

Note of last RURAL SERVICES NETWORK – RURAL ASSEMBLY SUB-SIG Special Interest Group Meeting

Title: RURAL SERVICES NETWORK Special Interest Group – Rural Assembly Sub-SIG
Date: Monday 13 April 2015
Venue: 10 St. Ann's Street London SW1P 2DE

Attendance

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

Item	Decisions and actions	Action
1	Apologies for absence Apologies were noted and would appear in the minutes.	
2	Minutes last Rural Assembly meeting 17 November 2014 The minutes of the last full meeting were agreed	
3	Minutes Executive meeting 19 January 2015 The minutes of the last Executive Meeting were agreed	
4	New Vice Chairman for the ensuing year It was reported that Cornwall Council have appointed Councillor Adam Paynter to be their representative in place of Councillor Alex Folkes. It was proposed that Councillor Paynter becomes the Vic Chair representing the South and South West region. This will be signed off formally at the next Executive Meeting.	
5	RSN Executive It was proposed that Janice Banks, the Chief Executive of Acre, joins the Executive. Item postponed . Graham Biggs reported that Acre have successfully retained their Defra grant for the current financial year, and are currently under consultation with staff about the future direction of the organisation.	
	Action Item to be put on agenda once the ACRE staff consultation has concluded.	

6 Constitution

A revised Constitution reflecting the Group's change in structure was sought to be adopted at the Annual General Meeting. This revised constitution was put out to postal ballot. For adoption a revised constitution requires a two thirds majority from councils voting. The revised document received such backing (thirty six yes votes to two no votes). It will therefore be formally adopted by the AGM in November.

7 Budget 2014/15 and 2015/16

The Budget report for 2014/15 and 2015/16 was **noted**.

The budget position is positive and better than predicted.

Action

Produce a first look at 16/17 for the next Executive . **Graham Biggs**

8 Election Manifestos

Brian Wilson discussed the first look on how the main Parliamentary Parties' Manifestos were shaping up and how they reflect the aspirations detailed in the RSN manifesto. His report was based on what is known in advance of their publication.

Conservative messages indicate a focus on affordable housing, but nothing rural is specifically addressed, nor is any specific allocation of funding for Local Authorities besides discussion around Business rates. They have discussed the promotion of small business growth and the extension of broadband.

Labour's 'Changing Britain Together' has a Rural Community section which includes issues such as the cost of living crisis, fuel poverty, and transport costs. It also discusses devolving powers to county regions as well as cities. It argues for the protection of Royal Mail's services but says nothing about broadband.

Liberal Democrat's pre-manifesto work for a 'Stronger Economy, Fairer Society' doesn't include the word rural. There is a section on farming, food and animal welfare and it discusses access to the countryside. There are relevant policies around planning, affordable housing and transport.

UKIP discuss access to Local GP surgeries, maintenance of pensioner bus passes and the amendment of the Local Authority Framework to make it easier to build on brownfield sites plus an exemption from stamp duty on a house's first sale.

Members suggested that they should lobby the LGA for greater influence on rural affairs. It was noted that this group was taking the lead on rural affairs and that the most should be made of that.

Members discussed that the proposed (by the Conservative Party) Right to Buy in respect of Housing Association stock would be the wrong path again. Members discussed how the need to fulfil affordable housing and Section 106 developer contributions were, in some cases, resulting in low standards and small accommodation.

It was noted that this would be taken forward depending on what the proposals are and how they develop under the new administration. These issues will also be covered at the Rural Housing Conference, 9th June, House of Lords. Members should contact Andy Dean for details.

Members noted that the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) manifesto may be of interest for future lobbying in June 2015.

Action

Update the report and circulate after the publication of the main Parliamentary Parties' Manifestos. **Brian Wilson**

Run a piece in weekly digest

9 Business Innovation and Skills Committee Reports etc

Graham Biggs reported on the Ninth Report of the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee. The RSN had submitted evidence

Members were concerned that Royal Mail could not provide a regional breakdown of the cost of the Universal Service, and that Royal Mail and Ofcom could not agree on what constitutes the cost, revenues and profits of the Universal Services.

Action

Invite Royal Mail to discuss the costs of the Universal Service at the next meeting

Invite Neil Parish MP (if re-elected) to talk on the issue

10 Rural Unitary Group

A fund of £400,000 has been given Nationally to look into rural transport. This will be shared with members at the next meeting.

11 Transformation challenge

Dan Bates introduced the item on Transformation Challenge and Best Practice. Predominantly Rural Councils have been awarded £22.6 Million and Urban with Significant Rural authorities have been awarded £18.5 Million.

