



**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, London
SW1P 2DE**

Date: Monday 12th June 2017

Time: 11-30 a.m. to 2.30pm

Please note change of venue as the LGA is not available for meetings for the coming months .

The meeting is being held at the City of Westminster Archives, 10 St Ann's St, Westminster, London SW1P 2DE. Visitor information and a map for the venue can be found in the links below:

[City of Westminster Archives Centre Visitor Information](#)

[City of Westminster Archives Centre Map](#)

1. Apologies for Absence

2. Notes of the Previous Meeting

Held on Monday 13th March 2017 to consider any relevant items.
(Attachment 1)

3. Notes of the Main Rural Assembly Meeting

Held on 10th April 2017 to consider any relevant items.
(Attachment 2)

4. Budget

Budget Report with actual to End May, 2017
(Attachment 3)

Providing a voice for rural communities and service providers

David Inman, Director Kilworthy Park, Tavistock, Devon PL19 0BZ
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5. Notification of Resignation from RSN Executive

Cllr Gordon Nicolson OBE has resigned as Vice Chair (North) and a replacement is to be considered.

Cllr Lewis Strange has resigned as Vice Chair (County 1) and a replacement is to be considered.

6. General Election 2017:

(a) Analysis of Main Party Manifesto's against RSN Priorities/2015 Manifesto (Attachment 4)

(b) The RSN's "Calls on Government from our 2015 Manifesto - what are the RSN's immediate calls to Ministers?" (Attachment 4 (a))

(c) Rural Coalition Statement 2017 - **PLEASE KEEP THIS AS CONFIDENTIAL UNTIL IT IS LAUNCHED BY THE COALITION**
(Attachment 4 (b))

(d) ACRE - rural asks for the next government
(Attachment 4 (c))

7. Report to RSN Executive – ‘Seeking to get backing in The House of Lords’

(Attachment 5)

8. Report to RSN Executive – A Virtual Rural Community Parliament

(Attachment 6)

9. Report to RSN Executive – Categories of RSN Operation

(Attachment 7)

Attachment 7(a) - Brief for Rural Services Community

Attachment 7(b) - Brief for Rural Assembly

Attachment 7(c) - Brief for RSN Associate

Attachment 7(d) - Brief for Rural Services Partnership

Attachment 7(e) - Brief for SPARSE Rural

10. Update on “Vulnerability” discussions with Energy and Water Providers

11. Update on BREXIT discussions to be held on 13th June

(Note prepared by Professor Mark Shucksmith attached

(Attachment 8)

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12. Annual Rural Conference in 2017 : Draft Programme attached

[Link to Booking Form and Agenda](#) (Attachment 9)

13. Agendas for the coming meetings :-

- (a) SPARSE Rural (which members have indicated will be in effect a finance conference for Finance Officers and Finance Portfolio Holders) – (Tuesday 27th June)

14. Any Other Business.

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**MINUTES OF THE SPARSE RURAL AND RURAL SERVICES NETWORK EXECUTIVE,
MONDAY 13th MARCH 2017 HELD AT CITY OF WESTMINSTER ARCHIVES CENTRE,
10 ST ANN'S STREET, LONDON**

Present: - Cllr Cecilia Motley (Chairman), Cllr Janet Duncton, Cllr Peter Thornton, Cllr Peter Stevens, Cllr Gordon Nicolson OBE, Revd Richard Kirlew

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

Apologies:- Cllr Robert Heseltine (First Vice Chairman), Cllr Derrick Haley, Cllr Philip Sanders, Cllr Adam Paynter, Cllr Lewis C Strange, Cllr Sue Sanderson, John Birtwistle (First Group), Kayleigh Wainwright (UK Youth), Kerry Booth RSN

1. Notes of Previous Executive Meeting

Agreed as a correct record with Cllr Peter Thornton added to the Minutes.

2. Notes of Last Main Meeting Monday 30th January 2017

Agreed mainly as a correct record. Amendment of mistake in Minute 10, delete Executive and insert Rural Assembly.

3. Budget

Position as detailed by Graham Biggs. The Report was accepted – it was regarded as a relatively healthy budget situation. Graham detailed the Service Level Agreement position concerning the NRCN Service Level Agreement where some uncertainty existed.

Membership under the two RSN's headings now stood at a total of 147.

4. Communication Strategy

The Lexington Report was accepted by the Executive.

In future there would be three types of Press Release:

- (1) **Strategic/Campaigns** – prepared in conjunction with Lexington. There may be one or two of these each year - targeted particularly at the nationals. There was provision in the budget of £6000a year for this.
- (2) **Periodic** – eight a year full releases in conjunction with Johann Tasker contract on a topic of particular relevance.
- (3) **Reactive Pieces** – one, brief comment piece stating the RSN position, through Johann Tasker at least every fortnight to make the network's presence felt more frequently.
- (4) **Specific Local Government Press Releases** – targeted at the Municipal Journal and the LGA First Magazine. Again, Johann Tasker would be employed.

In each case (other than Reactive) Councils' Media Officers would be given the release on a 'not for publication before' basis circa 24 hours before release so they aware of the issue in case they are contacted and also asked to use in their own local context. Each of the Press Releases would in future, as recommended by Lexington, include at the bottom the relevant piece outlining the key strategic message behind the RSN's position.

Additionally each Press Release would include the list of Authorities in membership by "Region" and the email address of the Authorities' media contact would be included...

The position would need discussion with Johann to make sure a consistent situation was achieved.

The Executive looked at what Lexington was offering. It was decided to buy the list of media contacts, which it was understood were established in relevant sections. It was also decided to buy the updating services for this list but only updating once a year.

The 'Audit of Events' and the 'Calendar of Facts' would not be purchased but we would try to replicate something internally through Kerry.

The 4 suggested key messages were agreed.

It was decided that Johann needed to fulfil a far more proactive multi- media role in terms of the Rural Conference and this would be discussed with him.

The whole Communication Strategy to be reviewed in 12 months' time to assess effectiveness

5. LG Finance Settlement

Graham Biggs detailed the situation which revolved around the four year settlement.

The Rural MPs had had a lengthy discussion with the Secretary of State who had agreed that the current position was inequitable to rural Local Authorities. He had assured the MPs that the situation would be rectified during the transformation to a Business Rate driven system, aspects of which he had agreed were now being brought forward to the 2019/2020 settlement. He had pointed out that in the LG consultation in relation to the 4 year settlement, 97% of Authorities in replying to the accepting the settlement and submitting their 4 year strategies showing how they could cope with the position..

Given this position, the Rural MPs advised:

- (a) That they concentrate on monitoring the needs assessment work and on the promised 19/20 changes.
- (b) The Local Authorities themselves petition Government and their MPs in a common letter prepared in the summer and lodged in the autumn of 2017.

(The MPs indicated that the absence of Local Authority lobbying of them over the 17/18 settlement had led them to not challenging the final settlement more robustly).

6. Update on 'Vulnerability' discussion with Water and Energy deliverers/providers.

A series of exploratory meetings had been held on this one to see whether it was possible to form a group of Rural England supporters from the Power and Water industries who would work with RSN and Rural England on the questions arising from Vulnerability/Safeguarding and the Priority Services Register.

It was proving challenging to try to establish a common position as the work areas had evolved in different ways. However the discussions were continuing and a further meeting was due on Thursday 16th March.

7. Update on Brexit discussions held on 20th February with CCN and DCN

The general position was detailed by Graham Biggs. Executive members emphasised the need to establish the global figure of how much Rural Areas received from Europe currently so that a true plumb line could be established. Officers commented on this and although different figures might be achieved from differing viewpoints – the importance of this particular exercise was accepted.

Cllr Nicolson reported that Eden was trying to establish such a figure in respect of its District. He agreed he would keep RSN informed both in respect of the amount and the various components which had been applied to establish it. Obviously, if such methodology could be achieved all Authorities in RSN could be encouraged to undertake a similar exercise.

8. Agendas for forthcoming meetings:

(a) Rural Social Care, Health and Vulnerability Committee

This committee was designed to involve particularly Unitary and County Councils in some ways, although District/Borough Councils in RSN Membership could be members of this Committee, therefore it was a replacement for the Unitary Group initiative. Due to the County/Unitary Council elections, it was felt prospective members might be unable to give the first meeting's initiative the attention it deserved. It had been decided therefore to not proceed on the 10th of April but to introduce the Committee at the AGM meeting in November.

It was decided that in terms of reporting lines the Committee would report to the Rural Assembly.

(b) The Rural Assembly on the 10th of April would commence at 11.30 a.m. Items would include SORS, Vulnerability, Brexit, Panels and Sounding Boards.

(c) The Sparse Rural meeting on the 10th of July would be in conference style, involving representative Councillors but also Finance Officers and Finance Portfolio Holders.

9. Total involvement of all rural areas in England in the work of the Rural Services Network.

The work of the Commission for Rural Communities and the Countryside Agency obviously had involved and been relevant to all rural areas no matter in which Local Authorities they were situate.

Somehow, as there was no longer any Commission for Rural Communities or Countryside Agency (or indeed LGA Rural Commission) there was a need to involve as many Local Authorities as possible in supporting the important work of the RSN. The difficulty was that unlike the Commission and the Countryside Agency, involvement had to equate to a financial input of some size by the Authority. This was the task in hand.

It was agreed the exercise would involve all Authorities who had over 20 rural output areas or more than 3,000 rural residents. (Tables were presented to members together with an indication of the amount being sought for Network support in accordance with the established charging structures).

It was felt that an approach signed by all Local Authority members of the Executive, giving their email address and phone number would be best - making it as informal as it could be.

Members looked at the proposed documentation and were generally happy with it. However, they felt that boxes showing RSN achievements to date and further targets that could be achieved if the financial support scheme set out could be established.

The work involved would be attempted over 12 months in ten defined tranches of approach. Documentation, it was agreed, would be varied to meet local circumstances.

Those being approached would be given two options:

- (a) Joining now to support the initiative immediately.
- (b) Taking advantage of free involvement for 12 months after which invoicing of the appropriate amount would take place, unless at a defined previous stage Authorities had indicated that they did not wish to remain involved.

10. Business rates retention

The paper prepared by Pixel Financial Management concerning the latest technical consultation paper on 100% business rate retention was discussed. It was agreed that Pixel would be requested to prepare a short formal response.

The Chief Executive presented information from two PowerPoint presentations given at a recent joint meeting on business rate retention between DCN, CCN and RSN. Copies of these two presentations are attached.

It was noted that the additional resources directed to adult social care, announced in the Chancellor's recent budget, would equate to an additional £18.20 per head in rural areas and £20.06 in urban areas in the first year rising to £67.88 and £70.42 respectively in 2019/20. Due to the complexity of this issue, it was agreed that letters would be written to MPs rather than issuing a press release on this matter.

11. Schools funding (F40 Group Briefing Note to MPs)

It was agreed that a RSN response would be drafted based on the key points raised in the Briefing Note.

12. Rural Health Conference

It was noted that the conference had gone well with a variety of interesting presentations. It had made a small financial loss

13. Annual Rural Conference

It was agreed that the critical themes of health and the economy should be incorporated into the conference and that a wider audience should be encouraged beyond RSN members. Members were requested to submit thoughts on the central theme and potential presentations to enable a draft programme to be developed.

14. Industrial Strategy White Paper Briefing Note

The report was noted and endorsed.

Notes of the last RURAL ASSEMBLY Sub SIG (incorporating SPARSE Rural Members, Rural Assembly Members and the Rural Services Partnership Meeting)

Title:	RURAL ASSEMBLY Sub SIG (incorporating SPARSE Rural Members, Rural Assembly Members and the Rural Services Partnership Meeting)
Date:	Monday 10 April 2017
Venue:	City of Westminster Archives Centre, 10 St Ann's Street, London SW1P 2DE

Attendance

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

Item	Decisions and actions
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1 Apologies for absence

The Chairman, Cllr Cecilia Motley, RSN was unable to attend the meeting. Cllr Peter Stephens (one of the RSN Vice Chairs) took the chair for the meeting.

Members noted the full list of apologies would be included with the minutes.

2 Minutes of the last Rural Assembly meeting - 21 November 2016

The minutes from the last meeting held on 21 November were approved. Members noted that apologies from Cllr Jane Mortimer and Richard Kirlew had not been recorded in those minutes.

3 Minutes of the last Executive meeting - 13 March 2017

The minutes from the meeting held on 13 March were accepted. Reference to West Lindsey's proposed motion to campaign on issues of GPs in rural areas had been omitted from the note of the meeting but members were informed that work was in progress and that a note had recently been sent to local authorities.

4 The State of Rural Services Report (SORS) 2016

Members received a presentation from Brian Wilson (Brian Wilson Associates) whilst Graham Biggs (RSN) provided some background on the RSN's priorities in respect of the issues covered in the report.

In the past, The Rural Services Network had produced a series of narrower based reports in the past. With the establishment of Rural England C I C and many more stakeholders now on board the range and depth of the SORS report had been

increased significantly

The launch of the Report in the House of Commons had been very successful and lots of excellent media coverage secured.

Members heard about recent statistics and trends with the aim of bringing together existing sources of evidence. The aim would be to produce an updated report every 2-3 years with updated information (and possibly some new services) in order to inform rural debate and provide independent research advice.

Members noted common issues – in particular the fact that nearly all services in rural areas are experiencing cutbacks with third sector service provision expanding. There were major concerns about lack of rural bus services and closing bank branches and the pressure on the demand for services by the ageing rural population, such as Adult Social Care. The Group heard about possible implications for access and choice and noted the lack of recorded data around certain issues.

Members raised various points:

- Community shops are an asset in rural areas – particularly in bringing the community together with enterprises such as coffee shops, although recruiting volunteers was difficult in some case.
- A member questioned accuracy of figures showing the rural population and felt that these were greater than shown as there were rural areas located within metropolitan and urban areas. It was agreed that it was not an easy task to identify a definite number because of National definitions and the geographical level at which national data was available. The SORS used the lowest geographical level available
- Engagement of parish/town councils and religious institutions were vital and should be brought into community considerations more than is currently the case in some areas.
- Isolation is a major issue particularly around mental ill health which often go undiagnosed in rural areas. Members agreed that they would like to see a Minister appointed with responsibilities including rural isolation and vulnerability
- They discussed community led housing schemes and difficulties in recruiting volunteers / teams, particularly those with the correct expertise.

Members agreed that it was a good evidence based report and an excellent resource of information, but noted cuts to local authority research departments would be mean it may not be used as much as it should be.

Mr Biggs agreed many issues were due to lack of funding and the importance of finding solutions from local people. The RSN would advise on existing barriers and this kind of report would provide an opportunity to lobby for funding to be directed towards rural services. He referred to the Green paper on Social Care and the need to make sure that the rural element is included.

Action – An RSN report be brought to the next meeting “reading across” the various sections of the SORS report and seeking to answer the “So What?” questions. The next Rural Sounding Board Survey would be designed around getting information and case studies to support the production of this report:
ACTION RSN OFFICERS

5 **Brexit**

Brexit – Mr Biggs provided a brief update on current discussions with other stakeholders and outlined agreed objectives. Members noted that a round table discussion was planned for June to see if sectorial interests have enough in common to take forward and build a national consensus on the work needed. There were concerns regarding regulations and quotas – particularly in the farming industry and difficulties in predetermining how money will be distributed. Members discussed current bureaucracy and concerns about more vulnerable areas where funding may be cut.

Results of the discussions will be on the next agenda.

6 **Rural Vulnerability**

David Inman (RSN) discussed problems of isolation and the importance of providing firm directions for dealing with these issues. Rural social care, health and vulnerability were key areas of concern and it was felt that this subject should be a constant item on future agendas.

Members noted the report and agreed the recommendation to create a vulnerability issues list which would feed into and link common issues with relevant bodies. It was agreed that the 2018 conference (at a special session before the Conference proper) should be used to bring together organisations such as citizens-advice, age uk etc. in order to discuss rural considerations and work together. Members also heard of plans to get a rural vulnerability day once a year in Westminster, engaging with Lords and MPs – starting in autumn this year. They agreed the importance of supporting other related schemes and noted that although there are lots of services available, there are issues around knowledge and accessibility.

