



**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

**Date:** Monday 26<sup>th</sup> September 2016

**Time:** 11.30am to 2.30pm

**Please note change of venue as the LGA is not now available for meetings for a year.**

The meeting is being held at the City of Westminster Archives, 10 St Ann's St, Westminster, London SW1P 2DE. A map for the venue can be found at the link below:

<https://www.google.co.uk/maps/place/Westminster+City+Archives/@51.4975566,-0.1301379,17z/data=!4m13!1m7!3m6!1s0x487604dcc30fdc3d:0x2db0d16858173a5e!2sWestminster+City+Archives!3b1!8m2!3d51.4975566!4d-0.1301379!3m4!1s0x487604dcc30fdc3d:0x2db0d16858173a5e!8m2!3d51.4975566!4d-0.1301379>

**1. Apologies for Absence**

**2. Notes of the Previous Meeting**

Held on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> June 2016 to consider any relevant items. (Attachment 1)

**3. Notes of the Main Meetings**

Held on 11<sup>th</sup> July 2016 to consider any relevant items. (Attachments 2(a) & 2(b))

**4. RSN Rural Conference 2016**

Discussion on the Rural Conference 2016 which took place at University of Gloucestershire on the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> September 2016. Notes from Jessica Sellick attached. (Attachment 3)

**5. Budget**

To consider the attached papers. (Attachment 4)

Providing a voice for rural communities and service providers

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**BLUE SKY MEETING:**

**6. 'Future Directions'**

Report from Officers attached. (Attachment 5)

**7. Executive Discussion Paper - Representing Rural**

Officers' Discussion Paper attached. (Attachment 6)

**8. Addendum Paper Relating to both the above reports attached.**

(Attachment 7)

**9. How do we continue our Local Government Financial Representation Programme?**

A report from Pixel Consulting will be circulated to the meeting.

**THIS PARTICULAR MEETING IS A SPECIAL ONE AND HAS BEEN PRIMARILY  
CONVENED TO 'BLUE SKY' OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS FOR THE RSN.**

**IT IS A REALLY IMPORTANT MEETING.**

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**MINUTES OF THE SPARSE RURAL AND RURAL SERVICES NETWORK EXECUTIVE, MONDAY 20<sup>TH</sup> June, 2016 HELD AT THE LGA, SMITH SQUARE, LONDON**

**Present:-** Cllr Cecilia Motley (Chair), Cllr Robert Heseltine (First Vice Chair), Cllr Peter Stevens, (Vice Chair) Cllr Peter Thornton (Vice Chair), Cllr Janet Duncton (Observer), Cllr Derrick Haley (Vice Chair), Cllr Sue Sanderson (Observer), John Birtwistle RSP (First Group), Rev Richard Kirlew -Community (Sherborne Deanery Rural Chaplaincy)

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

**Apologies:** - Cllr Gordon Nicolson OBE, Cllr Lewis Strange, Cllr Adam Paynter, Steward Horne, Brian Wilson

**1. Notes of the Main Meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> April 2016**

Apologies from Derrick Haley and Sue Sanderson to be noted. The election for representatives for the South and for the North would be held at the next meeting in July – Councillors Janet Duncton and Sue Sanderson respectively would be recommended by the Executive. The Unitary Vice- Chair position would be considered at the AGM in November.

**2. Notes of the previous Executive held on 18<sup>th</sup> January 2016**

Accepted as a correct record.

**Buses bill**

- John Birtwistle updated the Executive on the current position of the Buses Bill. This includes four key elements: statutory Quality Partnerships, franchising, enhanced Quality Partnerships and improved provision of information.
- The bill has been through 2 readings in the House of Lords and reaches Committee stage in the House of Commons later this month. Legislation is intended to be in place by May 2017 when Manchester is due to take on additional powers to be enabled by the bill.
- There will be a full session on this topic at the RSN Rural Conference in September.

**3. To consider the revised statement as to the Financial Representational Service**

Document approved to be sent out as a position statement to all Sparse Rural member Authorities.

**4. Pixel Financial Management Report**

- (1) The Report on Business Rates was noted and accepted.
- (2) Four Briefing Notes by Brian Wilson. These were felt to be of great value. They had already been sent out to members and (by Graham Stuart) to the Rural Fair Share MPs.
- (3) The short briefing note on the needs review was duly explained and accepted..
- (4) Graham Biggs made a verbal report on the work undertaken in identifying likely top up and tariff authorities – further work was to be undertaken.

**5. LG Futures Reports**

The following were presented:-

- (a) A paper on foreseen cost drivers of Sparsity
- (b) A paper on the value of Sparsity and Density (the provision for density in the formula was some four times higher than that for sparsity)

(c) RSDG Distribution Methodology – various options had been evaluated and this work continued. The sums involved were intended to be on top of existing RSDG allowances for super sparse Authorities.

**6. DCLG/LGA Steering Group and Needs Assessment Working Group**

RSN were on the latter group. Work was ongoing from an intended new base. Consideration would also need to be given to new services that would be allocated to Local Government and the delivery cost factors that needed to be applied to them.

It was believed that the Secretary of State intended to use ex Environmental Minister Sir James Paice in a role for part of this process. A meeting (joint RSN/DCN/CCN) had taken place with him to keep him updated. It was thought the intention might be some form of political sounding board which Greg Clark may Chair himself.

**7. Working with DCN and CCN**

Graham detailed how the three Local Government groups were all seeking to work together identifying common issues where they could all commission work and lobby together.

**8. Budget Report 2015/16 and 2016/17**

This was presented and duly noted.

**9. Blue Skies Meeting**

The next Executive would be a Blue Skies meeting. It would be an all day session dedicated to establishing the necessary platform for stronger systems to operate to both identify and represent the rural voice across all English Local Authorities. The officers would prepare introductory papers for the Executive to consider and this important meeting would take place on Monday 26<sup>th</sup> September. All Executive Members were asked to attend if at all possible.

**10. Rural England CIC Update**

David Inman and Andy Dean detailed the current position setting out the role of the Stakeholders Group (30+ leading national Organisations with a rural interest plus individuals having a strong rural background) and of the Supporter Group some 30 private sector companies paying £500 per annum led by two core supporters First Bus and Calor Ltd contributing material sums of £17k between them. To undertake the full programme identified some 214 further supporters needed to be eventually identified. It was felt necessary that the group benefit for each group of companies participating needed to be identified category by category. A recent meeting of the current existing infrastructure grouping (Water Companies and Energy Companies) had been successful in this regard.

It was stressed how this group's research, networking and best practice work was of interest to Local Authorities individually but it needed to be entirely separate from RSN's representational work.

The CIC was preparing to release its first report on the Vulnerable Elderly in rural areas.

**11. Rural Health Network**

Graham Biggs detailed work undertaken by a consultant into the establishment of a "refreshed" Rural Health Network. Her report would be circulated to members of the Executive the following day. If no contrary views were received within a week the Network would proceed on the following basis.

- A free network with quarterly bulletins available to all Directors of Health, Health and Wellbeing Boards and Health Watch Groups in member areas together with others interested in rural health. It was hoped to eventually extend this service to CCGs in member areas.
- A Conference to be held in London every January seeking to achieve a break even position on budgeted overall network costs.

**12. Rural Conference 2016**

The Rural Conference 2016 would be held over a day and a half at the University of Gloucestershire on the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> September. Some 20 people had currently booked at this fairly early stage. Around 50 delegates were needed for the event to break even.

13. Andy Dean reminded members of the Rural Housing Conference (this year organised on behalf of the Rural Housing Alliance by the National Housing Federation with support from the RSN rather than the RSN itself) taking place in London on Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> July

## Note of last SPARSE Rural Special Interest Group meeting

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**Title:** SPARSE Rural Special Interest Group – The Rural Sub SIG  
**Date:** Monday 11 July 2016  
**Venue:** Westminster Suite, 8th Floor, Local Government House, Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ

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### Attendance

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

Item	Decisions and actions	Action
1	<p><b>Notes of the Previous Meeting</b></p> <p>The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and asked each to introduce themselves to the group before moving onto the minutes from the last meeting - 11<sup>th</sup> April 2016.</p> <p><b><u>Decision</u></b></p> <p>Members agreed the minutes of the 11<sup>th</sup> April 2016 meeting.</p>	
2	<p><b>Minutes of the Executive Meeting - 20th June 2016</b></p> <p><b><u>Decision</u></b></p> <p>Members noted the minutes of the 20<sup>th</sup> June 2016 Executive Meeting.</p>	
3	<p><b>Election of Councillors to fill current vacancies until the AGM</b></p> <p>The Chair updated the group on the two candidates filling the Vice Chair vacancies until the AGM.</p> <p><b>Decision</b></p> <p><b>The following be appointed until the next AGM</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Vice Chair South East; Cllr Janet Duncton from West Sussex County Council</li><li>2. Vice Chair Without Portfolio: Cllr Sue Sanderson from Cubria County Council</li></ol>	
4	<p><b>Business Rate Retention - update</b></p> <p>Graham Biggs summarised some key points from a DCLG consultation paper regarding 'self-sufficient local government', and a call for evidence</p>	

regarding the 'needs and distribution formula'. He further stated that the consultation is a very open consultation and the whole process is at an early stage, with few detailed proposals in place.

Members made the following comments:

- All authorities need to formulate a united response to the business rate retention debate, lest the rural local government voice be lost in the debate.
- The RSN should move quickly once and if a new chancellor is appointed, to lobby for fairer funding for rural authorities who have been particularly hard hit by the austerity programme of central government.

Graham Biggs, Chief Executive of the RSN responded with these comments:

- There was rumour that the plans for 100% business rates retention for local government could be delayed due to the EU referendum result. Furthermore, that this may work in local government's favour should property values fall in a post Brexit Britain.
- The above mentioned working group have committed to a joint response to the business rates consultation, which will maximise rural authorities' potential for gaining an advantageous settlement.

### **Action**

Members agreed to endorse a letter from the Chair to the new Prime Minister and other key Ministers, once they are confirmed, calling for fairer funding for rural authorities.

## **5 Rural Fair Share Campaign - update**

The Chair introduced the item and handed over to Graham Biggs, Chief Executive of the Rural Services Network (RSN) who updated members as follows:

- The Campaign Group was to have met approx. 2 weeks ago; however, with the current political uncertainty in government, progressing the campaign has been delayed for a short while.
- MPs have voiced concerns that the final financial settlement is indistinguishable from the provisional financial settlement. The finishing point is a particular area of concern.
- There are currently no fixed plans to resolve these issues, however a solution should be ready to be put forward in September 2016.
- The campaign has two core messages:
  - 1) Rural authorities require an increase in Rural Services Delivery Grant (RSDG).

- 2) RSDG should be paid to all those authorities which should have benefitted from the DCLG Summer 2012 Consultation
- The campaign is tasked with devising a fairer mechanism for the distribution of RSDG.
  - There are complications with the LG futures process of calculation as many non-rural authorities have been included. This issue needs addressing.

Members made the following comments:

- There is a divergence of urban and rural income and property values which is not reflected in council tax i.e. a low value rural household, with low income, may pay a higher council tax than an equivalent sized, higher value home in an urban area.
- The next two months, with a change of Prime Minister and potentially the cabinet, provide an opportunity for the RSN to pursue its goals in housing, broadband, fairer funding etc.

### **Action**

The Chair stated that during this time of political uncertainty in national politics, the RSN need to take account of members' comments and formulate a response by the start of Parliament in September 2016.

## **6 Working with DCN & CCN**

Graham Biggs updated members on the creation of a working group between DCN/CCN/RSN. The group has been established, and has appointed an independent Chair. The message conveyed by the working group, is that these organisations must work closely together, and speak with a united and clear voice if they are to have an impact on the business rates retention and needs reviews and post Brexit settlement for rural authorities. This includes seeking to prepare a collective financial analysis to mitigate against the differences in how these groups collect and prepare their financial data.

The group will meet again in two weeks to formulate plans for a response to the recent DCLG consultation papers which will be completed in September 2016. The RSN are preparing a list of preferences in order to shape this debate.

### **Decision**

Members noted the work of the working group.

## **7 Pixel CIPFA FAS - FAQ No1**

The Chair stated that this report is a follow up to clarify the detail of the Pixel business rates retention presentation given to the group at the last meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> April 2016.



**Decision**

Members noted the report.

## Note of last SPARSE Rural Special Interest Group (Rural Assembly Sub-SIG) meeting

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<b>Title:</b>	SPARSE Rural Special Interest Group – The Rural Assembly Meeting
<b>Date:</b>	Monday 11 July 2016
<b>Venue:</b>	Westminster Suite, 8th Floor, Local Government House, Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ

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Item	Decisions and actions	Action
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**1 Note of the Previous Meeting**

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting..

**Decision**

Members agreed the minutes of the 11<sup>th</sup> April 2016 meeting.

**2 Minutes of the Executive Meeting - 20th June 2016**

**Decision**

Members noted the minutes of the 20<sup>th</sup> June 2016 Executive Meeting.

**3 Rural Development Programme**

Andy Dean, Assistant Director of the Rural Services Network (RSN), updated members on the ERDP (rural development programme) meeting with DEFRA. The following commitments were made on EU funding:

- There will be no change in short-term processing of EU claims.
- There will be no future financial commitments made until the uncertainty over EU funding has been resolved.

