966	500
22	Colchester	169	52,381	500
23	Corby	16	4,445	44
24	Dacorum	65	19,086	190
25	Darlington	44	13,173	131
26	Doncaster	135	42,705	500

No:	Authority	Number of Rural Output Areas	Rural Population	Contribution £
27	Dover			500
28	East Dorset	72	21,054	500
29	East Hampshire	133	42,229	500
30	East Staffs	83	26,258	262
31	Eastleigh	40	12,201	122
32	Epping Forest	114	34,407	344
33	Fylde	54	15,944	159
34	Gloucestershire	605	177,017	500
35	Great Yarmouth	118	33,849	338
36	Gravesham	61	19,498	194
37	Hart	87	28,580	285
38	Hertsmere	48	15,161	151
39	Hertfordshire	420	128,584	500
40	High Peak	98	27,903	279
41	Hillingdon	25	7,563	75
42	Hydburn	27	7,616	76
43	Isle of Scilly*	9	2,280	500
44	Kent	1,300	405,100	500
45	Kettering	64	19,485	194
46	Kirklees	151	49,661	500
47	Leeds	146	43,035	500
48	Maidstone	141	44,700	500
49	Mansfield	44	13,738	137
50	Medway	91	29,375	23
51	Milton Keynes	75	29,406	294
52	Mole Valley	73	22,002	220
53	Newcastle-on-Tyne	21	5,733	57
54	Newcastle-Under-Lyme	22	29,375	293
55	NE Derbyshire	68	20,193	201
56	NE Lincs	51	16,060	160
57	N Herts	79	23,156	231
58	North Tyneside	32	8,584	85
59	Pendle	43	12,416	124
60	Peterborough	70	22,142	221
61	Preston	27	8,170	81
62	Reigate & Banstead	22	7,061	70

No:	Authority	Number of Rural Output Areas	Rural Population	Contribution £
63	Rochford	37	11,669	116
64	Rossendale	11	3,559	35
65	Rotherham	91	25,919	259
66	Rushcliffe	207	64,443	500
67	Sefton	14	3,966	39
68	Sheffield	32	9,603	96
69	South Bucks	67	21,613	216
70	South Glos	113	34,715	347
71	St Albans	41	13,640	136
72	St Helens	33	9,818	98
73	Staffs M	102	31,573	2,145
74	Stockton-on-Tees	24	7,719	77
75	Surrey Heath	46	14,481	144
76	Swale	102	33,684	336
77	Test Valley	141	42,512	500
78	Thanet	32	9,086	90
79	Three Rivers	15	4,735	47
80	Thurrock	65	20,160	201
81	Tonbridge & Malling	130	43,556	435
82	Warrington	75	25,541	255
83	Waverley	108	34,241	500
84	Welwyn & Hatfield	43	13,261	132
85	West Berks	181	57,472	500
86	West Lanes	135	42,408	500
87	Weymouth & Portland	45	12,962	129
88	Wigan	40	11,740	117
89	Wiltshire	729	230,049	6,000
90	Winchester	210	68,696	2,145
91	Windsor & M	51	15,094	150
92	Wokingham	90	27,773	277
93	Wyre	103	32,033	320
94	Wyre Forest	69	20,966	209

Building our Industrial Strategy

Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy Green Paper

In the forward to this Green Paper the Prime Minister states that the Industrial Strategy is “not just a plan to leave the EU, but a plan to shape a new future for the kind of country we will be when we have left. It is a plan to build a stronger, fairer Britain that works for everyone, not just the privileged few.” The strategy, therefore, constitutes an important opportunity to ensure that rural areas and their economies are properly considered as part of the country’s plans for life after Brexit.

The government state that: “We want to build an industrial strategy that addresses long-term challenges to the UK economy. Our aim is to improve living standards and economic growth by increasing productivity and driving growth across the whole country.

“This green paper sets out our approach and some early actions we have committed to take. It is not intended to be the last word, but instead to start a consultation. We hope anyone with an interest will respond. We want to hear from every part of the country, every sector of industry and businesses of every size – and from the people who work in them and use them.”

This consultation closes on 17 April 2017. You can view the documentation [here](#).

The Green Paper contains a series of formal consultation questions. The first four questions are set out below together with some initial thoughts in terms of potential responses.

Question 1: Does this document identify the right areas of focus: extending our strengths; closing the gaps; and making the UK one of the most competitive places to start or grow a business?

