

Note of last RURAL SERVICES NETWORK - SPARSE Rural Sub-Sig Special Interest Group meeting

Title: RURAL SERVICES NETWORK - SPARSE RuralSub - Special Interest Group
Date: Monday 13 April 2015
Venue: 10 St. Ann's Street London SW1p 2DE

Attendance

An attendance list is attached as **Appendix A** to this note

| Item | Decisions and actions | Action |
|------|---|--------|
| 1 | New Vice Chairman for the ensuing Year It was noted that Councillor Adam Paynter would represent Cornwall Council in place of Councillor Alex Folkes. It was agreed that Councillor Paynter becomes the Vice Chair representing the South and South West Region. | |
| 2 | Minutes of Meeting 17 November 2014 (AGM) The minutes of the last meeting were agreed. | |
| 3 | Minutes of Executive meeting 19 January 2015 The minutes of the last Executive meeting were agreed. | |
| 4 | RSN Executive It was proposed that Janice Banks, the Chief Executive of Acre, joins the Executive. Item postponed . Graham Biggs reported that Acre have successfully retained their Defra grant for the current financial year, and are currently under consultation with staff about the future direction of the organisation. Action Item to be put on agenda once the ACRE staff consultation has concluded. | |
| 5 | Constitution A revised Constitution reflecting the Group's change in structure was sought to be adopted at the Annual General Meeting. This revised constitution was put out to postal ballot. For adoption a revised | |

constitution requires a two thirds majority from councils voting. The revised document received such backing (thirty six yes votes to two no votes). It will therefore be formally adopted by the AGM in November.

6 Fairer Funding Campaign 2015-16

Dan Bates and Graham Biggs presented on the current position of the Fairer Funding Campaign and detailed aspirations for the coming year.

In the Summer of 2012 a DCLG Consultation proposed significant changes to the Needs Block as an acknowledgement that the costs of providing services in rural areas were not properly recognised with in formulae. However due to other formula changes and damping only some 25% of the identified gains from this worked through post-damping. This nevertheless amounted to £60 million per year. Since then the Rural Services Delivery Grant was introduced and have seen modest year-on-year rises to now reach £15.5M and is part of the present formulae. Local and national press for the campaign have kept the issue on agendas across the country, alongside extensive parliamentary lobbying by MPs from the Rural Fair Shares Group led by Graham Stuart, MP.

The next steps will depend on the outcome of the election. The following is planned irrespective of the election outcome:

- Immediately after the election there will be a recruitment campaign for all rural MPs to join the Rural Fair Shares Group in parliament
- Every rural MP to receive a one-page geographical analysis showing levels of grant funding for their constituency compared to next to the nearest urban counterpart.
- Call for Local Government Minister to honour commitments given at the last meeting with Kris Hopkins MP

The following points were included in the discussion:

- The need to be aware that a new formula under a new administration would take a few years to produce and what was delivered alongside it through, for example, specific grants should be considered.
- The reliance of some councils on the New Homes Bonus and the potential implications for councils should a new administration scrap this.
- The need for the Rural Services Delivery Grant to be used appropriately in rural areas, and not used to fund urban services or be put into balances. Some Finance Officers may have done this due to the previous short term-assurances of the grants.

Action

Rural Fair Shares Group to be re-established as soon as possible

As many members of the Executive as possible are to attend the next executive meeting for a strategic discussion on future activity in the light of the composition of the next Government.

Members to work hard to influence their MPs and the next government on rural matters

7 Neighbourhood Planning Evidence Base Service

Dan introduced the Neighbourhood Planning Evidence Base, available to SPARSE - Rural authorities. It includes a wide range of data and statistics, with information available for parishes with comparisons to district/county/national figures. He added that this needed to take into account counties and local plans.

Members are asked to commend the website within their authorities. They can email dan.worth@sparse.gov.uk if there is anything they wish to add to the resource tool.

Members praised the resource and saw it benefitting the sector more widely through dissemination. It was noted as a tool to encourage 100% membership and as a possible income generator for non-SPARSE members to access.

Action

Share the Neighbourhood Planning Evidence Base Service within authorities

8 Any other Business

Members raised the issue of Broadband and the need to challenge BT.

The APPG is recognised as an official Parliamentary Body and therefore requires official process to be reformed. If Lead members are re-elected then notice can be given immediately and recruitment can continue. However, there is the potential for this to be a slower process.

Action

Put broadband on the agenda for the next Executive.

Appendix A -Attendance

Attendance:

Cllr Cecilia Motley (Shropshire Council); Cllr Cameron Clark (Sevenoaks DC); Cllr Derrick Haley (Mid Suffolk DC); Cllr Peter Bedford (Boston Council); Cllr Madge Shingleton (Shropshire Council); Cllr Carole Clark (South Northamptonshire); Cllr Jeremy

Savage (South Norfolk Council); Cllr Nick Daubney (West Norfolk); Cllr David Ireton (Craven DC); Cllr Sue Hawker (West Sussex CC); Cllr Hilary Carrick (Cumbria CC); Cllr Michael Hicks (South Hams DC); Cllr Lindsey Cawrey (North Kesteven); Cllr Jane Mortimer (Scarborough Council); Cllr C L Strange (Lincolnshire CC); Cllr Ken Potter (East Devon DC); Cllr Roger Begy (Rutland CC).

Officers: Graham Biggs (RSN); Dan Bates (RSN), Brian Wilson (RSN) and Andy Dean (RSN)

Apologies:

Peter Thornton (South Lakeland DC); Cllr Eddy Tomlinson (Durham); Cllr Les Kew (Bath & NE Somerset); Cllr John Williams (Taunton Deane); Cllr Jennifer Mein (Lancashire); Jane March (Tunbridge Wells); Paul Darby (Durham); Revd Richard Kirlew (Church in Wales); Ms Susan Joyce (Purbeck); Cllr Philip Sanders (West Devon); Ian Stephens (Isle of Wight); Jenny Poole (Cotswold); Joanna Killian (Essex); Cllr Gordon Nicolson OBE (Eden); Audrey Statham (Daventry); Adam Norburn (Rugby); Ian Knowles (West Lindsey); Jon Triggs (North Devon); Cllr Paul Diviani (East Devon); Cllr Ken Pollock (Worcestershire); Beverly Agass (South Kesteven); Jane Waggott (Ryedale); Ann Graves (South Holland); Cllr Margaret Squires (Mid Devon); Cllr Jane Horne (Forest of Dean); Sophie Hosking, Steve Jordan (South Hams & West Devon); Cllr Hudspeth (Oxfordshire); Cllr Wheeler (Stroud); Cllr Pam Posnett (Melton BC); Cllr Brian Robinson (Forest of Dean); Cllr Ann Carter (Daventry); Cllr David Worden (North Devon); Cllr Roger Hirst (Essex); Cllr Bee (Sussex)