Members responded with the following comments:

- Brexit should not affect the availability of funding, and Defra should follow the Prime Minister's guidance of business as usual.
- A letter should be drafted ASAP seeking urgent clarification on EU funding and timescales from the relevant Minister at Defra. Also an article should be prepared for LG First Magazine on this topic.

**Action**

Andy Dean to draft the letter to the Minister, and the article for First Magazine.

#### **4 Defra LEP roundtable update**

Andy Dean updated members on the latest meeting between LEPs and Defra of which the RSN is an attendee, including:

- There was much discussion on the uncertainty around EU funding and a call for more clarity for both short and long-term projects.
- Growth pilots were received well by Defra.
- There was an update on mobile infrastructure including the current national network coverage statistics, 5G, mast sharing proposals, and EE's plans for micro networks which promise to improve rural mobile coverage.
- There was a presentation on a pending promotion for rural food and drink tourism.

Members responded with the following comments:

- Mobile coverage for rural areas is poor despite Defra promises for ten years. This is having a detrimental effect on businesses.
- The statistics on mobile and broadband coverage are distorted by the differences in population densities between rural and urban areas.
- EE have mentioned plans to utilise the emergency airwaves service to extend some networks. This seems like a promising idea worth pursuing.
- Government plans for 2G and 3G networks are not ambitious enough and should be upgraded to 4G and 5G.
- The RSN should explore what proportion of rural areas have good mobile and broadband coverage to avoid using statistics distorted by urban area populations.

#### **Action**

Graham Biggs agreed to survey RSN members on the mobile and broadband coverage in members' rural areas and report the findings at the next Sparse meeting.

#### **5 Election of Councillors to fill current vacancies until the AGM**

The Chair updated the group on the two candidates filling the Vice Chair vacancies until the AGM.

#### **Decision**

**The following be appointed until the next AGM**

1. Vice Chair South East; Cllr Janet Duncton from West Sussex County Council
2. Vice Chair Without Portfolio; Cllr Sue Sanderson from Cubria County Council

## **6 Budget Report**

Graham Biggs, updated members on the budget report, including: receipt of membership subs being up slightly in comparison with the same period last year, and that there are large consultancy fees expected due to the work around the implications of 100% Business Rates Retention

### **Decision**

Members agreed the budget.

## **7 The Big Debate - Brexit**

The Chair stated the importance of rural areas voicing their concerns and priorities for a post-Brexit deal, focussing on what's important for rural councils and communities.

Members responded with the following comments:

- A comprehensive list of what EU funding rural areas currently benefit from would be advantageous for beginning post-Brexit negotiations.
- EU level regulations which disadvantage rural authorities should be considered in any forward looking objectives.
- Many farmers need both continuity of the levels of funding and subsidies as received from the EU, and assurances of no new restrictions on migrant labour in order to remain sustainable businesses.
- Agricultural bureaucracy is an excessive burden on farmers and needs reviewing post-Brexit..
- There is an opportunity to lobby for a more comprehensive devolution package as a consequence of Brexit which should not be overlooked.
- Affordable housing in rural areas should form a part of the post Brexit considerations. This may be an ideal time to initiate a thorough review of rural areas, their funding, and the forces of change they are, and will be subject to.

Graham Biggs, responded to these comments stating that it would be advantageous to release a statement from the Sparse Group over the next few weeks voicing the group's concerns over financial stability for rural areas, especially those hardest hit in the austerity programme since 2010. Furthermore, that the group should support the LGA, who has a place at the table for Brexit negotiations.

Graham Biggs also agreed with the proposition that the Government should launch a thorough review of the needs of rural areas. The Chair agreed this point and suggested that these ideas be fed into the rural conference.

## **8 Ofcom consultation**

The Chair introduced the report followed by Graham Biggs stating that the RSN had responded to the report which is lacking in multiple key areas.

### Decision

Members noted the RSN response to the Ofcom report.

## **9 RSN Events – the Rural Conference**

Graham Biggs updated members on the plans for conference, including a move to include more Brexit discussion and speakers towards this end in light of the referendum result.

The Chair asked members to ensure that they attend the rural conference and promote the event in their councils to both members and officers. The Chair also agreed to send a letter to RSN members promoting the conference.

### Decision

Members noted the decision to change the conference programme to better reflect the Brexit decision, and the Chair agreed to send promotional letters to RSN members.

## **10 Report on RSP Service Groups**

Graham Biggs updated members on the following RSN service groups:

- a) Housing** – Andy Dean, will be attending the Rural Housing Conference and will update members in due course.
- b) Health** – the decision has been taken to run the Health Network as a free service for a fixed term in order to build an extensive database. There will however, be a health conference in January/February 2017, which will offset some of the lost revenue.
- c) Crime** – the Rural Crime Network's (RCN) AGM is to be held next week, from which a decision as to its future work programme is expected. Furthermore, the RCN has funded research into the funding formula for the police which presently disadvantages rural forces.
- d) Fire** – in an upcoming meeting of the Fire Group, there is an expectation that the group's views on Business Rate Retention will be explored.
- e) Transport** – the transport agenda is pursued through the LGA's Transport special interest group which sends out a quarterly bulletin.

### Decision

Members noted the update.

## **RSN Rural Conference 2016**

### **“Brexit – survival of the fittest – making the case for rural”**

#### Day 1

**Panel Discussion – “can rural communities stay: connected, skilled, growth orientated, easy to live and work in and manage their own affairs in a post-recession world?”**

**The size and scale of the public sector in the next 5 years...**

- The public sector will continue to reduce but this is being driven by reduced funding not Brexit.
- The public is worried the cuts in the public sector have gone too far – will the funding given to Brussels/EU be reinvested in the state?
- No more funding will be allocated to local government – but the role of town and parish councils is growing (especially in taking up / delivering discretionary services). How do we equip and support town and parish councils to deliver services?
- The state will expand in response to Brexit but local government won't get any larger.
- New opportunities for the state to expand – Brexit has already led to new government departments and a need for more trade negotiators.
- Sense of renationalisation versus competition required by the EU.
- Local government can only deliver services with the resources they are given.
- Local government has already been innovative and transformational in responding to cuts and trying to protect frontline services.
- The role of local government and town & parish councils in increasing rates / precept to (i) bring in income to continue discretionary activities and (ii) to protect key services.

**What should we do with the money coming back from Brussels?**

- A fairer funding formulae and needs assessment for rural areas.
- Public, private and voluntary and community sectors working together for rural communities.
- What's left to cut in rural areas? What opportunities are there for further innovation in rural areas (e.g. health and care agendas)?
- How can we attract businesses into rural areas? 'Live work rural places' versus B&B villages.
- What impact will Brexit have on the way the countryside looks e.g. CAP and direct payments to farmers. Do we want to maintain a similar system to CAP or dismantle it and make a fresh start?
- Have an innovation pot to help rural local authorities work with partners and do rural community development radically differently.
- National rural organisations such as the RSN, National Trust, CLA, CPRE etc. coming together to think about the rural ask in a post Brexit world.
- What's our route map for the countryside post Brexit? The current debate is being driven by organisations and their single issue concerns – how can we join up and work together for rural? E.g. Scottish Rural Parliament.

- Fund broadband in rural areas – will give a bigger bang for the buck.
- Deliver rural affordable housing – current policy and strategies are not working.
- With EAFRD and LEADER disappearing post Brexit, what funding and support will rural businesses need?

### **What might happen during the transition from old to new arrangements?**

- The ongoing impact of local government funding reductions.
- Extension of purdah to LEADER applied by RPA and Defra – needing to get individual projects contracted before the Autumn Statement. What happens next?
- How can we continue to invest in rural businesses and rural entrepreneurs during transition?
- We need to ensure funding/activity are not just turned off – that there is not a start-stop approach – but any adjustments and changes are made over time.
- What to do with the freedoms, flexibilities and resources post Brexit and in time for the next general election?
- How is the rural pound going to be spent post Brexit? If you turn off money, facilities and services in rural will disappear overnight.
- Members and MPs need to think about what Brexit vote meant for their constituents – some people in rural areas felt central and local government were not making positive decisions for rural areas but making life more difficult.
- The need for transparency in how funding is allocated and spent in order for local democracy to be effective. We need to be sensitive as to what the issues in rural areas are, how much money is available and how decisions are made about spending money.
- We can't spend money in isolation but need to join up services and activities (e.g. linking housing with economic development, health etc.)
- The importance of value-for-money and social value.

### **Getting around transport and more...**

- How can we retain and improve the current bus network rather than setting up lots of new bus services? To do this we need to find out where, when and for what purpose people want to travel.
- We are losing rural bus operators – a variety of reasons are making it difficult for them to remain solvent.
- A bus costs £120,000 to run but most of these costs (60%) are for staff, back office functions and maintenance. Therefore, putting a smaller vehicle onto a rural route where there may be fewer passengers will not necessarily lead to cost savings.
- The subsidy for non-commercial providers only accounts for 15% of total bus operations – the role of rural local authorities in providing socially necessary services.
- Public transport provides access to education, training and employment – improving connectivity.
- Uncertainty around the Bus Services Bill (<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2016-17/busservices.html>) is leading to reduced investment.
- How can we make best use of de minimus funding to support transport infrastructure?

- We need to change the focus from ‘where do you want to go?’ to ‘where can we afford to take you?’ – Aspiration versus reality. We need to make intelligent transport provision: “what can you provide” rather than “I want”.
- We focus on cost of providing a service (a blunt instrument) rather than the purpose of the journey (to get to work, the hospital, school etc.)
- How can we encourage people to become transport champions/ambassadors in rural communities? They could provide information about local network, timetables and onward journey connections. But how can we ensure full parish coverage – a domino effect to inspire others?
- Uber in rural places?
- Transport in adult social care – and how local government can work with public health and the NHS to jointly fund and sustain services.
- Putting children on commercial bus routes rather than providing a dedicated school bus.
- Who can transport people in the most cost effective way? E.g. contract out, local authorities setting up wholly owned company – should bus providers run services and local authorities plan and coordinate those services?
- Total Transport Pilots (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/total-transport-pilot-fund>).
- Local authorities need to factor in risk of contract failure.
- Using personal budgets on transport.
- Can Section 22 become a commercial proposition – the need for paid drivers as well volunteers.
- Every rural market is different – transport in some rural areas is fully subsidised and in other areas all commercial.
- Can transport become more personalised so people only make trips when they need to – pooling resources such as taxi, car share, community transport.
- Talk to all of the transport providers in your area to try and reduce the pull on the public purse.
- How can we build transport networks from the bottom up?
- Using technology to provide real time information about buses (e.g. mobile apps).

### **Community broadband**

- How to make technology financially viable.
- The relationship between putting the infrastructure (broadband) in and then not adapting services to use the infrastructure.
- Making the business case for technology to local authorities, the NHS and communities.
- Access to carers and the distances they have to travel to support rural residents to remain in their own home and independent for as long as possible.
- How can we improve the take up of assistive technology to enhance people’s independence?
- The role of technology in decision support and transferring information between care providers – the importance of a data sharing protocol.



## **Delegate reflections from day 1**

- Brexit has led to a culture of uncertainty.
- Cultural and operational issues – new scope for a fairer funding conversation (opportunities for the RSN to influence during transition period). But RSN needs to join up with other organisations that ‘speak rural’ to set out the rural stall and make a compelling case.

## Day 2

### **Brexit and local government – where have we got to and where are we heading?**

- House of Commons Library Briefing Paper on Brexit (<http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7213/CBP-7213.pdf>)
- Brexit needs to result in a deal for rural areas that is fair, comprehensible and predictable.
- Will EU structural capital funding disappear post Brexit?
- Brexit will lead to the expansion of Whitehall.
- We need a powerful voice for rural in Brexit: getting a powerful rural voice at the negotiating table or losing by default.
- The need for politicians to engage with their constituents post Brexit.
- Will we see the rise of subnational government and decisions being made more locally?
- What impact will Brexit have on Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland?
- The need to manage expectations around Brexit.
- Will the cost of exiting the EU lead to less cash for rural areas?
- Falling interest rate payments on servicing the national debt.
- Making the case for rural funding is getting more difficult. Will Brexit lead to a diminished rural economy?
- The importance of lobbying MPs to ensure the rural voice is heard.
- The Government's industrial strategy and what rural economy do we want to come out of this? What is the agricultural industrial strategy – becoming self-sufficient in food or non-self-sufficient?

### **Combined authorities in practice**

- Is devolution providing rural areas with opportunities to leverage in more money?
- Collapse of devolution in north east England with Newcastle, Northumberland and North Tyneside councils voting to push ahead and the rest - Gateshead, Sunderland, Durham and South Tyneside – voting not to.
- Current policy and decision-making is far too centralised.
- Is there still an insistence on having an elected mayor for devolution deals in non-metropolitan areas?
- After agreeing a devolution deal you can go back to Government and make further deals.
- Devolution sees finance for local decision making rather than seeing rural funding always being cut back.
- How involved are town and parish councils in devolution?
- The administrative boundaries of combined authorities and other organisations such as Local Enterprise Partnerships, NHS, Clinical Commissioning Groups, Health and Wellbeing Boards etc. The importance of working together and overcoming any governance issues.

