

**AGENDA FOR SPARSE RURAL AND RURAL SERVICE  
NETWORK  
EXECUTIVE AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE RURAL  
SERVICES PARTNERSHIP LTD MEETING**

**Venue:- No 63 Bayswater Road, London W2 3PH**

**Date: Monday 24<sup>th</sup> September 2018**

**Time: 11.15am to 2.30pm**

**Please note change of venue - this meeting will take place at No 63 Bayswater Road, London W2 3PH**

Visitor information and a link to the map for the venue can be found below:

[\*\*No 63 Bayswater Road Travel information\*\*](#)

**1. Apologies for Absence**

**2. Notes of the Previous Meeting**

Held on 22nd May 2018 to consider any relevant items.  
(Appendix A)

**3. Notes of the Main Meeting**

SPARSE Rural Sub SIG and Rural Economy Group meetings held on 25th June 2018 to consider any relevant items.  
(Appendix B)

**4. Composition of the Executive**

Cllr Cecilia Motley	Chair
John Birtwistle	Buses
Cllr Rob Waltham	Vice Chair (Unitary)
Cllr Roger Phillips	Vice Chair (West Midlands)
Cllr Philip Sanders	Vice Chair (County 1)
Cllr Gill Heath	Vice Chair (County 2)
Cllr Robert Heseltine	First Vice Chair (Yorkshire)
Cllr Peter Thornton	Vice Chair (Without Portfolio)

Cllr Peter Stevens	Vice Chair (East)
Cllr Kevin Beaty	Vice Chair (North)
Cllr Adam Paynter	Vice Chair (South West)
Cllr Derrick Haley (Stepping Down)	Vice Chair (Without Portfolio)
Cllr Sue Sanderson	Vice Chair (Without Portfolio)
Cllr Janet Duncton (Stepping Down)	Vice Chair (South East)
Revd Richard Kirlew	RSP Chair
Stewart Horne	Federation of Small Businesses
Georgina Fung	Young People (UK Youth)
Christina Hicks	UK Youth
Kayleigh Wainwright	UK Youth
Graham Biggs	RSN
David Inman	RSN
Andy Dean	RSN
Kerry Booth	RSN

- 5. Joint RSN/CCN commission from Pixel re Additional Evidence Required by MHCLG VERAL REPORT ON PRESENT POSITION**
- 6. Partnership between RSN & National Centre for Rural Health and Care: Rural Health and Care Alliance**  
(Appendix C)
- 7. Proposed Template Rural Strategy Latest Draft**  
(Appendix D)
- 8. Communications Strategy Update**  
(Appendix E to follow)
- 9. RSP Recruitment – Report of Policy Director.**  
(Appendix F & FF)
- 10. Rural Vulnerability:**
  - (a) Report of the Corporate Services Director**  
(Appendix G)
  - (b) Suggested Revised Priorities Document**  
(Appendix GG)

**11. Report of the Corporate Director and the Policy Director on the Possibility of Separate RSP Meetings**  
(Appendix H)

**12. Rural Conference 2018 Verbal Report**

**13. RSN Budget 2017/18, 2018/19 & 2019/20**  
To consider the attached papers.  
(Appendix I)

(a) **RSP Directors to Consider the Company Accounts for 2017/18**  
(Appendix I (a))

(b) **RSN Subscriptions 2019/20**

**14. House of Lords Select Committee on the Rural Economy: RSN response to Call for Evidence**  
(Appendix J)

**15. Regional Meetings Update**

<b>Region</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Venue</b>	<b>Date for Agenda</b>	<b>Notes</b>
North West	8 <sup>th</sup> Oct	Barriers to Access Priority – Broadband, Connectivity & Transport	Lancashire Council <b>Confirmed</b>	14 <sup>th</sup> Sept	Community Transport Consultation may be out and still live
Yorkshire	10 <sup>th</sup> Dec	Health & Wellbeing Priority – Adult Social Care & Fuel Poverty	Harrogate Council <b>Confirmed but fee charged with 50% discount</b>	16 <sup>th</sup> Nov	Green Paper should be out on Social Care plus Jane's report for Rural England

**16. Any Other Business**

**MINUTES OF THE SPARSE RURAL AND RURAL SERVICES NETWORK EXECUTIVE AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE RURAL SERVICES PARTNERSHIP LTD MEETING, TUESDAY 22<sup>nd</sup> MAY 2018 HELD AT THE SOROPTOMISTS, NO 63 BAYSWATER ROAD, LONDON**

**Present:** - Cllr Cecilia Motley (Chair), Cllr Robert Heseltine (First Vice Chair Yorkshire), Cllr Peter Stevens (Vice Chair – East), Revd Richard Kirlew (RSP Chair - Community),

**Officers:** - Graham Biggs MBE (Chief Executive), David Inman (Director), Andy Dean (Assistant Director)

**Apologies:** - Philip Sanders (Vice Chair – County 1), Cllr Rob Waltham (Vice Chair – Unitary), Cllr Peter Thornton (Vice Chair – Without Portfolio), John Birtwistle – Head of Policy, UK Bus, Gill Heath – Vice Chair (County 2), Stewart Horne – Federation of Small Businesses, Cllr Janet Duncton (Vice Chair – South East), Derrick Haley (Vice Chair – Without Portfolio), Cllr Adam Paynter (Vice Chair South West), Cllr Sue Sanderson (Vice Chair – Without Portfolio)

**1. Notes of Previous Executive Meeting – 28<sup>th</sup> March 2018**

Agreed as a correct record.

**2. Notes of the Main Rural Assembly Sub SIG Meeting – 9<sup>th</sup> April 2018**

Agreed as a correct record.

**3. Notes of Rural Social Care and Health Group – 9<sup>th</sup> April 2018**

Agreed as a correct record.

**4. Membership and Response to Request for an Extra Levy**

The Chief Executive explained the position over Purchase Orders and the later than usual situation in respect of despatch of invoices. Payment pattern was therefore slightly behind previous years. To date 37 Authorities have paid with 32 agreeing to pay the Research levy and five declining.

**5. Meeting of Fair Share Group of MPs**

This had taken place and had been reasonably successful. Graham Biggs updated the meeting.

**6. Joint RSN/CCN Commission from Pixel Financial Management in Additional Evidence Required by MHCLG**

MHCLG had confirmed that the rural case was one of special interest. However, in this severely contested political environment the additional cost case would have to be proved. It was accepted however, rural comparison by the RSN could only be up against rural Authorities with urban areas. . MHCLG would be consulting after the summer 2018 on the shape of the Foundation Formula, top ups, use of Council Tax in the formula, area cost adjustment and high- level transition. By spring 2019 MHCLG would publish potential indicative allocations for each authority.

Rurality/Sparsity may be employed in the area cost adjustment which Pixel felt was not necessarily favourable to the rural case and may need to be contested. Damping -Transition -may gradually be released over a 4 – 5 year period. The Department of Transport data on journey times could be used within the formula.

The Authorities being approached to work with Pixel were:  
Districts - West Devon, South Hams, Selby and  
Counties & Unitaries – Wokingham, North Yorkshire, Cornwall, Cumbria and  
Oxfordshire.

The Pixel work – which was a joint RSN/CCN commission - would be completed by the end of July. Their work would then be shared with the rural group of MPs.

**7. Fire Service Group**

Graham Biggs raised the situation regarding the Fire Group. It was felt rural research work would be of real value but many of the Fire and Rescue Services had been reluctant payers sometimes. It was decided to write to the Group of 12 saying unless objection was raised by a set date, work would be commissioned and appropriate reimbursement would be sought.

**8. Report on the Work of the Rural Services APPG**

Graham Biggs reported on the Community Transport work which had involved the Transport Minister directly and the plans for July meetings to prepare a case for the rural aspects in response to the proposed Green Paper on future Adult Social Care Funding.

**9. Rural Conference 2018 – Progress Report**

The Chief Executive detailed the proposals. The programme would go live very shortly. A front line overall sponsor was being sought together with exhibitors. It was agreed that any front line sponsor would be allowed to address the Conference for a ten minute period.

**10. RSN Budget 2017/18, 2018/19 and 2019/20**

The Chief Executive presented budget papers showing the current position. Two Authorities had sought to leave and this position could not have been anticipated. The available balance at the end of the current financial year was now very slim. The Chief Executive detailed the RSN/Rural England position and notified members that the Policy Director was now in post, looking to concentrate on obtaining more income through RSP and Rural England Supporter recruitment.

**11. Rural Panel and Rural Sounding Boards Verbal Report**

David Inman gave a full report. It was hoped a partnership could be established with Gloucestershire University between Rural England and the CCRI for expansion work to be carried out by the University widening the existing panel, particularly by the incorporation of more young people. Two further surveys would be undertaken in July and in the Autumn to seek to do this.

The Sounding Board work was proceeding and working arrangements with UK Youth and the Rural Business Awards Group were being sought which would allow Young Persons and a Small Business Sounding Boards to be set up.

**12. Regional Meetings Update**

The third meeting and seminar in the North East was due to be held later in the week following the West Midlands and South West ones. These regional events did appear to be working well and were being well received. At each event some 20 to 25 Councillors had been present.

### **13. LGA – Post Brexit Commission – Analysis of Responses**

Eight replies had been received back and it was felt these gave an accurate snap shot of member consideration of the position. These, it was felt, would be really useful towards the preparation of a rural strategy.

### **14. RSN Statement on GDPR**

A document in relation to GDPR was tabled and agreed by the Executive and formally adopted by the RSP Directors.

### **15. New News Arrangements – The Bulletins**

The Executive had been considering the Group's Communication Strategy for some time and Officers had been considering previous feedback. They presented to members an option for a combined publication which would be sent out every Tuesday.

The intention was:

- (a) To prevent the current situation, where members received information frequently (at least 3 times) during the week (it was felt this might lead to some information getting lost).
- (b) That information would be strengthened because it would be able to use the details and style of the new website.
- (c) That as much information as possible was provided 'in house'. The new arrangement would go under the title of 'The Rural Bulletin' and it was hoped would provide a definitive rural product once a week that would be fully recognised across rural areas.

The Executive approved the change. Enquiries would now be made to test the going market rate for the news service being provided to the Group to ensure RSN received continued value for money.

### **16. Proposed New Arrangements – RSP**

It was accepted that work was necessary to revitalise the RSP and thought had accordingly been given as to how the RSP could operate in a slightly wider way.

It was decided that in future the RSP would have two meetings a year (one being the AGM) concentrating on RSP issues but mainly around topics pertinent to the consideration of Rural Vulnerability and the related service implications.. These meetings would be chaired by Rev Richard Kirlew, as the current RSP Chair.

The drive would be to make Rural Vulnerability and its service and community implications a central plank of the Organisation's work at MP (Rural Vulnerability Group of MPs) RSN (Social Care and Health meetings) and at research (Rural England) level in an annual meeting of RE Supporters' consideration of the topic.

### **17. New Members from the North East**

Cllr Trevor Thorne from Northumberland Council would be approached to see if it was possible to interest him becoming involved with the Group to ensure North East coverage on the Executive. Any formal decision would be for the AGM in November.

# Notes of the Sparse Rural Sub SIG and Rural Economy Group

**Date:** 25 June 2018

**Venue:** The LGA, Smith Square, London SW1P 3HZ

## Attendance

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

### 1. Apologies for absence

The Chairman welcomed members and noted apologies (listed in Appendix B).

### 2. Minutes of the SPARSE Rural Sub SIG

The minutes of the last meeting of the SPARSE-Rural Sub-SIG held on the 29<sup>th</sup> January 2018 were agreed.

### 3. Minutes of the Rural Economy Group

The Minutes of the last meeting of the Rural Economy Group held on the 29<sup>th</sup> January 2018 were agreed.

Graham Biggs reported a growing concern that Local Industrial Strategies may now focus solely on a selected number of Combined Authority areas. It was agreed that, should this be the case, a concerted effort would be made to ensure these Strategies were prepared for all areas, including rural areas.

It was agreed that a letter be written by the chair requesting a place for RSN on the People & Places Board in order to improve rural representation on such issues.

### 4. Minutes of the Executive Meeting

The Minutes of the last meeting of the Executive held on the 22nd May 2018 were agreed.

### 5. Rural Bus Services

John Birtwistle (First Group Buses) introduced this session, setting out the current overall position with respect to rural bus services and highlighting a number of findings from the recent 'Rural Public Transport' survey of RSN members, the results from which had been previously circulated.

It was noted that whilst the last 2 years had seen some stability following the significant service reductions in local authority subsidised routes in previous years, this is likely to increase again as a consequence of increasing costs associated with adult social care budgets.

#### Buses & Taxis

Ben Ridehalgh, Deputy Head of Buses & Taxis, at the Department for Transport then gave a presentation outlining current government policy with respect to bus services, A copy of this presentation is available via [this link](#)

It was noted that loneliness and mental health are growing factors with respect to policy associated with buses and that the Bus Services Act 2017 had introduced a number of new opportunities with regard to franchising powers, new partnership powers and open data & ticketing. Consultation is to be launched very soon with respect to open data. Ben also reported that a Ministerial Roundtable is to be established to discuss rural transport issues.

In discussion it was noted that government need to look across a range of services in order to understand the full impact of transport

## **Shyft Mobility**

Anna Rothnie from Shyft Mobility then gave a presentation on current development work which is underway with respect to improving existing transport apps aimed at better utilising existing spare capacity across a range of transport providers including local and community based services. A copy of this presentation is also available via [this link](#).

John Birtwistle informed attendees of the existence of the TNDs database which is produced every 2 weeks and provides accurate information on all services, routes, stopping points and is free to use. This could be a useful resource for local authorities.

In conclusion the importance of developing systems that can bring together supply and demand was noted. It was also agreed that RSN write to all members asking for responses to the impending consultation regarding open data to enable an RSN response to be compiled.

## **6. Budget report**

The budget report was noted and members reminded to send in any outstanding subscriptions.

## **7. Notes of the Meeting of the North East Regional Meeting/Seminar held on 25th May 2018 on the subject of the Rural Economy**

Andy Dean introduced the notes from the meeting, Feedback from those attending had been very positive.

At members request, a copy of the presentation made on impact measurement (the 'Social Value Engine') is available via this [link](#).

Ian Hunter from Littoral Arts informed the meeting of research work in relation to creative industries and rural areas due to commence next year.

## **8. ANALYSIS of Responses from members to the LGA's "post-Brexit England Commission – Call for Evidence"**

A summary of responses from RSN members had previously been circulated. It was seen as surprising that only 8 RSN members had appeared to submit formal evidence but the summary represented a good summation of the main issues. It was agreed that it will be important to see some form of rural cut in any resulting documents produced by the LGA and that the need for RSN representation on the People and Places Board of the LGA was very important.

A number of specific points were raised including the need to make more of the opportunities around public sector procurement and the need for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to understand the challenges faced by rural businesses.

It was agreed that all members to forward any relevant intelligence which emerges to RSN.

## **9. House of Lords Select Committee on the Rural Economy**

The new Lords Select Committee on the Rural Economy had held an initial discussion recently which had involved 5 external organisations. This included Rural England CIC and RSN.

The list of committee members for the select committee is as follows:

- Earl of Caithness
- Lord Carter of Coles
- Lord Colgrain
- Lord Curry of Kirkharle
- Lord Dannatt



- Lord Foster of Bath
- Baroness Humphreys
- Baroness Mallalieu
- Baroness O’Cathain
- Baroness Pitkeathley
- Baroness Rock
- Baroness Young of Old Scone

More updates will be issued to RSN members as the committee moves its work forward.

## **10.Fair Funding Review**

Graham Biggs reported that RSN, together with the County Councils’ Network, had met officials from MHCLG to discuss the additional evidence they want to see in relation to the sparsity case. This is required to be submitted by the end of July.

MHCLG will consult later this year on the broad shape of the foundation formula, top-ups, area cost adjustments and high level transition and this will be followed by publication of potential indicative allocations for local authorities in the spring of 2019.

It had been confirmed that the new formula will include damping but this will be strictly time-limited.

## **11.Any Other Business**

It was noted that a number of Police and Crime Commissioners are taking over Fire Authorities.

## **AGREED HEADS OF AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE NATIONAL CENTRE FOR RURAL HEALTH AND CARE C. I. C. (the National Centre) and THE RURAL SERVICES NETWORK (RSN)**

### **CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND**

1. Article 5 of the National centre's Articles of Association states that one of the Objects of the National Centre is "to facilitate an information network on rural health matters". These proposed Heads of Agreement relate to that Object.
2. The National Centre's website describes as a key activity "through focused dissemination and networking, generating wide scale adoption of what works". Networking and dissemination are key components of this proposal
3. The RSN has for a number of years been active in disseminating information relating to rural health issues and facilitating networking. It currently has a "Rural Health Network" as part of its operations. It has 31 non - local authority or NHS bodies in its membership, 30 NHS related bodies (including 14 Trusts & CCGs). No charge is currently made for membership of this Network.
4. The RSN's Rural Health Network are sent four "rural health spotlight" documents each year bringing together news and other information on relevant issues.
5. The RSN has just entered into a contract with Lexington Communications (reputedly the UK's leading independent public affairs and communications agency) to provide content for the weekly media digest, comprising of the following:
  - a. Six 'spotlight' stories from the past week, including:
  - b. Round up list of additional media stories for the past week
  - c. Political look back
  - d. Forward lookRural Health and Social Care is one of the key topic areas to which this contract relates
6. The RSN has held a number of successful Rural Health National Conferences since 2013 (in 2013, 2014, 2016 and 2017). The RSN has not organised a conference for 2018 due to the creation of the National Centre and a wish to work in partnership.

### **WHAT IS PROPOSED?**

A partnership linking the National Centre with the Rural Services Network.

It is suggested the partnership goes by a separate name- 'The Rural Health and Care Alliance'. (known as the RHCA)

The partners involved in the project will obviously be the Rural Services Network and the National Centre.

