

## Note of last SPARSE Rural Special Interest Group meeting

---

**Title:** Rural Services Network Special Interest Group  
RSN AGM, followed by Rural Assembly Meeting

**Date:** Monday 14 November 2022

**Venue:** Online via Zoom

---

### Attendance

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

### Item Decisions and actions

#### 1. Attendance and Apologies

The Chair welcomed colleagues to the meeting. Apologies were taken as read.

### Annual General Meeting

#### 2. Appointment of Chairman, Deputy Chairman and Members of the Executive.

Members noted that Councillor Motley had decided not to stand for re-election as the Chair of the Rural Services Network. She outlined achievements of the organisation during her time as Chair and extended her thanks to colleagues in the team and members.

She nominated Cllr Roger Phillips (Herefordshire Council) as her successor. The nomination was seconded and supported by members of the group. Colleagues extended their thanks to Cllr Motley for her dedication during her tenure as Chair of the RSN.

Graham Biggs (RSN) officially announced Cllr Roger Philips as Chair without any objection. The new Chair took over leading the meeting at this point and moved onto nominations for Deputy Chair.

Nominations for Deputy and Vice Chairs were made as follow:

- Cllr Peter Thornton (Cumbria) was nominated as Deputy Chair, and this was seconded.
- Cllr Robert Heseltine (North Yorkshire) was nominated as First Vice Chair and this was seconded.

Both nominations were accepted without opposition.

The Members of the Executive Board as set out in the Agenda were also agreed by the meeting without opposition.

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

#### **Rural Services Network**

Kilworthy Park, Tavistock, Devon, PL19 0BZ

Tel: 01822 851370

[www.rsonline.org.uk](http://www.rsonline.org.uk) email: [events@sparse.gov.uk](mailto:events@sparse.gov.uk) twitter: [@rsnonline](https://twitter.com/rsnonline)

Graham Biggs invited any members who might be interested in joining the Executive to contact himself, Roger Phillips or Kerry Booth.

**3 Notes from the last RSN AGM & Rural Assembly meeting.**

The notes were accepted as a correct record.

**4 Report of the RSN Executive: (1) 2022/23 Budget Report (2) 2023/24 Estimates and (3) Membership Subscriptions 2023/24**

Members received the report which explained changes for the forthcoming year and its impact on RSN finances. Cllr Phillips outlined consequences of inflation and medium-term financial plans. He informed colleagues that membership costs will need to go up to 5% for this year in order to cover additional costs.

Members said that a breakdown of benefits of membership in terms of RSDG and what has been achieved would be useful.

**Decision:**

**The Revised 2022/23 budget report be noted**

**SPARSE and Rural Assembly membership fees both be increased by 5% with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023**

**The fees for all other membership Groups be increased by 2% with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023**

**The Recommended Original Budget for 2023/24 be approved**

**That in accordance with current practice the RSN Executive be authorised to approve in year variations to the Budgets**

**5. Report on Revised RSN Campaigning Priorities.**

Members noted that Kerry Booth, Chief Executive Designate, will be taking over from Graham Biggs as Chief Executive in April 2023.

The group noted the report and Kerry provided an update to members on campaigning priorities which had been put to the Executive and agreed as recommendations to this meeting

The RSN is focusing on a core set of priorities with Fair Funding being the main focus of the work of the organisation. This will be supported with the four main priorities, Affordable Rural Housing, Rural Economy, Rural Transport and Health and Care Services. These would all be underpinned by cross cutting priorities focusing on Rural Planning, Rural Net Zero and Rural Connectivity.

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

**Rural Services Network**

Kilworthy Park, Tavistock, Devon, PL19 0BZ

Tel: 01822 851370

[www.rsonline.org.uk](http://www.rsonline.org.uk) email: [events@sparse.gov.uk](mailto:events@sparse.gov.uk) twitter: [@rsnonline](https://twitter.com/rsnonline)

**Decision:**

**The Revised RSN Campaigning priorities were approved**

**6. 2023 RSN Meeting Schedule.**

The Chair briefly spoke about the online meetings and Kerry referred to the benefits of online seminars run by RSN with a significant improvement of attendees and a wider reach of delegates across organisations.

Kerry will explore the option of the RSN having a presence in person at the LGA Conference next year.

Members noted meeting dates for the next year.

**Rural Assembly Meeting**

**7. Notes from the previous RSN Executive meetings.**

Members approved the minutes as read.