### **Business Brexit workshop**

- Private sector uncertainty around leaving the EU – postponement of investment decisions, research and development, migrant workers/staffing.
- How will farm and other rural businesses be supported during a period of uncertainty?

- What will be the new relationship between the UK, EU and rest of the world?
- Some businesses will have currency hedges in place, which offer short-term insurance against swings in sterling, but that is only delaying the impact of Brexit – and the impact will be passed on to consumers.

### **Thriving rural communities – the view from our business base**

- The role of Local Enterprise Partnerships in driving economic growth – and their relationships with other stakeholders, businesses, communities and town and parish councils.
- Opportunities around Brexit – exports, devaluing pound and staycation etc.
- Businesses taking more responsibility for delivering support for themselves rather than by the local authority (which continues to play an enabling and facilitating role).
- Strategic planning and growth plans (e.g. Food Enterprise Zones).

### **Where to next? Final reflections**

- Giving young people the opportunity to be part of the Brexit dialogue.
- Planning and housing – we still have a rural affordable housing crisis; houses need to be built to sustain our rural communities; and declining role of social housing as private rented sector viewed as solving the housing crisis. How deliverable are the housing allocations in Local Plans?
- How can we provide skills and training for people furthest from the labour market?
- Bringing rural MPs together to lobby for the rural voice.

RSN (INCOME & EXPENDITURE) 2016/17 WITH								
ACTUAL TO END AUGUST								
2016/17 ESTIMATE NO PROVISION MADE FOR INFLATION								
					ACTUAL TO	ESTIMATE	ACTUAL TO	
					END	2016/17	END	
					2015/16	(March 2016)	AUGUST	
<b>INCOME</b>					£	£	£	
Balances at Bank B/Fwd net of o/s cheques					19388	12304		
<b>DEBTORS FROM PREVIOUS YEAR (NET OF VAT)</b>								
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	
Fire Group						100	100	
RHA Websire Development Contributions						1300	1300	
<b>Subscriptions</b>								
SPARSE Rural/Rural Assembly					241414	257830	131400	
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							105721	
VOL CONTRIBS held by NKDC at Month end							13102	
Contribs to Business Rates Campaign					1000			
2016 VOLUNTARY CONTRIBS re BUSINESS RATES						44102	24500	
Extra Income From Parishes								
<b>RSP</b>					17166	12025	8347	
Commercial Partner First Group Buses					10000	10000	10000	

					ACTUAL TO	ESTIMATE	ACTUAL TO
					END	2016/17	END
					2015/16	(March 2016)	AUGUST
					£	£	
Subscriptions from Rural Health Group					1975	0	
Income from Rural Housing Group					5134	6895	6895
Income from Fire & Rescue Group					1390	2480	2380
<b>OTHER INCOME</b>							
<b>Conferences/Seminars</b>							
Rural Conference Income					13304		11640
Rural Conference Surplus						4614	
Rural Health Conference					3959	4500	
Rural Housing Conference Income					1710	0	
<b>Service Level Agreements</b>							
Recharges ro Rural Crime Network@					19500	25000	6250
Contras re RCN@					32484		15334
Recharges to Rural England CIC (Back Office Support)					600	1200	
Coastal Communities Alliance Gross)					3113	4149	1037
Contributions to costs of Parish Guide to Affordable Housing					500		
Contributions to RHA Website Development					1700	450	450
<b>Miscellaneous</b>							
Contras					215		784
CALLS FOR EVIDENCE/RURAL PANEL SURVEYS						0	
<b>VAT</b>							
VAT Refund					13240	706	10690
VAT Received					12870		8859
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>					<b>410767</b>	<b>397804</b>	<b>368938</b>

				ACTUAL TO	ESTIMATE	ACTUAL TO
				END	2016/17	END
				2015/16	(March 2016)	AUGUST
				£	£	£
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>						
VAT Paid on Goods & Services				27421		15512
<b>CONTRACTS FOR SERVICES ACTIVITY BREAKDOWN (EST)</b>						
Corporate Management		DI,GCB, & AD1 100%. KB 40%		55662	62693	24737
Finance/Performance and Data Analy		, DW, 100%, KB 20%		29508	27745	11990
Communications (incl Seminars)		Rose Regen,JT, AD3 100%		6831	8580	3135
Administrative and Technical Support		RI, WI,WC,BA,MB 100%		46694	49353	18856
Research and Monitoring		BW, JH, 100%		14990	11837	4051
Service Group Networking		KB40%		3100	8181	3359
Economic Development Service		AD5 100%		5000	5000	2084
Coastal Communities Contract				3650	3650	1825
Rural Health Network				3000	750	750
Rural Crime Network		NP 100%		17000	20200	8417
Rural Communities Housing Group		AD2 100%		6500	6500	2708
Rural Transport Group		AD6 100%		2000	2000	833
<b>OTHER EXPENDITURE</b>				265		
<b>Rural Fair Shares/Business Rates "Campaigns"</b>						
Rural Fair Shares Campaign etc.				22376	19000	
Fair Shares Campaign Media Relations				1868	2245	
<b>SPEND FROM VOLUNTARY CONTRIBS (BUSINESS RATES)</b>					44102	19329
<b>Conferences/Seminars</b>						
Rural Conference				9394		2856
Rural Conference Drinks Reception					1144	1144
Rural Health Network & Conference				1388	1900	150
Rural Housing National Conference				1262	0	
Seminar Costs				662	750	40

					ACTUAL TO	ESTIMATE	ACTUAL TO
					END	2016/17	END
					2015/16	(March 2016)	AUGUST
<b>Service Level Agreements</b>							
Rural Crime Network Refund of overpayment@					20082		
RCN -CONTRAS @					23340		31265
RCN Travel & Subsistence					825	1500	1017
Rural Housing Group (RHG)					169	1500	482
RHG Website Development					1000		
Rural England CIC to re-charge)					10786		361
Rural Inland CIC transfer of part of First Group Support						7000	7000
APPG Costs					620	1200	439
Rural England/Vulnerability Service Contrib					6750	3000	
<b>Business Expenses</b>							
RSN Online					24180	25174	4937
Travel and Subsistence					16797	18000	6448
Print, Stat,e mail, phone & Broadband@					4116	5000	1283
Meeting Room Hire					2810	2000	200
Website and Data Base software etc					4267	4300	1371
Rent of Devon Office & Associated Costs					4959	9000	413
Accountancy Fees					710	825	330
NKDC Services						2145	
Companies House Fees					13	13	13
Bank Charges					101	110	33
IT Equipment &Support & Other Capital					1110	1800	937
Insurance					549	600	
Phd in Rural Crime Contribution					1000		
Training					50		
Corporation Tax					674	72	
Membership of Rural Coalition					200	200	
Refunds of Overpayments/ Contrás@							782





# **RURAL SERVICES NETWORK**

## **REPORT TO THE RSN EXECUTIVE**

### **REPORT 1. - 'FUTURE DIRECTIONS'**

#### **Re Future Overall Structure**

**Sustainability; From Subscription to Charge; Future LGA Meetings; Table of Rural - Urban Comparison; Future Possible Financial Service: Possible Rural Vulnerability Initiative.**

##### **SUMMARY**

**This report discusses the foreseen challenges for RSN over the coming years.**

**It seeks to map potential ways of proceeding that might make the organisation as appealing as possible to both members and potential members in what are certain to be challenging times for any organisation.**

##### **SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION**

This is an important strategic report which looks at issues facing the future sustainability of the RSN as an organisation in the challenging times ahead.

All indicators suggest we need, as a Local Government Special Interest Group, to be thinking through what we will provide for the membership fee in the future so as to sustain the organisation.

- (a) Firstly it is now starting to be clear that, the continual austerity cut backs (whether the impact of BREXIT affects that one way or the other and for how long, of course is also in the background) are likely to start to impact on our level of membership in one way or another. We have currently around 150 members through the Sparse Rural and Rural Assembly Sub Groups, and 60 RSP members. We have shown continual growth over the past ten years. However, with the ever greater financial pressure on the public sector, we are now likely (unless we take radical action) to slowly experience net annual reductions in that membership. We need to revisit what we do and how we do it with the ambition to yet further strengthen our service and consequentially

the membership. We should aspire to RSN or RSP membership being a 'must have' for progressive, forward thinking, rural local authorities (no matter what their form) and for other rural facing organisations.

- (b) Secondly, in the local authority area it is already apparent that with a Business Rate system probably operating in place of the Annual Settlement Grant system the need for our rural L. A. financial work may appear to some to be less of an ongoing imperative as reviews of systems will occur less frequently and profile in this area therefore, possibly, less high than it has been with the annual settlement system. Authorities may be influenced by this so if we take no action the potential austerity driven trend identified above could gather pace. Nevertheless, we still feel there will be a continuing need for a strong and robust Financial Representational Service (as illustrated by APPENDIX A from the June Executive meeting) and we need to get that key message across.
- (c) The austerity years are gradually forming new council structures in local government. Current government "policy" is to allow structures to develop by local initiative (but within government limits) rather than by government requirement but it is clear that at the operational level the result will be either larger councils (including "administrative mergers") compared to existing structures and/or new unitary authorities. In addition there is the issue of the new Combined Authorities We need to give consideration as to how these changes will impact on existing LGA SIGS like the RSN and the CCN/DCN and what service they may provide.

There is a clear need to examine what we should be doing to achieve a pivotal position as an organisation allowing us to go forward with confidence in the future. It is never too early to start a discussion of this nature and this report looks to do that.

WE SET OUT ON THIS JOURNEY WITH TWO OVERLYING PURPOSES:-

- (a) **To ensure that authorities and organisations understand why our product 'rural' has to be represented through our structures and how rural councils, communities, and rural inhabitants will benefit by them by investing in the RSN as the advocate for its rural interests.**
- (b) **That our production systems or processes whilst delivering complicated messages, are seen as neat, compelling and as persuasive as they possibly can be.**

## **SECTION 2: CONTEXT**

In looking forward, we need to consider where we are and strategically define and specify what our unique 'rural' selling point is.

To some extent the Network has evolved to its present position. We started life as a small districts group and that coincided of course with rural areas. To maintain viability we have taken on a wider and wider rural services brief and finally, through circumstance, we now find ourselves almost alone carrying the rural 'governance' and 'service' batons at the national level.

There is now no Commission for Rural Communities, no Rural Commission at the LGA, nor any other rural advocate.

The RSN main income has been derived from council subscription especially from the SPARSE-Rural Sub SIG membership and that will continue to be the case.

### **(A) SPARSE-RURAL/RURAL ASSEMBLY**

Councils in particular will always identify their particular form of operation above their locality. They are basically administrative units so that is not particularly surprising. Their Executives are always likely to think that way. RSN in LGA terms, representing shire areas, will always appear a second place SIG, behind either CCN or DCN, and that is an inherent weakness for us that is difficult to negate. As bigger Counties (Unitaries) and bigger Districts emerge CCN and DCN may well become representatively more active as groupings in the way that the SIG of Metropolitan Authorities and the London Boroughs Groups are from a cities and metropolitan area viewpoint. There is a threat we need to be very aware of. Counties and Districts have, however, both got quite wide rural/urban variety within their membership which impacts on their ability to gain overall consensus on some issues. The counter point therefore is the RSN's USP of being a non-party political, pan class of authorities body totally focussed on one issue - "rural".

We have from this position formed a really useful alliance with the Rural Fair Share Group of MPs and this has proved its worth in the last five years of settlement deliberations. MPs (like the public) find it easier to empathise with either 'rural' or 'urban' rather than local government District, County or Unitary function. Maintaining our alliance with such a grouping of MPs will always give us as 'rural' a unique selling point that others cannot match. (Of course, we are also the Secretariat to the APPG on Rural Services – for which a new Chairman is needed following Graham Stuart's recent appointment as a Whip).

One of the problems we have come up against is what other areas of work best suit our members. As membership stretches across Districts, County Council to Unitary and Fire & Rescue, needs will vary dependent on the type of membership and their capacity. For example Counties have employed a lot of people in examining their

performance statistics and also do often involve big name consultants. Smaller Districts on the other hand have shown far more interest in this work from the RSN as their home team is far smaller and they have much less capacity.

One of the other problems has been that until recently the CCN have themselves been running a rural service involving a nominated set of councillors. This may not appear so much in evidence currently, as best we can see from web searches, but it would be interesting to know what the situation is. That could be a threat.

As both the CCN and the DCN have been particularly orientated towards their members and particular service to them we have not sought to mirror or duplicate that approach. Instead we have undertaken a far more generic approach that is orientated on rural (rather than authority type) as well as providing information to member's community areas and also working directly inside parliament. **We need to constantly and consistently emphasise that distinction.**

We have at this time 151 local authority members

Theoretically currently we could have members in three categories.

- (a) Those paying subscription directly
- (b) Those who do not wish to register on a formal membership basis and attend meetings but have instead a 'service' based relationship with us (this is allowed for in our constitution but we currently have no members in this category as to date we have not pushed this option)
- (c) Those members who instead of paying subscription provide a service that we feel benefits us to at least equal consideration i.e. North Kesteven do our invoicing work, Oxfordshire allow us to use much of their national statistical comparison work in the Digest

## **(B) THE RURAL SERVICES PARTNERSHIP**

The Rural Services Partnership, a not-for-profit company, membership comprises (including the various service sub-groups) some 60 organisations (representing almost 100 bodies) who are not local authorities. They (excluding the Fire & Rescue Group) cannot formally be in the LGA SIG, the Rural Services Network, although they often share common goals and interests.

