

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP ON RURAL SERVICES,
2.30 p.m. 1ST JULY, 2014 COMMITTEE ROOM 20, HOUSE OF COMMONS**

PRESENT

APPG Members Present in Person for Some or All of the Meeting

Graham Stuart MP
Anne Marie Morris MP
Andrew Bridgen MP
Bill Cash MP
Andrew Turner MP
Duke of Montrose

APPG Members not Present in Person But who were Represented

John Stevenson MP
Robert Walter MP
John Glen MP
Sir Nick Harvey MP
Julian Smith MP
Therese Coffey MP
Martin Vickers MP

Secretariat

Graham Biggs RSN
Dan Bates RSN

Others in Attendance

Elected Members from SPARSE-Rural Authorities

Cllr Cecilia Motley – Shropshire & RSN Chairman
Cllr Robert Heseltine – North Yorkshire CC & First Vice Chairman RSN
Cllr Derrick Haley – Mid Suffolk DC
Cllr Peter Bryant – North Somerset Council
Cllr Ken Potter – East Devon DC
Cllr Lewis Strange – Lincolnshire CC
Cllr Peter Stevens – St Edmundsbury BC
Cllr Geoff Holdcroft –Suffolk Coastal DC
Cllr Cameron Clark – Sevenoaks DC
Cllr Robert Carmichael – Mid Suffolk & Babergh DCs

Others

Sarah Lee – Countryside Alliance
Hugo Sumner – Office of Anne Marie Morris MP

1. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Only the APPG Members & the Secretariat were present for this item.

The Chairman stated that upon being appointed as a Defra Minister Dan Rogerson MP had resigned as a Vice Chairman. He had been replaced by Sir Nick Harvey MP. The Chairman further stated that all of the existing Office Holders were prepared to be re-elected and no other nominations had been received.

AGREED

That the following members be elected for the next year:-

Chairman – Graham Stuart MP
Vice Chairmen – Grahame Morris MP
 - Sir Nick Harvey MP
 - Lord Dear QPM
Treasurer – Rory Stewart MP
Secretary – Baroness Byford DBE

2. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The notes of the meeting held on 14th April 2014 were agreed as a correct record.

3. LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE

The Chairman stated that the proposed meeting with the Local Government Minister, Brandon Lewis earlier that day had had to be postponed (now 15th July).

Dan Bates of the RSN gave a presentation on the present position and what had been achieved so far through the Rural Fairs Shares Campaign and the RSN's own work/lobbying. A copy of the presentation slides is attached to these minutes.

Dan Bates reported that the steering group in respect of the DCLG/Defra study had met that morning. The Consultants (LGFutures) were seeking evidence of the cost drivers in respect, primarily, of Adult Social Care, Transport (including concessionary bus fares), Refuse Collection and Environmental Services.

Dan further reported that he had developed a methodology for dealing with the question of Exeter (for example) being urban but within the rural county of Devon. This should rebut one of the lines often used by Ministers.

Graham Stuart requested that the Rural Fair Shares Campaign members be sent a "leaflet" detailing the new terminology being used.

The elected members from SPARSE-Rural Local Authorities expressed their extreme disappointment with the small number of APPG members in attendance and felt that MPs did not fully appreciate the difficulties rural councils were facing and the impact there would be on front line services. Cllr Robert Heseltine said that North Yorkshire CC had to cut £174M out of its budget and whole swathes of rural communities will be left without public transport. Cllr Cameron Clark said that Sevenoaks

was 90% green belt and therefore would gain very little from either New Homes Bonus or retained Business Rates (it was also losing a major employer).

Graham Stuart commented that redistribution of resources in times of falling budgets was extremely difficult, politically. He further stated that the most that could be hoped for in respect of 2015/16 was a small increase in Rural Service Delivery Grant – Ministers would be aware that most Conservative and Liberal Democrat MPs would be unlikely to vote against the settlement just months before the General Election.

Cllr Peter Stevens said that many, many people felt there was a disconnect between Westminster and Rural Communities. In his view all political parties should be pressed to give a political commitment to supporting the countryside and rural communities.

Andrew Turner MP commented that Labour was proposing to move money from London to “City Regions” and it was important to understand what this would mean for rural areas. The general consensus was it would lead to enriched cities and their immediate hinterland and further impoverished rural areas.

There followed a general discussion as to campaign tactics for this year. Graham Stuart said that whilst pressure would continue to be put on Ministers, including through fringe events at the Conservative and Liberal Democrat party conferences, the timing – just ahead of the General Election – was wrong to believe any major change could be achieved. He said that parliamentary numbers and parliamentary arithmetic was key to a renewed campaign after the election. It was essential that Councils sought to get their MP to join and actively support the Rural Fair Shares Group both now and following the election.

The meeting closed at 3.40 p.m.