



**Minutes for the Rural Services Partnership
Vulnerability Group Online via Zoom
Monday 24th April 2023
11am-12:30pm**

Present:

Rachel Allen (North Yorkshire CA and Law Centre)
Graham Biggs MBE (Rural policy Consultant, Rural Services Network & Company Secretary RSP)
Dan Blake (Stakeholder Engagement Team Asst, National Grid)
Kerry Booth (Chief Executive, Rural Services Network)
Matthew Byrne (Development Manager, Community Council for Somerset)
Jaclyn Curry (Communications Manager, NICRE)
Suzy Deeley (Head of Partnerships, RABI)
Professor Janet Dwyer (CCRI, University of Glos & Director RSP)
Nik Harwood (Chief Executive, Young Somerset & Chair/Director RSP)
Ulrike Hotopp (Director, LIVE Economics Ltd)
David Inman (Corporate Director of Rural Services Network & Director RSP)
Beth Kennedy (CS Partnership Manager, Anglian Water)
Jane Mordue (Chair, Citizens Advice Rural Issues Group)
Rebecca Palmer (Communications Manager, Warwickshire Rural Community Council)
Hannah Perry (Lecturer, University of Bolton)
Amanda Phillips (Priority Services Partnership & Engagement Lead, United Utilities)
Paul Pirie (Head of Fundraising, RABI)
Ian Sherriff (Academic Partnership Lead for Dementia, University of Plymouth)
Kim Slater (Chief Executive, Warwickshire Rural Community Council)
Nadine Trout (Assistant Chief Executive, Rural Services Network)
Caron Whaley, (Director of Services, RABI)

Bethan Aldridge (minute-taker) (BA)

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

1. Apologies for Absence

John Birtwistle (RSP Director, representing First Group)
Nicki Johnson (National Grid)
Nick Hubbard (RIG Research Lead, CA Sedgemoor)

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

Minutes of the previous meeting 07.12.22 were accepted as a true record.

3. Matters arising were as follows:

None were raised.

4. Rural Cost of Living Survey

Presentation given by Nadine Trout, Assistant Chief Executive, Rural Services Network

Nadine explained how the Survey came about and as a result of a report commissioned by Rural Services Network (RSN) from [Kovia on the Rural Cost of Living](#) The Survey was carried out alongside the Rural Issues Group of Citizens Advice.

Nadine discussed the headline findings of the Rural Cost of Living Survey. The report has been drafted and will be published shortly. All at the meeting agreed that the results echoed their own organisations' experiences. The issues raised were of no surprise but the RSN needs to get the messages out to those who shape policy etc and case studies/lived experiences are a great way of providing depth and showing the impact of policy.

Nadine asked the group for their input in how to promote the report when it is available and this was discussed fully with everyone and how they could help with this.

Kerry will be discussing the findings of the survey with a BBC journalist on one of their political shows so hopefully they will want an exclusive.

Action: A copy of the report will be sent to those who attended the meeting today.

Action: Please email in any case studies, stories, anecdotes etc to admin@sparse.gov.uk

Action: A number of those present agreed to promote the report through their networks.

5. General Discussion

KB started off the discussion noting that Rural Services Network has been involved with a very recent [report on Rural Homelessness](#) as part of a Steering Group of organisations concerned about this growing but unacknowledged problem. Kerry joined some of the Steering Group in Parliament to meet the Homelessness Minister and senior civil servants.

The Cost of Living survey did not cover health but Nadine agreed to share the [joint research](#) undertaken by the National Centre for Rural Health and Care (RSN looks after it's membership base) and the APPG for Rural Health and Care Parliamentary Inquiry. This would provide further information for some of those at the meeting who were preparing their business plans re vulnerable customers.

Jane Mordue raised food insecurity as an area for discussion and also it's impact on farming families. Caron Whaley, RABI offered to share case studies on this.

Graham Biggs spoke on behalf of Rural England CIC, which is currently working with a small group of utility companies looking at the impact of supply outages on those with mental health/dementia issues, those relying on electrical medical equipment and also those who are blind/partially sighted. The other dimension of this is being how does rurality further exacerbate these issues.

Graham and Kerry noted that there will be a General Election in the near future and the RSN has been working on a Rural Manifesto of issues and asks for each political party. It's important to get in there before they finalise their own Manifestos.

Action: Graham asked for case studies to help get across to politicians the multiplicity of rural issues eg affordable housing, lack of transport, lower wages, difficulty in accessing employment/training opportunities, access to health care, elderly population etc.

6. Any Other Business

No items were brought forward.

7. Close

NH thanked everyone for attending the meeting today which closed at 12:06pm.