



**AGENDA FOR SPARSE RURAL AND RURAL SERVICE
NETWORK**

**EXECUTIVE AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE RURAL
SERVICES PARTNERSHIP LTD MEETING**

Venue:- Terrace Lounge, LGA, Smith Square, London. SW1

Date: Monday 18th January 2016

Time: 11.30am to 2.30pm

1. Apologies for Absence

2. Notes of the Previous Meeting

Held on Monday 14th September 2015 to consider any relevant items.
Attachment 1

3. Notes of the Main Meetings

Held on 16th November 2015 to consider any relevant items.
Sparse Rural Sub SIG - Attachment 2 (a)
Rural Assembly Sub SIG – Attachment 2 (b)
RSN SIG AGM – Attachment 2 (c)
RSP AGM – Attachment 2 (d)

4. Provisional Settlement

To consider the position and decide the Group's response.

5. New Homes Bonus

Draft response to the New Homes Bonus Consultation
Attachment 3

6. The Budget Rate Based System

To consider the position and decide the Group's response.

7. Budget Report 2015/2016 and 2016/2017

Budget Report – Conference Outturn 31st December 2015
Attachments 4 and 4 (a)

8. Contract for service rates

Providing a voice for rural communities and service providers

David Inman, Director Kilworthy Park, Tavistock, Devon PL19 0BZ
Tel: 01822 813693

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9. A Rural Information Exchange

Attachment 5

10. Membership

To discuss the situation generally.

11. Devolution

Discussion on the general position.

12. Rural Unitary Group

Any items arising

13. Rural Fire and Rescue Group

To discuss the current situation.

14. Sounding Boards and a Rural Panel

Attachment 6

15. Community Group.

Situation Report

Attachment 7

16. A House of Lords Group

Attachment 8

17. A RSN – ACRE – NALC Concordat

Attachment 9

18. Any other business.

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MINUTES OF THE SPARSE RURAL AND RURAL SERVICES NETWORK EXECUTIVE, MONDAY 14TH SEPTEMBER, 2015 HELD AT THE LGA, SMITH SQUARE, LONDON

Present:- Cllr Cecilia Motley (Chairman) Cllr Robert Heseltine (First Vice Chair), Cllr Roger Begy, Cllr Peter Stevens, Cllr Peter Thornton, Cllr Hilary Carrick, John Birtwistle (Transport), Rev Richard Kirlew (Community), Stewart Horne (Economy).

Officers: - Graham Biggs (Chief Executive), Andy Dean

Apologies: - Cllr Gordon Nicholson, Cllr Derrick Haley, Cllr Lewis Strange, David Inman.

Graham Biggs reported that this would be Hilary Carrick's last meeting as she had been replaced by Cllr Sue Sanderson as Cumbria's representative on the Group. Member's thanked Hilary for all her support and input over the years.

The Chair, Cecilia Motley, welcomed those present and formally opened the meeting.

1. Minutes of the Executive of 22nd June, 2015

These were agreed as a correct record.

2. Minutes of the Main Meeting held on 13th July, 2015.

These, both the SPARSE Rural SubSig and the Rural Assembly SubSig, were noted subject to both Richard Kirlew and John Birtwistle being recorded as being in attendance. Members expressed concern that there were often mistakes in the minutes of Main Meeting relating to attendances.

3. Agenda for AGMs on 16th November, 2015

In addition to normal items the following would be on the agendas:-

SPARSE RURAL

Graham Stuart had agreed to speak at the SPARSE Rural Meeting.

Fairer Funding the "Ask of Government"

Comprehensive Spending Review

Speakers at the Rural Assembly meeting would be Julia Mulligan, Police and Crime Commissioner for North Yorkshire and Chair of the Rural Crime Network, and Jo Lavis speaking on barriers to Housing Associations delivery of affordable housing.

Also on the Rural Assembly Meeting would be:-

Comprehensive Spending Review

Rural Productivity Plan and Cabinet Office/Defra Horizon Scanning document

Rural Health Conference – update

Feedback from the Rural Conference in respect of (a) the RSN Manifesto priorities and (b) the Conference itself

4. Fairer Funding

Members noted the “Ask of Government” document circulated which was the outcome from the Rural Fair Share Group of MP’s last meeting which accepted the recommendation of the last SPARSE Rural meeting.

Members suggested some changes in presentation which were accepted by the Chief Executive.

Graham Biggs said that the Rural Fair Share members would be encouraged by Graham Stuart to write to Ministers and lobby them at Party Conference. A delegation from the Group was asking to see the Minister.

Graham Biggs said that all members of SPARSE Rural had been written to setting out the campaign for 2015 and encouraging them to press the case with their MPs and to seek to persuade their MPs to join the Rural Fair Shares Group, if they had not already done so.

5. Home Office Consultation on Reform of Police Funding Arrangements

The Executive having been consulted by e mail on a draft RSN response, approved the submitted response.

6. Fire and Rescue Group.

The Chief Executive reported that a meeting of this Group was being arranged

7. English Devolution

This had been well discussed at the Seminar prior to the Rural Conference.

Members reported the circumstances in their areas.

Government feedback from the submissions made were awaited.

8. Advanced Austerity

It was agreed that this should be discussed at the AGMs when the CSR outcomes would be available.

9. Budget Report for 2015 -16 and Draft Budget for 2016 – 17 and the CIC Budget Report

The Chief Executive presented the budget report. Subject to meeting assumed income targets a positive balance is predicted for this year and next. However, income levels cannot be assumed with certainty and must be carefully monitored.

The next budget report would be following the mid- point of the financial year and would (a) exclude CIC income and expenditure and (b) reflect seriously on income targets and their likelihood of all being met. No problems were anticipated as a result of these actions.

The CIC budget report was noted.

