

MINUTES OF THE SPARSE RURAL AND RURAL SERVICES NETWORK EXECUTIVE AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE RURAL SERVICES PARTNERSHIP LTD MEETING, MONDAY 25th SEPTEMBER 2017 HELD AT CITY OF WESTMINSTER ARCHIVES CENTRE, 10 ST ANN'S STREET, LONDON

Present: - Cllr Cecilia Motley (Chair), Revd Richard Kirew (RSP Chair - Community), Cllr Robert Heseltine (First Vice Chair), Cllr Peter Stevens (Vice Chair – East) Cllr Philip Sanders (Vice Chair – County 2), Cllr Janet Duncton (Vice Chair – South East)

Officers: - Graham Biggs MBE (Chief Executive), David Inman (Director) Andy Dean (Assistant Director)

1. **Apologies:-** Georgina Fung (UK Youth), Stewart Horne (Federation of Small Businesses), John Birtwistle (First Group), Cllr Peter Thornton (Vice Chair – Without Portfolio), Cllr Kevin Beaty (Vice Chair – North), Cllr Adam Paynter (Vice Chair – South West), Cllr Derrick Haley (Vice Chair – Without Portfolio) Cllr Sue Sanderson (Vice Chair – Without Portfolio), Cllr Roger Phillips – Vice Chair Without Portfolio)
2. **Notes of Previous Executive Meeting – 12th June 2017**
Agreed as a correct record.
3. **Notes of Last Main SPARSE Meeting – 27th June 2017**
Agreed as a correct record with Cllr Sander's name corrected.
4. **Constitution of RSN Executive**

It was reported that both Cllrs Beaty and Phillips had accepted the invitation to be members of the Executive.

It was agreed Cllr Gill Heath (Staffordshire) would be invited to become a Vice Chair representing Counties)

In the light of the above it was decided the Chair would in future be 'without area or authority type' as the Chair. Cllr Roger Phillips (Herefordshire) would come on to the Executive to represent the West Midlands as the area Vice Chair and Cllr Gill Heath (Staffordshire) would be come on to be County (2) Chair.

5. Rural Conference

Numbers attending had been down this year but a financial break even, or very small surplus, was anticipated. Feedback had come from 11 people to date with a 70% 'Fairly' or 'Totally' Satisfied return. There was, however, an overall feeling that more learning could be incorporated and that the Conference content had not totally married with economic development titling.

It was felt that, to promote the RSN's 'ownership' of the Conference, RSN Officers should be more involved in the day with Ivan Annibal perhaps just invited to deal with the Panel discussion item.

The need to avoid politics being overplayed in presentations in items was noted.

The separate reception event should it was felt should be continued either at the Queens Hotel or elsewhere in central Cheltenham.

It was decided that a programme for 2018 would be looked at by the Executive in January.

The Director said that, as a number of members had suggested, an approach had been made to The Big Lottery offering RSN's assistance as an organisation 'gateway' in helping the Lottery show their new innovative approach at a grass roots level. It was agreed dialogue should continue with the BIG Lottery on that basis.

6. Rural Fair Share Group and the Needs Formula Review

Graham Biggs detailed the position. Steve Double was the new Chair, taking over from James Heapey who was now a P.P.S. Conservative MPs had been asked by Steve Double to write to Conservative Leaders in their constituencies with a questionnaire on the impact of cuts in government grant. This had gone out on the 18th August. RSN had recently chased this up with the Authorities involved and hoped to also be able to compile the information fed back. Steve Double was pressing Ministers for the Transitional Relief to be extended

The Fair Share Group agreed the Needs Formula Review which was on-going was extremely important and had asked to be kept informed.

Graham circulated and commented on a work which had been commissioned from Pixel – utilising the remainder of the voluntary contributions income gained last year.

7. National Rural Crime Network

The Network had decided to take in house the administrative work the RSN had previously been undertaking under a Service Level Agreement. RSN had bid for a Publicity and PR Brief which NRCN had advertised but had not been successful on this occasion. There had been previous talk of Graham being offered a position on the NRCN Executive. If the offer came, the Executive were happy for Graham, as Chief Executive, to accept this role and RSN would meet his travelling costs involved.

