

Notes of RURAL ECONOMY GROUP meeting

Title: Rural Services Network Special Interest Group

- Rural Economy Group meeting

Date: Monday 29 January 2018

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

Rural Economy Group Meeting 11.00am to 12.45pm

The Chairman welcomed members and noted apologies.

1 Why are we setting up this new Group?

Graham Biggs, RSN Chief Executive, opened up the meeting with a summary of current work under the remit of rural services network, Rural Assembly and the SPARSE Rural Sub SIG and outlined the reasoning for setting up this new group and its purpose.

Members agreed with the establishment of the Rural Economy Group

2 What should the Remit of the Group Cover?

Members discussed and agreed the remit of the group which aims to cover all matters related to and impacting on rural economies.

3 Current issues

Mr Biggs invited the group to discuss challenges in common and to share ideas and examples of best practice.

Members raised the following issues:

- Some had attended the recent LGA Councillors' Forum and referred to the speech by the attending Minister, Rishi Sunak MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. They agreed that a proper evidence base was vital in the profile of rural issues and, especially, financial representations.
- Members noted that a digital connectivity group had been set up under the remit of the People and Places Board of the LGA and were concerned that the RSN Sub SIG would end up duplicating work. Mr Biggs reminded members that the LGA Group would be focussing on both rural and urban issues and therefore, there was a danger that rural issues might be overlooked.
- Members were concerned that they have no representation on the People and Places Board and agreed that RSN colleagues should talk to the Board to

identify any similar initiatives and in particular those related to rural economies.

- Connectivity generally remains an important issue across rural areas
- Transport provision in rural areas especially is still a major issue – this needs to be urgently addressed and is a key issue affecting residents and businesses. They agreed that subsidies are often not available and noted detrimental impact on residents of stoppages of vital services, such as dial a ride.
- Members referred to business rates and agreed that the impact on rural GDP was a huge part on National GDP. In rural areas. Authorities where many small businesses are not liable to pay must be raised and considered
- They agreed that there were issues around other industries too – including people and skills, utility supplies and provisions and there was therefore a need to take a more strategic approach in lobbying government about all services to rural areas – not just broadband.
- Members noted that bus services are also utilised by young people trying to reach entry level employment or training and is therefore key to improving the economy. Members agreed that rural transport issues are not just about buses – implications arise and have an impact on the rural economy if working age people cannot get to work they will move as there is no alternative – this is a major damage to rural economies. Fairer funding for transport in rural areas was raised
- The Brexit impact of the loss of ERDF funding and the establishment of the Shared Prosperity Fund were both raised as important issues
- Members discussed housing issues and how to fund affordable housing. Affordable Housing in National Park areas was a particular challenge
- Rural master planning –and the need for a much wider definition of Infrastructure was raised. Capacity of the Electricity supply, the stance of the Regulator created major disadvantage in rural areas and impacted detrimentally on the return on investment re employment land and buildings..
- Sustainability needs to be properly defined in the rural context and supported according to individual areas and what is right for them in particular in order to be sustained. Land, and getting planning consent, for business diversification were referred to
- Members discussed ‘air band’ and issues around coverage. Agreeing that there are still problems.
- Attracting families to locate to and remain in rural areas was referred to. It was commented that through Countryfile etc. many people are rurally minded but not rural people minded
- They agreed that communication is of vital importance, particularly with regard to rural deprivation and that large organisations need to be called upon to raise the profile of particular issues with differences between those affecting urban and rural areas as part of their remits. Engagement is vital – particularly with MIND etc. – people misunderstand the meaning of deprivation – they include hidden issues such as depression and loneliness, isolation etc. Urban vulnerability is different to rural vulnerability.
- Members referred to recent work of the Jo Cox Commission – but agreed that much of it will be about urban issues and little (if any) on rural.
- The future of agriculture was discussed – members were concerned that traditional farming will stop – there isn’t the realisation of how much the rural and national economies are currently dependent on continuation of its existence the issues in Upland areas and supply chain were highlighted. Some analysis of Defra’s 25-year plan was warranted.
- Members made the point that community buses are run by volunteers and community shops are very good – work should also endorse the very good things that rural areas have and benefits to the local population not just focus on

the problems.

- Evidence of how the positives impact GDP should also be included in any work.

Members agreed that the new group will be of value but will need to be aware of existing work being done by CCN and DCN and LGA People and Places Board. Members agreed that connectivity is the most major concern and that rural areas are really struggling which impacts greatly on businesses in particular.

Mr Biggs referred to the RURAL BREXIT round table, set up to discuss the possible impact of BREXIT on rural areas. He outlined details of groups involved – he summarised details of previous meetings and agreement was reached that rural white paper of 2005 should be re-addressed to look at success and sustainability. The RSN is doing this. They also agreed in principle that a rural strategy should be introduced post BREXIT by the government. They are seeking to articulate issues which may inhibit or benefit rural economies. They hope to build a plan to argue the rural case for an appropriately funded and accepted strategy covering at least 10 years.

Members were informed that a draft strategy should be available at the next meeting for them to consider – and allow sufficient time to work on its content further to members' input. Members discussed the Shared Prosperity Fund and questioned how it would be distributed.

Members agreed that looking at ways in using existing parliamentary channels to try and raise these points and move government and urban opinion to raise the perception of how rural areas live. Was essential They agreed that fundamental attitudes about rural living need to change and they discussed how engagement with the media will help address this. Rural areas should be promoted and work done to attract more people to rural areas – although the issue of connectivity is a major issue. They agreed that public perception of living in rural areas is a particular problem due to the media and television.