10. Rural Conference 2015.

Feedback from members of the Executive who were able to attend the conference was very positive. They felt the two day event was a great success and that the venue worked very well as did Cheltenham as a location. Members felt that Dan Bates' presentation had been very good and Tony Travers as the keynote speaker was also excellent. Members suggested trying to place an Article, under the Chairman's name, in the LGA First Magazine.

Members suggested that a Conference should be run in 2016. It was suggested that, in future year's we should name a Conference Delegates Hotel, even if the Conference was not being held in that Hotel. They also suggested finishing the event with a "final debate and conclusions"

The Executive thanked and congratulated the RSN staff involved saying that the event had raised the profile of the RSN significantly.

11. Recent Government Documents

The Executive considered the Cabinet Office/Defra Horizon scanning document recently published and the joint RSN/ACRE response document. The Treasury/Defra Rural Productivity Plan was also discussed. It was agreed both should be on the Agenda for the Rural Assembly AGM.

The Chief Executive said that he had been in touch with the Secretariat of the Efra Select Committee but they did not yet know if either of these documents would be considered by the Committee. They had said, however, that the Chair of the Committee and some members would be meeting Ministers and would welcome any comments from the RSN on the two documents. It was agreed to send (a) the response document to the Horizon Scanning report, (b) the existing RSN briefing notes on Broadband and Housing and (c) a briefing note being prepared by Jo Lavis on the issue of Starter Homes referred to in the Productivity Plan.

In considering the RSN/ACRE response document the Executive Committee commented:

- Mobile coverage should not be overlooked
- In some rural areas new housing building was dependant on reliable broadband being available
- That there were concerns about Transport Franchising being discussed (John Birtwistle agree to provide a note)
- The cost of 100% coverage of broadband access across UK via fibre was an important figure to obtain

12 Threshold for small housing sites in rural areas.

Andy Dean reported on the success of the legal challenge of the Government's decision. The RSN had given a witness statement into the proceedings. It was not yet know if the Government would appeal the decision.

Andy also reported on a recent meeting between the Rural Coalition and Oliver Letwin of the Cabinet Office where Mr Letwin made some positive noises about rural exceptions to housing policies but gave no details.

13. Rural Health Conference

This was now to be in the House of Lords (sponsored by Baroness Byford) on 29th January, 2016. It had to be limited to four hours.

Agreed to include this on the agenda for the Rural Assembly AGM.

14. Rural Housing Alliance Conference 9th July 2015

Andy Dean reported that despite the industrial action on the tube and First Great Western the conference had been well attended. It was well received. Inevitably it was, in-part, dominated by the housing issues contained in the Government's Emergency Budget.

15 Rural Unitary Group

It was reported that the Rural Unitary Group was to meet on 28th September. Due to pressure in Rutland Roger Begy had resigned as Chairman.

16. Programme for APPGs

The Chief Executive explained that Housing and the Buses Bills would be the immediate priorities. The Group itself would consider priorities at its next meeting following a survey of its members. Roger Begy said that Adult Social Care was a major issue.

The APPG was meeting jointly with the Policing APPG the next day to consider the results from the Rural Crime Survey.

17 Any other Business

(a) Distribution of Meeting Papers

The LGA had decided to no longer issue paper copies of agendas, reports or minutes.

Members asked that the RSN distribute papers by e mail as and when they were ready, but in addition, a week or so before the meeting concerned issue/re-issue all the meeting papers in the form of a single pdf, so as to aid printing by members.

(b) Hilary Carrick

As reported earlier this was Hilary's last meeting.

Hilary said that of all the meeting at which she had represented Cumbria the SPARSE/RSN meetings had been the most interesting and influential and that meetings had always been warm and friendly. She wished the Group well in the future. Members re-iterated their thanks for Hilary's keen interest and involvement.

Notes of SPARSE Rural Special Interest Group meeting – 16th November 2015

Title:	SPARSE Rural Special Interest Group
Date:	Monday 16 th November 2015 commencing at 11.15 a.m.
Venue:	Westminster Suite, 8th Floor, Local Government House, Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ

Attendance

Attendance is included in the minutes of the main SPARSE Rural Assembly Sub SIG meeting which followed directly after this meeting,

Item	Decisions and actions	Action
1	Election of Chairman for the ensuing year Cllr Cecilia Motley, Shropshire CC, (Chair) thanked members for their support in extending her position for a further year.	
2	Election of Vice Chairs for the ensuing year Members noted the list of Vice Chairs, and raised concerns that representation from the south east and south west should also be considered. Action: Eligible existing Vice-Chairs be re-appointed and there be the creation of 2 additional vacancies for Vice-Chairs to address geographical issues with the appointments thereto being made at the next meeting.	
3	Election of First Vice Chair Cllr Motley nominated Cllr Robert Heseltine, North Yorkshire as First Vice Chair. The nomination was agreed by members.	
4	Constitution Members accepted the planned revised Constitution put before the meeting.	
5	Minutes of the last SPARSE Rural Sub SIG- 13th July 2015 The Minutes of the previous SPARSE Rural Sub SIG were approved. Members noted that Cllr Janet Duncton, West Sussex CC had been in attendance. Action: Amend attendance to include Cllr Duncton.	

6 Fairer Funding Campaign

Dan Bates from Pixel was present for this item and answered questions from members. Members received an update on work to convince the government to honour its commitment to ensure that rural communities receive fairer funding for provision of public services. A letter had recently been sent to Greg Clark MP signed by 59 MPs making the case and requesting a meeting.

Members noted the verbal report and also approved the commissioning of the work on business rates set out in the proposal from Pixel circulated with the agenda.

7 Full Business Rate Retention by Local Authorities

The Group discussed issues around business rate retention and the diversities between urban and rural areas. There would be new duties and responsibilities to the tune of some £10bn - £13bn which as yet, had not been clarified and these needed to be addressed in advance of the transition to avoid inefficiencies.

