

Notes from the South East Regional Seminar and Meeting 29/4/19.

Held at Sevenoaks Council, Argyle Road, Sevenoaks, West Kent commencing at 11-30 a.m.

Present:-

Name	Organisation
Cllr Cameron Clark, Chair	Sevenoaks District Council
Cllr Patricia Bosley, Chairman of the Council	Sevenoaks District Council
Cllr Peter Fleming OBE, Leader of the Council	Sevenoaks District Council
David Inman, Corporate Director	RSN
Tim Tempest, South East Regional Advisor for Kent	Pub is the Hub
Willow Cobby, Neighbourhood Connector	Guildford Borough Council
Catherine Beaumont, Deputy Head of Environmental Health	Rother & Wealden Environmental Health Service
Will Tompsett, Policy Officer	Wealden District Council
Amy Fearn – Housing Development Officer	Rother District Council
Paula Carey, Area Manager England South	Parkinson's UK
Sarah Lewis, Housing Register & Development Manager	Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
Emily Haswell, Economic Development Officer	Sevenoaks District Council
Ivan Annibal	Rose Regeneration
Jessica Sellick	Rose Regeneration
Cllr Christopher Woodley	Kent ALC
Will Train	Ashford Borough Council
Terry Martin	Kent ALC
Keith Harrison, Chief Executive	Rural Community Council – Kent & Medway
Emma Sutton, Policy & Research Officer	Age UK
Kathryn Harrison, Head of Housing Services	English Rural Housing Association

Speaker and Attendee	Organisation
Kerry Potter	UK Power Networks
Hayley Brooks	Sevenoaks District Council
Rachel Ryan-Crisp	Southern Water
Simon Kitchen	Bipolar UK

PART 1 OF MEETING: 11.30 am – 1.00 pm hrs

SEMINAR SESSION

1. Welcome from the Chairman of Sevenoaks District Council, Councillor Patricia Bosley.

The Chair formally thanked everyone for attending today's seminar and meeting.

The Rural Services Network was now the only organisation in England seeking to pull together the many rural areas which are spun across England so that they can present a national rural argument on behalf of the people living and working in these communities about their services and their issues.

She observed that rural areas have their fair share of problems and these can be very specific to them. People shouldn't fool themselves that because they are attractive areas, all must be well. These specific rural problems deserve some focus and the Network seeks to do that.

She was pleased to say that this is the first of the RSN Seminars that has been held in the South East and Sevenoaks were delighted to host it.

The very remoteness that so many others value, can for others gradually become a real burden. She observed that if you were vulnerable in a rural area you could be very vulnerable indeed in a rural one?

She very much hoped the event would cast some light on the problems and consider how by working together it may be possible to assist.

She thanked people for attending.

2. Introductory Remarks from Councillor Peter Fleming OBE, Leader of Sevenoaks District Council

The Leader welcomed the opportunity Sevenoaks had been given to attend the event. They had their fair share of rural areas across the Council area and were aware of the problems people faced.

He personally was involved with the District Council Network who likewise were aware and were concerned that rural problems lacked focus nationally.

He very much hoped the event would be a successful one and that it would bring about much needed scrutiny on this important topic and the exchange of best practice.

3. Introduction from David Inman, Corporate Director, RSN

David set out what ground the Network sought to cover and how they wished to work at local authority, community and parliamentary level. It was vital that the problems of rural areas were not simply mainstreamed with the assumption that national viewpoints would equally apply to rural areas. That was not always the case and rural areas would always lose out unless they achieved specific focus and attention. While the problems in inner cities were very much understood, England was almost 80% rural with 20% of its population living there. Its problems were specific and they needed special attention. He referred to the vulnerability problem with individuals in rural areas as the average age of the population was increasing and access to facilities becoming more difficult for many.

Vulnerability – Presentation One

Kerry Potter, UK Power Networks

Kerry is the Customer Vulnerability Officer for the Electricity Distributer, UK Power Networks holding the franchise for much of South East of England. She is a very experienced officer who is a central player in the Electricity Industry and their policies with people who are regarded, either permanently or temporary to be in a vulnerable situation. Kerry detailed how working with Ofcom a Priority Services Register system had been developed and how the industry had used this to give appropriate assistance to vulnerable customers.