Members noted the report.

7 **A Rural Panel and the Rural Sounding Boards**

Rural Panel and Rural Sounding Board – Members received the report from the Corporate Director which outlined aims for setting up a Board for dialogue and consultation within various sectors.

Members agreed to disseminate information in order to recruit interested parties. They noted Rural England have already approached University of Gloucestershire to try to enlist input from lay persons to federations of small businesses.

Action – RSN to circulate information leaflet to members in due course for distribution in order to enlist uptake.

8 **RSN Communication Strategy**

Members noted the Lexington PLC Toolkit, attached to this item, which stated that in future, press releases should include a list of authorities in membership. The Executive had recently accepted the toolkit and had agreed to review future strategies and outcomes in a year's time.

9 Total involvement of all rural areas in England in the work of the Network

Members noted the importance of getting all rural areas to work with the Rural Services Network in order to raise the budget required to be able to do more work. They noted challenges in recruiting and discussed opportunities for enlisting associate members. Members agreed to promote the Network as much as possible.

10 Budget Report

Members noted current budget figures and its entire dependence on payment of subscriptions. This does not allow a lot for contingency funding and so gaining popularity for the rural conference was important in order to encourage a bigger membership and therefore a bigger budget for RSN work.

11 Sounding Board Reports and Future Meetings

Mr Wilson and Mr Biggs agreed to take forward and develop comments to be included in questions for a Sounding Board exercise this summer with the member and parish councils together with suggested case studies. would report further at the next meeting.

Members briefly discussed the feasibility of inviting relevant Ministers to future planned meetings but understood there were issues around timing, availability and location. Colleagues from RSN agreed to feature this in planning dates within the 2018/19 programme, but asked that the group note cases were being put forward to Ministers regardless of their attendance.

12 Rural Weighting allowance for GPs

Cllr Owen Bierley, West Lindsey BC summarised the background to the initiative which addressed the importance of continuity of care in rural communities and availability of access no longer adequate for needs of patients. Recruiting and retaining GPs was difficult and the Government needed to address this. The obvious way forward would be to have a rural weighting allowance and he asked that members support the motion. The meeting was in unanimous support.

Mr Biggs confirmed that the RSN is supporting this campaign and recently contacted members regarding this issue and were hoping for positive responses.

13 Rural Services Network Events

Graham Biggs outlined future Rural Services Network Events. He asked colleagues to note that the theme for the Rural Conference, being held on 5/6 September in Cheltenham, had been changed to Rural Economy due to an event re Rural Health being held by LGA and Public Health England the week following the conference. Members noted the revised proposed agenda.

Feedback from the recent Rural Health Conference had been good with another hoped for next year. Although there had been a small loss after overheads it had been a good opportunity for networking.

Members noted arrangements for the Rural Housing Conference organised by the National Housing Federation to be held on 7 July in St Martin in the Fields, London. More details to follow in due course

14 Report on the RSP Service Groups

The Group received verbal updates and discussed relevant issues around the various RSP Service Groups.- Housing-Transport-Crime- Fire- Health.

15 Any other Business

Any other Business – There was no other business and the meeting was closed.

The next meeting (SPARSE Rural) will be held on Monday 10 July – City of Westminster Archives Centre, London. It was hoped it would largely be in the form of a Seminar.

Appendix A

In attendance

Name	Name
Graham Biggs	RSN
David Inman	RSN
Andy Dean	RSN
Chris Cowcher	ACRE
Jennifer Shaw, Housing Strategy Manager	Ashford Borough Council
Cllr Neil Butters	Bath & North East Somerset Council
Brian Wilson	Brian Wilson Associates
Dan Reynolds, Director South East	British Association for Shooting & Conservation
Cllr Geraldine Carter	Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council
Cllr Paul Diviani	East Devon District Council
Steve Blatch, Corporate Director	North Norfolk District Council
Cllr Malcolm Leeding MBE	Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils
Cllr Yvonne Peacock	Richmondshire District Council
Ian Hunter	Rural Cultural Forum

Cllr Cameron Clark	Sevenoaks District Council
Cllr Michael Hicks	South Hams District Council
Cllr Jeremy Savage	South Norfolk Council
Cllr Peter Stevens	St Edmundsbury Borough Council
Cllr Jane March	Tunbridge Wells District Council
Cllr Owen Bierley	West Lindsey District Council
Ian Knowles, Director of Resources	West Lindsey District Council

Apologies received

Name	Organisation
Cllr Cecilia Motley	RSN
Cllr Robert Heseltine	RSN
Cllr Derek Haley	RSN
Kerry Booth, Assistant Chief Executive	RSN
Karen Henriksen CPFA	Derbyshire Dales District Council
Cllr Eddie Tomlinson	Durham County Council
Cllr Mrs I Seccombe	Warwickshire County Council
Phil Kirby, Chief Executive	Broadland Council
Lesley Tucker	Teignbridge District Council
Terry Collins, Chief Executive	Durham County Council
Cllr Roy Miller	Barnsley Council
Cllr Adam Paynter	Cornwall Council
Cllr Martin Gannon	Gateshead Council
Peter Shipp	EYMS Group Ltd
Cllr Dr Ken Pollock	Worcestershire County Council
John Birtwistle, Head of Policy	UK Bus
Cllr Brian Long	Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk
Judith Weaver	Stroud District Council
Cllr Bob Adams	South Kesteven District Council
Cllr Lewis Strange	Lincolnshire County Council
Cllr Mrs Diana Holl-Allen	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Suzanne Clear	National Farmers Union
Cllr Michael Rickman	Harborough District Council
Cllr Andre Gonzalez De Savage	Northamptonshire County Council
Kate Cross	Citizens Advice
Cllr Richard Sherras	Ribble Valley Borough Council
Cllr Gary Sumner	Swindon Borough Council
Cllr Samantha Dixon	Cheshire West & Chester Council

Neil Duncan-Jordan	National Pensioners Convention
Cllr David Ireton	Craven District Council
Cllr Louise Gittins	Cheshire West & Chester Council
Cllr Peter Thornton	South Lakeland District Council
Cllr Glynn Gilfoyle	Nottinghamshire County Council
Jenny Poole	Cotswold District Council
Cllr Les Kew	Bath & North East Somerset Council
David Henley, Principal	Easton & Otley College
Lianna Etkind	Campaign for Better Transport
Angela Kitching	Age UK
Hannah Pearce	Age UK
Stewart Horne	Business Information Point
Jill Penn, Head of Finance	Broadland District Council
Debbie Lindon, Divisional Coordinator	Age UK
Cllr Baroness Redfern	North Lincolnshire Council
Claire Walters, Chief Executive	Bus Users UK
Nic Millington FRSA, Chief Executive	Rural Media
Jo Lancaster , Chief Executive	Huntingdonshire Council
Cllr Simon Edwards	South Cambridgeshire District Council
Paul Fitzgerald	South Somerset District Council
Cllr Kevin Barker	Wakefield Council
Katherine Steel, Assistant Director	Babergh & Mid Suffolk District Councils
Cllr Hugh McCarthy	Wycombe District Council
William Benson, Chief Executive	Tunbridge Wells Council
Matt Prosser, Chief Executive	North Dorset District Council
Cllr Adrian Hardman	Worcestershire Council
Cllr Margaret Squires	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr Sue Sanderson	Cumbria County Council
Cllr Gordon Nicolson OBE	Eden District Council
Cllr John Clarke	Gedling Borough Council

Cllr Gwilym Butler	Shropshire Council
Duncan Ellis, Head of Finance	North Norfolk District Council
Cllr Elizabeth Sneath	Lincolnshire County Council
Cllr Neil Butters	Bath & North East Somerset Council

RSN (INCOME & EXPENDITURE) 2017/18 WITH							
ACTUAL TO END MAY							
NB RED FIGURES IN ESTIMATES COLUMNS ARE RECOMMENDED CHANGES SINCE LAST BUDGET REPORT							
				ACTUAL	ACTUAL TO	ESTIMATE	
				2016/17	END	2017/18	
					MAY		
INCOME				£	£	£	
Balances at Bank B/Fwd net of o/s cheques				12304			
GENERAL BALANCE						13755	
VOLUNTARY CONTRIBUTIONS BALANCE						8500	
DEBTORS FROM PREVIOUS YEAR (NET OF VAT)							
Rural Assembly held by NKDC at year end					2873	2873	
Rural Assembly Outstanding					300	800	
RSP Subscriptions					990	990	
Rural Crime Network			8012	5918	5918	5918	
Rural Health Conference					175	175	
Housing Group Related			1100				
Coastal Communities Alliance (Gross)			1037	1037	1037	1037	
Fire Group			100				
RHA Website Development Contributions			1300				
Subscriptions							
SPARSE Rural/Rural Assembly			252155	141818	283182		
SPARSE/RA subs held by NKDC at month end				58459			
2016 VOLUNTARY CONTRIBS re BUSINESS RATES			51713				
CCN Contrib to Finance Study			3863				
RSP			10042	7175	10720		
Commercial Partner First Group Buses			10000		10000		

					ACTUAL TO	ACTUAL TO	ESTIMATE		
					END	END	2017/18		
					MARCH	MAY			
					£	£	£		
Subscriptions from Rural Health Group									
Income from Rural Housing Group					6895	5900	7390		
Income from Fire & Rescue Group					2480	795	2480		
OTHER INCOME									
Conferences/Seminars									
Rural Conference Income					16365				
Rural Conference Surplus							5000		
Rural Health Conference					4214				
Service Level Agreements									
Recharges ro Rural Crime Network (3 months 17/18)					20833		2438		
Contras re RCN@					34642				
Recharges to Rural England CIC Back Office Support £1200)					1200		1200		
Coastal Communities Alliance Gross)					3113		4149		
Contributions to RHA Website Development					450		408		
Miscellaneous									
Contras					2605	500			
VAT									
VAT Refund					20337	5126			
VAT Received					11823	3315			
TOTAL INCOME					476583	234381	361015		

					ACTUAL TO	ACTUAL TO	ESTIMATE		
					END	END	2017/18		
					MARCH	MAY			
					£	£	£		
Conferences/Seminars									
Rural Conference					11398				
Rural Conference 2017					474				
Rural Conference Drinks Reception					1144		1300		
Rural Health Network & Conference					4872				
Seminar Costs					861		600		
Service Level Agreements									
RCN -CONTRAS @					33898				
RCN Non Recoverable Travel & Subsistence					1027		0		
Rural Housing Group (RHG)					2050		1800		
RHG Website Maint							408		
Rural England CIC to re-charge)					977				
Rural Inland CIC transfer of part of First Group Support					7000		7000		
APPG/Rural Issues Group Costs					579		600		
Rural England/Vulnerability Service Contrib					3000		3000		
Business Expenses									
RSN Online etc.					19927		18239		
Database Update (media contracts)					2235				
Website Upgrade						2850	5350		
Ongoing Website Updates									
Travel and Subsistence					18509	2487	18000		
Print, Stat,e mail, phone & Broadband@					4015	492	3800		
Meeting Room Hire					1643		1200		
Website and Data Base software etc					3627	119	4000		
Rent of Devon Office & Associated Costs					4597	1265	9000		
Accountancy Fees					720	164	750		
NKDC Services					2128		2145		
Companies House Fees					13		13		
Bank Charges					84	7	90		
IT Equipment &Support & Other Capital					985		1000		
Insurance					567		600		
Corporation Tax					72		376		
Membership of Rural Coalition					200		200		
Refunds of Overpayments/ Contras@					1439	500			

				ACTUAL TO END MARCH £	ACTUAL TO END MAY £	ESTIMATE 2017/18 £		
ARREARS - PREVIOUS FINANCIAL YEAR								
Rural Housing Alliance				2675	100	792		
Contract for Service (ADMIN)				1349	1775	1775		
Contracts for Service (CORP MAN)				2427	1100	1100		
Communications					500	500		
Rose Regeneration				2000				
Seminars					71	71		
PIXEL					5203	5203		
B Wilson Arrears				3525	3525	3525		
RSN Online arrears				4840	9874	9874		
Travel and Subsistence arrears				675	718	718		
Printing, Phone and Stationery (arrears)				199		0		
Office Service Charge						5000		
Data base etc (arrears)				355	1130	1130		
Bank Charges				9	8	8		
Rural England				155				
TOTAL EXPENDITURE				454328	63525	346934		
BALANCE CARRIED FORWARD						14081		
BALANCE AT BANK 1/4/16				12304				
ADD INCOME 2016/17				464279				
LESS EXPENDITURE 2016/17				-454328				
BALANCE AT BANK 31/3/17				22255				
GENERAL BALANCE				13755				
VOLUNTARY CONTRIBUTIONS BALANCE				8500				

The Planning System	
Labour	A Labour government will properly resource and bolster planning authorities with fuller powers to put people and communities at the heart of planning. We will update compulsory purchase powers to make them more effective as a tool to drive regeneration and unlock planned development.
Conservative	Give councils powers to intervene where developers do not act on their planning permissions;
Lib Dem	Scrap exemptions on smaller housing development schemes from their obligation to provide aordable homes, and strengthen the hand of local government to prevent large developers renegeing on their commitments. Require local plans to take into account at least 15 years of future housing need – focusing on long-term development and community needs. Create a community right of appeal in cases where planning decisions go against the approved local plan.

Public Transport	
Labour	Under the Conservatives, bus fares have risen and services have been cut. Labour will introduce regulations to designate and protect routes of critical community value, including those that serve local schools, hospitals and isolated settlements in rural areas.
Conservative	We will invest in more low-emission buses, as well as supporting audio-visual displays for bus passengers and community minibuses for rural areas poorly served by public transport. We will increase services on our main lines and commuter routes, and launch new services to places which are poorly served or host major new housing projects. We will continue to support local authorities to expand cycle networks and upgrade facilities for cyclists at railway stations. We will introduce significantly discounted bus and train travel for apprentices to ensure that no young person is deterred from an apprenticeship due to travel costs.
Lib Dem	Introduce a new Young Person’s Bus Discount Card, for young people aged 16–21, giving a two-thirds discount on bus travel – allowing young people to access education, apprenticeships and work. Halt the decline in bus services and carry out a review of bus funding and bus policies. We will give principal local authorities the power to run, commission and regulate the bus network in their area.

Affordable Housing

Labour	<p>Rural infrastructure and industry has been neglected. Labour will invest in broadband, housing and transport to create jobs and ensure that the nation's prosperity is felt beyond our large towns and cities.</p> <p>By the end of the next Parliament we will be building at least 100,000 council and housing association homes a year for genuinely affordable rent or sale.</p> <p>Scrap the Bedroom Tax</p> <p>Reinstate Housing Benefit for under-21s</p>
Conservative	<p>We will meet our 2015 commitment to deliver a million homes by the end of 2020 and we will deliver half a million more by the end of 2022. We will deliver the reforms proposed in our Housing White Paper to free up more land for new homes in the right places, speed up build-out by encouraging modern methods of construction and give councils powers to intervene where developers do not act on their planning permissions; and we will diversify who builds homes in this country.</p> <p>We will enter into new Council Housing Deals with ambitious, pro-development, local authorities to help them build more social housing. We will work with them to improve their capability and capacity to develop more good homes, as well as providing them with significant low-cost capital funding. In doing so, we will build new fixed-term social houses, which will be sold privately after ten to fifteen years with an automatic Right to Buy for tenants, the proceeds of which will be recycled into further homes.</p>
Lib Dem	<p>Work with local authorities to deliver a significant increase in social and affordable housing in rural areas.</p> <p>New direct spending on housebuilding to help build 300,000 homes a year by 2022.</p> <p>Scrap the 'bedroom tax', while seeking to achieve the aim of making best use of the housing supply through incentivising local authorities to help tenants 'downsize'.</p> <p>Scrap exemptions on smaller housing development schemes from their obligation to provide affordable homes, and strengthen the hand of local government to prevent large developers renegeing on their commitments.</p> <p>Enable local authorities to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Levy up to 200% council tax on second homes and 'buy to leave empty' investments from overseas.- Enforce housebuilding on unwanted public sector land.- Penalise excessive land-banking when builders with planning permission have failed to build after three years.- End the Right to Buy if they choose.