There were concerns about whether redistribution of business rates would be done in a fair and transparent way to include those in rural areas which might have greater difficulty in exercising their ability to counteract appeals and avoidance of payment. In particular, issues were raised with regard to the ability to attract businesses to areas where infrastructure and transport links were not ideal. It was also essential that the equalisation proposals fully took account of the extra costs in serving rural areas.

Members agreed it was vital that local MPs were sufficiently informed with enough evidence of these and other difficulties so that they could promote their constituencies and ensure Government take into account the rural aspect. It was noted that there was a massive role here for the RSN.

The Group noted the report and agreed to take forward members' suggestions. They reiterated the need to lobby Government for a fair and favourable baseline funding for rural areas.

8 Performance

Members noted the Rural Services Network Performance Report.

9 Speaker:- Graham Stuart MP, Chair of the Parliamentary Rural Fair Share Campaign.

The Chair welcomed Graham Stuart MP, Chair of the Parliamentary Rural Fair Share Campaign.

He updated members on work in campaigning for fairer funding for their areas, including the introduction (with assistance from RSN) of a website for this purpose, correspondence with the Secretary of State and engagement with some 130 MPs from rural areas who had formed a parliamentary rural fair share group.

Members referred to examples of partnership working and risks in competing for businesses in order to attain their business rates. They

would need to align incentives in order to build and continue partnerships for the best interest of the local community – it was felt that there could be a risk that co-operation might reduce with the competition.

There were also concerns about negotiations on devolution and the impact upon unitary authorities. Members agreed that the cost of new burdens would be greater to those in rural areas and that consultations needed to be taken early in the process in order to avoid an unfair disadvantage at the start.

Graham Stuart agreed that there were complications and issues which needed to be addressed at an early stage, however he hoped that these would be resolved, with further consultation and in time.

The Chair thanked the Speaker and moved on to the meeting of the SPARSE Rural Assembly Sub SIG and the meeting of the Rural Services Network.

Notes of Rural Assembly Group meeting - 16th November 2015

Title:	Rural Assembly Group
Date:	Monday 16 th November 2015 beginning at 1 p.m.
Venue:	Westminster Suite, 8th Floor, Local Government House, Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ

Attendance

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

Item	Decisions and actions	Action
1	Apologies for absence Members noted apologies for the meeting.	
2	Constitution Members agreed to recommend the adoption of the revised Constitution which now reflected the Group's change in structure. At this point, the meeting was adjourned for the inaugural AGM of the Rural Services Network Special Interest Group.	
3	Election of a Chairman and any Vice Chairman Members agreed re-election of the Chairman, Cllr Cecilia Motley and Vice-Chairman, Cllr Robert Heseltine.	
4	Minutes of the last full meeting- 13th July 2015 The minutes of the last full meeting were agreed subject to an amendment to include Cllr Janet Duncton, West Sussex CC who had previously been omitted from the attendance.	
5	Minutes of the last Executive meeting- 14th September 2015 The minutes of the last Executive meeting were noted.	
6	Minutes of the last Rural Unitary Councils Group - 28th September 2015 Members noted a summary of the outcome of the meeting of the Rural Unitary Councils Community Group from Graham Biggs, RSN. It was agreed that the group had a meaningful role and that it should have a rolling Chairmanship of 6 months. Members noted that a paper on the lack of Broadband in rural areas, to be presented to the Treasury, would follow for information. Unfortunately, there had not been an opportunity to present a document on Rural Health and Well-being services as was referenced at that meeting	

7 Membership (Constitutional Requirement)

Members noted current membership of the Rural Assembly, recognising them as the only named organisation standing up for rural issues. 154 local authorities are currently in membership, with links to over 9000 parishes and 4000 schools.

The Chair thanked David Inman, RSN and colleagues for all their hard work recruiting to the Assembly.

8 Budget 2014/15 and 2015/16 (Constitutional Requirement)

Members noted the budget report and the prospect of a reasonably healthy out-turn. It would be important however, to ensure that subs were paid on time in order to balance the books at the end of the year.

9 RSN Services and Schedule of Meetings for 2015 (Constitutional Requirement)

Members agreed the dates of future meetings.

10 Rural Conference

Members received a presentation from Graham Biggs on arrangements for the Rural Conference, September 2016.

It was felt that largely the Conference had been a very successful event. Those members of RSN team who had been involved were very much thanked. Another conference would be held at the same venue in September 2016 and the University of Gloucestershire were thanked for all their help and assistance.

Members discussed their experiences from the previous conferences and raised a few points of detail. Some members had commented that they had felt somewhat isolated being apart from other members as the day was on the University campus and suggestions were made to try and organise a conference hotel in the future, so that some group sessions could carry on there. There had also been a few comments on domestic issues and it was agreed to review the issues highlighted before the next one.

11 Rural Sounding Board

David Inman, Rural Services Network, updated members on the outcomes of the Rural Sounding Board survey asking about the impact on services of the financial cut backs. This was a repeat of a survey undertaken in 2014 and the situation had altered with more feeling that the cut backs were having an impact on the quality of services.

Members were pleased that there had been a good response from local authority and parish councillors. It was agreed the same survey would be done from April to June 2016 with the results being reported back to the July meeting. Here is the link to the survey:

<http://www.rsonline.org.uk/best-practice/rural-sounding-board>

Action: Circulate Survey for information **David Inman**

12 Issues Facing Rural Housing Associations

The Chair welcomed Jo Lavis, Director of Rural Housing Solutions who provided a presentation to the group on provision of affordable housing within current constraints.

Her presentation outlined ways in which, through working together, and with available resources, policies could be developed to help deliver affordable housing in rural areas. Members heard how, by bringing stakeholders together to create collaborative partnerships, and using their expertise, capacity could be strengthened in order to achieve mutual goals.

Members discussed concerns, thanking the Speaker for her presentation and requested that it be available on the website.

