
Agenda

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

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

Hosted: Online via Zoom
Date: Monday, 17th May 2021
Time: 11:15am – 2:30pm

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

- 1. Attendance & Apologies.**
- 2. Notes from the previous RSN Executive meeting.** (Attachment 1)
Held on 15th March 2021 to consider any relevant updates and approve the minutes.
- 3. Summary of Previous RSN Meetings.** (Attachment 2)
Report from Kerry Booth, Assistant Chief Executive on attendance, key points, policy work.
- 4. Update on Work with Local Councils.** (Attachment 3)
Report from David Inman, Corporate Director with updates on Rural/Market Town Group & Rural Village Services Group.
- 5. National Rural Conference 2021.**
Verbal report from Kerry Booth, Assistant Chief Executive.
- 6. Revitalising Rural: Realising the Vision.**
Update on the campaign.
 - [Please click here to access campaign papers](#)¹
 - [Revitalising Rural – Press Release](#)²
- 7. Budget Reports.** (Attachments 4 & 5)
- 8. Rural Lens Review of National Bus Strategy & Build Back Better Strategy.**

¹ <https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/revitalising-rural>

² <https://rsnonline.org.uk/government-urged-to-give-people-in-villages-the-same-opportunity-as-those-living-in-bigger-towns-and-cities>

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[Bus Back Better - Rural Lens](#)³

9. **Rural Coalition Response to the Government's Rural Proofing Report.** (Attachment 6)
10. **Work by Pragmatix - Reviewing Various Recent New Funding Streams.**
Verbal progress report from Graham Biggs MBE, Chief Executive.
11. **Commissioned work from Pixel on Remoteness and Fire Funding Formula.**
Verbal progress reports from Graham Biggs MBE, Chief Executive.
12. **Any Other Business.**
The next RSN Executive & RSP Directors' meeting date is Monday, 27th September 2021.

³ <https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/bus-back-better-rural-lens>



Agenda

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

Hosted: Online via Zoom

Date: Monday, 15th March 2021

Time: 10:45am – 2:00pm

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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RSN Work March – May 2021

Report to the RSN Executive (Monday, 17th May 2021)
from Kerry Booth, Assistant Chief Executive

Aim

To provide the Executive with an update on meetings hosted and supported by the RSN since the last Executive meeting along with key campaigns and work carried out.

To date in 2021 we have hosted the following meetings

Event	Who can attend	Date	Attendees			
			LA	RSP	RMTG	TOTAL
Launch to membership of Revitalising Rural Campaign ¹	Sparse/Rural Assembly/RSP/RHCA/RMTG	29.03.21.21	45	25	11	81
RMTG Members Meeting ²	RMTG Councillors	29.03.21	-	-	40	40
Seminar on Rural Digital Connectivity	Sparse/Rural Assembly/RSP/RHCA/RMTG	31.03.21	34	14	8	56
Rural Social Care and Health Sub-Group meeting ³	Sparse/Rural Assembly/RSP/RHCA	12.04.21	13	8	-	21
Demo of Social Value Engine (hosted by East Riding)	Sparse/Rural Assembly/RSP/RHCA	14.04.21	15	15	-	+ 1 non member = 31
APPG	Invited MP's from APPG Group	26.04.21			-	23
RSP Vulnerability Group	RSP	27.04.21	-	3	-	3
Seminar on Rural Decarbonisation	Sparse/Rural Assembly/RSP/RHCA/RMTG	28.04.21	42	16	9	+ 2 = 69
RSN & DCMS Social Meeting	Sparse/Rural Assembly/RSP/RHCA	10.05.21	Not yet held at time of report writing			

**Not including RSN Staff or Speakers*

Key points to note

- The seminar programme was changed in Autumn 2020 to remove the regional element to the sessions and enable a wider audience across the Rural Services Network membership to attend.

¹ <https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/revitalising-rural/launch-report.pdf>

² <https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/minutes-of-the-rural-market-town-group-meeting-29th-march-2021>

³ <https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/rural-health-and-social-care-sub-group-meeting-12-april-2021>

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- Meetings in 2021 have been well attended to date by those entitled to join through their type of membership.
- There has been increase in RMTG booking onto seminars, this will be monitored for future events to ensure that Local Authorities and Rural Services Partnership Members are able to attend.

