

Rural Services APPG

All-Party Parliamentary Group on Rural Services
21st November 2023 at 10:30am -11:30am

Briefing Session: On-line via Zoom

Briefing on decarbonising off-grid gas heating in rural areas, Changes to the APPG rules, Update on Fair Funding and Winning the Rural Vote

MEMBERS

Lord Ewen Cameron of Dillington

REPRESENTING MEMBERS

Alexandra Twemlow (Office of Helen Morgan MP)

OBSERVERS

Cllr Roger Phillips (Chair of RSN)

In attendance from Secretariat

Kerry Booth – Chief Executive

Graham Biggs MBE (RSN)

Bethan Aldridge – Minute taker (RSN)

Welcome

Kerry Booth welcomed everyone to the Briefing Session and apologised for the short notice of changing the meeting from a hybrid one into an on-line session as there were insufficient numbers to ensure a quorate meeting.

1. Apologies for Absence

Derek Thomas MP (Chair)

Sarah Dyke MP

Helen Morgan MP

Greg Smith MP

Sir Bill Wiggin

Lord Rupert Carrington

Earl of Leicester

Lord John Taylor CBE

Lord Crathorne

2. Notes of Previous Meeting

Notes from the 25.04.23 to be discussed at the next APPG meeting

3. Discussion paper on Decarbonising off-gas grid heating in rural areas ([see link](#))

Kerry Booth introduced the discussion paper and noted that there had been a number of announcements since starting this work which included the deadline on the installation of new non-fossil fuel boilers in off gas grid homes of 2026 being moved to 2035. There are still many things that need to be done to ensure that rural areas are ready for the 2035 deadline.

The paper sets out a number of actions that the APPG could call for ahead of the 2035 deadline in regard to support for rural properties to make them more efficient, how that could work and alternative solutions to heat pumps as not all homes will be suitable for conversion to these. Defra is currently looking into exemptions and what that means in practice.

Graham Biggs noted that in the previous meeting, it had been agreed to hold a further meeting with Lord Callanan. Graham thought that it would be best to wait now until the exemptions have been published and as there were no government consultations to respond to, then there were no immediate timescale pressures.

Cllr Roger Phillips commented that although the green/climate change agenda is very important and relevant, it is important to have that second layer of sensible debate looking into the impact of proposals and the rural implications.

Action: (1) The Secretariat to send the Briefing Paper out to members again for comment/suggestions and to raise any concerns/objections about the action calls.

Action: (2) After (1) above If there are a number of Members who wish to feedback any comments/suggestions further, then a brief on-line meeting be called to facilitate this and to know that the APPG is moving in the right direction.

Action: (3) If anything were to happen in the meantime, then the Secretariat would ask the Chair or an Officer of the APPG to write to the Minister based on the Briefing Paper but in their own capacity.

4. Report on the Changes to the APPG rules ([see link](#))

Kerry presented the report on changes to the APPG rules which come into effect from the 31st March 2024. A number of changes are in regard to how the Secretariat provides support and the paperwork involved and some relate to the numbers of officers, quorate numbers for different types of meetings and, in a new Parliament – the maximum number of APPGs an MP can be an officer of (six).

Graham noted that with regard to reducing the number of officers for the APPG, it would be possible to hold a virtual EGM and/or correspond with the Officers directly and ask if some would agree to be Lead Members instead of an Officer and that this would be done before the 31st March 2024 deadline. The AGM would then be held before the 24th May 2024 (the last reporting deadline).

Lord Cameron agreed that when it's time for the AGM this must be well organised to get as many APPG members present as possible.

Action: (1) The Secretariat to correspond with current Officers and discuss the reduction in numbers to four and agreement for others to be Lead Members.

5. Update on Fair Funding

Kerry reported that the new Local Government Minister, Simon Hoare MP (Dorset), is from a rural constituency and has even recently challenged the Prime Minister on rural funding. It is probable that the provisional settlement has already been written and therefore he will be unable to influence that. However, last year between the provisional and final settlement there was an additional £10M given to the Rural Services Delivery Grant. In terms of the fair funding review, Kerry reported that nothing will happen until after the next general election.

Graham agreed and commented that the APPG's campaign for next year is not to change the formula but to apply the formula without damping. It will need sufficient MPs from rural constituencies to apply pressure on Ministers before the settlement is finalised.

Also, the impact or ripple effects of changing the formula now is too complex. But that doesn't apply to the Rural Services Delivery Grant, as long as the Government can allocate the money, as it doesn't change anything else in the formula. Graham thought this would be worth pursuing and that MPs should make representation to the new Minister/Secretary of State.

Lord Cameron agreed with these comments and suggested that the APPG sends a draft template letter to MPs for them to send to the Minister setting out the case.

Alexandra commented that Helen Morgan MP had written a letter to the Minister in September with regard to extra funding and thought it worth considering an "open letter" from MPs.

Action: (1) The Secretariat to draft written letters to MPs for them to sign off and forward on to the Minister to raise their concerns and request extra funding for rural areas.

Action: (2) The Secretariat to draft written parliamentary questions for APPG members to utilise.

Action: (3) Kerry to discuss the idea of an "open letter" further with Alexandra.

6. Winning the Rural Vote – a Roadmap to Rural Success ([see link](#))

Kerry shared the Roadmap to Rural Success that is aimed at all political parties. It sets out what the Rural Services Network would like all parties to be looking at and reminding them that rural voters may well be a key area in the next election.

The Roadmap includes short term and longer term asks, in a number of policy areas around fair funding, affordable housing, transport, connectivity, health and care planning and net zero. Kerry is keen that MPs, political parties, and potential MPs are looking at and understanding the needs of their rural area and voters.

7. Date(s) of Next Meeting

There will be an event on 30th January 2024, jointly hosted by the Association of Convenience Stores (ACS), when the Roadmap will be launched in Parliament and more details will follow on this.

Meeting finished at 11:06pm.