



**Minutes for the Rural Services Partnership  
Vulnerability Group Online via Zoom  
Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> April 2021  
11am-12 noon**

**Present:**

Graham Biggs MBE (Chief Executive, Rural Services Network & Company Secretary RSP) (GB)  
Jane Crisp (Vulnerability Strategy Manager, South East Water) (JC)  
Richard Dowson (Director, Raising Aspirations Empowering Change Ltd) (RD)  
Nik Harwood (Chief Executive, Young Somerset & Director RSP) (NH)  
David Inman (Corporate Director of Rural Services Network & Director RSP) (DI)  
Nadine Trout (Member Development & Support Manager, Rural Services Network) (NT)  
Brian Wilson (Chair of Directors, Rural England CIC) (BW)

Bethan Aldridge (minute-taker) (BA)

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

**1. Apologies for Absence**

Rev Richard Kirlaw (Chairman of the Agricultural Chaplaincy Association)

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

Minutes of the previous meeting 23.11.20 were accepted as a true record

Matters arising were as follows:

5b) Create Appendices of Good Practice - this has not been completed

**Action:** DI to chase colleagues for these.

4) Revitalising Rural – GB confirmed that this had been published formally on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2021. BW was the main author of the document; it would be kept as a “live” current document and there had been a number of strategies and intentions from the government already that had necessitated updates. The launch had been aimed at Ministers, Civil Servants and key policy makers and the intention now was to draw themes across all 14 chapters eg youth, older people rather than seeing them as 14 chapters in isolation.

**3. Rural Vulnerability - Research on Utility Company Rural Customer Vulnerability Issues (BW)** Download the presentation [here](#)

BW explained that the remit was to provide a rural evidence base on vulnerability issues for customers in rural areas. BW provided some background to the Priority Services Registers (PSR) which are kept and maintained by Distribution Network Operators. They are a requirement from their regulator and customers can voluntarily sign up to the register if they are entitled to.

The research has been funded by five utility companies: Cadent, Green Energy, Southern

Water, Wales & West Utilities, Western Power Distribution and also Defra. The project has been delivered by CCRI at the University of Gloucestershire who have been working with Rural England CIC. BW noted that it had not been easy to conduct interviews due to the pandemic restrictions in place in the locations identified for study and because of this, the project timescale has been extended and results due in July 2021. Early reflections showed that many considered vulnerable do not see themselves that way and that the PSR is not as well known as it should be amongst agencies.

JC agreed with a lot of the comments raised by BW and that more work is needed to raise awareness on the PSR. She said it is hard to get people to engage and particularly those in hard-to-reach communities or those who do not consider themselves vulnerable. South East Water is working on a number of programmes with trusted partners eg Kent Fire & Rescue Service with safe and well visits.

NH agreed that vulnerable young people do not see themselves as vulnerable either which in turn makes them more vulnerable. He has observed that people dislike being “labelled”. JC agreed with this and that a lot of research has gone into the use of language eg Priority Customer rather than Priority Services Register Customer, Well being rather than Safeguarding.

**Action:** Jane to send a copy of the UKRN [presentation](#) and [summary report](#) on “How can we help” Please click on the highlighted links above.

RD commented that in the North East Region there has been a big increase in the need for Mental Health services and he is interested in the research and how to use it. He has noted that Utility companies are one of the first to be impacted when people are unable to pay bills. JC said they are looking at personal and community resilience so that when someone picks up the phone to their Water company and are on the PSR that they only have to register one time only. She has to work with household recognised names because of GDPR, cross-infection etc so cannot engage with a number of the new community support groups that have been set up since Covid etc.

#### **4. Youth Vulnerability Issues – Recovery and Resilience Post Pandemic (NH)**

Download the presentation [here](#)

NH explained that Kayleigh Wainwright, Director of Collective Action, from UK Youth was unable to join us today but she had sent through a presentation with a voice over to talk us through the main points of her presentation.

The Covid response from UK Youth and National Youth Agency has supported the reopening of youth sector activities. Please see link here to their joint webpage on [Youth Work Support](#) while it is still live with plenty of training support and advice.

A recent report published by UK Youth on the impact of Covid on England’s youth organisations is at this [link](#) It looks at the financial implications that Covid has had on the ability of youth organisations to support young people as many are working at very much reduced levels of income, spending their reserves whilst reducing staff salaries and hours. The sector is calling for sustainable financial support, use of volunteers etc as well as help with delivering training, digital services and responding to increase need. Providing these

types of support in rural areas has always been challenging but it has been heavily more affected since Covid.

There has also been a move to provide more black, youth support for those in rural areas with the aim to improve lived experiences. Please see the link to the "[Being Black in Rural Spaces](#)" video on You Tube.

UK Youth will be launching a new strategy in May 2021, waiting for the outcomes of the DCMS Youth Review , encouraging young people to take part in volunteer work via #iwill Movement and launching a digital app – Youth Card to access opportunities and services in their local area.

GB asked if there were evidence based case studies on these and the rural implications.

**Action:** NH will contact Kayleigh to ask her if she has any studies on this. Rural areas tend to be served by small local organisation.

NH explained that his organisation, Young Somerset, is very lucky that it is able to operate at County level and their work had expanded considerably.

RD noted that as more activities moved online there was the age old issue of engagement.

NH agreed that with the lack of jobs, closure of activities, adults losing their jobs and moving into youth jobs, young people were feeling more marginalised and vulnerable.

Somerset was very active in economic development spaces eg opening a shop, run by a charity, was selling goods created by young people – not just another charity shop.

NH explained that the youth are not hard to reach – it's our services that are hard for them to reach.

## 5. Any Other Business

**Action:** DI asked if there was any evidence, particularly statistical that anyone could send him as it would be invaluable.

NH would like to keep the Vulnerability meetings going for now, even though attendance was particularly low for today's meeting as it may have been a consequence of timing and a one-off, and will review in December.

**Action:** BA to look at attendance figures for previous RSP meetings and report to NH.

## 6. Close

NH thanked everyone for attending the meeting today which closed at 12:21pm.