Wider Campaigns and Work

- All Party Parliamentary Group meeting was held in April and Baroness Vere of Norbiton, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Transport attended. Discussion focused on the National Bus Strategy.
- Sustainable Warmth: Protecting Vulnerable Households In England', Policy Paper (BEIS) - Rural Lens analysis of this paper published.
- Bus Back Better – Rural Lens analysis of this paper published.
- Government published response to Consultation on Changes to the Planning System – RSN held a specific event with member organisations in Autumn 2020 to formulate response to this consultation. Govt has indicated that it will not raise the threshold for affordable housing to 40 dwellings which was a key point of concern for RSN members.
- House of Lords Select Committee on Covid-19 published a report into 'Living Online: the long-term impact on wellbeing'. RSN consulted members and submitted a response to this inquiry. The RSN is quoted twice in the report.
- RSN Staff have accessed support provided by Cosmic through ERDF to develop social media and website improvement work.
- Invoicing of RSP and Local Authorities has been sent out.
- Pragmatix Advisory have been commissioned to research into place-based funding, the research is entitled, 'Towards the Shared Prosperity Fund'.
- Meeting held with Chief Executive Graham Biggs, with Minister for Digital Matt Warman MP to discuss Rural Digital Connectivity.
- Subsequent event arranged for RSN members with senior civil servant focusing on hard-to-reach rural areas and connectivity.

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Update on Work with Local Councils

Report to the RSN Executive (Monday, 17th May 2021)

from David Inman, Corporate Director

1. This note seeks to update members about work in this area.
2. Work on the **Rural /Market Town Grouping** commenced in the autumn of 2019 and a **Rural Village Services Grouping** was agreed by the Executive at their meeting in January this year.
3. In terms of the **Rural Market Towns Grouping**, we have currently a membership of 223 members. This membership level is no doubt inflated somewhat by the fact that throughout the COVID period with its various lockdowns it has been obvious that to 'sell' membership (even at the relatively low subscription levels) would be very difficult and we have given a free period of introductory membership in various trenches throughout the past year. The test will be how many of these newer members have the appetite to remain with us on a subscription basis and that will be tested as those trenches come forward to subscription in May/June, August, and October, respectively. However, we have only approached maybe approximately one half of the number of rural towns that there are in England so we are optimistic we will when all that is done have established a strong and sustainable group from across the country.
4. In relation to the **Rural Village Service Grouping** members will recall that we set as a middle line for membership a parish population of 2,750 and that our approaches would be either above that figure or down towards the 2,000-population figure. We also said we would look particularly at approaches in certain Counties. We have done some work in this area. One of the problems currently is that only consistent set of figures across the country are those provided through the 2011 census. (We have of course just had the 2021 Census but it maybe sometime before revised community figures are issued.) There has been material growth in some parishes/villages in the past ten years so it maybe that in some villages a 1500 population figure has grown by as much as 25%. Taking therefore 1500 at 2011 as the normal absolute base line for approaches we have done work across counties of varying characteristic to see how many parishes we will be approaching in these 9 counties. Here are the results of that work.

Bedfordshire 120 parishes in total 18 at 1500 to 2750 11 at 2750 to 4,000 15 at 4,000 + TOTAL* over 1500 = 44 = 36%**	Buckinghamshire 142 parishes in total 15 at 1500 to 2750 23 at 2750 to 4,000 27 at 4,000+ TOTAL over 1500 = 65 = 47%
Cornwall 203 parishes in total 19 at 1500 to 2750 16 at 2750 to 4,000 32 at 4,000 + TOTAL over 1500 = 67 = 33%	Dorset 200 parishes in total 10 at 1500 to 2750 10 at 2750 to 4,000 12 at 4,000+ TOTAL over 1500 = 32 = 16%
Gloucestershire 260 parishes in total 19 at 1500 to 2750 12 at 2750 to 4,000 26 at 4,000+ TOTAL over 1500 = 57 = 26%	Herefordshire 134 parishes in total 8 at 1500 to 2750 1 at 2750 to 4,000 5 at 4,000 + TOTAL over 1500 = 14 = 11%

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North Yorkshire 585 parishes in total 21 at 1500 to 2750 9 at 2750 to 4,000 29 at 4,000 + TOTAL over 1500 = 59 = c10 %	Redcar and Cleveland 5 parishes in total 0 at 1500 to 2750 2 at 2750 to 4,000 3 at 4,000 + TOTAL over 1500 = 5 = 100%
Wiltshire 232 parishes in total 20 at 1500 to 2750 10 at 2750 to 4,000 11 at 4,000+ TOTAL over 1500 = 41 = 18%	

(*Total of Rural Parishes with more than 1500 people in the 2011 Census. ** Percentage of parishes with over 1500 population as a percentage of the total number of parishes in the County/Unitary as a whole.)

