

Note of last RURAL SERVICES NETWORK Rural Assembly (sub) Special Interest Group meeting

Title:	RSN RURAL ASSEMBLY (sub) Rural Special Interest Group
Date:	Monday 11 April 2016
Venue:	Smith Square 1&2, Ground 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
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1 Apologies for Absence

Councillor Cecilia Motley, Chair, welcomed Rural Assembly members to the meeting and noted apologies.

The Chair paid tribute to the late Cllr Roger Begy who had recently passed away. Members were reminded of his valued contribution as a colleague and previous RSN Chair. In recognition of this, the Chair invited a minute's silence.

2 Minutes of the last Rural Assembly meeting - 16 November 2016

The minutes from the previous meeting were approved.

John Birtwistle commented that it looked like the Buses Bill would be out in September

3 Minutes of the last Executive meeting – 18th January 2016

The minutes of the last Executive meeting were noted and an update was provided on the Housing & Planning Bill.

Reference was made to the importance of RSN engagement with community groups and in particular, village halls via parish clerks.

4 Budget Report for 2015/16 and 2016/17

Members agreed the budget report which had been circulated to members in advance of the meeting.

5 Mains Gas Supply Networks in Rural Areas

It was agreed that this presentation would be postponed to the next

meeting, with the Executive considering the issues at its next meeting.

Action

Consider circulating forms requesting information to members in advance of next meeting.

Item to be included on the Executive agenda and on the agenda for the meeting in July.

6 Rural Services Network Events

Members received an update of progress and outline of future Rural Service Network Events.

- The Rural Conference, Cheltenham - 6,7 September.
- 2015-16 Rural Services Network Seminar Programme - Members noted a paper included within the agenda.

7 Devolution: to discuss the attached draft Policy Briefing Paper and thereby establish RSN Policy on Devolution

Brian Wilson introduced the draft policy briefing note on devolution. Evidence showed a strong rural and shire case for devolution but local authorities should decide themselves if they wish to do so. The government policy was that any substantial devolution would need an elected mayor but local authorities were keen that other options should be available.

Mr Wilson referred to LEPs and the need for them to match up with devolution geography. He invited comments on the draft.

Members raised several issues:

- They were concerned about associated members where city regions cross with shires and that their economies may pull different ways.
- With regard to housing and planning, there were issues about ground rules and consistencies - negotiating processes were very difficult.
- Members provided examples where lack of recognition of extreme rural areas within the scheme of devolution were evident. They agreed that there was a need for assistance and more lobbying to remind the government of the existence of rural areas and the problems faced. The Remit is about economic regeneration - rural community economies struggle to deliver.
- They were concerned about bureaucracy and additional costs in reaching agreements that do not help extreme rural communities in any way.
- Evidence showed that LEPs will be a major part of devolution deal – this has been judged on population figures which is not fair on more rural areas.

Members discussed shared responsibilities at local levels and Mr Wilson

agreed that they may not get as much in a devolution deal as they would with a mayor - but that there should still be a choice. He reiterated the importance of getting local MPs on board.

Mr Wilson agreed to amend the draft to incorporate member comments and to add information about housing.

8 Rural Sounding Board

Nothing to report.

9 Widening the Sounding Boards

Andy Dean (RSN) updated members on mechanisms for building more sounding boards and on the progress of developing websites

10 Report on the RSP Service Groups

Mr Dean went on to update members on progress of arrangements for the Alliance Rural Housing Week being held in July.

Members noted an update on the Rural Health Network and the planned re-launch in the next few months. Feedback had been received from the last conference and a product based on this would be developed and produced as a suggestion to be tested among interest groups. Key issues facing SPARSE areas needed to be addressed, including access to health care, GP recruitment/retention and high levels of rural fuel poverty. They agreed that a case needed to be made to find ways to deal with these barriers, both economically and practically.

Mr Biggs informed the group on work of the National Rural Crime Network including and development of the website. The 2 year Home Office funding grant was now finished – further funding would be dependent on the wishes of commissioners to be elected in May and whether they would be keen to continue and be part of the crime network which would have to be self funding.

Members noted updates on Fire and Transport Groups.

11 Housing Bill – An Update on the Current Position

Members received a presentation from Monica Burns (National Housing Federation). She outlined collaborative organisations and details of their current work which included the scheme being introduced for voluntary 'right to buy'. Members noted the policy which had received a major input from housing associations and progress on pilots.

She outlined the details of right-to-buy and the rules of the scheme, informing the group that full compensation for the discounts applied will be paid by government. Sales receipts would then be used to build new homes – with the intention that all those sold would be replaced nationally.

Ms Burns invited members to comment and informed them that the NHF would be organising workshops to inform organisations of their recommendations as well as consultations on starter homes.

Members noted the presentation and agreed that any exceptions to right to buy - particularly where housing associations refuse to sell to tenants – need to be clearly stated.

The Chair thanked Ms Burns for the presentation.

