

# Notes of the Sparse Rural Sub SIG and Rural Economy Group

**Date:** 25 June 2018

**Venue:** The LGA, Smith Square, London SW1P 3HZ

## Attendance

An attendance list is attached as **Appendix A** to this note.

### 1. Apologies for absence

The Chairman welcomed members and noted apologies (listed in Appendix B).

### 2. Minutes of the SPARSE Rural Sub SIG

The minutes of the last meeting of the SPARSE-Rural Sub-SIG held on the 29<sup>th</sup> January 2018 were agreed.

### 3. Minutes of the Rural Economy Group

The Minutes of the last meeting of the Rural Economy Group held on the 29<sup>th</sup> January 2018 were agreed.

Graham Biggs reported a growing concern that Local Industrial Strategies may now focus solely on a selected number of Combined Authority areas. It was agreed that, should this be the case, a concerted effort would be made to ensure these Strategies were prepared for all areas, including rural areas.

It was agreed that a letter be written by the chair requesting a place for RSN on the People & Places Board in order to improve rural representation on such issues.

### 4. Minutes of the Executive Meeting

The Minutes of the last meeting of the Executive held on the 22nd May 2018 were agreed.

### 5. Rural Bus Services

John Birtwistle (First Group Buses) introduced this session, setting out the current overall position with respect to rural bus services and highlighting a number of findings from the recent 'Rural Public Transport' survey of RSN members, the results from which had been previously circulated.

It was noted that whilst the last 2 years had seen some stability following the significant service reductions in local authority subsidised routes in previous years, this is likely to increase again as a consequence of increasing costs associated with adult social care budgets.

#### Buses & Taxis

Ben Ridehalgh, Deputy Head of Buses & Taxis, at the Department for Transport then gave a presentation outlining current government policy with respect to bus services, A copy of this presentation is available via [this link](#)

It was noted that loneliness and mental health are growing factors with respect to policy associated with buses and that the Bus Services Act 2017 had introduced a number of new opportunities with regard to franchising powers, new partnership powers and open data & ticketing. Consultation is to be launched very soon with respect to open data. Ben also reported that a Ministerial Roundtable is to be established to discuss rural transport issues.

In discussion it was noted that government need to look across a range of services in order to understand the full impact of transport

## **Shyft Mobility**

Anna Rothnie from Shyft Mobility then gave a presentation on current development work which is underway with respect to improving existing transport apps aimed at better utilising existing spare capacity across a range of transport providers including local and community based services. A copy of this presentation is also available via [this link](#).

John Birtwistle informed attendees of the existence of the TNDs database which is produced every 2 weeks and provides accurate information on all services, routes, stopping points and is free to use. This could be a useful resource for local authorities.

In conclusion the importance of developing systems that can bring together supply and demand was noted. It was also agreed that RSN write to all members asking for responses to the impending consultation regarding open data to enable an RSN response to be compiled.

## **6. Budget report**

The budget report was noted and members reminded to send in any outstanding subscriptions.

## **7. Notes of the Meeting of the North East Regional Meeting/Seminar held on 25th May 2018 on the subject of the Rural Economy**

Andy Dean introduced the notes from the meeting, Feedback from those attending had been very positive.

At members request, a copy of the presentation made on impact measurement (the 'Social Value Engine') is available via this [link](#).

Ian Hunter from Littoral Arts informed the meeting of research work in relation to creative industries and rural areas due to commence next year.

## **8. ANALYSIS of Responses from members to the LGA's "post-Brexit England Commission – Call for Evidence"**

A summary of responses from RSN members had previously been circulated. It was seen as surprising that only 8 RSN members had appeared to submit formal evidence but the summary represented a good summation of the main issues. It was agreed that it will be important to see some form of rural cut in any resulting documents produced by the LGA and that the need for RSN representation on the People and Places Board of the LGA was very important.

A number of specific points were raised including the need to make more of the opportunities around public sector procurement and the need for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to understand the challenges faced by rural businesses.

It was agreed that all members to forward any relevant intelligence which emerges to RSN.

## **9. House of Lords Select Committee on the Rural Economy**

The new Lords Select Committee on the Rural Economy had held an initial discussion recently which had involved 5 external organisations. This included Rural England CIC and RSN.

The list of committee members for the select committee is as follows:

- Earl of Caithness
- Lord Carter of Coles
- Lord Colgrain
- Lord Curry of Kirkharle
- Lord Dannatt

- Lord Foster of Bath
- Baroness Humphreys
- Baroness Mallalieu
- Baroness O’Cathain
- Baroness Pitkeathley
- Baroness Rock
- Baroness Young of Old Scone

More updates will be issued to RSN members as the committee moves its work forward.

## **10.Fair Funding Review**

Graham Biggs reported that RSN, together with the County Councils’ Network, had met officials from MHCLG to discuss the additional evidence they want to see in relation to the sparsity case. This is required to be submitted by the end of July.

MHCLG will consult later this year on the broad shape of the foundation formula, top-ups, area cost adjustments and high level transition and this will be followed by publication of potential indicative allocations for local authorities in the spring of 2019.

It had been confirmed that the new formula will include damping but this will be strictly time-limited.

## **11.Any Other Business**

It was noted that a number of Police and Crime Commissioners are taking over Fire Authorities.