
Agenda

SPARSE Rural and Rural Services Network Executive and Board of Director of the Rural Services Partnership Ltd meeting

Hosted: Online via Zoom
Date: Monday, 15th March 2021
Time: 10:45am – 2:00pm

We will circulate an email with Zoom joining instructions in advance.

1. Attendance & Apologies.

Attendance:

Cllr Cecilia Motley (Chair)	Shropshire Council / Rural Services Network
Graham Biggs MBE	Rural Services Network
John Birtwistle	FirstGroup plc UK Bus Division
Cllr Peter Stevens	West Suffolk Council
Kerry Booth	Rural Services Network
Martin Collett	English Rural Housing Association
Cllr Robert Heseltine	North Yorkshire County Council
David Inman	Rural Services Network
Cllr Roger Phillips	Herefordshire Council
Cllr Jeremy Savage	South Norfolk Council
Cllr Peter Thornton	South Lakeland District Council
Nik Harwood	Young Somerset
Cllr Mary Robinson	Eden District Council

Apologies:

Cllr Sue Sanderson	Cumbria County Council
Cllr Philip Atkins OBE	Staffordshire County Council

2. Notes from the previous RSN Executive meeting held 11th January 2021. (Attachment 1)

Agreed as a correct record.

3. Notes from the previous SPARSE Rural meeting held 25th January 2021. (Attachment 2)

Agreed as a correct record of the meeting.

RSN will shortly be sending out a draft response to the NHB Consultation, which is in very general terms, as the preferred options will vary from authority to authority depending on their circumstances.

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4. Notes from the previous Rural Economy Sub Group meeting held on 25th January 2021. (Attachment 3)

Agreed as a correct record of the meeting.

There is a demonstration event for the Social Value Engine on 14th April which is solely for members of the RSN.

5. Rural/Market Town Group Update. (Attachment 4)

Report from David Inman, Corporate Director.

The group is progressing well and now has three specific groups within it:

- RMTG Councillor meeting
- RMTG Clerks Advisory Panel
- RMTG Clerks Steering Group

Cllr Peter Thornton raised the issue of the role of Town and Parish Councils in the areas where unitary authorities are being considered. It was suggested that such questions are directed towards NALC if they have specific issues around the process for specialist support. The RSN would consider the position of the role of Parish/Town Councils under Unitary arrangements when the Devolution White Paper was published.

In addition, there was consideration of when the group would all be invoiced, and everyone would be out of their 'free' subscription period to ensure that the group was covering its costs. The invoices will be going out in batches throughout the year (starting 1st April, 2021) depending on when councils joined.

6. Rural Village Services Group Update. (Attachment 5)

Report from David Inman, Corporate Director.

The Executive agreed with the following recommendations:

- Work to commence in the summer in relation to the areas listed, North Yorkshire, Buckinghamshire, Redcar / Cleveland, Wiltshire and Dorset. There is a total of 188 'parishes' involved.
- Communities in the Counties in the bands listed would be approached with a view to establishing the Group.
- Communities between 2,750 and 8,000 population would be given details of both the Village Service and the Rural/Market Town Service and allowed to choose between the two.
- However, communities of more than 8,000 population would normally solely be offered Rural/Market Town membership.

7. RSN Work Update & the Achievements Leaflet. (Attachment 6 & 6A)

Report from Kerry Booth, Assistant Chief Executive.

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The Executive noted the report which set out key areas of work which have been undertaken since the last Executive meeting and the meetings that the RSN has hosted.

8. Revitalising Rural: Realising the Vision.

Update on the campaign arrangements and report on the launch event.

- [Please click here to access campaign papers](#)
- [Revitalising Rural – Press Release](#)

The Chief Executive, Graham Biggs provided an overview of the campaign and the Parliamentary launch event which took place on 1st March 2021. It was a very positive event and the three sessions had excellent Chairs and Witnesses with the overall event Chaired by Philip Dunne MP. The document has been distributed widely across Whitehall to Ministers, Secretaries of State, Select Committee Chairs, APPG Chairs and key civil servants. Where appropriate we have offered meetings to discuss the issues further.

