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## Minutes Rural Assembly meeting

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Hosted: Online via Zoom  
Date: Wednesday, 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2022  
Time: 1pm – 3pm  
Chair: [Cllr Cecilia Motley](#), Rural Services Network /  
Shropshire Council

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- Attendance & Apologies.** (Appendix A)  
Cllr Cecilia Motley, Rural Services Network/Shropshire Council welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were taken as read.
- [Notes from the previous Rural Assembly meeting.](#)**  
The record of the meeting held on 4<sup>th</sup> April 2021 was noted.
- Notes from the previous RSN Executive meetings.**  
The record of the following three meetings of the RSN Executive were noted.
  - [RSN Executive meeting 10<sup>th</sup> January 2022](#)
  - [RSN Executive meeting 21<sup>st</sup> March 2022](#)
  - [RSN Executive meeting 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2022](#)

Cllr Cecilia Motley commended Kerry Booth on delivering an excellent performance in interview and congratulated her on her new position as Chief Executive Designate.
- Speakers**  
**[Manu Ravishankar](#)**, Innovation Lead–Ofgem Programme, **[Innovate UK](#)**  
*“The Ofgem Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF): An Overview and Upcoming Opportunities”*  

Manu delivered a presentation to attendees on the Ofgem Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF). Ofgem and Innovate UK are collaborating to deliver a net zero energy system and position the UK as the ‘Silicon Valley’ of energy systems. The fund is of £450m over 5 years for energy network innovation projects. Manu highlighted the 3 pillars of the SIF, and described how the current political, market and social context have been carefully considered for round 2 challenges. Innovation Challenges are funded on the basis that networks must work with local authorities. Manu called for ideas but with local authorities principally acting as a stakeholder.

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Cllr Dr Virginia Taylor, Eden District Council, noted that many rural authorities would not have the capacity to provide ideas, and raised the limited grid capacity for new uses of electricity for heating and transport. The limitations of rural infrastructure were also noted by Graham Biggs, Rural Services Network, and that solutions would have to work in the rural context – he cited the transition from fossil fuels in off-gas grid areas and the government’s position on electric heat pumps as an example. Manu explained that the fund is technology agnostic, and the purpose of the SIF was to assess the solutions that would work for rural. Manu went on to consider how flexibility and improving efficiency of electricity use will unlock a great deal of grid capacity. A final point was made by Dr. Malcolm Rigler about area specific energy solutions, which Manu agreed were valuable to the overall problem of reaching a net zero energy system and cited as an example the work with the NFU where innovative solutions were considered.

**[Click here to view presentation from Manu Ravishankar, Innovate UK](#)**

**[Kerry Booth](#)**, Chief Executive Designate, **Rural Services Network**  
*“Levelling Up and SPF Agenda and what it means for rural areas”*

Kerry introduced the Levelling Up White Paper and how the RSN were initially excited at the prospect of its potential for positive rural outcomes. She went on to highlight the Rural Lens reviews (that the RSN provides its members, accessible through the RSN website), particularly mentioning one review on the Levelling Up White Paper. Kerry went on to discuss the disappointment in realising that the White Paper examined data at a granularity too large to understand the dispersed rural needs, how improvements were being sought at a regional level where focussing on the urban areas of a region can deliver “easy wins” at the expense of truly levelling up within the regions, that would include their rural areas. It was noted that rural local authorities rarely have the same capacity as urban authorities to bid for funds, and although the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) did away with the need to bid, numerous Levelling Up funds did require bids to be prepared.

**[Click here to view presentation from Kerry Booth, RSN](#)**

**[Graham Biggs MBE](#)**, Chief Executive, **Rural Services Network**  
*“Rural as a Region: The Hidden Challenge for Levelling Up”*

Graham introduced the report which the RSN had commissioned from Pragmatix Advisory. This report examines the missions and metrics of the Levelling Up White Paper through a rural perspective and provides comparison of ‘Rural as a Region’, through the metrics, to the geographical regions, highlighting rural England’s need to be considered a priority for levelling up.

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Rural Services Network

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Graham pointed out that the missions and metrics were not set in stone and could change over time, and that during this time the levelling up landscape might change drastically.

Currently rural areas are neglected in the Levelling Up framework as expressed in the White Paper. The conclusion of the Pragmatix work was that disparity is greater within regions than between regions, and for that reason a more granular level of assessment, and data requirement, is necessary to fulfil true Levelling Up.

