
Minutes

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

Hosted: Online via Zoom & in person

Venue: English Rural Housing Association,

7A Strutton Ground, London, SW1P 2HY

Date: Monday, 21st March 2022

Time: 11:15am – 2:30pm

1. Attendance & Apologies.

Attended in person: John Birtwistle, Kerry Booth, Martin Collett, Cllr Cecilia Motley (Chair), Cllr Roger Phillips, Cllr Jeremy Savage, Cllr Peter Stevens, Cllr Trevor Thorne.

Attended online: Cllr Philip Atkins OBE, Graham Biggs MBE, David Inman, Cllr Mary Robinson, Anna Price, Cllr Mark Whittington.

Apologies: Nik Harwood, Cllr Robert Heseltine, Cllr Sue Sanderson, Cllr Peter Thornton, Cllr Adam Paynter.

2. [Notes from the previous RSN Executive meeting.](#)

The Executive agreed the notes of the last meeting held on 10th January 2022 as a true record of that meeting.

3. Summary of Previous RSN Work and Meetings. (Attachment 1)

Kerry Booth, Deputy Chief Executive summarised the main areas of RSN work since the last Executive meeting. Of particular note was the attendance of Government Civil Servants at the RSN seminars, which is a positive step so they can find out experiences on the ground. on attendance, key points, policy work since the last meeting. Work has focused on the Levelling Up White Paper and implications for rural communities.

There was a short discussion on the Fair Share Group meeting with MP's and the future work which will involve some drop-in sessions for MPs to provide them with individual analysis for their areas.

The APPG Chair and RSN Chief Executive have a meeting scheduled with the Care Minister on 29th April. The APPG has agreed to consider Off Gas Grid properties and transition to non-fossil fuels and levelling up respectively at its next two meetings – both, hopefully before the Summer Recess.

4. Update on Work with Local Councils.

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David Inman, Corporate Director provided a verbal report on recent meetings with NALC to develop a joint initiative where NALC members will receive a 15% discount on RMTG membership and a representative from NALC will attend the membership and clerk's meetings.

Work over the next year will be to focus on recruitment to the RMTG and transfer those with free membership onto paying services. Recruitment to the Villages Group will also commence.

5. RSN Website and Newsletter. (Attachment 2)

Kerry Booth, Deputy Chief Executive provided an update on website performance and the Rural Bulletin. Whilst visitors to the website have decreased slightly in the last year, visitors finding the website from search engines has increased, perhaps demonstrating increased profile for RSN. Work is focusing on analysing the data from Mailchimp to enable the RSN team to determine which groups of customers are reading and using the Bulletin and other publications so that they can be best targeted to provide maximum value.

Action: The Executive noted the report and made some suggestions to help target bulletin headlines. Kerry will implement these with Richard Inman.

6. Levelling Up and Devolution White Paper/UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Update from Graham Biggs MBE, Chief Executive.

- Confidential proposal to RSN from Pragmatix Advisory. (Attachment 3*)
Graham Biggs confirmed that he has accepted this proposal for work which is anticipated to be delivered in the coming months.
- [RSN Rural Lens Reviews - Critique/Overview document and Future Actions for the RSN.](#)
The lack of rural proofing of the Levelling Up White Paper was discussed by the Executive with additional concerns raised over the cost of fuel and implications for rural areas.

The Executive will be kept informed on the outcomes on the work by Pragmatix and the RSN's internal analysis of many of the regional tables etc. in the White Paper.

The Executive agreed with the list of future actions included in the Overall Critique document. This will now be published in the Rural Bulletin next week.

The Executive agreed that the whole Levelling Up agenda and future actions by government needed to be kept under on-going close review by the RSN.

*Please be aware that Attachment 3 associated with this session is only available for [RSN Executive](#) members. If you are a [RSN Executive](#) member who would like this material, please email admin@sparse.gov.uk and we will send these papers out to you.

7. Budget Reports.

- Budget Report with Actuals to 5th March 2022. (Attachment 4)
- Four Year Budget Review. (Attachment 4A*)

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- Notes on Budget Reports. (Attachment 4B*)

Graham Biggs, Chief Executive talked through the budget reports. They included the £10,000 sponsorship from Airband this year and Graham highlighted how we need to learn from this experience for future years.

Action: The Executive noted this report. A decision on inflation will be postponed until the September Executive meeting to monitor the current situation.

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8. Any Other Business.

Kerry Booth updated the Executive on the Defra Rural Impact Forum which she attended on behalf of Graham Biggs last week. The session focused on the impact of the situation in Russia / Ukraine. Concerns were raised on the impact of increased fuel prices for rural local authorities.

Action: Kerry will write a letter to DEFRA on behalf of the RSN highlighting key concerns.

The next RSN Executive meeting will take place online on Monday, 23rd May 2022.

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