

Review of NALC and ACRE Manifesto Documents

Information note for the RSN Executive

The Rural Services Network (RSN) maintains good links with and shares many policy interests with the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and ACRE (the national body for the network of Rural Community Councils). It therefore makes sense to co-ordinate representational work with these organisations where we have common cause.

This short note considers the manifesto documents that were put out by NALC and ACRE before the General Election, and considers how far they could be supported by the RSN, not least given the content of our own Rural Services Manifesto.

ACRE

The ACRE manifesto, called '*Health, Wealth and Access*', makes 12 asks of an incoming Government. As set out in the table below: 7 of these are the same or almost the same as asks within the RSN manifesto; and 5 are different, but RSN could probably still support them. In short, there is a great deal of common cause between our two organisations.

ACRE ask	Assessment
Review criteria for non-emergency patient transport to address discrimination faced by rural residents.	RSN could support
Reinstate the GP practice Minimum Practice Income Guarantee (MPIG).	RSN has a similar ask
Review rural delivery of the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) energy efficiency programme.	RSN has the same ask
Review advice and support available to support communities creating renewable energy schemes.	RSN could support
Ensure LEADER programme benefits as many rural communities as possible.	RSN could support
Rural areas should get a fair share of LEP funding.	RSN has the same ask
Drop the spare room subsidy/bedroom tax in small rural communities with a population under 3,000.	RSN has the same ask
Reverse the small development site exemption from the requirement to contribute affordable housing.	RSN has the same ask
Invest in alternative broadband solutions for communities not covered by the current roll out.	RSN has the same ask
Invest in support for communities to develop social enterprise solutions to services they lack.	RSN has the same ask
Invest in volunteers, especially young drivers for community transport schemes.	RSN could support

Review concessionary fares scheme and ensure local authorities fully reimburse bus companies.	RSN could support (as law already expects providers to be no worse off)
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NALC

The NALC manifesto, called '*Communities in Control*', also makes 12 asks of an incoming Government. Prior to these it sets out 6 offers the sector would make to an incoming Government. RSN could probably support all of these offers, which in essence are about making parish councils more effective. It is inevitable that RSN views on the asks will be mixed, since some of them seek access to funding which could only come at the expense of funding for principal local authorities. Broadly speaking, and as the table below shows, RSN could probably: support almost all the first four asks on *democracy*; whilst mainly disagreeing with the next few asks on *funding*; and supporting some but not all of the last four asks on *powers*. In short, there is scope for cooperation, so long as certain differences are accepted.

NALC offers	Assessment
Provide communities with effective, accountable and democratic representation.	RSN could support this
Be fiscally responsible, using statutory powers and resident levy to take action on local priorities.	RSN could support this
Use grassroots knowledge to work in partnership with other councils and public service delivery bodies.	RSN could support this
Protect local assets and shape development such as new homes and shops.	RSN could support this
Work with local businesses and others to support local economic growth and regeneration.	RSN could support this
Modernise how we operate, so parish councils are resilient, efficient and effective.	RSN could support this
NALC asks	Assessment
Promote creating new parish councils. Introduce a community right of appeal for rejected requests.	RSN Executive is asked to express a view
Allow parish councils to impose sanctions for breaches of the Councillors' code of conduct.	RSN could support
Support the sector in developing an improvement and development strategy.	RSN could support
Encourage more people to stand as Councillors, so there are more contested elections.	RSN could support
Ensure Council Tax support funding is passed on by principal authorities to parish councils.	RSN would disagree (unless this is misunderstood)
Reform business rates so that 5% goes to parish councils for economic development work.	RSN would disagree
Drop the Government requirement that any precept increase above a certain level needs a referendum.	RSN could support
Ensure parish councils receive a share of CIL, the New Homes Bonus and exploration funding.	RSN would disagree (except CIL which already happens)

A Parish Councils Bill to reform laws governing their administration and give new service delivery powers.	RSN might support (subject to further information)
Promote use of the General Power of Competence and remove barriers to its use.	RSN could support
Parish councils to gain a right to be consulted on planning and licensing, and a right of planning appeal	RSN likely to disagree (at least on right of appeal)
Introduce a right to engage to help parish councils work more equitably with principal authorities.	RSN likely to disagree (with a legislative approach)

Rural Coalition

It is worth noting that RSN sits on the Rural Coalition. This is a Defra stakeholder group which has in membership both ACRE and NALC, as well as bodies such as the CLA, NFU, CPRE, Plunkett Foundation, TCPA and RICS. The Rural Coalition is in the process of deciding its priorities for the post-election period and is discovering a great deal of commonality among rural interest groups. Affordable housing is widely seen as the top priority, with devolution (within England), broadband connectivity, rural proofing and rural economy/LEPs also cited by many as important. The Rural Coalition is therefore another avenue for RSN to work in concert with other organisations.

Although this paper is largely for information, comments from the Executive would be welcome. In particular, on the NALC ask for a right of appeal where a request to create a new parish council is turned down. That decision will have been taken by the relevant district/unitary council.

Rural Services Network
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