Action: To place presentation on Rural Services Network **David Inman**

13 Buses Bill Briefing

The Group noted a briefing on the Buses Bill which contained two main provisions which would enable local authorities to take up more direct transport powers.

Members referred to existing voluntary partnership agreements and agreed that this would provide better opportunities to enable more innovative ways of providing commercially viable services.

The Bill was due to become law in 2017.

14 Julia Mulligan

The Chair welcomed Julia Mulligan, Chair, National Rural Crime Network and the Police and Crime Commissioner for North Yorkshire.

Julia summarised the work of the National Rural Crime Network, to raise the profile of the effects of crime in rural areas which are often underestimated and under-reported.

She outlined challenges in ensuring provision of quantitative funding and providing services across large, sparsely populated geographical areas that are often more costly than in urban areas.

Members heard that, whilst the volume of crime in rural areas is very often lower than in urban locations, its consequences can be equally impactful and undermine feelings of personal safety. The aim of the Network is to improve understanding of these issues and address the difficulties around provision of vital services.

Discussion continued about ways of sharing back office functions in order to address lack of funding and finding better ways of working via other shared services and logistics. Members agreed that raising public confidence in the police forces was a key issue and part of this was due to

heavy bureaucratic processes.

The Chair thanked the Speaker for a very interesting presentation.

15 Any Other Business

There was no other business.

The meeting was closed at 3 25 p.m.

Attendance at meetings 16 November 2015

Cecilia Motley – Chair RSN
James MacColl – Better Transport UK
Graham Biggs – Chief Executive RSN
John Birtwistle – Head of Policy, First Group PLC
David Inman – Corporate Director RSN
Gordon Nicolson OBE – Eden District Council
Helen Briggs – Chief Executive, Rutland County Council
Cllr Owen Bierley – West Lindsey District Council
Cllr Yvonne Peacock – Richmondshire District Council
Cllr David Godfrey – Shepway District Council
Frances Bedding – Suffolk County Council
Cllr Janet Duncton – West Sussex County Council
Cllr David Ireton – Craven District Council
Cllr Jeremy Savage – South Norfolk District Council
Cllr Pam Posnett – Melton Borough Council
John Birtwistle – Head of Policy, First Group PLC
Cllr Lindsey Cawrey – North Kesteven District Council
Cllr Peter Stevens – St Edmundsbury Borough Council
Paul Over – Executive Director, Chichester District Council
James MacColl – Better Transport UK
Cllr Mike Ellis – Bradford Metropolitan District Council
Cllr Les Kew – Bath & North East Somerset Council
Revd Richard Kirlew Mr Hugh McCarthy – Wycombe District Council
Liz Philip – Executive Principal, Askham Bryan College
Cllr Jane Mortimer – Scarborough Borough Council
Cllr Roger Begy – Rutland County Council
Cllr Cameron Clark – Sevenoaks District Council
Cllr Sue Sanderson – Cumbria County Council
Cllr Robert Heseltine – North Yorkshire County Council
Cllr Yvonne Peacock – Richmondshire District Council
Cllr John Clarke – Gedling Borough Council
Cllr N Daubney – King’s Lynn and West Norfolk Council
Cllr Rosemary Doyle – Canterbury City Council
William Jacobs – Head of Finance, Vale of White Horse District Council
Fatima de Abreu – Member Services, LGA

Speakers

Graham Stuart MP, Chair of the Parliamentary Rural Fair Share Campaign

Jo Lavis - Director of Rural Housing Solutions

Julia Mulligan, Chair – National Rural Crime Network and the Police and Crime Commission for North Yorkshire

Apologies List for Rural Assembly AGM - 16th November 2015

Cllr Roy Miller – Barnsley Council
Cllr Peter Martin – Surrey County Council
Deborah Clarke – ACRE?
Cllr Henry – Gateshead Council
Cllr Adam Paynter – Cornwall Council

Kevin Larner – Countryside & Communities Manager, Cherwell District Council
Richard Quallington – Interim Chief Executive, ACRE
Cllr Andre Gonzalez de Savage – Northamptonshire County Council
Cllr Hazel Brand – Bassetlaw District Council
Richard Bates – Head of Finance, Dorset County Council
Cllr I Seccombe – Warwickshire County Council
Cllr Carole Clarke – South Northamptonshire Council
Cllr Colin Noble – Leader, Suffolk County Council
Cllr B Pain – Harborough District Council
Steve Jordan – Executive Director, South Hams District Council
Lawrence Conway – South Lakeland District Council
Adam Norburn – Chief Executive, Rugby Borough Council
Lisa Buckle – West Devon Borough Council/South Hams District Council
Jim Graham – Chief Executive, Warwickshire County Council
Cllr Bob Adams – South Kesteven District Council
Kath Hemmings – Neighbourhood Manager, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Grant Black – Rural Media
Nic Millington – Rural Media
Ruth Hawkins – Nottingham Healthcare NHS Trust
Steward Horne – Business Information Point
Martin Rehorn – Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service
Steve Mackenzie – Chief Executive, Purbeck District Council
Peter Shipp – EYMS Group Ltd
Will Smith – Stagecoach in Norfolk
Cllr Peter Bedford – Boston Borough Council
Brian Wilson – Brian Wilson Associates
Jim Onions – Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service
Cllr Hazel Brand – Bassetlaw District Council
Cllr Anthony Alford – West Dorset District Council
Ian Richardson – Chief Executive, Shropshire Rural Housing Association
Cllr Margaret Squires – Mid Devon District Council
Cllr Michael Hicks – South Hams District Council
Cllr Neil Butters – Bath & North East Somerset Council
Cllr Liz Sneath – South Holland District Council
Sue Williams – Berkshire College of Agriculture
Cllr Peter Thornton – South Lakeland District Council
Cllr Nigel Manning – Guildford Borough Council
Donna Smith – Frontline Project Manager, Plunkett Foundation
Cllr Madge Shineton – Shropshire Council
Cllr Heather Bainbridge – Mid Devon District Council
Peter Vaughan – Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service



Notes of the Annual Meeting of the Rural Services Network Special Interest Group – 16th November 2015

Title:	Rural Services Network Special Interest Group
Date:	Monday 16 th November 2015 beginning at 1 pm
Venue:	Westminster Suite, 8th Floor, Local Government House, Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ

Attendance

Those persons listed in the notes of the Rural Assembly Group Meeting held on the same day in the same accommodation.