Councillor Cecilia Motley

Reported on Shropshire Council's 'Our Community Hubs' project which received £520,000 funding. It aimed to transform existing face to face customer focused services, including libraries and Customer Service Points. Libraries become a hub around which other services are built to create a one-stop shop allowing them to be better used and sustained.

Currently, the project is awaiting its final conclusion to confirm its success but the solution has been praised as a pragmatic and productive way forward.

A previous project begun in 2014 had £65k of funding to get the unemployed back to work. There was considerable success in finding people who were off the radar of job centres. 138 clients were found, 117 of which were on JSA. Overall 18% of clients were off JSA by the end of the project, and in one town this was as much as 50%. Cost-savings were significant and the housing association are keen to continue the work.

Councillor Derrick Haley

Reported on Suffolk County's 'Future Councils Model' project which received £3,323,125 funding. The project involves a wide range of authorities within the county and Suffolk Constabulary and the money will be used to pump prime new ways of collaborative working that support communities, reduce costs and generate benefits for residents of £19m over 10 years. Lessons have been learnt around trust relationships, capacity as an issue, the need to focus on outcomes, and the need to see communities through the eyes of our partners.

Members praised the work being done and the outcomes achieved. Other authorities had instigated work building on the models outline in the above.

It was noted that options are being explored to pull together case studies which provide a very good body of evidence to communicate with government and share information. There is also a Case Study area under Good Practice on the RSN Website.

Action

Space at future meetings for members to discuss the work being done with their own awards

12 Rural Services Network Events

(a) The Rural Conference 8 and 9 September

The LGA have declined to be involved this year because last year they did not make their required level of profit from the event. The Executive have agreed we will continue the event on our own, which has some advantages.

The conference will this year be at South Gloucestershire University on the Park Campus at Cheltenham. We will widen out the event from last year with two pre-conference seminars on English Devolution and Fairer Funding on the afternoon of the 8 September and the main conference now with a slightly cheaper fee all day on the 9 of September. It will also include a workshop on affordable housing, (other workshops to be decided) a round table, and a plenary session on viable villages.

Conference accommodation will be recommended in the programme.

(b) The Rural Health Conference 11 June

Health and Wellbeing Innovation Centre, Treliske, Truro

The third national Rural Health Network Conference has been announced. "Challenging Times - A New Dimension?" follows on from two previous successful and very well received RHN conferences in 2012 and 2013. The event will convene at the state of the art Health and Wellbeing Innovation Centre in Truro, Cornwall on 11 June 2015. The conference speakers include national commentators and leading health professionals presenting on the current issues and challenges in relation to rural health.

Duncan Selbie, CEO of Public Health England is the keynote speaker addressing the particular challenges of effective public health promotion to rural populations. Other presentations include Transforming End of Life Care in Rural Communities; Technology enabled Care Services - 6 months on (following the recent publication of the NHS England toolkit for Commissioners); a case study in excellent integrated Housing, Health and Social Care; and the innovative work of the Cumbria Rural Health Forum. Lord Cameron of Dillington will be talking about his rural proofing review and the implications for a new government to be elected in May. A series of interactive workshops will also be staged to show case excellent practice in various rural health related fields.

Sarah Wollaston MP, Chair of the Health Select Committee to May 2015 has been invited to chair our conference. Sarah's immense experience both as a former GP and through her Committee's

examination of the critical issues facing the NHS, will provide delegates with an unequalled insight in to the current challenges across the sector.

Link to programme and booking details:

<http://www.rsnonline.org.uk/rural-health-conference-2015/rural-health-conference-2015>

Places are limited to 100 and early booking is advised. The delegate fee is £125 plus VAT to include lunch and refreshments. This fee will also provide a year's membership to the Rural Health Network which facilitates the sharing of best practice. Booking enquiries should be addressed to the Rural Services Network on 01822 813693 or email: events@sparse.gov.uk

(c) 2015-16 Rural Services Network Seminar Programme

Further updates will be available after the publication of Party Manifestos

(d) Rural Housing Conference

The Rural Housing Conference has been confirmed for 9th July at the House of Lords. The conference will target Local Authorities, MPs and Housing Associations. This conference is in response to rural housing falling off the agenda of the National Housing Conference.

13 Rural Sounding Board

Members **noted** the results of the recent Principal Council and Parish Council Sounding Boards on the Accessibility of Services in relation to Older People in Rural Areas.

14 Rural England Group

Andy Dean reported on the progress of the Rural England Group, which is looking into re-introduce independent rural research and monitoring. There are currently 27 members on the steering group with a jointly recognised need, who are now looking into attracting funding.