The normal fee for membership of the ERHN will be £500 plus any VAT payable.

The partnership will provide the National Centre with its Information Network and processes for dissemination without having to develop its own by working with the Rural Services Network which has the processes and experience in these areas. The ERHN will have a direct relationship with RSN's Rural Services Partnership whose work normally relates to private and third sector service providers but is also closely linked with its local authority membership –including Social Care Authorities covering rural areas.

Both parties agree that entering into this partnership does not create any exclusive arrangement beyond what is set out here. For instance, The National Centre will be free to enter into partnership arrangement with other parties in furtherance of its work – including the supply of information and carrying out professional or technical consultations and the like.

The arrangement between the National Centre and the RSN will run for an initial period of 3 years allowing the English Rural Health and Care Network to be very fully established and operated. It is the intention of the parties that if the arrangements are mutually beneficial (financially and non - financial) the arrangements can stay in place into the long term. Therefore, there will be an option for renewal for a further 3-year term exercisable unless either party can demonstrate good reason why it should not be. Should either party “cease to trade” this Agreement shall cease forthwith.

It is agreed by both organisations that there will be an initial 6-month trial period to be sure that the arrangements work for both organisations or whether any changes are necessary for the remainder of the term. It is accepted by both parties that unless there has been good progress in achieving targets set for this period (as set out at the end of these Heads of Terms) the Agreement can be terminated without notice in the event that expenditure has, and is forecast by the parties to, exceed income. In this event the excess of expenditure over income shall be met in equal proportions by the two partner organisations.

## **WHAT WILL THE RURAL HEALTH AND CARE ALLIANCE DO.?**

The RHCA Network will: -

- issue a dedicated Rural Health news and information Spotlight to its members once every 2 months for 12 months using information received from the both the RSN (including the Lexington Contract) and the National Centre and strive to achieve that publication on a monthly basis after the first 12 Months period

- arrange for the publication of any additional information required by the National Centre including Calls for Evidence issued by The Centre

- stage annually (it is suggested, in either London, Birmingham Gloucester or Cheltenham) a specific full day Rural Health Conference. The chargeable attendance fee for ERHN members will not, it is hoped, exceed £100 so that the event is available to the maximum of members possible – it will, however, need to at least break even financially.

- Through the partnership with the RSN, provide the opportunities for
  - Networking
  - Sharing Best Practice Case Studies
  - Helping the National Centre to develop a collective voice
  - Access to elected representatives and policy makers over and above those with whom the National Centre will have its own relationships

## **RECRUITMENT**

Recruitment work for membership of the ERHN shall be formally undertaken by the RSN Administrative Office in Tavistock, Devon.

The RSN will take responsibility for managing the financial arrangements around this initiative but will not be required to set up a separate bank account. It will report to the National Centre quarterly as to the achievement of both financial and any other targets.

The RSN shall: -

-receive monies paid for memberships achieved and Conference attendance fees obtained.

- pay invoices received for agreed recruitment, marketing, operational and Conference costs.

Unless otherwise stated below and after the deduction of the recruitment etc. fees listed above the National Centre shall receive 75 percent of the net fee obtained after the payment of expenses in relation to organisations in Categories in A and B below with the RSN receiving 25 percent of the net figure. The percentages to be reversed between the two organisations in respect of members achieved in Categories C and D below so that the RSN receives the net 75% and the Centre receives a net 25% in such cases. In the event that organisations join who do not fall in the Categories A to D specified below the net figure received shall be split 50/50.

On the 31st of December each year the partners will distribute any balances which the Partners agree shall be distributed in line with the arrangements set out below.

## **CATEGORIES OF MEMBERSHIP AVAILABILITY**

Membership shall be available to the following categories: -

(A) NHS Trusts, CCGs and Acute Hospital Trusts

(B) Universities, Medical Schools and Colleges, Professional Institutes.

(C) Local Authorities covering rural areas

(D) Commercial Organisations with an interest in Health issues

(E) Charitable and other such independent bodies with a specific interest in health-related issues.

## **EXCEPTIONS TO THE NORMAL CHARGING ARRANGEMENTS ETC**

. Free membership of the RHCA for RSN SPARSE\* Rural Authorities

. The Rural Services Network shall give all organisations in category (A) free membership of the Rural Services Partnership to ensure they are kept abreast of all rural issues

. Membership for RSN RURAL ASSEMBLY\* members at a discounted sum of £125 (all of which shall in the accounting agreement be payable to the National Centre minus any recruitment etc fees- see above)

. For Health organisations from category (E) joining the RSN's RURAL SERVICES PARTNERSHIP joint membership of both RSP and The RHCA is available for £500. (in such cases the National Centre shall receive £125 per annum of this sum). For some of the smaller charities etc. some discretion as to fee levels will be needed but a minimum of £250.00 for a year is suggested

. Local Health and Well Being Boards shall be able to have joint membership of the RSP and the RHCA for the joint membership fee of £175. (Of the sum £125 shall be payable after the deduction of expenses to the RSN with £50 going to the National Centre-again net calculations shall apply)

\* in all cases VAT (currently of 20 percent) will be payable on membership fee rates.

## **SOUNDING BOARDS, RURAL PANEL, CALLS FOR EVIDENCE, RURAL OBSERVATORY.**

The RSN run the consultation systems listed above as well as a rural statistical observatory. It is agreed that both the National Centre and the RHCA may have free use of these arrangements as part of this agreement. (If, however any charge becomes involved in their user for any currently unforeseen reason the Centre or the RHCA will pay an appropriate contribution)

## **THE RURAL SERVICES NETWORK**

The Rural Services Network has at its core over 140 Rural Local Authorities and their members – County, Unitary & District). It also has a Community Group over 9,000 Parish/Town Council and other community contacts. The Rural Services Partnership has currently some 80 members (excluding the current Rural Health Network membership).

\*The two Local Authority Groups are technically split and labelled by differing names because the most rural local authorities benefit financially (possibly at the expense of others in a nil sum gain scenario) if funding formulae are altered in response to financial argument we work on and present through the SPARSE Rural Group whilst in the wider RURAL ASSEMBLY we bring together and argue the rural case relating to all other matters (other than finance) of all rural areas across England regardless of the potential funding formula outfall situation.

The Network E Addresses are maintained by the Rural Services Network in a GDPR compliant way and comprises RSN and RSP Officers, and principal Councillors and Parish Councillors and some local organisations. The network comprises some 25,000 rural e mail addresses and is believed to be the largest such rural network operating across England.

#### **METHOD OF RECRUITMENT.**

It is estimated there are over 1,000 potential members of the Health Network. Using the RSN in the fashion suggested will obviously introduce local authorities in a far faster way than would have otherwise have been the case (although most rural principal councils are in RSN membership so the potential there is limited).

The two parties will each use their best endeavours to encourage people and organisations they engage with in their ordinary course of business to become members of the NRHN.

Nevertheless, direct marketing approaches will also need to be employed. This will require good quality, focused marketing materials for posting, e mailing and use at events. It is recommended that someone with Marketing Expertise is employed to prepare these materials.

The National Centre has offered £5000.00 for marketing and that should meet the costs of getting marketing advice and the preparation of marketing material referred to above.

**N.B.** The RSN is not proposing to charge for its intellectual property rights, databases/licences etc so that will match the National Centres £5000.00 referred to above.

Experience shows that just sending materials out by post or e mail will not be sufficient in any direct marketing exercise. There will need to be extensive follow up telephone calls and discussions. This needs to be carried out at a Senior Level so that the individual can speak with both knowledge and authority

Over time, approaches will have to be made to many hundreds of organisations and it seems sensible to spread direct approach recruitment over at least a 4-year programme – probably on a ‘county by county’ basis. It is recommended that the parties establish such a plan for direct recruitment. There is an opportunity to launch this scheme at the proposed parliamentary launch of the National Centre on 16 October 2018.

One of the first areas of work will be to let all who receive correspondence from us under the title of Rural Health Network to know about the changes taking place and to encourage them to get their organisations involved on the new basis. For those

people who do not succeed in involving their organisations we would after a period of grace end their service.

The Annual Conference will be used as a catalyst seeking to achieve wider recruitment outside of any defined direct approach recruitment plan. Costings, including staff time, in respect of the proposed Annual Conference are not included here. Neither are estimates of travelling costs.

A website presence for the RHCA will be necessary through the established websites of both organisations— again it is not costed here.

**LIKELY BUDGET (for initial 6-month period then progress to be reviewed by the parties)**

**EXPENDITURE**

- |   |          |
|---|----------|
| 1. Assume 1 day per week for 26 days at £275.00 per day =   |          |
| £7150   |          |
| 2. Admin Support to put details onto databases etc          |          |
| – say 2 hours per week at £100.00 per day                   | = £ 693  |
| 3. Technical Support re Spotlight preparation & circulation |          |
| - say 2 hours per week at £150.00 per day                   | = £ 1040 |

<b>TOTAL FOR 6 MONTHS</b>	<b>=</b>	<b>£8883</b>
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**INCOME**

Assume 30 members recruited at equivalent of £500.00 each = £15000

(The assumption here is that specific NHS organisations should be approached first. Immediate mixture will however occur as those who join will be accompanied by the Sparse Rural County and Unitary Council groupings.)

**SURPLUS**

**Estimated surplus of Income over expenditure for 6-month period = £6117**

**Likely split: -**

National Centre (75%)	=	£4588
RSN (25%)	=	£1529

# Time for a Rural Strategy

## Why a Rural Strategy?

The Rural Services Network (RSN) calls on the Government to take the lead, working with other interested organisations to produce a comprehensive, long-term and funded Rural Strategy.

This document should set out the Government's priority objectives over the next decade for England's rural communities and rural economies. It should also define a set of policies and initiatives which will achieve them. Some of these policies and initiatives will be new, whilst others may exist now and simply need enhancing to properly meet rural needs.

Rural communities are frequently overlooked in a policy environment which is dominated by (majority) urban thinking and by urban policy concerns. So called "rural mainstreaming" has often led to policies which are inappropriate in a rural setting. As a result those communities miss out on the benefits and may experience unintended consequences of poorly thought through policies.

Rural economies are also widely misunderstood. Too often they are conflated with agriculture and land-based industries. Whilst agriculture certainly remains an important consideration, it is today one element within broad-based and diverse rural economies.

It is time for a Rural Strategy which raises rural challenges and opportunities up the political agenda: which is forward looking and ambitious, recognising the contribution that rural areas make and those they could make to the wellbeing and prosperity of the nation as a whole.

In the view of the RSN there is now a compelling case for such an approach. Years of public sector austerity have left significant challenges for service delivery to rural communities, which must be addressed. There is an urgent need to define a new settlement for rural areas to replace the current model, which is heavily based on European Union policies and funding streams. Change is also needed to overcome the weaknesses in the rural policy framework which have been highlighted by the House of Lords Select Committee in their inquiry into the NERC Act.

The Rural Services Network is the national champion for rural services, ensuring that people in rural areas have a strong voice. It is fighting for a fair deal for rural communities to maintain their social and economic viability for the benefit of the nation as a whole.

The RSN membership is 154 local authorities (counties, unitaries, districts and boroughs) from across England and over 75 other public, private and civil society sector organisations, such as fire and rescue authorities, housing associations, bus operators and land-based colleges.



## The context

Rural areas are home to 9.4 million people according to 2016 population estimates. That is, 17% of the population of England live in small rural towns, villages, hamlets and isolated dwellings. It is more people than live in Greater London.

Those rural areas are varied in type and character. They include – among others – remote and upland communities, coastal settlements, commuter belt villages and former mining settlements. Indeed, they can vary within a single local authority area. Policies ought to be flexible in their design and delivery, if they are to meet the needs of such diverse places.

There are, however, a number of policy challenges which are common to most rural places and which are often inter-connected. They are:

- **Ageing:** rural areas have a high proportion of residents in older age groups, raising demand for services such as health and social care. Moreover, growth in numbers aged 85 or over is expected to happen fastest in rural areas;
- **Living costs:** the cost of housing is typically high, especially in relation to local wages, creating severe issues with affordability. Costs of items such as transport and home heating are also higher than average in rural areas;
- **Infrastructure:** it is relatively costly to build infrastructure, like broadband and mobile phone networks, putting many rural homes and businesses at a disadvantage;
- **Accessibility:** limited public transport options often leave vulnerable groups isolated or without ready access to jobs, training, key services and social opportunities;
- **Delivery:** organisations responsible for delivering services to rural communities face added costs, due to time and expense travelling, a need to operate from multiple service outlets and lost economies of scale.

In 1995 and in 2000 the Governments of the day published a Rural White Paper. In many respects these were impressive documents, outlining a wide range of policy measures in an effort to address rural challenges of the day. Eighteen years have passed since the more recent White Paper. The Rural Productivity Plan of 2015 was welcome at the time, but was narrower in its scope and is already largely out-of-date.

In March 2018 a report published by a House of Lords Select Committee reviewed progress since the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. It highlighted serious concerns with the way that Government handles rural needs and a diminished focus on the potential of rural areas. It called for a strengthening of rural proofing, with all Whitehall departments doing more to ensure a rural dimension in their mainstream policy making.

The RSN accepts that producing another full White Paper may be overblown. However, it believes a comprehensive, properly resourced and up-to-date Rural Strategy is urgently needed to provide the required vision, priorities and policy drive that will meet the challenges in rural England. It will assure rural communities that their needs are not being overlooked.

This should have buy-in and bite across sectors and at all levels. It should therefore be drawn up in consultation with local government, rural interest organisations and others, creating a shared framework for action.

It must provide an overarching approach to the future sustainability of rural communities. It is clear that a piece-meal or short-term approach simply will not deliver.

## A thriving rural economy

*Businesses of all types, sizes and sectors should be supported to prosper, grow and provide decently paid employment opportunities. This will be of direct benefit to rural communities and will contribute significantly to the national economy.*

### Key facts<sup>1</sup>

547,000  
businesses

£246 billion  
productivity

84% working  
in SMEs

22% of jobs  
home-based

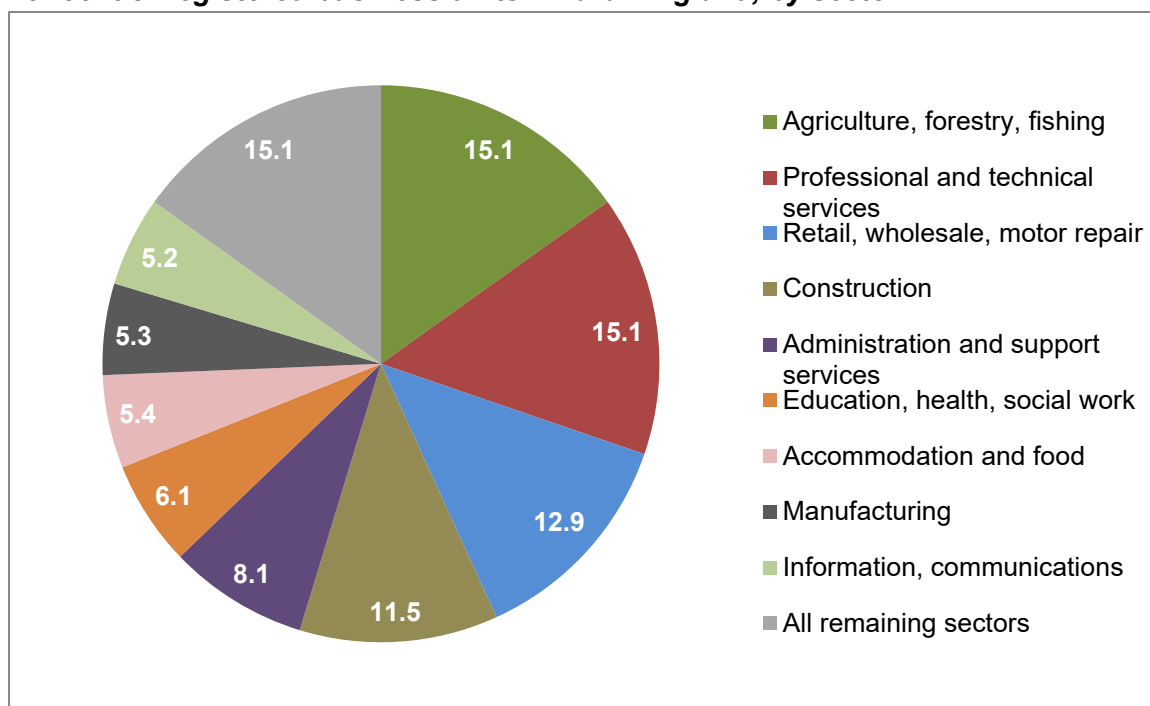
£21,400  
ave. wage

There are 547,000 registered businesses based in rural areas (and probably as many micro-businesses again which are unregistered). They are 24% of all the registered businesses in England, so form a vital part of the national economy.

Those registered businesses have an annual turnover of £434 billion or £124,000 of turnover per person employed. Productivity (Gross Value Added) in rural areas is £246 billion (2016 figure) or £44,740 per workforce job, which is less than the England average (£50,270).

The rural economy is diverse, with businesses from across the range of sectors. Land-based businesses (including farming) are important, but 85% of rural businesses are from other sectors. Other key sectors are professional services, retail and construction.

### Per cent of registered business units in rural England, by sector



<sup>1</sup> All figures in the Key facts section above relate to 2017 unless otherwise stated.

Most registered businesses in rural areas are small. Indeed, almost 18% of them have no employees, being sole traders or partnerships (more than double the equivalent urban figure). Some 84% of employees in rural areas work in SMEs.

Those registered rural businesses employ 3,500,000 people. This figure implies a significant outflow of people commuting to urban-based jobs. However, home working has grown and 22% of all rural jobs are home based (compared with 13% in urban areas).