Apologies

The same as listed in the notes of the Rural Assembly Meeting.

1. Election of Chairman for ensuing year

Cllr Cecilia Motley, Shropshire CC, (Chair of the Sparse Rural Sub Group) was elected formally as the Chair of the Rural Services Network for the ensuing year.

2. Election of Vice Chairs

It was agreed that the vice chairs as appointed by the Sparse Rural meeting immediately preceding this meeting be appointed in the same positions for the Rural Services Network.

3. Election of First Vice Chair

Cllr Cecilia Motley nominated Cllr Robert Heseltine, North Yorkshire as First Vice Chair. The nomination was agreed by members.

4. Constitution

Members accepted the Constitution formally put before the meeting as the Constitution of the Rural Services Network as a whole.



Notes of the Annual Meeting of the Rural Services Partnership Ltd – 16th November 2015

Title:	Rural Services Partnership Ltd
Date:	Monday 16 th November 2015 beginning at 12.30 pm
Venue:	Westminster Suite, 8th Floor, Local Government House, Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ

Attendance

David Inman, Graham Biggs, Rev Richard Kirlew, Malcolm Leading, (Oxon Parish Clerks Assoc), Cecilia Motley, John Birtwistle.

Apologies:

Stuart Horne

Item Decisions and Actions

- 1. Election of Chairman for the ensuing year**
Rev Richard Kirlew re-appointed Chairman.
- 2. Minutes of AGM of 17th Nov 2014**
Agreed as a correct record.
- 3. Accounts for year ending 31st March 2015**
Agreed as presented.
- 4. Tax Accountants**
Tax Assist of Ludlow were reappointed.
- 5. Appointment of Directors**
Those Directors present agreed to remain as Directors.

Meeting ended at 12.51 pm

NEW HOMES BONUS: SHARPENING THE INCENTIVE

By e mail to: newhomesbonus@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Dear Sir,

NEW HOMES BONUS: SHARPENING THE INCENTIVE: TECHNICAL CONSULTATION

INTRODUCTION

This response is from the Rural Services Network, a Special Interest Group of the Local Government Association. It is made on behalf of our XXX Principal Council Members. Our members may also respond individually.

We are not responding to all of the Consultation Questions and we are not seeking to suggest there are any specific issues raised by the Consultation Document which are solely related to rural local authorities.

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

Our comments and concerns are set against the background and context that for decades, under successive governments, rural areas have received substantially less government funding per head of population for their local government services compared to urban areas. A consequence of this is that rural local authorities have, over the years, found it necessary to increase Council Tax more than their urban counterparts (but have still had considerably less Spending Power overall).

So rural residents, who on average earn less than their urban counterparts, pay more in Council Tax but get less government grant and receive fewer services which often cost those residents more to access.

It is within this context that we consider that any suggestion that financial resources may be lost to rural authorities will, generally, be harder felt due to their smaller net revenue budgets.

The impact on small (mainly rural) District/Borough Councils in particular is very worrying indeed. Many such authorities have found it necessary to apply New Homes Bonus to support mainstream services – we regard this protection of services (as opposed to their reduction or complete withdrawal), as a quite proper way to recompense local communities for accepting new housing. A loss of New Homes Bonus on the scale proposed will be devastating on some services in some areas. It will also destroy the community's willingness to support new house building and will work against the government's house building targets being achieved.

We would further comment that all the proposals deal with Local Planning Authorities: just one half of the equation. What about incentivising developers?

In many cases they are sitting on land with planning consent, sometimes for years on end. DCLG should come up with stronger incentives to ensure they play their part and significantly toughen up the rules about planning consent lapsing.

QUESTION 1: What are your views on moving from 6 years of payments under the Bonus to 4 years, with an interim period for 5 year payments?

This proposal could make the payments to Local Authorities more volatile: dependent on a part of the housing market cycle and more likely to be affected by the timing of large developments. You could add that this proposal would reduce the incentive to local authorities, which seems rather perverse.

QUESTION 2: Should the number of years of payments under the Bonus be reduced further to 3 or 2 years?

No for the reason set out in the response to question 1.

QUESTION 4: Do you agree that local authorities should lose their Bonus allocation in the years during which their Local Plan has not been submitted? If not, what alternative arrangements should be in place?

QUESTION 5: Is there merit in a mechanism for abatement which reflects the date of the adopted plan?

Local Plan production is a major task and in the past many delays have been caused by the Planning Inspectorate (at Examinations in Public). It must be recognised that in rural authorities planning departments in small Districts are less well resourced (and facing cuts!) to produce and maintain up-to-date Local Plans.

Whilst we do not support this proposal, if it is introduced the measure should be the date the Local Plan is published for formal consultation prior to going to Examination in Public.

QUESTION 6: Do you agree to this mechanism for reflecting homes only allowed on appeal in Bonus payments?

It must be recognised that refusals won on Appeal can still be perfectly reasonable Local Planning Authority decisions. They may, for example, be due to an objection raised by a statutory body.

On many occasions there is a fine balance in the decision whether to approve or refuse an application. Residents opposed to an application would be appalled if the decision to approve was taken as a consequence of whether or not Bonus would be withheld

Only if the LPA is judged to have acted unreasonably or unlawfully in the appeal decision should Bonus be withheld

QUESTION 7: Do you agree that New Homes Bonus payments should be reduced by 50% or 100%, where homes are allowed on appeal? If not, what other adjustment would you propose, and why?