The meeting interface has developed through the Rural Assembly.

The RSP often comprise organisations in relation to a particular service. Most of the national organisations which will also be found in its membership have also become Stakeholders of Rural England. Membership has been falling a little in the years of

recession but the creation of dedicated service groups at a slightly lower subscription level has started to balance out this trend. Those groups however stretch our consultancy resource.

### **(C) THE RURAL SERVICES NETWORK COMMUNITY GROUP**

The RSN Community Group is basically a listing of e-mail addresses of Town and mostly Parish Councils in member areas and, as we obtain them, e-mail addresses of small businesses in member areas. In all, this comprises some 11,000 e-mail addresses (on top of a local authority contact list of a similar size). It is thought through onward transmission to council members and others the overall recipient catchment could be as high as 50,000 people throughout rural England.

The Group was created basically to encourage member retention but it is proving to be of unanticipated value in terms of communicating, trawling for information (including periodic Calls for Evidence) and the establishment of Sounding Boards. Whilst it requires structuring, it has given the Rural Services Network something that is nationally distinctive and is a key “selling point” to Government Departments etc. - demonstrating the RSN’s reach from grassroots to parliament.

This report considers how, in the changing circumstances, we should seek to take the rural **product** and **process** forward.

### **(D) THE GENERAL POSITION: WHAT MAKES AN AREA RURAL IN CHARACTER**

What makes an area rural in character is a fundamental issue given that “rural” is our unique selling proposition both now and in the future. Government has a definition that produces what they consider it to be and categorise rural areas as rural output areas. There is no midway house - people are either living in an urban area or in a rural area through this definition.

Of the 357 Local Authorities 52 have no rural residents at all and 42 have no rural output areas. There are around 300 Councils who have rural some theoretical rural interest although it will be probably be less defined if an authority has less than, say, 20 output areas or less than 3000 rural residents. This might leave around 248 principal authorities with a likely interest in rural issues to some degree of which 151 are currently RSN members. I will circulate at the meeting a list of the 97 authorities who are not currently members.

As said, practically all organisations which espoused rural argument generally (i.e. away from specific rural activity like farming or countryside interests) have gone. The biggest, the Commission for Rural Communities was a £6.5m a year organisation in its prime. It is very easy for national policy makers to ignore rural interest specifically in such circumstances and to “mainstream” it such that rural circumstances are lost. It can be argued that local authorities with an urban/rural population mix, under

massive financial pressure, will do exactly the same unless they can be persuaded that it would be wrong and not in their short or long term interests to do this.

To survive as a buoyant organisation, we have to persuade local authorities firstly that their rural areas and their specific problems are of particular importance to them and their communities and secondly that they therefore have to subsequently support us to argue nationally the general rural case - an argument no other body exists to present. This provides us with 232 challenges!

### **SECTION 3: WHAT AREAS SHOULD WE BE EXAMINING?**

The report looks at a wide range of topics. In some areas we are making some specific recommendation for discussion by the Executive and in other areas we are seeking agreement as to direction of travel so we can develop our thinking further in that light. That is inevitable in a report such as this in the setting of a “blue skies meeting”

In Section 4 below we address the issues under the following four headings:-

- (a) **Sustainability**- how do we cope with elements of voluntary work in the organisation disappearing as future personnel changes occur?

The Chief Executive and the Director are both in their late sixties. Both effectively are only part paid and input as many voluntary hours as they input paid hours. Even those paid hours are not really at the going market rate. Over the coming years they will either have to, or want to, retire or take a lesser role. If the organisation as a whole is to be sustainable it has to have a financial plan that allows for this. Section 4 (a) looks at what the subscription plan should be in changing circumstances and reflects the need to take full account of this situation which suggests there will be a need of an annual increase in budget in this regard in the region of £50k each year.

- (b) **Subscription**- Given evolving new structures in local government what should now be our anticipated operating budget and what should be a fair division in terms of ‘subscription’ of that target sum for the ever differing forms of members?
- (c) **LGA Cycle of Meetings** - As the Grant Settlement situation moves to a Business Rate and Council Tax backed finance system and assuming finance will remain at the core of our services - what is the cycle of meetings that best meets member’s needs and represent authorities’ considerations and the considerations of rural areas in England?
- (d) **Future Services** - What services would member authorities find of most value in this fast changing local government world? How can we change ourselves to

make us stronger? This requires a detailed examination following the key decisions arising from this Report, but this Report considers the financial remit and a suggested vulnerability service here as they flow directly from meeting considerations etc.

## **SECTION 4: ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES**

### **(a) How do we remain sustainable as current voluntary input reduces?**

The RSN group is currently assisted by Graham Biggs' and David Inman's voluntary hours. This probably saves the organisation over 50k a year. (About a fifth of the overall budget). It is highly unlikely that on their retirement this will continue to apply. It is therefore suggested that as the organisation becomes able we create a 'float' established in the budget of that amount. Neither officer can be certain when they would wish to leave or, worse still, have to leave. To not be allowing for a growth in budget creating the contingency allowance would be unrealistic budgeting and this issue does need to be tackled now. In the next item therefore we start to suggest a way we could become equipped to deal with this issue.

### **b. The target charging structure for members.**

- We suggest that the £50K referred to in (a) above is achieved fully in five years' time.
- Currently mostly all authorities irrespective of size pay the same fee. Counties and Districts are the same (only the Unitaries created in 2009 pay a greater sum). We hope the proposed new system is more equitable as it allows for size of authority and it also will allow for the changing shape of authorities over the next few years.
- The formula suggested below is based not on a subscription but on the relevant percentage of operating the group. We have set that operating cost at £340k (allowing for the £50k figure detailed above). This is a fixed cost so it will get lower per member if we achieve greater membership as the percentage slices will decrease -- if we lose subscribing members however member costs will increase.
- The system we have worked on here is one based on a standard charge of £1,500 plus a relatively small amount (less than a penny) per rural resident in their area to achieve the balance required. We have also introduced caps on the amount payable of £3,000 for historic two tier authorities and £6,000 for single tier unitaries or for newly created super two tier Districts or Counties

should their normally calculated charges be above those figures. We are not suggesting changes to the Rural Assembly contribution level of £495 p.a.

- Please note we propose the term 'charge'. Subscription has become a word that offers up discretion. We need to persuade authorities the need for our services is very considerable and should not be avoided. We have to try to change the starting point.
- We suggest the 2022-23 position is achieved through incremental variations over each of the five years after 17-18. We attach as Appendix C the 'charge amounts' that would be required in 18-19, 19-20, and 20-21, 21-22 and 22-23 financial years. If an authority is benefiting from the changes and paying less money they will have incremental reductions: if an authority is due to pay a higher amount than previously they will have incremental increases. The £50k contingency sum is also introduced incrementally at a rate of £10k a year (£10k in 18-19, £20k in 19-20, £30k in 20-21 and £40k in 21-22 reaching the £50k in 22-23.
- We think the system of replacing subscription with a slice of operating cost should encourage authorities to think of rural support more collectively.
- By paying a subscription it allows members to think of the annual payment as voluntary contribution and it does not come with an obligation. This system we hope is more opaque. There is an obligation to an authority's rural areas as they form part of an overall rural whole which has particular challenges and problems.
- We also need to emphasise the most vulnerable in the authority's area. If an authority doesn't support their rural inhabitants that burden then has to be shared by other authorities. If authorities have always avoided subscribing they in effect are now looking for the support, they should be giving to their rural areas, to be coming from other authorities. We need to major on that particular point if we are to persuade all authorities they have to be involved.
- Personalising the position to a comparison of an authorities' own vulnerable residents should we believe help sell RSN services.

### **(c) The LGA Cycle of Meetings**

- It is suggested that we should in future separate out the Sparse Rural meetings from the Rural Assembly meeting so that both meetings have a fuller day to focus on their particular issues on two occasions a year. (This means we would move back to a system of 4 meetings a year). They would take place in January; March, July and November.



- Establish in place of the (largely ineffective) Unitary Group a specific Social Care and Health Group allowing interchange of views across all authorities involved nationally in this vital area of activity. We could also link this arrangement across to make more linkage with the intended Rural Health Network. This group would meet for an hour prior to the two Rural Assembly meetings. (The Assembly meetings themselves will cover the issues like Broadband, Transport etc. that might have been covered by a dedicated Unitary Group). We would through the broader Rural Assembly meetings also seek to make more linkage with the Housing, Crime, and, Transport Sub Groups
- Sparse Rural meetings would also include consideration of Rural Growth issues with LEPs and Mayors and possibly grant presentations from potential Funders.
- The meetings would in future seek to decide a press release programme targeted across the RSN with alternate Sparse Rural and Assembly driven press release – re-active Press Releases on current issues will also be important.
- Each Meeting would in future, whenever possible, decide on a letter to the Minister on a timely issue to pursue and the letters generated would be published on the website.
- Each Rural Assembly meeting would try to pick up the results of Sounding Board exercise completed in the preceding months and each meeting would decide the following Sounding Board exercise to be undertaken.
- While the Rural Assembly meetings would be geared to Scrutiny Chairs and Members in their Community Leadership role and work, the Sparse Rural Meetings would have more of a focus on the work of the Executive member.

The timetable might therefore read:-

January- <b>Sparse Rural 12 to 3-</b> The Chair of the Parliamentary Rural Fair Share Group be invited to this Meeting
April- <b>Rural Assembly 12 to 3</b> (Preceded by a Meeting of the Social Care & Health Group at 11 a.m.) -Seek to involve Chair of the EFRA Select Committee here
July- <b>Sparse Rural 12 to 3</b> (LEPS and Mayors to be invited?)
(Sept- Conference in Cheltenham)
November 12 to 3 – <b>AGM Rural Service Network and Rural Assembly Day-</b> a DEFRA Minister would be invited to this meeting. (Preceded by a Meeting of the Social Care & Health Group at 11 a.m.)

#### **(d) Future Services**

We deal with two areas “in principle” recommendations here and we will seek to deal with RSN day to day and website issues in a future report.

We have two mainstream thoughts however that we wish to position at the centre of future thinking:-

**To attempt to “personalise” the argument. We feel that the comparison between the rural and urban person is the best way of illustrating the point to authorities and persuading them at this difficult time they need to give at least some attention to rural issues. It would be a fulcrum area of our website. It is of course the argument we have successfully employed in terms of our financial representational activity.**

Here is a start we have made on something that takes us into wider areas. We would make such a table a prominent part of our work and keep it updated.

Money allocated in general grant assistance to Local Government by Government per head of population £ in urban areas £ in rural areas.

2014/15 Government Funded Non Ring-fenced Spending power per head

Predominantly Urban received £155.33 more than Predominantly Rural

2015/16 Government Funded Non Ring-fenced Spending power per head

Predominantly Urban received £128.78 more than Predominantly Rural

Money paid in Council Tax per head

2014/15 Council Tax per head

Predominantly Urban paid £79.96 less than Predominantly Rural

2015/16 Council Tax per head

Predominantly Urban paid £80.58 less than Predominantly Rural

Number of social housing starts nationally. Number of social housing starts in rural areas, number of starts in urban areas.

In 2012-13 the rate of local authority/housing association permanent dwellings completed in England per 1000 households were:

Major Urban 1.3

Rural-50 1.1

Rural-80 1.1

Average wage of people working in rural areas against that of people living in urban areas.

Workplace based median gross annual earnings, (£), 2013

Predominantly Urban £24,500

Predominantly Rural £19,900

Percentage of residents who have a bus or train service within half a mile of their home.

Bus availability indicator (2012):

49% of rural villages, hamlets & isolated dwellings where the nearest bus stop is within a 13 minute walk and has a service at least once an hour

86% of rural town and fringe dwellings where the nearest bus stop is within a 13 minute walk and has a service at least once an hour

96% urban dwellings where the nearest bus stop is within a 13 minute walk and has a service at least once an hour

### Housing Affordability Ratios

Ratio of lower quartile house prices to lower quartile workplace-based earnings (2012)

Predominantly urban 7.1

Predominantly rural 7.9

Clearly there is work to do here but, if approved in principle by the Executive, then hopefully we can build a really strong table of data comparison that could be updated year on year as new statistics become available.

Following the rural resident against urban resident comparison we need to take the rural resident mantra to the heart of our operation.

Our argument has to be that authorities need to invest a fraction of a penny per rural resident to allow national argument about the rural position to be established and presented to prevent, at a time of public sector austerity, the position from deteriorating further.

I hope we can focus particularly on the number of younger and older people in these rural areas. It is these people who are we feel the most likely to find themselves 'vulnerable' as the cuts bite harder and harder.

**We think it is the word 'vulnerable' that we now need to present very forcibly. It conjures up an image of isolation and of people under multiple financial and social pressures and therefore works reasonably appealingly in the rural context. (Conversely the word deprivation perhaps produces some natural urban association). Unlike many areas that we deal with it can also be detailed by photo imagery.**

If we are to persuade all authorities with rural areas to be involved with us it is in our view essential that we outline rural vulnerability, time and again. Particularly as people live longer it is an increasing factor that relates to the lives of a significant percentage of these authorities' rural populations and often impacts directly on the services provided by District, County & Unitary Councils.