Whilst the unemployment rate in rural areas is relatively low, many job opportunities are poorly paid, seasonal or insecure. Median (average) annual earnings from rural employment are £21,400. This is 10% less than annual earnings in England as a whole (£23,700).

## The rural challenge

The level of entrepreneurship within rural areas presents a policy opportunity. However, there are a number of significant challenges which should be addressed by a Rural Strategy. They are:

- Closing the productivity gap;
- Supporting further diversification (especially into high value-added sectors);
- Helping rural businesses to grow locally; and
- Providing better paid and more secure jobs.

## What would make a difference?

The Rural Services Network believes that the following initiatives should be included within a Rural Strategy for a thriving rural economy:

- ✓ **A dedicated rural business support programme:** in 2020 EU programmes, such as the LEADER and EAFRD initiatives, will come to an end. These have provided funding streams for rural business growth, diversification and innovation. They have, however, been fairly narrow in scope and modest in size. Government should replace them with a dedicated business support programme, as part of its proposed Shared Prosperity Fund. This should be flexible in scope – potentially open to all business types and sectors – enabling local delivery to be tailored to match locally decided priorities. There is an opportunity for Government to scale-up its ambitions for the rural economy by announcing a significant investment programme.
- ✓ **A rural proofed Industrial Strategy:** many of its objectives in the Government's Industrial Strategy are highly relevant to the needs of the rural economy. However, in order for its benefits to reach into rural areas there will have to be careful 'rural proofing'. This should, for example, apply to Local Industrial Strategies as they are developed by Local Enterprise Partnerships, to ensure they take account of rural needs and opportunities. Where new initiatives are tested this should include rural pilots and where groups are set-up to take forward elements of the Strategy they should include rural specialists. In seeking to boost productivity the Strategy places much focus on hi-tech and innovation sectors. This needs balancing with support aimed at more traditional and numerous rural sectors, such as retail and tourism.

- ✓ **A re-purposing of Local Enterprise Partnerships:** these partnerships (LEPs) are the conduit for considerable sums of public money to support growth and economic development. Most LEPs operate across a mix of urban and rural places. However, whilst some have performed well in taking rural needs into account, others have failed to do so – focussing their efforts on a few large urban projects. As a matter of principle, all LEPs whose geography includes rural places ought to identify and target their needs too. Building on the 2018 LEP Review, Government should ensure that LEP Boards receive training on rural proofing and that LEP end of year reports state publically what has been delivered in their rural areas.
  
- ✓ **A training offer suited to small rural businesses:** all businesses should be able to benefit from training. This assists some to develop or grow their businesses. But equally it helps them stay up-to-date on matters such as tax and regulations. However, finding the time to attend and getting to training opportunities can be a real challenge for the smallest rural businesses. Sessions or courses therefore need to be as easily accessible as possible. Training providers should seek to deliver early evening sessions in readily accessible rural locations. They should also consider whether courses could be delivered online, including as distance learning.
  
- ✓ **A Further Education system accessible to rural pupils:** young people from rural areas often experience difficulties getting to Further Education colleges or sixth forms. For some this means undertaking long or complex journeys to get there and back, whilst for others it means compromising on the course topics they take. This dampens young people's aspirations and curtails their opportunities. One rural barrier would be removed if those travelling to post-16 education or training were entitled to subsidised bus fares. Those aged 17 and 18 should receive the same entitlement to free travel as those aged up to 16.

## A digitally connected countryside

*All rural households and businesses should have the option of affordable and reliable access to broadband and mobile networks. Digital connectivity is essential in a modern economy and to enable fair access to services and other opportunities.*

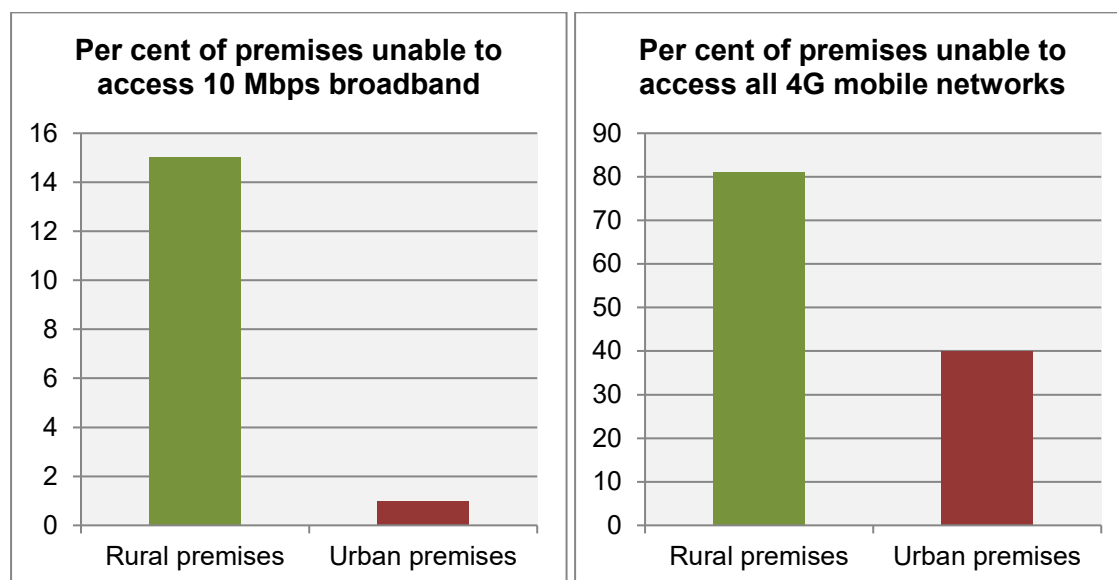
### Key facts<sup>2</sup>

Significant sums of public expenditure have been invested to extend the reach of superfast broadband networks into less commercial areas. This included match funding from rural local authorities (a cost not borne by urban authorities). However, there remains a noticeable gap between levels of connectivity in rural and urban areas.

In England's rural areas 15% of premises – households and businesses – are unable to access a broadband connection with a 10 Megabits per second (Mbps) download speed. Industry regulator, Ofcom, considers this a necessary speed for everyday online tasks.

In the most remote rural locations connection speeds can be significantly worse. A survey of its members by the National Farmers Union in 2016 concluded that over half of them (56%) could not yet access a basic 2 Mbps connection.

Mobile connectivity has improved, but the indoor signal is poor in England's rural areas, with phone calls on all four networks only possible at 59% of premises. Meanwhile, using 4G on all networks – giving fast internet access – is only possible inside 19% of rural premises.



Take-up of superfast broadband is fair in rural areas where it is available, with almost four in ten premises upgrading. However, a rural business survey by Rural England and SRUC found only 19% had a superfast connection and most (59%) relied on standard broadband. It also found high rates of dissatisfaction with connection speed and reliability.

<sup>2</sup> All figures in the Key facts section above refer to 2017, except the one cited as 2016.

The survey, cited above, identifies significant and wide-ranging rural business benefits from digital adoption. It estimates that if constraints to digital adoption, such as skills issues, could be overcome it would unlock at least £12 billion of extra productivity per annum (Gross Value Added).

Rural businesses say their top three benefits from digital adoption are:		
It enables remote working	It improves access to customers and suppliers	It boosts overall business efficiency

## The rural challenge

Broadband and mobile networks are improving and rural business adoption of digital technologies demonstrates real potential. However, there are a number of significant challenges which should be addressed by a Rural Strategy. They are:

- Extending broadband networks to those premises still missing out;
- Future proofing broadband policy, so rural areas do not fall far behind again;
- Capitalising on the benefits from the roll out of superfast networks; and
- Addressing issues with mobile network coverage (including 4G).

## What would make a difference?

The Rural Services Network believes that the following initiatives should be included within a Rural Strategy for a digitally connected countryside:

- ✓ **A focus on tackling market failure:** the unwillingness of most telecoms network providers to invest in superfast broadband roll out in rural areas has been a clear case of market failure. That and the inequity of the current situation fully justify a significant public sector intervention. The Government's Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review provides a helpful long term vision, by seeking to extend full fibre networks nationwide and achieving that by targeting future public funding at the most rural areas. Full fibre offers a long term solution, where rural connectivity does not keep slipping behind. The proposed rural first (or outside-in) approach to funding is exactly what will be needed. Further announcements about how the vision will be turned into practice – not least on the funding package – will be eagerly awaited.
- ✓ **A USO that is fit for the future:** in the shorter term, the planned introduction (in 2020) of a broadband Universal Service Obligation (USO) is welcome. However, the proposed level of that USO, at 10 Mbps, risks becoming out-of-date. Ofcom should review this prior to its introduction, not least because there will be pressure to leave the USO unchanged for a while to bed down. When the USO is applied decisions about upgrading networks should be taken on a value for money basis and not just a cheapest solution basis. Whilst the cheap option may get premises or areas just over the 10 Mbps threshold, a value for money solution could deliver much higher speeds that result in more sustained benefits.

- ✓ **A drive to connect rural businesses:** evidence from the Rural England and SRUC survey of rural businesses is that those with a superfast connection have realised more business benefits and faced fewer digital challenges than those still dependent on a slower connection. The survey report concludes that, in order to capitalise on the public investment in superfast networks, more businesses should therefore be encouraged to upgrade (where they have the option to do so). Government and local broadband partnerships should reinforce their current efforts to promote the business benefits. Actions could include finding rural businesses who are already adopters and who are willing to act as broadband champions among their peer group.
- ✓ **A review of mobile connectivity:** whilst mobile connectivity is improving, rural areas lag behind and there are particular rural issues, such as signal strength inside many premises and signal loss for those on the move. It is not yet clear whether the Government's 2017 targets for extending the reach of mobile networks (including 4G coverage) have been met **[NB Awaiting Ofcom conclusion]**. These, however, need to be updated, with more stretching targets set for both voice/text and mobile internet access. Revised targets should apply to all four networks (EE, O2, Three and Vodafone), so they are meaningful for those on the move. The sharing of network masts by providers, to address gaps in provision, should be supported and enabled (and if necessary regulated for).



## A place everyone can get around

*People of all ages must have the means to travel to services, jobs and other opportunities. Not least those in the one in nine rural households that do not have a car. Transport is crucial to life opportunities and its absence leads to isolation.*

### Key facts<sup>3</sup>

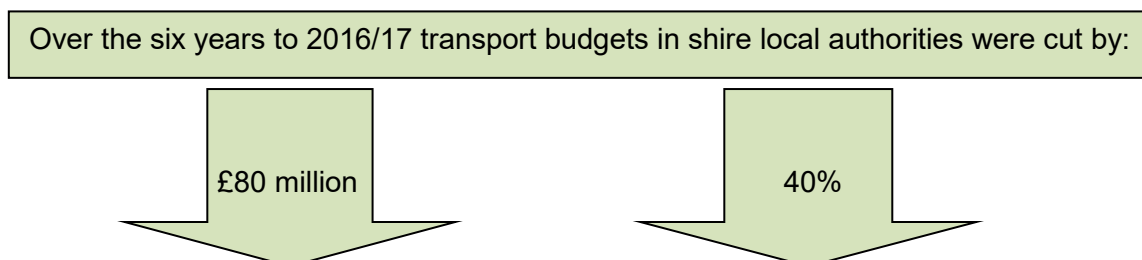
Rural residents need to travel further than their urban counterparts. Those living in small rural settlements (villages and hamlets) travel an average of 10,159 miles per year. This is 41% more than the average for residents living in urban settlements.

Car ownership is relatively high in rural areas. Particularly notable is that low income households are 70% more likely to run a car if they live in a rural (rather than urban) area. Car ownership is a necessity for many to get around and an added cost they face.

Less than half (49%) of households living in small rural settlements have access to a regular and nearby bus service. [NB This 2012 DfT statistic is due to be updated, which should make it possible to comment on the recent trend.]

### WHEN DATA AVAILABLE ADD CHART, SHOWING TREND AND URBAN COMPARISON

Local authorities in rural areas have far less funding to support bus services. In 2017/18 predominantly rural areas received £6.72 per resident to subsidise services, compared with £31.93 in predominantly urban areas. Figures for funding to cover concessionary bus fares were £13.48 (rural) and £25.54 (urban) respectively.



There have been widespread cuts to rural bus services which depended on some public subsidy. During 2016/17 alone some 202 bus services were withdrawn altogether in shire areas and a further 191 services were reduced or altered.

Around half (52%) of all community transport organisations either wholly or mostly serve rural communities. However, in rural areas these organisations tend to be small-scale and they rely more heavily on fare revenue (receiving less grant income).

## The rural challenge

<sup>3</sup> Data sources are: Department for Transport, Rural Services Network, Campaign for Better Transport and Community Transport Association.

Rural bus services are under a great deal of pressure and, despite much good practice, community transport is struggling to plug the gaps left behind. There are a number of significant challenges which should be addressed by a Rural Strategy. They are:

- Reversing the widespread decline in rural bus service provision;
- Making bus services a more attractive option for rural travellers;
- Creating a fairer funding system to support bus operations; and
- Providing sustained support for community transport schemes.

## What would make a difference?

The Rural Services Network believes that the following initiatives should be included within a Rural Strategy for a place everyone can get around:

- ✓ **A fair funding deal for local government:** it is inevitable that many bus routes require some subsidy in order to survive. The widespread cuts to rural bus services are primarily a result of the long-term squeeze on local government funding, coupled with growing demands on their other statutory functions such as adult social care. The funding squeeze must now be brought to an end. Funding rural bus services would also be much easier if the distribution of funding between local authorities was fair. In 2016/17 urban local authorities received 40% more (£116 per resident more) in funding than rural authorities. This historic funding imbalance needs putting right, taking full account of the added (sparsity) cost of delivering services, like supported bus routes, in rural areas.
  - ✓ **A viable deal for transport operators:** Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG) provides operators with a partial (20%) rebate on fuel duty and as such it helps to sustain many financially marginal rural bus routes. From time to time BSOG has, however, come under scrutiny. A positive signal from Government that recognises the importance of BSOG and commits to retaining it at its current level would help stabilise the market and provide some longer-term reassurance for operators. Where BSOG is paid out via local authorities (for tendered services) it must remain fully funded by central Government.
  - ✓ **A more sustainable approach to community transport:** many rural communities are struggling to establish schemes to replace lost bus services and others to keep their existing schemes viable. Grants may be sourced by them from local authorities, the national lottery and various trust funds. The Government has also been funding a £25 million Community Minibus Fund. This size of this fund is very modest compared with the growing level of need. A £50 million per year fund, which targets the particular needs of rural areas, could easily be justified. A fair funding deal for local government (see above) would also enable more grants to be paid out to sustain existing rural community transport schemes.
- [May want to add reference to current licensing issue when Govt decides its line]
- ✓ **A realistic concessionary fares scheme:** the statutory concessionary fares scheme, which gives pensioners and the disabled free travel on buses, is overly restrictive in a rural context. It only covers travel after 9.30 am. Some villages are served by just a few daily buses and there may be no service for some hours after that time. Others are served, not by traditional buses, but by community transport

schemes to which the current concessionary fares scheme does not apply. The statutory scheme therefore needs reform to make it valuable and fair to rural users.

As highlighted in the 'thriving rural economy' section, local authorities should also be funded to cover the public transport costs for 17 and 18 year olds travelling to further education.

## An affordable place to live

*Rural communities are only likely to thrive economically and socially if they are home to residents from a mix of age groups and backgrounds. This includes providing those brought up locally or working there with a chance to buy or rent a home that they can afford.*

### Key facts<sup>4</sup>

Average house prices are £44,000 higher in rural areas than urban areas (2017). Further, housing is less affordable in predominantly rural areas, where lower quartile (the cheapest 25%) house prices are 8.3 times greater than lower quartile annual earnings (2016).

Options for those on low incomes seeking social rented housing are typically very limited in small rural settlements. Only 8% of households in villages live in social housing. By contrast, 19% of households in urban settlements live in social housing (2011 Census).

### Per cent of households that live in each type of housing tenure (2011 Census)

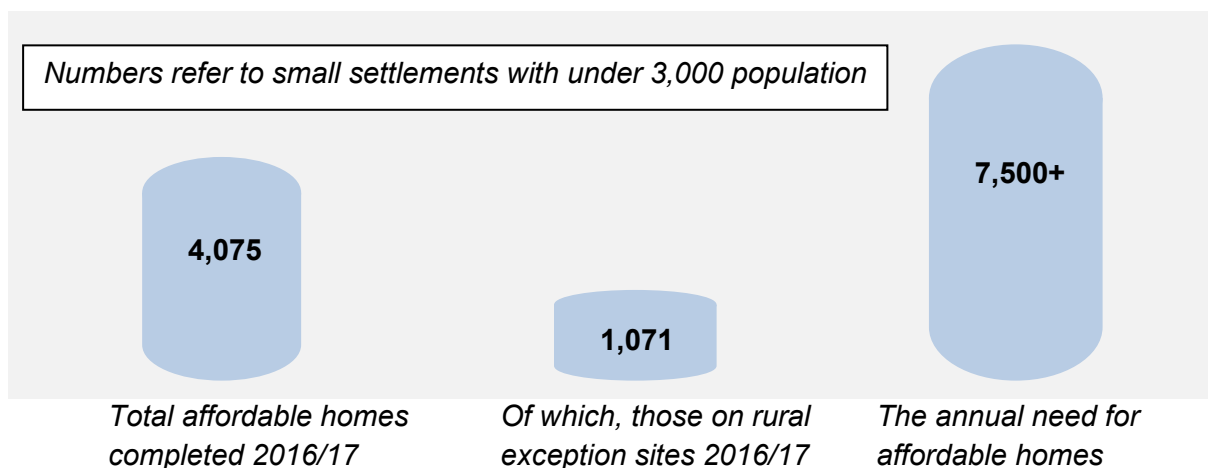


The rural stock of social rented housing has shrunk under the Right to Buy policy, with sales quadrupling between 2012 and 2015 to reach 1% of the stock each year. Although the sale income is intended for reinvestment, only 1 replacement home was built for every 8 sold in rural areas during this period, and those replacements are rarely in the same settlement.

