

# Rural Services APPG

## All-Party Parliamentary Group on Rural Services Annual General Meeting

15<sup>th</sup> June 2016 at 9:00am

Room O, Portcullis House, Bridge Street, London, SW1A 2LW

### Agenda

Page No.

1. **Apologies for absence**
2. **Election of Officers**  
To elect Members to the following positions:  
Chairman  
Vice Chairmen (x3)  
Treasurer  
Secretary  
  
Current post holders are:  
Chairman - Graham Stuart MP  
Vice Chairman - Helen Goodman MP  
- Rebecca Pow MP  
- Cat Smith MP  
Treasurer - Vacant  
Secretary - Vacant
3. **Notes of previous Meetings**  
AGM – 09.06.15 and 19.01.16
4. **Improving Standards in Rural Primary Schools**  
Speaker: Councillor Paul Carter, CBE  
(Leader of Kent County Council & Chairman of the County Councils Network)
5. **Next Meeting**  
To be confirmed

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

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# Rural Services APPG

**All-Party Parliamentary Group on Rural Services**  
**9<sup>TH</sup> JUNE, 2015 12:00pm**  
**Room N, Portcullis House, Bridge Street, London, SW1A 2LW**

## **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING MINUTES**

### **PRESENT**

Graham Stuart MP – Beverley & Holderness  
Helen Goodman MP – Bishop Auckland  
Neil Parish MP – Tiverton & Honiton  
Andrew Bridgen MP – North West Leicestershire  
Rebecca Pow MP – Taunton & Deane  
Cat Smith MP – Lancaster & Fleetwood  
The Lord Cameron of Dillington

Graham Biggs – RSN – Secretariat  
Sam Hall – Researcher to Graham Stuart

### **APOLOGIES**

Sir Alan Haselhurst MP  
Richard Bacon MP  
Robert Jenrick MP  
Julian Sturdy MP  
Lord James Cranthorne  
Lord Robert MacLennan  
Baroness Byford  
Phillip Dunne MP (Observer)  
AnneMarie Morris MP (Observer)

### **1. ELECTION OF OFFICERS**

It was noted that one of the Officers must be from the Labour Party.

### **AGREED**

That the following members be elected for the next year:-  
Chairman – Graham Stuart MP

Vice Chairmen:-  
Helen Goodman MP  
Rebecca Pow MP  
Cat Smith MP

Treasurer – Neil Parish MP  
Secretary – Baroness Byford DBE

## **2. NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that a joint meeting with the Policing APPG provisionally set for the 18<sup>th</sup> June had been postponed as the results of the Rural Crime Survey would not be available by then due to the survey stating later than planned.

Dates of future meetings would be circulated as soon as possible.

## **3. ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION AT FUTURE MEETINGS AND THE OPERATION OF THE GROUP**

The Chairman invited the members present to suggest items for discussion over the next year. The intention was to have a long list from which a short list of priorities could be drawn.

Members suggested the following topics:-

Housing  
Redundant Farm Buildings  
Broadband/ Digital delivery of Public Services  
Post Offices  
Government response to Lord Cameron's Rural Proofing Review  
Busses Bill  
Industrialisation of the Countryside & Fracking.  
GP recruitment

The Chairman remarked that in the past the APPG had tended to receive interesting and informative presentations but had rarely been asked to help achieve a particular outcome. Some members felt that perhaps a small sub group could take a topic and in a sort of Select Committee way hear evidence and produce a brief report and recommendations. The Chairman said that the Group had operated in that way on one occasion which was successful but he commented that it needed more members to be actively involved than had been the case over the last Parliament and that it also created significantly more work for the Secretariat.

## **AGREED**

1. That Members of the Group not present be canvassed for their views
2. That the immediate priorities should be the Housing and Buses Bills set out in the Queen's Speech
3. That the Chairman write to Liz Truss, Defra Secretary of State ( copy to Oliver Letwin, Cabinet Office) calling for the Government to publish its response to Lord Cameron's Rural Proofing Review without further delay. The Group would then consider the Government's Response as a priority item.

