

# REPORT TO THE EXECUTIVE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RURAL ASSEMBLY AND THE RURAL SERVICES NETWORK.

This report seeks to provide an update on the situation primarily relating to the growth of the Rural Assembly Sub Sig.

After the LGA's decision in February to run with a People and Places and a City Region Board structure instead of the Commissions including the Rural Commission the main meeting in March decided to proceed with a new arrangement with the Rural Services Network as the overall umbrella name for the organisation becoming also the main SIG name. The SIG would then be split between SPARSE Rural whose members received financial, performance and neighbourhood planning services as well as general rural services and the Rural Assembly whose members received just the general rural services.

Since the Spring we have been actively marketing these new arrangements to establish how broad a rural group could be established at the LGA.

It was always clear that many authorities were members of the Rural Commission because it was a free consequence of LGA membership and that with a fee having to be charged for membership of the Rural Assembly/ Sparse Rural the two arrangements could never be numerically comparable. (The Rural Commission had according to LGA records a membership of 212 authorities.). It was also clear that this was not the best time to be requesting new subscription support.

We have undertaken the marketing exercise in two ways:-

- (a) Approaching those authorities not necessarily benefiting from our financial work who were with the Rural Commission asking if they would join the organisation at £495 p.a. as RSN Rural Assembly members.
- (b) Approaching those authorities who could benefit directly from our financial work who were with the Rural Commission asking if they would join the RSN as SPARSE Rural members again at £495 for this year but stipulating that if our financial work benefits them in the DCLG settlement by more than £8,000 a year they will continue in a wider role with the network as full paying members at £2095 per annum for at least 3 years. (If however we fail with our representations we will not be entitled to anything further from them).

The marketing exercise for the new arrangement has proved a highly successful one. At the time of writing this report the new arrangements have produced a further 30 new members, 22 into the Rural Assembly and 8 into SPARSE Rural. The new members are:-

**Rural Assembly:-**

**Barnsley, Blaby, Bradford, Bromsgrove, Calderdale, Chorley, City of York, Dartford, Gateshead, Gedling, Guildford, Lancaster, Redcar and Cleveland, Rotherham, Solihull, Sunderland, Swindon, Telford and Wrekin, Wakefield, Warwick, Wellingborough, Wycombe.**

**SPARSE Rural:-**

**Essex, Lancashire, Lichfield, Nottinghamshire, Selby, Tandridge, Vale of White Horse, Worcestershire.**

The total number of authorities in the RSN as a whole is now 144. (122 in Sparse Rural; 22 singularly in the Rural Assembly)

At the time of writing this report there are some 23 authorities we are as yet to hear back from so that position may yet marginally improve further.

The emerging situation is interesting in one unexpected respect. There has been a stronger response here from the north of the country than the south.

In terms of outcome compared to expectation we are very pleasantly surprised. We had budgeted for interest from some 10 authorities when in total we have 30 new members.

As said that gives us a total of 143 members who are prepared to pay subscriptions so that they can collectively argue their rural case.

We do think the organisation as a whole has taken a significant step forward.