Local Government Funding

Labour	<p>A Labour government will give local government extra funding next year. We will initiate a review into reforming council tax and business rates and consider new options such as a land value tax, to ensure local government has sustainable funding for the long term.</p> <p>This Conservative government has taken rural communities for granted, with chronic under investment in transport, broadband and public services, including the closure of local schools, post offices and libraries.</p> <p>Investment – we will make sure schools are properly resourced by reversing the Conservatives’ cuts and ensuring that all schools have the resources they need. We will introduce a fairer funding formula that leaves no school worse off , while redressing the historical underfunding of certain schools.</p> <p>Rural councils deliver public services differently, and this needs to be rediected in funding allocation mechanisms. We will consider these differences in our re-evaluation of the business rate schemes.</p> <p>Labour will end cuts to local authority budgets to support the provision of libraries, museums and galleries.</p>
Conservative	<p>We know that the business rates system presents considerable challenges to some smaller companies. That is why we have supported those businesses most affected by the recent revaluation of business rates. That is not all we will do. We will make longer- term reforms to the system to address concerns about the way it currently works. We will make sure that revaluations are conducted more frequently to avoid large changes to the bills that businesses face, and explore the introduction of self-assessments in the valuation process. To ensure the system is sustainable for the future we will also conduct a full review of the business rates system to make sure it is up to date for a world in which people increasingly shop online.</p> <p>We will continue to give local government greater control over the money they raise and address concerns about the fairness of current funding distributions.</p> <p>The way funding is distributed to schools in England is not fair. Across the country, children with the same needs and expectations receive markedly different rates of funding for their school place. We have begun to correct this and in the next parliament we will make funding fairer still. We appreciate that it is hard for schools receiving a higher level of funding to make cuts in order to pay for increases elsewhere, so while we will make funding fairer over the course of the parliament, we will make sure that no school has its budget cut as a result of the new formula. We will increase the overall schools budget by £4 billion by 2022, representing more than a real terms increase for every year of the parliament. We will continue to protect the Pupil Premium to support those who need it.</p>
Lib Dem	<p>Reverse all cuts to front-line school and college budgets, protecting per-pupil funding in real terms.</p> <p>Introduce a fairer national funding system with a protection for all schools, so that no school loses money.</p> <p>Scrap the planned expansion of grammar schools and devolve all capital monies for new school spaces to local authorities.</p> <p>Remove the requirement to hold local referenda for council tax changes, ensuring that councillors are properly accountable for their decisions by introducing fair votes.</p> <p>We will initiate a spending review after the general election focusing on delivering efficiency, funding proven spend-to-save initiatives, pursuing local and community integration to drive efficiency, and investing in technology to get public services and front-line staff online.</p>

Older Peoples Services	
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Labour	<p>Alongside our commitment to extend Pension Credit to hundreds of thousands of the most vulnerable women, Labour is exploring options for further transitional protections, to ensure that all these women have security and dignity in older age.</p> <p>This must never happen again. Labour will legislate so that accrued rights to the basic state pension cannot be changed, but future benefits can.</p> <p>The pension age is due to rise to 66 by the end of 2020. Labour rejects the Conservatives' proposal to increase the state pension age even further. We will commission a new review of the pension age, specifically tasked with developing a flexible retirement policy to reflect both the contributions made by people, the wide variations in life expectancy, and the arduous conditions of some work.</p> <p>In our first term, Labour will lay the foundations of a National Care Service for England. Our first urgent task will be to address the immediate funding crisis. We will increase the social care budgets by a further £8 billion over the lifetime of the next Parliament, including an additional £1 billion for the first year. This will be enough for providers to pay a real living wage without cutting the quality of care they provide. It will allow implementation of the principles of the Ethical Care Charter, already adopted in 28 council areas, ending 15-minute care visits and providing care workers with paid travel time, access to training and an option to choose regular hours.</p>
Conservative	<p>Guaranteed annual increases in the state pension through a new Double Lock to be introduced in 2020.</p> <p>First, we will align the future basis for means-testing for domiciliary care with that for residential care, so that people are looked after in the place that is best for them. This will mean that the value of the family home will be taken into account along with other assets and income, whether care is provided at home, or in a residential or nursing care home. Second, to ensure this is fair, we will introduce a single capital floor, set at £100,000, more than four times the current means test threshold. This will ensure that, no matter how large the cost of care turns out to be, people will always retain at least £100,000 of their savings and assets, including value in the family home. Third, we will extend the current freedom to defer payments for residential care to those receiving care at home, so no-one will have to sell their home in their lifetime to pay for care.</p>
Lib Dem	<p>Finish the job of implementing a cap on the cost of social care, which the Conservatives have effectively abandoned. Move towards single place-based budgets for health and social care by 2020, allowing local areas to decide how best to provide the full spectrum of care for their community.</p> <p>Maintain the 'triple lock' of increasing the state pension each year by the highest of earnings growth, prices growth for 2.5% for the next parliament.</p> <p>Establish a review to consider the case for, and practical implications of, introducing a single rate of tax relief for pensions, which would be designed to be simpler and fairer and would be set more generously than the current 20% basic rate relief.</p> <p>Increase spending on the NHS and social care, using the proceeds of a 1p rise in Income Tax. This will be paid by taxpayers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and the revenue will be ringfenced for spending on NHS and social care services in England, with the appropriate share also being transferred to Wales and Northern Ireland</p>

Access to Health Facilities	
Labour	We will increase funding to GP services to ensure patients can access the care they need. And we will halt pharmacy cuts and review provision to ensure all patients have access to pharmacy services, particularly in deprived or remote communities.
Conservative	<p>We will ensure that the NHS has the buildings and technology it needs to deliver care properly and efficiently. Since its inception, the NHS has been forced to use too many inadequate and antiquated facilities, which are even more unsuitable today. We will put this right and enable more care to be delivered closer to home, by building and upgrading primary care facilities, mental health clinics and hospitals in every part of England.</p> <p>And we will reform Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services so that children with serious conditions are seen within an appropriate timeframe and no child has to leave their local area and their family to receive normal treatment. We will ensure that councils provide consistency of care and cannot relocate vulnerable children far from their home when it is not in their best interests to do so.</p> <p>We expect GPs to come together to provide greater access, more innovative services, share data and offer better facilities, while ensuring care remains personal – particularly for older and more vulnerable people – with named GPs accountable for individual patients. We will support GPs to deliver innovative services that better meet patients’ needs, including phone and on-line consultations and the use of technology to triage people better so they see the right clinician more quickly. We will ensure appropriate funding for GPs to meet rising costs of indemnity in the short term while working with the profession to introduce a sustainable long-term solution.</p>
Lib Dem	<p>Promote easier access to GPs, expanding evening and weekend opening to meet the needs of local patients, encouraging online, phone and Skype appointments, encouraging GPs to work together in federations and allowing people more choice.</p> <p>Provide national support to struggling GP practices, preventing mass practice closures.</p> <p>Use innovation funding to promote GP-led multidisciplinary health and care hubs, including mobile services to keep people out of hospital.</p> <p>Ensure that any changes to the way pharmacies are funded do not leave local areas without reasonable access to a community pharmacist.</p>

Tackling Fuel Poverty

Labour	<p>Introduce an immediate emergency price cap to ensure that the average dual-fuel household energy bill remains below £1,000 per year, while we transition to a fairer system for bill payers.</p> <p>Labour will insulate four million homes as an infrastructure priority to help those who suffer in cold homes each winter. This will cut emissions, improve health, save on bills, and reduce fuel poverty and winter deaths.</p>
Conservative	<p>Alongside giving individuals greater control over their energy bills and protecting customers from unfair bills, we will help them to save energy. An energy efficient home is a more affordable and healthy home. We will improve the energy efficiency of existing homes, especially for the least well off, by committing to upgrading all fuel poor homes to EPC Band C by 2030. We will also review requirements on new homes.</p>
Lib Dem	<p>Liberal Democrats will reduce energy bills permanently by improving home insulation and encouraging small-scale, community and local-authority renewable schemes. We will make saving energy a top infrastructure priority, slashing energy bills and carbon emissions, creating thousands of jobs and helping end the fuel poverty crisis once and for all. Ensure that at least four million homes are made highly energy efficient (Band C) by 2022, with priority given to fuel-poor households.</p>

The Rural Economy

Labour	<p>Labour is the party of devolution and we believe in handing back power to communities. We will devolve powers over economic development, complete with the necessary funding.</p>
Conservative	<p>We will bring sustainable growth to the rural economy and boost our rural areas, so that people who live in the countryside have the same opportunities as those who live in our towns and cities.</p> <p>First, we recognise the value of institutions to the vitality of towns and cities. As we explain in chapter two, it is why we are determined to move many of the functions of central government out to cities around Britain where possible and to see our vast cultural assets reach people around our country too. It is also why we will support local growth through combined authorities, mayoralities and local enterprise partnerships. We will make each partnership and combined authority responsible for co-ordinating their own local industrial strategy in alignment with our national industrial strategy, bringing together local businesses, political and public sector leaders to drive growth and economic regeneration. We will wherever possible deliver growth funding through these organisations. We will give local enterprise partnerships greater weight by backing them in law.</p>
Lib Dem	<p>Reviewing the Business Rates system, prioritising reforms that recognise the development of the digital economy, lessening the burden on smaller businesses, and ensuring high streets remain competitive. We will also consider the implementation of Land Value Taxation.</p>

Viable Village Services

Labour	<p>Under the Conservatives, nearly £400 million has been cut from youth services and over 600 youth centres have closed. Labour will end the cuts to youth services.</p> <p>We will set up a national review of local pubs to examine the causes for their large-scale demise, as well as establishing a joint taskforce that will consider future sustainability.</p> <p>Libraries are vital social assets, valued by communities across the country. We will ensure libraries are preserved for future generations and updated with wi-fi and computers to meet modern needs. We will reintroduce library standards so that government can assess and guide councils in delivering the best possible service.</p>
Conservative	<p>We will also take steps to enhance the provision of public services in rural areas. We will safeguard the post office network, to protect existing rural services and work with the Post Office to extend the availability of business and banking services to families and small businesses in rural areas. A third of all SMEs in rural areas use their post office weekly and our ambition is that all routine small business and consumer banking services should be available in rural post offices. We will support pharmacies and village schools in rural areas.</p> <p>we will immediately institute a capital fund to help primary schools develop nurseries where they currently do not have the facilities to provide one. We will introduce a presumption that all new primary schools should include a nursery. And we will continue to support maintained nurseries and allow them to take on academy freedoms, supporting them to grow independently or as part of a multi-academy trust.</p>
Lib Dem	<p>Commit to preventing Post Office closures and protect Royal Mail's Universal Service Obligation to deliver across the UK for the same price.</p> <p>Set up a £2 billion Rural Services Fund of capital investment to enable communities to establish a local base from which to co-locate services such as council offices, post offices, children's centres, libraries and visiting health-care professionals.</p> <p>Increase community policing in England and Wales by giving an additional £300 million a year to local police forces to reverse the increase in violent crime, boost community confidence and increase the flow of community intelligence.</p>

Broadband and mobile	
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Labour	Labour's national investment plans include coastal protections, better flood management and the broadband and 4G extensions that will underpin the future success of rural small businesses.
Conservative	<p>By the end of this year, 19 out of 20 premises will have access to superfast broadband and our Universal Service Obligation will ensure that by 2020 every home and every business in Britain has access to high speed broadband. We will work to provide gigaspeed connectivity to as many businesses and homes as possible. We will introduce a full fibre connection voucher for companies across the country by 2018 and by 2022 we will have major fibre spines in over a hundred towns and cities, with ten million premises connected to full fibre and a clear path to national coverage over the next decade.</p> <p>We have similar ambitions for mobile phone coverage. By 2022 we will extend mobile coverage further to 95 per cent geographic coverage of the UK.</p> <p>We will therefore create a new presumption of digital government services by default and an expectation that all government services are fully accessible online, with assisted digital support available for all public sector websites. We will publish far more information about public services online, including relevant information about local issues and public transport so that every person can find out up to date information about roadworks, planning applications and bus routes online, without the hassle and delay that currently exists.</p>
Lib Dem	<p>A programme of installing hyperfast, fibre-optic broadband across the UK.</p> <p>Invest to ensure that broadband connections and services to be provided before 2020 have a speed of 2 Gbps or more, with fibre to the premises (FTTP) as standard and unlimited usage by 2020 across the whole of the UK. SMEs should be prioritised in the roll-out of hyperfast broadband.</p> <p>Ensure that every property in the UK is provided, by 2022, with a superfast broadband connection with a download speed of 30Mbps, an upload speed of 6Mbps, and an unlimited usage cap.</p> <p>Invest £2 billion in innovative solutions to ensure the provision of high-speed broadband across the rural UK, working with local authorities and providing grants to help areas replicate the success of existing community-led projects.</p> <p>Work with Ofcom to ensure that mobile phone companies provide fast and reliable coverage in rural areas.</p>

Rural Proofing	
Labour	We will introduce a 'rural proofing' process so that all our laws, policies and programmes consider their impact on rural communities
Conservative	
Lib Dem	

Brexit	
Labour	We will ensure there is no drop in Structural funding as a result of Brexit until the end of the current EU funding round in 2019/20. As part of Labour's plans to rebalance and rebuild the economy, we will ensure that no region or nation of the UK is affected by the withdrawal of funding for the remainder of this Parliament.
Conservative	<p>We have huge ambitions for our farming industry: we are determined to grow more, sell more and export more great British food. We want to provide stability to farmers as we leave the EU and set up new frameworks for supporting food production and stewardship of the countryside. So we will continue to commit the same cash total in funds for farm support until the end of the parliament.</p> <p>We will use the structural fund money that comes back to the UK following Brexit to create a United Kingdom Shared Prosperity Fund, specially designed to reduce inequalities between communities across our four nations. The money that is spent will help deliver sustainable, inclusive growth based on our modern industrial strategy. We will consult widely on the design of the fund, including with the devolved administrations, local authorities, businesses and public bodies.</p>
Lib Dem	Continue our long campaign to reform agricultural subsidies – making sure British farming remains competitive and doesn't lose out in the event of Britain leaving the EU, rebalancing away from direct subsidy and refocusing support towards the public benefits that come from effective land management including countryside protection, flood prevention, food production and climate-change mitigation.

Local Govt Organisation	
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Labour	We will restore regional offices to increase contact between central and local government on the ground. Labour will be guided by public opinion when determining whether to include directly elected mayors in future devolution deals. Labour will create a role for a Minister for England, who will sit under the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, and will work with the Secretaries of State for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
Conservative	With devolution now established in London and other parts of England, we will consolidate our approach, providing clarity across England on what devolution means for different administrations so all authorities operate in a common framework. We will support those authorities that wish to combine to serve their communities better. For combined authorities that are based around our great cities, we will continue to support the adoption of elected mayors, but we will not support them for the rural counties.
Lib Dem	Devolve further revenue-raising powers away from Westminster, to regions from Cornwall to the north-east. We will ensure that any powers devolved are matched by the funding to deliver on the needs of local people. Devolve more decision-making power over key levers of economic development including transport, housing and skills. Aim to increase the number of neighbourhood, community and parish councils and promote tenant management in social housing. Establish a government process to deliver greater devolution of financial responsibility to English local authorities and any new devolved bodies in England, building on the work of the Independent Commission on Local Government Finance. Any changes must balance the objectives of more local autonomy and fair equalisation between communities. Replace Police and Crime Commissioners, elected at great expense in elections with very low turnout, with accountable police boards made up of local councillors. In some areas of England there is a greater appetite for powers, but not every part of the country wants to move at the same speed and there cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach. All areas should however have access to the same opportunities and mayoral authorities should not be ranked higher in terms of the powers with which they can be granted. We will therefore introduce 'devolution on demand', enabling even greater devolution of powers from Westminster to councils or groups of councils working together – for example to a Cornish Assembly or a Yorkshire Parliament.



