



RSN working with **inac** in support of Rural Market Towns

Minutes of the RMTG meeting

Online via Zoom

Monday, 9th October 2023, 16:30–18:00

1. **Welcome from Nadine Trout, Assistant Chief Executive, Rural Services Network (RSN).** Nadine introduced David Inman, Consultant to the RSN and Sally Sargent, Administrative Assistant, who work with RMTG members.

2. **Notes from the previous RMTG meeting (27.03.2023)**

The **RSN Cost of Living survey** generated well over 6,000 responses and a summary of survey findings can be found [here](#). RSN also commissioned independent consultants, Kovia Consulting, to undertake a Rural Cost of Living report, examining key differences in cost-of-living between rural and urban locations. This report can be downloaded [here](#).

3. **RSN Rural Roadmap**

Nadine presented the **RSN Rural Roadmap**. Ahead of the next general election, RSN are campaigning to ensure that all political parties recognise the importance of including rural policies in their manifestos. Rural areas have great potential to contribute to the overall wealth of the UK, and rural votes could help decide the election, with 40% of constituencies in rural areas.

The RSN Rural Roadmap sets out our short and longer term asks for political parties to address in eight priority areas: Fair Funding; Rural Health and Care; Rural Transport; Rural Connectivity; Rural Economies; Rural Affordable Housing; Rural Net Zero; and Rural Planning. RSN asks government to address all these issues together. **Nadine invited RMTG members to contact RSN if they have any thoughts or comments on this document.**

4. **Fair Funding Campaign**

RSN continues to fight for a fairer deal for rural communities in all public sector funding. Successive governments have underfunded rural councils:

- Urban areas receive 38% more per head in Government Funded Spending Power than their rural counterparts.
- Rural residents pay 20% per head more in Council Tax than urban residents.
- It costs more to deliver services in rural areas, and urban authorities are able to spend almost double that of rural authorities on discretionary services.

Providing a voice for rural communities and service providers

Rural Services Network

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In addition to lobbying central government, RSN has also written to Leaders of Sparse local authorities and to rural MPs. **Nadine encouraged RMTG members to write to their local MPs and a template letter will be circulated to participants.**

5. RMTG Learning and best practice

Participants discussed key issues that they face in their market towns. These include:

- **Public sector funding.** Cutbacks in district and county council funding mean that local businesses and residents are increasingly looking to their town or parish council to provide additional services. There can be a lack of understanding about public sector income streams from business rates and council tax, leading to tensions between councils, businesses and local people.
- **Town Twinning schemes.** Participants discussed the challenges in finding sufficient volunteers and funding to sustain Town Twinning Schemes. Suggested solutions included twinning with multiple towns to share the load, getting the right people involved, local fundraising activities and the role of the town council in taking the lead.
- **Conservation and planning.** Stringent conservation measures at both a national and local level can cause problems when attempting to refurbish and update listed properties in rural market towns. **Nadine recommended that participants interested in rural planning issues sign up to attend the next RSN Seminar on Rural Planning on October 25th.**

Best practice

- [Wisbech Town Council](#) have led on a package of initiatives aimed at supporting the local economy and rejuvenating the town centre. This includes a market place refurbishment scheme, pedestrianisation and community events programme. The council has also installed footfall counters to measure the impact of these improvements and this initiative will be shared with participants as a case study.
- [Bourton-on-the-Water Parish Council](#) have worked with the district council to add a 50p levy on car parking charges in this highly visited town. This has raised between £50-£60,000 for local causes.

Nadine encouraged participants to make use of the RMTG network to share knowledge and experience with other members. Any councils that have a project to share can do so by sending through a written summary to sally.sargent@sparse.gov.uk or by filling out the RSN case study template which will be circulated to all RMTG members.

6. **Next RMTG meeting.** The provisional date for the next RMTG meeting is Monday 25th March 2024 (16.30-18.00). This date and the full schedule of 2024 RMTG events will be circulated once these dates have been confirmed.

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