

Minutes of RSP & RSN AGM

1 December 2025
Online via Zoom

Attendance

An attendance list is attached as **Appendix A**

	Decisions
1	<p>Welcome to the joint AGM by Cllr Roger Phillips, Chair of RSN</p> <p>Cllr Roger Phillips (RP) Chair of RSN welcomed colleagues to the joint formal Annual General Meeting of the Rural Services Network and SPARSE Rural SIG.</p>
2	<p>Apologies</p> <p>Apologies were received from Nick Harwood (NH) and Cllr Robin Hill, Staffordshire.</p> <p>Attendance details are provided at the end of this note.</p>
3	<p>Rural Services Partnership AGM by Nik Harwood, Chair of RSP</p> <p>The Chair introduced this item in the absence of NH and summarised the key issues for consideration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To receive and consider the Minutes of the AGM held on 2 December 2024. • At their meeting of 13 October 2025, the directors of the RSP approved the accounts for 2024/25 and agreed the reappointment of Tax Assist Ludlow as the Company's Tax Accountants. • The AGM to approve the Company Accounts for the year ended 31st March 2025. • The AGM should note the re-appointment TaxAssist of Ludlow as the Company's Tax Accountants. • If no such nominations are received existing Directors (if willing) remain as Directors for a further year until the next AGM. <p>Members considered the issues and noted the existing Directors:</p> <p>Kerry Booth (ex officio Director as Chief Executive) Cllr Roger Phillips (RSN Chair) Martin Collett (Housing) Nick Harwood (Youth)</p> <p>Decisions: By consensus, the meeting:</p>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agreed the minutes of the previous AGM held on 2 December 2024. 2. Noted RSP Directors' approval of the accounts for 2024/25 and agreement of the reappointment of Tax Assist Ludlow as the Company's Tax Accountants. 3. Agreed the Company Accounts for the year ended 31st March 2025 4. Noted and agreed the re-appointment TaxAssist of Ludlow as the Company's Tax Accountants. 5. Agreed that the existing Directors remain for a further year until the next AGM.
4	<p>Rural Services Network AGM Chaired by Kerry Booth, Chief Executive RSN</p> <p>KB outlined details of the nominations for the Executive and asked members to consider the appointments of Chairman, Deputy Chairman and Members as set out below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chair: Cllr Roger Phillips, Herefordshire County • Deputy Chair: Cllr Peter Thornton, Westmorland and Furness Council • Vice-Chair: Cllr Robert Heseltine, North Yorkshire County Council • Vice Chair: Cllr Robert Waltham MBE, North Lincolnshire Council • Vice Chair: Cllr Adam Paynter, Cornwall Council • Vice Chair: Cllr Sarah Pugh, West Suffolk Council • Vice Chair: Cllr Gale Waller, Rutland Council • Vice Chair: Cllr Mark Whittington <p>Along with the two directors from the RSP Partnership:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Martin Collett (Housing) • Nick Harwood (Youth) <p>Members noted that a nomination was also received for Cllr Robin Hall, (Staffordshire County Council) to join the Executive.</p> <p>Decisions: By consensus, the meeting:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agreed the reappointment of Chairman, Cllr Roger Phillips 2. Agreed the appointment of Deputy Chairman, Cllr Peter Thornton. 3. Agreed all appointments to the Executive, and including Cllr Robin Hall as set out above. <p>Councillor Phillips took the opportunity to thank colleagues for their confidence in appointing him for a further year, with members noting that it was his 4th year as Chair.</p> <p>He took the opportunity to give 12 months' notice to the group, informing them that he would not be standing as Chair next year although he would welcome remaining on the Executive.</p> <p>b) Report of the RSN Executive:</p>

1. 2025/26 Budget Report Attachment 3
2. 2025/26 Estimates Attachment 4

Members noted the reports and were asked to consider budget proposals which detailed the following:

- That the Revised 2025/26 budget report be noted.
- That SPARSE and Rural Assembly membership fees and all Rural Services Partnership Groups membership fees should increase by 5% for 2026/27.
- That, assuming the above recommendations are accepted, the Draft Estimates/Budget for 2026/27 be approved.
- That in accordance with current practice the RSN Executive be authorised to approve in year variations to the Budgets.

Members' comments and questions:

- Rita Lawson, Tees Valley Rural Action asked whether different membership levels would also be affected by the 5% increase or whether it would just be just local authorities.
- KB confirmed that the increase would still be based upon income and therefore the increase would be applied accordingly.

Councillor Phillips acknowledged there may be risks involved but felt that it was important to address these with the increase.

Decisions:

By consensus, the meeting:

- **Agreed** that the Revised 2025/26 budget report be noted.
- **Agreed** that SPARSE and Rural Assembly membership fees and all Rural Services Partnership Groups membership fees should increase by 5% for 2026/27.
- **Agreed** that, assuming the above recommendations are accepted, the Draft Estimates/Budget for 2026/27 be approved.
- **Agreed** that in accordance with current practice the RSN Executive be authorised to approve in year variations to the Budgets.

5 Joint AGM Items:

Future on-line meeting dates and seminars 2025-2026

Members noted that dates had been set and would be circulated in due course.