The Rural Services Manifesto

Seeking the best for rural England, 2015 to 2020

The planning system

The Rural Services Network calls upon an incoming Government to:

- Respect that planning authorities need the flexibility to write and interpret Local Plan policies which can reflect local priorities and circumstances. The shortened NPPF is welcome. Whilst explanatory guidance can be useful, any temptation to reintroduce more national policies should be resisted.
- Relax its unreasonable timescales for putting up-to-date Local Plans in place, in view of the complexity of the plan preparation process.
- Give greater weight to draft and submitted Local Plans, so that localism is upheld, especially where the Government's Planning Inspectorate is hearing Appeals.
- Identify a fairer way to calculate the five year housing land supply figures. Shortfalls from previous years, due to weak market conditions, should not simply be added on. If planning authorities can show they are successfully working towards a five year land supply that should be sufficient to reject applications at odds with the Local Plan.
- Rethink the proposed exemption of single plot self-build homes from the Community Infrastructure Levy. In the smallest settlements they may be the only developments and form a key income source for Parish Councils. It also risks games playing, with developers splitting sites into single plots.

The Rural Services Manifesto

- Ensure decisions uphold the principle that draft Neighbourhood Plans have weight once they have been submitted to local planning authorities (at the so-called Regulation 15 stage).
- Ensure there is continued grant funding both for Neighbourhood Planning groups and to cover the additional costs that they bring for local planning authorities.

Affordable housing

The Rural Services Network calls upon an incoming Government to:

- Reinstate a rural target in the HCA's Affordable Homes Programme, to ensure that investment is available to meet needs within rural communities.
- Recognise the additional cost of building social housing in smaller rural settlements, when the HCA assesses value for money of schemes and awards grants.
- Drop completely the proposal to exempt small development sites from planning agreements which require developers to include some affordable housing.
- As proposed by the EFRA Select Committee and Rural Housing Alliance, exclude social housing tenants in rural settlements with under 3,000 population from the spare room subsidy (or bedroom tax). This would align with the exemption from the Right to Acquire policy, which also applies to these settlements.
- Give local authorities the flexibility to suspend the Right to Buy where they can demonstrate it doesn't suit local circumstances. Similarly, give local authorities the ability to stipulate that Right to Buy properties can only be sold on to someone with a local connection.
- Confirm through central Government guidance that, especially in rural areas, local authority Allocation Schemes should seek to strike a balance between the needs of prospective housing tenants and their having a local connection.
- Introduce an additional grant for registered providers, such as housing associations, to help them invest in energy efficiency measures in their housing stock, which could considerably benefit their tenants.

Local government funding

The Rural Services Network calls upon an incoming Government to:

- Acknowledge that Government proposals contained in its 2012 Consultation were seeking to right an historic wrong and that the whole of the pre-damped amounts exemplified should flow through to the 170 Councils and Fire Authorities concerned. Implement this with annual increases to 2020, at the latest, either by changes to the formulae or by extending Rural Services Delivery Grant to benefit all 170 authorities.
- Protect rural schools from closure. The 'sparsity factor', introduced to the education funding formula in 2014/15 to take some account of the rural cost premium should be continued, with local authorities having discretion how that funding is best used locally.
- Monitor the effect of introducing retained Business Rates to understand implications for the distribution of local authority funding and test whether all local authorities have fair opportunities to benefit from it. Change may be needed, if some types of authority lose out as a result of factors beyond their control.
- Compensate local authorities which experience a significant financial loss from reduced business rate income as a result of major national infrastructure projects.
- Monitor the effect of the New Homes Bonus on the distribution of Government grant, to understand the implications and test whether all local authorities have fair opportunities to benefit from it. This should consider authorities largely covered by National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, where there are major constraints on house building.

Public transport

The Rural Services Network calls upon an incoming Government to:

- Encourage and incentivise bus operators, local authorities and communities to work in partnership, so they can find local solutions that reduce the frontline impact on services that are a result of tightening public sector budgets.
- As noted in the local government funding section above, amend the formula used by DCLG to distribute Government grant, to make it fairer and to take full account of the rural cost premium.
- Reform the statutory concessionary fares scheme so it applies to and is fully funded by central Government to apply to the public transport that is actually available in a local area (including community transport). It should not be restricted to bus travel.

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- Provide sufficient extra funding for local authorities to enable them to provide transport to 16 to 19 year olds still in education.
- Protect the value of Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG) under any future payment regime and ensure that rural areas are not disadvantaged by revisions. Any further erosion of this grant could have a significant impact on marginal rural bus services, including those run by smaller rural bus operators.
- Extend the Local Sustainable Transport Fund beyond 2015, to enable innovative schemes in rural areas and elsewhere that will deliver economic, social and environmental benefits. Encouragement for new rural transport approaches should be supported.
- Incentivise and remove any barriers there may be to local authorities and other public bodies working together, so they make best use of the transport fleets that already exist e.g. for health care, social services, schools.

Access to health facilities

The Rural Services Network calls upon an incoming Government to:

- Ask its Advisory Committee on Resource Allocation (ACRA) to review the NHS resource allocation formula for Clinical Commissioning Groups, so that their funding more closely matches local levels of actual and predicted demand for services.
- Pursue rigorously the stated wish to see more of the NHS budget spent locally, so that rural communities have easier access to non-specialist treatments.
- Take urgent action to address a growing rural recruitment problem as many GPs and Practice Nurses retire. A career in rural practice must be made attractive and, if necessary, incentivised.
- Seek to resolve the financially unsustainable situation facing many smaller NHS district hospitals by removing their historic debt burden and allowing them more flexibility.
- Take more account of accessibility by public transport, including for rural communities, in NHS service planning and review exercises.
- Take steps to ensure that ambulance response time targets are being met in rural areas and emergency patients are not being left at greater risk.
- Support investment which can pilot and roll-out models of care delivery that are shown to be cost-effective and well suited to rural circumstances, such as tele-medicine and outreach services. The Airedale Telehealth Hub is an exemplar and access to fast broadband is, of course, key to such innovation.

The Rural Services Manifesto

- Resolve the threat facing a small number of GP surgeries that is a result of the phasing out of the Minimum Practice Income Guarantee, where their closure would create access problems for patients because no other surgery is close by.
- Ensure funding allocations to local authorities for public health services are put on a fairer footing, as a matter of urgency, basing them upon local demand and needs (rather than historic patterns of spend) and taking proper account of sparsity costs.

Older people's services

The Rural Services Network calls upon an incoming Government to:

- Ensure, as noted earlier, that the formula used to allocate local government finance properly takes better account of the additional cost of delivering services such as adult social care in rural areas.
- Ensure that where older people's support services are subject to competition, new providers cannot cherry pick and simply deliver in urban centres where it is easier for them to keep costs down.
- Ensure that opportunities presented by the Care Act and Children's & Families Act take account of rural issues, such as gaps in primary care capacity which can impact on adult social services. Extend the Better Care Fund beyond its current timescale.
- Decentralise more health services to primary care settings, to improve their rural accessibility, and offer more preventative services within GP surgeries.
- Identify and promote delivery models such as outreach provision, which take services to users. More services could be delivered to older people's homes or nearby outlets, for example repeat prescriptions taken to village post offices.
- Support local initiatives such as Good Neighbour, Village Agent and First Contact schemes, which help older people remain in their own homes and improve their quality of life. They can also deliver valuable services, such as fire safety checks. Ensure such schemes have routes to grant funding to establish and sustain them.
- Promote a market-led approach to specialist housing development, which offers older people a choice of both market and affordable homes where they can continue to live independently. This would also release more housing for younger rural households. Enabling the development of 'granny annexes' or similar, would similarly help.

Tackling fuel poverty

The Rural Services Network calls upon an incoming Government to:

- Recognise that fuel poverty is a significant rural issue and that rising fuel prices hit many rural households hard. Policy initiatives should therefore target rural needs and be designed to suit rural circumstances.
- Maintain the current value of the Winter Fuel Payment for pensioners. This is hugely important for a vulnerable segment of rural society, who might otherwise worry about fuel bills. Government should consider paying it earlier in the year when oil fuel and LPG prices tend to be lower.
- Pay close regard to the guidance which is being drawn up by NICE into excess winter deaths and illnesses, devising policy actions to support its implementation.
- Amend the eligibility criteria for phase two of the Green Deal Home Improvement Scheme so it applies to oil and LPG boilers.
- Press energy providers hard to meet the 15% rural target for ECO and to refocus their efforts on solid wall homes. The rural fuel poor, who contribute to ECO through their energy bills, must start to see more benefits.
- Ensure that free advice about energy saving measures is both available to and reaches rural communities. Work with and support the local authorities and organisations (such as Calor, NEA and the ACRE Network) who seek to provide it.
- Support and promote those organisations and communities which establish practical help through Oil Bulk Buying schemes to cut bills for households that have oil central heating systems.

Viable village services

The Rural Services Network calls upon an incoming Government to:

- Commit that there will be no programme of post office closures during the lifetime of the 2015 to 2020 Parliament and the access measures for the post office network will be maintained. Statistical access measures are inevitably quite crude, so it is important the Post Office identifies and seeks to plug geographic gaps in its network.
- Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the Post Office Locals model, to identify where improvements could be made to address customer needs. This should test the long-term viability of the approach, since it makes the income of post offices entirely based on their sales and does away with the fixed core payment.

The Rural Services Manifesto

- Do more to invest in the future of Community Post Offices, which are typically the last shop in the village. View this extensive rural network as an opportunity for government and public service delivery. Establish a Post Bank, owned by the Post Office, to offer a full range of banking services through its network.
- Encourage the public sector to look to local rural retailers and outlets to improve access to their services. Examples include library drop-off points and prescription pick-up points within village shops. Anyone living more than five miles from a dispensing chemist should be offered some nearer or alternate means of collection.
- Support and uphold Local Plan policies and Neighbourhood Plan policies which seek to retain vital village services and facilities by placing restrictions on their permitted change of use e.g. into residential.
- Uphold the Royal Mail USO and introduce measures that stop blatant cherry picking by other postal operators, to the detriment of rural customers.
- Review experience to-date with the Community Right to Bid, to assess how well it has worked and whether improvements can be made.
- Analyse information about pub closures and the underlying reasons. If this indicates a problem with leasehold and tenancy arrangements, initiate a review in order to address the concerns. Research new and innovative financial approaches that could sustain pubs.
- Seek to enhance the support and seedcorn funding that is available to communities, including from the National Lottery. The Village SOS learning programme, which gives £1.4 million over two years to the ACRE Network, is a helpful start. Funding needs to provide both direct project grants to rural communities, and grants to bodies or networks which can advise and support communities with their endeavours.

Broadband and mobile connectivity

The Rural Services Network then calls upon an incoming Government to:

- Recognise that fast broadband infrastructure is now of fundamental importance to rural economies and communities. Without it the nation's rural areas will be at a significant disadvantage, with impacts on business performance and access to services amongst other things.
- Introduce a more ambitious target for universal provision, set much higher than 2Mbps. Explore the scope for an up-to-date Universal Service Obligation for broadband.

The Rural Services Manifesto

- Focus its broadband strategy and investment on achieving coverage where there is genuine market failure, with no broadband available or in prospect, instead of diverting funding to places likely to be commercially viable.
- Set out in more detail how and when it intends to reach the 5% of premises outside its main superfast programme, making use of innovative technologies. Expand the £10 million funding pot for this work.
- Lobby hard for a relaxation of State Aid rules applied to networks built with public subsidy. The current rules present both technical and commercial barriers to providing solutions in the deepest rural areas.
- Examine how improved mobile phone network coverage and competition can be achieved in rural areas, by encouraging more mast sharing between operators and by arguing for regulated access to BT's backhaul infrastructure for other 4G operators.

The rural economy

The Rural Services Network then calls upon an incoming Government to:

- Recognise the important contribution that rural areas make to the nation's economic wellbeing and reflect this explicitly in its growth policies.
- Insist that all Local Economic Partnerships (LEPs) whose geographies include rural communities and rural based businesses are clear how their Strategic Economic Plans will benefit them. This should apply to LEPs whose areas are mainly urban, as well as to those in more obviously rural locations.
- Have LEPs appoint someone to their Boards with a clear role to act as a rural champion. When monitoring the impacts of their programmes, LEPs should measure and publish figures about the impacts on their rural communities and businesses.
- Ensure that Growth Fund support managed by LEPs is available to micro and small businesses, and does not overlook rural by dint of focussing on larger firms.
- Ensure that it learns and promotes lessons from the Rural Growth Pilots, which have been funded by Defra, and implement the findings from their ongoing evaluation.
- Fund local authorities to be part of the solution helping deliver Jobcentre Plus services locally in those rural places where this (very urban based) service to help people back into employment is not otherwise easy to physically access.
- Continue its funding for the 'Wheels to Work' scheme coordinator posts. This is a simple and cheap way to support local projects that predominantly help young people

The Rural Services Manifesto

in rural areas with transport to access training and employment opportunities. In many cases older age groups could usefully be eligible to benefit from these projects.

- Act upon the recent report from the Higher Education Funding Council for England, which identified geographic gaps in university/HE provision in rural areas and which highlighted the key role the sector plays in workforce skills and economic growth.
- Maintain funding support for the specialist colleges that are central to the supply of skilled personnel ready to enter the agricultural and land-based sector.

Rural proofing

The Rural Services Network calls upon an incoming Government to:

- Recommit to the principle of rural proofing by Whitehall and its delivery agencies, to ensure a fair outcome for rural communities. Make clear that that commitment comes from the top and has the backing of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.
- Apply rural proofing rigorously to its post-2015 programme for Government. In particular, to think carefully about the targeting of needs-based policies to ensure they reach rural communities.
- Make sure that any proposals drawn up to devolve powers away from the centre within England give as much consideration to rural areas as they do to large cities or city-regions.
- Ensure that Defra's Rural Communities Policy Unit (or any future equivalent) is given both the clout and resources to work across Whitehall, supporting other departments with their rural proofing. Its co-ordination and promotional role will be vital.
- Ensure that consultation during policy development includes rural stakeholder organisations (like the Rural Services Network and ACRE) and rural communities.
- Enforce better the system, whereby departments assess the likely rural impacts – among other impacts – of proposed policy developments in Impact Assessments. Their assessment should show the financial consequences for rural areas (relative to other types of area).
- Produce an annual report on its rural proofing work for scrutiny by the Environment, Food & Rural Affairs Parliamentary Select Committee.

The Rural Coalition Statement 2017 (v6)

The Rural Coalition is twelve national organisations who subscribe to a vision for a living and working countryside in England. Given many shared values, we seek to be more influential by joining in common cause. Below we set out our key principles, policies and actions which we would urge the new Government to apply to rural communities.

Our policy principles

The Rural Coalition believes that the following four principles should underpin policy making:

- ❖ **Brexit discussions must recognise 'rural' is more than agriculture and the natural environment.**
- ❖ **All Brexit negotiations and post-Brexit policies must be rural proofed.**
- ❖ **Policies and funding must deliver a fair deal for rural communities.**
- ❖ **Decision-making, funding and delivery must be devolved and involve rural communities.**

Why Rural England matters

Rural communities and rural economies are significant contributors to the life and prosperity of the country as a whole.

9.3 million people live in the small towns, villages, hamlets and farms of rural England, comprising 17% of the country's total population.

Rural areas of England are also home to 524,000 registered businesses, employing almost 3.7 million people and with an annual turnover of £404 billion.

Rural England directly benefits us all as a place for food production, energy generation, flood alleviation, leisure activities and the enjoyment of nature.

The sustainability and wellbeing of rural communities makes the countryside a place that everyone can value and enjoy.

Taking up the Brexit challenge

In March 2017 the United Kingdom invoked Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty, starting the process of leaving the European Union. The Rural Coalition is neutral on the Brexit debate. However, EU trade, regulations, funding programmes and migrant labour have all helped to shape rural areas. Negotiations about leaving the EU and decisions about UK policies in the future must, therefore, take full account of the needs of rural communities and businesses.

