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## Minutes

### 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.

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

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#### 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 Jeremy Savage	South Norfolk Council

##### Apologies:

Cllr Roger Phillips	Herefordshire Council
Nik Harwood	Young Somerset
Cllr Mary Robinson	Eden District Council
Cllr Sue Sanderson	Cumbria County Council
Cllr Peter Thornton	South Lakeland District Council

#### 2. Notes from the previous RSN Executive meeting. (Attachment 1)

Held on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2021, these minutes were noted as a record of the meeting.

#### 3. Summary of Previous RSN Meetings. (Attachment 2)

Report from Kerry Booth, Assistant Chief Executive on attendance, key points, policy work. The Report was noted. There was some discussion around the possible future return to face-to-face meetings. There are benefits in relation to networking by holding face to face, but online meetings enable more Officers and Members to attend and reduced budgets will also impact local authorities and organisations not having the resources to send people physically to meetings. A decision had been taken previously to hold all meetings in 2021 online.

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Action: Meetings for 2022 and beyond will be considered at the September meeting of the Executive along with the four-year budget.

**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.

David Inman, Corporate Director updated the meeting on the Rural Market Town Group and the plans for the Rural Village Services Group.

He highlighted the plans to approach smaller Parish Councils to join the Rural Village Services Group.

Action: The meeting agreed that the lower level of population could be set as 1500 for this group.

**5. National Rural Conference 2021.**

Verbal report from Kerry Booth, Assistant Chief Executive.

Kerry updated the Executive about initial plans for the Conference 2021, focusing on 5 days, **13<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> September 2021**. There will be one event per day focusing on the topics of Rural Economy, Rural Health and Care, Rural Housing, Rural Transport and Decarbonisation and Rural Digital Connectivity. There will also be a specific session on Young People with a panel discussion.

Martin Collett suggested preparing a brief for member organisations of key messages/social media etc for them to share during the week.

Action: Kerry to implement the briefing pack to assist with sharing messages during the conference.

**6. Revitalising Rural: Realising the Vision.**

Update on the campaign.

- [Please click here to access campaign papers<sup>1</sup>](#)
- [Revitalising Rural – Press Release<sup>2</sup>](#)

Graham Biggs updated the Executive about the overall campaign and progress made to date. The documents are currently being updated following the Queens Speech and other key changes to Government policy that have been announced in recent months.

Work is being done to consider the campaign from the perspective of young people and we will look to add depth to these with case studies.

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

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

**7. Budget Reports.** (Attachments 4 & 5)

Attachment 5 shows some of the variances in the budget.

Councillor Heseltine wanted to note his thanks to Graham, David and the team for all of their work this year, to keep services running while everyone is working online.

**8. Rural Lens Review of National Bus Strategy & Build Back Better Strategy.**

[Bus Back Better - Rural Lens<sup>3</sup>](#)

These Rural Lens documents enable us to highlight some of the key issues for rural areas that there may be from Government documents but its when we can see the details of policies that we can really see the practical implications for rural communities.

John Birtwistle provided more detail to the Executive about Bus Back Better.

Stage 1 – Local Transport Authorities declare by end of June 2021 which route they want to take:

- Enhanced Partnership Plan Option
- In House Partnership moving onto Franchise
- No action (but then no access to discretionary funding from the Government)

Stage 2 – By end of October 2021, Local Transport Authorities will need to publish a Local Bus Service Improvement Plan.

Stage 3 – From April 2022, Local Transport Authorities will need to have an Enhanced Partnership in place or be following the statutory process to decide whether to implement a franchising scheme to access the new discretionary streams of bus funding.

Key message is that there will be no funding formula. Money will be allocated from Government based on Quality and Ambition, so you need to be able to argue the case for particular options. There also need to be plans for future sustainability, for example of asking for funding to subsidise bus routes, need to have a plan for the future on what happens next with that.

Rural Lens review of Build Back Better will be published by the RSN tomorrow in the Rural Bulletin. This doesn't set out the future of LEPs or Local Industrial Strategies so we need to watch out for updates on this.

**9. Rural Coalition Response to the Government's Rural Proofing Report.** (Attachment 6)

The Executive noted the report from the Rural Coalition, of which the RSN is a member.

Defra has a new Lord Minister, Lord Benyon who has replaced Lord Gardiner.

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

Cllr Stevens is part of a Conservative Group and will share with them the key points of the RSN overall campaign and concerns for rural areas.

**10. Work by Pragmatix - Reviewing Various Recent New Funding Streams.**

Verbal progress report from Graham Biggs MBE, Chief Executive.

Work aims to consider the funding streams ahead of the Shared Prosperity Fund. This work is due to be published June 2021.

**11. Commissioned work from Pixel on Remoteness and Fire Funding Formula.**

Verbal progress reports from Graham Biggs MBE, Chief Executive.

Adrian Jenkins has been in contact with Chief Fire Officer and has developed a discussion document about providing the service in a rural context about areas not recognised in funding formula. Adrian will attend a meeting of our Fire and Rescue group along with their Heads of Finance to share his findings and see how we could use the information.

Adrian will also be attending the SPARSE meeting in June to present some work on Remoteness to member authorities.

**12. Any Other Business.**

**Social Care Funding Arrangements** – Councillor Motley raised this item as a concern. Graham indicated that there are elements in some of the Rural Lens review for example around workforce plans for social care.

Action: Graham will contact the CCN to see if there are any joint areas, we could work on to raise awareness together for this issue.

The next RSN Executive & RSP Directors' meeting date is Monday, 27<sup>th</sup> September 2021.

**Providing a voice for rural communities and service providers**

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