

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
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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
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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
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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
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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