

**MINUTES FOR RURAL SERVICES NETWORK  
EXECUTIVE AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

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

**Date: Monday 30<sup>th</sup> of September 2019**

**Time: 11.15am to 2.30pm**

**Attendance & Apologies for Absence**

**Attending:**

Cllr Cecilia Motley, Chair – RSN, Shropshire Council

Graham Biggs MBE, CX – RSN

David Inman, Director – RSN

Cllr Robert Heseltine, First Vice Chair (Yorkshire) – North Yorkshire County Council

Cllr Roger Phillips, Vice Chair (West Midlands) – Herefordshire Council

John Birtwistle – First Group, Buses

Martin Collett – English Rural Housing Association

Mary Robinson, Vice Chair (North) – Eden District Council

**Apologies:**

Cllr Sue Sanderson – Vice chair (Without Portfolio)

Cllr Adam Paynter – Vice Chair (South West)

Anna Price – RSP Director - Small businesses

Cllr Mark Whittington – Vice Chair (Without Portfolio)

Cllr Gill Heath – Vice Chair (County 2)

Jeremy Savage – Vice Chair (Without Portfolio)

Peter Thornton – Vice Chair (Without Portfolio)

Cllr Peter Stevens – Vice Chair (East)

Richard Kirlew – RSP Chair – Community

Stewart Horne – Business Information Point (BIP)

**1. Notes from the 2018 AGM.**

Held on 12<sup>th</sup> November 2018 – were agreed as an accurate minute.

**2. RSN Constitution.**

The RSN Constitution presented on the 12<sup>th</sup> November 2018 AGM had been circulated to all RSN members as required by the present constitution. Only one council had made representations/comment. These had been dealt with in the new revised Constitution draft circulated to this meeting.

**Providing a voice for rural communities and service providers**

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The Executive agreed this revised draft will now go forward to the AGM on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December 2019. Electronic decision making by the Executive may be referenced in any future changes.

**3. Notes from the previous RSN Executive meeting.**

Held on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2019 – were agreed as an accurate minute with no matters arising.

**4. Notes from the SPARSE Rural Special Interest Group meeting.**

Held on the 24<sup>th</sup> of June 2019 – were agreed as an accurate minute with no matters arising.

**5. Notes from the Rural Economy Group meeting.**

Held on the 24<sup>th</sup> of June 2019 – were agreed as an accurate minute.

LEPs item – it was agreed that EDO's in member areas would be asked to let RSN know when their LEP had produced a (draft or final) Local Industrial Strategy and if they had comments as to the extent they considered it "fair, evidence based and fit for purpose" as far as their rural areas were concerned.

The RSN would produce a report on the extent to which the Local Industrial Strategies were sensitive and responsive to rural needs.

**6. Associate Group.**

A report from the Corporate Director was received suggesting that those who had rural local connections could form an Associate Group – on the basis set out in the report - for those local authorities who did not wish to be members of the RSN SIG. The report was agreed.

**7. A Rural/Market Towns Group.**

Over two hundred invitations have been sent out to a group of towns and large parishes across England. Details would be sent out to Executive of the towns/parishes approached to date.

**8. The National Rural Conference 2019.**

Held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> of September, Cheltenham.

The CEO reported that attendance and income had been at a record high this year. This was however due to wider interest particularly from RSP members, while Local Authority attendance had fallen compared to previous years.

Individual feedback from those attending was good. A survey will be taking place asking local authorities why they are not sending a representative to the annual conference and what their authorities might find of value in 2020.

CCRI were thanked for their assistance which was of particular value.

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Members agreed that if possible, Cheltenham would continue as the venue for the conference in future years.

A fuller report would be presented to the next Executive as information comes to hand.

**9. AGM, Assembly, Rural Social Care & Health Group.**

Meeting will be held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December 2019.

(a) It was agreed that the rise in subscription levels be held at 2% for inflation.

**10. Schedule of dates for RSN and Executive meetings in 2020.**

The schedule of dates circulated appeared to be acceptable to the Executive members, but they would come back in the week if there were any concerns.

**11. RSN Budget, 2019/20 and First Estimate 2020/21.**

Whilst subs were coming in as slowly as in previous years, the present situation as known about at the time seemed to be on budget.

Members did feel that in addition to the current flow diagrams (available on the website to all members), a third 'short, sharp' diagram (varying between authorities) showing the calculated benefit for SPARSE rural authorities, might be of real value if this was possible. Officers agreed to look at this and report back to the next meeting.