Four underpinning principles

Our starting point is that four principles should underpin policy making to promote sustainable rural communities:

- ❖ **Brexit discussions must recognise ‘rural’ is more than agriculture and the natural environment.** Both these issues are critical, but are only part of the rural agenda and other issues risk being squeezed out of the debate. Rural economies are made up of diverse business sectors and rural communities share the same varied needs as communities elsewhere.
- ❖ **All Brexit negotiations and post-Brexit policies must be rural proofed.** Rural areas are shaped by policies from across Government, on topics such as taxation, housing, health and social care, education, workforce skills, business support and broadband connectivity. All Whitehall departments should rural proof their Brexit and post-Brexit work, testing policy proposals to ensure that they are designed to suit rural circumstances and meet rural needs.
- ❖ **Policies and funding must deliver a fair deal for rural communities.** Many rural communities are feeling left behind. Those communities (and taxpayers) deserve an equitable share of service provision and its funding. It is vital that services are accessible to rural communities and businesses. Focusing delivery in larger settlements may be an easy option, but it is not a fair option.
- ❖ **Decision-making, funding and delivery must be devolved and involve rural communities.** Rural areas are varied. Decisions, funding and delivery are more likely to take account of local needs and circumstances if they are devolved to the most appropriate local or very local levels. Engagement with rural communities, who are part of the solution, will make them even more relevant.

Four policy priorities

The Rural Coalition believes that the evidence points to four policy priorities:

- ❖ **A meaningful increase in the delivery of affordable housing in villages and small towns.** Across rural England there is a severe and growing shortage of affordable housing for local people. Many areas are turning into enclaves of the affluent. Yet the number of affordable rural homes built is dispiritingly low. The previous Government’s Housing White Paper was a good start, but much more action is needed to address the backlog and meet future needs. The planning system must deliver more affordable homes to help sustain rural communities.
- ❖ **Proper recognition of rural service delivery challenges and services designed to meet rural needs.** Important services and facilities are being cut back in rural areas as a result of public sector austerity and private sector cost-cutting and efficiency savings. Adult social care and bus services are among the most affected. Yet rural local authorities receive much less funding (per resident) than local authorities elsewhere.

- ❖ **Long-term support for social action, to help communities become more resilient.** Many rural communities have shown real initiative, making neighbourhood plans, running services, managing assets and engaging with renewable energy projects. Communities and their parish councils are part of the solution to rural policy challenges. However, this underpinning of rural life needs sustained support, especially if the benefits are to become widespread.
- ❖ **Business support and infrastructure which reaches rural areas, so the rural economy can grow and create quality jobs.** Important grant funds for rural businesses and projects – the LEADER and EAFRD programmes¹ – will cease after exiting the EU. Modern businesses also depend on connectivity to broadband and mobile networks, yet a quarter of rural premises cannot access fast broadband. The follow up to the last Government's Industrial Strategy needs to put in place support to release the potential of rural areas and to address market failures.

Progress since our 2015 document

In reaching our view about principles and future priorities we have reviewed the three policy areas highlighted in our Rural Challenge 2015 document and what progress has been made. This evidence shows that in the two years since its publication:

- ❖ Growing and sustaining the rural economy: some progress has been made.
- ❖ Providing affordable housing for local people: progress has been disappointing.
- ❖ Working for healthy rural communities: progress has been mixed.

The evidence that underpins this assessment of progress can be found in [[link to other document](#)].

Four key actions now needed

Action by Government will be crucial, since it sets the policy framework and decides on overall resources. Government departments must, therefore, up their rural proofing game. But many other organisations will help deliver those policies, including local authorities and LEPs. They too must take rural proofing seriously.

The Rural Coalition now calls on the incoming Government to take four positive actions:

- ❖ Introduce an ambitious annual target for the number of new affordable homes built in rural areas and a dedicated rural affordable housing funding programme.
- ❖ Deliver a support programme for rural businesses and community entrepreneurs.

¹ These programmes offer grants for projects which contribute towards economic development, diversification and productivity in rural areas. EAFRD is managed by Local Enterprise Partnerships and LEADER is managed by Local Action Groups.

- ❖ Ensure that the extra costs of delivering services in rural areas are properly reflected in any funding formula, such as those used for local government, education and the NHS.
- ❖ Provide a comprehensive community infrastructure support programme, which recognises the pressures on volunteers, helps those places with less capacity and spreads existing good rural practice.

The Rural Coalition offer

The Rural Coalition offers itself as a partner for all Government departments and their agencies, drawing on a wealth of expertise and access to rural practitioners. In exchange:

- ❖ We will help to identify solutions to rural policy and delivery challenges.
- ❖ We will be a sounding board – somewhere to turn to for rural proofing advice, when developing policies and programmes.
- ❖ We will use our networks to seek out examples of good rural practice and local innovation.

Above all, the Rural Coalition wants a Brexit deal and domestic policy agenda that works for rural communities and is ready to play its part in helping to achieve this.

Members of the Rural Coalition

Action with Communities in Rural England	National Housing Federation
Arthur Rank Centre	Plunkett Foundation
Campaign to Protect Rural England	Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors
Country Land and Business Association	Royal Town Planning Institute
National Association of Local Councils	Rural Services Network
National Farmers Union	Town and Country Planning Association

Rural Coalition President: Rt Revd Dr Alan Smith, Bishop of St Albans

Rural Coalition Chair: Margaret Clark CBE

Website: <http://www.acre.org.uk/our-work/rural-coalition>



Rural Communities at the Heart of Government Policy ACRE's General Election Asks 2017

ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England) is **the country's largest rural network**. Together with our members we reach 52,000 grassroots organisations in 11,000 rural communities in England, and we work closely with UK partners. We help people who live and work in rural communities, and we have an impressive track record since the 1920s of supporting them with practical and cost effective solutions to tackle problems posed by distance from facilities. Our work over this period has contributed to the community cohesion seen in so many rural areas, and which we celebrate.

To help the future Government to **enable England's rural communities to thrive**, we set out below policy solutions to the current challenges facing those communities.

The central theme of our proposals is taking steps to free up the potential of rural communities, by building on the factors that strengthen their resilience.

Our experience shows that those things that connect rural and urban places are more important than the things that divide them. Nonetheless there remains a distinctive rural context, and one which represents a real challenge for people living in our communities.

Brexit and the Rural Economy:

The decision to leave the European Union provides new opportunities to develop a more resilient future post Brexit. In particular we urge the creation of a suite of Rural, Social and Economic Development measures based upon building growth in rural businesses as part of future industrial policy, with a new community-owned approach to very local investment in rural enterprise. This would replicate key EU funded investment programmes such as the LEADER programme, EAFRD (European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development) and certain aspects of the ERDF (European Rural Development Fund), which have provided such capacity to grow rural businesses.

Key Fact: Our diverse rural economy currently accounts for just under 17% of national productivity. It has real potential to grow but needs new and nuanced approaches to do so.

ACRE believes that the following policy solutions will help to build sustainable rural communities throughout England:

1. Housing and Planning

- Invest in initiatives such as Rural Housing Enablers, Community Land Trusts and the Community Housing Fund that will help rural communities increase the supply of affordable housing.
- Encourage rural housing schemes which remain affordable and available to local people in perpetuity by maintaining protection from the Right to Buy.
- Support the development of Neighbourhood Plans that enable local communities to pro-actively engage in the planning process.

Key Fact: Only 1,020 affordable properties were built in England on rural exception sites in 2016, exposing a three-year low and highlighting the need for fresh ideas to solve the acute shortage of rural housing.

2. Community Buildings

- Continue the availability of capital grant and loan funding for improvement and rebuilding of community buildings to adapt to modern demands, for example the Big Lottery Fund, and LEADER funding.
- Reduce the fiscal burden on community buildings: particularly VAT, but also the Climate Change Levy, Insurance Premium Tax, and Non-Domestic Rates.

Key Fact: ACRE has identified approximately 10,000 rural community buildings in England acting as hubs offering opportunity for local service provision.

3. Health

- Deliver rural focused approaches to reduce the pressure on acute services, joining up health and social care services through initiatives that maximise the impact of primary care locally.
- Facilitate the provision of adult domiciliary care by local social enterprises which provide village level care.
- Support Village Agent and Good Neighbour schemes, as delivered by many ACRE Network members to address the health and social care challenges for isolated (mainly older) people and reduce the pressure on hard-pressed public services.

Key Fact: Since October 2014 there have been 415 enquiries from people with ideas for services local to them. Of these, 173 have gone on to set up a new service in their neighbourhood. The [Somerset Community Micro-enterprise Directory](#) features 230 Community Micro-providers. Collectively they are supporting 700 older people and provide 220 jobs to local people. Together they provide 3,600 hours of care or support a week.

4. Rural Services and Transport

- Maintain the current network of rural post offices, to ensure that residents are still able to access vital services effectively.
- Invest in community-led, community-owned solutions to service provision in rural areas where a service has been lost due to a closure or withdrawal.
- Further investment in community transport initiatives to address market failure and to enable rural dwellers to access employment and services; eg community bus schemes, car sharing, as well as 'Wheels to Work', an ACRE Network initiative which helps young people access training and work.

Key Facts: Between 2010 and 2016, more than 2,400 bus routes were reduced or withdrawn as a result of reduced local authority budgets.

Recent research by Citizens Advice, in their role as consumer watchdog for post office consumers **shows that 60% of residents in rural areas view the post office as an 'extremely' or 'very important' service.**

5. Schools and Childcare

- Encourage growth of, and community engagement with, smaller local schools to protect them from closure. Rural schools **don't just provide education, they provide local employment; childcare which enables parents to work; and a focal point for community networking.** They are integral to building social capital and community cohesion.
- Increase access to rural childcare, through the provision of appropriate finance and support for rural childcare providers and facilities.

Key Fact: In 2016, 20% of primaries (3,478) in England had fewer than 200 pupils, and 30% (5,037) had fewer than 300 pupils, and all these were financially at risk.

6. Broadband/Mobile Connectivity

- Roll out good broadband and mobile connectivity to reduce the impact of remoteness on rural businesses and pupils.
- Provide resources to local groups to develop their own community responses to poor broadband and mobile provision.
- Hold broadband and mobile providers to account through consistent use of regulation and licensing to ensure rural communities are connected, including the most difficult to reach, **and that they do not 'cherry pick' only customers that can be served at lowest cost.**
- Invest in a focused programme of online access and safety training behind the roll out of digital connectivity, to enable older and non-digitally savvy members of our rural communities to both compete economically and replace their dwindling access to services.

Key Fact: In 2013 just 25% of premises in small settlements, with a population of less than 2,000, had the option of superfast broadband. The commercial roll out of these networks has focused on urban centres where 88% of premises had the option.

7. Energy

- Provide further support for initiatives which tackle the higher heating costs for 'off mains gas' households, such as the ACRE Network bulk oil purchase schemes, and energy efficiency measures for vulnerable older people.
- Continue to challenge utility providers to provide rural energy users with a fair deal.

Key Fact: The cost of heating an 'off mains gas' household is between 50-100% higher.

8. Investing in the development of local capacity and 'Know How'

- Resource the development of local community solutions to the modern challenges and opportunities for providing public and private services, such as through a successor to the successful Village SOS programme.

Key Fact: Village SOS (2014 – 2017) was a Big Lottery Fund funded campaign which supported 455 communities in moving a project from "idea to plan" and "plan to action"; engaged over 1,400 people in rural community regeneration initiatives; and recruited over 200 community mentors at a cost of just £3,000 per initiative.

9. Harnessing the Potential of Unused or Surplus Assets in Rural Communities

- Build on the One Public Estate Programme through a dedicated rural strand. This would focus activities, alongside local government, on raising resources which can then be used more widely (than for just housing) to address market failure in rural areas.

Key Fact: According to Ofcom, since 2013 (the last period for which we have data) the Government's One Public Estate Programme has created 44,000 jobs, released land for 25,000 homes, raised £415 million in capital receipts from land and property sales, and cut running costs by £98 million.

10. Rural Evidence

- Provide support and resources for producing up-to-date Rural Evidence. ACRE believes that rural policy must be based upon well evidenced data about rural areas.

Key Fact: Since the Commission for Rural Communities closed in 2013 there has been no dedicated agency using Government funding to commission specific rural community research outside of the general research budget of Defra.

As we have done over the past 90 years, ACRE and the ACRE Network will continue to listen to those living in rural areas, support them to develop thriving communities, and champion their concerns at a national level with the Government and other national partners.

Contact details:

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- Chris Cowcher, ACRE Community Manager
c.cowcher@acre.org.uk or 01285 653477

Notes to editors:

- The ACRE Network is formed of ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England) and its 38 Network members based at county level across England. Many of the ACRE Network members date back 90 years; ACRE was formed in 1987 to bring them under one umbrella. Today, the Network collectively reaches 52,000 grassroots organisations.
- In support of the ACRE General Election Asks 2017, there is a full report on all 10 policy areas available for download via the ACRE website.
- In order to represent the views of rural communities at a national level, ACRE is a member of the [Rural Coalition](#) and a partner of [Rural England CIC](#).

REPORT TO THE RSN EXECUTIVE – 12th of June 2017- ‘Seeking to get backing in the House of Lords’.

The Executive has considered this on previous occasions and we do need to try to proceed on the issue.

We have at the moment the Rural Fair Share Group in the Commons and there is talk of us trying to form a second campaigning group in the new parliament, after the election, in the Commons in relation to rural vulnerability and isolation. We will have to re-establish the All Party Parliamentary Group on Rural Services in the new parliament but as this cannot campaign as such and is established to just receive information it is thought it will only meet the required twice a year.

The APPG used to have representatives from the Lords but our connections there have become thinner and thinner over the years. We do think the time is right to conduct some form of Lords Initiative.

Our thought pattern is to form a panel of Lords who we could consult with at least annually.

Terms of Reference might be as follows:-

- To meet annually in December to discuss the various rural challenges which the members of the panel consider necessary that the RSN look at and seek to take on. (It is suggested this session is always Chaired by the Chair of the RSN and that they be accompanied by the First Vice Chair at this meeting)
- To facilitate an email forum between these Panel Members concerning particular rural issues as they arise

We previously went down this route when we were seeking Vice Presidents (an exercise that was aborted because of lack of interest) and it is not certain it will be an easy one but we do think we have to try it.

We list the people we suggest we approach first:-

Baroness Scott (Conserv)—LG- Wiltshire
Baroness Redfern (Conserv)—LG- North Lincolnshire

Baroness Watkins (Cross Bench)— Health
Lord Best (Cross Bench)-- Housing
Lord Cameron (Cross Bench) – Rural

Baroness Parminter (Lib Dems)-- CPRE
Lord Taylor of Goss Moor (Lib Dems)—Housing

Lord Rooker (Labour) – Previous Environment Minister
Lord Knight of Weymouth (Labour)—Education

Bishop of St Albans (Bishop) --- President of the Rural Coalition

This would provide us with a panel of 10.

~However it is likely we will get some who are approached who decline and it would be very useful if the Executive could help us by giving us some back up names they would like us to pursue in that eventuality.

~Are the Executive happy with the suggested Terms of Reference?

REPORT TO THE RSN EXECUTIVE Monday 12th of June 2017

A Virtual Rural Community Parliament

Members will recall that we discussed this one when we were 'Blue Skying' last summer.

We have been thinking through the position here and we just wondered if we proceeded down the virtual route it would remove many of the 'political' obstacles but also achieve a similar goal.

The desire of course is to achieve consensus views across the rural areas of England. This is something the urban areas can achieve far more readily because of tightness of population and the various bodies and structures that flow from that.

Rural areas which are often misread by the public as being predominantly agricultural seem to struggle to get a firm united view across on 'governance' and service issues and can be seen as less forceful and persuasive.

The proposal now put here is more perhaps an extension of the proposed Rural Sounding Boards and the Rural Panel than any 'meeting', 'forum', 'gathering' or 'congress'.

'An Online Community Parliament for Rural England?'