Action

Circulate slides to members.

12 LEPs and Rural Areas

Mr Dean gave a presentation on member experiences of relationships with LEPs and the problems faced in setting them up to be active in very rural areas.

Members agreed the importance of continuing to emphasise the value of contribution by rural areas but were aware that there were issues which made it very difficult, such as lack of broadband. Parish councils also needed to be more involved and communication was vital as there was a real lack of public knowledge.

Action

Circulate presentation.

13 Any Other Business

Members noted that the Surrey Rural Statement was now available and would be sent to the RSN

.

The Chair thanked members and officers for their attendance and the meeting closed at 3.30pm.

Date of next meeting:

SPARSE Rural Sub SIG and SPARSE Rural Assembly sub SIG – 11 July 2016

Appendix A - Attendance

Position / Role	Name	Organisation
Chairman	Cllr Cecilia Motley	Shropshire Council
Members	Cllr Neil Butters	Bath & NE Somerset Council
	Cllr Leslie Kew	Bath & NE Somerset Council
	Cllr Peter Bedford	Boston BC
	Brian Wilson	Brian Wilson Associates
	Christopher Graffius (Observer)	British Association for Shooting & Conservation
	Cllr Geraldine Carter	Calderdale MBC
	Cllr David Ireton	Craven DC
	Cllr William Gray	East Lindsey DC
	Cllr G Nicolson OBE	Eden DC
	Cllr Rupert Reichhold	EN DC
	John Birtwistle	First Group, Head of Policy
	Anne McLoughlin	Hastoe Housing Association
	Cllr R Phillips	Herefordshire Council
	Revd. R Kirlew	Independent
	Cllr C Strange	Lincolnshire CC
	Cllr P Posnett	Melton BC
	Cllr Margaret Squires	Mid Devon DC
	Cllr Heather Bainbridge	Mid Devon DC
	Monica Burns	National Housing Federation
	Cllr Robert Heseltine	NYC
	Cllr Lindsey Cawson	North Kesteven DC
	Cllr Robert Heseltine	North Yorkshire CC
	Cllr Malcolm Leeding	OALC, President
	Cllr Y Peacock	Richmondshire DC
	Graham Biggs	RSN
	Andy Dean	RSN

	Cllr Cameron Clark	Sevenoaks DC
	Cllr David Godfrey	Shepway DC
	Cllr E Sneath	South Holland DC
	Cllr P Thornton	South Lakeland DC
	Cllr Jeremy Savage	South Norfolk DC
	Carole Clarke	South Northamptonshire Council
	Cllr P Stevens	St Edmundsbury BC
	Cllr P Sanders	West Devon BC
	Cllr Owen Bierley	West Lindsey DC
	Cllr Nick Daubney	West Norfolk BC
LGA Officer	Fatima de Abreu	LGA
Apologies	Liz Philip	Askham-Bryan College
	Cllr Roy Miller	Barnsley MBC
	James MacColl	Better Transport
	Mark Hemming, Head of Finance	Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service
	Holly Jago	Calor Ltd
	Peter Shipp	Chairman & CX – EYMS Group Ltd
	Cllr Barry Wood	Cherwell DC
	Cllr Samantha Dixon	Cheshire West & Chester Council
	Paul Over	Chichester DC
	Dr P Blantern	Chief Executive, Northamptonshire CC
	Steve MacKenzie	Chief Executive, Purbeck DC
	Nick Millington	Chief Executive, Rural Media Company
	Ian Richardson	Chief Executive, Shropshire Rural Housing Association
	Lesley Tucker	Chief Finance Officer, Teignbridge DC
	Jenny Poole	Cotswold DC
	Mary Davis	Director of Finance - Devon CC
	Cllr R Gould	Dorset CC
	Cllr Paul Diviani	East Devon DC

	Paul Over	Executive Director, Chichester DC
	Steve Jordan	Executive Director, South Hams & West Devon Councils
	Cllr M Henry	Gateshead Council
	Karen Henriksen	Head of Resources, Derbyshire Dales DC
	Martin Reohorn	Hereford & Worcester Fire & Rescue Service
	Cllr P Posnett	Melton BC
	Nicky Lovely	Newark & Sherwood DC
	Cllr Gonzalez De Savage	Northamptonshire CC
	Donna Smith	Plunkett Foundation
	Gill Cameron-Waller	Policy & Partnerships Manager – Wealden DC
	James Mitchell	Royal Mail
	David Inman	RSN
	Cllr Malcolm Pate	Shropshire Council
	Kath Hemmings, Neighbourhood Manager	Solihull MDC
	Cllr Michael Hicks	South Hams DC
	Mark Hardingham	Suffolk Fire & Rescue
	Cllr P Martin	Surrey CC
	Cllr Williams	Taunton Deane DC
	Cllr Whittaker	Torrige DC
	Cllr Seccombe	Warwickshire CC
	Cllr Roger Croft	West Berkshire Council