



**RMTG meeting
Online via Zoom
16:30–18:00, Tuesday, 12th October 2021**

Agenda

- 1. Welcome and introduction to Rural Services Network from Graham Biggs MBE, Chief Executive and David Inman, Director.**
- 2. Update on Composition of RMTG Officer Steering Group meeting.**

Update from David Inman, Corporate Director.
We envisage an RMTG Officer Steering Group of **17 Clerks/Officers** the following intended spread with existing representatives and those who are yet to be confirmed.

 - South West – we have two representatives.
 - South – we have two representatives.
 - West Midlands/West – we have one representative, seeking a second one.
 - Lancashire – we have one representative.
 - North West – we have one representative, seeking a second one.
 - Home Counties – we have two representatives.
 - Suffolk and Norfolk – we have two representatives.
 - East Midlands/East – we have one representative, seeking a second one.
 - Lincolnshire – we have two representatives.
 - Yorkshire – we are seeking on representative.
 - Northumberland/Durham – we are seeking on representative.
- 3. RMTG Meeting Schedule 2022.**
 - RMTG Officer Steering Group meeting – Friday, 18th February 2022
 - RMTG Clerks Advisory Panel meeting – Friday, 18th March 2022
 - RMTG meeting – Monday, 28th March 2022
 - RMTG Officer Steering Group meeting – Thursday, 29th September 2022
 - RMTG meeting – Tuesday, 11th October 2022
- 4. RMTG Facebook Group Proposal. ([Attachment 1](#))**

Update from Kerry Booth, Deputy Chief Executive.
- 5. Young People in Rural Areas.**

Update from David Inman, Corporate Director and a presentation from Nik Harwood, Chief Executive, Young Somerset.

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- 6. Transport in Rural Areas.**
- 7. An Exchange of Post Lockdown Experiences from RMTG Members.**
- 8. RSN Rural Market Town Group - Covid-19 Costs and Lost Income Survey.** ([Attachment 2](#))
Report on outcomes by Graham Biggs MBE, Chief Executive.
- 9. Rural Situation Relating to Discretionary Services.**
Update from Graham Biggs MBE, Chief Executive.
- 10. Any Other Business.**
An opportunity for members to offer their views on the group and discussed proposals.

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RURAL MARKET TOWN GROUP



Rural Market Town Group – Facebook Group

Purpose: Update members of the RMTG Steering Group of the proposal to establish an RMTG Discussion Group on Facebook.

Background:

The RMTG Meeting requested an online discussion forum to enable member organisations to share good practice, ask for support and network across other similar rural councils. Initial research has shown that 86 % of the current RMTG membership have a Facebook page for sharing information with their communities. Due to this high figure, it is proposed to establish a private Facebook group for this purpose rather than a different medium that could be a new type of software for members.

Ground Rules:

The group would be a private Facebook Group, that organisations must ask to join. Joining requests would have to be approved by the RSN.

The group would have the following rules:

- Be Kind - Be polite – foul and abusive language will not be tolerated. Insulting or bullying other members will get you removed from the group.
- Aim of the group - To support Rural Market Towns and larger Parish Councils across England that are members of the RSN RMTG to network and share best practice.
- Respect Everyone's Privacy - Being part of this group requires mutual trust. Authentic, expressive discussions make groups great, but may also be sensitive and private. What's shared in the group should stay in the group...
- Be Constructive - Please do not criticise other Local and Principal Councils in this Facebook group. The aim is to be constructive and develop good practice and networking to improve rural services.
- RSN Disclaimer - Posts by members of the group are not representative of the views of the Rural Services Network.
- No Promotions or Spam - Give more than you take in this group. Self-promotion, spam and irrelevant links aren't allowed. No Selling.
- Individuals or organisations that contravene the rules will have their posts deleted and be removed from the group.

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In addition, members should be aware that by using # in a post, it will be possible to view posts by topic, enabling people to just see the discussion areas that they are interested in. These # could be as follows:

- #health
- #housing
- #connectivity
- #youngpeople

We would welcome suggestions from the steering group of possible # that may be used by the group. Obviously, these are only a suggestion and members of the group can use whichever # they wish, to propose new topics and debates.

The group will be visible on Facebook if people search for it, but unless they are a member, they will not be able to see anything that is posted in the group or see who else is a member. Once people are accepted in the group, they will be able to see all posts and the membership of the group.

Rollout

It is proposed to share this information with the wider RMTG, inviting them to join the group. They would have to request to join, completing a few simple questions to identify themselves, and the RSN would accept their requests.

In the first instances, we would encourage the clerks to join the group, to ensure that it is working as anticipated, then in due course, Councillors from the RMTG membership would be invited to attend.

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Analysis of Responses to Covid-19 Additional Costs and Lost Income for the Year 2020/2021

1.0 Introduction

1.1 At the end of April 2021 the RSN distributed a survey to its RMTG members with the following covering e mail:

“Dear Colleague

At recent meetings of the Rural Market Town Group (RMTG) and the RMTG Clerks Advisory Panel it was agreed that we should carry out a membership survey relating to the additional costs incurred by members and income lost in 2020/21 due to COVID-19.

