

MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE OF THE RURAL SERVICES NETWORK

MONDAY 16th SEPTEMBER AT THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION, SMITH SQUARE, LONDON

Present: Cllr Cecilia Motley, (Chair for Meeting), Cllr Robert Heseltine, Cllr Derek Haley, Cllr Peter Stevens, Cllr Hilary Carrick, John Birtwistle (Transport), Richard Kirlew (Community), Stuart Horne (Business), Barbara Shaw (Community)

Officers present - David Inman, Dan Bates

Apologies: Cllr Roger Begy (Chairman), Cllr Mac Cotterell, Cllr Alex Folkes (Cornwall), Cllr Peter Thornton, Cllr Gordon Nicholson, Graham Biggs

- ITEMS FROM PREVIOUS MEETING – 24th June 2013
 - Rural England Steering Group
The Rural Commission of the LGA had also been involved.
 - Corporation Tax on RSP “profits”
Stuart Horne detailed discussions he had had with the Chief Executive. It was felt that whilst there was no alternative this year matters would be arranged in a different way by the auditor which may avoid the situation re-occurring, but there was no certainty.
 - Working with Others
A meeting with the CCN at officer level was detailed. It was felt that the organisations should be able to work and liaise together very successfully.
 - Party Conferences
A discussion note on the rural case would be formulated for the Conservative conference.
 - Prince’s Countryside Fund Bid
The bid had been unsuccessful.
 - Unitary Group
A group within a group had been formed. It comprised Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Cornwall, East Riding, Herefordshire, Lincolnshire, North Somerset, Rutland, Shropshire with hopefully Isle of Wight and Wiltshire also involved.
 - Highway and Street Lighting
This appeared to be a problem for North West Councils only. It would be taken up through the APPG.
 - Broadband
Again the APPG would be consulted.

- BUDGET STATEMENT 2012/13 – 2013/14

The budget, as prepared by the Chief Executive, was considered by the meeting. The Group was running a comprehensive programme and although the budget for 2012/13 was on target, the programme for 2013/14 would be more robust if there was a stronger input from all those who have benefitted financially from the Group's work. A number of Councils who had benefited financially had not, to date, joined the group and the position of the group would be stronger and more could be achieved if their support was forthcoming. It was agreed that there should be a programme of approach from the Councillor members of the Executive to the appropriate Portfolio Holders of these authorities. Such a programme would be formulated and would, where it was possible, involve the appropriate MP members of the APPG.

The proposed budget for the 13/14 would be put to the AGM. The position relating to the 12/13 budget was formally noted.

- DCLG GRANT CONSULTATION

The position was fully set out by Dan Bates together with details of a recent meeting of the Settlement Working Group.

- The draft response put before the Executive was formally agreed
- Discussions would take place with consultant Neil Benn to seek to establish an overall position that gave the context to this consultative response and set out for members an overview of the rural position and the request to Government.

- RURAL FAIR SHARES CAMPAIGN

- Petition

The target was to achieve a petition that involved 80 rural constituencies. The petition closes at the end of September and it was anticipated most papers would be sent to Graham Stuart's office towards the 30th. Currently 25 constituencies were involved. The Director detailed to the meeting the measures that had been undertaken to make sure Council Leaders and their Authorities responded.

- £500 Contribution update

A request had been made to member authorities for a £500 contribution to assist with the detailed representations process currently being undertaken. Fifty authorities had agreed to contribute and those who had not declined were being approached. It was known that a very strong lobby was being organised by urban authorities and the rural situation needed to be outlined in considerable detail.

Action Plan

The Action Plan as prepared by the Chief Executive was presented. The Executive felt it was very comprehensive. The Officers were thanked and congratulated on all that was being done for the rural authorities and organisations.

- RURAL ENGLAND & PATRON

The Steering Group's first full meeting is on the 11th November in London. It would comprise former Commission for the Rural Communities Commissioners (and one Director) and representatives of the five main rural organisations outside the RSN. Its brief was research and rural information away from the representation work mostly undertaken by RSN.