If the Government really insist on pressing ahead with this, a 50% rather than 100% reduction seems only fair, given such external factors and that this penalises local residents

QUESTION 9: Do you agree that setting a national baseline offers the best incentive effect for the Bonus?

QUESTION 10: Do you agree that the right level for the baseline is 0.25%

This seems to us to be unfair and to add unnecessary complexity. It may not be a simply rural-urban issue, but some parts of the country clearly have more housing demand and more scope to promote development than others. Some peripheral rural areas would probably be among the losers in such a system.

Areas that have large parts of their geography protected as National Parks or AONBs could also be penalised unfairly.

Moreover, a fixed annual percentage (0.25%) does not reflect the boom and bust cycle in the housing market.

The RSN opposes this proposal in any form.

QUESTION 11: Do you agree that adjustments to the baseline should be used to reflect significant and unexpected housing growth? If not, what other mechanism could be used to ensure that the costs of the Bonus stay within the funding envelope and ensure that we have the necessary resources for adult social care?

Again we feel this proposal is very unfair - a case of tails I win or heads you lose!

It is penalising Local Authorities if they all do what the Government wants them to do!

We strongly object to the principle of New Homes Bonus being reduced so significantly to support increased government funding into Adult Social Care.

Of course, we recognise the importance of additional funding for Adult Social Care but consider that, like the NHS, this is a national issue which should be funded by new government monies to meet the needs of an ageing population.

RSN (INCOME & EXPENDITURE) 2015/16 WITH ACTUAL TO END DECEMBER AND ESTIMATE 2016/17 2016/17 NO PROVISION MADE FOR INFLATION NOW EXCLUDES CIC INCOME AND SPEND									
					2014/15	ESTIMATE	ACTUAL TO	ESTIMATE	
						2015/16	END	2016/17	
					ACTUAL		DECEMBER		
					£	£	£	£	
INCOME									
Balances at Bank B/Fwd net of o/s cheques					13170	19388		18484	
DEBTORS FROM PREVIOUS YEAR (NET OF VAT)									
Seminar Fees					265	205	205		
Housing Conference					315				
Infrastructure Group					1050	0	500	0	
Rural Health Network					225				
Housing Group					250				
Coastal Communities Alliance (Gross)					1037				
Subscriptions									
SPARSE Rural/Rural assembly					237075	246498	195905	242248	
SPARSE Fighting Fund Levy						5000	3000	4950	
SPARSE Rura/RA held by NKDC at Year End					5970	5250	5250		
SPARSE Rural/RA held by NKDC at Month end							29968		
Extra Income From Parishes						0		5000	
RSP					17725	16636	16176	15151	
Commercial Partner First Group Buses					10000	3000	10000	3000	
Calor support for RuralEngland (inc Vulnerability Service)					11000			0	
Subscriptions from Rural Health Group					3100	1975	1975	1975	
Income from Rural Housing Group					1395	4625	4625	4625	
Income from Infrastructure Group					2500	0		0	
Income from Fire & Rescue Group						1390		1390	

					2014/15	ESTIMATE	ACTUAL TO	ESTIMATE	
						2015/16	END	2016/17	
					ACTUAL		DECEMBER		
					£	£	£	£	
OTHER INCOME									
Refund of Travel/Subsistence@					667				
Refund of fees paid to "consultants"@					5842				
Contra phones 14/14 & Bank Comp + Printer 15/16					100	215	215		
Grant from BR Camp held by NKDC at year end					500				
Contributions to costs of Parish Guide to Affordable Housing					11250	500	500		
Coastal Communities Alliance (Gross)					4150	4149	2075	4149	
Seminar Fees					1785				
Rural Conference Income							12706		
Rural Conference Surplus						3500		4000	
Recharges to Rural Crime Network@					19500	19500	14679	19500	
Contras re RCN@					5424		27082		
Overpayment from RCN					20082				
ADDITIONAL INCOME TARGETS SET RE NETWORKING ACTIVITY									
RURAL HEALTH NETWORK HEALTH CONFERENCE						4500	525	5625	
CALLS FOR EVIDENCE/RURAL PANEL SURVEYS								1500	
Rural Conference Recharges@					2844				
Rural Housing Conference Income						1710	1710	1710	
Recharges to Rural England CIC (Back Office Support)						600		1200	
VAT									
VAT Refund					12491		11047		
VAT Received					13802		10292		
TOTAL INCOME					403514	338641	348435	334507	

				2014/15	ESTIMATE	ACTUAL TO	ESTIMATE	
					2015/16	END	2016/17	
				ACTUAL		DECEMBER		
				£	£	£	£	
EXPENDITURE								
VAT Paid on Goods & Services				26555		20478		
CONTRACTS FOR SERVICES ACTIVITY BREAKDOWN (EST)								
Corporate Management		DI,GCB & AD1 100%. KB 40%		62300	57870	39715	77906	
Finance/Performance and Data Analy		DB, DP, DW,KS 100%, KB 20%		41883	29430	22193	30000	
Communications (incl Seminars)		Rose Regen,JT, AD3 100%		9500	7331	3956	8500	
Administrative and Technical Support		RI, WI,WC,BA,MB 100%		40556	47000	34878	48500	
Research and Monitoring		BW, JH, 100%		19250	8563	11153	11000	
Service Group Networking		KB40%		12400	3444	2066	12525	
Economic Development Service		AD5 100%			5000	3752	5000	
Coastal Communities Contract				3650	3650	3650	3650	
Rural Health Network		NP 15%		10000	3000	2250	3030	
Rural Crime Network		NP 85%		10000	17000	12750	17200	
Rural Communities Housing Group		AD2 100%		6500	6500	4877	6500	
Rural Transport Group		AD6 100%			2002	1502	2002	
Rural England/Vulnerability Service		AD4 100%+ JT £6000		7500	3000	7375	3000	

