

# RURAL SERVICES NETWORK



## RURAL MARKET TOWN GROUP



### YOUNG PEOPLE IN RURAL MARKET TOWN AREAS COUNCILLOR SOUNDING BOARD THURSDAY 4<sup>th</sup> AUGUST 2022

#### NOTES

##### Present:

Cllr Tony Leech	Okehampton Town Council
Cllr Claire Wilding	Charlbury Town Council
Cllr Phillip Howells	Ledbury Town Council
Cllr Pete Squire	Tavistock Town Council
Cllr Alan Brown	Corsham Town Council
Cllr Emma Hix	Wincanton Town Council
Cllr Freddie Easters	Market Rasen Town Council
Cllr Sarah Cavell	New Alresford Town Council
Nik Harwood	Chief Executive, Young Somerset and Chair of the Rural Services Partnership
Graham Biggs MBE	RSN
David Inman	RSN

#### OPERATION OF THE SOUNDING BOARDS

There were initially to be two sounding boards being operated by the Rural Market Towns Group.

One of these, this one, would relate to Young People in rural market towns. The second would be in relation to Older People in Market Towns in rural areas.

## **REASON FOR OPERATION OF THE SOUNDING BOARDS**

There were no organisations or other mechanisms in England which provided dedicated focus to the situation relating to young people in the rural areas of England. Initial canvassing had taken place with RMTG Member Towns/Parishes. Indicators to the RSN that such a sounding board was needed included stats showing there were greater problems with young people in rural areas than urban ones, such as in self-harming, and suicide being sadly more common. Of the 150-170 authorities that could be involved, 30 had said they would like to be involved to help form this sounding board looking at problems which the Towns' young people might face. As the recent COVID and Economic Situations demonstrated life challenges continually changed in relatively short time spans and it was felt there was the need for rurally based Sounding Boards that gave some frequency to the consideration about the various social issues facing rural sectors.

It was hoped that the work of this Young People -Councillor Sounding Board might provide the opportunity for

- (a) Comment from Town representatives about Local issues facing young people being foreseen as occurring in Rural/Market Towns across England.
- (b) The opportunity through survey work to establish the consensus view on a variety of topics relating to Young People in England's Rural Towns and Areas.
- (c) The gathering of anecdotal evidence from group representatives and where possible also empirical material.
- (d) The opportunity to inform those governmental and dedicated national organisations considering matters relating to Young People in England of the views from this rural grass root perspective.
- (e) Sharing best practice

## **THE RURAL SERVICES NETWORK**

David Inman briefly explained how the Rural Services Network operated through a variety of groups including the Local Government Association Special Interest Group relating to Rural Services (Local Authorities), the Rural Services Partnership (rurally interested national and area non-Council based organisations), the Rural Health and Care Alliance (Health organisations in English Rural Areas), the Rural Services All Party Parliamentary Group of MPs and members from the House of Lords (APPG).

He detailed how Local Council Groups were now sought to be established by the RSN through the Rural/Market Towns Group and a Grouping relating Village Services involving some Parish Councils.

A Company formed by the RSN, Rural England CIC, looked to undertake independent rural research where it was felt to be necessary. Rural England every few years (most

recent was 2021) undertake a significant State of Rural Services report, and it was hoped the work of both Sounding Boards might assist in informing this report in the future.

## **FIRST THOUGHTS.**

Councillors were invited to come forward with their personal view about what the prevalent issues in relation to young people in their rural market towns might be. The following we recorded from this 'round the table' session.

- The importance of having a town outreach worker in relation to Young People if this were possible
- Young people feeling a lack of engagement with their particular problems which many youngsters felt had not being fully appreciated.
- Mental Health issues
- From some, a subsequent reaction, almost over reaction, to COVID lockdowns by a live for today mentality emerging.
- A continuing lack of opportunities for young people who had to remain in their market towns because there were now few opportunities for them to better themselves.
- Increasing lack of transport (and high transport costs) which gave young people full opportunities both from an educational and leisure viewpoint.
- The disproportionate expense of living in rural areas particularly in relation to transport and housing.
- The dire lack of rented accommodation in market towns.
- The constant temptation to look to move away to gain greater opportunities
- The transport deficiencies were becoming a greater and greater rural problem.
- Young people do not want 'organised spaces run by grown-ups'
- Lack of driving tests available for months

## **DEFINITION OF THE YOUNG PEOPLE THE GROUP FELT THEY SHOULD BE MOST CONCERNED WITH.**

Discussion took place between Councillors present about the age bands which it was felt might be most at the centre of the Group's consideration.

