

Note of last SPARSE Rural Special Interest Group meeting

Title: Rural Services Network Special Interest Group
Date: Monday 17 April 2023
Venue: Online via Zoom

Attendance

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

Item Decisions and actions

1 Attendance and Apologies

Kerry Booth, the new Chief Executive of the Rural Services Network introduced herself and outlined the agenda and planned discussion.

2 Notes from the Previous RSN AGM and Rural Assembly Meeting

The note of the previous meeting was accepted.

3 Round up of RSN Work in 2022-23

Kerry introduced Nadine Trout, Assistant Chief Executive, RSN and members received a presentation on the work of the RSN over the past 12 months. Nadine outlined details of members making up 500 organisations as part of RSN. Members heard about the online seminar programmes which have been very well attended and very inclusive. Colleagues have expressed the value of these with lively debate.

Nadine referred to the annual National Rural Conference, with attendance of over 600 delegates in 2022. She went on to outline further work of RSN which includes:

- Rural Lens Series - Reviews of Government Policies.
- Commissioning of Independent Research with a survey on the Rural Cost of Living generating almost 7000 rural responses. Findings will be shared with membership and key influencers.
- Audience secured with the Minister Lee Rowley on the funding of rural councils
- Canvassing opinion of membership to inform responding to Government consultations.
- Providing weekly bulletins for local authorities with over 20,000 subscribers.
- Scanning of Westminster events in order to inform Ministers with relevant briefing material.

Nadine went on to speak about gains which include influencing the final Local Government Settlement for 2023/24 with an additional £10million funding secured in

the Rural Services Delivery Grant. Members were also reminded of ways in which the RSN has influenced other organisations by providing evidence and information.

Colleagues were invited to submit any stories for the bulletin and to contact the administration for any further information.

Kerry thanked Nadine for an informative presentation and agreed to share the slides with the group.

Access to rural lens reviews can be found at this link:

<https://www.rsonline.org.uk/tag/rural-lens>

4 RSN Campaigns in 2023 and your involvement

Kerry gave the meeting a presentation on upcoming campaigns and events and noted recent changes to the team.

She went on to inform the group of a range of RSN priorities and the need to make sure that MPs are aware of all the issues that rural areas face and ensure a fairer distribution of national resources in all public sector funding.

Information was shared which shows that urban areas receive 38% more per head in Government Funded Spending Power than their rural counterparts. As a result of this, rural residents pay more per head in Council Tax than their urban counterparts. The RSN is campaigning for recognition of rural issues and fairer funding formulae which appreciate these.

Kerry outlined key priorities and discussed issues and strategies around these:

- Rural Economies.
- Access to Rural Health and Care.
- Rural Affordable Housing.
- Rural Transport.
- Rural Net Zero.
- Rural Connectivity.

Members were invited to comment.

Cllr Peacock raised concerns with regards to housing and the need to have representation on discussion around local plans particularly in National Park areas. There were further comments via the chat around provision of bus services and the real issues around accessing services within rural communities.

Kerry added that once the manifesto asks were developed, and the presentation had outlined these, they would be circulated to member organisations to ensure that they represented the needs of the organisation.

Members were invited to contribute to the process with case studies and suggestions. Kerry provided a summary of planned seminars and outlined key advocates within the All Party Parliamentary Group for Rural Services.

Cllr Roger Phillips (Chair) thanked both Kerry and Nadine for their presentations and commented on the necessity to recognise issues for these communities. He

referred to work with political parties on their manifestos to ensure that they are well informed in advance of the General Election. Political engagement with a clear evidence base is key to ensure that challenges in rural areas are considered.

Members raised several comments:

- Cllr Chantler, West Northants Council, referred to problems around transport and digital accessibility in his local parishes. He raised concerns that small parishes and hamlets are not heard.
- Cllr Thornton, Westmorland & Furness Council, spoke about successes of the RSN and decisions which they have been influential on. He reminded colleagues of the importance of encouraging others to join.

Kerry assured colleagues that lobbying and communication are coordinated to ensure that all areas are covered and that the very role of the RSN, is to bring together these smaller rural voices, so that the rural voice can be heard.

5 National Rural Conference 2023

Kerry Booth reminded colleagues that the RSN will be running a new Members' induction about challenges in delivering services in rural areas.

She outlined planned sessions for the RSN National Rural Conference and invited members to share with colleagues that might be interested.

The Conference will be taking place from 18 – 21 September 2023, virtually via Zoom. To book a place, please go to <https://rsn-national-conference-2023.eventbrite.co.uk>

6 Any other Business

Members noted that the RSN will be hosting a session at the LGA Conference in Bournemouth from 4–6 July.

Cllr Phillips asked colleagues to consider attending and to make others aware of the RSN's presence at the event. To book attendance at the LGA Conference, see [here](#)

Members were reminded that they are welcome to contact the Team at any time on admin@sparse.gov.uk and to also check the website which has a lot of useful and important information.

The meeting was closed.

Attendance by Organisation

Airedale NHS Foundation Trust
Ashford Borough Council
Blaby District Council
Cadent Ltd
Citizens Advice Rural Issues Group
Citizens Advice Shropshire
Cornwall Council
Cornwall Rural Community Charity
Cumbria County Council
Derbyshire County Council
Devon County Council
English Rural HA
Hastoe Housing Association
Herefordshire Council
Lincolnshire Rural HA Ltd
Mid-Sussex District Council
NICRE
North Kesteven District Council
North Norfolk District Council
North Somerset Council
North Yorkshire Citizens Advice and Law Centre
North Yorkshire County Council
Outside the Box
Oxfordshire County Council
RABI
Rural Services Network
Rutland County Council
Somerset Council
South Norfolk District Council
SP Energy Networks
Suffolk County Council
Teignbridge District Council
University of Plymouth
Uttlesford District Council
Warwickshire Rural Community Council
West Devon Borough Council
West Northamptonshire Council
West Suffolk Council
Westmorland & Furness Council
Worcs Council
Wychavon District Council

Apologies by Organisation

Agricultural Chaplains Association
Anglian Water
Devon Churches Rural Forum
North Lincolnshire Council
Shropshire Council
United Utilities
Warwickshire CC
Young Somerset