**8. The Rt Hon Philip Dunne MP – Chair of APPG for Rural Services**

Members received a video clip from the recent debate in the Commons about levelling up for rural areas.

The Chair welcomed Philip Dunne MP and outlined recent meetings about the work of RSN.

Mr Dunne expressed his appreciation of the work of the previous Chair and congratulated Cllr Phillips on his election. He went on to outline the conversation held at the recent debate and confirmed that the new Minister, Lee Rowley MP has agreed to hold a meeting with the APPG to discuss rural fair funding.

The Minister acknowledged difficulties around budget planning and the elevated cost of living for councils and residents in rural areas. Members were pleased to hear that the new Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, is aware of issues and is also enthusiastic to help these matters with a focus via the Autumn statement expected later in the month.

Mr Dunne referred to the work of APPG, particularly around fuel poverty and issues around the government promise to assist via a £400 payment to households. He spoke about decarbonisation and energy efficiency measures and discussions with Lord Callanan however attendance at meetings have not been great. A meeting with the Minister will be arranged soon..

Cllr Phillips invited comments and members said:

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

**Rural Services Network**

Kilworthy Park, Tavistock, Devon, PL19 0BZ

Tel: 01822 851370

[www.rsonline.org.uk](http://www.rsonline.org.uk) email: [events@sparse.gov.uk](mailto:events@sparse.gov.uk) twitter: [@rsnonline](https://twitter.com/rsnonline)

- There has been an improvement in Ministers attending APPG, although overall figures are still relatively small.
- Figures show that 240k homes are without mains gas or electricity.
- Concerns about the scrapping of capping council tax charges and the fact that rural residents already pay more.
- Consideration of grid capacity in exporting energy needs to be made and more easily achievable.

Mr Dunne responded to comments, agreeing to take these points forward to relevant parties, including the National Grid and the Minister.

The Chair thanked Mr Dunne and pledged support for his work around finding practical solutions to the problems around cost of energy.

To view the recent back bench debate on Levelling Up in Rural Britain and Lee Rowley MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State in the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities response, see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vuRToZxp-Qg>

## 9. Annual Review of RSN Work.

The Chair invited Kerry Booth to introduce this item and members received a link to the video of RSN work.

She outlined achievements, including:

- A wide-ranging membership, interested in sharing information around rural issues.
- Specialist meetings held throughout the year in order to get feedback on key issues.
- Delivery of the weekly Rural Bulletin reaching 20k readers.
- Influencing Parliament work with the APPG.
- RSN attend Defra Rural Impact Forum along with other key rural national organisations.
- Provision of Rural Lens reviews where government strategy white papers are considered and key rural issues explained for members.
- Research on Levelling Up White Paper and sharing findings with Secretaries of State.
- Informing Ministers of additional cost of living issues in rural issues.
- Putting together rural responses to government consultations.

Kerry acknowledged advantages in being able to influence via virtual meetings with greater and better access to key people at short notice.

To find out more about our Revitalising Rural: Realising the Vision campaign, please follow this link: <https://www.rsonline.org.uk/revitalising-rural>

To read Rural Lens reviews, please visit the following link:  
<https://rsonline.org.uk/tag/rural-lens>

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

**Rural Services Network**

Kilworthy Park, Tavistock, Devon, PL19 0BZ

Tel: 01822 851370

[www.rsonline.org.uk](http://www.rsonline.org.uk) email: [events@sparse.gov.uk](mailto:events@sparse.gov.uk) twitter: [@rsonline](https://twitter.com/rsonline)

You may be interested in this Levelling Up research that we have done:  
We've done an analysis of Mission 1, 3, 4 and 10 for each local authority in Sparse membership of RSN, you can see your local figures at this link:

<https://rsnonline.org.uk/category/levelling-up-analysis>

You may be interested in our research into the Rural Cost of Living Crisis:

<https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/new-report-shows-devastating-triple-blow-pushes-rural-communities-in-a-cost-of-living-emergency>

To find out how the RSN has been influencing please see our in the news section on our website: <https://rsnonline.org.uk/page/rural-in-the-news>

## **10. National Rural Conference 2022.**

Kerry gave a short presentation about the National Rural Conference, which was held in September 2022, and focussed upon Reducing Rural Inequalities and Improving Opportunities.

Members were invited to contact the RSN on [admin@sparse.gov.uk](mailto:admin@sparse.gov.uk) if they wish to engage and share best practice, particularly if they wished to speak at the conference next year and raise key issues to discuss.