Potential response: Yes. The focus on building on strengths, encouraging new and growing business and addressing the needs and opportunities of all parts of the country is welcome. However, whilst there is some recognition of the needs of rural areas, there is a danger that the potential opportunities presented by rural economies are significantly underestimated. The following extract is taken from the government’s Rural Planning Review call for evidence published in February 2016:

“England’s rural areas make a substantial and vitally important contribution to the economy, accounting for around £210 billion, or 16%, of England’s total output. Taken as a whole, the structure of economies in rural areas is now reasonably similar to that of urban areas. Manufacturing represents 13% of GVA in predominantly rural local authority areas compared with 8% in predominantly urban areas. The service sector is also significant across rural areas with business services, for example, representing 10% of rural output.

“Rural areas host around half a million businesses, over 25% of all registered businesses in England. Many of the businesses operating in rural areas are small or medium sized enterprises. Economic activity in rural areas is increasingly diverse, with significant manufacturing and services sectors, alongside more traditional farming. Knowledge-based and creative industries are also growing rapidly.”

The Industrial Strategy should properly recognise the existing and potential economic contribution of rural areas to the nation's growth and success. This should be embedded throughout the Strategy, recognising the location of many innovative and growth potential businesses located across rural areas. This is not confined by traditional views of rural economies and stretches across all sectors.

Question 2: Are the 10 pillars suggested the right ones to tackle low productivity and unbalanced growth? If not, which areas are missing?

Potential response: The suggested pillars are relatively comprehensive and welcomed. However, if growth is to be driven "across the whole country" there needs to be full consideration of the issues and opportunities facing rural communities in relation to each pillar.

For example, in relation to the Strategy's aspirations towards developing skills, only half of rural users can get to a FE College by public transport or walking in a 'reasonable travel time' (as defined by the Department for Transport) and just 39% of rural users can get to a school sixth form by public transport or walking in a 'reasonable travel time' (and that transport may be infrequent). In seeking to develop skills whilst driving growth in all parts of the country, the Strategy should acknowledge the accessibility issues faced by residents in rural areas.

In relation to new business growth, the Strategy should recognise the presence of a diverse range of new and existing business activity in rural areas and the opportunities this presents. Rural economies are incredibly diverse and make a significant contribution to national economic performance. Farming and tourism are of critical importance but to pigeon-hole rural economies as being solely about these sectors would be a mistake. The environment is of pivotal significance to rural economies. Farming, forestry and land management sectors help to create the environment on which the tourism sector depends and to which a vast array of economic activities are attracted – from manufacturing and service industries to knowledge intensive and creative sectors. Enterprise and opportunity are abundant with rural areas often providing a breeding ground for high growth businesses which can migrate to more populated areas as expansion plans require. This should be clearly recognised by the Strategy.

Question 3: Are the right central government and local institutions in place to deliver an effective industrial strategy? If not, how should they be reformed? Are the types of measures to strengthen local institutions set out here and below the right ones?

Potential response: Businesses in rural areas are often remote from government and other institutions. Business support is often seen as confusing and urban centric. Constant changes to organisations and programmes has the potential to further confuse businesses and, therefore, improvements to existing structures is preferred to any wholesale restructuring in order to begin to provide continuity and certainty.

LEPs are key delivery organisations and some have an effective approach to rural areas. However, too frequently LEP programmes have little consideration for the opportunities and needs presented by existing and new business located in rural areas. Mechanisms should be put in place to ensure that LEPs and other vehicles address the needs and take advantage of the opportunities presented by rural economies.

For example, a report commissioned by Defra (working in conjunction with BIS) in 2013 and produced by the Institute for Employment Studies (supported by the Countryside & Community Research Institute) investigated the degree to which rural businesses access national employer skills and government business support programmes. A key finding of the report was that: "Access to national mainstream employer skills programmes and government business support programmes among rural businesses may be improved if information and advice on how to apply for support is proactively provided (ideally face-to-face or by telephone) by a stable set of intermediaries." LEPs and others should take account of the need for such intermediaries in delivering skills development and business support programmes to ensure that the full potential of rural businesses is realised.

The green paper should clearly identify the need for special attention to be paid to the opportunities of rural businesses in delivering future programmes.

Question 4: Are there important lessons we can learn from the industrial policies of other countries which are not reflected in these ten pillars?

Potential response: Lessons from community-driven approaches, such as that delivered as part of the 'Leader' approach, should be considered. Over many years, Leader programmes have demonstrated the value of local engagement and a rounded view of local economies where social and community support is an invaluable mechanism for ensuring economic development and growth are maximised. This is, arguably, of particular importance in rural areas where the connections between the environment, social and economic activity are of huge importance. The Industrial Strategy should make it clear that locally driven economic strategies have a role to play, building on the lessons learned from the delivery of Leader programmes over many, many years.