Graham pointed to the Pragmatix considered opinion that additional measures and metrics would be required to present a more accurate picture of the rural level. The report has had good media coverage, and dependent on other news of the day, could be expected to create more coverage in the coming days. However, Graham highlighted that a big success already achieved is the response from the Department for Levelling Up, which stated:

*“Rural areas are at the heart of our levelling up agenda. Our white paper is a plan for everyone, including rural communities, who rightly expect and deserve access to better services, quicker transport, and quality education. We’ve designed our funds to ensure we reach places most in need and we continue to keep them under review as we develop each levelling up mission.”*

Graham went on to advise the meeting that the Rural Services Network will be providing for each of its Sparse members data analysis of those metrics for which data is available at local authority level, examining position and trajectory of the measures relative to England and ‘Rural as a Region’.

### **[Click here to view presentation from Graham Biggs MBE, RSN](#)**

Cllr Cecilia Motley rhetorically questioned whether Government wants to produce data of sufficient granularity or has a willingness to engage with the complexity of rural. Simon Matthews, Rural West Sussex Partnership, noted that the SPF (Shared Prosperity Fund) was very difficult to break into for rural since the prospectus does not mention “rural”. Graham replied that it is the RSN’s intention to request from member authorities their SPF investment plans for analysis, but noted that, whether they will be sufficient to achieve anything meaningful in specific rural communities – especially those areas receiving the minimum of £1M over 3-years remains to be seen. He went on to say RSN was pleased that the SPF was not a competition, but that the RSN would have expected weighting for sparsity to be included in the funding calculation for authorities’ share, which it was not as far as the 70% allocated per capita.

Cllr Phil King, Harborough District Council, made the point that a clear series of rural asks are needed so that he and his rural colleagues across England can more effectively lobby Government where opportunities arise. Graham agreed and

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confirmed a list of specific asked would be drawn up. He also gave assurance that through the Rural Coalition, the APPG on Rural Services, as well as sending to all relevant Government Departments, the Pragmatix report will deliver the messages that RSN members want the Government to understand.

**Links to background documents:**

[Overarching Rural Lens review of Levelling Up White Paper published](#)  
[Rural Lens Review of UK Shared Prosperity Fund Prospectus and Allocations](#)  
[Pragmatix Report – “Rural as a Region: The Hidden Challenge for Levelling Up”](#)

**5. Cost of Living Research.**

Verbal report from Graham Biggs MBE, Chief Executive.

Graham gave an overview of the Kovia Consulting interim report looking into the Rural Cost of Living that has been based on a literature review and desk research. Graham noted some of the findings and expressed his desire for the consultants to bring the document to life with case studies and asked those in attendance for pertinent case studies for inclusion.

Kerry said that information on the increasing cost of rural living had been sent to Newsnight, and that although the RSN had not been referenced, this information had been used.

**6. National Rural Conference 2022.**

Verbal report from Kerry Booth, Chief Executive Designate.

[Please click here to book your place at our National Rural Conference 2022](#)

Kerry gave a brief update on the progress for this year’s National Rural Conference and the likely format for the week of online events.

**7. Social Value Engine Event.**

Event hosted by hosted by East Riding of Yorkshire Council, taking place from 10:30 to 12:00 on Wednesday, 19th October 2022.

Verbal update from Kerry Booth, Chief Executive Designate. Graham Biggs commented that being able to assess social value could become increasingly important in the context of Levelling Up and UKSPF.

**8. Any Other Business.**

The next joint RSN AGM & Rural Assembly meeting is scheduled for Monday, 14<sup>th</sup> November 2022. [Please click here to book your place in advance.](#)

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## **Attendance and Apologies**

### **Attendance**

<b>Full Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Ian Adams	Essex Fire Service
Cllr Philip Atkins	Staffordshire County Council
David Barrowcliff	English Rural Housing Association
Julie Beresford	Bassetlaw District Council
Graham Biggs MBE	Rural Services Network
Kerry Booth	Rural Services Network
Lois Brentnall	Advance Northumberland
Tony Brown	Northumberland County Council
Lillian Burns	National Association of Local Councils (NALC)
Matthew Byrne	Community Council Somerset
Sinead Carey	South Norfolk Council
Adam Clarke	Young Somerset
Abi Culley	Warwickshire County Council
Dr Jane Deville	University of Lincoln
Connor Finch	Anglian Water
Louise Flavell	Braintree District Council
Rachael Fullwood	Lincolnshire Rural Housing Association
Jo Giles	Cadent Ltd
Alan Gray	North Kesteven District Council
Nik Harwood	Young Somerset
Nicola Healy	Babergh & Mid Suffolk District Councils
Paul Henry	Suffolk County Council
David Inman	Rural Services Network
Cllr Patrick Kimber	West Devon Borough Council
Cllr Phil King	Harborough District Council
Nadine Kinsey	Herefordshire Council
Karen Lawrenson	Lancashire County Council
Simon Matthews	Rural West Sussex Partnership
Diana Maxwell	Hastoe Housing Association
Hayley McHugo	Harborough District Council
Nic Millington	Rural Media
Cllr Cecilia Motley	Shropshire Council
Cllr Karen Payne	Rutland County Council
Hannah Perry	University of Bolton
Emma Phillips	West Oxfordshire District Council
Cllr Garry Purdy	Derbyshire Dales District Council
Nicola Radford	Lincolnshire County Council
Mandy Ramm	Lincolnshire County Council
Julia Raven	West Northamptonshire Council

