

Rural Services APPG

**All-Party Parliamentary Group on Rural Services
7th September 2017 at 11am
Room N, Portcullis House, Bridge Street, London, SW1A 2LW**

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

PRESENT

Jo Churchill MP (Bury St Edmunds) (Chair)
Steve Double MP (St Austell & Newquay) (Chair of the Parliamentary Rural Fair Share Group)
Lord Crathorne, KCVO
Dr David Drew MP (Stroud)
Scott Mann MP (North Cornwall)
Rachel Maclean MP (Redditch County)
Rebecca Pow MP (Taunton Deane)
Victoria Atkins MP (Louth & Horncastle)

In attendance

Graham Biggs, David Inman, (RSN) Jane Mordue, Nick Hubbard, (Rural Issues Group of Citizens Advice). Various Researchers from MPs Offices.

1. Apologies for Absence

Listed on Appendix A

2. Election of Officers

The following were elected for 2017/18:

Chair – Jo Churchill MP

Senior Vice Chair - Rebecca Pow MP

Vice Chair - Ruth George MP

Victoria Atkins MP

Dr David Drew MP

Scott Mann MP

Rachel Maclean MP

Secretary – Baroness Byford DBE

Treasurer – Lord Crathorne KCVO

3. Notes of Previous Meeting

Notes of Extraordinary Meeting for 25th October 2016

Agreed as a correct record.

4. Presentation: Ticket to Ride – Transport as a Main Problem in Rural Life

Speaker: Nick Hubbard (Research & Campaigns member of CA (RIG))

Nick Hubbard made the following points:-

“Citizens Advice gave advice in response to almost 5.75 million questions last year; they were asked by almost 2 million clients. So we think that we have a remarkable view of what is worrying people.

Sedgemoor contributes to a Rural Issues Group of 157 bureaux.

In 2015, that group started to think about what is bothering rural people. I expected it to be Affordable Housing, but Transport came out head and shoulders above the rest. 62% of people responding to our survey prioritised Transport. Housing came second and availability of broadband came third.

By Transport, people mean bus services.

A few weeks ago we published a report containing the facts of the matter and a wealth of case studies.

Rural bus services are under used and uneconomic. For most of us, when the bus is a problem, we jump in the car. But there were still 2.21 billion bus journeys outside London in the 15-16 year.

Nationally about 25% of people don't have a car. Many of these are older people or younger people or disabled – to a fair extent, they are the vulnerable people.

They would use a bus

- To get to work
- To the doctor or the hospital
- To get to shops, post offices and banks – in a time when small post offices and banks are closing
- To get to school/college
- To get to the job centre and interviews for benefits

- To obtain Advice or to get to a foodbank
- Some simply catch the bus to mitigate a sense of isolation.

What are they complaining about?

- There are many localities in which there is simply no bus service.
- Where there is a service, it often costs too much.
- Country Buses are not always reliable - they often run late or not at all.
- Buses are often not timely. Some arrive after work/school starts. Some are not daily – perhaps they arrive one day and depart the next. Or perhaps they arrive and depart so quickly that there is no time for the doctor’s appointment.

Alternatives like walking, cycling and taxis are less likely to be realistic in rural areas.

And this situation gets worse every year.

One of our clients M reported that he will walk the 24 mile round trip to attend the initial meeting to receive Universal Credit as he is desperate.

This problem has a wider effect on the economy, as well as on congestion and the environment.

We believe that bus services should be available to all – particularly those who are disadvantaged.

And they must be reliable, cost effective and timely.

We are campaigning

- To raise awareness
- To encourage the development, support and publication of Community Transport Schemes
- To encourage any measures to improve this desperate situation.

A possible means of addressing some of the issues was the concept of “Total Transport” so there was better, co-ordinated, use of transport serving Schools, Health, and Community Transport etc.

Reference was made to the recent judgement requiring that Community Transport Groups bidding to run services in competition to commercial bus operators required drivers with PSV licenses etc. This was a hoop many volunteers had no wish to go through and there were concerns about the principle being spread wider than just the “competition” aspect.

5. Parliamentary Vulnerability Day – 14.11.17

Although the APPG was important, groupings of MPs could be even more effective.

Through the APPG a Parliamentary Rural MPs Group had been formed some five years or so ago. This had proved successful with over 50 MPs involved as members.

It was now intended to seek to form a Rural Vulnerability Group of MPs who would, it was intended, to formulate a remit for action at their first meeting. In effect they would be looking at vulnerability issues facing rural people and communities (and services aimed at addressing them) where they felt they could successfully work together to get policy makers to particularly focus on priority work areas and issues.

The Vulnerability Day on the 14th November 2017 was intended to stage an exhibition showing action which was already being undertaken in relation to rural vulnerability and bring in delegates from the RSN and Rural England C.I.C. as well as parliamentarians the day would run from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. would also stage a number of presentations on vulnerability topics.

MPs would be invited to attend and sign up to become members of the Rural Vulnerability Group.

Photo sessions would be set up and special badges for group members would be available. A website would be established for the Group.

The APPG agreed the actions proposed.

6. Next Meeting

Because of the emphasis on campaigning groups only two APPG meetings would be held in the year. The next meeting would be convened in early 2018.

Apologies

Bim Afolami MP (Hitchin & Harpenden)

Rt Hon Richard Benyon MP (Newbury)

Andrew Bridgen MP (North West Leicestershire)

Maria Caulfield MP (Lewes)

Geoffrey Cox QC MP (Torridge and West Devon)

Drew Hendry MP (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey) (New APPG MEMBER)

Simon Hoare MP (North Dorset)

Ranil Jayawardena MP (North East Hampshire)

Bernard Jenkin MP (Harwich & North Essex) (New APPG MEMBER)

Karen Lee MP (Lincoln)

Rt Hon Maria Miller MP (Basingstoke)

Anne Marie Morris MP (Newton Abbot)

Rt Hon Owen Paterson MP (North Shropshire)

Dr Daniel Poulter MP (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich)

Victoria Prentis MP (North Oxfordshire)

Angela Smith MP (Penistone & Stocksbridge)

The Rt Hon Sir Nicholas Soames MP (Mid Sussex)

Cat Smith MP (Lancaster and Fleetwood)

Rishi Sunak MP (Richmond (Yorks))

Martin Vickers MP (Cleethorpes)

Baroness Byford DBE (HofL)

The Lord Cameron of Dillington (HofL)

The Rt Hon. the Lord Maclennan of Rogart

Rt Revd Dr Alan Smith, Bishop of St Albans (HofL)

Rt Hon Lord Tyler CBE (HofL)

Cllr Cecilia Motley (RSN – Secretariat)

Clare Field (The Crown Estate)