A meeting had recently taken place with Ian Baker, leading for the proposed Rural Evidence Exchange Consortium, to see if that initiative could be brought towards the Rural England package. The possibility of a package might present conceivable advantages from both parties viewpoint was now being considered in some detail. If such a proposal was considered to be in the overall interest of the RSN the Executive would be consulted on the intended detail.

To date there had been no success with attempts to establish a patronage package which was felt to be a pre-requisite of successful approaches for sponsorship. It was felt it may be appropriate for the Steering Group to personally make approaches.

- POST OFFICE AND ROYAL MAIL PRIVITISATION

The Executive considered a paper from Councillor Ken Potter of East Devon on his concerns for the Post Office service around the privatisation of the Post Office. It was agreed the Councillor would be invited to the AGM (18th November) for the meeting to discuss the situation. Brian Wilson who had been representing the RSN on a working group would also be in attendance.

- PROGRESS ON SERVICE GROUPS

- (a) Housing

Discussions were being held with the Rural Housing Alliance (a forty strong group of rural housing associations) to establish whether RSN could enter into a working relationship with them to supplement work being undertaken with the Chartered Initiative of Housing.

- (b) Health

A report was given about the forthcoming Rural Health Conference to be held in Exeter on the 18th October and the grouping that it was hoped could be established through that which could potentially involve over 40 organisations.

- (c) Crime

Nick Payne (Director – Rural Services Partnership) was working on a grouping which it was hoped would see a grouping of Police Commissioners working with RSN, the Countryside Alliance, the National Community Safety Network, Farmers Weekly and hopefully the NFU Mutual to give a higher profile on rural crime and the fear of crime through a Rural Crime Network. Nick was giving a presentation to the NCSN annual conference on the 18th September. He would then seek to constitute a grouping of Commissioners.

(d) Fire

A rural grouping of 12 Fire and Rescue Services had been constituted. They would be responding to the Sir Ken Knight consultation report into a suggested future direction for Fire Services. They would also be involved in responding to the DCLG consultation exercise and be playing a role from a Fire perspective in the Fairer Funding Campaign. (next meeting 21st November)

(e) Transport

It had not been possible to constitute a RSP grouping of Transport organisations because of conflicting franchise interests. John Birtwistle suggested it would be a positive step however to constitute a group of Transport Officers respecting the rural perspective. He felt there was the clear absence of such a group that sometimes meant that the rural voice in respect of countryside transport issues was not articulated. The Executive agreed to hold an inaugural meeting to see whether there was interest amongst officers and if so to plan how the concept could be taken forward.

- TRANPOSRT SELECT COMMITTEE

John Birtwistle tabled an intended response from First Group to this select committee looking at their view of the rural perspective. The response was agreed by the Executive.

- LGA PAPER REDUCTION REQUEST

The LGA was seeking to reduce paper and postage costs. They had been consulting with Special Interest Groups and the Rural Commission. It was agreed the LGA would:

- (a) Cease sending the minutes separately and instead they would be e-mailed after meetings and then included in agendas.
- (b) Include links and/or e-mail attachments of presentations and documents rather than adding them in hard copy.
- (c) Formulate a policy on the number of agendas requested to be printed at the AGM on the 18th November.

- SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS

The following was agreed for 2014, all hopefully at the LGA, and all to start at 11.30am.

Main Meetings

Monday 17th March 2014

Monday 14th July 2014

Monday 17th November 2014

Executive

Monday 20th January 2014

Monday 23rd June 2014

Monday 15th September 2014

11. TAXATION OF COUNCIL TRAVELLING

Eden District Council had been in contact expressing concern about the way the present situation, in their view, discriminated against rural councillors. They were required to travel further because the area was greater. THE HMRC taxed on after a flat rate allowance that made no allowance for this. It was agreed officers would discuss the position with the LGA and see if they were prepared to take up this matter.