5. We will be approaching through different routes based on our own feelings from available information on the seeming character of the community involved. These are routes:
 - Giving invitation for the Rural Village Grouping only
 - Giving the local Council the choice of choosing between membership of the Village Group and the Market Town Group
 - Giving invitation of the Rural/Market Town Grouping (some parishes/ villages are high in population terms and, where that it is the case, it is best if the approach is on that basis).
Hopefully in that way with can avoid over mixing and matching.
6. The process moves ahead and we very much hope produces a picture for our principal council member of ourselves as the recognised rural advocate in terms of our rural service role, and of the importance of the organisation across tiers in that role. We will keep the Executive updated.

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	A	B	C	D	E	F
1						
2						Attachment 4
3						
4	The Rural Services Partnership Limited					
5	Budget vs. Actuals: RURAL SERVICES PARTNERSHIP - FY21 P&L					
6	April 2020 - March 2021					
7	AS AT END FINANCIAL YEAR 2020/2021 ACCRUAL BASIS					
8		Total				
9		2020/21 ACTUAL 31/03//21	2020/21 REVISED BUDGET	2020/21 ACTUAL v BUDGET	ESTIMATED BUDGET 2021/22	2020/21 VARIATION DUE TO
10	INCOME	£	£	£	£	
11	Coastal communities contract income	5,644.68	5,557.00	87.68	5758.00	
12	National rural conference	2,608.02	2,608.00	0.02	5000.00	
13	RHCA Membership	19,279.04	27,883.00	-8603.96	23743.00	DEBTOR C/FWD
14	RSP Membership	19,272.08	17,977.00	1295.08	20642.00	
15	Rural England Annual Re CHARGES	7,706.00	7,006.00	700.00	6835.00	
16	Rural England project support	600.00	1,300.00	-700.00	1800.00	LESS SUPPORT CALLED ON
17	Rural fire and rescue	3,917.00	3,917.00	0.00	3995.00	
18	Rural housing group subscriptions	6,400.00	6,400.00	0.00	7318.00	
19	Rural housing group website	915.00	915.00	0.00		
20	Rural Strategy Income	11,847.92	11,848.00	-0.08		
21	Rural Towns Group	10,160.00	10,676.00	-516.00	11000.00	DEBTOR C/FWD
22	SPARSE - Rural general grant	309,918.00	310632.00	-714.00	300463.00	DEBTOR C/FWD
23	Strategic partnering arrangements	10,000.00	10,000.00	0.00	10000.00	
24	DEBTOR FROM 2020/21 VAT REFUND			0.00	3403.96	
25	Total Income	408267.74	416719.00		399957.96	
26	Cost of Sales					
27	GROSS WAGES	229,951.64	227471.00	2480.64	241421.00	

	A	B	C	D	E	F
28	Total Cost of Sales	229,951.64	227471.00	2480.64	241421.00	
29	Gross Profit	178316.10	189248.00		158536.96	
30	Expenses					
31	Accountancy	1763.00	1,763.00	0.00	1820.00	
32	Bank charges	102.95	95.00	7.95	105.00	
33	Coastal communities contract	5,724.13	5,721.00	3.13	4000.00	
34	Communications	29,169.50	29,616.00	-446.50	36000.00	
35	Databases	6,221.40	6,000.00	221.40	6180.00	
36	EMPLOYER Pension contributions	5,195.42	5194.00	1.42	4944.12	
37	Employer's NI contributions	10,238.18	12686.00	-2447.82	11417.72	CREDITOR C/FWD
38	Fair Funding Work external support	9,875.00	27500.00	-17625.00	18000.00	LESS ACTIVITY: TRANSFER TO RESERVE
39	Insurance	1,485.78	1486.00	-0.22	780.00	
40	IT Support	328.77	330.00	-1.23	700.00	
41	Legal and professional fees	1,090.42	1090.00	0.42	13.00	
42	Meeting Room Hire		0.00	0.00	500.00	
43	Nat Centre RHC	7,631.00	7631.00	0.00	7784.00	
44	National rural conference expenses		1500.00	-1500.00	1500.00	NO EXTERNAL COSTS 2020/21
45	Printing, postage stationery & phone	3,488.91	3100.00	388.91	3750.00	
46	Professional subscriptions	482.00	482.00	0.00	550.00	
47	Rent and service charge	7,967.86	8700.00	-732.14	9986.00	
48	RSN ONLINE - Website	295.00	295.00	0.00		
49	Rural England Service	7,000.00	7000.00	0.00	7000.00	
50	Rural housing group website expenses	167.88	168.00	-0.12	175.00	
51	Rural Strategy/Rural Policy Expenses	28,613.17	25000.00	3613.17	18000.00	SEE NOTE BELOW
52	Travel and subsistence	-85.58	0.00	-85.58	5000.00	
53	HOUSING	119.88	0.00	119.88	500.00	
54	Parliamentary		0.00	0.00	800.00	
55	TOTAL	126874.67	145357.00		139504.84	
56	Corporation Tax			-1000.00	4500.00	NO TAX DUE 2020/21