Action:

Discussion on the Industrial Strategy to be carried forward to the next Rural Assembly meeting on 9 April, as well as more discussion on the work of the Rural BREXIT Roundtable.

4 Industrial Strategy: What should the Rural response be?

Members had discussed some of these issues within the last item.

5 Items put forward by members

Apologies were received from Cllr Peter Thornton who had raised Rural Broadband and from Ian Hunter, Littoral Rural Arts Trust.

On behalf of Ian Hunter it was reported that CaDRE – Creative and Digital Rural Economy - R & D initiative is going ahead with a Creative Rural Economy conference planned for Tate Britain in the early Autumn

Members noted the following updates:

- Cllr Andrew Hadley, Lead Member for Economic Growth & Tourism and Gordon Dwyer spoke about the work of the South West Rural Productivity Commission and development of a task force set up to feed into, and progress key priorities

around the work of the commission. Further updates would be provided at future meetings.

Further information and the reports can be found at:

<http://heartofswlep.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/HotSW-14332-A4-Overview-report-digital-doc-FINAL.pdf>

<http://heartofswlep.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Evidence-Report.pdf>

- They also gave an oral report on the work of their Opportunity Department for Education Programme in trying to increase social mobility and increase opportunities for disadvantaged young people. Members noted issues particular to West Somerset and details of current progress and estimated delivery.
- Clare Walters, Chief Executive Bus Users UK, discussed perceptions regarding the use of buses in rural areas. She spoke about how different areas have been creative in providing transport and referred to different schemes set up to ensure that the system is available and outlined the impact of the lack of these services including problems including accessibility to education, to work, and health and welfare of local residents. She referred to legal duties for provision of subsidies and the impact of withdrawing these on local communities. Research is to be carried out, once fully funded, aiming to show whether or not reducing public transport increases the adult social care budget and harms rural economies.

Members agreed that lobbying must show the impact on urban communities if rural connectivity is not enabled. Quality of life in rural areas will hugely diminish if this is not sustained. They also discussed issues around lack of further education and getting commitment for transporting young people to areas which have further education facilities, agreeing that it will be difficult to attract families with young children if they have concerns about their future education. Discussion continued as Ms Walters provided an operator's perspective and discussed the difficulties faced where there are not enough people reliant on the services to justify supply. There were problems around investment, enabling skills and costs and they noted that business growth is a different dynamic in a rural area which therefore means that they will not get the amount of investment as in the cities to take that risk. Devolution is key – it is vital to have the evidence about building investment in rural areas – there is also an issue about resistance from local people. There are always going to be issues around infrastructure.

Mr Inman offered the services of SPARSE to help Ms Walters with evidence and information and the Chair thanked her for her contribution.

- John Birtwistle, Head of Policy, UK Bus, First Buses – had sustained an injury at the weekend and had sent apologies.
- Janice Rose – Northumberland CC – gave an uplifting presentation on (a) North of Tyne Devolution Deal; and its rural ambitions and (b) a perspective on the proposed Borderlands Deal covering Northumberland, Cumbria, Scottish Borders and Dumfries & Galloway. There was a real possibility that the North of Tyne Devo. Deal to become a Rural Champion for England. Contact details Janice Rose Northumberland CC Janice.rose@northumberland.gov.uk Tel 01670 624 747

6 Any other business

There was no other business.

Attendance

Name	Representing
Graham Biggs	RSN
David Inman	RSN
Cllr Cecilia Motley	RSN
Andy Dean	RSN
Richard Quallington	ACRE
Cllr Les Kew	Bath & North East Somerset Council
Claire Walters	Bus Users UK
Cllr David Ireton	Craven District Council
Darren Peters, Staff Officers	Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue
Greg Macdonald, Head of Economic & Commercial Development	East Northamptonshire Council
Henry Lee, External Research & Policy Co- ordinator	Hastoe Housing Association
Cllr Roger Phillips	Herefordshire County Council
Ashley Curzon	Isle of Wight Council
Helen Harris, Economic Growth Manager	Leicestershire County Council
Cllr Mark Whittington	Lincolnshire County Council
Heidi Turnbull	Maldon District Council
Alan Gray, Economic Development Manager	North Kesteven District Council
Steve Blatch, Chief Executive	North Norfolk District Council
Cllr Tom Fitzpatrick	North Norfolk District Council
Robert Heseltine	North Yorkshire Council
Janice Rose	Northumberland County Council

Malcolm Leading	Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils
Cllr Yvonne Peacock	Richmondshire District Council
Cllr Cameron Clark	Sevenoaks District Council
Revd Richard Kirlew	Sherborne Deanery Rural Chaplaincy
Cllr Gwilym Butler	Shropshire Council
Gill Heath	Staffordshire County Council
Peter Stevens	St Edmundsbury Council
Matt Jones	Suffolk County Council
Cllr Philip Sanders	West Devon Borough Council
Ian Knowles, Director of Resources	West Lindsey District Council
Cllr Owen Bierley	West Lindsey District Council
Cllr Andrew Hadley	West Somerset Council
Gordon Dwyer, Senior Economic Development Officer	West Somerset Council
Cllr Janet Duncton	West Sussex County Council
Steve Brain, Programmes & Performance Manager	Worcestershire County Council
Katie Ainsworth, Project Manager – Worcestershire LEADER Programme	Worcestershire County Council