# Rural Services APPG

**All-Party Parliamentary Group on Rural Services**  
**19<sup>th</sup> January 2016, 12:00pm**  
**Room P, Portcullis House, Bridge Street, London, SW1A 2LW**

## **PRESENT**

Graham Stuart MP  
John Howell MP  
Chris Davies MP  
Kevin Hollinrake MP  
Lord Ewan Cameron  
Sam Hall – Office of Graham Stuart MP  
Tom Kennedy – Office of Jesse Norman MP  
Elizabeth Simister – Office of Tom Tugendhat MP  
Josh Boughton – Office of Philip Dunne MP

## **Secretariat**

Graham Biggs – RSN  
Andy Dean – RSN

## **Others in Attendance**

Cllr Sandra Cage – LGA Public Transport Consortium (Ipswich & Suffolk)  
John Pope – LGA Public Transport Consortium  
Gary Nolan – Stagecoach UK Bus  
Cllr Chris Brewis – LGA Public Transport Consortium (Lincolnshire)  
Stephen Joseph – Campaign for Better Transport  
Martin Abrams – Campaign for Better Transport  
Clinton Jones – Association of Transport Co-ordinating Officers  
John Birtwistle – First Group

## **Apologies**

Julian Sturdy MP  
Dr Daniel Poulter MP  
Jo Churchill MP  
Jesse Norman MP  
Philip Dunne MP  
Eleanor Laing MP

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown MP  
Huw Merriman MP  
Graham Evans MP  
Baroness Hazel Byford  
James Cleverley MP  
Maria Caulfield MP  
Holly Jago (Calor)

**1. Notes of previous Meeting**

The notes of the previous meeting were noted.

**2. The value of bus services in rural areas**

As stated on the agenda, “A wealth of recent research proves the overwhelming case for the provision of rural bus services to meet the needs of older people, young people, the unemployed, those on low incomes, disabled people and businesses and to deliver economic growth. However, bus services are often threatened by a lack of cross service and cross sector thinking.”

John Birtwistle gave an overview explaining that 80% of bus services are provided commercially and, where a gap exists, local authorities are able tender for additional services. It was pointed out, however, that whilst authorities had a duty to identify needs, action to address any need identified is not a statutory requirement. The financial constraints on local authorities has forced many to cut services, despite an overall increase in bus patronage across England and Wales of 8%.

Operators and local authorities had been very pleased to see the retention of the Bus Services Operating Grant (BSOG) as a key tool in enabling the provision of rural bus services. It was the case that Bus Operators received a 50% reduction in Fuel Duty Rail Operators got 100%. Operators also receive funding through concessionary fares, the precise amount of which varies from area to area. However, increasing numbers of concessionary pass holders can lead to problems of sustainability with some services being well patronised but operating at a loss due to the proportion of subsidised passengers.

John emphasised the significant contribution of rural buses to the economy with research by Greener Journeys, for example, demonstrating that for every £1 spent by government on rural buses, £3.50 of wider benefit is generated. This not only relates to helping residents to access local businesses, services and employment but also in helping to keep an increasingly ageing population active with consequent significant reductions in health and social services expenditure.

John outlined a desire across operators and local authorities for greater awareness of the benefits of rural bus services in taking policy and funding decisions.

During discussion a range of points were raised. The opportunities afforded by improved broadband communications were discussed alongside the need for community transport and commercial services to complement each other rather than compete for the same customers.

The impact of cuts so far varies greatly around the country and a 'Buses in Crisis' report had been produced by the Campaign for Better Transport in November 2015 (available via this [link](#) ). In some areas innovative schemes are in place and partnerships work effectively whilst in some areas this has proved more difficult. Cross boundary issues also exist, particularly where adjoining local authorities approach services in different ways and there is a clear need for LEPs to consider revenue costs alongside proposals for capital infrastructure, both in terms of maintaining the capital investment and essential bus and other services.

The fact that local authority subsidised services are discretionary in a period of significant financial constraint was acknowledged as a fundamental issue. Any attempts to improve the distribution of existing resources to better reflect the additional net costs of rural service provision would be very welcome.

Graham Biggs referred to the unfair treatment of rural Councils in the allocation of government funding power which rural MPs were challenging and in some ways lay at the heart of the funding issues relating to rural buses

Going forward it was agreed that BSOG should be retained. The representatives present were asked to consider the sort of actions which they would like to see included or enabled in the forthcoming Buses Bill for consideration at a future meeting where the Buses Bill will be discussed.

The meeting closed at 1.00 p.m.

<http://www.rsonline.org.uk/all-party-parliamentary-minutes/appg-minutes-19th-january-2016>