



# Rural Market Town Group



## RMTG Meeting 24<sup>th</sup> March 2025 - AI Generated Notes

### Quick recap

The meeting began with presentations on rural funding challenges, Penzance's development initiatives, and the English Devolution White Paper. Discussions covered the financial disparities between rural and urban councils, Penzance's successful projects and ongoing challenges, and the implications of devolution for local government structures. The meeting emphasized the importance of sharing best practices, addressing rural needs, and engaging with authorities to strengthen the role of parish and town councils in the devolution process.

### Next steps

- Town and parish councils to consider their role and potential opportunities in upcoming local government reorganization and devolution.
- Attendees to review full slide decks from presentations and follow up with any additional questions to the organizers at [events@sparse.gov.uk](mailto:events@sparse.gov.uk)
- Attendees to contact organisers at [events@sparse.gov.uk](mailto:events@sparse.gov.uk) if they have case studies or projects they would like featured in the rural market town group roundup publication
- NALC to continue engaging with government on devolution plans and advocating for parish/town council involvement.
- Councils to explore collaboration opportunities with neighbouring parishes/towns to deliver services more effectively.
- Attendees to contact their county associations for more information on devolution and reorganization plans in their areas.

### Summary

#### Rural Market Towns Collaboration Meeting

The meeting began with introductions and an overview of the agenda. Kerry Booth, Chief Executive, Rural Services Network, explained that James Hardy from Penzance Town Council would present on his recent work, for which he won a NALC Star award. Justin Griggs from NALC would then discuss the English Devolution White Paper and its potential impact on market towns. Kerry started with an update on the RSN Fair Funding Campaign and invited members to use the chat function for questions and comments. Kerry emphasized the goal of sharing best practices across rural markets towns.

### **Rural Funding Challenges in England**

Kerry discussed the challenges faced by rural communities in England due to underfunding and inadequate funding mechanisms. She highlighted that rural councils receive 40% less per head compared to urban councils, leading to increased council tax for rural residents. Kerry also mentioned the removal of the Rural Services Delivery Grant and the introduction of the Recovery Grant, which she believes does not adequately address rural needs. She emphasized the importance of considering factors like aging population and pockets of deprivation in rural areas when allocating funds. Kerry also mentioned the RSN's campaign to address eight priority areas for rural communities, including affordable housing, connectivity, and fair funding. She encouraged attendees to share their local concerns and experiences.

### **Penzance's Development Initiatives and Challenges**

James Hardy, Penzance Town Clerk, presented an overview of Penzance's recent development initiatives and challenges. He described how the town council has taken on devolved responsibilities from the unitary authority, including managing public spaces and facilities. A key project was the restoration of Jubilee Pool, which involved a creative partnership with the local authority and stakeholders. The town has secured significant investment through town deal and future High Street funding, totalling £37 million. This funding is being used to revitalize the town centre, including creating creative workspaces, housing, and repurposing derelict buildings. James highlighted the creation of the Penzance Regeneration Company to manage key projects, such as the renovation of the Market House. He also mentioned ongoing challenges, including major infrastructure work in the town centre.

### **Balancing Council Finances and Local Elections**

In the meeting, James discussed the challenges of balancing the financial situation of Cornwall Council and the town parish councils. He mentioned the upcoming elections and the need for condition surveys to negotiate grants. James advised on the importance of understanding the costs of delivering services. Councillor Ruston, Hunstanton Town Council, shared his concerns about the reorganization of local government in his area and the challenges of pitching for resources as a town council. James was thanked for his insights, and Justin was introduced to discuss the English Devolution white paper.

### **English Devolution White Paper Overview**

Justin Griggs, Head of Policy and Communications at NALC, discussed the English Devolution White Paper and its implications for local government, particularly parish and town councils. The government aims to transfer power from Westminster, extend the mayoral model across the country, and strengthen local government accountability and capacity. The proposals include devolution, reorganization, and accountability measures. The government wants to see mayors everywhere and is inviting proposals for reorganization with a minimum population of half a million. The paper also addresses financial reforms, remote meetings, and standards regime improvements. Justin emphasized the importance of engaging with principal authorities and strengthening the role of parish and town councils in the devolution process.