	A	B	C	D	E	F
57	Uncategorised Expenditure	32.00	32.00			
58	Uncategorised Expense @ RHCA	510.00		510.00		
59	CAPITAL ITEMS IT EQUIPMENT	2265.00	2265.00			
60	TOTAL EXPENSES	129681.67	147654.00	-490.00	144004.84	
61	Net Operating Income	48634.43	41594.00		14532.12	
62	Sundry income RHCA Overpayment @	510.00	510.00			
63	Sundry Income Insurance Refund @	467.89	467.89			
64	DEBTORS DUE 31/03/2021					
65	RMTG	150.00				
66	RHCA	9030.00				
67	Net Income	58792.32	42571.89		14532.12	
68	GENERAL FUND BALANCE B/FWD	18901.00	18901.00		51833.57	
69	FAIR FUNDING RESERVE B/FWD				17625.00	
70	RURAL POLICY RESERVE B/FWD				8234.75	
71	BALANCE CARRIED FORWARD	77693.32	61472.89		92225.44	
72	TFR TO FAIR FUNDING RESERVE	-17625.00				
73	TFR TO RURAL POLICY RESERVE	-8234.75				
74	GENERAL FUND CARRIED FWD	51833.57				
75						
76	RURAL POLICY RESERVE ANALYSIS					
77	2020/21 BUDGET PROVISION	25000.00				
78	ADD INCOME IN YEAR	11847.92				
79	LESS EXPENDITURE IN YEAR	-28613.17				
80						
81	BALANCE C/FORWARD TO 2021/22	8234.75				
82						
83						
84	RE ANNUAL CHARGES INCOME BREAKDOWN					
85						

	A	B	C	D	E	F
86	Back Office		1457.00		1485.00	
87	Staff Costs (Incl Vuln Panels)		3000.00		3000.00	
88	Website		2332.00		2350.00	
89						
90	TOTAL		6789.00		6835.00	
91						
92	RE PROJECT INCOME BREAKDOWN					
93	Toolkit		500.00			
94	Utility Vulnerability Panel		800.00		800.00	
95	SORS				300.00	
96	Unspecified				700.00	
97						
98	TOTAL		1300.00		1800.00	

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1							
2						Attachment 5	
3							
4		RSP BUDGET 2020/21					
5		NOTE AS TO MAIN VARIATIONS FROM ORGINAL BUDGET COMPARED TO ACTUAL					
6		NB ORIGINAL BUDGET AS AT JANUARY 2020 (Pre COVID)					
7							
8		NB					
9			1 All figures Rounded				
10			2 Debtors/Creditors into 2021/22 Excluded				
11							
12		INCOME	LESS	MORE	COMMENT	NET	
13			INCOME	INCOME		SUM	
14			ACHIEVED	ACHIEVED			
15			£	£		£	
16		RSP Subs	-1458				
17		RHCA SUBS		5376			
18		Housing Group Subs	-1291				
19		RMT Subs		3310			
20		Coastal communities		1200	Offest by Balance B/Fwd		
21		Rural Conference Surplus	-11300				
22		Rural Strategy/Policy		11848	Slightly Offest by Increased Expenditure		
23		Sparse/Assembly Subs		8291			
24		Employers NIC		1013			
25		Rural England Project Support	-2650				
26							
27		TOTAL RE INCOME	-16699	31038		14339	
28							
29		EXPENDITURE	MORE	LESS	COMMENT	NET SUM	
30			EXPENDITURE	EXPENDITURE			
31			INCURRED	INCURRED			

