



## RURAL SERVICES NETWORK: BREXIT STATEMENT

15 JULY, 2016

The electorate, including the majority in rural areas of England, have voted in the Referendum that the UK should leave the European Union. This will have major, short, medium and long term, implications for rural communities and the local authorities and others which supply essential services to them.

The decision having been taken, it is now essential that we look to safeguard the future of rural local authorities (and other service providers), the services provided to local rural residents, and the essential role our members have in supporting local economies.

The RSN will seek to represent rural interests in the period to come using our position as a Special Interest Group within the LGA, the Secretariat to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Rural Services, Advisors to the Rural Fair Share Campaign Group of MPs and a member of the Rural Coalition. Some of the immediate issues, include

- **Promoting the case for a period of financial stability and no further funding reductions.** Rural Local Authorities have historically been underfunded compared to their urban counterparts. Yet they have more than played their part in responding to austerity measures. The RSN will continue to support the Rural Fair Share Group in seeking fairer funding for rural authorities and will make the strongest case possible against the reductions proposed in the 2016 Local Government Finance Settlement to apply after the Transitional Relief has ended. These will lead to significant cuts to frontline service unless reversed. RSN will also strongly resist any further reduction in funding. We will also seek urgent clarification over planned reforms relating to business rates retention – the Brexit decision creates uncertainty and if that uncertainty starts to affect Business Rates yields local services could be seriously damaged.
- **Supporting the LGA in representing the interests of the local government sector.** Ensuring local government has a seat at the negotiating table and that there is clarity over EU structural funds, Common Agricultural Policy payments and the policy and regulatory impact of leaving the Union.
- **Safeguarding local partnerships and their role in supporting local economies and job creation.** Rural local authorities meet most of the growth related expenditure and this will remain critical at a time of economic uncertainty. The issues of Broadband connectivity and speeds and mobile phone coverage seriously inhibit rural economic sustainability and growth.

The powers and funding that are returned from Brussels cannot reside in Westminster. They need to flow from Westminster, with a significant reduction in bureaucracy, to the shire areas of England, giving a real say to local people at the most appropriate level of governance.

In delivering a devolution settlement for the whole of England, there is now the opportunity to engage Theresa May as the country's new Prime Minister and her Government, with a view to placing County, Unitary & District authorities at the forefront of the devolution and public service reform debate.

The changing dynamics in Westminster present an opportunity to put forward alternative models for devolution to rural areas. Our members have continuously raised concerns over the one-size-fits all approach to Elected Mayors. There is now a period for the Government to reconsider this approach where our members feel this governance model is not appropriate for their areas.

There has never been a more important time to be a strong, cross-party network of rural authorities, working in partnership with non- local authority bodies (private and voluntary sectors) concerned with all aspects of living and working in rural areas of England and providing services to rural people, communities and businesses .