The RSN is currently considering how we continue with the campaign and keep it relevant for parliamentarians. We are going to task Brian Wilson to consider in the first instance a document relating to Young People, to explore all of the chapters of the campaign and the key issues that are relevant for young people. In time this would be followed by working age families, businesses and older people as key cross cutting themes.

This exercise would be followed by some specific work to develop case studies and bring the document and its themes to life, using videos.

It was suggested that we engage with Nik Harwood at the Case Study stage of this work on younger people and in addition organisations like the National Association of Young Farmers. It was felt that this approach would help us to engage with groups like the APPG on Young People to bring key messages from young people living in rural areas.

The approach was approved by the Executive.

9. Budget Report. (Attachment 7)

The Budget report was noted by the Executive.

Graham Biggs highlighted a particular issue for future consideration by the Executive where there are three areas, Cumbria, North Yorkshire, and Somerset currently being considered for reorganisation to create Unitary Councils. Even were the RSN able to retain the new organisations (bearing in mind that this is several years in the future), there would be a reduction in the income for the organisation due to losing the current mix of district and county authorities.

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Potential solutions such as an increase in fees, increase in membership across all of the different groupings of the RSN, charging premiums for some services were discussed as options and it was decided to wait until after the Devolution White Paper and more detail on the consultation arrangements for these areas to consider the issue.

An options report would be brought to the September meeting.

- 10. Comparing RSDG with the 2012 DCLG Consultation Exemplifications.** (Attachment 8)
Report from Graham Biggs MBE, Chief Executive.

The report is to note by the Executive and the Chief Executive concluded that the RSN will continue with its current argument in the fairer funding campaign, that RSDG should be increased and allocated to a wider group of local authorities than currently specified.

- 11. The Costs Associated with Remoteness – Pixel Questionnaire to Selected Authorities.** (Attachment 9)

The Executive noted this questionnaire which has been sent out by Pixel to selected authorities and will lead to a report which will be put to the Executive for consideration in due course.

- 12. Review of Government Strategies “Through a Rural Lens”.**
12.1. Skills for Jobs, Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth. (Attachment 10)

The RSN has recently published a range of ‘Rural Lens’ analyses of Government publications, and the most recent focuses on Skills for Jobs, Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth.

- 13. APPG on Rural Services: Letters sent to Matt Warmer (Digital Minister) and Chris Pincher (Housing Minister).** (Attachments 11 & 11A).

The Executive noted these two letters which were sent from the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Rural Services to two key ministers.

- 14. Green Book Study by Pragmatix Advisory.**
Copy of Press Release issued on 22nd February (Attachment 12).
[Article in Politics Home 5th March 2021.](#)

The Press Release and launch of the report by Pragmatix Advisory has gone well, and key messages will be used throughout the year in future campaigns to highlight the issues raised. The document has been distributed widely across Whitehall to Ministers, Secretaries of State, Select Committee Chairs, APPG Chairs and key civil servants. Where appropriate we have offered meetings to discuss the issues further.

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15. Budget 3rd March and Associated Documents – Levelling Up Fund Prospectus and UK Community Renewal Fund Prospectus.

Oral report from Graham Biggs MBE, Chief Executive.

Graham is currently considering the documents released by the Government in addition to the specific methodology released last week about how local authorities were prioritised. It would appear that the UK Community Renewal Fund will focus on supporting those most disengaged from the labour market and is linked to the economy, whereas the Levelling Up Fund is wider and considers cultural investment, transport and infrastructure. A Briefing Note and Key Rural Messages and Questions will be circulated to all members.

The RSN will carry out a survey of the membership in due course to explore whether they are bidding for the funds (and the barriers to doing so where relevant), whether they are successful and any rural good practice to share in future bidding rounds. This will also inform the RSN's views on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund in due course.

16. Any Other Business.

The next RSN Executive meeting date is Monday, 17th May 2021.

Current in consultation with membership on Schools National Funding Formula which is related to sparsity and appears beneficial.

The Launch of the Revitalising Rural Campaign for the membership of the RSN will take place on 29 March 2021. Members of the Executive were encouraged to book their place.

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