

MINUTES OF THE SPARSE RURAL AND RURAL SERVICES NETWORK EXECUTIVE OF MONDAY 27th JANUARY 2014

Present:- Cllr Cecilia Motley (Chairman) Cllr Robert Heseltine (First Vice Chair) Cllr Lewis Strange, Cllr Alex Folkes , Cllr Gordon Nicholson , Cllr Hilary Carrick , Cllr Peter Stevens, Richard Kirlew (Church in Wales - Community), Patrick Begg (National Trust)

Officers :- Graham Biggs (Chief Executive), David Inman , Kerry Booth, Dan Bates, David Dickinson.

Cllr Marion Overton a Vice Chair of the LGA and the Leader of the Independents Group at the LGA attended the meeting at her request.

Apologies:- Cllr R Begy; , Cllr Peter Thornton, Cllr Derek Haley, Barbara Shaw (Community), John Birtwistle (Transport), Stuart Horne (Business)

1. Chairs Remarks:-

As the new Chair Cecilia Motley paid tribute to the work carried out by her predecessor Cllr Roger Begy over many years. This work had been key to the development of the Group. She welcomed Cllr Folkes to his first meeting.

2. Minutes of the Executive of 16th of September 2013

Councillor Strange's apologies for absence were added to the minutes.

3. Minutes of The Rural Unitary Group

The minutes were received. Cllr Roger Begy was the first Group Chair. Helen Briggs of Rutland would be the first Chief Executive of this Group and she would assist the RSN team to put in place Lead Officers for the topics being covered together with officer teams in relation to those topics. This was clearly important in the evolution of the Group.

4. Local Government Association Structural Changes

An amended report was tabled following the LGA Special Assembly on the 23rd of January and consideration by the Chair and the Chief Executive of the outcomes. A discussion was had about the new Board system and the suggestion that the People and Places Board would hold a Conference which in some quarters had been described as a rural conference. However it was concluded that:-

- Because of the wide composition of the 'People and Places Board' it could not be expected to be able to give rural issues the concentrated focus that was desirable.
- With that Board comprising 20 people appointed politically there was a clear need to create a forum where every authority could feel it was inputting into rural policy and giving its view on rural issues as they arose.
- That it was important that the SIG that dealt with rural issues had an important role at any Conference whether that conference was titled a Rural Conference or had a slightly wider titling to reflect the width of membership of the authorities served by the People and Places Board.

The amended report was fully endorsed by the meeting but because of the importance of the changes being recommended it was felt appropriate to give members of the Executive

who were not at the meeting the opportunity to look at the amended report and to offer any comment they might wish to by Friday so that they felt included in this process.

The report, once it had been through this consultation process, would go to the Chief Executive of the LGA with a letter asking the LGA to support the recommendations.

The meeting on the 17th of March would have to be an Extraordinary Annual General Meeting as the constitution would need to be amended.

5. Budget Report 2013/14

The Chief Executive presented the Budget for the current year and the intended budget for 2014-15.

Both budgets were in balance.

The policy had been to expand the network, particularly in relation to RSP topic areas, and as a result the group balances would largely be used by the end of 2014-15. There was a need therefore to monitor the budget carefully and to ensure the intended income streams, particularly from these RSP groups, were being established so that these activities were self-funding by 2015-16 otherwise there would be a need for identification of material budget savings in that year.

6. Settlement Announcement

The draft Settlement had been announced just prior to Christmas. A revised ESSSA fund had been established of £9.5 m, less both in monetary size and width of beneficiary than the one asked for. The Fund had however found its way into the Settlement and would be automatically continued in future years and would not be subject to damping. The task now was to seek to materially increase the £9.5 million and to widen the fund (which RSN had asked to be renamed to Rural Service Delivery Grant) so that it related to sparse areas and not just to super sparse areas. A meeting had been had with Brandon Lewis the LG Minister to this end. He had indicated that he had been persuaded that there should be a DCLG/Defra study into the degree of additional rural cost and that he would like to see scheme improvement flow from there – assuming the study provided the evidence. RSN on the other hand felt there was already recognition in the settlement of sparse costs as a result of work undertaken in 2012 and all that was required was for the sums allocated to be unfrozen in whatever way was feasible. The RSN was to be consulted by DCLG on the specification for the study. The need for action to be taken at this time of severe cut backs was imperative and there was concern that a further study, although potentially helpful, would possibly delay matters until after the General Election.

7. Rural Fair Share Campaign

Numerous meetings had taken place with the MPs at the head of this Westminster based campaign. The MPs were meeting in the House on the day of the Executive to discuss their position and it was anticipated at least 26 MPs would already be involved in some way. The MPs would be calling for their meeting with Eric Pickles which had been postponed just before Christmas because of his illness to now take place so that they could decide their

position with regard to the Settlement debate which was due in the first two weeks of February.

8. 'Rural England' Report of the first meeting of the Steering Group

The Director outlined the position in relation to the Rural England Group. The Steering Group, comprising former CRC Commissioners and representatives from organisations with a strong rural interest, was steering the RSN research work to ensure that this work was clearly separated from the RSN's representational role. The group, at their first full meeting in November, had begun to identify their remit and broad targets. In a second meeting in early March they would give consideration to the projects outlined in the initial prospectus and would consider how approaches could be made to seek to secure funding, particularly in relation to attempts to involve sponsorship.

9. Patron

The Director outlined attempts being made to identify patrons for the organisation as a whole and for the Rural England initiative. Lord Taylor of Goss Moor had agreed to become one of four Lords sought (from all political quarters) but this was the one success so far. Patrons who were 'non political' were also being considered.

10. Progress on RSP Steering Groups

The Director reported on the position. Very material progress had been made.

The RSN Health Conference had established a Rural Health Network of 100 organisations involving representatives from Health organisations, GPs, Voluntary Sector, Pharmacists and some Local Authorities.

In relation to Housing matters we were now working in tandem with the 45 organisations belonging to the Rural Housing Alliance and alongside the Institute of Housing. A Housing Seminar was being staged on the 21st of February at Cheltenham at which HRH Princess Anne had agreed to speak.

Working with a group of 18 Police Commissioners and other organisations at a meeting in Leicester on the 24th of January, a National Rural Crime Group had been established. We had previously established a Rural Fire Group and a further meeting of that would take place in March.

11. Any Other Business - Networking for Real

Kerry Booth outlined the progress that has been made in relation to the e-network. This is a virtual forum for local authority members to join where officers can discuss key issues, share learning and ask questions of each other. The benefit is that they can network and share best practice ideas without leaving the office and therefore not use significant resources to do so.

There are currently 65 authorities that have joined this e-network and new tranches of officers will be invited in the coming months.

In addition work is being done to explore the possibility of setting up specific working groups for example on transformation to share ideas and work that has been progressed.