It is on that basis we believe we can maintain and even enhance our position. – See (2) below for first thoughts as to how this might be structured.

### **(1) Our Future Financial Service**

In future we think we need to seek to widen the Service out so that it also comments on other areas of public sector financial work. We think if we are to survive this has

to be THE hand to play as LG Finance gets less coverage. We might seek to develop some home expertise with a consultant per area. Funding areas like **Police, Fire, Health, Public Health, Transport, Schools and Floods** should fall into the Sparse Rural side of the organisation (and of course it's Sub Groups).

It's getting back to the essential message (as set out in the table above) that the rural resident gets a below par service package across the spectrum and matters left unchecked could/would get worse and that authorities- organisations are obliged to show some concern about it by being involved in some way in our work.

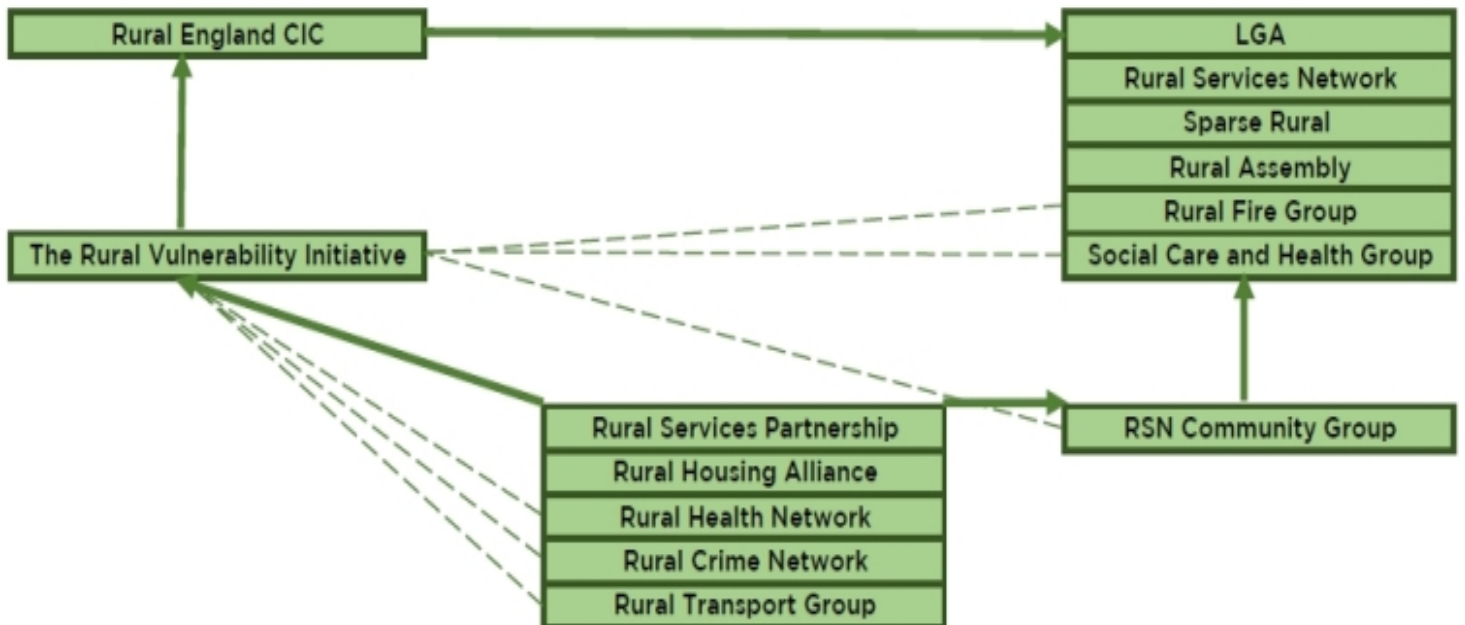
## **(2) A Rural Vulnerability Initiative.**

**A Rural Vulnerability Initiative within the Rural England Community Interest Company Corporate Structure but directly involving RSN members as Stakeholders in this part of those structures as part of the RSN spread of Activities is suggested.**

Over the past ten years if you live in a rural area the following has occurred:-

- A worrying percentage of local Doctors Surgeries have closed
- Village pubs and shops have significantly reduced
- Local Bus Services are reducing
- The percentage of people over 65 living in the area has increased by over 4% and now will comprise towards one in four of the rural population (while in predominantly urban areas that increase has been 0.9% and only one in six of the population falls into that age range). By 2039, one third of the rural population is likely to be over 65.
- The internet revolution which has been of benefit to many people in England has, in rural areas, been clouded over by poor telecommunication and broadband situations. It is clear that the countryside will always lie behind the technological advancement trend nationally

As we detail we feel there now needs to be specific acknowledgment of a rural vulnerability problem that is increasing in rural areas.



We show above an illustration of how a Rural Vulnerability Specialist Grouping within the CIC Corporate Structure might work with the overall RSN operation providing a two way flow of information. Income from the private sector (which has already shown some significant interest) would flow to the CIC but the RSN would charge for its work and use of its database of community contacts thereby generating additional income from the RSN.

As can be seen by the dotted communication lines on the diagram below there is a really big opportunity through involvement of the CIC to fuel a wide number of the existing components of the overall network.

We have the following initial thoughts relating to the basis of such CIC work:-

- We (now as Rural England CIC “product”) have some current work in this area with the Rural Vulnerability Bulletins relating to Fuel Poverty, Transport and Broadband which Johann Tasker puts together three weekly through the financial assistance of Calor sponsorship to the CIC. The new CIC would, through private sector financial support seek to establish dedicated research officer support to back up these publications and grow this into a much a fuller service.

- All RSN members should be automatically stakeholders of the CIC's Rural Vulnerability Initiative.
- The CIC should have a UK remit (as well as an English one) to facilitate information exchange through the UK Rural Policy and Practitioner and Researchers Group system as well as through English dialogue as illustrated in the diagram below. The group terms of reference should be in relation to young people, older people and people suffering ill health/disability/low income households and across all forms of "vulnerability".
- A dedicated website detailing the Initiative should be established
- An annual strategic meeting should take place with organisations particularly operating in this area such as the Citizens Advice Bureau, the Red Cross, and the Alzheimer's Society etc.
- One of the targets should be a meeting with Funders and other Charities to seek to ensure there is an overall strategy applying to social need in the countryside
- A group should be established to network nursing homes and residential care homes in the countryside
- Consideration should be given about how parish (and town councils) could play a role in monitoring in some way those at risk in their areas.
- A table mapping the rural vulnerability situation should be established giving hopefully a far stronger statistical base to the growing problem.

Obviously this proposal will require in the medium term additional staffing resource probably by the appointment of a relatively senior officer'. As stated in the report the proposal has however the potential to be detailed graphically (unlike the services we provide currently). It is hoped therefore that 'charitable' support from individuals and wills etc. can therefore maybe be achieved from calls asking for backing for this specific initiative and that we can similarly constitute new (subscription based) income from say the Care and Retirement Home sector.

### **3. PARLIAMENTARY GROUPS.**

At this stage we have created an All Party Parliamentary Group which meets 4 to 5 times a year. The purpose of APPG's is basically to provide information to Members of Parliament (both Commons and Lords). We send the agenda 's out to some 280 people (MPs with any rural territory including Ministers) and a limited number of Lords who have expressed an interest. Information can be provided in writing or in person. It has however a limited core of about 10 Lords and MPs and meetings are a struggle – they are certainly not usually especially productive

APPGs are not lobbying bodies. They can have as few as one meeting (the AGM) a year.

The following have the rural prefix

- Rural Business
- Rural Health and Social Care
- Rural Services

Also from the “Rural” world are:-

- National Parks

And from the Local Government world:-

- Local Democracy
- Local Government
- Local Growth
- County
- District Councils

Quite separately the Rural MPs have created, through our-selves, a Parliamentary Rural Fair Share MP’s Group. The group can look at all rural financial issues and could therefore have more symmetry with item one in this report about a wider financial lobbying role for the RSN. This MP group has about 120 MP members and is (unlike an APPG which has to operate within Parliamentary Rules); a campaigning body and has a core of about 20-30 MPs maybe. It has its own web site which details what it seeks to do and the role it anticipates for itself. We however provide its essential information feed.

Graham Stuart has just been appointed a Whip and it is maybe time to review what we do. He chaired both the APPG and the Rural Fair share Group. We will have to find a new Chair for both. In both cases the Chair will be appointed by the Group’s membership.

The APPG has been fairly placid the Fair Share MPs group a major force in terms of arguing Rural Local Government Finance.

We would suggest as follows:-

- We seek to create – ( the decision will be for MPs) a Rural MPs lobbying group called maybe “Rural Issues” that we could attempt to use for all rural issues of the moment apart from Financial issues. This is an idea from Graham Stuart. The group would be very useful as the Impact of Brexit on rural issues and the rural economy develops. The group would receive briefing papers on current issues from the various RSN groupings. Again it is suggested it would have to have its own website



- We seek to continue with the Rural Fair Share Group of MPs.
- We seek to establish a Rural Issues Lords Group but their brief would include Finance as well as other issues. Again a website might be desirable.
- An Annual Meeting takes place to coordinate the activities of the two MP pressure groups and the Lords Group.
- In the future should a useful function be identified by APPG members we (normally) restrict the APPG to only the one or two meetings each year.

### **A BREXIT FOOTNOTE**

At the risk of making what is already a long report still lengthier it is felt all reports going before members ought to be examined to see how they align with our very recent conference and its post Brexit world considerations.

We would like therefore to comment briefly from this perspective:-

Proposal 3 immediately above has its roots growing directly from the conference and hopefully the connection to what was said at the conference about ‘the need for rural to get its act together’. However to follow examine Tony Traver’s comments in this area in relation to proposals (1) (Wider Financial Role) and (2) (Vulnerability) as well I think we need to ask the question ‘if not us’ who will actually do the work envisaged by the Future Financial Service section (1) and the Rural Vulnerability initiative (2) if we do not ourselves take these initiatives. We cannot see many organisations who would want to coordinate matters in many instances and to quote our key note main conference speaker ‘get the act together’.

The CCN despite the fact they can’t be called a majority rural grouping anymore would certainly take on some of the finance issues we outline. However they will only take on those issues which relate their council member’s direct operation (and not those of Districts) and they will not want to have the label ‘rural’ solely attached to them either as that would not find favour with some of their members. In relation to Proposal 2 again the CCN will have interest in the work but their brief is not one that engages with the rural communities throughout England in relation to their interest and view in the way we are structured to do.

**Members are asked to debate and consider in detail the recommendations made in this report and to help in refining them, where necessary, with the intention of producing a report and recommendations from the Executive to the AGM in November.**

## **REPORT TO THE RSN EXECUTIVE**

### **REPORT 2 – REPRESENTING RURAL**

#### **How can rural as an entity be best represented? - Is this a role the RSN should embrace (who will do it if we don't)?**

##### **SUMMARY**

**This report details the problem as to how rural areas often with diverse interests and scattered populations can be brought together to facilitate consensus views and opinions to be formulated. It suggests a possible option for consideration.**

##### **PRELUDE**

Even in these hard times rural areas can produce a lot of advocates. Often these come from particular sectoral viewpoints and obviously they speak for their sector. Therefore, whilst everyone says it would be better if there was a mechanism to achieve one overall voice from time to time, it is in reality quite difficult to achieve.

If however we don't consider taking on the vexed question of rural advocacy, our overall selling point immediately becomes a lot closer to that of the other SIGs and organisations who themselves are representing particular sectors or interests.

The question might then become, particularly in the unitary world to which we all might be heading, what would differentiate ourselves from the CCN and DCN, and if unitary comes its successor body, in 'championing' the rural cause?

In such a world the CCN body would rightly say they are the champion for the group of the shires that include most of rural England. They will also claim to be more strategic than Districts had been. A District body might say they are “closer to the people” themselves than when County Councils existed over much of one of the Local Government tiers. They will each point to services they offer to their membership which encompass rural areas and with that some rural thinking.

That of, course, would be entirely different to the RSN service where rural thinking is our lifeblood and rural communities are our bedrock of our work rather than “classes of authority discussion” (the RSN is also run on a non-party political basis). Those Rural Communities themselves would not, in our opinion, be particularly well served by such a representational outcome be it CCN or DCN based as it is simply far from a good fit. However the cash starved LGA authorities of the future could argue they do look at rural issues collectively in this way. We have to be very careful. It is our community base that maintains our difference – one of our main selling points is the way we actually seek to work directly with rural areas and through to Westminster via the APPG & Rural Fair Share Group. To strengthen that rural community base should therefore materially strengthen our position with local authorities and with rurally focused/supportive organisations generally.

Therefore, in addition to the strategic report that accompanies this report, we also feel we need to find a way that can really emphasise the difference between a service for members of local authorities and a rural service that, in addition to supporting and assisting rural local authority members in their Community Leadership role, has the potential to achieve a lot of publicity and stands a real chance of also making a difference across the rural spectrum.

At a recent meeting, the Executive agreed proposals where RSN would seek to establish the following Rural Sounding Boards.

