
Minutes

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

Incorporating SPARSE Rural Members, Rural Assembly and Rural Services Partnership Members. All nominated members & officers of RSN are invited to attend this meeting.

Venue: English Rural Housing Association,
7A Strutton Ground, Westminster, London, SW1P 2HY
Date: Monday, 16th of March 2020
Time: 11.15 am – 2.30 pm

[Please follow this link for the map of the venue.](#)

1. Attendance & Apologies

Attendance:

CLlr Roger Phillips	Herefordshire Council
Graham Biggs	RSN
John Birtwistle	First Group
Martin Collett	English Rural Housing Association

Remote attendance:

CLlr Cecilia Motley (Chair)	RSN & Shropshire Council
CLlr Jeremy Savage	South Norfolk District Council
Nadine Trout	RSN

Apologies:

CLlr Gill Heath	Staffordshire County Council
CLlr Mark Whittington	Lincolnshire County Council
CLlr Mary Robinson	Eden District Council
CLlr Peter Stevens	West Suffolk Council
CLlr Peter Thornton	South Lakeland District Council
CLlr Robert Heseltine	North Yorkshire County Council
CLlr Sue Sanderson	Cumbria County Council
CLlr Trevor Thorne	Northumberland County Council
David Inman	RSN
Kerry Booth	RSN
Nik Harwood	Young Somerset

Providing a voice for rural communities and service providers

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2. COVID-19

Agreed:

(a) Due to the ever-worsening situation it was agreed that all RSN & RSP meetings, regional meetings, seminars and rural strategy roadshows planned to take place until the end of April 2020 be cancelled/postponed. A decision about meetings from May onwards be taken by the Chief Executive in the light of prevailing Government advice.

(b) The Chief Executive and colleagues consider member engagement in the light of the prevailing situation.

3. Minutes from the previous RSN Executive meeting that took place on the 13th of January 2020. (Attachment 1)

Agreed as a correct record.

Arising out of the Minutes not elsewhere on the Agenda:

(a) Minute No 15. It was noted that the Meeting of the Fire Group planned for 11th March 2020 had been postponed until there was further information relating to funding issues.

(b) Minute No 17. It was noted that the West Midlands Regional Meeting/Seminar planned for 24th February 2020 had been postponed due to the flooding situation.

4. Minutes from the previous SPARSE Rural meeting that took place on the 27th of January 2020. (Attachment 2)

Noted.

5. Minutes from the previous Rural Economy Sub-Group meeting that took place on the 27th of January 2020. (Attachment 3)

Noted.

Arising out of Note 4.1 (i) The Chief Executive report that he had received from Cornwall Council the data circulated to LEPS by Defra.

Arising out of Note 4.4 The Chief Executive reported that the liaison with the Institute of Economic Development was continuing.

6. Fair Funding Review: Paper from Pixel (Attachment 4) and Letter Sent to Local Government Minister. (Attachment 4A)

The paper from Pixel circulated with the agenda was noted.

The Chief Executive reported that over the previous weekend he had received the “summary” paper from Pixel. He outlined the main issues – based on the Pixel modelling – District Members would be seriously affected by the proposals relating to sparsity/rurality in the Needs Formula if they proceed. It was agreed that at this time the RSN would not make an offer to MHCLG to carry out further research.

The letter of 25th February to the Local Government Minister was noted and supported.

Agreed:

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The summary paper, referred to by the Chief Executive, and the tables of impact at authority level to be circulated to the Executive; after which it would be circulated to all SPARSE-Rural members suggesting they might wish to brief their MPs. The Chair of the Rural Fair Share would be taking the issue up with Ministers.

7. RSN Budget Report. (Attachment 5)

The Budget report was noted. The Chief Executive reported that virtually all subscriptions (RSN & RSP) had now been received. The balance at the end of the Financial Year (31st March 2020) was likely to be slightly bigger than that indicated in the report.

In answer to a comment from Martin Collett the Chief Executive agreed that the format of the budget would be simplified for 2020-2021 onwards.

8. British Standards Institute Proposal “Successful Rural Communities”.
(Attachment 6)

The British Standards Institute (BSI) has been in touch to explore how we might work with them on a new project, the brief outline of which is attached.

The report and documentation were noted.

9. LGA Special Interest Group – Rural Services Network. (Attachment 7)

Recent email from Marion Stribling, Member Services, LGA.

It was noted that the LGA’s Leadership Board agreed last year that SIGs (which includes the RSN) would be formed for 5 years after which each SIG would have to make a case to the Leadership Board for the SIG to continue. Annual Reports would continue to be required in the meantime.

10. Rural Services APPG and Rural Fair Share Group – Update. (Attachment 8)

The Minutes of the APPG AGM held on 28th January 2020 were noted.

Item 6 above had dealt with the Rural Fair Funding Group whose new Chair was Derek Thomas MP.

11. MHCLG First Homes Consultation. (Attachment 9)

Agreed:

That the RSN respond to this Consultation along the lines of the Briefing Note prepared by Jo Lavis for ACRE.

Martin Collett referred to the Planning for the Future Paper from MHCLG and agreed to send details to the Chief Executive. This was an area where the RSN, the Rural Housing Alliance and other rural interest groups needed, as far as possible, to take a common view.

12. Carbon Net Zero and Rural Communities. (Attachment 10)

The briefing paper prepared by ACRE for its membership and the Rural Coalition was noted.

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- 13. Queens Speech Briefing Related to RSN Priorities.** (Attachment 11 & 11A)
This document was noted.
Close attention would be paid to the legislation as it was introduced into, and progressed through, Parliament.
The Chair reported on the meeting held on 3rd March 2020 with members of the (former) House of Lords Select Committee on the Rural Economy and some other Peers with whom the RSN liaised. They were prepared to continue to press the need for a Rural Strategy at every opportunity.
- 14. Rural Strategy: Draft Project Plan for Further Work.** (Attachment 12)
Agreed:
(a) The Project Plan to be agreed.
(b) That the Chief Executive consider opportunities for engagement with members on this – especially in the light of planned meetings having to be cancelled for some time to come.
- 15. Membership Engagement Plan: Report by Nadine Trout.** (Attachment 13, 13A & 13B)
Nadine Trout, the recently appointed Member Development and Support Manager for the RSN, introduced herself and gave details of her background.
Nadine took the Executive through the Membership Engagement Plan and the rationale behind it.
The Executive were 100% supportive of the proposals and again re-enforced the need for member engagement and that the RSN was still working on their behalf in these turbulent times.
Agreed:
The Membership Engagement Plan to be approved and the Member Development and Support Manager be tasked to deliver the plan.
- 16. Any Other Business.**
John Birtwistle referred to the APPG Minutes and a County APPG inquiry launched on 6th March to investigate the decline in rural bus services. He also referred to the plethora of new funding streams and the proposed National Bus Strategy. He agreed to prepare a briefing note on these issues by Mid-April.
John also suggested Ben Colson as a Plenary Speaker at the Conference. His theme would be along the lines of “Professionalisation of Community Transport”. The Chief Executive agreed to look into this.
Cllr Roger Phillips report that The Fire Authorities (not just Rural) had funded a post as a Lead Finance Officer (an Officer from Devon & Cornwall Authority) to input views into the upcoming Spending Review.

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