

MINUTES OF THE SPARSE RURAL AND RURAL SERVICES NETWORK EXECUTIVE AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE RURAL SERVICES PARTNERSHIP LTD MEETING, MONDAY 24TH SEPTEMBER 2018 HELD AT THE SOROPTOMISTS, NO 63 BAYSWATER ROAD, LONDON

Present: - Cllr Cecilia Motley (Chairman) Cllr Philip Sanders, Cllr Robert Heseltine, Cllr Peter Thornton, Cllr Sue Sanderson, Cllr Peter Stevens, Revd Richard Kirlew

Officers: - Graham Biggs MBE (Chief Executive), David Inman (Director), Kerry Booth, Jon Turner

Apologies: - John Birtwistle – Head of Policy, UK Bus; Cllr Kevin Beaty – Eden District Council; Cllr Rob Waltham – North Lincolnshire Council; Cllr Roger Phillips – Herefordshire Council

1. Notes of Previous Executive Meeting – 22nd May 2018.

Agreed as a correct record.

2. Notes of the Main Meeting – 25th of June 2018

Agreed as a correct record.

Matters arising:-

- A. Rural Services APPG:- the one that was the second part of the enquiry into Social Care had been inquorate. This was discussed. Some members said they would be writing to their MPs about the situation. For the next meeting it was agreed MPs would be specifically targeted.
- B. People and Places Board arrangements - a verbal report was received. There were a significant number of the Board's membership from RSN member authorities. It had been agreed with the LGA that in future the RSN's Chief Executive would be sent the Board's meeting papers in advance of meetings. This would enable the RSN to brief members from RSN member authorities on any issues and submit comment direct to the LGA

3. Composition of the Executive: -

- (1) The new Vice Chair for the NE Region, Cllr Trevor Thorne - Northumberland County Council would be contacted.
- (2) Anna Price from the Rural Small Business Awards to be offered a place as a Director of the Rural Services Partnership (agreed unanimously by RSP Directors present) and to be on the RSN's Executive representing small business.
- (3) To facilitate involvement it was agreed that the September meeting would be arranged around the Conference and the May meeting would be a core membership present at a meeting and a phone conferenced one for others
- (4) The new Policy Director John Turner was formally introduced. He was added to the Executive listings.

4. Joint RSN/CCN commission from Pixel re Additional Evidence Required MHCLG

A verbal report was given by Graham Biggs on this matter.

PIXEL had concluded the first phase of the joint commission from the RSN & CCN aimed at demonstrating the rural premium cost penalty. The study had concentrated on Refuse Collection but as a "Proof of Concept" for other services. Dan Bates had presented a summary at 2 workshop sessions at the conference. This first phase report had been discussed with MHCLG Officials and those discussions went well.

It is intended to finish the work on waste collection in North Yorkshire. This could lead to working with them to look at Waste Disposal which would provide a traversal proxy for both upper and lower tier. MHCLG were interested in us being able to demonstrate where we think that dispersal, traversal and remoteness applied to other services but seem to accept that this might have to include more anecdotal work - the intention here then would be to look to build upon the more statistically sound work (which establishes a proxy for traversal) but to supplement this with case studies in other areas - we could build upon the NY domiciliary work quoted by CCN for example.

Developing some case study work on non - provision and unmet need will be considered.

Once the report is finalised a meeting of the Rural Fair Share Group of MPs will be convened to ensure they remain fully briefed

5. Partnership between RSN and the National Centre for Rural Health and Care: Rural Health and Care Alliance.

Graham Biggs detailed the initiative and members also received a written report. The National Centre was happy with the Heads of Terms which RSN had suggested and matters would proceed as detailed in that document.

Membership of the Alliance would normally be at a subscription of £500 a year. Membership would run from 1st of January to 1st of January.

The Centre and the intended accompanying Alliance would be formally launched in the House of Commons on the 16th of October. Jon Turner and Bethan Aldridge would be working to seek a significant number of members of the Alliance over the coming months.

6. Time for a Rural Strategy

The latest draft of this was presented. The draft would be amended to accord with a wide range of representations which had been received.

It was agreed

- (A) to include paragraphs on the position relating to rural schools where Cumbria would assist with the drafting.
- (B) the rural proofing section would be beefed up And based on the recent legislation in Northern Ireland upon which a presentation had been made to the Conference

7. Communication Strategy Update.

Kerry Booth presented a full report.

Members noted the communication strategy review and the recent changes that have taken place with the revised rsonline website and Rural Bulletin. The changes were warmly welcomed and congratulations given to all involved

It was agreed that RSN would develop its social media with a regular campaign of awareness raising on rural issues and statistics.