- (a) Principal Council and Parish Council Sounding Board (s)
- (b) A Rural Small Business Sounding Board
- (c) A Rural Young Persons Sounding Board

(d) A Rural Community Sounding Board (possibly from Primary School Parent Governors)

In the accompanying report members will see how reports back from these sounding boards are planned to become an integral part of the proposed new RSN meetings system via the Rural Assembly meetings.

Members also agreed previously that every effort would be made to establish some form of representative Rural Panel across England and this work is now being taken up by the Rural England CIC, working with the University of Gloucestershire. [A RURAL PANEL WILL BE A STATISTICALLY VALID GROUP LOOKING AT RURAL ENGLAND AS A WHOLE – THE SOUNDING BOARDS ARE NOT STATISTICALLY VALID AND ARE MORE “SELF SELECTING”.]

The question that remains however, is how can the views being harnessed by these exercises be themselves taken forward into some form of (wider than RSN) event that gives a properly constituted national rural voice to rural problems, issues and opportunities? We would comment at this stage that the RSN is viewed by most “outsiders” (including Whitehall) as a Local Government Lobbying Organisation. A lot of rural organisations (including ourselves) produce Manifestos from their particular viewpoint. There is no mechanism however which seeks to record the wishes of rural communities across the whole of England.

Through this report we seek to create a mechanism for doing something of that nature on the simple premise that if that is possible then the sum of the whole is greater than the sum of the component parts.

The rural areas of England have more people living in them than live in the whole of Wales or Scotland or Northern Ireland but they fail to attract a lot of media type coverage for issues of substance that lie outside of the BBC’s photographic coverage of ‘Countryfile’ or ITVs ‘Countrywise’. In England, which also has a stronger urban presence than the other home countries, there is always the danger of having issues mainstreamed with rural issues lost within supposedly similar national ones. Here may be a way of taking matters forward to gain, from time to time, some rural emphasis.

This report looks to present embryo thoughts we have had about a way rural areas collectively, and wider than just local government, could arrive at consensus views about the rural issues that affect them. We hope this may be an area where RSN and Rural England could work together possibly alongside the University of Gloucestershire.

*This is what makes RSN different- because we do ask questions of this nature.*

		2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23) Sub based on rural population (after £1500 contribution), £:
	Sub 2017/18, £	Sub	Sub	Sub	Sub	
Allerdale	2145	2279	2529	2683	2855	3000
Ashford	1850	1849	1961	2030	2107	2196
Aylesbury Vale	998	0	0	0	0	0
Babergh	2145	2170	2386	2518	2666	2835
Barnsley	495	515	535	555	575	595
Bath and North East Somerset	499	519	539	559	579	599
Bassetlaw	499	515	535	555	575	595
Blaby	495	515	535	555	575	595
Boston	1850	1688	1749	1786	1827	1875
Bradford	495	515	535	555	575	595
Braintree	2145	2256	2499	2648	2815	3000
Breckland	2145	2554	2893	3000	3000	3000
Broadland	499	0	0	0	0	0
Bromsgrove	495	515	535	555	575	595
Buckinghamshire	0	0	0	0	0	0
Calderdale	495	515	535	555	575	595
Canterbury	495	515	535	555	575	595
Cherwell	499	519	539	559	579	599
Cheshire East	2145	3844	4599	5061	5579	6000
Cheshire West and Chester	2145	2894	3342	3617	3925	4278
Chichester	2145	2088	2278	2394	2523	2672
Chorley	495	515	535	555	575	595
York	495	515	535	555	575	595
Cornwall	7645	6000	6000	6000	6000	6000
Cotswold	2145	2169	2385	2517	2664	2834
Craven	2145	1886	2011	2087	2172	2270
Cumbria	2145	3000	3000	3000	3000	3000
Dartford	495	515	535	555	575	595
Daventry	2145	2092	2282	2399	2529	2679

	<b>Sub 2017/18, £</b>	<b>2018/19 Sub</b>	<b>2019/20 Sub</b>	<b>2020/21 Sub</b>	<b>2021/22 Sub</b>	<b>2022/23) Sub based on rural population (after £1500 contribution), £:</b>
Derbyshire	495	519	539	559	579	599
Derbyshire Dales	2145	2074	2259	2372	2499	2644
Devon	2145	3000	3000	3000	3000	3000
Dorset	1800	3000	3000	3000	3000	3000
Dover	998	0	0	0	0	0
County Durham	6335	6000	6000	6000	6000	6000
East Cambridgeshire	2145	2177	2395	2528	2677	2849
East Devon	2145	2291	2546	2702	2877	3000
East Hampshire	0	0	0	0	0	0
East Hertfordshire	1850	1828	1933	1998	2070	2153
East Lindsey	2145	2601	2956	3000	3000	3000
East Northamptonshire	2145	1904	2034	2114	2203	2306
East Riding of Yorkshire	3537	4737	5779	6000	6000	6000
East Sussex	1850	3000	3000	3000	3000	3000
Eden	2145	1924	2061	2145	2238	2346
Essex	1800	3000	3000	3000	3000	3000
Fenland	2145	2037	2209	2315	2434	2570
Forest Heath	2145	1982	2138	2233	2339	2462
Forest of Dean	2145	2131	2334	2458	2598	2758
Gateshead	495	515	535	555	575	595
Gedling	495	515	535	555	575	595
Guildford	495	515	535	555	575	595
Hambleton	2145	2220	2451	2593	2752	2935
Hampshire	1850	3000	3000	3000	3000	3000
Harborough	2145	2148	2357	2485	2628	2792
Harrogate	1850	2051	2229	2337	2459	2599
Herefordshire, County of	2919	3449	4076	4460	4890	5384
Hinckley and Bosworth	499	519	539	559	579	599
Horsham	2145	2142	2349	2475	2617	2779

	<b>Sub 2017/18, £</b>	<b>2018/19 Sub</b>	<b>2019/20 Sub</b>	<b>2020/21 Sub</b>	<b>2021/22 Sub</b>	<b>2022/23) Sub based on rural population (after £1500 contribution), £:</b>
Huntingdonshire	499	519	539	559	579	599
Isle of Wight	2145	3733	4451	4892	5385	5950
King's Lynn and West Norfolk	2145	2289	2542	2698	2872	3000
Lancashire	1800	3000	3000	3000	3000	3000
Lancaster	495	515	535	555	575	595
Leicestershire	1800	3000	3000	3000	3000	3000
Lewes	2145	1820	1923	1986	2057	2138
Lichfield	1800	1740	1817	1864	1917	1978
Lincolnshire	2145	3000	3000	3000	3000	3000
Maldon	2145	1998	2158	2256	2366	2492
Malvern Hills	2145	1816	1917	1980	2049	2129
Melton	2145	1907	2038	2118	2208	2311
Mendip	2145	2382	2666	2840	3000	3000
Mid Devon	2145	2128	2330	2454	2592	2751
Mid Suffolk	2145	2265	2511	2662	2830	3000
Mid Sussex	499	519	539	559	579	599
New Forest	1800	2145	2353	2480	2623	2786
Norfolk	2145	3000	3000	3000	3000	3000
Northamptonshire	1800	3000	3000	3000	3000	3000
North Devon	2145	2001	2162	2261	2372	2499
North Dorset	2145	2054	2232	2341	2463	2604
North Lincolnshire	2735	2734	3131	3374	3647	3959
North Norfolk	2145	2320	2583	2745	2926	3000
North Somerset	2145	2772	3182	3433	3713	4036
North Warwickshire	2145	1960	2108	2199	2301	2417
North West Leicestershire	2145	1938	2079	2165	2262	2373
North Yorkshire	2145	3000	3000	3000	3000	3000
Northumberland	5491	5116	6000	6000	6000	6000
Nottinghamshire	1800	3000	3000	3000	3000	3000



		2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23) Sub based on rural population (after £1500 contribution), £:
	Sub 2017/18, £	Sub	Sub	Sub	Sub	
Purbeck	2145	1804	1902	1962	2029	2106
Redcar and Cleveland	495	515	535	555	575	595
Ribble Valley	2145	1929	2067	2151	2246	2355
Richmondshire	2145	1920	2055	2137	2230	2336
Rother	2145	1883	2006	2082	2166	2263
Rotherham	495	515	535	555	575	595
Rugby	1850	1696	1759	1798	1841	1890
Rutland	2491	2103	2298	2417	2550	2703
Ryedale	2145	1918	2052	2135	2227	2333
Scarborough	2145	1880	2002	2077	2161	2257
Sedgemoor	2145	2092	2282	2399	2530	2680
Selby	1800	2158	2369	2499	2644	2811
Sevenoaks	2145	2157	2369	2499	2644	2810
Shepway	1850	1835	1943	2010	2084	2168
Shropshire	5150	5201	6000	6000	6000	6000
Solihull	495	515	535	555	575	595
Somerset	2145	3000	3000	3000	3000	3000
South Cambridgeshire	2145	2419	2715	2896	3000	3000
South Derbyshire	499	519	539	559	579	599
South Hams	2145	2125	2326	2450	2588	2746
South Holland	2145	1958	2105	2195	2296	2412
South Kesteven	2145	2226	2460	2603	2764	2948
South Lakeland	2145	2337	2606	2771	2956	3000
South Norfolk	2145	2369	2648	2819	3000	3000
South Northamptonshire	2145	2186	2406	2541	2693	2866
South Oxfordshire	2145	2521	2850	3000	3000	3000
South Somerset	2145	2432	2732	2916	3000	3000
South Staffordshire	500	520	540	560	580	600
St Edmundsbury	2145	2051	2228	2336	2458	2597

		2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23) Sub based on rural population (after £1500 contribution), £:
	Sub 2017/18, £	Sub	Sub	Sub	Sub	
Stafford	1850	1956	2103	2193	2294	2409
Staffordshire	2145	3000	3000	3000	3000	3000
Stratford-On-Avon	2145	2470	2782	2974	3000	3000
Stroud	2145	1883	2006	2081	2166	2263
Suffolk Coastal	2145	2191	2414	2550	2703	2878
Suffolk	2145	3000	3000	3000	3000	3000
Surrey	495	515	535	555	575	595
Sunderland	495	515	535	555	575	595
Swindon	495	515	535	555	575	595
Tandridge	499	519	539	559	579	599
Taunton Deane	1850	1868	1986	2059	2140	2233
Teignbridge	2145	2204	2431	2570	2725	2904
Telford and Wrekin	495	515	535	555	575	595
Tendring	495	515	535	555	575	595
Tewkesbury	2145	1852	1965	2034	2112	2201
Torridge	2145	2015	2181	2283	2397	2527
Tunbridge Wells	1850	1873	1992	2066	2148	2243
Uttlesford	2145	2141	2348	2474	2616	2778
Vale of White Horse	1800	2052	2230	2339	2461	2601
Wakefield	495	515	535	555	575	595
Waveney	499	519	539	559	579	599
Warwick	495	515	535	555	575	595
Warwickshire	495	515	535	555	575	595
Wealden	2145	2517	2845	3000	3000	3000
Wellingborough	495	0	0	0	0	0
West Berkshire	1800	0	0	0	0	0
West Devon	2145	1932	2072	2157	2252	2362
West Dorset	2145	2255	2498	2647	2814	3000
West Lindsey	2145	2217	2447	2589	2747	2928

	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2019/20</b>	<b>2020/21</b>	<b>2021/22</b>	<b>2022/23) Sub based on rural population (after £1500 contribution), £:</b>	
<b>Sub 2017/18, £</b>	<b>Sub</b>	<b>Sub</b>	<b>Sub</b>	<b>Sub</b>		
West Oxfordshire	2145	2346	2618	2785	2972	3000
West Somerset	2145	1780	1870	1925	1987	2058
West Sussex	1800	3000	3000	3000	3000	3000
Winchester	4290	0	0	0	0	0
Worcestershire	499	515	535	555	575	595
Wychavon	2145	2425	2722	2904	3000	3000
Wycombe	495	515	535	555	575	595
Wyre Forest	300	0	0	0	0	0
	<b>269358</b>	<b>281854</b>	<b>303730</b>	<b>315606</b>	<b>327482</b>	<b>339358</b>

# AN ENGLISH RURAL COMMUNITY 'PARLIAMENT'?

## INTRODUCTION

This report, therefore, seeks to link in some way democratically elected members of Councils and the All Party Parliamentary Group on Rural Services with those undertaking voluntary work in rural areas in the community interest to achieve overall rural consensus on rural issues. It will never be an easy task, one group has to run a budget the other is often dependent on community assistance from budget holders. At a time of cut backs, in particular, the council-voluntary sector inter-relationship can be difficult. However, there has to be the ability to achieve some generated and announced consensus thinking on issues in the overall rural interest. Silence achieves nothing.

The Rural Services Network has tried to give rural communities a voice on rural national issues through its community group. We are currently seeking to examine the impact of our service at community level. It is a mixed bag. We have had as many as 1,800 community consultation responses from the 12,000 weekly e mails sent out. In questioning more deeply however, it is apparent that whilst there are many supportive parishes who very much welcome our work not every parish clerk sees our material as we do and parish councils can be rural cynical as well as rural proactive.

Issues like rural funding, broadband difficulties and the ongoing rural fuel poverty simply don't get covered to the media depth we would hope for and which is clearly warranted. All that happens now is short-term, one-off blips of media attention, caused by a report or event of one kind or another. Without a common rural voice it is feared that this will always be a problem.