Second homes and holiday lets often add to rural housing market pressures, especially in popular tourist areas. They form a particularly large share of the housing stock in some local authority areas – Isles of Scilly (15%), North Norfolk (10%) and South Hams (9%).

It has previously been estimated there is a need to build 7,500 new affordable homes each year at England's small rural settlements, a figure now considered an under-estimate. Around 3,700 such homes were completed in 2015/16 and just over 4,000 during 2016/17.

<sup>4</sup> Data sources are: Halifax Building Society, ONS, Rural Housing Policy Review, MHCLG and Rural Services Network.



Two thirds of rural local authorities say that affordable housing delivery decreased in their rural areas in 2017. This follows a change in planning policy, with developers no longer required to include any affordable homes on small market development sites.

## The rural challenge

Rural communities are generally attractive places to live, but they need to be able to grow in ways which meet the needs of local people. There are a number of significant challenges which should be addressed by a Rural Strategy. They are:

- Bringing forward development sites at a price suited to affordable housing;
- Making sure such homes are and remain genuinely affordable;
- Planning new housing in ways which attract community support; and
- Ensuring the funding model for affordable housing adds up.

## What would make a difference?

**NB NEEDS SOME REDRAFTING TO ACCOUNT FOR FINAL NPPF REVISIONS**

The Rural Services Network believes that the following initiatives should be included within a Rural Strategy for an affordable place to live:

- ✓ **A planning policy which fits rural circumstances:** most development sites in rural areas are small. Recent changes to planning policy exclude small sites (of less than 10 dwellings) from the requirement that private developers include a proportion of affordable homes within developments. Despite some minor qualifications being inserted in this policy change, its impact is proving significant and negative for the delivery of rural affordable housing. Indeed, this was the main way such housing was built and it required no public subsidy. A simple solution would be to exempt all small rural settlements from this policy change, allowing affordable housing quotas again where they are most needed.
- ✓ **A realistic definition of affordable:** in the most rural areas the greatest need for affordable housing is that for social housing to rent. Many rural households cannot afford to pay anywhere near open market prices or rents. However, the policy definition of 'affordable housing' has been broadened to include Starter Homes, which are for sale at a 20% discount, and Affordable Rent, which is for rent at up to

80% of market prices. Whilst these tenures have their place, the overriding need in rural areas is to increase the supply of truly affordable homes. This might be achieved by improved funding for housing associations (see below) and giving local planning authorities more discretion to set tenures in Local Plan policies.

- ✓ **A workable approach to exception sites:** rural exception sites (RES) have proven a valued mechanism, delivering affordable homes to meet local needs in and around villages where residential development would not usually be given planning consent. They are generally popular with communities because they target local needs and seek to remain affordable. RES policies delivered 1,071 affordable rural homes in 2016/17. However, the approach is now at risk from the introduction of Entry Level Exception Sites (ELES), with market housing for first time buyers. It is expected higher land values will be realised for ELES than for RES sites, so the former is likely to be achieved at the expense of the latter. There needs to be a serious rethink, with rural areas preferably exempted from the ELES policy.
- ✓ **A dedicated rural affordable housing programme:** there is a need for a specific grant programme designed to boost delivery at small rural settlements by housing associations. This could be managed by Homes England and run at a scale which meets the shortfall in delivery identified by the 2014 Rural Housing Policy Review. The grant rates on offer should take account of the fact that undertaking small-scale development in rural areas is comparatively costly. Similarly, a fair share of the Community Housing Fund, which supports community land trusts, co-housing and self-build projects, should be allocated to rural projects, thus meeting the original objective for this fund.
- ✓ **A policy supported by landowners and communities:** landowners' willingness to release land at less than market prices depends on them being assured it will only ever be used for affordable housing. At present there is too much uncertainty and this undermines policy delivery. One way to address this could be putting into law the ability to attach such a purpose (for affordability) to the deeds of sale. Rural community support for the development of affordable housing could be enhanced if the occupancy of new homes was not limited to those on local authority housing registers, but extended to households from the relevant parishes or settlements who currently live in insecure rented or tied accommodation.

## A fair deal on health and social care

*Rural communities, like communities everywhere, need access to good quality health care facilities and some require extra support from social care services. This is fundamental to wellbeing and anything less may pose a health risk. They should not have to pay extra for this (either directly or indirectly).*

### Key facts<sup>5</sup>

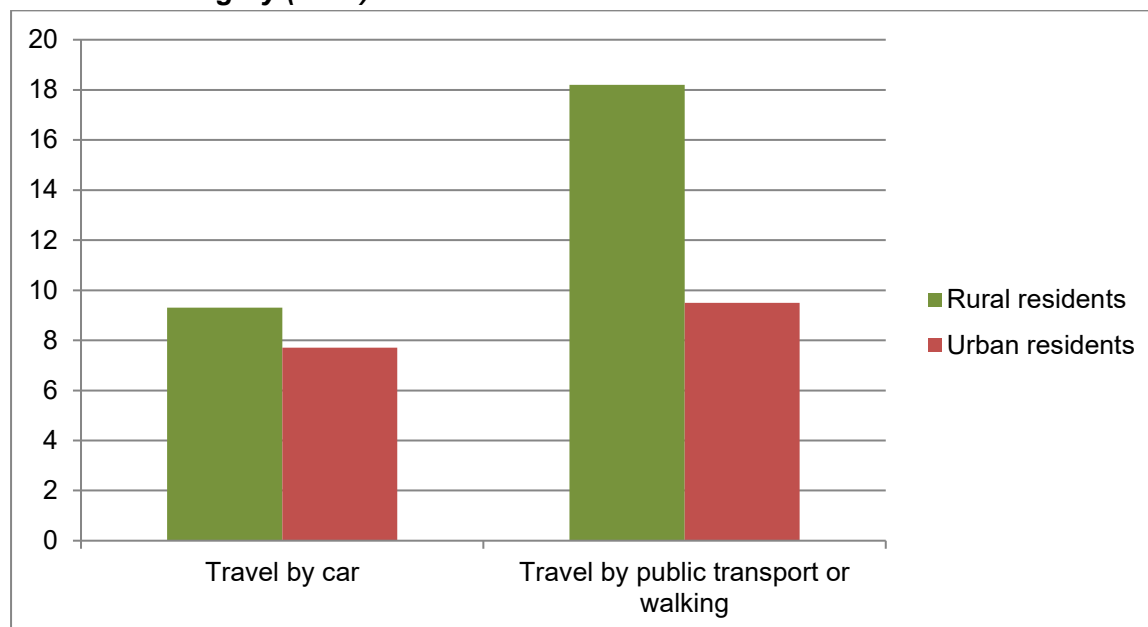
Older age groups form a significant and growing share of the rural population. In 2011 29% of the rural population were aged 60 or over, up from 24% in 2001. Comparative urban figures were 21% in 2011 and 20% in 2001. Projections expect the population aged 85 and over to double in rural areas over the next twenty years.

Rural areas receive less funding (per resident) than urban areas under the NHS allocations to Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs). This is despite them having an older population, which places more demand on NHS services due to chronic illness, disability and mortality.

[Note: Up-to-date figures are being sought to insert here (as existing figures are for 2010/11)]

Rural residents face longer journeys to reach a GP surgery than their urban counterparts. Those who travel by public transport or walk have an average 18 minute journey, though this figure takes no account of the frequency of such transport and hence any waiting time.

### **Minimum travel time, in minutes, for average rural and urban resident to reach their nearest GP surgery (2016)**



The Government's resource allocation system for local government (Settlement Funding Assessment) provided urban areas with 40% more funding per resident than rural areas in 2016/17. With growing demand and reducing budgets, spend on social care provision risks overwhelming rural county and unitary council budgets at the expense of other services.

<sup>5</sup> Data sources are: ONS, Department for Transport, Rural Services Network and Rural England.

Rural residents also face an additional cost burden for their adult social care provision they receive. In 2017/18 they funded 76% of the cost of its provision through their Council Tax bills. The urban comparator figure was 53%.

Home care providers face various challenges in rural areas, including difficulties recruiting staff and unproductive staff travel time between geographically spread clients. Rates of delayed transfer of care upon hospital discharge are higher in rural than urban areas.

#### ***Rates of delayed transfer of care from hospitals in 2016/17***

Predominantly rural areas:

Rate = **19.2** cases per 100,000 adult population

Predominantly urban areas:

Rate = **13.0** cases per 100,000 adult population

Almost 12% of all residents who live in rural areas are providing informal care to someone else on a regular basis. That figure doubles to 24% among older people who live in rural areas. Both of these figures are higher than the urban equivalents.

### **The rural challenge**

On measures of healthiness the rural population can score quite well, but demand for health and social care services is growing and access to them is frequently a concern. A number of significant challenges should be addressed by a Rural Strategy. They are:

- Ensuring that patients can get to secondary and tertiary health services;
- Delivering locally-based, quality primary health care in rural settings;
- Making sure social care reaches those who need it in remote locations; and
- Benefitting rural clients through improved health and social care integration.

### **What would make a difference?**

The Rural Services Network believes that the following initiatives should be included within a Rural Strategy for a fair deal on health and social care:

- ✓ **A fair allocation of funding to rural areas:** funding for the NHS, social care and public health should each be overhauled to reflect actual patterns of demand for those services and to take better account of the extra costs of provision in sparsely populated areas. As a matter of principle, residents in rural and urban areas should receive equitable service provision. Rural residents should not be paying higher Council Tax for fewer services. Local taxation has become unable to meet rising social care needs and there is now a case for financing the social care services managed by local authorities in a different way, with their statutory provision being fully funded by central Government. This would address the current unfairness in the system and make it easier to cope with future demand.
- ✓ **A rural proofed model for health care delivery:** in many areas the NHS Sustainability and Transformation Plans (STPs) propose reconfiguring secondary and tertiary health care services, including A&E, elective and other hospital provision.



Often these plans would result in more centralised services. Whilst there can be a medical case for specialising at one NHS location, this needs to be balanced against the need for patient (and visitor) access to services, not least from outlying rural areas. STPs should also emphasise delivering things such as clinics locally in health centres or community hospitals, whilst seeking to improve hospital patient transport.

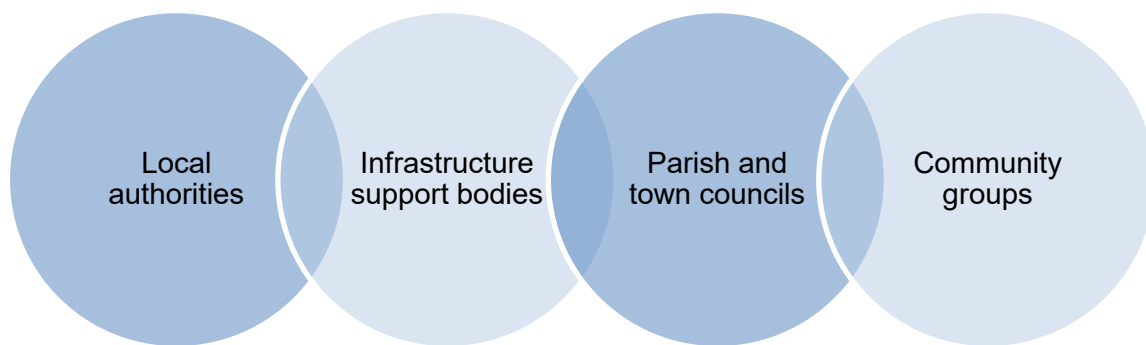
- ✓ **A stronger focus on filling vacancies:** a growing number of rural GP surgeries report problems recruiting to fill vacancies for family doctors and other professional members of staff. Working in smaller or rural surgeries appears to be less attractive to trainees and younger health care professionals. The NHS now manages a fund to help attract recruits into hard-to-fill posts. It is important that rural provision benefits sufficiently from this initiative. The level of rural vacancies should be carefully monitored by the NHS and, if the recent trend is not reversed, further action will be required.
- ✓ **A joined up approach to health and social care:** in rural areas, perhaps even more than elsewhere, there is a need to achieve greater integration between health and social care services. To that end, the Better Care Fund has been a helpful (pooled) funding pot, despite giving less to rural than to urban areas<sup>6</sup>. The upcoming Social Care Green Paper offers an opportunity to move to a more sustainable and effective approach. It should aim to address rural service cost issues. It should also extend to tackling linked housing issues, such as access to specialist housing for older people and adapting the homes of those who live independently. This is important in rural areas where there are typically limited housing choices.

<sup>6</sup> This Fund will provide £29.54 per rural resident and £37.74 per urban resident in 2019/20.

## A settlement to support local action

*The needs of rural communities are mostly best met when policy decisions take place locally by those who understand the area. This means devolving decisions to local authorities, working in partnership with parish councils and engaging their communities. Such local action will also help address issues such as rural isolation, loneliness and vulnerability.*

### Key facts<sup>7</sup>



Local authorities are fundamental to efforts to ensure sustainable and inclusive rural communities. They provide democratically elected local leadership, address community needs and deliver a range of important public services, either directly or working with others.

To be effective local authorities must be sufficiently resourced. In rural areas their capacity has increasingly been curtailed both by funding cuts which affect the whole local authority sector and because they receive less funding than local authorities in urban areas.

At the very local level there are roughly 10,000 Parish and Town Councils, mostly in rural areas. Increasingly they are taking on facilities and services which principal local authorities can no longer afford to run. This is a positive response, though the long term survival of such services often remains uncertain.

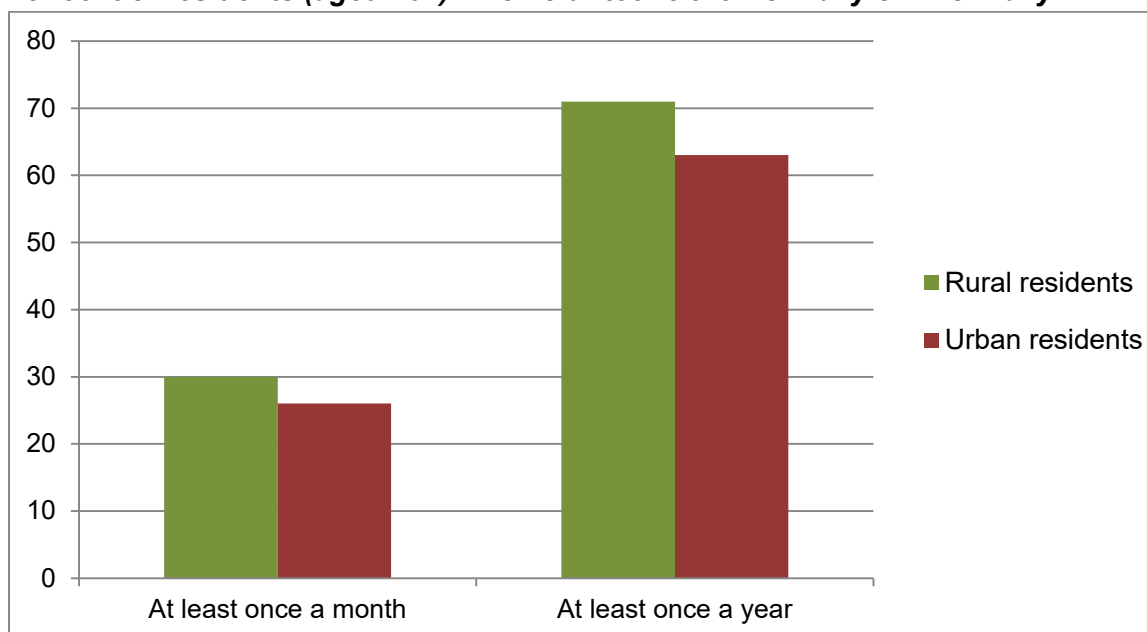
Rural England has almost 10,000 village halls or community buildings, usually managed by volunteer trustees. These are venues for a wide variety of social, sports, recreation and arts activities. Many host services like a pre-school, outreach post office or country market.

Much of the growth in numbers of community-run shops, pubs and libraries has taken place in rural communities where their private or public provision has disappeared. In 2016 there were 296 community-run shops in England, some 59% of which contained a post office.

Survey data shows that 30% of rural residents aged 16 or over volunteered on at least a monthly basis (2017/18), which is higher than the urban figure (26%). The voluntary sector, however, often expresses concern about growing expectations and volunteer burn-out.

<sup>7</sup> Data sources are: NALC, DCMS, ACRE and Plunkett Foundation.

***Per cent of residents (aged 16+) who volunteer either formally or informally***



In many parts of the country local action has been taken to draw up Community Resilience Plans. This is particularly important in rural areas where residents and businesses have experienced extreme weather events, such as flooding, drought and storm damage.

Earlier sections in this document contain other facts relevant to local action, such as those about community transport and neighbourhood planning.

## **The rural challenge**

The extent of community activism and self help is a positive feature found in many rural communities. However, there are a number of significant challenges which should be addressed by a Rural Strategy. They are:

- Ensuring that local authorities retain the capacity to serve their rural communities;
- Boosting the capacity of parish and town councils to bring about local solutions;
- Recruiting and retaining volunteers with sufficient time and the right skills; and
- Providing the support infrastructure to grow community action in more areas.

## **What would make a difference?**

The Rural Services Network believes that the following initiatives should be included within a Rural Strategy for a settlement to support local action:

- ✓ **A properly resourced local authority sector:** from 2011 to 2017 the revenue funding to pay for local authority services was reduced by £16 billion. This has forced the sector to make uncomfortable cutbacks that impact negatively on the quality of resident's lives. Those impacts have been particularly felt by rural residents, since their local authorities had below average levels of funding to start with. Ending the long funding squeeze would take the pressure of vital services and

be welcomed by communities. Ensuring a fairer allocation of that funding to rural local authorities would go further and deliver tangible benefits for rural residents.