				2014/15	ESTIMATE	ACTUAL TO		
					2015/16	END		
				ACTUAL		DECEMBER		
				£	£	£		
OTHER EXPENDITURE								
Further Expend. from Calor etc. CIC Support					0		0	
Rural Crime Network Refund of overpayment@					20082	20082		
RCN Re-Charges@				21299		20952		
RCN Other				3989	3500	802		
Corporation Tax				259	674	674	700	
Rural Fair Shares Campaign etc.					15000	9108	15000	
Fair Shares Campaign Media Relations					4000		4000	
Rural Conference				2111		9394		
RSN Online				24200	24200	16940	24200	
Travel and Subsistence				21565	20000	13650	20000	
Print, Stat,e mail, phone & Broadband@				5216	4200	2733	5200	
Meeting Room Hire				687	2000	1740	2500	
Website and Data Base software etc				3336	4500	3247	4500	

					2014/15	ESTIMATE	ACTUAL TO	ESTIMATE	
						2015/16	END	2016/17	
					ACTUAL		DECEMBER		
					£	£	£	£	
Rent of Devon Office					4959	4960	3719	4960	
Addit Costs re Devon Office (25% in 15/16)						850		5000	
Accountancy Fees					630	640	546	650	
Companies House Fees					13	13	13	13	
Bank Charges					100	100	78	100	
Membership of Rural Coalition					200	200		200	
Seminar Costs					1589	200	98	200	
APPG Costs					315	750	365	750	
Conference/Seminar Fees					174				
IT Equipment &Support@					2000	1250	835	2000	
Insurance					396	614	214	614	
Rural Health Network & Conference					236	500	122	500	
Rural Housing National Conference						1262	1262	1262	
Phd in Rural Crime Contribution					1000	1000			
Fighting Fund					974				
Rural England CIC					2732	0	10644		
Refunds of Overpayments@					5877				
Set up of CIC for Rural England Panel					450				
Rural Housing Group					842	800	653	800	

Executive Meeting of Rural Services Network

Information Report on Rural Information Exchange: Networking and sharing our expertise

We recognise that in these times of budget cuts, reductions in funding, and the pressure to find more efficient ways of working, officers need help and support from their peers more than ever.

We are therefore progressing with two specific areas of work, E-networking, and the Information Service to better support our local authorities and their officers to find solutions to problems and to share best practice specifically around delivering services in rural areas.

E-networking

We provide to all of the officers in our 150 member authorities, the opportunity to take part in our online network and forum. This forum will enable authorities to:

- Innovate with colleagues from other rural authorities
- Share best practice and generate ideas
- Save time and resources by networking electronically without leaving the office
- Avoid duplication in research
- Keep up to date with current thinking

We are progressing with our use of the KHUB. This is an online networking forum that was previously known as the Knowledge Hub and was run by the LGA. This is now owned privately but it exists for the public sector and boasts over 100,000 members.

We have a closed group on the KHUB which only members of the Rural Services Network can join. It currently has three main areas:

- Local Government Finance
- Performance, Improvement and Transforming Services
- Rural Service Delivery

Each of these areas has a number of 'threads' below them that officers can use to post items in relevant areas, for example the section on Rural Service Delivery includes threads on 'Planning and Communities', 'Rural Economic Development' and 'Rural Housing'. We aim to fully establish current areas with officers and will be inviting different professional groups of officers to join the forum as it becomes populated with items.

Our longer term plan is to develop sections to support areas such as social care and education to the group to offer the best service that we can to our authorities.

Rural Information Service

Whilst we see this networking service as key to supporting officers, we also understand that they are very busy and can have limited time to proactively search for support. We also know that the services we provide may only be reaching key officers within the local authority such as Heads of Finance, Chief Executives and Leaders. We are therefore proposing a Rural Information Service to target our services and information at the full range of officers and members who may find it useful.

We have recently updated our contact lists for member authorities and currently have 6 Member lists and 22 Officer lists of contacts. These include for example groups of Finance Officers, Communication Officers, Planning Officers, Broadband Officers, Housing Strategy Officers and Economic Development Officers.

We will be sending these officers targeted information that we produce which they may not be aware of currently. For example housing officers will receive the quarterly Housing Newsletters and also the Rural Vulnerability Service focussing on Fuel Poverty. Planning Officers will receive our Performance analysis of planning statistics, the Spotlight on the Heart of the Village newsletter which is produced twice a year and information and updates about our Neighbourhood Planning evidence base.

We anticipate that this service will not be very labour intensive as we are using existing services and just widening the recipients for them across our local authority members, increasing the benefits for member authorities.

SOUNDING BOARDS and A RURAL PANEL.

Sounding Boards are groupings of people with a common purpose. They are not appropriately categorised by gender, age, social standing, or occupation and cannot be regarded as having as important a role as a properly constituted panel but their views are indicative of the feelings across certain groupings and \sounding Board work is still important.

The RSN currently runs two sounding boards:-

One for Councillor representatives appointed by the member authorities to serve on the RSN (both Sparse Rural and Assembly). This in theory comprises one representative each from the 154 members.

One is for the Parish or Town Councils who wish to be involved. From the c8, 000 Parish Councils to who we send material some 500 have appointed representatives.

We normally undertake a Sounding Board exercise targeted on a current topic 3 times a year so every four months. We aim to get results back to every main meeting.

We have had some discussion with Gloucestershire University. A Sounding Board or a Panel response of some 300 people would normally constitute a reasonable response from across the areas that constitute Rural England.

We do see potential for expansion of this Sounding Board system.

It would be good to establish the follows:-

- A Sounding Board of Young People (say under 25) living in the rural areas.
- A Sounding Board of people engaged in small businesses in rural areas
- A Sounding Board of Rural Residents (the Parish Council Sounding Board in all probability comprises people towards the older groupings so a Resident Board would be useful for comparison purposes.