## THE PRESENT POSITION

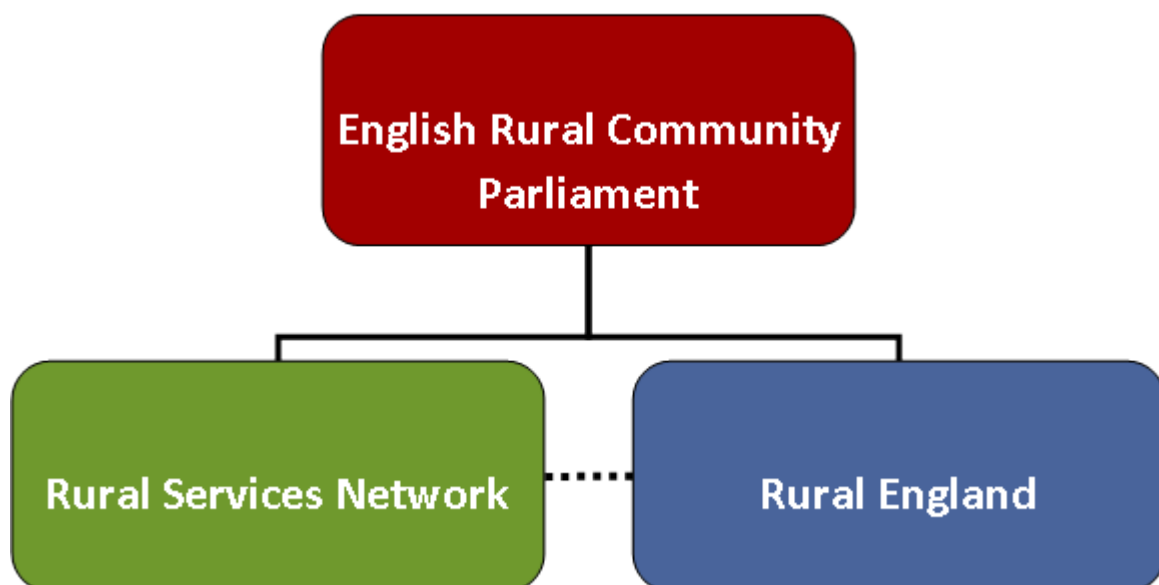
Currently for us:-

- The Rural Services Network undertakes representational work
- Rural England C.I.C. seeks to engage in, support and encourage continuing rural research and best practice exchange

However, neither the RSN (nor the Rural England C.I.C) can validly claim to speak for rural communities across England.

However, how can any broad rural consensus be produced from rural people and rural organisations on rural issues that gives greater weight to the rural argument?

This report seeks to examine that. Perhaps for us the proposed solution might lie in something towards the following arrangement.



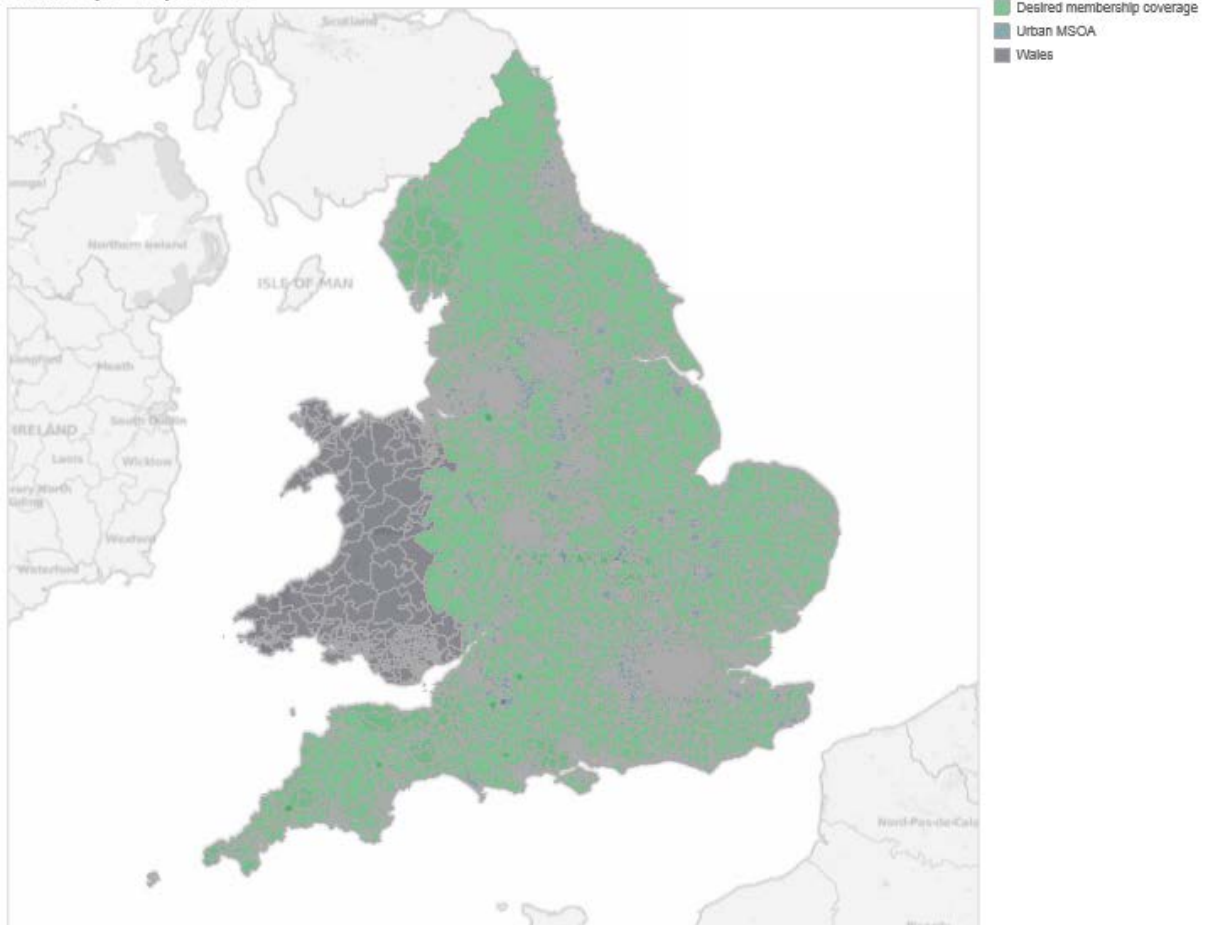
## **CONSIDERATION**

It is a characteristic of rural England, which is pictorially shown on the following attached map, that in our view:-

- (a) It can struggle to be properly recognised as it comprises a series of separate areas and unlike Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland fails therefore to present itself particularly forcibly.
- (b) Without some way of these diverse areas presenting themselves, and where they wish, to promote their views, there will always be a danger of either having them overlooked or rural issues being marginalised by being scooped into national policy mainstream thinking about England.
- (c) As England grows still further to accommodate a growing population there is a danger of this threat becoming more pronounced.

The cut backs in rural areas, which have a lower service base in any event, coupled with a rural population that is ageing faster than the English norm are concerning in this context.

Middle Super Output Areas



It could be claimed that there is a stronger need for some ‘voice’ mechanism for rural areas than there is in the other home countries where that process, we think, happens far more naturally.

However any process that seeks to tackle this will not be easy. Rural representation can look inward, blaming local government in relation to their situation/setbacks, or be very insular and look solely at their individual community need instead of any wider national picture and missing “stronger together” opportunities. We have to accept from the outset that whatever is done will not be universally welcomed or supported by all.

If there is to be a process of seeking to pull rural communities and rural people together more at the national level, and to thereby hopefully arrive at more consensus views, what term might be suitable in labelling that process?

We have run through a lot of options in our minds.

Terms like 'Senate' are often used in America and tend, maybe, to be unpopular with the public here. The phrase 'Assembly' has already been employed by RSN in our LGA Special Interest Group Work. The term 'Forum' may be a possibility but it tends to now, perhaps, be over used and seems therefore to lack the gravitas it once had. A Congress, Chamber, Convention or Convocation doesn't, to us, sound right either. The term 'Parliament' is a good one but can perhaps be met with surprise and distrust from MPs who regard a parliamentary process to be the one they were elected to. If the word is to be used at all here it certainly needs, in our view, to be caveated to make it sound more of the meeting it will be and less like something that is legislative. We are not sure a Convention or Conference label would particularly assist a process of trying to bring together dynamic, rural thought.

So, if we run with the word "Parliament" (historically a deliberative assembly for discussion) how do we soften the phrase to make it less threatening? The word 'community' in front of it might just do that. It perhaps makes it sound, we feel, less capable of anything authoritarian and more a vehicle for gathering, harnessing and expressing community opinion. Community opinion gathering and seeking consensus at a pan national level should be welcomed by MPs and indeed Councillors in their elected roles.

A traditional and nationally constituted Rural Parliament as run in other European countries is unlikely we feel to be advocated (or supported) directly or indirectly – and certainly not supported financially, by government in England.

There appears to be a gap in England in a way of achieving rural consensus at community level (and call the process by whatever name is agreeable to everyone) we do feel it needs addressing.



## **POSSIBLE WAY OF MOVING SUCH A CONCEPT FORWARD**

So how could such a concept move forward without employing a large budget that clearly does not exist and certainly would not be provided by government?

It is suggested, therefore, that any 'community parliamentary' process may be:-

- (a) Very loose leaf in form -involving whoever shows enthusiasm instead of having any formal structures of appointed people
- (b) Its actual meetings may be more symbolic than a formal structure as formal structures obviously require a proper budget and formal processes.
- (c) Such symbolic meetings can't be held too often as they then would involve some cost and might be seen by some as another form of bureaucracy.
- (d) Ideally it would in our view involve a University which deals with rural issues to constitute some independence to the process.

To avoid expense it occurs to us that the RSN/Rural England network (particularly if it can be expanded further as is our aim) can, in this technological age, produce as much discussion and evidence through 'e' exchange as any formal series of meetings.

(There does not appear to be any wider or more diverse network in England's rural areas than our own).

Whatever mechanism is created it would, out of financial necessity, have to be very light in touch.

Could a series of Survey Monkey questionnaires sent out generally and to sounding boards seek to replicate most meetings and seek to generate the overall rural starting position on many issues which could then be tested wider?

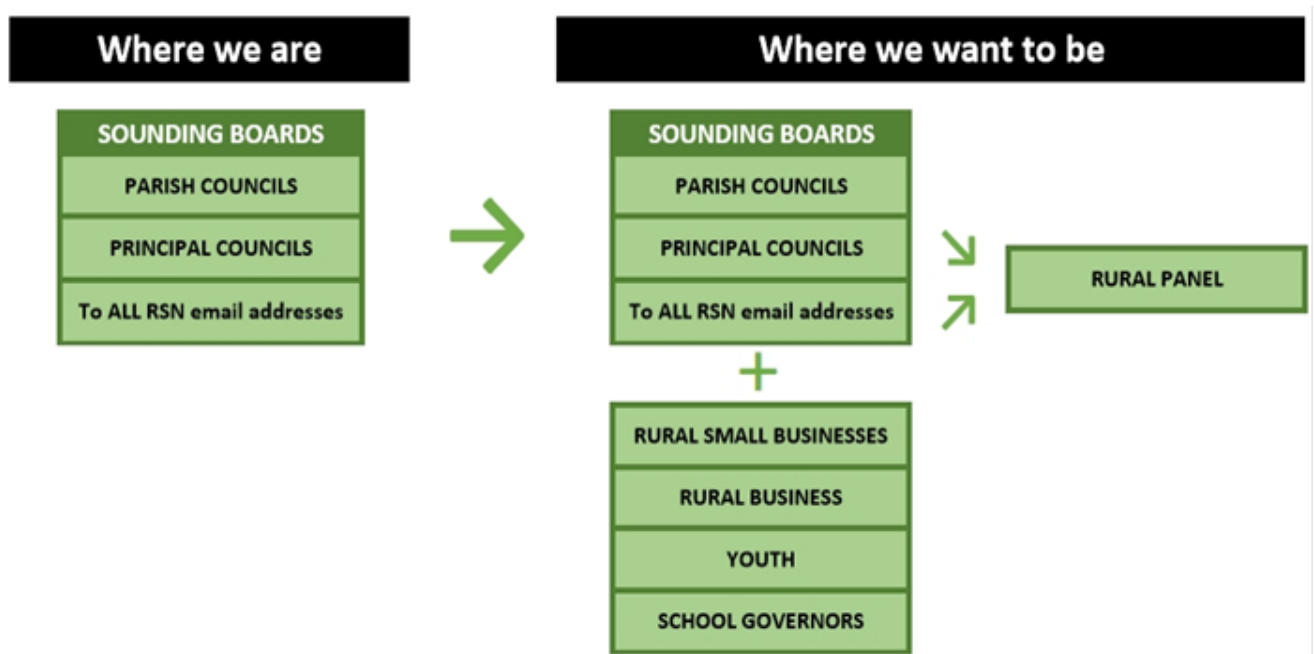
We email weekly to some 24,000 email addresses. For some of the suggested general surveys we could seek to use all of these people.

We currently have two sounding boards: Principal Councils (150) and Parish Councils (500+).

As said, we hope to establish further Sounding Boards:- Rural Business, Youth, Primary School Governors (because they are likely to be more representative of the 30/40 age groups than parish councillors who would on average normally fall into a higher age profile).

