

---

## 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.

---

**Hosted: Online via Zoom**  
**Date: Thursday, 2nd July 2020**  
**Time: 3.15 pm**

---

#### Attendance:

Cllr Cecilia Motley (Chair)	Shropshire Council / Rural Services Network
Graham Biggs	Rural Services Network
John Birtwistle	First Group
Kerry Booth	Rural Services Network
Martin Collett	English Rural Housing Association
Nik Harwood	Young Somerset
Cllr Gill Heath	Staffordshire County Council
David Inman	Rural Services Network
Cllr Adam Paynter	Cornwall Council
Cllr Roger Phillips	Herefordshire Council
Anna Price	Rural Business Group
Cllr Mary Robinson	Eden District Council
Cllr Sue Sanderson	Cumbria County Council
Cllr Jeremy Savage	South Norfolk Council
Cllr Peter Stevens	West Suffolk Council
Cllr Trevor Thorne	Northumberland County Council
Cllr Peter Thornton	South Lakeland District Council
Nadine Trout	Rural Services Network
Cllr Mark Whittington	Lincolnshire County Council

#### Apologies:

Cllr Robert Heseltine	North Yorkshire County Council
Cllr Rob Waltham MBE	North Lincolnshire Council

- Notes from the previous RSN Executive meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> of March 2020.**  
(Attachment 1)  
Agreed as a correct record.

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

## 2. **Thoughts for the Future of the Network – report from Corporate Director.**

(Attachment 2, Attachment 2A)

A detailed paper was presented to the Executive from the RSN Corporate Director. The paper set out the current situation in relation to the Network. It set out perceived strengths and weaknesses.

### **The Executive agreed as follows:**

#### **Engagement with Member Councils**

- (a) Strengthen the Nominated Member situation by establishing with all member authorities both a **Nominated Member and a Deputy**. If these nominees were not already on the authority's Cabinet, or Executive Arrangements, there would be a request for a Cabinet Member to also be involved - at least with the Annual Rural discussion meetings referred to in (c) below.
- (b) The establishment of an **'RSN Insider' publication** which would be sent out four or five times a year to those involved Members and to Key Officers. This would provide a full briefing on the Networks current activities.
- (c) A series of **Annual Rural Discussion Meetings** for each member authority would be introduced. These meetings would be conducted online and would involve a senior member of the RSN staff and the Nominated Member and Deputy, a Cabinet member, and at least one of the Key Officers. These meetings would seek to establish the Authority's rural views across the spectrum of the RSN's operation. This would include in respect of Fairer Funding (Sparse Rural members only), Rural Service Provision, Current RSN Campaigns, the Rural Economy and issues surrounding Rural Vulnerability and Disadvantage. Discussion would also take place at these meeting about the way in which member authorities dealt with Rural Issues and whether that had any individual special arrangements.  
These Annual Rural Discussion Meetings would ensure annual input and discussion with all member authorities, facilitating RSN policy making. They would take place in addition to the current formal meetings, regional seminars, and the annual National Rural Conference in September.
- (d) There would be **annual requests to all member authorities for** specific named **'Key Liaison (Senior) Officers'** in relation to Public Relations, Democratic Services, Economic Activity, Public Health and Finance. We anticipate that this would allow some specialist work in these areas. All Management Board members, traditional cross section officer appointees and all Council Members would in the future also receive RSN service.

#### **Towns and Parishes**

- 1) It was decided to try to recruit to the RSP Rural/Market Towns Group at least one Town within each member area - thus, hopefully, materially widening this emerging Grouping.

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

Rural Services Network

Kilworthy Park, Tavistock, Devon PL19 0BZ

Tel: 01822 813693

[www.rsonline.org.uk](http://www.rsonline.org.uk) email: [admin@sparse.gov.uk](mailto:admin@sparse.gov.uk) twitter: @rsonline

- 2) A system of local social & economic profile of our Principal Council's area to be established to support engagement with the Rural/Market Towns Group members in those areas.
- 3) The Executive at its next meeting will review the existing 'categories' of membership of the Rural/Market Towns Group.
- 4) The suggestion of creating an English Rural Parishes Group was not endorsed at this juncture. The issue would be considered further if the future role and responsibilities etc. of Parish Councils is set out in the Government's proposed Devolution White Paper.

### **Sounding Boards**

Sounding Board surveys will be operated by the RSN at least twice a year focused on Rural Strategy themes. The Sounding Boards will continue to operate at the levels of:

- Principal Councils in membership
- Parishes in RSN Community Group membership
- Rural/Market Towns Group
- Rural Small Business
- Rural Young People

### **3. RSN Budget Report. (Attachment 3)**

The report was accepted, and new format agreed subject to the % of budget column being removed and a new column added to show variances to the original budget.

### **4. Rural Strategy Campaign Progress – report from Chief Executive.**

(Attachment 4)

The Chief Executive's report informed the Executive of the progress on implementing the agreed workplan to produce the Reinvigorating Rural: Realising the Vision document. It also outlined the proposed member consultation processes which were agreed.

The documents needed to reflect the impacts of COVID-19 set out in the papers for the next item on the Agenda.

The RSN Executive accepted that the policy asks (once determined) would form the basis of the RSN's representational work over the life of the current Parliament. The Chief Executive stressed that it was important that the document – especially in respect of the 'current policy context' and the 'policy asks' – was maintained as a 'live-document' and updated as things changed. Lobbying/representational work may be based on opportunities as they arise on individual topics in the various sections of the document. The budget had no expenditure in it for future financial years and that would need to be addressed.