IF we could get these what would then be five sounding boards in operation the Gloucestershire University feel the base would then be there to select some 500 people who should cover the range required to have a Rural Panel constituted.

To get these representatives we will have to work in more detail than we do currently with the Local Councils and Schools in the Community Group. This is the subject of an accompanying report.

This would be a more useful body in some respects as it should be able to give cross sector views on rural issues as they arose.

One of the difficulties with rural areas is that as they are diverse and lack large centres of population they can be regarded as quiet and consequently regarded as being content.

A series of Sounding Board and a constitutionally balanced Rural Panel would be a major advance in being able to secure an accurate view from rural people.

It is hoped the Executive will endorse the course of action being suggested here.

Situation Report on the Community Group

This report should be taken in tandem with the report on rural sounding boards and a possible rural panel.

The Community Group currently comprises some 8,000 rural parish/town councils and some 4,000 Local Schools as well as to local Chambers of Commerce/Trade.

They receive the Digest, Opportunities and the Vulnerability Bulletin and the Spotlight series of e mails. Because of the system used (Bright-Pearl and Mail-Chimp) we cannot be absolutely sure of regularity of delivery and receipt. E mail filters can also come into play without us knowing. We use a blanket approach as opposed to any specific targeting

The Group comprises Local Councils, Schools and Chambers in areas which have a Principal Council in RSN membership so it covers maybe 70%-80% of the rural areas of England.

Obviously the more RSN is known by people involved with member authorities and by people in its communities and organisations the greater its chance of surviving the budget cuts that will now continue until 2020.

Obviously there is a balance to strike between a lot of time consumptive work towards the community group and too little meaning that knowledge of RSN amongst people who it is hoped would be aware of it does not in reality exist. However the more RSN grows the greater the chance organisations will become inquisitive and take up service that way. (The opportunity to join through application is available through the website).

Times are obviously changing. The Parish Magazine is gradually being replaced by the parish e newsletter. Parish Council websites are appearing and in some Parishes Community sites as well.

We simply don't know how Parish Clerks will deal with our e mails. Some unfortunately may ignore them, some draw member's attention to certain items, some will forward them on to all their councillors.

We have decided to send out e mails to local communities seeking the following information:-

- Encouraging clerks to forward our e mails on to all Parish Councillors who have e mail addresses.
- The name and address of the Village Hall Chair.
- Details of local pubs and shops
- Details of any Youth Club and School
- Details of their parish council website
- Details of any community website
- Establishing whether any Parish Councillor is prepared to be on the Parish Sounding Board
- Establishing whether any Parish Councillor runs a Small Business and is prepared to be on the proposed Small Business Sounding Board
- Establishing whether any parishioner (who is not on the parish council) might be interested on being on the rural inhabitants panel

(we would hope we can persuade the operators of the Parish Council website and any Parish Community site to put a link to www.rsnonline.org.uk to encourage members of the public to subscribe to our service)

What we seek to do slowly is to have a rough matrix of every rural parish we are associated with allowing us to place our service on offer to as many people as possible.

With the resource we have we can clearly only approach this incrementally member area by member area. We will start in the South West and work slowly eastward and northward no doubt learning as we go. Clearly it will be a slow process, undertaken on an as and when basis and therefore very incrementally.

We send out our service to some 24,000 e mail addresses a week currently. We think through material being forwarded it is likely to go to 50,000 to 60,000 e mail addresses each week.

Overtime we would like to seek to extend that audience to some 250,000 to 300,000 people living or having an interest in rural areas.

A House of Lords Group?

At the present time we have an All Party Group on Rural Services. We send out papers to 12 e mail addresses in the Lords and 265 MPs in the Commons who we consider have a rural interest. Lords have been easier to get to APPG meetings because they are comparatively freer to attend but the number attending has over the last two years been falling as those previously involved have as they have got older come to London less frequently.

There is also a Rural Fair Share Group constituted by MPs themselves with which some 131 MPs.

Clearly we could do better in the Lords.

There is currently no designated rural standing committee and that possibly might be a longer term aspiration.

It might be in the short term we try to establish a group of people who are interested in the rural cause. This is a rather different job from the Commons where it is far easier to identify those members who should from the geography have some rural interest.

The purpose of forming such a 'group' might be

- To increase the number of Lords becoming involved in the work of the Rural Services APPGs.
- To be able to pull together a 'group' say once a year to talk through the 'Rural Agenda' with them and see how they feel they can help.

RSN-ACRE-NALC Concordat

Objectives

The Rural Services Network (RSN), Action for Communities in Rural England (ACRE) and the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) seek to promote joint working across the three organisations to:

- Provide a unified voice for Rural England's communities across a range of key issues
- Give Rural Affairs a greater national profile
- Maximise the value of the combined membership network for:
 - Evidence gathering
 - Information distribution
- Generate economies and efficiencies, further enhancing the effectiveness of each organisation

Initial Actions

The initial three priorities for action (*subject to agreement by each party*) are:

1. Devolution of powers and localism
2. Rural housing
3. Broadband and access to services in rural areas

In order to progress joint working across these areas the following initial actions will take place:

- A joint list of existing national engagement and lobbying routes will be compiled including All Party Parliamentary Groups, close links to MPs and national forums.
- Research, evidence and intelligence on these priorities will be shared as and when available
- Each organisation will let each other know when relevant activities are taking place in relation to these priorities to enable joined up communication wherever possible (e.g. retweeting and linked article publication)
- Each organisation will accommodate appropriate articles from the other 2 organisations in relevant publications
- A free place will be offered at each other's main conferences
- A short organisation description, including membership summary, will be provided for inclusion in each other's websites and website links provided
- Consideration will be given to the provision of joint evidence to EFRA (and other) Select Committees and relevant national consultations as appropriate

Meeting Arrangements

- Tripartite discussion between relevant officers will take place twice per year
- Officers will meet briefly immediately prior to meetings of the Rural Coalition to examine common ground