We have developed and circulated a survey questionnaire following consultation with the RMTG Officer Steering Group.

We believe Government should be made aware of the issues faced by Rural/Market Towns in this regard and if we are to pursue this matter, **we need evidence** to facilitate discussion with the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). Hence, through this survey questionnaire, we are seeking direct evidence and input from you, our RMTG members, to understand each local council’s financial position and present an evidence-based case to the Government.

Please note that the survey on this topic is quite narrow, looking at very specific finance questions, as we are seeking to demonstrate how big a proportion those expenses are in your overall budgets. This survey does not seek to dismiss all the other work that you have done to help your local communities.”

1.2 This document is a headline analysis of the responses received.

2.0 Responses Received

2.1 The survey was sent to some 220 Towns/Parishes. Disappointingly we only received 18 completed responses to the survey (just 8.2% response rate).

3.0 Format of this Analysis

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3.1 To try to ensure that the population size of each Town/Parish (and therefore its budget) does not 'dilute' findings from Towns/Parishes of different sizes, we have analysed the responses in respect of two population size groups:

- Under 5,000 population (5 responses)
- 10,000 population or over (13 responses)

3.2 Not every question was responded to by each respondent. It is not known therefore whether, for instance, no response to the first question on extra costs indicates the data not being available or if there were no extra costs borne by that respondent. We have, for the purpose of this analysis, included averages only based on the number of positive answers to each question (£0 being treated as a positive answer).

3.3 For the purpose of this document we have just analysed the main figures (and not the supplementary/breakdowns of the main figures).

4.0 Analysis of Responses to Specific Questions

4.1 THIS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION: What is the total (Net of any financial support received from other bodies) increased expenditure and income loss your Council met due to the impacts of COVID-19 in 2020/21 AND Percentage increase in precept that represents

	<u>5000 and under pop'n</u>	5000 and under %age	<u>10,000 and over pop'n</u>	10,000 and over %age
Number of Positive Responses	3	3	10	9
Average	3923	3.08%	£7077	20.14%
Range	£0 – £9435	0%- 6.75%	£0 - £310766	0%-134%

NOTES:

- (1) There is one (in the 10,000+ pop'n group) major outlier at 134%. If that is removed the average reduces to 5.9%

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- (2) 2 of the over 10,000 population Councils state that overall savings on expenditure more than offset extra costs due to Covid plus income losses
- (3) . 2 Councils also used reserves and CIL so did not increase the precept for COVID related purposes

4.2 How Much Was your Precept for 2020/21?

	<u>5000 and under pop'n</u>	<u>10,000 and over pop'n</u>
Number of Positive Responses	5	13
Average	£99,915	£549,333
Range	£39,500 – £154,075	£88 - £849,852

4.3 How much increased costs (net of VAT) for Covid related activities have you had to bear over and above your budgeted expenditure for 2020/2021?

	<u>5000 and under pop'n</u>	<u>10,000 and over pop'n</u>
Number of Positive Response	5	10
Average	£976	£9,524
Range	£0 - £2,531	£0 – £31,253

NOTES:

The type of increased costs and the number of respondents referring to them were (a) Grants to Voluntary/Community Bodies (6); Direct Costs of Supporting Vulnerable Residents (4) and Miscellaneous (11)

4.4 How much is the Extra Costs referred to in 4.2 above as a percentage of your Council's Total Expenditure (including staffing costs) for 2020/21?)

	<u>5000 and under pop'n</u>	<u>10,000 and over pop'n</u>

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Number of Positive Responses	3	8
Average	1.27%	1.15%
Range	1.5%-2.3%	1%-2.1%

4.5 How much was your Council's Gross Budget for 2020/21 (including staffing costs)?

	<u>5000 and under pop'n</u>	<u>10,000 and over pop'n</u>
Number of Positive Responses	2	11
Average	£138,434	£818,366
Range	£131,113 – £145,755	£106,735 – £1,117,974

4.6 How much income (net of VAT) have you lost due to COVID for 2020/21

	<u>5000 and under pop'n</u>	<u>10,000 and over pop'n</u>
Number of Positive Responses	2	12
Average	£10,500	£72,510
Range	£0 – £10500	£0- £176,050

NOTES:

- (1) Lost car park income was by far the biggest loss – but only for 3 of the respondents
- (2) Other losses and the number of respondents referring to them were ((a) Loss of Rents from Markets (4); (b) Leisure Facilities income (5); (c) Room Hire income (8) and (d) Miscellaneous (8)

4.7 Financial Support from District, County or Unitary Councils

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5 of the 13 over 10,000 population respondents received some such financial support ranging from £1,500 to £80,986

4 of the Under 5000 population respondents received some such financial support ranging from £500 - £10,000

5.0 Conclusions

5.1 The loss of income (Average £72,510 for the 10,000+ pop'n group) for respondents was of far greater impact than the increased expenditure (Average £9,524 for the 10,000+ pop'n group)

5.2 Whilst undoubtedly COVID-19 has had a significant financial effect of many of the respondent Councils, with such a low level of responses and given the wide range of responses we do not have enough evidence from this survey to mount any sort of a convincing case to put to MHCLG on this occasion.

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