

The Group comprises 85% of English Local Authorities classified by Government as Predominantly Rural as more than 50% of residents live in the countryside, rural settlements and market towns.

The group is open to County, Unitary, and District Councils. These local councils work together to give heart to the delivery of rural services across England with a grouping of over 150 non council service providers called The RURAL SERVICE PARTNERSHIP Ltd (a not for profit company, limited by guarantee) that comprise an alliance of Police, Fire, Health, Housing, Educational, Business, National Rural Bodies and Local Organisations. The two organisations work together as the RURAL SERVICES NETWORK.



This is the only organisation in England dedicated solely to the promotion and improvement of rural services. The group provides the vehicle for representation, the establishment of effective cross service working and disseminating best practice in service delivery to England's predominately rural communities.

**- WE SEEK TO PROVIDE THE FOLLOWING 21 SERVICES TO THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN MEMBERSHIP AS THE COMPREHENSIVE PACKAGE WE PROVIDE FOR THE MEMBERSHIP FEE.**



## Fairer Funding

We argue the case for rural local authorities

We are the only organisation arguing about the 'rural penalty', the inevitably higher cost of serving rural areas and defending the current small sparsity allowance.

We are asking government to close the significant grant funding gap between urban and rural which currently risks many rural activities and services being curtailed.

We have won a place at the table of the Government Settlement Working Group where we represent this rural dimension. Even small changes in formula can result in hundreds of thousands of pounds increase in a Council's annual grant settlement figure.



## The Annual State of Rural Services Report

Working with the other service providers we represent we provide comparative analyses of the service pattern across England on an annual basis. This is vital at a time of considerable change and this documentation will become increasingly strategic. We also seek to link this work to local information and insight to highlight local successes.



## Performance Profiling

We provide a comprehensive analysis based on the areas identified on the Government's shortlist. Detailed diagrammatic comparison is undertaken across member's major services based on cost and performance.

Analysis is done which provides benchmarks for rural authorities, as well as by authority type, audit commission family and county group.

It provides the same level of information that can be purchased from a number of commercial organisations but ours is a free service!



## Financial Analysis

Budget comparison is undertaken across member rural authorities to identify how authorities perform in relation to others in every main area of the budget as well as identifying comparative directions of travel.



## The Economic Indicator

Up to date economic comparisons with true peer groups in rural England. Prosperity, deprivation and access to services will all be given in comparison tables, both at the authority and individual ward level allowing inter authority and intra authority comparison.



## The Defra Priorities

Defra have announced their priorities will be:- Rural Economy, Housing, Rural Services, The Uplands, Rural Broadband and Rural Fuel Poverty. We will seek to obtain individual and collective input into these areas. Through our website we will facilitate exchanges of views and experiences and run seminars. We hope this will provide every a conduit for grass roots input to Defra.



## Rural News Service

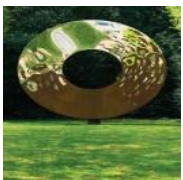
RSOnline provides the most comprehensive rural news service available. It serves over 45,000 people each week. The website is the most extensive independent rural website in the country.

Weekly email rural news digests, hot topic briefings, monthly service news and newsletters on the organisation itself go to Councillors and Officers and provide, we believe, the most comprehensive coverage of rural issues in England.



## Local Communities 'Link' Service (c 9,000 members)

Facilitated by your membership fee, rural service information for Towns, Parishes other local organisations, schools and businesses in member areas to motivate discussion, debate and shared experience on rural service issues.



## Rural Aggregator

We will set up a system that collates links to rural information from across the research and news areas. You can be right up to date in every quarter of rural consideration just by visiting rsnonline and using the links. It is THE website for everything Rural.

Point of reference to all current rural research from the other key rural websites.



## Best Practice Service

'Calls for Evidence' service and a catalogue of information across the rural hot topics.



