



Rural Market Town Group



Part of the Rural Services Network

Summary

The meeting involved discussions about the Rural Services Network, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Rural Services, and the National Association of Local Councils. Falmouth and Launceston Town Councils also shared their experiences with devolution, discussing the challenges and successes of working in partnership to improve services in their towns. Lastly, they discussed the importance of securing funding for rural regions and the role of public consultation in this process.

Rural Services Network and Fair Funding Campaigns

Nadine Trout, Assistant Chief Executive at the Rural Services Network, explained the role of the RSN as the national champion for rural services which campaigns for fair funding for rural areas. She stated that rural councils have been underfunded by successive governments and that the RSN had been instrumental in successfully increasing the Rural Services Delivery Grant Allocation, but more work is needed to ensure that rural councils receive the funding they need. She stated that the RSN acts as the secretariat for the Rural Services All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG), which focuses on rural fair funding, growing the rural economy, rural affordable housing, and rural health and care services. She also mentioned the RSN's ongoing "Delivering for Rural" campaign, which is a living document that adapts to policy changes. Nadine finished by giving an overview of RSN members services including its analysis, research (including RMTG area profiles), consultation responses, publications, funding digest and events.

The Co-Operative Movement

In response to Nadine presentation Cllr Amanda Davis from Bourton on the Water Parish Council highlighted the importance of the Co-Operative Movement in levelling up rural communities around the world especially with regards to democracy and housing.

Parish and Town Councils Growth and Contributions

Jonathan Owen, Chief Executive from NALC (National Association of Local Councils) a national body for all parish, town and community councils

discussed the sector's growth and contributions to local communities. Jonathan highlighted the NALC's advisory services, lobbying, and promotion roles, as well as its focus on sharing good practice through networks. Jonathan discussed NALC's lobbying efforts for legislative changes, highlighting successful campaigns such as the removal of the "toilet tax" and the prevention of referendum principles. He also mentioned ongoing campaigns, including banking responsiveness and the reuse of burial grounds. Jonathan emphasised the importance of market towns submitting motions through their County Association and using the Sustainable Communities Act to promote specific issues. He also discussed the new government and the need for local government, including parish and town councils, to be recognised and respected. Jonathan urged the attendees to engage with their local MPs and share the potential of parish and town councils and signposted an upcoming NALC even on devolution.

Devolution in Cornwall and Rural Market Towns

Mark Williams, Town Clerk at Falmouth Town Council in Cornwall, discussed the history of devolution in Cornwall, including the formation of the unitary authority in 2009 and the subsequent devolution of services to town and parish councils. He also highlighted the influence of the Sustainable Communities Act and the potential for further devolution around community assets. Mark shared the four tranches of devolution that Falmouth Town Council has undertaken, with the fourth tranche being a cost-neutral one that is still under discussion. Mark then touched on the devolution of services from Cornwall Council to Falmouth Town Council, highlighting the challenges and successes of this process. He explained how the town council took on the responsibility of managing the Princess Pavilion, a theatre, restaurant, and public gardens, and the Pendennis Leisure Centre. He mentioned how Cornwall Council passed the freehold of the Pendennis Headland to Falmouth Town Council for a symbolic sum of a pound. Mark touched on the creation of a conservation management plan for the Pendennis Headland and the transfer of the leisure centre to a new Community Interest Company (CIC). He emphasised the importance of partnerships in delivering services, citing the example of the Dracaena Centre (CIC), which receives core funding from the town council and secures additional funding from external sources. Cllr Paul Cowell, Thame Town Council expressed interest in the funding model for youth services. Mark suggested reaching out to the Dracaena Centre and Jonathan from NALC posted a link to Yate Town Council's youth service provision.

Council Growth, Devolution, and Funding Challenges

Mark Williams and Christopher Drake discussed the significant changes in their respective councils over the years. Mark highlighted the growth of Falmouth Town Council which started as a large parish council and has since expanded due to various devolution projects. He also emphasised the importance of securing funding for rural regions to act as a catalyst for further growth. Christopher, the clerk at Launceston Town Council, shared his

experiences with devolution, noting that his council has more than doubled in size and budget since he joined eight years ago. He detailed the council's involvement in various projects, including taking over a tourist information centre and public facilities, and the challenges associated with these. Christopher also mentioned the council's efforts to maintain the library service, which was a significant project. Both speakers expressed their willingness to offer support or guidance to other councils facing similar challenges.