[Kerry's presentation is linked here:-](#)

Vulnerability Presentation Two

Hayley Brooks, Sevenoaks District Council, Head of Housing and Health.

The Department that Hayley headed up had sought to devise policies and procedures that sought to give special consideration to those who were vulnerable or who had special difficulties. The authority had gained a reputation in the South East for work in this area.

[Hayley's presentation is linked here:-](#)

Vulnerability Presentation Three

Rachel Ryan-Crisp, Southern Water PLC, Affordability and Vulnerability Lead.

The company had been giving special recent consideration to their customer service work and had introduced many recent new systems. Whilst Water Companies' Priority Service Registers were not currently as extensive as those of Power Companies, Ofwat was encouraging Water Companies to be more pro-active in this work. Rachel detailed initiatives being undertaken including the introduction of a new Customer Inclusion Panel on which rural organisations were represented.

[Rachel's presentation is linked here:-](#)

4. Q&A of morning speakers

Particular questioning took place about what would constitute vulnerable customers, what special measures may be considered and how people were made aware of Priority Registration and how they could register

PART 2 OF MEETING: 1.30 pm – Finish

1. Afternoon presentation

Learning from the Rural Services Partnership - Simon Kitchen, Bipolar UK

Simon detailed how Bipolar diagnosis took place and how increasingly the number of people being diagnosed was increasing. This was particularly true in rural areas where isolation could be a key factor.

[Simon's presentation is linked here](#)

2. Roundtable Networking Session

Learning from others about Rural Vulnerability in the South East.

A very full discussion took place. It was felt that far more emphasis needed to be given to the priority registration system, which it was felt could and should be used far more extensively both across the regulated industries. It was also felt it had relevance in the public sector.

3. Summing up of afternoon session - Cllr Cameron Clark, Sevenoaks District Council

[Cllr Clark's remarks are linked here](#)

4. Meeting Apologies

The following were received:

Apologies

Name	Organisation
Cllr Mary Lewis	Surrey County Council
Councillor Rupert Simmons	East Sussex County Council
Jane Lang, Housing Services Manager	Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
Cllr Lawrie Stratford	Oxfordshire County Council
Cllr Anne Scicluna	Chichester District Council
Cllr Stephen Catlin	Lewes District Council
Cllr Ted Fenton	West Oxfordshire District Council
Cllr Mrs Sally-Ann Hart	Rother District Council
Cllr Sue Coleman	Sevenoaks District Council
Andrew Potter, Chief Executive	Hastoe Housing Association
Caroline Shaw	Norfolk & Waveney STP

Chris Stanton, Rural Economy Officer	Guildford Borough Council
Andy Haime, Operations Manager	Lincolnshire Rural Housing Ltd
Cllr Marge Harvey	Hampshire County Council
Cllr Mark Harris	Wycombe District Council
Cllr Jonathan Glen	Hampshire County Council
Cllr Kathryn Field	Rother District Council
Rupert Clubb, Director Community, Economy & Transport	East Sussex County Council
Jane Townsend, Principal	Easton and Otley College
Cllr Liz Leffman	West Oxfordshire District Council
Cllr Tony Ganly	Rother District Council
Cllr Carol Purnell	West Sussex County Council
Cllr David Turner	South Oxfordshire District Council
Cllr Eileen Lintill	Chichester District Council
Cllr Brenda Smith	West Sussex County Council
Maureen Taylor	Northumbria Healthcare
Cllr Yvonne Constance	Oxfordshire County Council
Sam Jones	Hampshire County Council
Cllr Sally-Ann Hart	Rother District Council
Alison Spring - Programme Office and Policy Manager, Community and Economy	Rother District Council
Cllr Sarah Barker, Chairman	Kent Association of Local Councils
Cllr Bill Withers	Hampshire County Council
Cllr Paul Peacock	Folkestone & Hythe District Council
Cllr Jenny Hollingsbee	Folkestone & Hythe District Council
Cllr Nikki Nelson-Smith	Guildford Borough Council

Cllr Dr James Walsh	West Sussex County Council
Cllr Mrs Morwen Millson	West Sussex County Council