**12. Fairer Funding Review: Draft Paper from Pixel on "measuring success".**

Graham Biggs detailed the position in relation to this work on which member consultation would be necessary. However, the Executive themselves were happy how Pixel had approached the situation to date and the work so far undertaken. A report would be presented back to the Executive after consultation had taken place and members observations had been received.

**13. Spending Review Discussions about Finance based Aspirations with the Chief Secretary Treasury and with other Rural Groups.**

The Executive heard that Rishi Sunak had moved into this position, in place of Elizabeth Truss. It was appreciated that current times were very difficult but felt it would clearly be desirable for work to continue around Housing and Transport that had started under the previous administrative team at the Treasury.

It was decided that discussion would take place with Phillip Dunne MP about how and when this could be pursued. Some members felt that these discussions might be held in conjunction with North Yorkshire County Council given that Rishi Sunak was one of their Constituency MPs.

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John Birtwistle felt that although Electronic Buses may not directly benefit rural areas at this stage the technology should still be encouraged. He agreed to undertake to write and present a two-page document on busses for rural areas which RSN should be concentrating on in the short term.

#### **14. Post of Policy Director.**

Members received a report from the Chief Executive and the Corporate Director as the current postholder had secured alternative employment. It was suggested the post would have somewhat varied emphasis – with slightly less emphasis on direct recruitment and slightly greater emphasis on retention working. Sponsorship and attraction of exhibitors for the Annual Conference was also very important.

It was decided to trial the situation by advertisement. The job would continue to be foreseen as being based in the South West. However, the Executive considered there ought to be an opportunity to discuss with applicants a working pattern of 3 or 4 days a week, advertising on hours per week rather than days a week. It was felt this might present a more flexible package for would-be applicants.

#### **15. Rural Strategy Campaign.**

(a) The Government response to main points in the Lords Select Committee Report on the Rural Economy was circulated together with a draft RSN Commentary on each of the issues. Although the Executive had received this close to the meeting it was on first reading to be a good document. Nevertheless, Executive Members will look at it in more detail over the next week and come back with any further comments before the document goes out to the RSN membership for comment. This would also give the opportunity for those who were unable to attend this meeting to comment.

The Government's response was felt to be very disappointing. It demonstrated the considerable amount of work that would need to be undertaken.

(b) Proposed Rural Strategy Regional Roadshows.

Calor had agree to sponsor these.

Having had a successful Roadshow in the North East, the next one will be held in Kendal on 17<sup>th</sup> October for the North West. Others were planned for the East and West Midlands and South East. There was a possibility of an additional one in the South West if the money stretches that far.

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The main points from the North East Roadshow were comments on Climate Change, De-Carbonisation and Rural Crime, which were not referred to in the RSN Template Strategy. No specific Regional “differences” had been highlighted.

(c) Engaging with RSN/RSP Members.

An email had gone out to all Leaders asking for their authority to become involved by signing up to the Campaign and encouraging their networks to do so. The Executive would be kept updated in relation to the response.

**16. Report on the Priorities of the Rural Services Network.**

The Executive received the new document which they felt was excellent and they would like it to be used extensively. The Chief Executive was asked to congratulate Richard Inman and Kerry Booth. The meeting agreed to the RSN Priorities being re-expressed (and the website amended accordingly) to accord with the Template Rural Strategy. The RSN Priorities therefore being:

- A thriving rural economy;
- An affordable place to live;
- A digitally connected countryside;
- A place everyone can get around;
- A place to learn and grow;
- A rural proofed policy framework;
- A fair deal on health and social care;
- Fairer funding to address the rural penalty.

**17. Regional Meetings 2019 update.**

The situation was noted.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>Town</b>	<b>Primary Topic being considered</b>
28.06.19	North East	Durham County Council	Sustainable Communities
31.07.19	East Midlands/East Anglia	West Suffolk Council	Rural Health and Wellbeing
07.10.19	North West	Lancashire County Council	Delivering Local Services
09.12.19	Yorkshire & the Humber	Hambleton District Council	Barriers to Access – Connectivity and Rural Transport

**18. Election Questions to Candidates at a General Election.**

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The Chair referred to discussions between herself, Peter Thornton and the Chief Executive at the Annual Conference around this issue.

It was agreed that draft questions need to be sent to all members of the Executive for input. These would, once an election had been called, be issued to members (including the Community Group) through the Weekly Bulletin. And by direct email with the suggestion that they be put to candidates at hustings and on the doorstep. They would also be sent to all the main parties Party Headquarters (including minority parties fielding significant numbers of candidates) to enable them to brief their candidates if they chose to do so.

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