- ✓ **A new deal for parish and town councils:** many parish and town councils have taken on discretionary services previously provided by their principal local authorities, such as maintaining open spaces, public footpaths and public toilets. Typically they do this well. But with shrinking local authority budgets these services often have to be taken on without any accompanying funding. There is an inevitable extra cost for town and parish councils. Government should therefore remove its threat to impose a cap on increases to the precept they charge. More of these councils could also be encouraged to group together to provide services cost-effectively.
- ✓ **An underpinning for community action:** the rural voluntary and community sector needs access to professional and technical support. That includes advice on governance, finance, operational and other matters. It also includes training for volunteers. In some areas there is limited community action and more intensive support is needed to help build capacity. All of this requires infrastructure bodies that specialise in providing advice, training and support to rural community groups and volunteers. Such bodies offer good value for money, but can only survive with some underpinning funding. Wherever possible this should last for a few years, giving them more certainty and letting them get on with the task. Proposals outlined in the Government's Civil Society Strategy have the potential to address this rural need.
- ✓ **A support package for communities:** community activism is low cost, but it rarely comes free. This is especially so when community groups take on buildings or other assets. Various trusts are generous funders of local projects. Government, too, has provided some grant funding through bodies such as Locality. If rural communities are being expected to play a growing role in service delivery and the management of local assets it is imperative this funding continues and at a level which matches the policy aspiration. This will need backing up with resources, such as good practice guidance and local networks where communities can learn from each other.
- ✓ **A local response to extreme weather:** rural communities have increasingly experienced extreme weather events. In recent years rural communities in places such as Cornwall, Somerset and Cumbria have faced torrential rainfall and flooding. In 2018 many communities suffered from drought conditions, not least those homes and businesses which rely on abstracted water from bore holes, springs, streams and the like. Communities in vulnerable locations need assistance in the form of infrastructure and measures to reduce future risk, and having plans in place to respond to extreme circumstances. Local Community Resilience Plans should be encouraged and supported.

## A rural-proofed policy framework

*Mainstream policies, such as those on housing, health, education, planning and economic growth, must be workable in rural areas, where there can be distinct challenges delivering to small and scattered settlements or where economies of scale are harder to achieve.*

### Key points

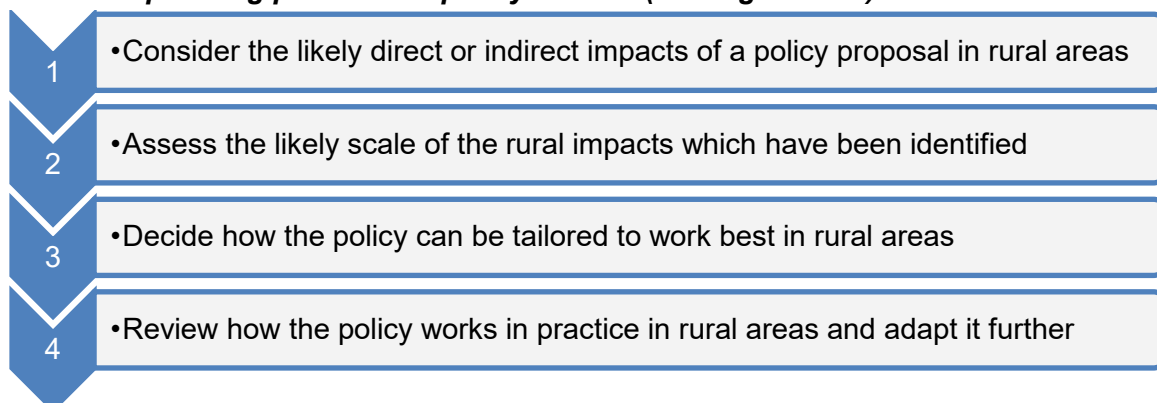
Most policies which impact on the quality of life for rural communities are policies that operate England- or UK-wide. There is, hence, a clear need to design and deliver them so they prove of equal benefit to urban and rural residents and businesses. What works in an urban context will not necessarily work in a rural context.

Rural proofing is the policy making process intended to achieve that end. Over the years various reviews have found that its implementation is patchy – including, most recently, the Independent Rural Proofing Implementation Review led by Lord Cameron.

The review by Lord Cameron concluded that Defra has insufficient staff resources working on rural affairs. It questioned the ability of Defra, as lead department on this topic, to engage sufficiently with other Whitehall departments and to support rural proofing.

Various commentators have cited other factors that, when in place, make rural proofing more likely to succeed. They include having buy-in from departmental Ministers, policy makers consulting with rural interest groups and making rural proofing a more transparent process.

### ***The rural proofing process for policy makers (Defra guidance)***



That rural proofing can work well seems clear. A recent example of good practice is the Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review issued by DCMS. This seeks to address market failure in rural areas, proposing an approach to ensure rural communities are not left behind.

Rural proofing can add just as much value at the local level, where services and policy initiatives are typically delivered. Its application can be especially beneficial in administrative areas that are mostly urban in character, yet which also contain rural localities.

## The challenge

Whilst rural proofing has a mixed record, it has nonetheless proved a useful lever for seeking to have rural needs and circumstances taken into account. To improve its effectiveness a Rural Strategy should address certain points. They are:

- Providing sufficient staff and resources to carry out the rural proofing function;
- Making it clearer what rural proofing actions policy makers are taking;
- Reaffirming the rural proofing commitment of Government and Ministers; and
- Ensuring that rural proofing filters down more consistently to the local level.

## What would make a difference?

- ✓ **A redoubled rural proofing commitment:** whilst the rural affairs function sits within Defra, rural proofing must be properly understood and needs to take place across Whitehall departments. That is much more likely to be the case if there is a visible commitment to the process from the top. A centrepiece of a Rural Strategy should therefore be a renewed commitment to rural proofing from the Prime Minister and Cabinet. That would send a strong and positive message, both externally to rural communities and internally to policy making teams.
- ✓ **A more transparent proofing process:** it is frequently unclear the extent to which Whitehall departments have considered rural needs and circumstances when developing policies or initiatives. Since rural proofing is a commitment this is unfortunate. Three actions could help. First, policy making teams could more often consult rural interest groups who have relevant subject expertise. Second, departments could report annually and publically on their rural proofing activities. Third, the Environment, Food & Rural Affairs Select Committee could hold a short, regular (say, biennial) inquiry to review progress.
- ✓ **A better resourced team with Defra:** the dedicated rural affairs team within Defra has a key role to engage with policy making teams across Whitehall, helping them to understand rural issues, to undertake rural proofing and to apply rural evidence. This is an ongoing function: rural proofing activity quickly withers if it is not supported. Whilst Defra staff will never be able to engage with every policy development that takes place, there nevertheless needs to be sufficient resourcing to cover a broad sweep of topics which impact significantly on rural communities and economies.
- ✓ **An effective approach to local policy delivery:** the principle of rural proofing ought to be followed through to the local level where policies are delivered, not least by various statutory bodies and partnerships. Good practice can include the adoption of local rural strategies, rural impact assessment, rural scrutiny sessions, rural pilots to test new initiatives, appointing rural champions to key groups or committees and monitoring rural outcomes. It is also valuable if there are opportunities and resources which enable the sharing and learning from existing rural practice. Organisations such as the Rural Services Network stand ready to play their part.

## **Our call to Government and others**

FINAL SECTION YET TO BE DRAFTED

# **Report to the Rural Services Network Executive**

**Monday 24<sup>th</sup> September 2018**

## **The Rural Services Partnership**

### **1. Introduction**

To provide the Executive Members with an update and overview of the Rural Services Partnership since the appointment of Jon Turner, Policy Director, in April of this year, who has the responsibility to increase the membership.

### **2. Background**

The Rural Services Partnership (RSP) is a long-standing not-for-profit membership company Limited by Guarantee established by the RSN in 2008. The RSP is a component of the wider Rural Services Network (RSN). The RSP is the non-local government part of the RSN and works predominantly with both the private and third sector service providers in rural England and a number of national interest groups.

Working closely with the RSN's local authority members, the RSP is the only national champion for rural services in England for non - local government services. The RSP works with the RSN for the benefit of all rural sectors it represents as a membership organisation, which lobbies and advocates on behalf of rural service providers. The RSP, as part of the RSN, lobbies for a fair deal for rural communities to maintain and enhance their social and economic wellbeing and viability.

The RSP proved to be a very successful organisation and engaged with over 200 organisations at its peak, however, due to the austerity regime its membership has since declined to some 100 organisations, which includes the Landex Rural Colleges Consortium of 52 colleges.

Since the beginning of May this year, the membership and its diversity has evolved with an emphasis on a sector approach to recruitment, which include the following sectors and the type of organisations to be approached:

**Health and Wellbeing** - Carers organisations, mental health and social care.

**Older People** – similar organisation to Age UK.

**Young People** - small and national youth organisation such as UK Youth, Northampton Youth Association.

**Other Community Organisations** – Faith Groups, Arts, Rural Media, Community Development Organisations

**Rural Businesses Networks** – The Rural Chambers, Rural LEs and other business networks who support rural businesses.

**Commercial Transport Operators** – commercial operators both large and small



**Professional Services** – legal practices, planning and land-use consultants, architects and master planners and land agents

**Housing Businesses** (Not including members of the Rural Housing Alliance)

The membership has increased by a further 20 organisations since the beginning of April 2018, which brings the total number, included the Landex Colleges, to 123. The accompanying table highlights the new members in yellow. These new members have joined at different times of the year and have therefore not been asked for the full subscription amount for this first year

### **What's New for RSP members?**

In light of the need to manage cost for the RSN and avoid unnecessary cost increases, the offer for the existing and new members has been mainly based on the work already being undertaken by the RSN. However, the RSN website and Rural Bulletin, including the Spotlights, have been tailored to include dedicated pages for the RSP members. The 'Promotion of Best Practice', page has proved popular so far.

The RSP offer, as set out in a new recruitment leaflet, includes the following services:

### **Rural Officer Service**

We can provide a one-stop-shop for rural services through our extensive network of rural service providers and our lobbying and campaigning expertise.

### **The National Rural Services Website**

[www.rsnonline.org.uk](http://www.rsnonline.org.uk)

A comprehensive information service including rural news stories, rural statistics at a Local Authority level, updates on Rural campaigns and much more...

Each member has a dedicated place on the website that highlights their approach and best experience in relation to the delivery of rural services in England.

An RSP members' page <http://www.rsnonline.org.uk/category/rural-services-partnership-members>

An RSP Promoting Rural Best Practice page <http://www.rsnonline.org.uk/category/promoting-rural-best-practice>

Each member is given an RSP logo to use to promote the fact they are an active member of the RSP.

### **A Rural Bulletin**

The weekly bulletin covers topical issues affecting rural England, including: health, transport, youth, older people, housing and economy. The Bulletin reaches over 25,000 recipients each week; including over 140 local authorities.

There is also an opportunity to include a feature about the organisation in the topical publication, the Rural Spotlight, which has a weekly focus on current rural topics. The Spotlight could reach as many as 25,000 people per week.

## **Rural National Campaigning**

To campaign for better rural services through the 66-strong cross-party member group from both Houses; the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Rural Services. This service will provide an opportunity to influence central government policy impacting on rural areas.

## **Rural Topics**

Through a series of topical sub groups, rural issues are considered in more detail and their outcomes help to inform the provision of better rural services, in particular for vulnerable groups.

- Rural Housing (The Rural Housing Alliance)
- Rural Health (The Rural Services Network Health Group and representation at the National Centre for Rural Health & Care)
- Rural Vulnerability Group (RSN Social Care and Health Group)
- Rural Economy Group (RSN Rural Economy Group)
- Rural policing through representation on the National Rural Crime Network

## **Rural Conference**

England's only annual national Rural Conference focusing on rural services which provides a forum to discuss topical issues affecting rural communities, businesses and service providers. A chance to network, benefit from best practice and learn from experts and likeminded community activists on how to address vulnerability issues in rural England. Conference fees are reduced for RSP members.

## **Rural Regional Seminars**

Six free seminars are held each year throughout England, the subject areas vary according to the current topics that members wish to debate.

We are working with professional bodies to see if Continuing Professional Development (CPD) accreditation can be accredited for those who attend the Rural Seminars.

## **A Rural Funding Digest**

A monthly round up of grant and funding opportunities for rural organisations.

## **The State of Rural Services Report.**

A biennial report prepared by Rural England Community Interest Company. The report presents the most recent evidence and trends regarding the provision of services in rural England. It covers nine service areas, which are: local buses and community transport, welfare services, access to cash, further education, the retail sector, mental health services, older people's services, public health services and community assets. The next report will be published in 2019.

## **The Rural Observatory**

The Observatory opens the window to a statistical review of rural life. It provides an analysis and commentary on the key services provisions and issues affecting rural communities utilising publicly available statistics. A very useful source of data to inform funding bids and lobbying campaigns.

## **Rural Sounding Boards and Calls for Evidence**

To gauge opinions on rural issues and working from case studies, best practice and experience providing a consensus, a 'rural voice', which can lobby and inform much needed rural research. We currently have Sounding Boards for:

- Rural Councillors and Parish Councils
- Young People
- Rural Small Businesses

## **Rural Services Partnership Meetings in London**

An AGM and one other meeting each year are to be held specifically for RSP members. These meetings will work to key rural policy documents including the State of Rural Services Reports, Rural Strategy and Government draft proposals. Furthermore, you will also be able to attend the Rural Assembly meetings, alongside colleagues from local government, to share best practice and to network with likeminded organisations. The Rural Assembly meetings take place twice a year in London.

## **3. Financial Review**

As the membership continues to grow, it is proposed to introduce a new membership offer based on some financial thresholds. The following are considered for:

### **Individual**

Small sole traders, researchers, voluntary sector organisations with a turnover less than £15,000 pa

Annual membership **£90+VAT.**

### **Small Scale Corporate**

Professional Services and Third Sector Organisation with a turn over between £15,000 - £50,000 pa

Annual membership **£220+VAT.**

### **Large Corporate**

Professional Services and Third Sector Organisation with a turnover of more than £50,000 pa and above.

Annual membership **£495 +VAT**

**SEE SEPERATE REPORT ON THE NEW RURAL HEALTH AND CARE ALLIANCE  
FOR ADDITIONAL FEES PAYABLE FOR SOME RSP BODIES PAYING LESS THAN  
THE FULL £495.00 RSP SUBSCRIPTION WISHING TO BECOME MEMBERS OF  
THAT ALLIANCE IN ADDITION TO RSP MEMBERSHIP**

## RURAL SERVICES PARTNERSHIP LTD MEMBERSHIP (August 2018)

RSP General	Housing (Rural Housing Alliance)
ACRE	Action Hampshire
Abingdon Risk Consulting	Aster Group
Age UK (NB they are members but do not pay)	Broadacre Housing
Alzheimer's Society – UK	Bromford Housing
APSE (Assn Public Service Excellence)	Cirencester Housing
Arts Council England	Connexus
BASC (British Assn for Shooting & Conservation	Cornwall Rural Housing Association Limited
Blackdown Support Group	Eden Housing Association
C. Co	English Rural Housing Association
Calor Ltd (Major Sponsor)	Hastoe Housing Association Limited
Chichester in Partnership	Housing Plus Group
Citizens Advice	Karbon Homes
Community Heartbeat Trust	Lincs Rural Housing Association
Countryside Alliance	Midlands Rural Housing
Cumbria Action for Sustainability	National Housing Federation
Dartmoor National Park	Shropshire Rural Housing Association
Dispensing Doctors ' Association	South Devon Rural Housing Limited
Exmoor National Park	Sovereign Housing
Federation of Women's Institute	Stafford and Rural Homes
Germinate	The Wrekin Housing Trust
Gigaclear	Trent & Dove Housing
Institute of Economic Development	White Horse
Institute of Mental Health	Yarlington Housing Group
Living Memories	
Locality	
MIND	
National Association of Local Councils	
National Pensioners Convention	
NFU (National Farmers Union)	
NRTF (National Rural Touring Forum)	
OALC (Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils)	
Outside the Box	
Plunkett Foundation	
Post Office	
Pub is the Hub	
Royal Agricultural College	
Royal Mail	
Rural Cultural Forum	
Sherborne Deanery Rural Chaplaincy	
South Holland Rural Action Zone	
Tees Valley Rural Community Council	
UK Youth	

## Colleges

Landex x 52 colleges

## Transport

Campaign For Better Transport
<b>Bus Users UK</b>
EYMS Group Limited
First Group plc MAJOR SPONSOR
<b>Fire and Rescue (Under review)</b>
Cheshire Fire & Rescue
Cumbria Fire & Rescue
Dorset & Wiltshire Fire & Rescue
Essex Fire & Rescue
Hereford & Worcester Fire & Rescue
Lincolnshire Fire & Rescue
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue
Suffolk Fire & Rescue
West Sussex Fire & Rescue

**Report to the RSN Executive**

**Monday 24<sup>th</sup> September 2018**

**Rural Vulnerability**

**Introduction**

Whilst this is clearly a cross-cutting theme it is felt desirable that the Network approaches this topic in more depth than is currently the case.

It is suggested that at this stage that this topic should be formally added to the RSN's other 4 priorities for action.

**The Present Situation**

Rural England CIC has become more involved with the issue of vulnerability as it has progressed and has covered the topic in some of its reports. It has also got involvement on the issues with utility companies as Rural England has sought to get financial support through establishing these Utility Companies as "Supporters".

