

AI Meeting summary for RMTG: Older People Sounding Board Meeting (08/07/2025)

Quick recap

The meeting covered various challenges faced by rural communities, particularly focusing on issues affecting older residents such as access to healthcare, transportation, and digital services. Discussions included the funding disparities between rural and urban areas, the need for better infrastructure and community support, and initiatives to make rural towns more age-friendly. The participants also explored potential solutions and campaign strategies to address these concerns, emphasising the importance of gathering evidence and engaging with policymakers to improve rural living conditions.

Summary

Rural Aging Challenges and Solutions

Kerry hosted a meeting with the Rural Market Town Group's Older People Sounding Board to discuss challenges and opportunities for older residents in rural areas. She presented data on the ageing population in rural communities, highlighting issues such as limited access to healthcare, transport, and social services. Kerry also discussed the importance of volunteering among older people and the need for sustainable models of community support. The conversation ended with a review of campaigns and initiatives aimed at improving housing and living conditions for older residents in rural areas.

Rural Prosperity Roadmap Presentation

Kerry presented the RSN's Delivering for All Campaign which sets out a Roadmap for rural prosperity which was also shared at the Local Government Association Conference. This highlights three key areas: fair funding for rural public services, appropriate metrics to understand rural challenges, and a dedicated rural policy plan. She emphasised the significant funding gap between urban and rural councils, noting that rural residents pay 20% more in council tax but receive less government funding. Kerry also discussed various challenges facing rural areas, including affordable housing, transport limitations, and connectivity issues, and outlined several asks for the government to address these concerns.

Rural Digital Skills and Infrastructure

Kerry discussed the importance of digital skills and planning for building homes in rural areas, emphasising the need for infrastructure access and community vibrancy. She highlighted the campaign's focus on older people's issues and shared a poll to gather community views on the biggest challenges, with results showing that accessing health and care services was the top concern, followed

by transport and cost of living. Participants were encouraged to share additional local issues for further consideration.

Rural Digital Divide Challenges

Kerry discussed the challenges faced by rural communities, particularly in accessing services and support due to digital exclusion and limited infrastructure. She highlighted that while the government is focusing on poverty and deprivation, funding is being directed towards urban areas with high clusters of deprivation, leaving rural areas underfunded. Kerry also addressed the issue of digital skills, noting that it's a challenge for both the elderly and younger residents in rural areas, and mentioned ongoing efforts to campaign for better support and access to digital services. She emphasised the importance of banks and post offices in rural communities and their role in providing social engagement and access to cash.

Rural Service Access Challenges

Kerry discussed the challenges faced by rural communities due to the closure of banks and other services, highlighting the need for local access to essential services like banking, post offices, and healthcare. She emphasised the importance of training healthcare professionals and teachers in rural areas to better address the unique needs of these communities. Cllr. Brown shared Corsham's experience as an age-friendly town, which has helped address the needs of its aging population through surveys and strategic planning.

Supporting Older Residents Initiatives

Cllr. Brown discussed various initiatives to support older residents, including providing extra chairs for shops, digital readouts at bus stops, and flashing lights instead of fire alarm bells in supermarkets. Kerry inquired about information on these initiatives, which Cllr. Brown suggested could be found on the Age-friendly Communities website. Cllr. Woodbridge raised concerns about the lack of support for rural areas, particularly from organisations like Macmillan nurses, and Kerry acknowledged this issue, promising to look into it further and gather evidence.

Rural Funding and Service Disparities

Kerry discussed the need to address funding disparities between rural and urban areas, highlighting the challenges faced by rural communities. She noted that while political parties often focus on urban areas due to higher voter populations, there is a growing recognition among Labour MPs of the need to address rural issues. Kerry encouraged attendees to provide evidence of increased service costs in rural areas to support their campaign efforts. Councillor Wood suggested making palliative care a mainstream service rather than a charitable one, emphasising its importance in rural areas.

Rural Infrastructure and Services Challenges

Cllr. Wood expressed concerns about the lack of infrastructure and services in rural areas, highlighting the challenges of accessing healthcare and the high cost of new housing, which is unaffordable for local residents. Kerry acknowledged these issues and discussed ongoing efforts to improve rural infrastructure, including energy networks and transport connectivity. Both agreed on the need for better

planning and community engagement in rural development. The conversation ended with an invitation to attend a future discussion on similar topics, focusing on the impact on young people in rural areas.