



**Minutes for the Rural Services Partnership
Vulnerability Group Online via Zoom
Monday 23rd November 2020
11am-12 noon**

Present:

Cllr Rachel Bailey (Cheshire Fire Authority) (RB)
Graham Biggs MBE (Chief Executive, Rural Services Network & Company Secretary RSP) (GB)
John Birtwistle (Head of Policy, First Group & Director RSP) (JB)
Kerry Booth (Assistant Chief Executive, Rural Services Network)
Jane Crisp (Vulnerability Strategy Manager, South East Water) (JC)
Jo Giles (Customer Safeguarding Manager, Cadent Ltd), (JG)
Nik Harwood (Chief Executive, Young Somerset & Director RSP) (NH)
David Inman (Corporate Director of Rural Services Network & Director RSP) (DI)
Nicki Johnson (Stakeholder Engagement Officer, Western Power Distribution) (NJ)
Rev Richard Kirlew (Lead Chaplain, Sherborne Deanery Rural Chaplaincy) (RK)
Amanda Philips (Priority Services Partnership & Engagement Lead, United Utilities) (AP)
Nadine Trout (Member Development & Support Manager, Rural Services Network) (NT)

Bethan Aldridge (minute-taker) (BA)

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

1. Apologies for Absence

Richard Allcock (Western Power Distribution), Vicki Beers (Farming Community Network), Marin Collett (English Rural Housing Association), Martin Fagin (The Community Heartbeat Trust), Amanda Fearn (National Youth Agency), Gavin Jones (Hastoe Group), Jane Mordue (CAB Rural Issues Group)

2. Purpose of the Group (DI)

DI explained that this is a select group with emphasis on working in the Vulnerability area rather than the whole of the Rural Services Partnership (RSP) area of work. This meeting was set up with those chosen who would be interested specifically in this. Vulnerability is an ever - increasing problem e.g., as numbers of older people grow in rural areas, therefore we have to look at national policies and procedures and whether or not they fit for rural areas. This group will look at how we can take things forward given the difficulties in rural areas.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting (See Attachment 1)

Minutes of the previous meeting 03.12.2019 were accepted as a true record and there were no matters arising.

4. Revitalising Rural, Realising the Vision - A Social Perspective (GB)

GB provided some background information. In 2019, the Rural Services Network

developed the campaign “ Time for a Rural Strategy”. In tandem with this, a House of Lords’ Select Committee on the Rural Economy also produced their own document which supported what we were asking for – namely for the government to produce a national strategy. The government is required to respond to the House of Lords’ Committee and did so in June/July 2019. The government of the time did not accept the need for a a national rural strategy and instead said that it would expand on their strategic vision. We are now at November 2020 and are still waiting for the vision, what will be achieved, the timescales and how it will be accountable.

The first campaign was showing the need and then making the “Call for a Rural Strategy”. This has now moved on to the second campaign “Revitalising Rural, Realising the Vision”. There are 16 chapters in the document calling for investment in rural areas which will have a positive outcome not only in those areas but also the wider national economy. Action is required across all the chapters rather than just picking and choosing and there is a much greater interdependency with social and economic needs.

The next step is to prepare for a launch of the Vision in February 2021. This date has been advised by the media consultants, Lexington, as they believe this will give the greatest opportunity for media coverage. We will be sharing individual chapters, and the full document, to RSN and RSP members and seeking to engage with Parliamentarians and decision makers.

This is our policy agenda for a while and we will be keeping the key Asks high level and relevant depending on initiatives/strategies, the Queen’s speech etc that the government introduces and their impact on the Revitalising Rural document as a whole. We will be underpinning the asks with a finer grain/nuancing of detail and to develop case studies to support the asks. These case studies will be an Appendix of Good Practice around the Rural Vulnerability Statement and the evidence will come from our members. If we need to change a policy ask, viewpoint etc then we will consult with members on this.

5. Rural Vulnerability Statement (See Attachment 2) (DI)

a) *Agreement of the statement*

DI explained that this is the third Vulnerability Statement that has been written as the RSN endeavours to keep it current and relevant. He thanked Dr Jane Hart for her work on the Statement.

JB noted that the Statement concentrates on factually setting the scene, moves onto how we do something and references. JB suggested that the reference documentation should be based on what we propose e.g. Revitalising Rural, information on the RSN website, position papers etc. The Vulnerability Statement should be more positive i.e. raise the problem but put forward the solutions as well. It should be more “this is what we think can be done and how our members can help”.

NH was in agreement in with this and GB thought this was an excellent idea which would need to link across our work areas and bring these together. GB commented that the Revitalising Rural document would be the driver for this and in turn would then feed into the Vulnerability Statement.

RK raised the point that on page 5 of the Statement under Access to Services and Facilities, the “walk-in” section did not make reference to churches or faith groups. These are very good at working within their communities and as a result are the groups with growing membership in these current times. It was agreed that in the context of decline, then the growth in church and faith group membership could be put in as a positive in community support. DI added that the appendices would give the opportunity for organisations to input the good work being undertaken and for example how lots of areas are making the church open and current in the community.

Action: RK will write three or four paragraphs on this.

RB also commented that she is really interested in the voluntary and faith sectors as well. The local experience is that national organisations did not support rural areas but now since the pandemic, these are now reaching the vulnerable groups. She has written a paper for the LGA on how voluntary groups have evolved, which included the local church etc and are the bedrock of communities. Her report noted that the “down up” model was much better than the “top down”.

Action: GB asked RB for her paper and this would be the first case study.

b) *Creation of an appendices of good practice*

As noted in a) above the Annual RSN Vulnerability Statement would in future be accompanied by a series of topic-based Appendices. The appropriate members of the RSP would be involved in assisting with these. These might contain both concerns and best practice.

The Appendices would need to be kept relatively brief and no more than four paragraphs each. Instead of the annual review of the main statement it is suggested that these Appendices would be reviewed every three years unless a member requested an earlier review.

Appendices on the following subject areas would be helpful:

- * Older People
- * Community Activity
- * Young People
- * Transport
- * Housing
- * Health
- * Broadband availability
- * Church
- * Rural Commerce

DI would ask some organisations directly to write an appendix.

NJ asked if there would be an appendix on low carbon technology and Net Zero as a number of councils have made declarations on this or put this in some of the other appendices as it cuts across several themes here.

JC recommended contacting Rob Melville, Head of Partnerships and income generation at the Countryside Alliance.

Action: The following agreed to write an appendix: NH - Young People; JB – Transport;

RK – Church

Action: RSN to email everyone the relevant chapters for them to provide their appendix.

Action: GB to give NJ's request further reflection.

Action: JC to pass on Rob Melville's contact details to NT.

6. General Discussion

GB would like to consider bringing vulnerability back into the main group meetings and possibly do this for the April meeting. It would entail a longer main meeting with a vulnerability section for all the membership to contribute. GB saw a major advantage in having this at a main meeting as this would allow for the smaller Vulnerability group to get into the detail and move things forward. DI agreed he was happy to trial this as well. JC had to leave the meeting but noted in the Zoom chat that she thought "the separate meeting should stay but we should bring to the table any update and ask for input the smaller group will help concentrate on specific areas."

Action: The RSP main meeting in April to include an agenda item for general discussion on vulnerability.

RK added that as the former RSP chair, he was pleased to see that rural vulnerability was moving on and that the RSP group was growing.

7. Any Other Business

There was none brought forward.

8. Close

NH thanked everyone for attending the meeting today.