Through this process Rural England (and RSN) have:

- Established a Rural Vulnerability Day in Parliament at the beginning of each calendar year
- Facilitated through the event the establishment of an MPs Group on Vulnerability (because this group may be more 'representational' than 'research' it will actually fall under the parameters of RSN in any event)

I attach the fact sheet RSN has published around Rural Vulnerability which we feel demonstrates the emerging depth of the problem in rural areas.

Undoubtedly as austerity continues there can be no doubt that many rural residents will effectively become more remote from services.

- Organisations from Doctor Surgeries, Hospitals to Job Centres will operate with as much critical mass as possible to achieve more efficiency but at a cost, in many instances, of their location making access to them by people in rural areas more challenging.
- Public Transport becomes more difficult as subsidised travel reduces.
- The demographics for the coming years show a higher and higher percentage of older people in rural areas well in advance of the national situation. The

number of over 85-year olds may be particularly challenging for rural services providers.

Inevitably, there will be increasing numbers of people in rural areas who will feel or who become vulnerable.

It is felt there is here a significant role for RSN to play.

- (a) Seeking to bring together the various people/organisations who are involved with vulnerability so that rural local authorities can be seen to play a pivotal role in seeking to deal with this problem
- (b) Providing information and opinion to the Rural Vulnerability MPs Group to seek to ensure it plays an important role.
- (c) Trying to secure as much cross-organisation/cross-local authority cohesion as is possible both in terms of structures and local operation.

## **TOPICS TO BE DISCUSSED**

- (1) Use of Regional Meeting/Seminar days for specific consideration of items relating to the Vulnerability Agenda
- (2) A Rural Vulnerability Section in the RSN on-line website
- (3) The importance in overall membership terms

## **USE OF REGIONAL MEETINGS/SEMINARS**

We hold currently six regional seminars (West Midlands (Stafford), South West (Sidmouth), North East (Durham), East Midlands (Huntingdonshire), North West (Lancaster) and Yorkshire (Harrogate) Currently we do not hold a regional seminar in the South East but members are asked to consider that suggestion which would bring the total number to seven.

The following authorities are in the South East and they currently do not have a seminar serving them. (Ashford, Braintree, Chichester, East Cambs, Isle of Wight, Lewes, New Forest, East Herts, Rother, Sevenoaks, Tandridge, Folkestone and Hythe, South Oxon, Vale of White Horse, Surrey, Essex. Hampshire. East Sussex, West Sussex, Wokingham)

It is considered that it would be good if two of these seven seminars per year could mainly revolve around the vulnerability issue. There might then be the opportunity to invite to those days not only the local authorities but also staff employed by the power distributors, water authorities, community councils, citizens advice staff and from other appropriate RSP organisations, ambulance, fire and police staff..

Rural England receives fulcrum sponsorship from Electricity North West and the Southern Water and it might be of value if we commenced such an experiment with these two areas maybe- so it would be the North West and South East seminars where vulnerability would be the stand alone topic?



Possibly as vulnerability is a cross cutting theme we could have it as one of the agenda items on the remaining five regional agendas as well. Obviously however we would not go into it in the detail given to it in the SE and the NW. In the other 5 areas we could seek to identify with our members specific vulnerabilities related to the service topic under discussion (e.g. Broadband or affordable housing) and also seek best practice in addressing this issues – this would bring service and vulnerability issues together for mutual consideration.

We wish to stress that the emphasis of these discussions will not be on dwelling on the vulnerabilities themselves – we do not wish to portray rural areas as weak and ailing – the emphasis will be on gathering information and data on the vulnerabilities and their effects on rural people, businesses and service providers. Just as importantly, if not more so, we will be seeking best practice in responding to the issues.

### **A RURAL VULNERABILITY SECTION IN THE RSN on-line website**

Rural Vulnerability has a section on the site dedicated to it and it is one of the ‘hot topics’ on the home page.

It is suggested that this will need to be a far wider and more active section as focus on this work area grows. There could be the possibility of opening a discussion forum on this area at a later stage. Whilst existing staff can deal with the preliminary work here obviously if /or as this area becomes more and more active there may be the need to provide some additional resource up to be able to cope with this as staff are at capacity already

### **THE RELEVANCE IN MEMBERSHIP TERMS**

It is felt that Rural Vulnerability is going to be important topic area in relation to authorities looking at membership of RSN. It is something that will be relate exclusively to the RSN and cannot really be dealt with by Groups who are either District or County centric. It is hoped It can become a reasonable selling point for membership as it grows as a service. It is also a “selling point” regarding RSP recruitment.

David Inman

Corporate Director

The Rural Services Network has 4 specific and one overarching priorities:

- Public Sector Funding
- Barriers to Access
- Future of Rural Areas
- Health and Wellbeing
- Rural Vulnerability

The table below shows the Priorities, which areas are included within each and the key message for that priority.

SPECIFIC PRIORITIES	Areas included	Key Message
Public Sector Funding  Graham Biggs Cecilia Motley	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rural-urban comparison</li> <li>• Most underfunded councils</li> <li>• The need for a fair share in the distribution of funding</li> <li>• Cuts</li> <li>• Impact on council tax</li> </ul>	Central Government has historically and systematically underfunded rural areas giving them less grant per head than urban areas – despite the fact that it costs more to provide the services. Rural residents earn less on average than those in urban areas and therefore pay more Council Tax for fewer local government services. Government policy, implicitly, is that council services in rural areas are more reliant on funding through council tax than their urban counterparts. We demand fairer funding for all public services serving rural areas.
Barriers to Access  Graham Biggs Kerry Booth	<p><b><u>Transport</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of public transport</li> <li>• Reduced funding for community transport Impact on access to FE / lack of concessionary fares</li> <li>• Fuel prices</li> </ul>	Rural residents and businesses face multiple barriers in terms of access to key services, including transport and broadband. Yet councils providing services to rural residents receive less money from government, pay disproportionately more for fewer services and typically earn less than people in urban areas. As a result rural

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public subsidy</li> <li>• Uneconomic routes</li> <li>• Congestion</li> <li>• Road and winter maintenance</li> </ul> <p><b>Broadband / connectivity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Last 5 per cent</li> <li>• Speed and access</li> <li>• Lack of desire or ability to learn digital skills</li> <li>• Rural connectivity keeping up with the pace of change</li> </ul>	residents suffer multiple disadvantages.
<p>Future of Rural Areas</p> <p>Andy Dean Graham Biggs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Viable villages Rural economy</li> <li>• Lack of affordable housing and housing generally</li> <li>• Infrastructure Young people leaving – ‘brain drain’</li> <li>• Young people living with parents (inability to get on the housing ladder)</li> <li>• Access to jobs and training</li> <li>• Low-wage economy</li> <li>• Demographics (depopulation)</li> <li>• Poor communications</li> <li>• Importance of rural economy for the national economy</li> <li>• Threats to green belt</li> <li>• Media preoccupation with food and farming</li> </ul>	Rural communities contribute a great deal to the national economy but are facing threats to their future. This is due to a combination of chronic underfunding, demographic challenges, diminishing resources, with the needs of rural areas being systematically overlooked. Without action conditions in rural areas will deteriorate further. It is in the national interest that we all work together to revitalise this fundamental national asset.
Health and Wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ageing population</li> <li>• Social care (non-funding issues)</li> <li>• Mental health</li> <li>• Vulnerability</li> <li>• Recruitment of health staff</li> </ul>	Despite its idyllic image, rural communities often experience difficulties in accessing health and support services. This is becoming increasingly difficult as specialist services are centralised to remain resilient and poor transport links reduce access. There are

David Inman Jane Hart	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specialisation of hospital facilities</li> <li>• Ambulance waiting times</li> <li>• Cost of health services in rural areas</li> <li>• Resilience of services</li> <li>• Isolation</li> <li>• STP plans</li> <li>• Community health provision</li> <li>• Specialisation and centralisation of hospital facilities</li> </ul>	recruitment and retention issues amongst medical staff in rural areas. Rural residents are therefore vulnerable to isolation and poorer health outcomes in the long term.
OVERARCHING PRIORITY  Rural Vulnerability  David Inman Jon Turner (RSP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Isolation and Loneliness.</li> <li>• IT Take Up</li> <li>• Broadband and Mobile Connectivity</li> <li>• Rural Fuel Poverty Consideration</li> <li>• Coordination of Services</li> <li>• Community Cohesion</li> <li>• Outreach Measures</li> <li>• Demographics</li> <li>• Hidden Poverty</li> <li>• Lack or restricted of choices in relation to many aspects of life</li> <li>• Dependence on community help/solutions</li> <li>• Loss of local facilities</li> <li>• Few minimum public service standards</li> </ul>	<p>Vulnerability in rural areas is seen as an overarching theme because it is at the root of many of the priorities but it also requires consideration in its own right.</p> <p>All communities can face issues in relation to low wages, poor access to health services, poor transport options and difficulties in accessing training and educational opportunities however in rural areas, due to its often remote location, these issues can become compounded, leading to Rural Vulnerability. Rural areas have a higher than average number of older residents and this figure is increasing rapidly. Public services need to work together to combat the issues relating to Rural Vulnerability to ensure that rural residents are not left disadvantaged.</p>

## **REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR AND THE POLICY DIRECTOR ON THE POSSIBILITY OF SEPARATE RSP MEETINGS.**

### **Introduction**

At the present time the RSP only has one meeting of its own in a year (normally at the lunchtime of another RSN Meeting) to look at its annual Accounts. It does not have a separate business meeting but its member's receive the agenda of the Rural Assembly (and its name is currently referred to in that title of that meeting as an act of courtesy to RSP members).

However not many RSP organisations do actually attend Assembly meetings. It is felt that the obvious fact that these meeting have to be very Council targeted in their agendas does contribute to that.

RSP has always been quite diverse in its membership. It has a group of National Organisations, a group of Land Based Colleges, some Transport Providers, some Fire and Rescue Services, some Housing Associations and some National Parks together with a number of "national organisations". Since the recruitment work of the Policy Director it is looking to acquire groupings of larger Housing Associations, Businesses, Health and Well Being Organisations, Older People and Youth organisations, alongside some Professional Services ( Consultants). These groupings may in turn spurn group consideration and occasionally further meetings. For example an annual meeting with Youth organisations on youth issues is now planned.

It has previously been difficult to find a "bonding agent" for the RSP to underpin separate meetings. However the increasing problems associated with Rural Vulnerability and the increasing difficulty around access to services from rural areas has certainly altered that situation. It is also felt that there are elements of the rural economic case that would also benefit by separate consideration and scrutiny by formal RSP Meetings.

Whilst therefore it is suggested RSP members continue to receive Assembly agendas it also suggested they have two meetings of their own a year. One of these would have to be an AGM – maybe running very close to the RSN AGM in November and the second maybe in the Spring would run close to the RSN Assembly meeting in that month. Hopefully therefore operation of an RSP group could avoid further separate trips by RSN officers.

The change to create separate meetings RSP Meetings is therefore proposed to the Executive and if approved to recommend to the RSP AGM in November.

David Inman

RSN Corporate Director

Jon Turner

RSN Policy Director.

	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
2	<b>RSN (INCOME &amp; EXPENDITURE) 2018/19 AND</b>							
3	<b>ACTUAL TO END AUGUST 2018</b>							
4						<b>ACTUAL</b>	<b>ESTIMATE</b>	<b>ACTUAL TO</b>
5						<b>END 2017/18</b>	<b>18/19</b>	<b>END AUG 18</b>
6	<b>INCOME</b>					£	£	£
7								
8	<b>DEBTORS FROM PREVIOUS YEAR (NET OF VAT)</b>							
9	SPARSE/Rural Assembly held by NKDC at year end					2873	5345	3000
10	SPARSE Rural Assembly Outstanding NK)					745	0	
11	RHA - Website Contribs.						300	300
12	RSP Subscriptions					990	495	
13	Rural Crime Network					5918		
14	Rural Health Conference					175		
15	Coastal Communities Alliance (Gross)					1037		
16	CCN re Bexit Roundtable						381	381
17	SPARSE Rural/Rural Assembly					269267	306000	235656
18	Ditto Held by NKDC at Month End							3567
19	RSN Extra £350Levy							30100
20	Extra Levy held by NKDC at month end							350
21	RSP					9679	12550	10082
22	Commercial Partner First Group Buses					10000	10000	10000
23	Income from Rural Housing Group					6895	8135	6918
24	Income from Fire & Rescue Group					1985	4755	2575
25	FIRE GROUP LEVY RE SPARSITY EVIDENCE							5000
26	OTHER INCOME							
27	Conferences/Seminars					9427		
28	Rural Conference Income							9943
29	Rural Conference Surplus						6000	
30	Assumed additional Income Generated						2500	
31	Recharges ro Rural Crime Network (5 months 17/18)					4063		

	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
32						<b>ACTUAL</b>	<b>ESTIMATE</b>	<b>ACTUAL TO</b>
33						<b>END 2017/18</b>	<b>18/19</b>	<b>END AUG 18</b>
34						£	£	£
35	Contras re RCN@					1895		
36	Recharges to Rural England Back Office Support £1200)					1200	1400	
37	RE recharge re Amazon Contract					3500		
38	RE recharge re Elec NW Commission					1375	1100	
39	RE recharge re Southern Water Commission						1000	
40	Coastal Communities Alliance Gross)					4150	4358	1089
41	RHCA - Fee Income						1529	
42	RNCA Expenditure Reimbursement						8883	
43	Contributions to RHA Website Development/Maintenance					3280		
44	RE Website Maintenance						2241	
45	Miscellaneous (BT)						979	979
46	Contras					15089		365
47	VAT							
48	VAT Refund					10983		1290
49	VAT Received					10996		9453
50	<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>					<b>375522</b>	<b>377951</b>	<b>331048</b>
51								

	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
52						<b>ACTUAL</b>	<b>EST</b>	<b>ACTUAL TO</b>
53						<b>END FIN YEAR</b>	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>END AUG 18</b>
54	<b>EXPENDITURE</b>					<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
55	VAT Paid on Goods & Services					18255		7287
56	VAT Paid to HMRC					178		
57	General Provision for Inflation							
58	<b>NET WAGES &amp; CONTRACTS FOR SERVICES</b>							
59	Corporate Management				DI,GB,AD, JT, 100% KB 40%	74531	114147	51926
60	Finance/Performance and Data Analysis				, DW, 100%, KB 20%	29456	30045	9970
61	Communications (incl Seminars)				RoseR,RCM,,AD3 100%	10506	12000	6087
62	Administrative and Technical Support				RI, WI,WC,BA,MB 100%	53902	55349	19622
63	Research and Monitoring				BW, 100%	10238	9000	3525
64	Service Group Networking				KB40%	8432	8601	2934
65	Economic Development Service				AD5 100%	5100	5100	2125
66	Coastal Communities Contract					3650	3650	1825
67	Rural Communities Housing Group				AD2 100%	6630	6630	2763
68	Rural Transport Group				AD6 100%	2040		
69	Employee Deductions							5955
70	Less March 19 Employee Deductions						-2146	
71	Provision for Inflation on Contracts (2% p.a.)							
72	PAYE - Employers NIC (11 mths)						8269	4400
73	PAYE ADMIN (Accountants)						252	105
74	NEST PENSIONS (Employee & Employer in Actual to date)						2533	2021
75	<b>OTHER EXPENDITURE</b>							
76	Budget for Brexit Project					1421		
77	Rural Fair Shares Campaign etc.					9646	8500	3500
78	Pixell Financial Service (core Annual Service)						8500	3500
79	Fair Shares and Other Campaign Media Relations							
80	SPEND FROM VOL CONTRIBS (BUSINESS RATES)					8500		



	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
81	SPEND FROM 2018/19 £350 VOL CONTRIB							
82	<b>Conferences/Seminars</b>							
83	Rural Conference 2018					9329		2274
84	Rural Conference Drinks Reception					1300	1000	
85	Seminar Costs					972		
86	Regional Meetings/Seminars					404	2000	635
87						<b>ACTUAL</b>	<b>EST</b>	
88						<b>END FIN YEAR</b>	<b>2018/19</b>	
89						<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>	
90	<b>Service Level Agreements</b>							
91	RCN -CONTRAS @					1425		
92	Rural Housing Group (RHG)					955	1000	462
93	RHG Website Maint					345	1224	510
94	RE Website Maint						2040	850
95	Rural England CIC to re-charge)					786		1171
96	Rural Inland CIC transfer of part of First Group Support					7000	7000	4000
97	APPG/Rural Issues Group Costs					487	1200	226
98	Parlia Rural Vulnerability Group					199	500	
99	Rural England/Vulnerability Service Contrib					3000	3000	3000
100	RHCA Direct							2220
101	<b>Business Expenses</b>							
102	RSN Online etc.					13569	18239	
103	Database Update (media contrcts)							
104	Website Upgrade					4750	250	250
105	Ongoing Website Updates							
106	Travel and Subsistence					20765	20000	11151
107	Print, Stat,e mail, phone & Broadband@					5549	4000	1498
108	Meeting Room Hire					3618	1000	409
109	Website and Data Base software etc					3757	3000	1363

	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
110	Rent of Devon Office & Associated Costs					5119	7800	2531
111	Accountancy Fees					740	800	295
112	NKDC Services						2345	
113	Companies House Fees					13	13	13
114	Bank Charges					78	90	37
115	IT Equipment & Support & Other Capital					1701	750	146
116	Insurance					597	650	55
117	Corporation Tax							
118	Membership of Rural Coalition					250	250	
119	Refunds of Overpayments/ Contrs@					13693		913
120								
121						<b>ACTUAL</b>	<b>EST</b>	
122						<b>END FIN YEAR</b>	<b>2018/19</b>	
123						£	£	
124	<b>ARREARS - PREVIOUS FINANCIAL YEAR</b>							
125	Regional Meetings/Seminars						450	450
126	Rural Housing Alliance					792		
127	NKDC						0	
128	Contract for Service (ADMIN)					1775	1660	1660
129	Contracts for Service (CORP MAN)					1100		
130	Communications					500	500	500
131	Extra Media by RCM						963	963
132	Rose Regeneration					333	2000	2000
133	Seminar Costs					71		
134	PIXELL					5203	21958	21958
135	B Wilson Arrears					3525	12350	12350
136	RSN Online arrears					9874	4523	4523
137	RHA website Maint						300	300
138	Travel and Subsistence arrears					1281	824	823

	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
139	Printing, Phone and Stationery (arrears )						13	9
140	Office Costs					3424	4748	
141	Data base etc (arrears )					1130	433	433
142	Rural England					8		
143	<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>					<b>371902</b>	<b>399303</b>	<b>207523</b>
144								
145								
146	<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>					<b>375522</b>	<b>377951</b>	
147	LESS TOTAL EXP					-371902	-399303	
148	<b>DIFFERENCE BETWEEN IN YEAR INC &amp; EXP</b>					<b>3620</b>	<b>-21352</b>	
149	<b>ADD GEN BALANCE BROUGHT FORWARD</b>					<b>13755</b>	<b>25875</b>	
150	<b>ADD RESERVE BALANCE B/FWD</b>					<b>8500</b>		
151	<b>BALANCE CARRIED FORWARD</b>					<b>25875</b>	<b>4523</b>	
152								
153								
154								

Company Registration Number 06960646 (England and Wales)

**THE RURAL SERVICES PARTNERSHIP LTD**  
**UNAUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2018**

# THE RURAL SERVICES PARTNERSHIP LTD

## COMPANY INFORMATION

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**Directors**

Mr G Biggs  
Mr D Inman  
Mrs C Motley  
Mr J R Birtwistle  
Mr D S Horne  
Rev R Kirlew

**Company number**

06960646

**Registered office**

1 Aldon View  
Craven Arms  
Shropshire  
SY7 9EQ

**Accountants**

TaxAssist Accountants  
First Floor Offices  
114B Corve Street  
Ludlow  
Shropshire  
SY8 1DJ

**Business address**

1 Aldon View  
Craven Arms  
Shropshire  
SY7 9EQ

# THE RURAL SERVICES PARTNERSHIP LTD

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Balance sheet	3

# THE RURAL SERVICES PARTNERSHIP LTD

## REPORT TO THE DIRECTORS ON THE PREPARATION OF THE UNAUDITED STATUTORY ACCOUNTS OF THE RURAL SERVICES PARTNERSHIP LTD

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In order to assist you to fulfil your duties under the Companies Act 2006, we have prepared for your approval the financial statements of The Rural Services Partnership Ltd for the year ended 31 March 2018 set out on pages 2 to 3 from the company's accounting records and from information and explanations you have given us.