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Manu Ravishankar  
Cllr Helen Reeve  
Dr Malcolm Rigler  
Mark Ryder  
Cllr Jeremy Savage  
Cllr Graham Simpkins  
Zoe Swanwick  
Cllr Dr Virginia Taylor  
Fiona Thomson  
Cllr Peter Thornton  
Mary Timmis  
Will Tompsett  
Nadine Trout  
Cllr Sue Tucker  
Ellen Wardle  
Ian Whittle  
Andy Wood  
Dan Worth

Innovate UK  
South Hams District Council  
Retired GP  
Warwickshire County Council  
South Norfolk District Council  
Westmorland & Furness Council / Eden District Council  
Strand Partners  
Eden District Council  
Outside the Box  
Cumbria County Council  
Stafford Borough Council  
Wealden District Council  
Rural Services Network  
Scarborough Borough Council  
Cadent  
Reed In Partnership  
East Devon District Council  
Rural Services Network

## Apologies

### Full Name

Vinia Abesamis  
Jane Adams  
Beverley Alderton-Sambrook  
Jane Birch  
Ruth Buckley-Salmon  
Dr Chris Clark  
Cllr Stephen Clarke  
Cllr Sue Cooper  
Mike Crawshaw  
Lois Dale  
Cllr Ronnie De Burle  
Caroline Duffy  
Cllr Janet Duncton  
Emma Foy  
Andrea Gardner  
Professor Anne Green  
Kate Hampson  
Mitch Harper  
Cllr Robert Heseltine  
Cllr Stephen Hillier  
Cllr David Hitchiner  
Claire Holt  
Dr Ulrike Hotopp

### Organisation

Herefordshire Council  
YMCA Lincolnshire  
Bassetlaw District Council  
Community Council Somerset  
The National Federation of Sub-Postmasters  
Royal College of General Practitioners, Rural Forum  
West Northamptonshire Council  
South Oxfordshire District Council  
Shrewsbury and Telford Hospitals NHS Trust  
Shropshire Council  
Melton Borough Council  
Mid Sussex District Council  
West Sussex County Council  
West Lindsey District Council  
Myerscough College  
University of Birmingham  
West Sussex County Council  
Leicestershire County Council  
North Yorkshire County Council  
Mid Sussex District Council  
Herefordshire County Council  
Durham County Council  
LIVE Economics Ltd

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Gavin Iredale  
Cllr David Jeffels  
Samantha Jones  
Rev Richard Kirlew  
Francesca Kirtley-Paine  
Martyne Manning  
Cllr Paul Marshall  
Toby Matthews  
Sean Mcgrath  
Cllr Roger Phillips  
Gary Powell  
Bobbie Preston  
Sylvia Pringle  
Cllr Stephen Purser  
Clair Raybould  
Cllr David Rogers  
Janice Rose  
Marina Di Salvatore  
Sareeta Sharma  
Stuart Shaw  
Cllr Richard Sherras  
Ian Sherriff  
Nicola Simmons  
Cllr Margaret Squires  
Cllr Vivienne Stock-Williams  
Cllr Richard van Dulken  
Cllr Norman Webster  
Rosie Wiggins  
Edward Woodall  
Phill Woods  
Damian Woolfe

Reed in Partnership  
North Yorkshire County Council  
Suffolk County Council  
The Agricultural Chaplains Association  
Liquid Gas UK  
Stafford Borough Council  
West Sussex County Council  
Norfolk County Council  
Lancashire County Council  
Herefordshire Council  
Teignbridge District Council  
SP Energy Networks  
Northumberland County Council  
Teignbridge district Council  
NHS Lincolnshire CCG  
OALC  
Northumberland County Council  
West Lindsey District Council  
Longhurst Group (Housing Association)  
Airedale NHS Foundation Trust  
Ribble Valley Borough Council  
Plymouth University  
Reed in Partnership  
Mid Devon District Council  
Somerset West & Taunton Council  
Braintree District Council  
Mid Sussex District Council  
Association of Convenience Stores  
Association of Convenience Stores  
Cornwall Council  
Lancaster City Council

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