15 Housing in Rural Areas

Martin Collett, English Rural Housing Association, spoke on behalf of the Rural Housing Alliance, who has been in partnership with RSN since 2013 as a single voice to influence and advocate on rural housing.

Martin outlined the challenges being faced in rural housing which faces a time of uncertainty and change, but also opportunity. He outlined the role of the Alliance in providing shared intelligence and scale, alongside a maintained localism of smaller associations.

Members raised the issue of current proposal around Right to Buy, an issue which the Alliance would look to lobby on should such proposals be enacted under a new government.

Members raised some of the challenges faced around affordable housing, and Martin directed Members towards a practical guide for parish councillors, 'Affordable Rural Housing', a useful toolkit to advise plans.

Members discussed the potential continuation of Section 106, and the difficulty of keeping up with demands. Martin suggested that affordable element to this will continue, but in a diminished way.

Actions

It was felt the Rural Housing Alliance should consider:

developing case study on how different authorities have worked with Allocations Policies under Section 106

producing guidance for principal Local Authorities

16 Report on the RSP Service Groups

- a) Housing – addressed in the above
- b) Health – The Rural Health Conference is confirmed for 11th June, in Truro
- c) Crime – Website is under development and first national rural crime survey is being drafted
- d) Fire – nothing to report
- e) Transport – nothing to report

17 Any other Business

Members raised the Parish Association and reinforced the importance of working together.

Cllr Ken Potter announced that this would be his last occasion as he retires from politics. Members joined the chair in thanking Cllr Potter for his work.

Members agreed that it was important to work together with NALC in rural matters.

Appendix A -Attendance

Attendance:

Cllr Cecilia Motley (Shropshire Council); Cllr Cameron Clark (Sevenoaks DC); Cllr Derrick Haley (Mid Suffolk DC); Cllr Peter Bedford (Boston Council); Cllr Madge Shinton (Shropshire Council); Cllr Carole Clark (South Northamptonshire); Cllr Jeremy Savage (South Norfolk Council); Cllr Nick Daubney (West Norfolk); Cllr John Hamilton (Gateshead Council); Cllr David Ireton (Craven DC); Cllr Sue Hawker (West Sussex CC); Cllr Hilary Carrick (Cumbria CC); Cllr Michael Hicks (South Hams DC); Cllr Lindsey Cawrey (North Kesteven); Cllr Jane Mortimer (Scarborough Council); Cllr C L Strange (Lincolnshire CC); Cllr Ken Potter (East Devon DC), Cllr Roger Begy (Rutland CC); Cllr Adam Paynter (Cornwall CC).

Officers: Graham Biggs (RSN); Dan Bates (RSN), Brian Wilson (RSN) and Andy Dean (RSN)

Apologies:

Cllr Roy Miller (Barnsley); Cllr Eddy Tomlinson (Durham); Cllr Les Kew (Bath & NE Somerset); Cllr John Williams (Taunton Deane); Cllr Jennifer Mein (Lancashire); Jane March (Tunbridge Wells); Paul Darby (Durham); Revd Richard Kirlaw (Church in Wales); Ms Susan Joyce (Purbeck); Cllr Philip Sanders (West Devon); Ian Stephens (Isle of Wight); Jenny Poole (Cotswold); Elizabeth Rideout (Tendring); Joanna Killian (Essex); Cllr Gordon Nicolson OBE (Eden); Audrey Statham (Daventry); Adam Norburn (Rugby); Cllr John Savage (Wycombe); Ian Knowles (West Lindsey); Jon Triggs (North Devon); Cllr Paul Diviani (East Devon); Holly Sims (Calor);); Cllr Ken Pollock (Worcestershire); Beverly Agass (South Kesteven); Jane Waggott (Ryedale); Ann Graves (South Holland); Cllr Margaret Squires (Mid Devon); Ann-Marie Sarginson (Cumbria Fire and Rescue; CFO Andy Hickmott (Warwickshire Fire & Rescue); Mrs Elizabeth Philip (Askham Bryan); Steward Horne (BIP West Devon); Peter Moore (Cornwall Rural Housing); Cllr Jane Horne (Forest of Deane); Sophie Hosking, Steve Jordan (South Hams & West Devon); Cllr Hudspeth (Oxfordshire); Cllr Wheeler (Stroud); Cllr Pam Posnett (Melton BC); Martyn Emberson (Northamptonshire Fire & Rescue); Cllr John Clarke (Gedling); Cllr Brian Robinson (Forest of Deane); Cllr Ann Carter (Daventry); Cllr David Worden (North Devon); Cllr Roger Hirst (Essex); Cllr Rosemary Doyle (Canterbury); Chris Schmidt-Reid (Wycombe District Council)