A DISCUSSION DOCUMENT

This report looks to present embryo thoughts we have had about a way rural areas collectively could arrive at consensus views about the rural issues that affect them via the web. We hope this may be an area where RSN, ACRE, NALC and the University of Gloucestershire and various rural representative organisations could work together.

INTRODUCTION

This report seeks to link organisations, councillors and individuals from across rural areas of England for the first time to seek to achieve consensus views to assist rural areas express their thoughts and concerns to opinion formers and policy makers.

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 1800 community consultation responses from the 12,000 weekly emails sent out. In questioning more deeply however there are Parishes and individuals who are best described as cynical and who are rather tongue-in-cheek on everything and anything.

It is hoped we can incrementally strengthen the rural hand, lessen the cynicism a tad and produce some rural consensus thinking through the proposals in this report.

We think technological advances can now make this a practical option.

THE PRESENT POSITION

Currently:-

- The Rural Services Network undertakes representational work
- Rural England C.I.C. seeks to allow continuing rural research and best practice exchange

However, how can a non-organisational rural consensus be produced from rural people and rural organisations?

This report seeks to examine that. Perhaps for us our current proposed solution lies in the following internal arrangement:-

We look to find a way that our current network, Sounding Board system and the planned rural panel can be integrated into a system that produces a more comprehensive and cohesive voice for rural people. In some ways they can act as building blocks to such a system

THE RSN NETWORK (RSN)

The network comprises some 23,000 e mail contacts of people and organisations associated with or living and/or working in rural areas. We use the network periodically to gain views on specific issues. There will shortly be a discussion board and we send out from time to time **Calls for Information** on a wide range of topics.

SOUNDING BOARDS

Sounding Boards are merely established to give indicative responses on issues. They comprise people from similar backgrounds In so far as they are associated with the rural areas of England.

RSN currently runs two sounding boards. One comprises the representatives on RSN of the member authorities of the organisation (about 150 councils). The other comprises a representative from parish councils in those RSN member areas who have agreed to appoint a Councillor for a Parish Council Board (about 500 parish councils) RSN is looking to also establish Sounding Boards for Small Businesses, School Governors, Young People, Students on Rural Research Issues. Each Sounding Board would need to comprise at least 50 people but they are not "statistically valid" in market research/survey work terms.

THE RURAL PANEL

Working with Rural England C.I.C. the University of Gloucestershire is currently undertaking work looking to establish a fully representative “statistically valid” panel, hopefully of at least 300 people which can be used for full consultation on a range of issues. It will be balanced in proportion to the population of rural England as a whole, in terms of gender, background, age and other important considerations.

AN ONLINE RURAL COMMUNITY PARLIAMENT

This report therefore sets out to consider how by using some (but not all) of the systems already in place a deliberative assembly for discussion (the original definition of a Parliament) could be constituted to establish perhaps still wider membership, vision and respect, and responsive to, the rural situation.

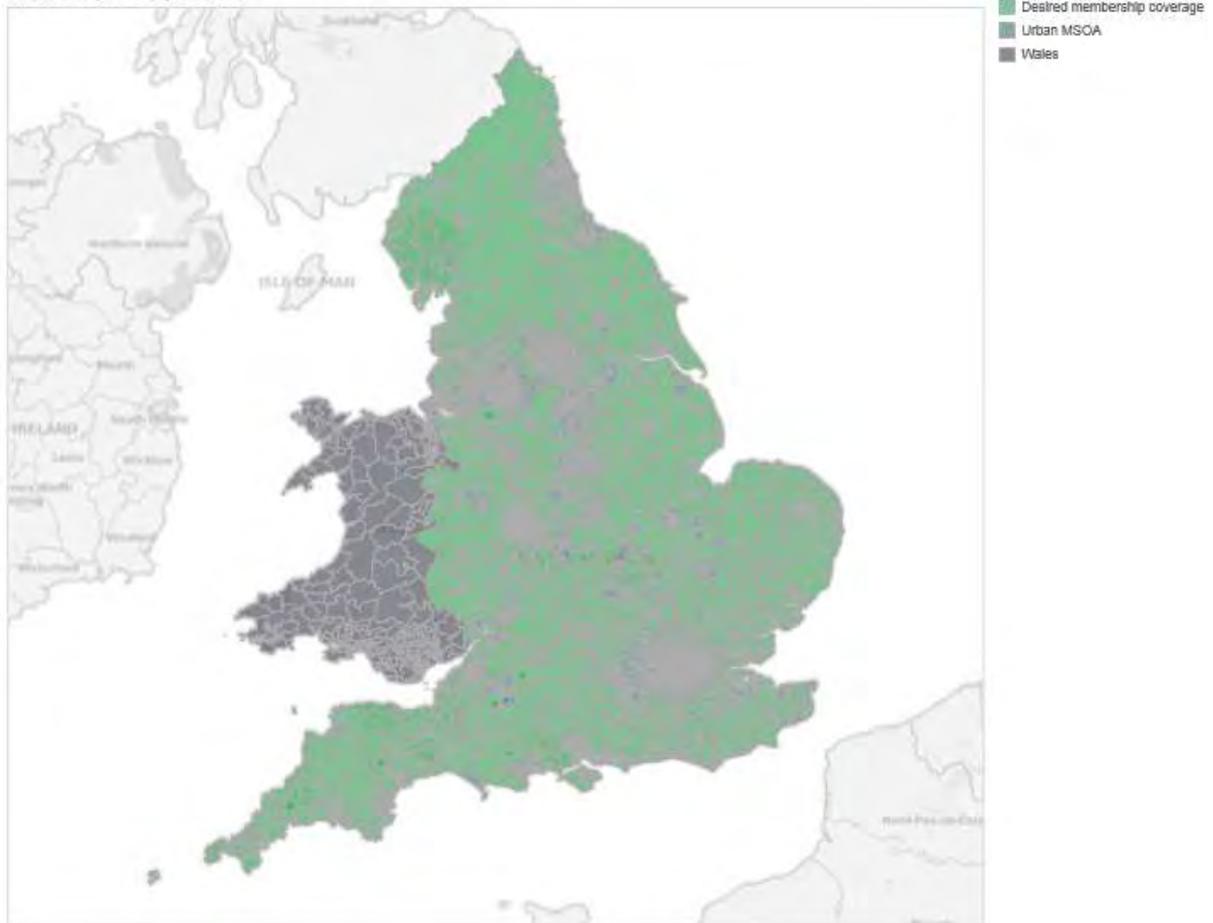
CONSIDERATION

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

- (a) It struggles 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 holistically or forcibly.
- (b) Without some way of these diverse areas presenting themselves, and, where they wish to, their views, it will always be in danger of either being overlooked or scooped into mainstream thinking about England.
- (c) As England grows still further to accommodate a growing population there is a danger of that threat becoming more pronounced.

The financial cut backs (from central government) in rural areas, which have a lower service base in any event, are clearly concerning in this context.

Middle Super Output Areas



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

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.

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, Convention or Convocation doesn't, to us, sound right either particularly as the process here will take place online. The term 'Parliament' is a good one But 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 legislative

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 makes it sound we feel less capable of anything authoritarian (which it certainly cannot be as an online process) and more a vehicle of community opinion.

A traditional Rural Parliament as run in other European countries (Scotland has just begun to stage physical events that go under that heading) is unlikely, we feel, to be advocated or particularly supported directly by government in England.

However an online process we think can achieve a lot without being of ‘political’ concern.

HOW THIS WOULD WORK WITH OTHER PROCESSES

Such an Online Community Parliamentary system would need to compliment and not compete with other systems.

The RSN Calls for evidence are spasmodic, the Sounding Boards would be employed for sector views instead of an overall view and the Panel is being used because it is a balanced view

So there does seem to be a noticeable variance between systems.

HOW CAN RURAL BE BEST REPRESENTED?

Our feeling is that this might best be served by a mixture of representative and community interests here. Our suggestion is as follows

- Principal Authority Councillor. From the RSN
- Parish Councillor From the RSN Community Group
- Representatives for Youth 100 each from the Young Farmers and UK Youth
- Community 200 people from the Community Large.
- Small Business Representatives From the Sounding Board or the FED of SB
- School Governors From the RSN Community Group
- Rural Services Partnership From the RSP Ltd Company
- Rural Citizens Advice Bureaux From the Citizen’s Advice Rural Interest Group
- Rural Age Uk
- Rural Colleges

- Rural Students
- Local Economic Partnerships
- Leader Groups
- NFU reps
- CLA Reps
- Countryside Alliance Reps
- CPRE Reps



HOW WOULD THE 'COMMUNITY PARLIAMENT' WORK

It's necessary to think from the outset of the beginning, the process itself, and the outcomes sought. This might be paraphrased, who sets the areas to be considered? How does the process (community parliament) actually work? And who considers the outcomes.

The Beginning

It is suggested that the Rural Assembly of the RSN takes the lead role in deciding the questions to be posed. The Assembly includes the RSP members and therefore ACRE, NALC, NFU, CAB, CA, Age UK all of whom are RSP members can come to the meeting and input into its deliberations on this. It will be about the preparation of a survey monkey questionnaire which will pose maybe 10 or 12 questions each year across a range of topics. It's easy to overstate this, maybe, but it will be the first time that a mechanism is created that allows a truly consensus rural view can to emerge on topics of the day. The starting process may take place at the Rural Assembly in the November of each year.

The Process

It is suggested that people we are involving as the 'community parliamentarians' are given a defined period of nine weeks to reply. We would send out reminders (and the survey again) after 3 and 6 weeks. Looking at the constituent numbers again there are some 1,750 people

potentially involved. We think an extensive process like this can add considerable weight to views that may previously have been obtained from a Rural Panel or a Sounding Board. It is suggested this survey runs from the mid weeks of January to the end of March.

The Outcome

The RSN rural Conference runs in Cheltenham over 2 days in September each year. It is suggested that the 'taking forward' session of the consensus views takes place in a special session of that conference, possibly on the first day of the conference. That first day could be targeted to bring all the non local government sessions together perhaps so that there becomes one open day and a second day which might perhaps be more targeted to government and local government considerations.

ADVANTAGES OVER A SYSTEM PHYSICALLY BRINGING TOGETHER PEOPLE

We feel there are many advantages:-

- No costly meetings to arrange here, no travelling expenses.
- Far more flexibility regarding arrangements. It is for the various organisations to ensure their representative quotas are full and that RSN have the maximum number of email addresses to send the survey to
- Parliamentarians may have some concern about a physical body coming together under that title but we hope there would be far less chance of concern about this arrangement.

POSSIBLE UNIVERSITY INVOLVEMENT IN THE PROCESS

We do think there are real advantages to a university or maybe two being involved in the process. We are therefore having discussions with the University of Gloucestershire at this time. It would re-enforce the neutrality and academic rigour of the process and although, as here, there does have to be some organisation fulfilling a lead role to get things running and underpinned, it perhaps makes it less likely that friction between parties will occur.

CONCLUSION

This is of course a consultative document. We would need favourable consultation with the University Sector and with Acre and NALC (under a tripartite arrangement we already have with them which provides a forum for joint discussion)

We welcome members input and hopefully approval of the following report.

REPORT TO RSN EXECUTIVE – 12th June 2017

CATEGORIES OF RSN OPERATION

In the summer of 2016 the Executive at their Blue Sky meeting decided on a pathway for a range of issues. The consequential Future Directions report from the Executive went through the RSN AGM in November.

As a result of the new directions being taken it is important that each of the operational areas of the Rural Services Network have a clear brief setting out what it seeks to do, why its operation is Special and the Problem Areas it has to try to tackle.

There are now, as a result of the Future Directions process, five operational areas inside the RSN. These are:-

- SPARSE RURAL
- THE RURAL ASSEMBLY
- THE RURAL SERVICES PARTERSHIP
- THE RSN ASSOCIATE MEMBER GROUP
- THE RURAL COMMUNITY GROUP MEMBERS

Attached to this document are the five suggested Briefs. The Executive are asked to formally ratify them.

BRIEF FOR RURAL SERVICES NETWORK

COMMUNITY MEMBERSHIP

NATIONALLY REPRESENTING RURAL AREAS

Service provided free of charge to organisations in areas where the principal local authorities are in membership of the Rural Services Network

THE SERVICE

1. To act 'de facto' as the 'Rural Officer' to the local councils, local rural schools, local community groups, and relevant rural small businesses in the rural area of local authorities who are formally members of the Rural Services Network.
2. To provide to those organisations information and news, details of grant opportunities, consultation requests. We also provide specific bulletins in respect of Rural Health, Transport, Fuel Poverty, Heart of the Village, Young People and Older People.
3. To seek to deliver a national liaison service to support the authority's rural areas in dealing with collective problems arising from rural people encountering vulnerability, isolation, rural crime, poverty and other service difficulties.
4. To stage each year an Annual Rural Conference and an annual Rural Health Conference to allow the continuance of a national platform ensuring some rural proofing and consideration of relevant issues as they relate to English rural areas.
5. To run each year four subsidised seminars on rural issues.
6. To involve some community members in a prominent role in the staging of a virtual Rural Parliament or a Rural Panel or appropriate Rural Sounding Boards seeking to ensure the consensus rural views and opinions and information on topical issues as they occur.
7. To seek to ensure, through the operation of a Rural Services APPG and a Rural Peers Group and associated parliamentary campaigning groups, that rural local authorities' views on rural issues are pressed and are fully debated in the parliamentary arena.
8. Ensure that specific rural research dovetailed upon the template of England's rural areas continues. (Rural England CIC <https://ruralengland.org/>)

THE COMMITMENT

With the ceasing of operation of the Government funded Commission for Rural Communities; the LGA.s Rural Commission, the Market Town's Association, and of National Rural, RSN through its various networks will work on as the sole dedicated organisation dealing specifically with rural services and rural governance considerations.

SOME OF THE PROBLEMS WE HAVE TO GRAPPLE WITH.

The 'Country-file' image of rural England masks some hard statistics that are extremely troubling:-

- The average age of the population as a whole living in the rural areas of England increases twice as fast each year as does the rise in the average age of the national population figure.
- In Predominantly Rural areas 98.8% of the projected twenty year population increase (2015 to 2035) relates to the over-65 age group. The projected population increase of over-65s in Predominantly Urban areas accounts for 52.8% of the total increase.
- In the next 20 years the number of people over 85 years of age living in Predominantly Rural areas of England is predicted to increase by 132%. This is 18% greater than the situation for England as a whole.
- The suicide rate in rural areas is actually higher than the national average.
- The earned average wage in rural areas compared to urban areas is 18.8% lower.
- Council tax per head is 21% higher in rural areas (2017/18).
- Residual fuel usage (non-gas, non-electricity and non-road transport fuels, covering consumption of coal, petroleum, manufactured solid fuels and bioenergy and waste not used for electricity generation or road transport) per resident is 388% higher in rural areas (2014).
- Average domestic electricity consumption is 18% higher in rural areas (2015) (domestic gas consumption is approximately equal).
- The proportion of fuel poor households is greatest in rural villages, hamlets and isolated dwellings, standing at 14% compared with the English position of 11% (2014).
- "People in rural areas typically need to spend 10–20 per cent more on everyday requirements than those in urban areas. The more remote the area, the greater these additional costs." - Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Minimum Income Standard for Rural Households.
- Vehicle miles on local authority supported bus services have had to be reduced by 33% in predominantly rural areas in the period 2011/12 to 2015/16.
- Adult social care as a percentage of local authority total service expenditure is higher in Predominantly Rural areas, standing at 23% in 2016/17 (18% for Predominantly Urban).
- Hourly rates for personal social care home care (external) are 9.3% greater in Predominantly Rural local authority areas when compared with the England average.
- In 2014/15, nearly 15% of 15 year olds surveyed from Predominantly Rural areas had a long term illness, disability or medical condition (this is greater than found for respondents from Predominantly Urban areas and is important as self-rated health is seen to be related to behaviours, outcomes and other social conditions such as life satisfaction).

Rural Vulnerability increases every year and so does the number of people for whom it would be appropriate to be registered on the priority services list. Rural Isolation has become greater because of the cut backs. If rural areas are to be taken into the economic and social equation both locally and nationally it is vital that a Rural Services Network operates successfully.