This report is made solely to the board of directors of The Rural Services Partnership Ltd, as a body, in accordance with the terms of our engagement letter dated 31 August 2015. Our work has been undertaken solely to prepare for your approval the financial statements of The Rural Services Partnership Ltd and state those matters that we have agreed to state to the board of directors of The Rural Services Partnership Ltd. To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than The Rural Services Partnership Ltd and its board of directors as a body, for our work or for this report.

It is your duty to ensure that The Rural Services Partnership Ltd has kept adequate accounting records and to prepare statutory financial statements that give a true and fair view of the assets, liabilities, financial position and of The Rural Services Partnership Ltd. You consider that The Rural Services Partnership Ltd is exempt from the statutory audit requirement for the year.

We have not been instructed to carry out an audit or a review of the financial statements of The Rural Services Partnership Ltd. For this reason, we have not verified the accuracy or completeness of the accounting records or information and explanations you have given to us and we do not, therefore, express any opinion on the statutory financial statements.

**Taxassist Accountants**

.....  
First Floor Offices  
114B Corve Street  
Ludlow  
Shropshire  
SY8 1DJ

# THE RURAL SERVICES PARTNERSHIP LTD

## STATEMENT OF INCOME AND EXPENDITURE

**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2018**

---

	<b>2018</b>	<b>2017</b>
	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
<b>Turnover</b>	344,696	420,960
Depreciation and other amounts written off assets	(1,985)	(520)
Other charges	(344,330)	(423,498)
	<hr/>	<hr/>
<b>Trading (deficit) / surplus for the financial year</b>	<b>(1,619)</b>	<b>(3,058)</b>
	<hr/>	<hr/>



# THE RURAL SERVICES PARTNERSHIP LTD

## BALANCE SHEET

AS AT 31 MARCH 2018

	2018		2017	
	£	£	£	£
Fixed assets		5,953		1,562
Current assets	36,035		38,943	
Prepayments and accrued income	-		804	
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	(37,293)		(34,995)	
Net current (liabilities)/assets		(1,258)		4,752
Total assets less current liabilities		4,695		6,314
Net assets		4,695		6,314
Capital and reserves		4,695		6,314

### Notes to the financial statements

#### 1 Average employees

The average number of persons (including directors) employed by the company during the year was 6 (2017 - 6).

The Rural Services Partnership Ltd is a private company limited by shares incorporated in England and Wales. The registered office is 1 Aldon View, Craven Arms, Shropshire, SY7 9EQ.

For the year ended 31 March 2018 the company was entitled to exemption from audit under section 477 of the Companies Act 2006 relating to small companies.

The directors acknowledge their responsibilities for complying with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006 with respect to accounting records and the preparation of financial statements.

The members have not required the company to obtain an audit of its financial statements for the year in question in accordance with section 476.

These financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the micro-entity provisions and in accordance with FRS 105 'The Financial Reporting Standard applicable to the Micro-entities Regime' and the provisions applicable to companies subject to the small companies regime.

The financial statements were approved by the board of directors and authorised for issue on ..... and are signed on its behalf by:

.....  
Mr Graham Biggs  
Director

Company Registration Number 06960646

# THE RURAL SERVICES PARTNERSHIP LTD

## DETAILED INCOME AND EXPENDITURE REPORT

**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2018**

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	2018	2017
	£	£
<b>Turnover</b>		
Management subscriptions	10,670	10,041
SPARSE - Rural general grant	276,992	255,738
Coastal communities contract income	4,150	4,150
Strategic partnering arrangements	10,000	10,000
Rural health conference	-	4,381
Rural housing group website	4,680	1,400
Rural crime network	5,959	61,394
Rural housing group subscriptions	6,400	6,735
Rural fire and rescue	1,985	2,480
Rural england re-charges	1,200	1,200
Business rates reserve research	8,500	47,076
National rural conference	9,285	16,365
Rural England project support	4,875	-
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	344,696	420,960
 <b>Administrative expenses</b>	 (346,315)	 (424,018)
	<hr/>	<hr/>
<b>Trading (deficit) / surplus</b>	<b>(1,619)</b>	<b>(3,058)</b>
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>

# THE RURAL SERVICES PARTNERSHIP LTD

## SCHEDULE OF ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENSES

**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2018**

	2018 £	2017 £
<b>Administrative expenses</b>		
Rent and service charge	15,291	4,597
Business rates proposals work	9,951	24,416
National rural conference	10,629	12,542
Finance and performance monitoring	29,456	28,835
Corporate management	75,571	59,558
Insurance	597	567
Admin and tech support	57,907	51,067
RSN online - website	18,092	29,801
Coastal communities contract	3,650	3,650
Rural health conference	474	4,672
Travel and subsistence	20,778	23,664
Databases	4,381	4,242
Professional subscriptions	250	200
Legal and professional fees	63	13
Accountancy	708	684
Bank charges	77	147
Rural health network	-	900
Rural England Service	7,000	7,397
Rural vulnerability service	3,000	3,000
Rural crime network	1,425	55,233
Rural transport group	2,040	2,000
Rural communities housing group	8,487	8,411
Rural housing group website	1,137	3,783
Business rates lobbying consultancy fees	21,500	42,830
Printing and stationery	5,572	3,736
Research and communications	27,006	30,988
Service group networking	8,432	8,181
IT Support	75	-
APPG & Seminar fees	5,681	3,384
Economic development service	5,100	5,000
Amortisation	1,188	-
Depreciation	797	520
	<u>346,315</u>	<u>424,018</u>

*Rural Services Network  
Kilworthy Park  
Tavistock  
Devon  
PL19 0BZ*

*3<sup>rd</sup> September, 2018*

Dear Sir/Madam

### **House of Lords Select Committee on the Rural Economy – Call for Evidence**

The Rural Services Network (RSN) is the national champion for rural services, ensuring that people in rural areas have a strong voice. It is fighting for a fair deal for rural communities to maintain their social and economic viability for the benefit of the nation as a whole.

The RSN membership is 154 local authorities (counties, unitaries, districts and boroughs) from across England and over 75 other public, private and civil society sector organisations, such as fire and rescue authorities, housing associations, bus operators and land-based colleges.

Our entire membership is deeply concerned about the rural economy. We strive to ensure that the rural economy is properly considered and supported in relation to government and other policy and actions.

Our response to the questions raised by this call for evidence is set out below.

### **General Questions**

**What do you understand by the “rural economy”? How has it changed over recent years, and what has been the impact of these changes?**

Rural economies are incredibly diverse and make a significant contribution to national economic performance. Farming and tourism are of critical importance but to pigeon-hole rural economies as being solely about these sectors would be a mistake. The environment is of pivotal significance to rural economies. Farming, forestry and land management sectors help to create the environment on which the tourism sector depends and to which a vast array of economic activities are attracted – from manufacturing and service industries to knowledge intensive and creative sectors. Enterprise and opportunity are abundant with rural areas often providing a breeding ground for high growth businesses which can migrate to more populated areas as expansion plans require.

Rural areas are home to 9.4 million people according to 2016 population estimates. In other words, 17% of the population of England live in small rural towns, villages, hamlets and isolated dwellings – that’s more people than live in Greater London.

The contribution of the rural economy is all too often over-looked or miss-represented in national and regional policy making.

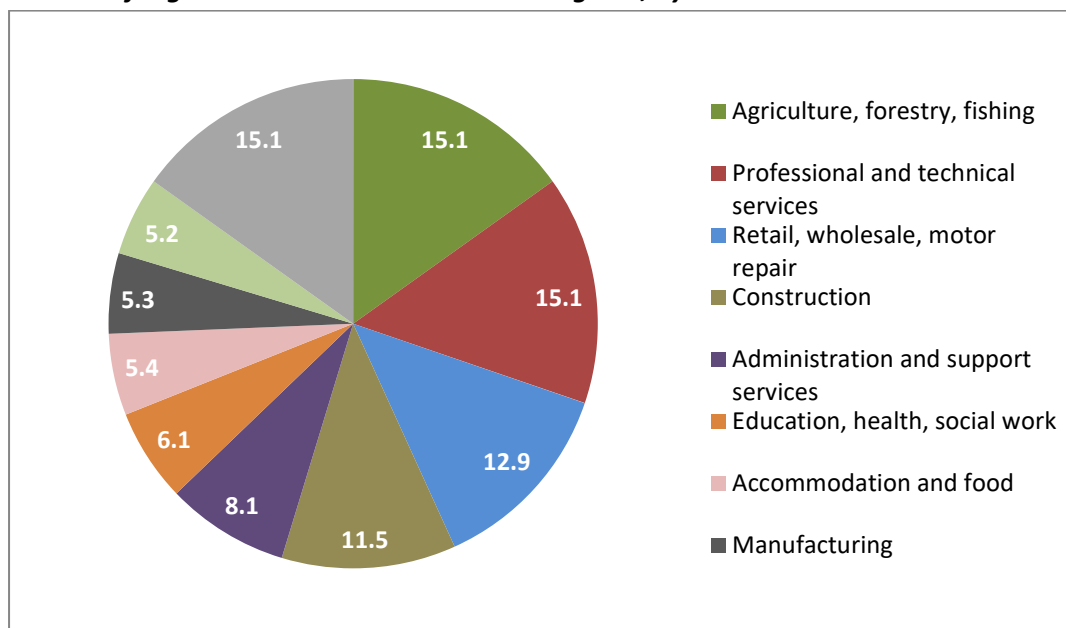
There are 547,000 registered businesses based in rural areas (and probably as many micro-businesses again which are unregistered). They are 24% of all the registered businesses in England, so form a vital part of the national economy.

Those registered businesses have an annual turnover of £434 billion and represent an incredible range of business activity – land-based industries (including farming) are important but 85% of rural businesses are from other sectors.

Much business activity in rural areas goes unseen by policymakers and support providers due to scale. Indeed, almost 18% of rural businesses have no employees, being sole traders or partnerships (more than double the equivalent urban figure). Some 84% of employees in rural areas work in SMEs and 22% of all rural jobs are home-based (compared with 13% in urban areas).

Registered rural businesses, however, employ 3,500,000 people. They should not be ignored.

***Per cent of registered business units in rural England, by sector***



An excellent analysis of the current state of play of small businesses in particular, and the opportunities which exist in rural areas, is provided by work undertaken by Newcastle University: *'Small Rural Firms in English Regions: Analysis and Key findings from UK Longitudinal Small Business Survey, 2015'* ([Centre for Rural Economy & Newcastle University Business School, September 2017](#)). For example, this state: "more rural firms have goods or services suitable for exporting than which currently export, and rural firms are less likely to expect to grow their workforce. Obstacles to rural business success are cited as regulations

or red tape, staff recruitment and skills, and taxes, rates and National Insurance (NI) that concern significantly more rural than urban firms.” Other evidence shows that low wages and low productivity are clearly limiting factors as are skill levels.

**Could you give examples of notable success stories and good practice in the rural economy? How might rural successes be replicated and better promoted?**

There are countless reports regarding what works – and what doesn’t – in terms of supporting the rural economy. For example, SQW were commissioned by Defra to evaluate the Rural Growth Network (RGN) 3 year pilot initiative which ran between 2012 and 2015 with £12.5 million from Defra and £1.6 million from the Government Equalities Office. The initiative was set up in response to barriers to rural economic growth identified in the Rural Economy Growth Review. The aims were to encourage rural economic growth and to generate and disseminate lessons on what works in this context.

The findings of the evaluation report produced by SQW point to a number of successful interventions which can help inform future policy and programmes including supporting both new and existing businesses to grow. *‘Final Evaluation of the Rural Growth Network Pilot Initiative’* ([SQW, May 2016](#))

An additional example is provided through a report commissioned by Defra (working in conjunction with BIS) in 2013 and produced by the Institute for Employment Studies (supported by the Countryside & Community Research Institute). This investigated the degree to which rural businesses access national employer skills and government business support programmes. A key finding of the report was that: “Access to national mainstream employer skills programmes and government business support programmes among rural businesses may be improved if information and advice on how to apply for support is proactively provided (ideally face-to-face or by telephone) by a stable set of intermediaries.” LEPs and others should take account of the need for such intermediaries in delivering skills development and business support programmes to ensure that the full potential of rural businesses is realised. (*‘An assessment of the degree to which rural businesses access national mainstream employer skills and government business support programmes’* ([Institute for Employment Studies, September 2013](#)))

In terms of replication and promotion of successful rural economic development, RSN already seeks to promote good practice across its network through activities such as the quarterly ‘Rural Economy Spotlight,’ our regional seminar series and national conference. We are in an excellent position, and would be very willing, to assist government in spreading the word about what works across our entire membership, reaching right across rural England.

**How do you see the future of the rural economy? Where is the greatest potential for growth, and what might be the impact of technological and other changes?**

The rural economy will continue to diversify. However, serious concern exists with respect to the impact of Brexit on farming and related activity. Whilst accounting for a relatively small proportion of rural employment and GVA, farming underpins the environment of rural

areas, which is key to further diversification, and impacts on many other economic activities. Much of the financial support which is currently directed at farmers will be spent and re-spent within the wider rural economy. It is critical, therefore, that ongoing support for the industry is provided at the correct level.

Brexit could present an opportunity to increase food production and processing, both to serve export markets but also to serve the UK, regardless of any trade deals which are or are not put in place. Rural areas contain large numbers of businesses of all scales producing food and drink proving a robust platform for future development.

For example, since the designation of the South Downs National Park in 2010, visitor numbers to Lewes district have increased by over 12%, with visitor spending up by almost 15%. Existing farms and food/drink producers in the area have already diversified with significant prospects for further growth. In East Sussex, for example, the burgeoning brewing, distilling and viticulture scene has seen 1500% growth in the microbrewery sector in the last year alone with 33 breweries in the county.

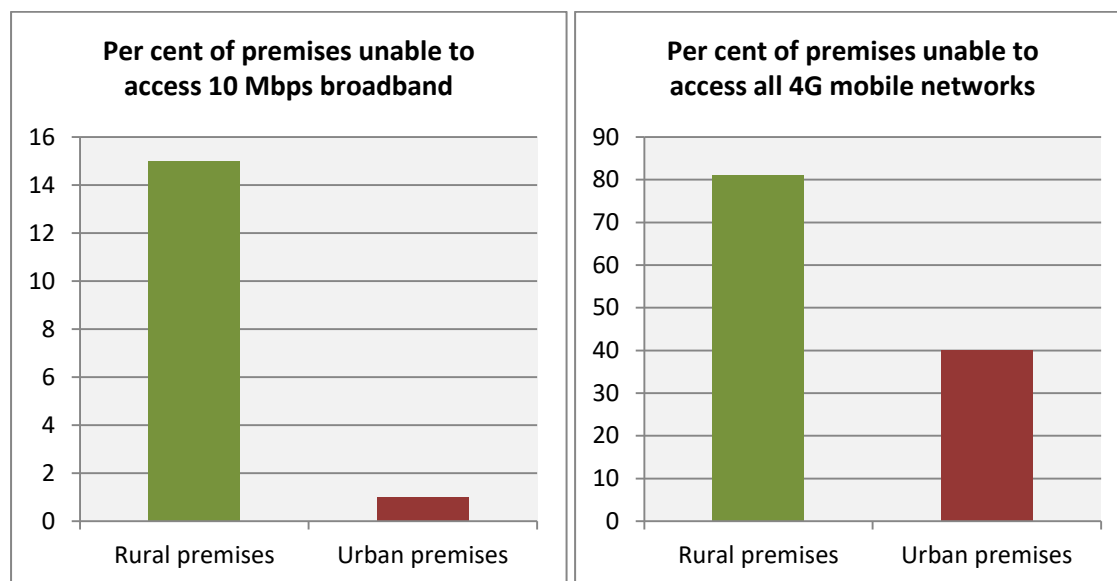
However, as noted above, rural economies are incredibly diverse and make a significant contribution to national economic performance. There is no such thing as a single, homogeneous “rural economy” – indeed in most rural areas multiple economies operate with different needs and opportunities. This will continue in the future and will be further supported by technological change. The precise geography of this diverse, growing economy will depend on the geography of broadband, fibre and mobile connectivity development. It is critical that all rural areas keep pace with technological developments and any market failure in service provision is filled by government intervention.