## Compendium of Research Work

Authorities often take opinions and guidance on an array of rural topics which could be really useful to other authorities. We seek to compile these areas of work to establish a reference source for member authorities. This will obviously take time to build up but information exchange is one of the key reasons for operation of the network and we are sure this will prove to be an important initiative.



## Practitioners and Locum Service (Finance, Performance and Economic Development)

Emergency service at low cost to members to cover crisis periods. We will give you 2 days cover for just £150 and 5 days at a special rate as well. Members can save their subscription fee on this service alone

We also offer longer term temporary assistance, through our team of practitioners, at less than commercial rates.



## Forums and Seminars

In addition to our 3 main London meetings we provide 7 free Seminars each year, one based in every English region with significant rural areas. These meetings will give a forum for member discussion and allow consideration of the identified DEFRA priorities individually.

We have established an Academic Network across the major rural universities and we hold periodic RDPE Liaison Meetings.



## Parliamentary

We have facilitated and provide the secretariat to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Rural Services to give a Westminster focus to the rural issues expressed in the production of our Rural Manifesto.

In conjunction with Federation of Small Businesses will we also ensure that certain meetings also give consideration to matters relating to the rural economy.

We will be sending out tri-annual news bulletins to 180 rural MPs detailing members' specific concerns.



## UK Policy and Practitioners Group

We have established a working arrangement with twenty other bodies across the UK to allow consideration of both best practice and concern on rural issues. With the establishment of national "parliaments" we feel there is a need for a home nation forum to assist in exchange of rural thoughts and learning. This will be the first year of operation of this group and it will be interesting to see how it rolls out.



## Officer Annual Meetings

It is vital that, once a year, officers with common agendas come together to share experience and establish best practice. We look to do this with three groups of officers from Finance, Policy and Performance, and Rural Economy backgrounds.



## Representations

Because we work across services we believe we can establish holistic views about rural issues in a way which not be possible for groups representing individual sectors.



## E Forums

Through the increasingly flexible technology now becoming available we plan a series of conference sessions where individual service groups can share knowledge and experience across their service issues. This will be an ever growing area of the network. Because of the cut backs we now all need shared resources and these forums will provide excellent value for money.



## Big Society Scheme

We are very keen to assist members to assist their local communities and organisations. We have entered into an arrangement with DR consulting where they will provide an advice service on possible Big Society Project Funding initiatives. For our member authorities there is one free call down each year. Additionally for the Community members in free membership because you subscribe to RSN there is (again through DR Consulting) a service for 2 hours grant advice for a token £40 payment.

## Working with Defra



We have a bilateral relationship with the Rural Communities Policy Unit at DEFRA. They will use our networks for calls for evidence when necessary, comment and assist where they can with the Annual Report on the State of Rural Services and attend and input into the RSN seminars and forums as well as put news items in the Digest and the Hinterland publications. They will also have a one on one Annual Meeting with us. We very much hope this relationship can facilitate direct access for our members to this important DEFRA team.



## Media Story Piece

We plan a service where, once a fortnight, we will issue to your council's media officer a rural press article on a current issue. The story will be particularly orientated so that with the addition of just a few 'local' words and a local councillor quote it can be seen as a local story and be readily used by your local weekly newspaper. This we feel can allow your authority to show continuing empathy with your residents living in very rural, and even remote locations.

**The programme outlined is based on existing membership figures which are key to its successful operation.**

We think that joint working, pooling thoughts, and lateral thinking are going to be the key to maintaining strong service and we seek to act as the hub of operation in this way. We are continuing to gear our service to be of maximum value to our members at a critical time

Please view our website: [www.rsonline.org.uk](http://www.rsonline.org.uk)

Contact us: [david.inman@sparse.gov.uk](mailto:david.inman@sparse.gov.uk) for further details

**OUR ROLE IS TO BE THERE FOR YOUR COUNCIL AND ITS COMMUNITIES EVERY DAY.**