Improving Services Through Partnership and Flexibility

Christopher Drake, Town Clerk at Launceston Town Council also discussed the challenges and successes of working in partnership with Cornwall Council to improve services in the town. He highlighted the importance of consultation with residents and the need for flexibility in budget allocation. The speaker also mentioned the acquisition of a new library building, that became available due to a bank's departure. The town council is now working with Cornwall Council to refurbish the building and incorporate it into their services. Christopher also mentioned the acquisition of land for a park and nature reserve, which was made possible through partnership with Cornwall Council. Christopher emphasised the importance of having control over services and the ability to make decisions based on consultation with residents. He also noted the challenges of the lengthy legal process involved in these projects.

Securing Funding for Projects and Public Consultation

Christopher and Mark shared their experiences with securing funding for various projects, including a library and a museum. They highlighted the importance of public consultation and the role of their MP in securing funding. Cllr Amanda Davis raised questions about the Public Works Loans Board and how it could be leveraged to secure additional funds. Cllr Paul Cowell asked about the process of public consultation for the Public Works Loan. Jonathan Owen, NALC responded by providing a useful link to finance advice for town and parish councils.

LINKS TO USEFUL LINKS AND RESOURCES SHARED AT THE MEETING

National Association of Local Councils (NALC)

<https://www.nalc.gov.uk/>

NALC Networks

<https://www.nalc.gov.uk/support/national-networks.html>

Upcoming NALC event on Devolution

<https://www.nalc.gov.uk/events/the-quest-for-devolution-in-local-governance.html>

LGA paper on working across tiers

<https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/local-service-delivery-and-place-shaping-framework-support-parish-and-town-councils>

Yate Town Council Youth Engagement

<https://www.nalc.gov.uk/resource/youth-engagement-in-yate.html>

Parish and Town Council Borrowing including reference to the Public Works Loan Board

<https://www.nalc.gov.uk/support/finance-advice/parish-and-town-council-borrowing.html>

Falmouth Town Council

<https://www.falmouthtowncouncil.co.uk/>

Dracaena Centre CIC, a community hub in Falmouth providing wide range of services

<https://dracaenacentre.org/>

Launceston Town Council

<https://launceston-tc.gov.uk/>

RMTG Membership Benefits

<https://www.rsonline.org.uk/page/rural-market-town-group>

RMTG Case Studies & Best Practice

<https://rsonline.org.uk/rmtg-share-your-best-practice-and-case-studies>

Specific Case Studies on Youth Services

Faversham

<https://rsonline.org.uk/rmtg-share-your-best-practice-and-case-studies#faversham2>

Cricklade

<https://rsonline.org.uk/rmtg-share-your-best-practice-and-case-studies#cricklade>

RMTG Young People Sounding Board

<https://www.rsonline.org.uk/08-08-2024-young-people-in-rural-market-town-areas-sounding-board>

RMTG Older People Sounding Board

<https://www.rsonline.org.uk/06-08-2024-older-people-in-rural-market-town-areas-sounding-board>

RSN Rural Market Town Group Area Profiles

<https://rsonline.org.uk/rural-market-towns-group-area-profiles>

RSN Rural Funding Digest

<https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/tag/rural-funding-digest>

Rural Services Network Fair Funding Campaign

<https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/page/rural-fair-funding>

RSN Delivering for Rural Campaign

<https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/winning-the-rural-vote>

Rural Services APPG

<https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/inaugural-meeting-of-the-appg-for-rural-services-a-promising-start-for-rural-communities>

RSN Rural Lens

<https://rsnonline.org.uk/tag/rural-lens>

RSN Newsletters

<https://rsnonline.org.uk/category/newsletters>

RSN Seminar Programme

<https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/meetings/online-seminars/2024/programme.pdf>