The delivery of effective broadband, and its utilisation, is a clear area of opportunity for rural businesses. Useful research has recently been provided via a rural business survey carried out by Rural England and SRUC which found only 19% of rural businesses had a superfast connection and most (59%) relied on standard broadband. It also found high rates of dissatisfaction with connection speed and reliability. The survey estimates that if constraints to digital adoption, such as skills issues, could be overcome it would unlock at least £12 billion of extra productivity per annum (Gross Value Added). (*‘Unlocking the digital potential of rural areas across the UK’* [\*Rural England and SRUC, March 2018\*](#) )

Despite significant public investment, a sizable gap persists in relation to levels of connectivity in rural and urban areas. In England’s rural areas, for example, 15% of premises – households and businesses – are unable to access a broadband connection with a 10 Megabits per second download speed (industry regulator, Ofcom, considers this a necessary speed for everyday online tasks). Mobile connectivity has improved, but the indoor signal is poor in England’s rural areas, with phone calls on all four networks only possible at 59% of premises. Meanwhile, using 4G on all networks – giving fast internet access – is only possible inside 19% of rural premises.

The funding for 5G test bed projects announced earlier this year is welcomed but the funding commitment for these projects are for a year. A longer term commitment is required and the opportunity needs to be taken to ensure rural businesses are well represented in this testing.

The recent pledge by government to prioritise the connection of hard-to-reach rural areas in its future support for the roll out of full fibre broadband networks is hugely welcome and it is important that this pledge is seen through to fruition.



The planned introduction of a broadband Universal Service Obligation (USO) is welcome. However, the proposed level of that USO, at 10 Mbps, could be out-of-date by the time it comes into effect (2020). Ofcom should review this before its introduction, not least because there will be pressure to leave the USO unchanged for a while to bed down. When the USO is applied (from 2020) decisions about upgrading networks should be taken on a value for money basis and not just a cheapest solution basis. Whilst the cheap option may get premises or areas just over the 10 Mbps threshold, a value for money solution could deliver much higher speeds that result in greater and more sustained benefits. Long term solutions, such as full fibre broadband, should be encouraged wherever possible.

There is a clear opportunity, if connectivity issues are addressed, to see significant increase in the number of digital businesses located or being established in rural areas. Where connectivity issues have been addressed this is already beginning to happen and could be accelerated.

## Infrastructure and Services

**How can access to transport be improved in rural areas?**



Local authorities in rural areas have far less funding to support bus services. In 2017/18 predominantly, rural areas spent £6.72 per resident to subsidise services, compared with £31.93 in predominantly urban areas. Figures for funding to cover concessionary bus fares were £13.48 per head (rural) and £25.54 per head (urban) respectively.

There have been widespread cuts to rural bus services which depended on some public subsidy. During 2016/17 alone some 202 bus services were withdrawn altogether in shire areas and a further 191 services were reduced or altered.

There must be a fair funding deal for local government: this will significantly improve access to transport in rural areas. Given the geography of rural areas, it is inevitable that many bus routes require some subsidy in order to survive. The widespread cuts to rural bus services are primarily a result of the long-term squeeze on local government funding coupled with the ever increasing costs of providing statutory services, especially Adult and Children's Social Care, driving funding away from other services such as public transport subsidy. That must now be brought to an end. Funding rural bus services would also be much easier if the distribution of funding between local authorities was fair.

There should also be a realistic concessionary fares scheme. The statutory concessionary fares scheme, which gives pensioners and the disabled free travel on buses, is overly restrictive in a rural context. It only covers travel after 9.30 am. Some villages are served by just a few daily buses and there may be no service for some hours after that time. Others are served, not by traditional buses, but by community transport schemes to which the current concessionary fares scheme does not apply. The statutory scheme therefore needs reform, to make it equitable in comparison to urban areas and of real value to rural users.

**A more sustainable approach to community transport should be established in recognition that for many rural communities such services provide the only accessibility solution.**

Young people from rural areas often experience difficulties getting to Further Education colleges or sixth forms. For some this means undertaking long or complex journeys to get there and back, whilst for others it means compromising on the course topics they take. This dampens young people's aspirations and curtails their opportunities. One rural barrier would be removed if those travelling to post-16 education or training were entitled to subsidised bus fares, fully funded by central government. Indeed, it is hard to understand the rationale for the current situation, where those up to age 16 can travel free while those aged 17 or 18 cannot.

The state of local road infrastructure is also a cause for concern with local authorities often struggling to provide adequate maintenance. In addition to the national government focus on large scale infrastructure projects, such as HS2, local routes providing essential access for

communities and businesses to wider geographies must be identified as a priority for government with adequate local resources provided.

**What barriers to growth are created by poor digital connectivity? How can connectivity be improved across the board?**

See response above.

In addition, government and programmes could usefully encourage higher take-up of superfast broadband and support the development of the digital/IT skills of rural businesses (as identified in the report published by Rural England and SRUC: '*Unlocking the digital potential of rural areas across the UK*' ([\*Rural England and SRUC, March 2018\*](#))). The research showed that digital skills among their workforce and problems recruiting people with digital skills were key rural constraints. The report suggested better local collaboration between education providers and employers, as well as providing retraining opportunities for the older workforce. Also, making online short training courses more readily available to SME owners. But the research recognised that businesses have to play their part and set aside some resources to upskill on digital.

**What can be done to improve and maintain provision for essential services such as healthcare, education and banking in rural areas?**

Older age groups form a significant and growing share of the rural population. In 2011 29% of the rural population were aged 60 or over, up from 24% in 2001. Comparative urban figures were 21% in 2011 and 20% in 2001. Projections expect the population aged 85 and over to double in rural areas over the next twenty years.

Rural areas receive slightly less funding (per resident) than urban areas under the NHS allocations to Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs). This is despite them having an older population, which places more demand on NHS services due to chronic illness, disability and mortality.

In total 2016/17 urban local authorities received 40% more (£116 per resident more) in funding than rural authorities. This historic funding imbalance needs putting right, taking full account of the added (sparsity) cost of delivering services, such as supported bus routes, in rural areas.

With growing demand and reducing budgets, expenditure on social care provision risks overwhelming rural county and unitary council budgets (at the expense of their other services). Moreover rural residents are required, due to historic underfunding, to pay more in Council Tax for their local services than urban residents

A fair allocation of funding is needed to rural areas. Funding for the NHS, for social care and for public health should each be overhauled to reflect actual patterns of demand for those services and to take better account of the extra costs of provision in sparsely populated

areas. As a matter of principle, residents in rural and urban areas should receive equitable service provision. Local taxation has become unable to meet rising social care needs and there is now a case for financing the social care services managed by local authorities in a different way, with their statutory provision being fully funded by central Government. This would address the current unfairness in the system and would make it easier to cope with future demand.

A properly joined up approach to health and social care is also needed. In rural areas, perhaps even more than elsewhere, there is a need to achieve greater integration between health and social care services.

The upcoming Social Care Green Paper offers an opportunity to move to a more sustainable and effective approach. It is important that the issues especially pertinent in rural areas – including the costs of service provision – are fully addressed in the Green Paper and subsequent policy actions. It should also extend to addressing linked housing issues, such as access to specialist housing for older people and adapting the homes of those who live independently. This is important in rural areas where there are typically limited housing choices.

## **Business, employment, skills and demography**

### **How can rural businesses be helped to thrive, and how can new industries and investment be supported? How might labour and skills shortages be overcome?**

Businesses in rural areas are often remote from government and other institutions. Business support is often seen as confusing and urban centric. Constant changes to organisations and programmes has the potential to further confuse businesses and, therefore, improvements to existing structures is preferred to any wholesale restructuring in order to begin to provide continuity and certainty.

LEPs are key delivery organisations and some have an effective approach to rural areas. However, too frequently LEP programmes have little consideration for the opportunities and needs presented by existing and new business located in rural areas with many programmes selecting the 'lowest hanging fruit' in relation to beneficiaries with little or no support available for the smaller business which predominate rural areas. Mechanisms should be put in place to ensure that LEPs and other vehicles address the needs and take advantage of the opportunities presented by rural economies. Specifically in relation to the recent government policy paper on LEPs, RSN suggest that:

- The planned Government statements on 'the role & responsibilities of LEPs' and 'Local Industrial Strategies' should include a specific reference to the need to

consider rural areas within LEPs. This would help to ensure all LEPs take proper account of their rural economies.

- Rural Proofing should be included in the proposed induction and training programme for LEP members and officers. This would go a long way to helping to embed rural areas in LEP thinking. Defra could usefully deliver this training and take advantage of a potentially golden opportunity to put rural proofing into practice.
- RSN is very keen to help share good practice across LEPs in relation to rural economic development as set out in the document. RSN already works to share good practice and is in a fantastic position to help government achieve this end.

In addition, a dedicated rural business support programme should be put in place. In 2020 EU programmes, such as the LEADER and EAFRD initiatives, will come to an end. These have provided funding streams for rural business growth, diversification and innovation. They have, however, been fairly narrow in scope and modest in size. Government should replace them by designing a dedicated business support programme, as part of its proposed Shared Prosperity Fund. This should be flexible in scope – potentially open to all business types and sectors – enabling local delivery to be tailored to match locally decided priorities. There is an opportunity for Government to scale-up its ambitions for the rural economy by announcing a significant investment programme. Such a programme should include locally available skills training for small businesses, often struggling to cope with the pace and complexity of change, in order to maximise the economic contribution such businesses can make.

In addition, opportunities exist in relation to incentivising investment in technology and innovation to reduce the dependency on low paid labour evident in many rural areas and investing in technology and new delivery models within the skills sector to support remote delivery. This will enable the retention of young talent and development of a higher skilled workforce.

The Industrial Strategy, along with Local Industrial Strategies, should be rural proofed. The Government's Industrial Strategy is an important document. Many of its objectives are or could be highly relevant to the needs of the rural economy. However, in order for its benefits to reach into rural areas there will have to be careful 'rural proofing'. New policy initiatives that emanate from the Industrial Strategy should be tested at an early stage to ensure they take account of rural economic needs, opportunities and circumstances. Rural examples should be included wherever initiatives are piloted and rural specialists should sit on groups that are tasked with taking forward parts of the strategy document.

**What can be done to address the challenges associated with an ageing rural population, such as social isolation and social care provision? What opportunities are there for the older retired population to help support the rural economy?**

As set out above, a properly joined up approach to health and social care is also needed. In rural areas, perhaps even more than elsewhere, there is a need to achieve greater integration between health and social care services. To that end, the Better Care Fund has been a helpful (pooled) funding pot, despite giving less to rural than to urban areas. In 2019/20, the average predominantly urban resident will attract £37.74 per head in Improved Better Care Funding, £8.20 per head more than rural residents per head (of £29.54). In 2017/18 Adult Social Care Core Funding is met by Council Tax to the tune of 76% in rural areas compared to just 53% in urban.

The upcoming Social Care Green Paper offers an opportunity to move to a more sustainable and effective approach. It is important that the issues especially pertinent in rural areas – including the costs of service provision – are fully addressed in the Green Paper and subsequent policy actions. It should also extend to addressing linked housing issues, such as access to specialist housing for older people and adapting the homes of those who live independently. This is important in rural areas where there are typically limited housing choices.

In addition, there are many tried and tested approaches to addressing the issues of social isolation in a rural context both through local authorities and the third sector. Other organisations, such as ACRE, will be better placed to outline initiatives such as Village Agent and Good Neighbour schemes to the Select Committee. Such approaches should be supported, helping them become more widely available.

For example, the Daventry & District Forum (DDF) is an independent group run by the over fifties to enhance the quality of life to those living in Daventry District, which includes the town of Daventry and 78 villages. The group has set up a Good Neighbour Scheme throughout the district to reduce social isolation and loneliness ([www.daventrydc.gov.uk/living/good-neighbours-scheme](http://www.daventrydc.gov.uk/living/good-neighbours-scheme)) in partnership with Daventry District Council and Northamptonshire ACRE.

In rural areas the social care sector can and should be seen as an economic driver. If the associated costs of adult social care – including the trend for older people to migrate to rural areas – were properly funded by central government rather than local council tax payers, excellent quality of care and care facilities (including housing related issues) in rural areas could have a significant positive impact on rural economies.

## **Rural housing and planning**

**How can the affordability of rural housing be improved? What are the other challenges associated with rural housing and how can these be addressed?**

**How have recent planning policy reforms affected rural housing and the wider rural economy? What changes, if any, are needed to planning rules?**

The affordability of housing is a key issue for the rural workforce and hence for rural businesses and the rural economy

Average house prices are £44,000 higher in rural areas than urban areas (2017). Further, housing is less affordable in predominantly rural areas, where lower quartile (the cheapest 25%) house prices are 8.3 times greater than lower quartile annual earnings (2016).

Options for those on low incomes seeking social rented housing are typically very limited in small rural settlements. Only 8% of households in villages live in social housing. By contrast, 19% of households in urban settlements live in social housing (2011 Census).

The rural stock of social rented housing has shrunk under the Right to Buy policy, with sales quadrupling between 2012 and 2015 to reach 1% of the stock each year. Although the sale income is intended for reinvestment, only 1 replacement home was built for every 8 sold in rural areas during this period, and those replacements are rarely in the same settlement.

Second homes and holiday lets often add to rural housing market pressures, especially in popular tourist areas. They form a particularly large share of the housing stock in some local authority areas – Isles of Scilly (15%), North Norfolk (10%) and South Hams (9%).

It has previously been estimated there is a need to build 7,500 new affordable homes each year at England's small rural settlements, a figure now considered an under-estimate. Around 3,700 such homes were completed in 2015/16 and just over 4,000 during 2016/17.

A significant issue affecting the delivery of affordable homes in rural areas in recent years has been the planning policy change which removed the requirement to deliver affordable homes on small sites. Most development sites in rural areas are small. Recent changes to planning policy exclude small sites (of less than 10 dwellings) from the requirement that private developers include a proportion of affordable homes within developments has had a significant and negative impact for the delivery of rural affordable housing. Indeed, this was the main way such housing was built and it required no public subsidy. A simple solution would be to exempt all small rural settlements from this policy change, allowing affordable housing quotas again where they are most needed.

A dedicated rural affordable housing programme would also ensure that sufficient focus is given to the affordable homes needed in smaller rural settlements. Given the scale of the housing issue facing all parts of the country, and the significant resources made available by government to address this need, there is a significant concern that government effort will be targeted at larger developments in larger communities where greater efficiencies can be generated rather than smaller sites in rural communities where proportionately more effort is often required to bring forward critical affordable homes for local communities. There is a

need for a specific grant programme designed to boost delivery at small rural settlements by housing associations. This could be managed by Homes England and run at a scale which meets the shortfall in delivery identified by the 2014 Rural Housing Policy Review. The grant rates on offer should take account of the fact that undertaking small-scale development in rural areas is comparatively costly. Similarly, a fair share of the Community Housing Fund, which supports community land trusts, co-housing and self-build projects, should be allocated to rural projects, thus meeting the original objective for this fund.

## **Government Policy, Devolution & Local Government**

**Do the Government and other public bodies pay sufficient attention to the rural economy and if not, why not? What might be done to ensure that Government and other public bodies hear and act on rural voices?**

There is an urgent need for government to set out how it will approach and support rural economies and rural communities in the future. Whilst the government's 'Health and Harmony' consultation document begins to address such issues in relation to food and the environment, this represents a small subset of the entirety of the rural economy and the issues facing rural communities. Any suggestion that such wider issues will be addressed via 'mainstreaming' through other strategic documents, such as the Industrial Strategy, fail to recognise the bespoke attention required to meet the needs and build on the opportunities available in rural areas.

There must be proper consideration of all the critical issues facing rural communities and rural businesses. Government should produce a comprehensive, cross government and cross organisation strategy for rural areas. This is the only way to ensure rural businesses and rural communities are given due consideration and to make sure that wider strategic policy, such as that set out in the Industrial Strategy and ensuing Local Industrial Strategies, properly reflect the issues and identify specific measures to build on the wide rural opportunities which exist. Such a Rural Strategy is urgently required and warrants a separate consultation exercise.

It is time for a Rural Strategy which raises rural challenges and opportunities up the political agenda: which is forward looking and ambitious, recognising the contribution that rural areas make and those they could make to the wellbeing and prosperity of the nation as a whole. In the view of the RSN there is now a compelling case for such an approach.

In calling for a comprehensive fully funded strategy for at least the next 10 years the RSN also calls for rural proofing of government policies and legislation to be far more effective. Experience has shown that currently its application has been patchy and all too often applied only at a late stage. We commend the recent DCMS r proofing of the Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review as a good practice example. Roofing proofing needs to be applied to and by LEPS.

We trust that you find these comments useful and constructive and look forward to further development of policy and programmes which seek to build the role of rural areas in contributing to future economic growth.

Yours faithfully,

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