



**Minutes for the Rural Services Partnership  
Vulnerability Group Online via Zoom  
Monday 22 April 2024  
11am-12:30pm**

**Present:**

Nik Harwood, Chair of the Rural Services Partnership  
Kerry Booth, Chief Executive, Rural Services Network  
Nadine Trout, Assistant Chief Executive, Rural Services Network  
Krystal Vittles, Deputy Chief Executive, Suffolk Libraries  
Graham Biggs, Rural Services Partnership  
Rev Richard Kirlew, Agricultural Chaplains Association  
Alan Neal, National Association of Local Councils  
Cassandra Pither, Digital Mobile Spectrum Limited  
Karen Fuller, Digital Mobile Spectrum Limited  
Jane Mordue, Citizens Advice Rural Issues Group  
Kate Lovelock, Northern Gas Networks  
Katie Wynd, Northern Gas Networks  
Rachel Allen, North Yorkshire Citizens Advice and Law Centre

**Nik Harwood, RSP Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.**

**1. Apologies for Absence**

Amy Barker, 100 Green  
Hannah Perry, Bolton University  
Rebecca Sedgwick, Broadacres  
Jim Hume, Change Mental Health  
Katrina Ford, Citizens Advice East Dorset and Purbeck  
Paula Salazar, Community Transport Association  
Ian Cass, Forum of Private Business  
Laurence Keeley, Land and Leisure  
Chris Cowcher, Plunkett UK  
John Longden, Pub is the Hub  
Anita Kirwen-Nye, South Downs National Park Authority  
Tim Slaney, South Downs National Park Authority  
Katharine Nolan, Spark Somerset  
Steph Smith, United Utilities  
Cathy Jackson, University of Central Lancashire  
Ian Sherriff, University of Plymouth Faculty of Health  
Nigel Winnan, Wales & West Utilities

**2. Minutes of Previous Meeting**

(See [link to Minutes and Papers](#))

Minutes of the previous meeting 22.11.23 were accepted as a true record.

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

#### **Homelessness**

Nadine Trout provided an update on the Rural Homeless Coalition and referred to an article recently published in the RSN Bulletin about tackling rough sleeping at a local level. Click [here](#) for details.

#### **Winning the Rural Vote**

Nadine Trout, gave an update on the Winning the Rural Vote Campaign and its launch to Parliamentarians in January, click [here](#) for more information. Nadine also mentioned that the Campaign is achieving national coverage and cited [The Daily Express Coverage](#) as an example.

Nadine also invited members to contact her at [nadine.trout@sparse.gov.uk](mailto:nadine.trout@sparse.gov.uk) if they had anything they would like to see incorporated into the Campaign especially regarding the needs of vulnerable people in rural areas or to supply case studies.

### **4. How libraries support vulnerable residents in rural communities ([Download the presentation here](#))**

Krystal Vittles, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Suffolk Libraries shared the above presentation. Krystal highlighted the role that rural and mobile libraries play in supporting the isolated and vulnerable. Krystal then fielded questions stating all library staff are paid and that volunteers are used to provide supplementary services only. She also stated that she was keen to work with her local Integrated Care System on acting as a hub to provide health support but that it was proving problematic as their boundaries were not co-terminus. Krystal finished by saying that she was concerned about the vulnerability of 18–30 year-olds, as at present they fall through the gaps as an age grouping and that she was keen to consider future provision.

#### **Links shared relevant to Krystal's presentation:**

##### **About Krystal Vittles**

<https://www.suffolklibraries.co.uk/about/news/suffolk-libraries-head-of-service-delivery-honoured-in-new-years-honours-list>

##### **RSN rural libraries news article**

<https://www.rsonline.org.uk/the-essential-lifeline-of-libraries-in-rural-communities>

##### **Good Things Foundation - National Data Bank:**

<https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/databank/>

### **5. Reduced funding and the voluntary sector – a case study from Somerset**

Unfortunately, Katherine Nolan was unable to attend the meeting. In her absence Nik Harwood asked the meeting how their organisations were faring financially, in a climate of financial pressures accompanied by ever-increasing demand, difficulties in supply and the direct impact on rural vulnerable individuals, groups and communities.

Several members expressed their concerns stating they were turning to more partnership working. Jane Mordue shared that Buckinghamshire Citizens Advice was looking at a three pronged approach with funding from the public sector, businesses, and wealthy individuals – venturing for the first time into the world of philanthropy as a source of funding.

Nik went on to share that the VCFSE sector were seeing the removal of grants resulting in preventative work being cut, creating a short-term financial fix which will come back to bite in higher need. He also stated issues with a health and social care system that is largely based on spot-purchase and where individuals being supported are mobile (often displaced) and that care support packages are simply not logistically portable easily which can lead to delay in provision, lack of continuity in staff, etc. producing poorer outcomes and greater expense. Members echoed Nik's thoughts stating the Cost of Living Crisis was having a long tail impact.

#### **6. Any Other Business**

Nadine Trout, stated that the [All Party Parliamentary Group for Rural Services](#) will be holding a mini-inquiry into the decarbonisation of rural off gas grid homes. The RSN will be facilitating this inquiry with some evidence sessions being held online later in May/June. Members were invited to contact [nadine.trout@sparse.gov.uk](mailto:nadine.trout@sparse.gov.uk) if they had anything they would like the inquiry to consider.

#### **7. Close**

Nik Harwood, thanked everyone for attending. The meeting closed at 12:20pm