

Notes of Rural Assembly Group meeting - 16th November 2015

Title: Rural Assembly Group
Date: Monday 16th November 2015 beginning at 1 p.m.
Venue: Westminster Suite, 8th 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	Action
1	Apologies for absence Members noted apologies for the meeting.	
2	Constitution Members agreed to recommend the adoption of the revised Constitution which now reflected the Group's change in structure. At this point, the meeting was adjourned for the inaugural AGM of the Rural Services Network Special Interest Group.	
3	Election of a Chairman and any Vice Chairman Members agreed re-election of the Chairman, Cllr Cecilia Motley and Vice-Chairman, Cllr Robert Heseltine.	
4	Minutes of the last full meeting- 13th July 2015 The minutes of the last full meeting were agreed subject to an amendment to include Cllr Janet Duncton, West Sussex CC who had previously been omitted from the attendance.	
5	Minutes of the last Executive meeting- 14th September 2015 The minutes of the last Executive meeting were noted.	
6	Minutes of the last Rural Unitary Councils Group - 28th September 2015 Members noted a summary of the outcome of the meeting of the Rural Unitary Councils Community Group from Graham Biggs, RSN. It was agreed that the group had a meaningful role and that it should have a rolling Chairmanship of 6 months. Members noted that a paper on the lack of Broadband in rural areas, to be presented to the Treasury, would follow for information. Unfortunately, there had not been an opportunity to present a document on Rural Health and Well-being services as was referenced at that meeting	

7 Membership (Constitutional Requirement)

Members noted current membership of the Rural Assembly, recognising them as the only named organisation standing up for rural issues. 154 local authorities are currently in membership, with links to over 9000 parishes and 4000 schools.

The Chair thanked David Inman, RSN and colleagues for all their hard work recruiting to the Assembly.

8 Budget 2014/15 and 2015/16 (Constitutional Requirement)

Members noted the budget report and the prospect of a reasonably healthy out-turn. It would be important however, to ensure that subs were paid on time in order to balance the books at the end of the year.

9 RSN Services and Schedule of Meetings for 2015 (Constitutional Requirement)

Members agreed the dates of future meetings.

10 Rural Conference

Members received a presentation from Graham Biggs on arrangements for the Rural Conference, September 2016.

It was felt that largely the Conference had been a very successful event. Those members of RSN team who had been involved were very much thanked. Another conference would be held at the same venue in September 2016 and the University of Gloucestershire were thanked for all their help and assistance.

Members discussed their experiences from the previous conferences and raised a few points of detail. Some members had commented that they had felt somewhat isolated being apart from other members as the day was on the University campus and suggestions were made to try and organise a conference hotel in the future, so that some group sessions could carry on there. There had also been a few comments on domestic issues and it was agreed to review the issues highlighted before the next one.

11 Rural Sounding Board

David Inman, Rural Services Network, updated members on the outcomes of the Rural Sounding Board survey asking about the impact on services of the financial cut backs. This was a repeat of a survey undertaken in 2014 and the situation had altered with more feeling that the cut backs were having an impact on the quality of services.

Members were pleased that there had been a good response from local authority and parish councillors. It was agreed the same survey would be done from April to June 2016 with the results being reported back to the July meeting. Here is the link to the survey:

<http://www.rsonline.org.uk/best-practice/rural-sounding-board>

Action: Circulate Survey for information **David Inman**

12 Issues Facing Rural Housing Associations

The Chair welcomed Jo Lavis, Director of Rural Housing Solutions who provided a presentation to the group on provision of affordable housing within current constraints.

Her presentation outlined ways in which, through working together, and with available resources, policies could be developed to help deliver affordable housing in rural areas. Members heard how, by bringing stakeholders together to create collaborative partnerships, and using their expertise, capacity could be strengthened in order to achieve mutual goals.

Members discussed concerns, thanking the Speaker for her presentation and requested that it be available on the website.

Action: To place presentation on Rural Services Network **David Inman**

13 Buses Bill Briefing

The Group noted a briefing on the Buses Bill which contained two main provisions which would enable local authorities to take up more direct transport powers.

Members referred to existing voluntary partnership agreements and agreed that this would provide better opportunities to enable more innovative ways of providing commercially viable services.

The Bill was due to become law in 2017.

14 Julia Mulligan

The Chair welcomed Julia Mulligan, Chair, National Rural Crime Network and the Police and Crime Commissioner for North Yorkshire.

Julia summarised the work of the National Rural Crime Network, to raise the profile of the effects of crime in rural areas which are often underestimated and under-reported.

She outlined challenges in ensuring provision of quantitative funding and providing services across large, sparsely populated geographical areas that are often more costly than in urban areas.

Members heard that, whilst the volume of crime in rural areas is very often lower than in urban locations, its consequences can be equally impactful and undermine feelings of personal safety. The aim of the Network is to improve understanding of these issues and address the difficulties around provision of vital services.