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
32			£	£		£	
33		Wages/Contracts		19375			
34		Databases		1000			
35		Fair FundingExternal Support		5125	Transfer to Reserve		
36		Legal & Professional Fees	-1077				
37		Meeting Expenses		7200			
38		Print, Postage & Stationery		1000			
39		Rent & Service Charge		1832			
40		Rural Conference		1200			
41		Rural Strategy/Policy	-5400		Offset by Income. Balance to Reserve		
42		Travel & Subsistence		21300			
43		Corporation Tax		300			
44							
45		TOTAL RE EXPENDITURE	-6477	58332		51855	
46							
47		TOTAL BENEFICIAL IMPACT ON BUDGET FROM MAIN VARIATIONS				66194	
48							
49		ORIGINAL ESTIMATED BALANCE CARRIED FORWARD TO 2021/22				13933	
50		ACTUAL BALANCE CARRIED FORWARD TO 2021/22				81687	
51							
52		INCREASE IN BALANCE C/FWD				67754	



RURAL PROOFING IN ENGLAND 2020 REPORT

COMMENTS FROM THE RURAL COALITION

In March 2021 the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) published its first annual rural proofing report, *Rural Proofing in England 2020*¹. In doing so, it invited contributions or comments from rural stakeholders and residents. This note is the comments from the Rural Coalition, whose members are the thirteen organisations listed at the end.

The context for Defra's report is a commitment made by the Government in July 2019 in its response to a report from the House of Lords Select Committee on the Rural Economy. In that response² the Government rejected a key Select Committee recommendation, that it should develop a Rural Strategy. Instead, it said that "over the coming months, the government will expand on its strategic vision [for rural areas]". It also reaffirmed its "clear commitment that all policies be 'rural proofed'" and stated that "Defra will therefore publish each year an evidence-based report on rural proofing". No expanded strategic vision for rural areas has yet been published.

The following comments represent the joint views of the Rural Coalition. Individual members may have also commented separately.

Comments on the 2020 rural proofing report

- **Publication:** the Rural Coalition welcomes publication of this first annual *Rural Proofing in England* report. We acknowledge that Defra has made progress with certain processes intended to assist rural proofing, by identifying lead rural proofing officers in other Whitehall departments, by further developing its rural evidence base, by supporting rural academic research and by engaging regularly with rural stakeholders like ourselves.
- **Timeframe:** we would have expected an annual report for 2020 to focus on policies which were developed, launched or implemented during that year. We do not think it should be citing policies from earlier periods, such as the Early Years National Funding Formula from 2017 and the rural affairs strategy of the National Police Chiefs' Council from 2018. Similarly, we do not think it should be citing policies commenced only in 2021, such as the call for evidence on digital connectivity in hard-to-reach areas issued in March 2021 and the launch of the Community Ownership Fund in March 2021. It is important these annual reports adopt a consistent timeframe and, as the process evolves, they should examine the real impacts for rural communities of rural proofing which was cited in previous years.
- **Generic policies:** many policies cited in the report are national policies, where it is hard to point to anything about their design or implementation that adjusts for rural needs or mitigates for rural circumstances or even capitalises on rural opportunities. Describing the benefits of these generic policies the report falls back on phrases such as, "including in rural

¹ *Rural Proofing in England 2020 – Delivering policy in a rural context*, Defra (2021)

² *Government Response to the House of Lords Select Committee on the Rural Economy: "Time for a strategy for the rural economy"* (2019)

and remote areas”. Examples include references to international trade support and social care recruitment. A nationally applicable policy is not necessarily a rural proofed policy and there is no evidence provided that rural proofing took place.