The Group did not rule out looking occasionally at early schooling issues or at the situation in relation to 21- to 25-year-olds but felt the core of most of its work might be for those youngsters who were between the ages of 11 to 21. It was felt the greatest difficulties might be most commonly occurring for rural youngsters of that age.

## CENSUS DATA

**Please note that these statistics will include the populations of Market Towns in the Group.**

The Sounding Board were presented with the latest initial material gathered from the 2021 Census in respect of the national position.

- A 2% decrease in Predominantly Rural areas of the 0 to 19 years old age group population (Census 2011 to 2021), meaning this age group now accounts for 21% of PR total population, a decrease from 22% in 2011.
- A 10% increase in Urban with Significant Rural areas of the 0 to 19 years old age group population (Census 2011 to 2021), meaning this age group now accounts for 22% of PR total population, a decrease from 23% in 2011.
- A 3% increase in Predominantly Urban areas of the 0 to 19 years old age group population (Census 2011 to 2021), meaning this age group now accounts for 24% of PR total population, a decrease from 25% in 2011.
- A 4% decrease in Predominantly Rural areas of the 20 to 24 years old age group population (Census 2011 to 2021), meaning this age group now accounts for 5% of PR total population, no movement from 5% in 2011.
- A 5% increase in Urban with Significant Rural areas of the 20 to 24 years old age group population (Census 2011 to 2021), meaning this age group now accounts for 5% of PR total population, a decrease from 6% in 2011.
- A 7% decrease in Predominantly Urban areas of the 20 to 24 years old age group population (Census 2011 to 2021), meaning this age group now accounts for 7% of PR total population, a decrease from 8% in 2011.

		All persons	Aged 0 to 19 years old	Aged 20 to 24 years
Census 2021	Predominantly Urban	36837900	8838000	2474700
	Predominantly Rural	11724800	2444900	538900
	Urban with Significant Rural	7927100	1777000	400600
		56489800	13059900	3414200

Census 2011	Predominantly Urban	35056370	8615029	2651877
	Predominantly Rural	11057745	2487016	560887
	Urban with Significant Rural	6898341	1610230	382557
		53012456	12712275	3595321

It is apparent that the trends for more young people to leave their 'home' areas the more rural they are is continuing and in fact is slowly accelerating. Accompanied by an accelerating greater percentage of older people in these areas these overall trends at both ends of the spectrum are of some concern. A greater lack of services is very much a worry for both young and older people as reliance upon them is greater in respect of both groupings.

## **A PRIORITY SURVEY INVOLVING THE SOUNDING BOARD**

It was planned to run a short survey of the sounding board to establish what concerned members of the Sounding Board most in relation to the areas which affected young people. Discussion took place about these areas where a view on prioritisation would be a useful process.

Suggestions for this prioritisation exercise were:

- Transport deficiencies
- Broadband and mobile phone limitations
- Cost of living in a rural area
- Housing (particularly rental now being virtually non-existent) and rural homelessness
- Isolation /Loneliness
- Lack of choice in relation to jobs/college/career
- Crime and fear of crime
- Lack of social facilities
- Mental Health problems - Risk of suicide and self - harm

Those present would be consulted by e mail on the draft questionnaire. The priorities for the Sounding Board would be considered following this survey

## **A SUGGESTED QUESTIONNAIRE INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE THEMSELVES**

The Sounding Board considered their Best Practice and Evidence Gathering role. Out of this discussion came forward an idea that perhaps an exercise of a survey questionnaire of Young People themselves should be attempted. This might possibly be partly done by attempting to work with Board member secondary schools. This could only be carried out by Board members in their areas – with the same questions being asked in each survey.

The exercise needed to be tick box in response to three simple bullet points.

It was suggested it might be as straightforward as simply:

- + What's going well?
- + What is not going well?
- + What can we all do about it?

## **CONTINUING OPERATION OF THE SOUNDING BOARD**

Members who were present were asked if they wished to operate the Group as solely relating to just Market Towns or whether as there was to be a Rural Village Services Group as well whether they felt there might be more benefit in operating totally jointly with that Group so that one Sounding Board would cover Rural Market Towns and Rural Villages and their surrounding areas. Members were of the view that if possible both types of Sounding Boards should be run in the case of Young People. Whilst recognising there might be issues in Market Towns which it would be good to discuss independently. It was however also recognised that coming together on Town-Village- Rural Catchment basis was on some occasions equally important.