Members approved the RSN Meeting Schedule for 2019 and the proposed subjects for consideration for the seminar and meetings.

It was noted that for the Executive in 2019 there would be 3 meetings plus one more based upon by teleconference. One of the meeting dates may be moved to be held at the end of the conference to save Members travelling and additional time.

At a further item in the meeting it was agreed to include an additional seminar in the SE of the country on the subject of Vulnerability.

8. RSP Recruitment

The Policy Director Jon Turner presented a full report as well as the Papers (F) and (FF) in the report.

Members congratulated Jon on the progress that has been made in the past 5 months with some twenty five new RSP members having been gained.

The meeting was supportive of the 'sector groupings' and the engagement of potential private sector organisations who deliver services in rural England. An "ethical framework" had been prepared for commercial organisations would be circulated to Executive members for comment.

Members endorsed Jon's recommendation that the financial threshold should be introduced, including an Individual Membership of c£90+VAT.

Members were supportive of the idea that RSP members should be encouraged to participate in both the National Rural Conference and Regional Seminars.

They were also supportive of Richard Kirlew's suggestion that faith groups should be encouraged to join the Partnership.

9. Rural Vulnerability

(A) Suggested Revised Priorities Document.

The new document including Rural Vulnerability as a cross-cutting issue was formally agreed subject to tidying around the wording in the current - document to avoid any duplication.

(B) Report on the topic of 'Rural Vulnerability'.

The Corporate Director presented his report.

A full discussion took place on the way people in rural areas were increasingly coming under more and more pressure from the situation relating to rural services. This together with a rural population that was statistically getting older was creating considerable difficulties for many people. Discussion took place about terminology and approach but it was concluded that the approach suggested was the correct one as the situation was in danger of affecting the continued sustainability of rural areas was in need of being described and detailed.

It was decided that:-

- (A) Rural Vulnerability should be accepted as a cross cutting issue in respect of the RSN priorities.
- (B) A specific section relating to Rural Vulnerability should be included in the RSN website as time permitted.
- (C) A regional seminar and meeting should in future be held in the South East and the schedule would be altered accordingly. The first of these meetings would seek to cover the issues around the topic. Consideration would be also be given to the topic being considered in next year's North West event due to be held in October 2019.
- (D) A new Vulnerability Grouping within the RSP of the most appropriate RSP members would be established. Meetings held would be grouped with other London meetings to avoid additional expense.

10. Separate RSP Meetings

The meeting received a joint report from the Corporate and the Policy Directors. It was agreed to hold two separate RSP meetings from 2019. It was hoped the meetings to be held in April and November every year could be held on the days following the RSN meetings to allow any necessary dovetailing of Agendas and to avoid further travelling expenses.

11. RSN Budget 2018-19, 2019-20

Graham Biggs updated members on the position. Although this was currently satisfactory there were a list of members who had not paid and they all would have to be chased.

A separate report regarding the charging structure for 2019-20 and following years was discussed.

RECOMMENDED:

- (1) The previously agreed policy of increasing contributions to reflect reductions in membership income be rescinded forthwith. There was
- (2) In lieu of the policy referred to in (1) above an annual inflationary increase of 2% be included across all charges with effect from 1st April, 2019.

12. Rural Conference 2018

A verbal report was given on the event held over two days in early September. Attendance had been up on 2017 and it was felt the Conference had been a very successful one which had been generally well received by those who had attended.

The event would be staged in 2019 and in future the event would be titled the National Rural Conference.

13. House of Lords Select Committee on the Rural Economy

An update report for information was given. Graham Biggs had been invited to give evidence on 16th October.

Regional Meetings Update

These continued to be well received and attendances had been encouraging. The last two in the North West and Yorkshire would be held on the 8th of October and the 10th of December respectively.

Any Other Business

A. Draft Agriculture Bill

There no provision relating to funding Rural Development and Rural Community issues (including LEADER type activity) in the current drafting. This could be an omission if these matters were not be empowered elsewhere. In Wales a different pattern had emerged. The Chief Executive would make enquiries, and if necessary make representations – including in response to the EFRA Select Committee's Call for Evidence closing on 6th October and report back at the November AGM.

NB It was subsequently determined that the Government had the power referred to in other legislation affecting England

B. Request to have a Special Offer in the RSN Bulletin

The Chief Executive reported on a request that had been made but which was not likely to go further because of failure to agree terms. The meeting agreed with the stance that had been taken by officers. The officers were asked to present a report on the position and the principles involved to the next meeting.