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

Rural Services Network

Kilworthy Park, Tavistock, Devon PL19 0BZ

Tel: 01822 813693

[www.rsonline.org.uk](http://www.rsonline.org.uk) email: [admin@sparse.gov.uk](mailto:admin@sparse.gov.uk) twitter: @rsonline

**5. COVID-19 Related Issues.**

**(a) Draft RSN Position Statements on various COVID-19 issues** (Attachment 5)

This paper was agreed.

**(b) For consideration as part of the Rural Strategy work - Assessment of Rural Issues and 'Asks' for a COVID-19 Recovery Plan** (Attachment 6)

This paper was agreed for the purposes of the consultation with members referred to in Minute 5 above.

**(c) General Discussion on the work of the RSN and member engagement 'during lockdown'** (Attachment 7)

Kerry Booth outlined the different ways that RSN has been providing services to its members during lockdown, including online seminars, targeted surveys to feed into DEFRA on key issues such as the Rural Economy and Domestic Abuse, and an increased social media presence. The Executive noted the report.

**6. National Rural Conference 2020 – report from Kerry Booth, Assistant Chief Executive.** (Attachment 8)

Due to the pandemic, the National Rural Conference cannot take place in Cheltenham and is going to be moved online for this year. Kerry outlined the format for the event which will take place over the course of a week with a range of plenary and seminar sessions taking place online focusing on key issues relating to Revitalising Rural.

The Executive agreed the proposed format which they felt was a positive and exciting way forward.

**7. Fairer Funding Review: Update.**

The Chief Executive reminded members that due to the pandemic the Government had (again) postponed the Fair Funding/Needs and Resources Review. No new timetable had been set.

The move to 75% Business Rate Retention was now uncertain given both the impact of the pandemic and the fact that the Government is to carry out a fundamental review of Business Rates (again no timescales have been set).

Kerry Booth reported on the very successful and well attended recent Zoom Finance Seminar led by Adrian Jenkins (Pixel).

The Chief Executive reported that he had recently commissioned a short piece of work from Pixel on the costs of 'remoteness'. Members agreed that it was important that the RSN continued to build and evidence the case for rurality costs being much more than travel time.

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

Rural Services Network

Kilworthy Park, Tavistock, Devon PL19 0BZ

Tel: 01822 813693

[www.rsnonline.org.uk](http://www.rsnonline.org.uk) email: [admin@rsn.gov.uk](mailto:admin@rsn.gov.uk) twitter: @rsnonline

The Chief Executive referred to the announcement earlier that day on the government's new funding package for councils to help address COVID-19 pressures and cover lost income during the pandemic. He stated that the RSN would try to assess the impact (in terms of Council Tax and percentage of net budgets) of extra costs/lost income not covered by government support for rural areas.

**8. Work of RSN and iEDO on LIS and rural economy opportunities – report from Nadine Trout, Member Development & Support Manager. (Attachment 9)**

Work of RSN and iED on LIS and a proposed Rural Economy Opportunities Toolkit.

Nadine took the Executive through the proposed content of a Rural Economy Opportunities Toolkit. The Executive were supportive of the content with one member citing the importance of referencing agriculture, supply chains and Brexit in the toolkit.

It was agreed that the Rural Economy Opportunities Toolkit content be approved and the Member Development and Support Manager be tasked with launching the Toolkit in partnership with the iED (Institute of Economic Development), at the Rural Services Network National Conference in September 2020.

**9. To note the Annual Report to the LGA. (Attachment 10)**

This was an annual report for LGA purposes, but the Chairman commended the document saying it represented an excellent overview of the RSN's work. She asked that it be sent to members on a suitable occasion and included on the website.

**10. Regional Seminars 2020 update.**

North East & West Midlands Regional Seminars took place online on 19th May and 30th of June 2020 and were received well. The team will endeavour to continue organising meetings online for the foreseeable future where possible. It was agreed that face to face meetings were unlikely to be held in this calendar year.

The Chief Executive suggested, and the Executive agreed, that we would try to organise the SPARSE Rural and Rural Economy Group meetings (which were postponed earlier in the year) online via Zoom.

<b>Event</b>	<b>Rescheduled Date</b>	<b>Format and Platform</b>
East Midlands Regional Seminar (Rural Skills & Education)	28.07.2020	Online via Zoom
National Rural Conference 2020	14 Monday 15 Tuesday 16 Wednesday 17 Thursday 18 Friday 09.2020	Online via Zoom and possibly other platforms

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

**Rural Services Network**

Kilworthy Park, Tavistock, Devon PL19 0BZ

Tel: 01822 813693

[www.rsonline.org.uk](http://www.rsonline.org.uk) email: [admin@sparse.gov.uk](mailto:admin@sparse.gov.uk) twitter: @rsonline

North West Regional Seminar (Rural Vulnerability)	05.10.2020	Online via Zoom
SPARSE Rural meeting	12.10.2020	Online via Zoom
Rural Economy Sub Group meeting	12.10.2020	Online via Zoom
Yorkshire Regional Seminar (Rural Housing)	02.11.2020	Online via Zoom
Rural Social Care & Health Sub Group	16.11.2020	Online via Zoom
RSN AGM	16.11.2020	Online via Zoom
Rural Assembly	16.11.2020	Online via Zoom

**11. Any Other Business**

The next RSN Executive is scheduled for Monday, 28<sup>th</sup> September 2020.

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

**Rural Services Network**

Kilworthy Park, Tavistock, Devon PL19 0BZ

Tel: 01822 813693

[www.rsonline.org.uk](http://www.rsonline.org.uk) email: [admin@sparse.gov.uk](mailto:admin@sparse.gov.uk) twitter: @rsnonline