

Note of last RURAL SERVICES NETWORK Rural Assembly Special Interest Group meeting

Title: SPARSE Rural Assembly Special Interest Group
Date: Monday 13 July 2015, 12.30pm
Venue: Local Government House, Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ

1. Attendance

Name	Organisation
Graham Biggs	RSN
David Inman	RSN
Andy Dean	RSN
Brian Wilson	RSN
Cllr Cecilia Motley	Shropshire Council
Elaine O'Leary (send Agenda)	Northamptonshire ACRE
Cllr Robert Heseltine	North Yorkshire CC
Cllr Cameron Clark	Sevenoaks DC
Cllr Peter Thornton	South Lakeland DC
Cllr Lewis Strange	Lincolnshire CC
Jenny Hall	Royal Mail
James Mitchell	Royal Mail
Cllr David Ireton	Craven DC
Cllr Owen Bierley	West Lindsey DC
Cllr Madge Shineton	Shropshire Council
Cllr Peter Stevens	St Edmundsbury BC
Peter Moore, Chief Executive	Cornwall Rural Housing Association
Cllr Pam Posnett	Melton
Cllr Ann Carter	Daventry
Cllr Michael Hicks	South Hams
Cllr Nick Daubney	King's Lynn & West Norfolk
Cllr Hilary Carrick	Cumbria
Cllr Rupert Reichhold	East Northamptonshire Council
Neil Parish MP (Speaker)	Chair, EFRA Select Committee
Ian Hunter	Rural Cultural Reform
Cllr Jeremy Savage	South Norfolk
John Birtwistle, Head of Policy	First Group
Cllr Carole Clarke	South Northamptonshire
Anna Bradley-Dorman, Public Affairs	NFWI
Cllr John Clarke	Gedling
Cllr Roger Phillips	Herefordshire

Apologies

Name	Organisation
Cllr Alan Rhodes	Notts County
Jim Onions, Chief Fire Officer	Cumbria County Council
Ann Turner	Myrescough College
Cllr Roy Miller	Barnsley

Cllr Ablewhite	Huntingdonshire
Helen Briggs, Chief Executive	Rutland
Peter Shipp, Chairman & Chief Executive	EYMS Group Ltd
Stewart Horne, Managing Director	BIP West Devon
Jenny Maw	Federation of Small Businesses
Katherine Murphy	Patients Association
Cllr Jane Mortimer	Scarborough
David Harding, Area Manager	Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue
Liz Sneath	South Holland
Cllr Michael Wassell	Breckland
Cllr Neil Butters	Bath & North East Somerset
Cllr Paul Diviani	East Devon
Cllr Colin Law	Waveney
John Ward, District Treasurer	Chichester
Ian Knowles, Director of Resources	West Lindsey
Kath Hemmings, Neighbourhood Manager	Solihull
Adam Norburn, Executive Director	Rugby
Dr Nigel Stone	Exmoor National Park
Ken Parsons	Rural Shops Alliance
Cllr Steven Pugsley	West Somerset
Cllr Peter Bedford	Boston
Richard Quallington	ACRE
Eileen Swan	Derby College
Karen Symonds	Cornwall
Cllr Hugh McCarthy	Wycombe
Sue Chalkley, Chief Executive	Hastoe Group
Cllr John Pollard	Cornwall
Martyn Emberson, Chief Fire Officer	Northants Fire & Rescue
Cllr Jane Mortimer	Scarborough
Cllr Philip Sanders	West Devon Borough Council
Cllr Jane March	Tunbridge Wells
Paul Over, Executive Director	Chichester
Cllr Adam Paynter	Cornwall
Cllr Robert Gould	Sherborne
Cllr Gordon Nicolson OBE	Eden
Jean Hunter, Chief Executive	South Cambridgeshire
Cllr David Worden	North Devon
Cllr Roger Begy	Rutland
Suzanne Clear, Senior Advisor (Rural Affairs)	NFU
Alice Woudhuysen, Senior Campaigns Officer	Age UK
Cllr Les Kew	Bath and North East Somerset

Item Decisions and actions

2 Minutes of the last Rural Assembly meeting - 13th April 2015

The Minutes of the last Rural Assembly meeting held on 13 July 2015 were approved.

3 Minutes of the last Executive meeting - 22nd June 2015

The Minutes of the last Executive meeting held on 22 June 2015 were approved.

4 Budget 2015/16 and 2016/17

Members noted the Budget report for 2015/16 and 2016/17 which showed a prospective surplus of £9k in the first year, rising to £11k in the second. The Chair thanked Graham Biggs (Rural Services Network) for his report.