8. Report on Membership

Membership was currently at 148 members but for the first time there had been a range of members wishing to leave to save money in their budgets. David Inman outlined the position:

- (a) Two Counties had withdrawn their decision to leave and the position across Shire Counties was now actually quite strong.
- (b) All other Authorities which had been looking to withdraw had now been contacted, asking for detailed discussions. The position was most difficult with regard to Rural Assembly Authorities and the Executive acknowledged, that this as the newest service was the one requiring the most work.

The Executive then considered three reports on suggested changes prepared by the Director which it was hoped may assist demonstrate the RSN's value to its members:-

After detailed discussion it was decided that as a means of greater involvement by the RSN membership to recommend to the A.G.M.

(1) Regional Seminars/Meetings

- (a) The current seminar system would be replaced with six 'regional' Meeting/seminar sessions across all regions (SW,W Midlands, E Midlands, Yorkshire, North East and North West. There would however not be one in the South East as London was more accessible to events there.
- (b) Specific invites would go out to the member authorities in the area being:-
- (1) Nominated representatives on RSN (Member and Officer),
 - (2) Members representing rural wards; and
 - (3) The appropriate Portfolio Holder (dependent on discussion topic) of member Authorities in that region.
- (c) This proposal would be worked up as a detailed report to the AGM and sent by e mail to the Executive for approval

(2) Cabinet Portfolio Holders/Lead Members

The Community, the Health and the Economic Development Port Folio Holders (or their representative) would each be invited to attend two specific meetings per year. The Community and the Health Portfolio Holders would be invited to the Social Care and Health Group which included Rural Vulnerability considerations and the Economic Development Port Folio Holders would be invited to a new Economic Development Sub Group. Both of these meetings would be before the Rural Assembly meeting and the Sparse Rural Meeting respectively.

This it was hoped would enable better understanding and responsiveness of the RSN to these key issues in both its Representational Role and in the sharing of Best Practice

(3) Specific Member Support

- All Authorities would in future all be asked to appoint nominated Councillors for RSN meetings, Sounding Boards and hopefully the virtual Rural Parliament work as it was established.
- The 'Rural' Councillors would be identified in each member Authority and they would be invited to the Regional Meeting/Seminars and invited to be involved in one Sounding Board exercises each year.
- There would be a special briefing paper three times a year for all of the nominated Councillors.

(4) Fact Sheet for any Relevant Rural/Scrutiny member Authority meeting.

In case Member Authorities want to have specific focused meetings on their rural problems, it was suggested a fact sheet for each individual member be prepared and sent out to each Member Authority once a year. An example of such a sheet would be prepared for the next Executive meeting in January to consider and if felt satisfied ratify.

9. Report on Subscriptions

The principle (agreed in 2016) that member subscriptions should tally to enable the maintenance of the current intended viable operational budget produced a

membership sheet for 2018/19 with individual authority breakdowns. This was circulated and agreed in principle by the meeting. The position changed week by week however and an up to date version would be prepared for the Annual Meeting and passed over the Executive by email ahead of agenda circulation.

10. Budget

The current budget paper was circulated and agreed including some changes in operational practice set out in the report.

11. Brexit Update

Graham Biggs and Andy Dean updated the Executive both verbally and through a written paper. The BREXIT Rural Roundtable, initiated by the RSN, was meeting the following Friday

12. A schedule of foreseen meeting dates was circulated. It was decided to bring the 2018 AGM forward to the 12th of November to avoid clashing with the CCN Conference.

13. Work with TRIG

It was decided to work with this group on BREXIT and other broader matters (but not on their 'day to day' work which was considered to be specialist) where appropriate to marry well with the RSN overall agenda.

14. Parliamentary Groups

The Director detailed the initiative to establish Rural Action across Parliament. The Commons Rural Fair Share Group (about Rural 40 MPs) had been re-established and it was hoped to establish a similarly sized Rural Vulnerability Matters Group shortly in the New Year. A cross party Rural House of Lords Group had just been established with all 12 Lords invited accepting and this group would meet for the first time in December.