

# Rural Services APPG

**All-Party Parliamentary Group on Rural Services  
Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> October 2012, 8:30am - 10:00am  
Dining Room B, HoC**

## **Agenda**

1. **Notes of the Meeting – 26<sup>th</sup> June 2012 (AGM)** attached page 2
2. **Matters arising from the last meeting**
3. **Federation of Small Businesses**  
To consider presentation from Mike Cherry, National Policy Chairman and Ulrika Diallo Federation of Small Businesses on the Federation's document "The Missing Links – revitalising our rural economy". This document is circulated with the agenda and copies will be available at the meeting.
4. **Vulnerability Index**  
To consider a presentation from Ivan Annibal, Managing Director of Rose Regeneration.  
An explanation of the findings of the Vulnerability Index 2012, which considers the relative economic vulnerability of every local authority area in England (considering the interplay of wages, employment, demography and dependency on public sector employment) including a comparison with the 2011 results from the Index. A highlighting of the most challenged areas according to the index trends and the policy implications arising from its findings.

**For further details concerning this meeting please contact:**

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# Rural Services APPG

Annual General Meeting  
All-Party Parliamentary Group on Rural Services

Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> June 2012, 8.30 – 10.00 am  
Breakfast Room 5

## In attendance:

### Members:

Graham Stuart MP – Chairman  
Lord Dear (Vice Chair)  
Baroness Byford (Secretary)  
Teresa Coffe  
Simon Park  
Simon Holt  
Mark Garnier  
Lord Cameron of Dillington

### Rural Services Network (RSN) (Secretariat):

Graham Biggs – Chief Executive  
David Inman – Director

### Speakers:

#### *First Group Buses*

John Birtwistle

#### *ACoRP – The Association of Community Rail Partnerships*

Neil Buxton, Chris Austin.

#### *Comission for Rural Communities*

Jon Carling  
Stuart Burgess

### Apologies

Anthony Bishop, Nadhim Zahawi, Duke of Montrose, Andrew Tyrie, Grahame Morris, Andrew George, Rory Stewart, Sir Alan Beith

## 1. Election of Officers:

The following members were re-elected to committee positions:

*Chairman:* Graham Stuart MP  
*Vice-Chairmen:* Grahame Morris MP  
Dan Rogerson MP  
Lord Dear QPM  
*Treasurer:* Rory Stewart MP  
*Secretary:* Baroness Byford DBE

There was no change to the current membership.

## **2. Matters Arising**

- (a) Minutes of previous meeting confirmed as an accurate record
- (b) Localisation of Council Tax Support:  
Concern was expressed that people of working age on benefit in rural local authority areas might suffer more than those in urban areas as these authorities had a higher percentage of pensioners whose level of benefit had to be protected.
- (c) A note from the Rural Services Network's Finance Director. Rural Health Payments is attached as Appendix A.  
Despite an 'improvement' between consultation and the latest figures grant to rural local authorities would still be significantly lower than to their urban counterparts. This appeared yet again to be an understatement of rural need.
- (d) Local Authority Fairer Funding Campaign:  
Graham Biggs detailed the position reached. The consultation documentation from DCLG was anticipated before the recess. The support of Rural MP's would be key.

## **3. Rural Bus Services**

John Birtwistle from First Group Buses made a detailed presentation on the threats and challenges facing rural areas. The position was very mixed but there was a clear and continuing threat to services in rural areas. In rural areas because of the economic situation bus usage was declining.

The presentation included points on:

- (a) Local Authority Finances and Policy
  - (b) The OFT Report on Price and Choice in remote communities
  - (c) Legislation
  - (d) Merges and Acquisitions
  - (e) Concessionary Fares
  - (f) Fuel
  - (g) Demand for Services
  - (h) What are operators doing
- (A copy of the power points slides are attached)

## **4. ACoRP – The Association of Community Rail Partnerships Presentation**

Neil Buxton, the General Manager of the Association of Community Rail partnerships, made a presentation about the Partnerships' work. Yet again there was a feeling that rural services needed support at a turbulent time. Coordination of forward thinking would be of assistance.

(A copy of the main points of the presentation is attached as Appendix C).

## **5. CRC – The Commission for Rural Communities Presentation**

The Chairman and Chief Executive of the Commission for Rural Communities commented across a wide range of areas. Unfortunately the Commission is due to close on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013.

### **(a) Social Isolation (Jon Carling – Chief Executive)**

Two papers have been produced which have now been widely circulated. The need for good practice was emphasised and it was hoped the papers would assist in this regards. A major problem in rural areas clearly arose by bereavement which could be followed for the accompanying partner by a lack of social mobility.

### **(b) Social Care Expenditure – (Stuart Burgess – Chairman)**

A paper by Commissioner Sheena Asthana was outlined. The disparity between payments per head between rural and urban residents was very worrying. In rural areas

the average was less than half of the urban figure. What been anecdotal evidence has been verified by real evidence. Funding which was based on deprivation and ignored age needs clearly heavily skewed the position to favour urban areas.

**(c) Housing Benefit**

There was concern about moves in relation to more unused bedrooms leading to lower benefit. The need for careful consideration in relation to rural areas was emphasised.

**(d) Transport and Concessionary Fares**

The need for concessionary fares to begin prior to 9:30am was discussed. Some discussion took place about the possibility of personal transport costs budgets in lieu of concessionary fares in certain areas. The shortage of community minibuses as an increasing problem was outlined.

**6. Dates of next meeting:**

- (a) 15<sup>th</sup> October 2012 – Small Businesses
- (b) 20<sup>th</sup> October 2012 – First Response Services

