

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Graham Biggs reported that this would be Hilary Carrick's last meeting as she had been replaced by Cllr Sue Sanderson as Cumbria's representative on the Group.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.