5 Postal Services across rural areas of England

Members received a presentation from Jenny Hall and James Mitchell from the Royal Mail, which provided an overview of current issues affecting the future of postal services.

The guests outlined processes used by universal services and the impact of changing requirements upon current systems. They informed members that a submission had already been sent to Ofcom detailing their concerns, in particular regarding analysis of rising costs. They assured the group that dialogue would continue with local councillors in order to ensure a continued customer-focussed service.

Members commended their work and agreed that continuing relationships were valuable. Some concerns were raised and noted, with a request to be updated on any further developments.

The Chairman thanked Ms Hall and Mr Mitchell for their presentation.

6 Presentation from Neil Parish, newly elected Chair of the EFRA Select Committee

Members welcomed Neil Parish MP, newly elected Chair of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee, to the meeting.

Mr Parish outlined the role of the Select Committee, to examine the work the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs does and how it spends its budgets. The Committee also covers major agencies including the Environment Agency, the Rural Payments Agency, Natural England and the Food and Environment Research Agency.

Members heard about the Mr. Parish's current workload which included looking at issues around Broadband access and tackling problems with bus service contractors in rural areas.

The group noted Mr. Parish's enthusiasm. He informed them that it was a role he had particularly wanted as the key issues affecting rural areas were very important to him and was keen to continue collaboration with local councils in order to reach solutions to these problems.

The Chairman agreed that access to Broadband – particularly in the most rural areas was a major drawback and hoped that with the industry becoming more competitive, addressing this should be a main priority. Mr. Parish assured members that it was, and he looked forward to future liaisons in working towards a solution.

Members thanked Neil Parish MP for his contribution.

7 Housing in Rural Areas

Members welcomed Peter Moore, Chief Executive of Cornwall Rural Housing Association and Chair of The Rural Housing Alliance.

Mr. Moore outlined the work of the Alliance, with the help and support of the RSN, in helping to provide a single, clear and collective voice for housing associations' lobbying and influencing on rural housing. Originally created help support National Housing Federation member housing associations that own and manage homes in rural areas, it enables associations to compare and learn from each other in areas such as design and sustainability. Members were referred to the

Alliance's rural housing pledge, ***Affordable homes for local people*** <http://www.housing.org.uk/policy/rural-housing/rural-alliance-pledge/> which offers a set of guarantees for rural communities.

Mr. Moore informed members of the Alliance's involvement with the Government's Rural Housing Advisory Group; a subgroup of the main Homes and Communities Agency's board. The Group's aim is to advise the HCA and seek ways to improve the delivery of affordable rural housing.

Members raised issues around affordability and lack of housing and agreed that mutual input would be necessary in order to sustain a consistent message to Government.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Moore for his presentation.

8 Election Manifestos

Brian Wilson, Rural Services Network, outlined rural issues addressed to in the recent Conservative Party 2015 Manifesto and also a comparison of common aims between RSN, NALC and ACRE as set out in their respective Manifestos.

Members noted the reports and continuing work.

9 Buses Bill.

Members briefly discussed the Buses Bill as one of the legislative plans for the year ahead unveiled in the Queen's Speech to Parliament.

The Buses Bill would provide the option for combined authority areas with directly-elected mayors to be responsible for the running of their local bus services with a hope that cities would be better able to promote an integrated transport system.

Several issues were raised, in particular pressures around lack of funding, concessionary fares and the need to enhance collaboration between bus operators and local authorities.

Members noted key points for consideration.

10 Devolution

Graham Biggs outlined the LGA's position in addressing devolution from a national point of view and agreed to bring the subject to a future meeting as requirements for involvement from RSN evolved.

11 Rural Services Network Events

Members noted the programme of forthcoming events and were encouraged to attend those of interest.

12 Rural Sounding Board

David Inman, Rural Services Network, conveyed the results of a recent sounding board survey, which asked for views on priorities of the new Government in its first 100 days to a range of rural issues.

The Chair expressed disappointment at the relatively low response from local Principal Authority councillors and encouraged members to participate in future surveys.

The results were noted.

13 Rural England Group

Andy Dean, Rural Services Network, outlined the progress of work of the Rural England Group. Members noted that 28 organisations were involved and that there had been a good level of attendance and debate at meetings, although there were some issues around funding and generating resources.

The Chairman thanked Mr Dean for the update.

14 Report on the RSP Service Groups

Members noted updated on the RSP Service Groups.

15 Any Other Business

Members briefly discussed the government's announcement that national minimum wage rates would rise from October **2015**. Although welcome, it was important to remain aware of potential negative impact on local and small businesses and indeed, local government.

The meeting was closed.