It is hoped that within a year these Sounding Boards could be established with some 300 people each.

That in turn could lead to a fully representative, statistically sound Rural Panel by 2018. All of this could help any process.



to become involved.

We would suggest that we might use the Rural Assembly (a Sub Sig of the RSN and therefore the LGA- which deals with rural issue as opposed to rural finance work) as the formal monitoring 'Committee' for all of this. We also suggest that to commence this process we have a session of the Assembly. After the survey results, i.e. one year on, they would have a second meeting to consider what further work they feel is necessary. Their third meeting, the following year, would be to receive the report from a Community 'Parliament' meeting and decide how they wish to take it forward (as well as starting the survey process all over again). This in our view would be a good additional role for the Rural

Assembly to have. It needs to grow strategically perhaps from just being a LGA meeting.

**GRAPH SHOWING HOW A TOPIC WOULD GO THROUGH THESE SUGGESTED PROCESSES SUGGESTED TO BE INCORPORATED IF THIS CONCEPT PROCEEDS.**

Additionally, it is suggested this is a continual or standing agenda item on the All Party Parliamentary Group for Rural Services to ensure continual liaison between the Community 'Parliament' procedures and Westminster rural advocates in the Elected Parliament.

The series of surveys would therefore establish the overall rural thought patterns. They would, it is suggested, be documented and presented to the Community 'Parliament' for consideration and documentary adoption.

A Community 'Parliament' meeting might take place maybe every two years maybe in Gloucester or Cheltenham if the University wished to be involved. They are of course both good locations for this process as both are to the centre of England and we feel this is an important consideration.

The Community Parliament could, we suggest, be put on the same week (early September) as the RSN Rural Conference potentially strengthening both events.

Decisions reached at the Rural Community 'Parliament' would be those of the Parliament.

They would not be binding on any organisation. Indeed from an RSN perspective our position may be different on occasions to that of the Parliament and if that occurs we see no harm in that.

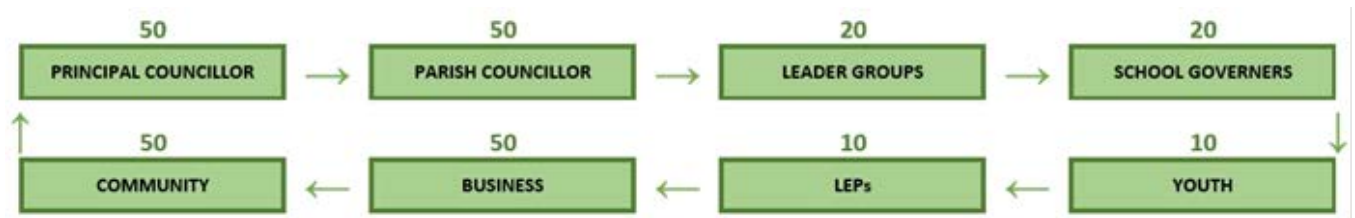
**THE COMMUNITY PARLIAMENT MEETING**

Who would attend the meeting?

There would, in our view, need to be a first-come-first-served rule as it is impossible to decide between people in such a loose leaf process.

There appear important blocks of organisations however. Invitations, therefore, might be allocated to specific blocks. Some of these blocks may be bigger than others. Obviously a potential attendance of around 300 might be able to be managed. Figures in advance of that obviously bring problems.

Our very initial stab to facilitate initial discussion might be something like this:-



## ADVANTAGES/DISADVANTAGES

Once again these are from our own perspective at this stage

We might identify them as follows:-

### ADVANTAGES

1. In theory every LGA authority with a significant rural area should wish to be involved and maybe pay a RSN SIG membership fee. (Definition of an optimist!)
2. Those involved, including those on the Sounding Boards, might feel they are playing a role (albeit a small one) in a quasi – ‘parliamentary’ process.
3. It achieves, we feel, an important rural process that should be of value when pursuing rural goals. How else for example do we get rural funding debates down to true community level?
4. It may be that it will strengthen the now to be Annual Conference.
5. It strengthens our Sounding Boards system.
6. Hopefully we could pull in a realistic financial sponsor for this work.
7. It will bring purpose and direction to the RSN Community Group in a way that no other mechanism would be able to do.

8. This achieves a form (albeit a thin one) of a Rural Parliament in England which some groups and some people have been calling for. Frankly it is quite difficult to see how else it will be established.
9. The word 'parliament' probably maximises the interest such a system would generate more than the use of any other word?
10. It creates another significant building block in informing the direction of our Manifesto ahead of General Elections.

### **DISADVANTAGES**

1. There is a little bit of a possible dilemma regarding the use of the word 'parliament' despite the use of quotations marks. It will not be the concept that some would be calling for and others may feel there can be only one such use of the word and that is at Westminster.

We would hope that softening or caveating the term used and involving the All Party Rural Services Group assists. Moving down the process to a Community position might be seen as novel.

2. We have clearly gone for a system that is financially light. However we will need to think through what we can offer without involving ourselves in a system that incurs additional unsupported cost.

### **BREXIT**

It's again important I think to touch on what the conference considered in this area and how it might have relevance to this discussion.

Tony Travers eloquently made the points about how 'rural' could come together and argue a case with the same force that others will do who feel in need of post Brexit support.

Organisations representing particular interests might be able to come together to establish bare bones of an agreed case. Arrangements like the Rural Coalition might be able to assist with that and RSN might wish to do some ground work here (see accompanying report). However as with the position in relation to the Rural Funding debate there are no current mechanisms that

capture record and publicise rural public views and sentiment on such major issues and it would clearly be a plus if that were possible. A system of Rural Sounding Boards, a Rural Panel, and a Rural Community 'Parliament' seems to the report author a massively strong card to be able to play as the current European Based Funding System fade. Tony Travers at the conference suggest that it could be 20 to 30 year before any real assessment of the impacts of leaving the EU could be determined with any certainty.

At this moment the interests of the Rural Economy are popularised under the names of individual organisations and activities. There doesn't seem to be a current mechanism to confirm the community backing that would assist them so very considerably over what are likely to be very difficult coming years, whatever sector is being considered. We hope the thoughts in this report can if they gain wide enough support really assist.

## **CONCLUSION**

We have had one preliminary meeting with Gloucestershire who have expressed initial interest in the project. Obviously, however, we need the views of the Executive before exploring any further.

If the project is supported in principle by the Executive, we would need to discuss with the other two universities in England who are taking a leading rural role (Newcastle and Exeter) and with other rural organisations (we suggest ACRE, NALC and Plunkett as well as the Rural England CIC). Obviously in discussion other people's priorities are tabled and discussion or negotiation takes place to establish the degree of agreed support. It has to be recognised from the outset that no organisation can take such a proposal forward in isolation and there will need to be give and take if it is to proceed.

Given that situation what would be considered as vital from the RSN perspective?

We think the following are imperatives for the RSN:

- A fulcrum role for the Rural Assembly at certain stages of the process.
- Our network being used for general consultation to 'backbone' the process (further enhancing we hope the value of our network)

- Our Sounding Boards and any Rural Panel being employed to gauge rural opinion to inform the agenda items for the event
- A block of at least 15% of the attendees at the event being reserved for Local Authority representatives.

We feel, if successful, a lot of our initiatives are brought together and gain much increased emphasis and relevance/impact from such an outcome.

Should we be able to take this proposal forward on that basis, we do feel the value of the RSN would be considerably enhanced by this process which we would recommend we explore further in the way we have outlined.

# ADDENDUM TO REPORTS TO THE BLUE SKY EXECUTIVE MEETING.

Although the current Government has made no statement about wishing to pursue the mass introduction of Unitary councils throughout England the subject is mooted from time to time by individual MPs and many commentators feel we will eventually see a government at some stage prescribing such a system throughout England. Although our main agenda is predicated on the basis of what is the current government policy of letting local authorities decide local solutions it might be remiss of us in blue skying to not discuss the total Unitary position at all.

The question that gets begged immediately is how many rural unitaries will get created. Will they all be County size? We feel we need to take possibly the worst scenario and assume all will be that way but the existing unitaries will survive.

This would leave us with some 40 Councils across areas of rural England.

They are:- Durham, Northumberland, Chester East, Chester and Cheshire West, Cumbria, Lancashire, East Riding, North Lincs, Derbyshire, Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, Rutland, Northants, Nottinghamshire, Herefordshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire, Central Bedfordshire, Bedford, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk, Suffolk, Buckinghamshire, E Sussex, W. Sussex, Hampshire, Kent, Oxfordshire, Surrey, Cornwall, Bath and NE Somerset, North Somerset, Surrey, Cornwall, Wiltshire, Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire, Somerset.

How would the thinking and proposals in our main papers stand up to such a major reorganisation? Obviously any proposals based on the present system cannot work in the context of one that has so few councils across England. If we could get all involved from all current members (a hope rather than a certainty) at the income take recommended in the report produces in 22/23 a total income of some c£226k as against £318k from the present 120 significantly rural councils plus the Assembly members.



In terms of residents split between those living in DEFRA classified rural and urban output areas the following situation emerges. (Figures given are thousands)

	<b>Rural population</b>	<b>Total population</b>	<b>Urban population</b>	<b>Rural + Hub Town population</b>	<b>Hub Town Population</b>
County Durham	231417	513242	281825	312568	81151
Northumberland	145096	316028	170932	223897	78801
Cheshire East	70607	370127	299520	145178	74571
Cheshire West and Chester	86301	329608	243307	86301	0
Cumbria	267819	499858	232039	375523	107704
Lancashire	241710	1171339	929629	292269	50559
East Riding of Yorkshire	146674	334179	187505	200468	53794
North Lincolnshire	75295	167446	92151	76403	1108
Derbyshire	208184	769686	561502	245255	37071
Lincolnshire	343265	713653	370388	482013	138748
Leicestershire	198576	650489	451913	281257	82681
Rutland	25847	37369	11522	37369	11522
Northamptonshire	220625	691952	471327	257522	36897
Nottinghamshire	213275	785802	572527	235298	22023
Herefordshire, County of	99142	183477	84335	120662	21520
Shropshire	175469	306129	130660	229157	53688
Staffordshire	205856	848489	642633	290670	84814
Warwickshire	180097	545474	365377	218500	38403
Worcestershire	149148	566169	417021	217144	67996
Central Bedfordshire	100272	254381	154109	148506	48234

Bedford	49104	157479	108375	49104	0
Cambridgeshire	292633	621210	328577	401415	108782
Essex	360605	1393587	1032982	472717	112112
Hertfordshire	128584	1116062	987478	178291	49707
Norfolk	428713	857888	429175	531509	102796
Suffolk	288721	728163	439442	435571	146850
Buckinghamshire	165740	505283	339543	196709	30969
East Sussex	136725	526671	389946	213058	76333
West Sussex	191574	806892	615318	204117	12543
Hampshire	288452	1317788	1029336	388628	100176
Kent	405100	1463740	1058640	488540	83440
Oxfordshire	218597	653798	435201	360910	142313
Surrey	152141	1132390	980249	215317	63176
Cornwall	326682	532273	205591	442029	115347
Bath and North East Somerset	37103	176016	138913	64239	27136
Wiltshire	223719	470981	247262	317285	93566
North Somerset	37238	202566	165328	78783	41545
Devon	384031	746399	362368	520389	136358
Dorset	168577	412905	244328	248160	79583
Gloucestershire	177017	596984	419967	252279	75262
Somerset	255263	529972	274709	378291	123028
	<b>8100994</b>	<b>25003944</b>	<b>16902950</b>	<b>10913301</b>	<b>2812307</b>

Surprisingly in only 18 of these 41 Councils does the rural population exceed the urban population (even allowing for Market or Hub towns being included in the rural totals )

We would need to yet further increase the suggested subs by some 40% to maintain our existing work programme or obviously more likely cut back by 90k per annum. The answer might lie in the middle if we could get enough income (from the private sector) into Rural England to fund say a further 45k of RSN existing officer recharge.

The urban to rural population split shows maybe that when looked across these 40 'shire' unitaries even allowing for market/hub towns being classified rural, the term shire as usually accepted is hardly applicable anymore as the total population came to virtually 17 million to 11 million as urban to rural based. The really bad news out of all this is just how marginalised rural becomes under a hard large unitary regime like this and I think most agree that something like this might happen as some stage in the future when labour next take power although maybe not with the shires retained so universally .

Trying to read the up side for RSN---- (a) I still think after their political allegiances those MPs who have rural areas will always be aware of that and seek or be willing to represent that in some-way. That is an undeniable strength.

(b) the more marginalised rural areas become the stronger maybe the case becomes for our continued existence in some form or other. I don't personally see the rural argument on finance being totally subsumed into any new CCN Unitary Group. There surely remains the need (and it still seems to be in the overall interest of the 40 projected Councils as well) that rural as a term fully recognised by the MPs and the public 'rural' gets voiced separately somehow?

All of this paper is of course currently total surmise. However it needs bearing in mind just in case.

The acid question that needs answering by the blue sky debate is what is it that would persuade all these authorities, either with more rural than urban population, or those having an urban 'majority' but still having in their area a significant rural patch, to want to specialise on rural issues by aligning with our organisation and its SIG. That truly is the 64 million dollar question we all have to try to answer - whatever the system introduced.

DBI.