- **Transparency:** more generally, we found it hard, from the material in the report, to understand how, or even whether, rural proofing influenced policy making by departments. The rural proofing process has been outlined in Defra guidance³ written for other departments, but it is not clear whether this guidance has been applied. We would expect an evidence-based report to show the rural thinking behind policies and the rural outcomes that resulted.
- **Scope:** we acknowledge the fairly broad scope of this report, in terms of the policies that it cites. However, since the Government’s rural proofing commitment applies to all (domestic) departments and their policies for England, we had expected to see more about the work of certain key departments. Four whose policies are only briefly referred to are HM Treasury, Home Office, Department of Work and Pensions and Ministry of Justice, all of whom have a significant impact on the lives of rural people and the operation of rural businesses.
- **Natural environment:** rural communities and many rural businesses benefit substantively from the quality of the natural environment in their localities. Having a section in the report on the natural environment is therefore justified. However, Defra for this reason also needs to rural proof its own policy making, for its likely impact on rural communities. It is unclear whether this has happened with the natural environment policies cited. In our view, the fact that rural communities live close to open countryside is not in itself evidence that those policies demonstrate rural proofing.
- **Outcomes:** we consider some of the rural proofing outcomes claimed in the report to be over-stated or over-simplified. We would be concerned if these were seen as good practice examples of rural proofing. For example, the flexibility given to local planning authorities to require an affordable housing contribution from small development sites applies only to ‘designated rural areas’ which comprise just 30% of small rural settlements. Similarly, the policy aim, to deliver gigabit-capable broadband to at least 85% of premises by 2025, could be met without provision reaching most rural premises.

Looking ahead

Despite our reservations about the *Rural Proofing in England 2020* report, we recognise it offers a starting point for an annual reporting process. In future years, we would expect to see the reports:

- Relating more obviously to rural proofing that has happened during the reporting year;
- Offering a more transparent picture of rural proofing, how it has been applied and its outcomes; and
- Providing more tangible evidence of rural proofing across all departments.

We recognise that these reports must not become over-long. One option would be to pepper the text with some more detailed examples illustrating how rural proofing was applied and its results.

Equally, we recognise that policies made in one year can lead to tangible outcomes in the following or future years. Where appropriate, it would be helpful to report back on the delivery results of rural proofing policy decisions that were cited in previous years’ reports.

³ *Rural Proofing: Practical guidance to assess impacts of policies on rural areas*, Defra (2017)

Future reports should, as a matter of course, include evidence about the rural proofing of all Government legislation and all White Papers.

In addition, we would expect to see sufficient evidence of rural proofing on key Government agendas, especially levelling up those places and communities which have been left behind and enabling the nation to follow its trajectory towards the 2050 net zero target.

Defra has shared with the Rural Coalition its list of five priority areas for its future rural proofing support activity. We appreciate the principle that the core of Defra's support effort on rural proofing, provided to other departments, needs focussing if it is to be manageable, but we were disappointed that neither health nor transport policies were on that list. At the same time, we still expect all departments to undertake rural proofing across their policy work and to demonstrate that they have done so.

The following are likely to be some of the most significant policy developments for rural communities in the coming year and, therefore, should feature in the 2021 report:

- The Comprehensive Spending Review
- UK Shared Prosperity Fund (in England)
- Planning reform following the Planning White Paper
- Further NHS restructuring and policy reforms
- Government public procurement policy (post-EU)
- The implementation of Project Gigabit
- The implementation of the National Bus Strategy and Future of Transport programme
- The Heat and Buildings Strategy
- The Devolution White Paper
- The Tourism Strategy

In applying rural proofing, we look to all Government departments (and not just Defra) to engage with stakeholder organisations with expertise on the rural affairs agenda, in order to benefit from their perspectives. This will help departments to meet the aims described in Defra's rural proofing guidance:

"Rural proofing aims to understand the impacts of government policy intervention and to ensure fair and equitable policy outcomes for rural areas. Rural proofing is about finding the best ways to deliver policies in rural areas."

Finally – importantly – during 2021 we urge the Government to develop and publish its expanded vision for rural areas in England and to include within this a commitment to fair funding for rural areas and equitable access to public services for rural people. Without clarification of its policy priorities and objectives the Government's commitment to rural proofing is weakened. An expanded vision will provide the framework for engaging with rural stakeholders and partners, whilst the policy actions that ought to flow from it will help rural areas contribute fully towards national recovery and wellbeing.

Members of the Rural Coalition: Action with Communities in Rural England, CPRE – The Countryside Charity, Country Land and Business Association, The Arthur Rank Centre, National Association of Local Councils, National Centre for Rural Health and Care, National Farmers Union, National Housing Federation, Plunkett Foundation, Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, Royal Town Planning Institute, Rural Services Network, Town and Country Planning Association.

President: Rt Revd Dr Alan Smith, Bishop of St Albans

Chair: Margaret Clark CBE

Rural Coalition May 2021