



**Minutes for the Rural Services Partnership  
Vulnerability Group Online via Zoom  
Monday 6<sup>th</sup> December 2021  
11am-12 noon**

**Present:**

Graham Biggs MBE (Chief Executive, Rural Services Network & Company Secretary RSP) (GB)  
Jo Giles (Customer Safeguarding Senior Manager, Cadent Ltd) (JG)  
Nik Harwood (Chief Executive, Young Somerset & Director RSP) (NH)  
Sarah Hulme (Rural Mission & Ministry Officer, Methodist Church, Arthur Rank Centre) (SH)  
David Inman (Corporate Director of Rural Services Network & Director RSP) (DI)  
Beth Kennedy (CS Partnership Manager, Anglian Water) (BK)  
Rev Richard Kirlew (Chairman of the Agricultural Chaplaincy Association) (RK)  
Jane Mordue (Chair, Citizens Advice Rural Issues Group) (JM)  
Kate Robbins (Head of Customer Policy, Wessex Water) (KR)  
Nadine Trout (Member Development & Support Manager, Rural Services Network) (NT)  
Brian Wilson (Chair of Directors, Rural England CIC) (BW)

Bethan Aldridge (minute-taker) (BA)

**Speaker:**

Nick Hubbard (RIG Research Lead, CA Sedgemoor) (NHu)

The Chair, Nik Harwood, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**1. Apologies for Absence**

John Birtwistle (Head of Policy – UK Bus, First Group)  
Andrew Potter (Chief Executive, Hastoe Housing Association)  
Tony Price (Hd of Programme, Innovation, Commercial Mgt & Sales, Trent & Dove Housing)  
Martin Rehorn (Director of Finance, Hereford & Worcester Fire & Rescue Service)  
Rachel Ryan-Crisp (Vulnerability Lead, Southern Water)

**2. Minutes of Previous Meeting** (See [link to Minutes and Papers](#))

Minutes of the previous meeting 27.04.21 were accepted as a true record.

**3. Matters arising were as follows:**

- 4) Youth Vulnerability Issues – Recovery and Resilience Post Pandemic: NH is speaking to Kayleigh Wainwright (UK Youth) shortly for updated evidence.
- 5) AOB: NH reported that he would keep the Vulnerability meetings as it covered a very important issue and it was important to have other RSP members here too.

**4. RSN Rural Vulnerability and Disadvantage Statement 2021** ([see Attachment 1](#))  
**Vulnerability Appendices** ([see link](#))

Discussion took place on the Statement, the impact of the pandemic, the Social Care White Paper, Government funding streams eg UKSPF, Levelling Up etc.

**Action:** Statement to be updated fully and put on website– BA, NT and NH to work on this.

**Action:** Statistics in Statement to be updated once the data from the 2021 Census has been released.

**Action:** DI to arrange for an appendix on older people to be produced

**5. Rural Vulnerability: What is the impact of current pressures? ([see Presentation](#))**

NHu gave a presentation on behalf of the Citizens Advice. Its main purpose is to advise, help and support those who have problems. The second purpose is in research and campaigns. The Rural Issues Group is a Special Interests Group which supports the aim of campaigning.

Poverty - in rural areas is about “Costs” not just about income levels and NHu has produced a report highlighting this. RSN Vulnerability Statement chimes with much of Nick’s current work.

Digital Inclusion – only about 1% in furthest parts of rural that cannot connect, mainly as they don’t have electricity. 25% of homes have not taken up the offer of connection but CA can help people to access and take advantage of this. Internet helps those who are isolated – not the answer but better than nothing.

Rural Transport – biggest ask from rural areas, particularly in regard to bus services. To get funding, a Local Transport Authority had to submit a report by October 2021 and awaiting funding. CA will be monitoring what happens next.

Data base set up that focuses on what is “bothering people”. Now able to pull out those from rural areas - know far more than two years ago. NHu very happy to share this information.

KR asked why people were rejecting taking up digital connection and what were the demographics. NHu will publish that “big data” early next year but nothing stands out. It’s not necessarily older people but cost is a factor. 2016 report by Sedgemoor, CA, showed that there is an issue with literacy – 58% of clients had an issue, military is 50%, prison – 50%. Entry level costs in most areas is about £700 worth of equipment and approx. £45 per month – those on benefits cannot afford this.

**6. State of Care in County and Rural Areas- a joint report by Rural Services Network (RSN) and the County Council Network (CCN) ([see Presentation](#))**

Adult Social Care White Paper published 1<sup>st</sup> December. Presentation was prepared before this and is on the joint report from RSN and CCN published in September so still have work to do on this. Report aimed at highlighting specific, rural concerns. APPG Rural Services, for which RSN is the Secretariat, hope to meet the Care Minister in January 2022 to discuss this.

Joint Report identified key issues on Resource, workforce, demography, self-funders, care homes and sparsity. These will all have a significant differential impact in rural areas as compared to urban areas in the introduction of these proposals – ie £86K threshold, 1.25% NI increase.

Graph 2 – brings together the figures in Graph 1 for new requests for support and shows that the numbers for County & Rural is the same as the other three types of Council combined . In the other Graphs, the data shows that there are huge differences in gross expenditure by age band, service provider, higher cost per unit etc for County & Rural compared to other authority areas in the current system but with less funding per head.

We have been calling for extra funding by 2023; Spending Review was unclear about this. Since the White Paper was published, we have put forward a number of recommendations including ensuring fair and equitable funding. Local Government Funding Settlement is due mid-December and hoping that there is some new funding available.

#### **7. Any Other Business**

No items were brought forward.

**Action:** NH will extend the next RSP Vulnerability Group meeting on **25th April 2022** at 11am to 90 minutes to allow for further discussions etc.

#### **8. Close**

NH thanked everyone for attending the meeting today which closed at 12:02pm.

#### **Addendum:**

[Local Government Funding Settlement](#) published 16.12.21