It is fair to say that rural areas have received some favourable consideration from some of the European Funds. There is obviously a national case that rural areas have to present as the Brexit process moves forward to seek to persuade Westminster that continued assistance is an absolute necessity. It is vital now that there is a way to present such a joined up case and the Rural Services Network will need to be at the heart of that.

BRIEF FOR RURAL ASSEMBLY MEMBERSHIP

REPRESENTING YOUR RURAL AREAS

Flat rate charge of £520 per annum per authority.

THE SERVICE

1. To act 'de facto' as the authority's Rural Officer providing the authority and its local councils, local rural schools, local community groups, and relevant rural small businesses in its area, with information and news, details of grant opportunities and consultation requests. We also provide specific bulletins in relation to Rural Health, Transport, Fuel Poverty, Heart of the Village, Young People and Older People.
2. To seek to deliver a national liaison service to support the authority's rural areas in dealing with collective problems arising from rural people encountering vulnerability, isolation, rural crime, poverty and other service difficulties.
3. To stage each year two Rural Assembly Meetings at the LGA together with an annual Rural Conference and an annual Rural Health Conference (both at reduced rates for Rural Assembly members) to allow the continuance of a national platform ensuring some rural proofing and consideration of relevant issues as they relate to English rural areas.
4. To run each year four FREE seminars on rural issues across the country to ensure the authority's officers and members can keep fully updated on rural issues.
5. To involve local authority members in a prominent role in the staging of a virtual Rural Parliament which together with a Rural Panel and appropriate Rural Sounding Boards will ensure the arrival and the promotion of consensus rural views and opinions on topical issues as they occur.
6. To seek to ensure, through the operation of a Rural Services APPG and a Rural Peers Group and associated parliamentary campaigning groups, that rural local authorities' views on rural issues are pressed and are fully debated in the parliamentary arena.
7. Ensure that local authority members, with a rural ward, have full opportunity to present their views and concerns at a national level through this specific Rural Councillor forum.
8. Ensure that specific rural research dovetailed upon the template of England's rural areas continues. (Rural England CIC- <https://ruralengland.org/>)

9. Ensure through the operation of appropriate sub groups that rural consideration continues in relation to the following specific services:-

- Housing; (Rural Housing Alliance)
- Health; (RSN Rural Health Group)
- Transport, (Transport SIG)
- Rural Crime, (National Rural Crime Network)
- Rural Fire and Rescue (RSN Rural Fire and Rescue Sub SIG).
- Rural Social Care (RSN Rural Health, Social Care and Vulnerability Group)

These arrangements work in conjunction with the Rural Services Partnership Ltd to ensure that all service providers (Local Authority or otherwise) are engaged and involved in taking the rural case forward.

THE COMMITMENT

With the ceasing of operation of the Government funded Commission for Rural Communities; the LGA.s Rural Commission, the Market Town's Association, and of National Rural, RSN through the Rural Assembly will work on as the sole dedicated organisation dealing specifically with rural services and rural governance considerations. We are totally dependent on all local authorities with pronounced rural areas working with us to be able to achieve cross national operation but offer this at a minimal cost.

SOME OF THE PROBLEMS WE HAVE TO GRAPPLE WITH.

The 'Country-file' image of rural England masks some hard statistics that are extremely troubling:-

- The average age of the population as a whole living in the rural areas of England increases twice as fast each year as does the rise in the average age of the national population figure.
- In Predominantly Rural areas 98.8% of the projected twenty year population increase (2015 to 2035) relates to the over-65 age group. The projected population increase of over-65s in Predominantly Urban areas accounts for 52.8% of the total increase.
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- Council tax per head is 21% higher in rural areas (2017/18).
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- Average domestic electricity consumption is 18% higher in rural areas (2015) (domestic gas consumption is approximately equal).

- The proportion of fuel poor households is greatest in rural villages, hamlets and isolated dwellings, standing at 14% compared with the English position of 11% (2014).
- "People in rural areas typically need to spend 10–20 per cent more on everyday requirements than those in urban areas. The more remote the area, the greater these additional costs." - Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Minimum Income Standard for Rural Households.
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- Hourly rates for personal social care home care (external) are 9.3% greater in Predominantly Rural local authority areas when compared with the England average.
- In 2014/15, nearly 15% of 15 year olds surveyed from Predominantly Rural areas had a long term illness, disability or medical condition (this is greater than found for respondents from Predominantly Urban areas and is important as self-rated health is seen to be related to behaviours, outcomes and other social conditions such as life satisfaction).

Rural Vulnerability increases every year and so does the number of people for whom it would be appropriate to be registered on the priority services list. Rural Isolation has become greater because of the cut backs.

It is fair to say that rural areas have received some favourable consideration from some of the European Funds. There is obviously a national case that rural areas have to present as the Brexit process moves forward to seek to persuade Westminster that continued assistance is an absolute necessity. It is vital now that there is a way to present such a joined up case and the Rural Assembly and the Rural Services Network will need to be at the heart of that.

BRIEF FOR RURAL SERVICES NETWORK ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP.

NATIONALLY REPRESENTING YOUR RURAL AREAS

Service provided at a nominal charge based on number of rural output areas in an authority.

THE SERVICE

1. To act 'de facto' as the authorities 'Rural Officer' providing to the authority itself and to the local councils, local rural schools, local community groups, and relevant rural small businesses in its rural area information and news, details of grant opportunities, consultation requests and suggested responses with specific bulletins in respect of Rural Health, Transport, Fuel Poverty, Heart of the Village, Young People and Older People.
2. To seek to deliver a national liaison service to support authorities' rural areas in dealing with collective problems arising from rural people encountering vulnerability, isolation, rural crime, poverty and other service difficulties.
3. To stage each year an Annual Rural Conference and a Rural Health Conference to allow the continuance of a national platform ensuring some rural proofing and consideration of relevant issues as they relate to English rural areas.
4. To run each year four subsidised seminars on rural issues.
5. To involve local authority members in a prominent role in the staging of a virtual Rural Parliament which together with a Rural Panel and appropriate Rural Sounding Boards will ensure the arrival and the promotion of consensus rural views and opinions on topical issues as they occur.
6. To seek to ensure, through the operation of a Rural Services APPG and a Rural Peers Group and associated parliamentary campaigning groups, that rural local authority's views on rural issues are pressed and are fully debated in the parliamentary arena.
7. Ensure that local authority members with a rural ward have full opportunity to present their views and concerns at a national level.
8. Ensure that specific rural research dovetailed upon the template of England's rural areas continues. (Rural England CIC)

THE COMMITMENT

With the ceasing of operation of the Government funded Commission for Rural Communities; the LGA.s Rural Commission, the Market Town's Association, and of National Rural, RSN through the Rural Assembly will work on as the sole dedicated organisation dealing specifically with rural services and rural governance considerations. We are totally dependent however on all local authorities with pronounced rural areas working with us to this end enabling achievement of cross national operation. This can be achieved at a minimal cost to individual authorities.

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Rural Vulnerability increases every year as will the number of people for whom safeguarded by the priority services list would be appropriate. Rural Isolation has become greater because of the cut backs. If rural areas are to be taken into the economic and social equation both locally and nationally it is vital that a Rural Assembly operates successfully.

It is fair to say that rural areas have received some favourable consideration from some of the European Funds. There is obviously a national case that rural areas have to present as the Brexit process moves forward to seek to persuade Westminster that continued assistance is an absolute necessity. It is vital now that there is a way to present such a joined up case and the Rural Services Network will need to be at the heart of that.

BRIEF FOR RURAL SERVICES PARTNERSHIP MEMBERSHIP

NATIONALLY JOINING TOGETHER AND REPRESENTING THOSE SERVING RURAL AREAS

At a flat-rate charge of £495 per annum per organisation.

THE SERVICE

1. To act 'de facto' as the organisations national 'Rural Officer' providing to the main organisation itself and to its various regional and local rural branches and their staff, details of grant opportunities, consultation requests and suggested responses in specific cases. We also provide bulletins in relation to Rural Health, Transport, Fuel Poverty, Heart of the Village, Young People and Older People.
2. To seek to deliver a national liaison service to support rural areas in dealing with collective problems arising from rural people encountering vulnerability, isolation, rural crime, poverty and other service difficulties.
3. To stage each year two Rural Assembly Meetings at the LGA together with an Annual Rural Conference and a Rural Health Conference (both at reduced rates for Rural Services Partnership members) to allow the continuance of a national platform ensuring some rural proofing and consideration of relevant issues as they relate to English rural areas.
4. To run each year four FREE seminars on rural issues across the country to ensure all member authorities officers and members can keep fully updated n rural issues
5. To involve rural service providers in a prominent role in the staging of a virtual Rural Parliament which together with a Rural Panel and appropriate Rural Sounding Boards will ensure the arrival and the promotion of consensus rural views and opinions on topical issues as they occur.
6. To seek to ensure, through the operation of a Rural Services APPG and a Rural Peers Group and associated parliamentary campaigning groups, that rural service providers views on rural issues are pressed and are fully debated in the parliamentary arena.
7. Ensure that local rural service providers have full opportunity to present their views and concerns at a national level.
8. Ensure that specific rural research dovetailed upon the template of England's rural areas continues. (Rural England CIC)
9. Ensure through the operation of appropriate sub groups that rural consideration continues in relation to the following specific services:-
 - Housing; (Rural Housing Alliance)
 - Health; (RSN Rural Health Group)
 - Transport, (Transport SIG)
 - Rural Crime, (National Rural Crime Network)
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 - Rural Social Care (RSN Rural Health, Social Care and Vulnerability Group)

These arrangements work in conjunction with the Rural Service Networks' and the LGA's Rural Assembly to make certain that the totality of service providers (Local Authority or otherwise) are both engaged together and involved in taking the rural case forward.

THE COMMITMENT

With the ceasing of operation of the Government funded Commission for Rural Communities; the LGA's Rural Commission, the Market Town's Association, and of National Rural, RSN through the Rural Services Partnership and the Rural Assembly will work on as the sole dedicated organisation dealing specifically with rural services and rural governance considerations. We are totally dependent however on all who work in the rural areas of England to work with us to enable cross service and cross national operation. This can be achieved at a minimal cost to individual organisations.

SOME OF THE PROBLEMS WE ALL HAVE TO GRAPPLE WITH.

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Rural Vulnerability increases every year as will the number of people for whom safeguarded by the priority services list would be appropriate. Rural Isolation has become greater because of the cut backs. If rural areas are to be taken into the economic and social equation both locally and nationally it is vital that cross rural considerations are both established and operated successfully.



BRIEF FOR SPARSE RURAL

ARGUING YOUR AUTHORITY'S AND YOUR AREAS

FINANCIAL INTEREST

Subscription Counties and Districts: - £1500 flat rate plus calculation based on number of rural residents in an Authority's area. Capped at £3000.

Subscription Unitaries: - £2100 flat rate plus calculation based on number of rural residents. Capped at £6,000.

THE SERVICE

1. Work with the Rural Fair Share Group of MPS providing data and other information to seek to improve the financial allocation in respect of rural services provision for Local Authorities (including public health), & Fire & Rescue as well as Police & Health/CCG Services. This to also include commentary from time to time on financial issues relating to rural housing, education, transport and flooding services.
2. Pass financial advice and guidance to all Member Authorities on national financial issues impacting upon them.
3. Two membership meetings each year of just SPARSE Rural members.
4. Hold for Sparse Rural Authorities an Annual Finance Seminar at no extra charge.
5. Provide rural local Authorities with statistical and comparison data to enable local Authorities to assess their performance both in individual service areas and across rural activities generally.
6. To provide, through the Rural Services Observatory, rural data comparing the rural position with the English position generally and where appropriate comparing the position across different member authorities' areas.
7. To run each year four FREE seminars on rural issues across the country to ensure the authority's officers and members can keep fully updated on rural issues plus, one special meeting for Sparse Rural Economic Development Officers.
8. Reduced rates for both the annual Rural Conference and Rural Health Conference.
9. All Rural Assembly programmes (including 2 meetings a year) and activities (see attached) free of any further charge.

THE COMMITMENT

Over a settlement/baseline re-set period we will provide through our financial representational work returns to member authorities better than they otherwise would have been and which will considerably exceed the annual Sparse Rural charge levied. This will continue to be our commitment to Sparse Rural members as financial support continues in the form of a tailored Business Rate system.

SOME OF THE PROBLEMS WE HAVE TO GRAPPLE WITH.

1. BASED ON THE PRESENT REVENUE SUPPORT GRANT SYSTEM

- a) **Government Funded Spending Power (GFSP) in 2015/16 showed a funding disparity of 39% in favour of Predominantly Urban local authorities over Predominantly Rural authorities.**
- b) GFSP in the multi-year settlement announced in February 2017 shows this funding gap worsening and is set to increase to **55%** for the year 2019/20
- c) Rural residents pay, on average, 17% (£86.99, Final Settlement 2017/18) per head more in Council Tax than their urban counterparts due to receiving less government grant.
- d) The workplace based median average annual earnings for predominantly rural areas is 18.8% lower than for predominantly urban areas.
- e) In effect, Government policy is to see local public services funded much more through Council Tax in rural areas compared to urban.
- f) Rural residents are suffering systematic discrimination through underfunding of key services by the lack of proper recognition of the extra costs of providing services in rural areas. The outcome is that rural areas compared to urban get less government grant, pay more in Council Tax (from, on average, lower wages), and get fewer services affecting both levels of availability and accessibility.
- g) Adult social care is a growing issue, and will become even be more acute in rural areas where the proportion of older population is growing faster than urban areas. Despite the older rural population, Adult Social Care Support Grant in 2017/18 was 15% greater per resident for Predominantly Urban authorities than Predominantly Adult Social Care Core Resources which are funded 76% by Council Tax in rural areas compared to 66% in urban areas.
- h) In the next 20 years the number of people over 85 years old living in Predominantly Rural areas of England is predicted to increase by 132%. This is 18% greater than the situation for England as a whole.
- i) Adult social care as a percentage of local authority total service expenditure is higher in Predominantly Rural areas, standing at 23% in 2016/17 (18% for Predominantly Urban).
- j) Hourly rates for personal social care home care (external) are 9.3% greater in Predominantly Rural local authority areas when compared with the England average.
- k) Public Health allocations to local authorities for improving the health of their local population and reducing health inequalities are based on unequal funding, where Predominantly Urban authorities had allocations in 2017/18 56% greater than Predominantly Rural authorities.
- l) Government funding of Police and Fire services in 2017/18 were higher per head of population for urban areas than rural areas.

2. BASED ON PROPOSED 100% BUSINESS RATES RETENTION (BY THE SECTOR)

- a) **Reform of the local government finance system to a system of 100% business rates retention will lock in current inequalities unless rural authorities have a strong shared mandate arguing**

for fairer funding. The proposed new “Needs Assessment” will need close scrutiny and probably strong challenge through the Rural Fair Share Group. The same is true of the equalisation methodology.

- b) The opportunities for business growth leading to significant increases in rateable value are far less in rural areas compared to major urban/metropolitan areas.
- c) Rateable values per square metre are half of those in London.
- d) In rural areas much more is given by way of business rate relief than in urban areas.
- e) There is a real risk that the gap in spending power between urban and rural will, over the years, grow ever wider.

SPARSE Rural has been in existence for twenty years and has fought off an attempt for the Sparsity Indicator in the Needs Block to be removed entirely and then a decade later persuaded government to materially increase the indicator. We have levelled the playing field over that time but the weaknesses in the system created when there was no joined up rural representation still haunt rural authorities and there remains much to do, especially as a new Needs Assessment is being worked up.

Brexit – facilitating the rural voice.

Discussion paper for Roundtable, 13th June 2017. Draft.

Professor Mark Shucksmith OBE, Newcastle University

What could rural areas look like after Brexit?

