

**MINUTES OF THE SPARSE RURAL AND RURAL SERVICES NETWORK EXECUTIVE,
MONDAY 12th JUNE 2017 HELD AT CITY OF WESTMINSTER ARCHIVES CENTRE,
10 ST ANN'S STREET, LONDON**

Present: - Cllr Cecilia Motley (Chairman), Cllr Robert Heseltine (First Vice Chair), Cllr Derrick Haley, John Birtwistle (First Group), Cllr Philip Saunders and Hannah Graham (UK Youth)

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

1. Apologies:- Georgina Fung (UK Youth). Cllr Sue Sanderson, Stewart Horne (Fed of Small Businesses), Rev Richard Kirlew (RSP Chair – Community)

2. Notes of Previous Executive Meeting – 13th March 2017

Agreed as a correct record.

3. Notes of Last Main Rural Assembly Meeting – 10th April 2017

Agreed as a correct record with the addition of Rev Richard Kirlew as present.

4. Budget

The budget was in line with its predicted position as set out in the agreed estimates.

A discussion took place on the need to expand the Officer Core Group of the organisation so that the Network's widened role and future planned expansion could be successfully accomplished. There was a need to bring in another Director at this time. The estimated expenditure was £40k a year. The position would be one of Policy Director but would also have responsibility for the recruitment and retention activities currently undertaken by the Corporate Director

The Executive were informed that financially this was achievable but until the move generated additional income there would be a need for a prudent approach. The position had been discussed with a person with experience in rural issues and his decision would be made shortly.

The Executive agreed the expansion of the Core team of the RSN and the necessary variation to the budget

5. Notification of Resignation from RSN Executive

Two members of the Executive, Cllrs Nicholson and Strange have stepped down. The Executive agreed to approach two Councillors from Eden and Herefordshire respectively to see if they were interested in coming onto the Executive.

6. General Election 2017

The Executive considered the position generally and the following:

- (a) Analysis of Main Party Manifestos against RSN Priorities/2015 Manifesto.
- (b) Rural Coalition Statement
- (c) ACRES asks of next government.

Discussion concentrated on whether or not the 100% Business Rates retention scheme would go ahead (and its timing) and the approach to future settlements.

The Executive agreed that the position would be discussed with the Chair of the Rural Fair Shares Group. Discussions would also take place with the Research Assistants of the Chair and Vice-Chair of the APPG with a view to re-establishing the APPG and

also establishing a Rural Vulnerability Day and hopefully to a dedicated MP group concerning the question of Rural Vulnerability.

7. Report to RSN Executive – Seeking to get backing in the House of Lords.

- The Executive received a written report from the Corporate Director. He suggested trying to set up a Rural Panel for the House of Lords to meet annually in December to discuss the various issues/challenges they feel the RSN should look at to address those issues.. (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 e mail forum between these Panel Members concerning particular rural issues as they arise the panel of Peers o would be consulted with at least annually. The suggested terms of reference are:

NEEDS INSERTING

The Executive agreed to the proposed approach. However, instead of the panel comprising 10 people, they suggested an approach be made to 12 people by adding a potential further cross-bencher and a further Bishop to those to be invited.

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

The Executive received a detailed report about how mechanisms aimed at establishing a rural consensus and sentiment on major issues might be established. The Executive heard how work was being undertaken by Rural England with the University of Gloucestershire to seek to establish a proportionally representative/statistically valid Rural Panel of private individuals. This work was growing on the Rural Principal Council Sounding Board. (Additional Sounding Boards in relation to Small Businesses and Youth were also planned).

The virtual Parliament might involve individuals from Principal Councils, Parish Councils, the Community, small Business, Youth, Citizens Advice, School Governors, RSP, Age UK Groups, Rural Colleges, Rural Students, CPRE, Rural LEPs, NFU, CLA and Countryside Alliance. In all, it was suggested some 1900 people may be involved on email forum.

It was agreed that the arrangement would need the backing of ACRE and some of the rural universities. It was foreseen that the Rural Assembly would be involved in question formation and the results of consultation being reported upon at the Rural Conference. The report was approved by the Executive.

9. Report to RSN Executive – Categories of RSN Operation

Briefs for SPARASE Rural, the Rural Assembly, the Rural Services Partnership, the Rural Services Community Section and the proposed RSN Associate section were presented. Each brief comprised details of:

- (a) The Services
- (b) The Commitment
- (c) Any membership cost and
- (d) The problems that had to be grappled with

The documents were all agreed by the Executive. The Executive also agreed that further short sections outlining successes and targets should be added. These would be agreed by the Executive through email consultation.

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

The Corporate Director reported on the current situation. Attempts were being made to strengthen the support given by those involved in the Energy and Water Industries based on a widened service involving 2 meetings a year and a special parliamentary day on rural vulnerability. It was early days in this regard but some backing had been received from an existing Rural England supporter, Electricity North West, and enquiries were being made of another distributor – UK Power providers who served the South East.

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

A meeting with all parties who had been invited to participate had been arranged for the 13th. The NFU wished to be kept informed but were unable to be represented at the meeting on the 13th.

An introductory report had been prepared by Professor Mark Shucksmith. Ex-BBC political reporter Carole Walker had agreed to act as an independent Chair for the meeting.

The extent of common ground would be explored.

12. Annual Rural Conference 2017: Draft Programme attached

The arrangements were looked at in detail by the Executive and formally agreed.

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) – 27.06.17
The Agenda had already been dispatched as the meeting was only a fortnight away. Finance Officers and Councillor Finance Portfolio holders had also been involved.

14. Any Other Business

(a) Rural Transport

John Birtwistle led members through the Buses Act and the enabling legislation that had to follow it.

An important provision was that an operator now proposing to cease a route or dramatically altering its operation now was statutorily obliged to give to the Transport authority full details including its financial and passenger profiles so that the Transport authority could give full consideration to attracting alternative arrangements.

[Bus Services Act 2017](#). This paper explains the policy background to and contents and purpose of the Bus Services Act 2017. It will be updated as the Act is brought into force and implemented over coming years.

(b) Rural Housing

The Executive on behalf of the RSN as a whole considered and endorsed the National Housing Federation and the Rural Housing Alliance's Rural Housing Five Star Plan.