Discussion continued about ways of sharing back office functions in order to address lack of funding and finding better ways of working via other shared services and logistics. Members agreed that raising public confidence in the police forces was a key issue and part of this was due to

heavy bureaucratic processes.

The Chair thanked the Speaker for a very interesting presentation.

15 Any Other Business

There was no other business.

The meeting was closed at 3 25 p.m.

Attendance at meetings 16 November 2015

Cecilia Motley – Chair RSN
James MacColl – Better Transport UK
Graham Biggs – Chief Executive RSN
John Birtwistle – Head of Policy, First Group PLC
David Inman – Corporate Director RSN
Gordon Nicolson OBE – Eden District Council
Helen Briggs – Chief Executive, Rutland County Council
Cllr Owen Bierley – West Lindsey District Council
Cllr Yvonne Peacock – Richmondshire District Council
Cllr David Godfrey – Shepway District Council
Frances Bedding – Suffolk County Council
Cllr Janet Duncton – West Sussex County Council
Cllr David Ireton – Craven District Council
Cllr Jeremy Savage – South Norfolk District Council
Cllr Pam Posnett – Melton Borough Council
John Birtwistle – Head of Policy, First Group PLC
Cllr Lindsey Cawrey – North Kesteven District Council
Cllr Peter Stevens – St Edmundsbury Borough Council
Paul Over – Executive Director, Chichester District Council
James MacColl – Better Transport UK
Cllr Mike Ellis – Bradford Metropolitan District Council
Cllr Les Kew – Bath & North East Somerset Council
Revd Richard Kirlew Mr Hugh McCarthy – Wycombe District Council
Liz Philip – Executive Principal, Askham Bryan College
Cllr Jane Mortimer – Scarborough Borough Council
Cllr Roger Begy – Rutland County Council
Cllr Cameron Clark – Sevenoaks District Council
Cllr Sue Sanderson – Cumbria County Council
Cllr Robert Heseltine – North Yorkshire County Council
Cllr Yvonne Peacock – Richmondshire District Council
Cllr John Clarke – Gedling Borough Council
Cllr N Daubney – King’s Lynn and West Norfolk Council
Cllr Rosemary Doyle – Canterbury City Council
William Jacobs – Head of Finance, Vale of White Horse District Council
Fatima de Abreu – Member Services, LGA

Speakers

Graham Stuart MP, Chair of the Parliamentary Rural Fair Share Campaign

Jo Lavis - Director of Rural Housing Solutions

Julia Mulligan, Chair – National Rural Crime Network and the Police and Crime Commission for North Yorkshire

Apologies List for Rural Assembly AGM - 16th November 2015

Cllr Roy Miller – Barnsley Council
Cllr Peter Martin – Surrey County Council
Deborah Clarke – ACRE?
Cllr Henry – Gateshead Council
Cllr Adam Paynter – Cornwall Council

Kevin Larner – Countryside & Communities Manager, Cherwell District Council
Richard Quallington – Interim Chief Executive, ACRE
Cllr Andre Gonzalez de Savage – Northamptonshire County Council
Cllr Hazel Brand – Bassetlaw District Council
Richard Bates – Head of Finance, Dorset County Council
Cllr I Seccombe – Warwickshire County Council
Cllr Carole Clarke – South Northamptonshire Council
Cllr Colin Noble – Leader, Suffolk County Council
Cllr B Pain – Harborough District Council
Steve Jordan – Executive Director, South Hams District Council
Lawrence Conway – South Lakeland District Council
Adam Norburn – Chief Executive, Rugby Borough Council
Lisa Buckle – West Devon Borough Council/South Hams District Council
Jim Graham – Chief Executive, Warwickshire County Council
Cllr Bob Adams – South Kesteven District Council
Kath Hemmings – Neighbourhood Manager, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Grant Black – Rural Media
Nic Millington – Rural Media
Ruth Hawkins – Nottingham Healthcare NHS Trust
Steward Horne – Business Information Point
Martin Rehorn – Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service
Steve Mackenzie – Chief Executive, Purbeck District Council
Peter Shipp – EYMS Group Ltd
Will Smith – Stagecoach in Norfolk
Cllr Peter Bedford – Boston Borough Council
Brian Wilson – Brian Wilson Associates
Jim Onions – Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service
Cllr Hazel Brand – Bassetlaw District Council
Cllr Anthony Alford – West Dorset District Council
Ian Richardson – Chief Executive, Shropshire Rural Housing Association
Cllr Margaret Squires – Mid Devon District Council
Cllr Michael Hicks – South Hams District Council
Cllr Neil Butters – Bath & North East Somerset Council
Cllr Liz Sneath – South Holland District Council
Sue Williams – Berkshire College of Agriculture
Cllr Peter Thornton – South Lakeland District Council
Cllr Nigel Manning – Guildford Borough Council
Donna Smith – Frontline Project Manager, Plunkett Foundation
Cllr Madge Shineton – Shropshire Council
Cllr Heather Bainbridge – Mid Devon District Council
Peter Vaughan – Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service