Annual Review of RSN Work including RSP, RMTG and RVSG, and RHCA work

Members received a presentation which detailed the extent of work carried out by the RSN over the last year on behalf of the SIG. KB informed colleagues that engagement had included publications, conferences, meetings and other events to raise awareness of issues in rural areas. Members also noted plans around member induction for 2026 and were pleased at the level of conversation around rural services with seminars also live and available for booking.

KB highlighted details of work aimed at shaping the influence of the group and outlined key areas, including:

- Engagement via a 'Delivery for All' survey in order to provide an understanding of common issues and unlock some of the barriers faced by rural communities.
- Increasing influence by participating in other groups and national bodies.
- Evidence given to the House of Lords select committee on social mobility in rural areas.
- Attendance at the labour conference and presentations to the Labour Rural Parliamentary Party.
- Participation in consultations on behalf of the membership to ensure that rural areas have a strong voice.
- Engagement with rural MPs via online briefing campaigns.

Members' comments and questions:

- Members asked for an update on the new initiative which had been set up by a group of first time Labour MPs from rural areas (Labour Rural Research Group) who had indicated an interest in meeting.
 - KB confirmed that they had met and were currently engaged in work around their analysis on poverty and deprivation with a plan to come to the group for input in due course. KB spoke briefly about the impact on health in particular and members acknowledged major issues.
- Some Members expressed disappointment that some of the Unitaries had not taken up membership of the RSN given that they had rural within their areas.

RP acknowledged the extent of work done by the secretariat which was a relatively small team. He said that it was important to raise awareness with new councils and other relevant organisations that the RSN was recognised as an established voice for rural communities.

Discussion with Member organisations about Key Challenges Facing Rural Services Delivery in 2025/26

RP invited colleagues to discuss key challenges facing rural services delivery over the next 12 months.

Members' comments and questions:

- Members were concerned about the announcement on SEND and what would happen to any existing overspend.
- Members felt that the link to deprivation within rural areas was not emphasised as much as the effect within urban areas.
- Members raised concerns about future funding and damping and the need for greater clarity.
- Members raised concerns about the link between education and transport and the importance of ensuring that planning included recognition of the connection.

Discussion continued around the imminent fair funding settlement and KB informed colleagues that a draft response would be circulated to local authorities once details of the settlement has been received.

The Chair invited Graham Biggs (GB) to comment and he raised several points as follow:

- Rural areas would continue to suffer in comparison to urban areas.
- The latest policy statement was similar to the previous one.
- The rural case needed to be developed in depth and with more evidence for when the 3-year settlement formula ended in 2029.
- Rural MPs would need to have a full handle on their constituencies and therefore it would be up to rural authorities in membership to ensure they were engaged.
- A lot of the issues were around remoteness and the extra costs of providing more delivery points for residents.
- A further discussion to look at the context in line with the settlement should take place at the next meeting in January.

Members were reminded of previous work around remoteness and were assured that evidence would continue to be included in the remit going forward.

Decisions:

By consensus, the meeting:

1. **Noted** the review of RSN's work.
2. **Agreed** that issues around remoteness would continue to be included as evidence within the work remit going forward.

Members noted several links submitted via the chat function and these are included below for information:

2026 Seminar Programme is available to book at this link:

<https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/meetings/online-seminars/2026/programme.pdf>

Delivering for All Survey: <https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/have-your-say-delivering-for-all-survey>

	Taking a look at our work throughout 2025: https://youtu.be/rv_AHYSn63M
6	<p>Any other Business</p> <p>There was no other business.</p> <p>The Chair acknowledged the work of the group over the past twelve months and thanked everyone for their attendance.</p>
7	<p>Close of meeting</p> <p>The next SPARSE Rural Fair Funding meeting would take place on 12 January 2026.</p> <p><u>Please click the link to book your place</u></p>

Appendix A - Attendance

Cllr Roger Phillips (Chair)	Herefordshire Council
Maryann MacAulay	Rural Services Network
Natalie Birch	Rural Services Network
Kerry Booth	Rural Services Network
Graham Biggs	Rural Services Network
Cllr Adam Paynter	Cornwall Council
Cllr Gale Waller	Rutland County Council
Cllr Gordon Czapiewski	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr John Toye	North Norfolk District Council
Cllr Keith Horgan	East Cambridgeshire District Council
Cllr Sarah Pugh	West Suffolk Council
Cllr Teresa Davis	Mid Suffolk District Council
Fatima De Abreu	Local Government Association
Martin Collett	English Rural Housing Association
Rita Lawson	Tees Valley Rural Action
Tony Price	Trent & Dove Housing
Ursula Alderman-Wells	North Northamptonshire Council

Apology for absence

<u>Councillor</u>	<u>Authority</u>
Julie McLatch	East Hampshire District Council
Cllr Robert Waltham MBE	North Lincolnshire Council
Kate Kennally	Cornwall Council
Katherine Nissen	Cornwall Rural Community Charity
Cllr Robin Hall	Staffordshire County Council
Jane Owen	Humber and Wolds Rural Action
Victoria Clare	Rotherham Doncaster and South Humber NHS Foundation Trust
Cllr Brian Evans	Shropshire Council
Kate Smith	Connexus
Amy Worley	Countryside Jobs Service
Patrick Mahon	Acre
Nik Harwood	Young Somerset
Shannon Petrossian	North Northamptonshire Council
Hazel Webb	North Northamptonshire Council
Caroline Rhodes	Cotswold District Council