2025 Scenario 1

Small businesses across rural England are struggling to survive as a result of what they describe as the ‘triple whammy’ of loss of markets due to export tariffs, skills shortages, and the closure of support schemes formerly funded by the EU’s regional policy and rural development policy. Farm families are hard hit, especially in upland areas such as our national parks and AONBs, by the loss of export markets and EU subsidies and by a reduction in opportunities to earn off-farm incomes. District, County and Unitary Councils lose funding as they are now reliant on Business Rates and Council Tax – services suffer. Environmental groups are concerned that land abandonment is damaging landscapes and habitats – tourism businesses suffer. Rural communities complain that the lengthy economic downturn and public spending cutbacks together with a failure to rural-proof national policies, are leading to losses of essential services, such as aspects of social care, health care, schools, leisure opportunities, shops and transport, with many voluntary and community organisations also having to close their services. Young people and older people requiring care face particular hardships. MPs representing rural constituencies are forming an all-party parliamentary group to promote the need for a coherent rural policy.

2025 Scenario 2

Small rural businesses are leading the economic recovery from the initial economic shock of leaving the EU. Aided by a national rural industrial strategy which recognises the economic potential of rural innovation and enterprise (including tourism and culture) and builds on lessons from the rural growth pilots, rural businesses are outperforming those in most cities. Farmers are adapting to the new trade deal with the EU and to new national support schemes which are better targeted toward provision of public goods such as landscape, wildlife, flood prevention and carbon sinks, and to diversifying income sources. Rural communities are thriving due to the growth in employment opportunities, renewed investment in affordable rural housing, and effective joint working between better-resourced and less financially challenged unitary, county, district and parish/town councils and community and voluntary organisations. These are all part of a new coherent rural strategy, agreed between central and local government and other key stakeholders, which is encouraging and enabling innovations in service and infrastructure provision, in planning and place-shaping, and in skills provision and business support. The OECD is sending a team of experts to study this successful approach so that other countries can learn from our experience.

What might be the elements of a successful, coherent rural strategy post-Brexit?

Suggested elements which would underpin the more desirable scenario are outlined as follows:

An asset-based, locally-led approach: In such an approach, place-based strategies are developed by local people collectively working with local councils as democratically elected, community leaders and deliverers of essential services but also involve external partners and networks. Primarily based

on local assets and local knowledge, local groups also learn from one another through national and transnational networks, sharing ideas and know-how; and the necessary contribution of an enabling state in partnering, capacity-building and setting an enabling framework is also recognisedⁱⁱ. Without this, inequalities will grow between places – a recipe for a two-speed countryside.

A Rural Industrial Strategy: A crucial part of the enabling framework for rural entrepreneurial potentialⁱⁱⁱ to be fulfilled, contributing to national productivity, growth and innovation, is an Industrial Strategy that encourages rural businesses and builds on learning from the rural growth networks. This does not just mean rural-proofing the Industrial Strategy, but the adoption of a more effective approach in the development and implementation of a Rural Industrial Strategy. This would address skills and training, business support, infrastructure, planning and finance – taking ideas both from the Rural Productivity Plan 2015 and from EU schemes such as the RDPE, LEADER and Objective 1 and 5b. LEPs would be required to address rural issues through properly funded Rural Action Plans

A Rural Communities Strategy: Rural life opportunities and thriving communities are also core elements in such a vision. DEFRA Ministers have spoken of their determination to “keep our villages thriving and growing” and to ensure “people living in our market towns and villages have the same life opportunities as those who live in our cities”. This requires investment and innovation in the provision of affordable housing^{iv}, public spaces, connectivity, social care, health care and schools, among other essential services – often in partnership between public, private and VCSE sectors. There is much innovative practice to draw on^v but this is hampered by underfunding.

Public goods and market failure: The British countryside contains iconic landscapes, precious habitats, flora and fauna, beloved cultural legacies - indeed a wealth of natural and cultural assets which depend on land management often without any market revenue. These public goods are highly valued by millions of people, as well as helping to support a low carbon future and green economy^{vi}. Prince Charles, among others, has argued that the countryside is like a delicately woven tapestry, where land, farmers and communities are inextricably intertwined and may easily unravel. Their stewardship therefore requires targeted incentives and rewards for appropriate land management (within the constraints of WTO rules) alongside sustainable rural communities.

Fostering and promoting social innovation: Social innovation is increasingly recognised as a vital ingredient of dynamic economies and as a means of addressing the challenges of service provision in rural areas. In urban policy social innovation is well established in terms of a ‘quadruple helix’ of open cooperation and interaction between public authorities, private businesses, universities and citizens towards smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. International research^{vii} suggests that rural regions may benefit even more from such models of open innovation. These would require a new social partnership operating transparently at multiple scales between public authorities, private businesses, universities and the citizens and voluntary and community organisations of rural areas.

Coherent rural policy and implementation: Rural policy in each of the devolved nations necessarily reaches across the portfolios of many government departments, creating challenges of co-ordination, responsibility and accountability. None of the ten actions in the Rural Productivity Plan were DEFRA responsibilities, for example, although rural policy is scrutinised by the EFRA Select Committee which expressed its misgivings about the lack of co-ordination of rural policy in its report *Rural Communities* (2013). Since then the post of Rural Advocate has been lost and the Rural Community Policy Unit much reduced in size. Each of the devolved nations has developed their own approach to rural-proofing^{viii}. The question remains of how best to ensure rural policy co-ordination:

- Across central government departments (leadership; rural-proofing^{ix})

- Partnerships between local and central government (an England-wide 'rural deal'?)
- At local level (triple devolution incorporating also VCSEs?)

A short list of key areas where core partners should focus their influencing efforts.

There are a number of possible areas where core partners might focus their influencing efforts, many of which would also involve working with other organisations. It is anticipated that the roundtable would discuss these and reach agreement about priorities and roles. The following possible areas are suggested to assist that discussion:

- *A Rural Industrial Strategy*: This would be a better version of the Rural Productivity Plan incorporating such elements as a Rural Growth Fund, reforms to planning guidance, training and skills initiatives and investment in infrastructure (see below).
- *Rural Social Innovation Fund*: This would recapture the creativity and capacity-building of early LEADER programmes, administered through local partnerships of councils and RCCs. The purpose would be to build capacity through animation, facilitation and knowledge exchange and to promote social innovation in service provision and social enterprise.
- *Affordable rural housing*: Reinstatement of affordable rural housing target with necessary budget and cross-subsidy provisions, alongside incentives to landowners to release exception sites, with powers for councils and housing associations to build small rural schemes exempt from the right to buy. The right to buy, mandatory or voluntary, should not apply in rural areas where unmet demand exceeds supply over the medium to long term.
- *Effective rural-proofing*: The impact on rural citizens of new policies or policy changes should be considered at early stages of policy development; failure to demonstrate this should be acknowledged by government as grounds for legal challenge to such policies' implementation. Training and advice on conducting rural-proofing should be available to all civil servants from a specialist team.
- *A Fair Deal for Rural Communities*: Rural citizens should expect a fair share, fair play, a fair go and a fair say – i.e. fair outcomes including access to services which meet needs; transparent decisions based on evidence; equal opportunities to realise their potential and to participate in society; and a fair hearing and an effective voice in decision-making.
- *Rural premium*: The government's allocation of resources to local authorities and other providers should fully recognise the additional costs of delivering services in rural areas and the extra time and cost for citizens of reaching distant, centralised services.
- *Connectivity*: Investment (to meet market failures) is required in ensuring full coverage of super-fast broadband, mobile technologies, emerging technologies and public transport to all rural citizens and businesses, and to tackling digital exclusion. Rural areas should not be allowed to lag too far behind urban as technological advances occur.
- *Social care*: The provision of social care to the ageing population of rural England will be a major challenge, growing more acute as people live longer; as accommodation for care workers becomes ever less affordable; and as budgets for social care become tighter. It is

vital that emerging policies and funding proposals to address social care provision (adults and Children) are fully rural-proofed.

- *Farm families*: Especially in upland areas, support for farm families should be refocused to enable them to continue their stewardship of rural land and environment after the loss of Pillar 2 payments. This could be through outcome-based payments for ecosystem services or through payment for standardised labour inputs (SMDs).
- *New Coherent Rural Strategy*: A new 25-year Rural Strategy should be agreed between central and local government and other key stakeholders. This should enable the potential of rural economies and a fair deal for rural communities. It would include coherent leadership from within central government alongside an England-wide “rural deal” which shares power, resources and responsibility with local government and communities through a framework of triple devolution and capacity building.

ⁱ See also CRE (2017) After Brexit: 10 key questions for rural policy.

http://www.ncl.ac.uk/media/wwwnclacuk/centreforruraleconomy/files/CRE_10_Key_Questions_final.pdf

ⁱⁱ Shucksmith (2012) [Future Directions in Rural Development](#), Carnegie UK Trust.

ⁱⁱⁱ Phillipson et al (2017) [Small rural firms in English regions: analysis of UK longitudinal business survey](#), CRE

^{iv} [Rural Housing Policy Review](#), 2015.

^v CRE (2015) [Reimagining the rural: What's missing in rural policy?](#) CRE

^{vi} Commission for Rural Communities (2010) [High Ground, High Potential](#), CRC.

^{vii} Kolehmainen et al (2015); Nordberg 2013)

^{viii} Shortall (2017) Rural-proofing: magic bullet or rural vote catcher? Newcastle University Institute for Social Renewal <https://blogs.ncl.ac.uk/nisr/rural-proofing-magic-bullet-or-rural-vote-catcher/>

^{ix} <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rural-proofing>

Rural Conference 2017

The Infrastructure of Success - New Routes to Economic Growth

Rural
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5&6 September
Park Campus, Cheltenham

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How to Book

- Complete and return the booking form below

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Please return or email completed forms to:

Post:

Rural Services Network, Kilworthy Park, Tavistock, PL19 0BZ

Email: events@sparse.gov.uk

If you need any further assistance please call us on 01822 851370

CLOSING DATE FOR REGISTRATIONS: 28th August 2017

Conference Agenda

DAY 1	
11:30 am	Arrival and Registration (<i>Tea and Coffee available</i>)
11:50 am	Welcome and Introduction Cecilia Motley and Graham Biggs
12:00 pm	Panel Discussion
13:00 pm	Lunch
14:00 pm	Keynote Speaker
14:45 pm	Local Government Finance and The Implications of the Business Rates Regime for Rural Areas Dan Bates (Pixel Financial Management)
15:30 pm	Local Authority perspective on Local Government Finance – Business Rates Pilot
16:00 pm	Summing up key points from the first day Ivan Annibal
18:45 pm	Evening Drinks Reception - Queens Hotel, Cheltenham Alice Grimes (Big Lottery)

DAY 2	
9:30 am	Arrival and Registration (<i>Tea and Coffee available</i>)
9:50 am	Welcome and Introduction Cecilia Motley and Graham Biggs*
10:05 am	Plenary 1 - People, Place and Prosperity
10:05 am	The Road to Somewhere - Understanding our Divided Communities David Goodhart (Policy Exchange)
10:50 am	Farming Matters - The Impact of Brexit on Food, Landscapes and Rural Communities <i>Details to follow</i>
11:20 am	Morning Tea and Coffee
11:40 am	Enterprising Rural Communities - Where they are and what makes them <i>Details to follow</i>
12:10 pm	Panel Q&A
12:40 pm	Workshop 1 - Hints and Tips for Rural Growth <i>(Delegates choose 2 workshops from the choices below - each workshop is repeated in the second workshop session at 14:05 pm)</i> A - Food Enterprise Zones in Practice (Martin Collison - Collison and Associates) B - Regenerating "Rural" (James Farrar - Chief Operating Officer - York, North Yorkshire and East Riding LEP) C - Roads and Regeneration (Richard Wills Executive Director for Environment and Economy - Lincolnshire County Council)
13:15 pm	Lunch
14:05 pm	Workshop 2 - Hints and Tips for Rural Growth <i>(Delegates attend their second choice of workshop from the list provided above)</i>
14:40 pm	Afternoon Tea and Coffee
15:00 pm	Plenary 2 - The Big Picture
15:00 pm	Our Sustainable Approach to Rural Economic Development Charlotte Wright (Chief Executive Officer of Highlands and Islands Enterprise)
15:25 pm	The impact of infrastructure investment on rural places Tony Meggs (CEO - Infrastructure and Projects Authority)
15:50 pm	Question and Answers
16:05 pm	Summing Up and Close Cecilia Motley

*As an outcome we will ask delegates to reflect during the day and fill in a "shopping list" of the 5 key things they need to do in the light of the conference to build the prosperity of their authority/services

The Infrastructure of Success - New Routes to Economic Growth

Tuesday 5th and Wednesday 6th September 2017

DELEGATE BOOKING FORM

Delegate Details	
Please Circle	Mr Mrs Miss Ms Other
Name	
Surname	
Job Title	
Organisation	
Address	
Postcode	
Telephone Number	
Email	

Workshop Choices (Please indicate your workshop choices below using the corresponding letter as shown in the programme above)

	Choice
Workshop Session One	
Workshop Session Two	

Spaces at workshops may be limited and we will try to assign you to your first choice where possible

Payment can be made by:

Cheque made payable to: Rural Services Partnership Ltd and addressed to: G Biggs, PO Box 101, Craven Arms, SY7 7AL

BACS: Account Name: The Rural Services Partnership Ltd; Sort Code: 30 65 93; Account Number: 14877960

Please quote the invoice number on payment or send a BACS remittance advice to graham.biggs@sparse.gov.uk

Book and pay online: Visit [click here](#) (Please note PayPal fees apply)

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Name:

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Purchase Order Number: (if applicable)

Do you have any dietary requirements? _____

Do you have any other special requirements or access needs? _____

Conference fee: **Early Bird Rate**

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2 Non RSN Member Rate ***£249.00**

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4 RSN Non Member 'New Councillor' Rate ***£236.55**

* These prices are excluding VAT.

Prices including VAT are: **1 - £238.80 2 - £298.80 3 - £226.86 4 - £283.86**

Do you require a VAT receipt? (Delete as appropriate)

Yes

No

Please indicate which conference fee applies to your booking using the corresponding number

Confirmation of Booking: All places will be confirmed by email, pending availability.
Please contact us if you do not receive any confirmation 10 days after submitting your booking.

All enquiries to: Rural Services Network – 01822 851370 events@sparse.gov.uk

Please complete and return form to:

Post: Nicola Busuttill, Rural Services Network, Kilworthy Park, Tavistock, PL19 0BZ

Email: events@sparse.gov.uk

CLOSING DATE FOR REGISTRATIONS: 28th AUGUST 2017

The Rural Services Network

The Rural Services Network (RSN) seeks to maintain and, where possible, improve rural services in England.

The Rural Service Network:

- Makes representations on issues affecting rural services
- Promotes active networking between service providers and across all sectors
- Establishes and broadcasts rural best practice
- Promotes debate and interaction between agencies/sectors across many areas of joint interest for example rural crime, rural housing, broadband provision and rural health

The Network comprises over 149 Local Authorities (SPARSE Rural and Rural Assembly) and around 100 Non Local Authority Service Bodies (Rural Services Partnership Ltd) and has Affiliate (Private Sector) Groups. Adequate recognition of the additional cost of provision of rural services in the countryside is an important issue for the Network. The Network was instrumental in the formation of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Rural Services in Parliament. It involves 66 Parliamentarians.

The Network is believed to be unique in Europe and seeks to foster constructive debate on all English rural service issues. Its weekly email newsletter on rural news and comment goes out to some 45,000 people in service and consumer groups. At grass roots level, we have a Community Group comprising 4,000 Local Councils, 3,000 Schools and 500 other rural organisations. "Calls for Evidence" and questionnaires seek to provide operating experience, best practice and collective rural viewpoints.

This information is disseminated and available through our widely respected website (www.rsnonline.org.uk). The group provides services through membership subscription and contract revenue and does not receive any Government grant.

All enquiries to: Rural Services Network - 01822 851370

Please complete and return form to:

- ✉ Post: Nicola Busuttil, c/o Rural Services Network, Kilworthy Park, Drake Road, Tavistock, PL19 0BZ
- ✉ Email: events@sparse.gov.uk

CLOSING DATE FOR REGISTRATIONS: 28th August 2017