

# Rural Services APPG

All-Party Parliamentary Group on Rural Services  
28<sup>th</sup> February 2023 at 2.30 p.m.  
Room M, Portcullis House, London

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

### 1. Present

Rt Hon. Philip Dunne MP (Ludlow)  
Derek Thomas MP (West Cornwall & Isles of Scilly)  
Greg Smith MP (Buckingham)  
Rob Butler MP (Aylesbury)  
Sir Bill Wiggin MP (North Herefordshire)  
Lord Ewen Cameron  
Lord James Crathorne  
Lord Rupert Carrington

### In attendance

Graham Biggs, MBE (RSN -Secretariat)  
Arthur Virgo (Office of Phillip Dunne MP)

### 2. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from:

MP Name	Constituency
Chris Loder	West Dorset
Helen Morgan	North Shropshire
Rt Hon Esther McVey	Tatton
Rt Hon Sir Gavin Williamson, CBE	South Staffordshire

### **3. Introduction**

Philip Dunne (Chairman of the APPG) welcomed those in attendance.

### **4. Notes of Previous Meetings**

The notes of the following meetings were both agreed as correct records:

19<sup>th</sup> July 2022 – with Lord Callanan re Off Gas Grid Heating; and

6<sup>th</sup> December 2022 – with Lee Rowley re Local Government Funding in rural areas.

### **5. Matters Arising**

(a) The Chair report that just yesterday the Government had released the Energy Bill £400 discount for those that did not get it automatically. This includes those who:

- pay for energy through a landlord, housing manager or site owner
- live in a park home, houseboat or off the electricity grid.

The £200 for those who use alternative fuels as their main form of heating would be released “soon”.

(b) The Chair commented that the meeting with Lee Rowley had not succeeded in influencing the Local Government Finance Provisional Settlement. Graham Biggs commented that in the Final Settlement an increase of £10M was secured in Rural Services Delivery Grant (RSDG) thanks to the pressure on DLUHC Ministers by rural MPs. For rural District Councils that increase had been 100% offset by reductions in the Funding Guarantee which had been introduced for 2023/24. However, the RSDG increase was very welcome as it became ‘baked into the formula’ for the future and was part of the baseline for any review of the formula.

### **6. Appointment of Officers**

#### **(a) Chair**

The Chair announced that he was not seeking re-election. He proposed that Derek Thomas MP be appointed as Chair. That was seconded by Sir Bill Wiggin MP. There were no other nominations and Derek Thomas MP was unanimously elected as Chair of the Group.

Derek Thomas thanked Phillip Dunne MP for all he had done over the years on behalf of the Group. Graham Biggs endorsed those comments on behalf of the Secretariat and also thanked Arthur Virgo and other staff in Phillip Dunne’s Office for all of their help and support.

## **(b) Other Officers**

The following were (without opposition) appointed as the other Officers of the Group for the following year:

### **Vice- Chairs**

The Rt Hon Phillip Dunne MP (Ludlow)

Rob Butler MP (Aylesbury)

Rosie Duffield MP (Canterbury)

Helen Morgan MP (North Shropshire)

Selaine Saxby MP (North Devon)

Julian Sturdy MP (York Outer)

Lord Carrington

**Treasurer.** Lord Crathorne

**Secretary.** Lord Cameron

## **7. Future Work of the Group/Future Meetings**

The following were agreed as the areas for discussion over the next 12 months (subject to other matters arising needing urgent consideration):

### **(1) Off Gas Grid households and businesses and the move to Net Zero, and the banning of fossil fuel boilers in the future.**

This was considered to be the most pressing item given issues relating to the Energy Bill, the Energy Efficiency Taskforce and the soon to be announced Government response to the fossil fuel boiler replacement consultation.

**It was agreed that the Group should meet before the Easter Recess (30<sup>th</sup> March -17<sup>th</sup> April) to discuss current issues relating to this in more detail and upcoming opportunities for influence.**

### **(2) Local Government Finance**

It was agreed that there needed to be engagements with DLUHC Ministers well in advance of the next Provisional Settlement. There were outstanding issues from the last position the Group had taken.

In the debate on the Final Settlement, Chris Loder MP was successful in getting the Secretary of State to agree to meet him to discuss the funding for rural councils. It will be important to note the outcomes from the proposed meeting.

**The Secretariat would produce a Briefing Note for discussion.**

### **(3) Rural Health and Care**

It was noted that the APPG for Rural Health and Care had now disbanded.

The Group agreed it needed to consider issues relating to (a) rural health and (b) social care in rural areas as on-going important issues.

### **(4) Rural Bus Services**

The Group agreed that this was another important issue for consideration as government financial support was changing.

### **(5) Role of Vice Chairs**

Graham Biggs reported that following discussion with the Chair he would be contacting MPs who were Vice Chairs to invite them to take on a sort of 'Lead Member/Spokesperson' in respect of some areas of policy. **The Group agreed this was appropriate.**

### **(6) Rural Fair Share Group**

It was noted that due to the recent engagement by this Group with the Minister on Local Government Finance issues that work would continue in this Group.

The Rural Fair Share Group of MPs whilst not being active in the near future would not be disbanded as such a campaigning group might be needed again in the future. **Again, the Group agreed this was appropriate.**

## **8. Date of Next Meeting**

**To be before 30<sup>th</sup> March 2023 as referred to in Minute 7 (1) above.**

The meeting closed at 3.15 p.m.