

Rural Services APPG

All-Party Parliamentary Group on Rural Services

17 March, 2015 12:00pm

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

PRESENT

Julian Sturdy MP (Chair for the Meeting) (York Outer)

Eric Ollerenshaw MP (Lancaster & Fleetwood)

Sam Hall – Office of Graham Stuart MP (Beverley & Holderness)

Philip Virgo – Office of Lord Lucas

Arthur Virgo – Office of Philip Dunne MP (Ludlow)

Secretariat

Graham Biggs – Secretariat

Others in Attendance

Helen Briggs – Chief Executive, Rutland Council & Lead Officer of RSN Rural Unitaries Group

Matt Smith - Operations Manager, Herefordshire Council

Apologies for Absence

Graham Stuart MP (APPG Chair)

Rt. Hon Sir Alan Beith MP

Mark Garnier MP

Tessa Munt MP

Rory Stewart MP

Angela Smith MP

Sir Alan Haselhurst MP

Lord Cameron of Dillington

Lord Cranthorne

NB: THE MEETING WAS NOT QUORATE: A QUORUM IS 5 MEMBERS FROM EITHER HOUSE.

THE MEETING THEREFORE PROCEEDED AS AN INFORMATION EXCHANGE AND GENERAL DISCUSSION

1. Notes of previous Meeting

The notes of the meeting held on 28th October 2014 were noted, as was the subsequent Report from the Rural Housing Alliance and a letter from Peter Moore, Chair of the Alliance.

2. Rural Broadband

Helen Briggs and Matt Smith gave a joint presentation using a power-point presentation. A copy of the presentation slides is attached to these notes as is a glossary explaining the acronyms used in the slides.

Some of the key points which arose from the presentation and the discussion arising there from were:-

- Rutland had overmatched in the Phase one project but the overmatch could not count towards Phase two funding.
- The “fall-back” position of 2Mbps would have a major effect on business and a serious inhibitor to economic growth.
- The digital divide will get wider and wider increasing rural disadvantage markedly.
- Capacity in the “green cabinets” was not keeping pace with demand take up.
- The rural agenda is not high enough up on the LGA’s agenda for them to be interested in using their clout.
- BDUK is seen to act in the interests of BT and, on occasions, have disadvantaged Local Authority negotiations with BT.
- BT give details to 5 digit postcode level but 7 digit level is necessary to get granularity of the data. Local Authority data disagrees markedly from BT’s.
- There are two types of Local Authority programmes, those using the BDUK Framework and those which are not (including both Rutland and Herefordshire).
- Introducing superfast broadband in more remote rural areas has reached the limits of fibre affordability in most cases.
- A critical time is approaching as the EU exemption from State Aid Rules runs out in June 2015 but no-one appears to be doing anything about that. If it is not renewed both local and central government funding will not legally be able to be applied to broadband projects.

The two MPs present felt that the issues needed to be raised very early on in the next Parliament given the EU approval deadline of June 2015. Helen Briggs agreed to seek to bring together as soon as possible after the General Election, the group of non BDUK Framework authorities and the MPs representing their areas to discuss

the issues. The MPs present felt that MPs would need tangible examples and sharply focussed briefings to enable them to ask the right questions. They felt that a backbench debate and/or other parliamentary procedures could be used in respect of the future of BDUK and the future of the rural broadband programme in the light of the EU approval coming to an end.

3 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled as a Joint Meeting with the Policing APPG on 18th June 2015 but would be dependent on both APPGs being properly constituted under the House Rules by that date

The meeting closed at 12 noon.