



Rural Village Services Group

Part of the Rural Services Network

Notes from Annual Meeting held on Thursday 3 October 2024

Meeting Summary

Kerry Booth, the Chief Executive of the Rural Services Network, discussed the organisation's work and its role as a national champion for rural services, highlighting the need for fairer funding for public services in rural areas and rural policy. The meeting also covered the challenges faced by rural communities, such as affordable housing, transportation issues, and the decline in the availability and quality of public services. The discussion concluded with the potential of community-run shops and services, the challenges faced by rural areas, and the importance of building homes to meet local needs and on local wages.

Rural Services Network Campaigns Update

Kerry Booth, Chief Executive of the Rural Services Network, introduced the organisation's work and its role as a national champion for rural services. She explained that the RSN is financially independent, funded solely through memberships, which allows it to challenge government policies and strategies. Kerry also highlighted the RSN's various member benefits, including publications, funding digests, and newsletters. She mentioned that the RSN represents the rural voice on a national level, supports an All Party Parliamentary Group of MPs for Rural Services, and responds to government consultations relevant to rural areas. Kerry also shared that the RSN sits on various national bodies and tries to keep rural issues in the news. She then briefly discussed the RSN's campaign, "Delivering for Rural," which focuses on fairer funding for public services in rural areas and nuanced rural policy.

Addressing Rural Funding and Policy Challenges

Kerry discussed the complexities of local authority funding, highlighting that rural councils are underfunded and that urban councils receive 36% more government-funded spending per head than rural. This has led to rural residents paying more in council tax and increased costs for service delivery. Kerry also mentioned the Delivering for Rural Campaign's focus on eight policy areas, including fair funding, access to health and care, rural transport, rural connectivity, growing the rural economy, rural affordable housing, rural net zero, and rural planning. She emphasised the need for government action to address these issues and improve the situation for rural communities.

Addressing Rural Community Challenges and Support

Cllr Sara Miller from Datchworth Parish Council shared her concerns about the lack of affordable housing in her village, leading to an aging population and a struggling school. Cllr Pat Hastings from Broughton Parish Council, on the other hand, highlighted the rapid population growth in her area due to new housing developments, but expressed concerns about the lack of services and infrastructure and the potential merging of her parish with other areas. Kerry acknowledged these issues and mentioned the need for further research and collaboration with government departments to address the unfairness faced by rural communities.

Rural Fair Funding and Public Services Discussion

Kerry discussed the outcomes of the [Inaugural Meeting of the APPG](#) and confirmed that the meeting's notes and presentations would be shared, and that the list of MPs involved would be available on their website. Kerry also mentioned that the group of MPs had set their priorities for the year ahead, focusing on rural fair funding for public services, rural transport access to rural health and care, growing the economy, and affordable homes.

RVSG Annual Survey Results

Kerry then shared the results of a survey conducted earlier in the year, which showed a decline in the availability and quality of public services in rural areas. The survey also highlighted the impact of reduced funding on services such as grass cutting, public toilets, and youth services. Kerry concluded by stating that the survey results had been shared with partners and promoted in their bulletin.

Sharing Messages and Supporting Local Initiatives

Kerry encouraged the sharing of messages widely. Cllr Sara Miller, Chair of Datchworth Parish Council, a small parish council in Hertfordshire, shared her experience of supporting a local market initiative. The market, started by a group of people in October 2020, aimed to tackle climate change by exchanging and selling various items such as vegetables, chutney, jam, bug hotels, gardening tools, and handmade crafts. The council provided support by removing obstacles, changing the market's location, and offering a small grant. The market also featured local tradespeople like a brewery and a meat seller, with the council providing financial assistance for licenses.

Fostering Community Harmony and Supporting Local Initiatives

Cllr Sara Miller discussed the efforts of the Parish council to foster a harmonious community by encouraging outside groups to participate in village events. These events, held monthly, raise money for various charities and local organisations. The council also supports local businesses and initiatives, such as the museum opening and the Women's Institute selling cakes. Kerry highlighted the organisation [Plunkett](#)

[UK](#), a group that supports community-run businesses, suggested that the council could consider expanding their initiatives and offered their support.

Exploring Community Services and Repair Initiatives

Kerry discussed the potential of community-run shops and services, highlighting the success of Plunkett UK in rural areas. Cllr Hastings expressed interest in these services, particularly for their community cafe. Kerry suggested that Plunkett UK could potentially provide advice and support for such initiatives. Cllr Eleanor Bell from Hursley Parish Council introduced the [Restart Project](#) and the Repair Cafes, which are part of a national initiative. Kim Carpenter from West Dean Parish Council shared their experience with Mend and Repair Cafes, which are part of the national network. The team agreed to send out links to these resources for further reference.

Addressing Challenges in Rural Areas and Transport

Cllr Pat Hastings discussed the challenges faced with traffic management in their area, including the recent installation of a stop sign at a previously problematic crossroads. Cllr David Johnston from Wheathampstead Parish Council discussed the challenges faced by his area, particularly the reliance on volunteers due to devolved services and the increasing traffic in the village. He noted that while the traffic has benefits such as maintaining a high street, it also presents challenges like parking and potential charging for parking. Kim Carpenter, from Gloucestershire, echoed these concerns and added that her area is also experiencing a rise in second home ownership and holiday lets, which is pricing out young people. She also highlighted the issue of rural transport, with limited bus services and the introduction of an on-demand rural bus service, the Robin, which has proven popular in her area.

Rural Challenges: Waste, Social Services, and Housing

The meeting discussed the challenges faced by rural areas, particularly in terms of waste management, social services, and housing. It was noted that the cost of delivering social services is increasing, leading to cuts in other areas. The discussion also touched on the issue of homeownership in rural areas, with a focus on the need for incentives to encourage people to move. The importance of building homes to meet local needs and on local wages was emphasised. The conversation ended with an invitation for further case studies and experiences to be shared, which would be used to inform national discussions and policy decisions.