The Chair commended the work of RSN, and members noted links via the Chat for more information.

If you are interested in RSN future events, please visit the following link to view our events calendar and book your place: <https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/future-meetings-and-events>

## **11. Guest Speaker Presentations with Short Q&A's**

Cllr Phillips welcomed speakers to the meeting.

Sarah McClelland, (Principal Consultant, Turner and Townsend) provided members with a presentation on the Home Upgrade Grant Phase 2 and the Home Upgrade Hub and provided information about technical support provided by the organisation.

She asked colleagues to check that all rural local authorities are aware of the scheme and the procedures needed to submit.

The Chair acknowledged the understanding of local authorities' pressures and the availability of assistance and support with any challenges they might be facing. Members noted the deadline for submission.

Kerry assured colleagues that an email with the presentation will be sent to all authorities and a reminder of the deadline put into the bulletin. The Chair thanked the speaker and agreed to spread information about the scheme.

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

**Rural Services Network**

Kilworthy Park, Tavistock, Devon, PL19 0BZ

Tel: 01822 851370

[www.rsnonline.org.uk](http://www.rsnonline.org.uk) email: [events@sparse.gov.uk](mailto:events@sparse.gov.uk) twitter: [@rsnonline](https://twitter.com/rsnonline)

Information can be found at:

[info@homeupgradehub.org.uk](mailto:info@homeupgradehub.org.uk)

The Chair then welcomed Helen Wright Rural Policy & Partnerships Manager, East Riding of Yorkshire Council who had agreed to attend to speak to members about development of their Rural Strategy.

Members received a presentation on the work of the Partnership as responsible for the development, monitoring and review of the East Riding of Yorkshire Rural Strategy. The speaker outlined its history and noted that it now has a membership of 50 organisations covering all aspects of rural life.

Helen spoke about particular issues that have underpinned the strategy and ways in which the rural profile has been raised by providing an efficient communication channel for sharing effective information. Members noted achievements brought about via the partnership and integration of key stakeholders.

Cllr Phillips thanked the speaker, acknowledging the commitment made by East Riding Council on addressing rural issues and policies.

To find out more about East Riding of Yorkshire Council, visit:  
<https://www.eastriding.gov.uk/>

## **12. Discussion with Members about Key Challenges Facing Rural Areas in 2022/23.**

Cllr Phillips asked colleagues to consider priorities over the next 12 months. He invited suggestions for future agendas.

Mr Biggs took the opportunity to confirm that, although agreement on the RSN's campaign priorities had taken place earlier in the meeting, there was flexibility to amend it as required throughout the year. He referred to the need to ensure that rural impacts are relayed to relevant Ministers.

Members made a few comments, including:

- Pivotal discussion around benefits and opportunities for rural areas needs to be presented to government.
- The profile of rural areas needs to be raised by demonstrating the beneficial economic impact of investment.
- The rural economy has a lot to contribute to improvement of the green economy.

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

**Rural Services Network**

Kilworthy Park, Tavistock, Devon, PL19 0BZ

Tel: 01822 851370

[www.rsonline.org.uk](http://www.rsonline.org.uk) email: [events@sparse.gov.uk](mailto:events@sparse.gov.uk) twitter: [@rsnonline](https://twitter.com/rsnonline)

### 13. Any Other Business.

Members noted the dates of future meetings.

- The next Rural Assembly meeting is scheduled for Monday, 17<sup>th</sup> April 2023.
- The next joint RSN AGM & Rural Assembly meeting is scheduled for Monday, 13<sup>th</sup> November 2023.

Cllr Phillips reminded colleagues to continue to lobby their MPs on rural issues and provided a quick summary of what had been agreed in the conversation today.

He thanked secretariat colleagues for their input and ended the meeting.

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

**Rural Services Network**

Kilworthy Park, Tavistock, Devon, PL19 0BZ

Tel: 01822 851370

[www.rsonline.org.uk](http://www.rsonline.org.uk) email: [events@sparse.gov.uk](mailto:events@sparse.gov.uk) twitter: [@rsnonline](https://twitter.com/rsnonline)

**Attendance**

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

**Rural Services Network**

Kilworthy Park, Tavistock, Devon, PL19 0BZ

Tel: 01822 851370

[www.rsonline.org.uk](http://www.rsonline.org.uk) email: [events@sparse.gov.uk](mailto:events@sparse.gov.uk) twitter: [@rsnonline](https://twitter.com/rsnonline)