



Rural Village Services Group

Part of the Rural Services Network

Minutes of RVSG Annual Meeting

On-line via Zoom

Thursday 5th October 2023, 16.30-17.30

1. **Welcome from Kerry Booth, Chief Executive of the Rural Services Network (RSN).** Kerry introduced David Inman, Consultant to the RSN and Sally Sargent, Administrative Assistant, who work with the RVSG group.

2. **Introduction to Rural Services Network**

Kerry updated the group on the work of the Rural Services Network (RSN) as the national champion for rural services. This includes:

- [Rural Lens Review](#), considering key government strategy documents from a rural perspective.
- [Rural Services All Party Parliamentary Group](#). A cross party group of MP's from rural constituencies that the RSN supports as the Secretariat.
- Responding to government consultations with a rural response.
- Working to influence government departments, House of Lords and national service providers to understand the challenges facing rural communities.
- [Keeping rural issues in the news](#)

3. **RVSG Member Benefits.**

Kerry outlined the services provided to RVSG members. These include:

- RSN publications by email (Rural Bulletin, Funding Digest, RSVG newsletter).
- Opportunities to network and share best practice.
- Access to rural research.
- Representing the interests of local rural communities on a national level.

RVSG membership is currently free on a trial basis until April 2024.

Providing a voice for rural communities and service providers

Rural Services Network

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4. RSN Campaign: 'Roadmap for Rural'

Kerry presented the RSN Rural Roadmap. Ahead of the next general election, RSN are campaigning to ensure that all political parties recognise the importance of including rural policies in their manifestos. Rural votes could help swing the election, with 40% of constituencies in rural areas.

Successive governments have underfunded rural councils:

- Urban areas receive 38% more per head in Government Funded Spending Power than their rural counterparts.
- Rural residents pay 20% per head more in Council Tax than urban residents.
- It costs more to deliver services in rural areas, and urban authorities are able to spend almost double that of rural authorities on discretionary services.

The RSN Rural Roadmap sets out our short and longer term asks for political parties to address in eight priority areas: Fair Funding; Rural Health and Care; Rural Transport; Rural Connectivity; Rural Economies; Rural Affordable Housing; Rural Net Zero; and Rural Planning. RSN asks government to address all these issues together.

5. Local perspective on RSN Rural Roadmap

Kerry invited each of the attendees to comment on which of the RSN Rural Roadmap priorities are of greatest importance to their local communities.

- **Public transport** is a significant issue. This includes the loss of local bus services and the impacts this has on local residents and businesses. A need for coordinated support for community transport schemes was also identified.
- **A loss of other local services**, including local pubs and health services, is a common issue.
- **Identify funding opportunities.** The group would welcome creative community fundraising ideas to help support their local services. With numerous renewable energy projects planned in rural areas, it is important to ensure that local communities benefit directly from these schemes.

The RVSG provides a good opportunity to share best practice and innovative projects between members. RSN have developed a template for sharing best practice and will circulate this to participants, as well as the wider RVSG membership.

6. Local campaigning

Ahead of the general election, David Inman advised councils to ensure that prospective candidates in their local areas are fully aware of how these 'bigger picture' rural issues impact on their local communities.