

RSN Annual Review November 2023

Report from Kerry Booth, Chief Executive

Aim

To provide the Rural Services Network (RSN) Membership with an update on services provided by the RSN throughout the year to date along with key campaigns and work.



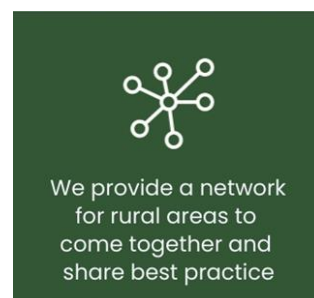
NETWORKING

Networking to share best practice

To date in 2023 we have hosted the following meetings:

RSN Seminar Programme

Access to the seminar programme is free to member organisations and this year we have provided 8 seminars each featuring 3-4 expert speakers with the opportunity for delegates to contribute to the debate and share experiences and good practice.



Date	Event	Subjects Covered	Attendee Total
25.01.23	Seminar Rural Net Zero	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fair transition to low carbon heating for rural communities Electric vehicle infrastructure in rural areas North Norfolk District Council Climate Emergency Journey 	95

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22.02.23	Seminar: Rural Connectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tackling Data Poverty • Digital Voice, getting it right for our customers • Gigafast Staffordshire – connecting our rural communities • Protecting broadcast and radio services for rural communities 	66
29.03.23	Seminar: Rural Fair Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural Police Funding • Local Government Funding and Rural Services Delivery Grant • Impact of unfair funding on discretionary services 	32
26.04.23	Seminar: Rural Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The importance of micro businesses to the rural economy • Rural Poverty Today: the policy challenges • Levelling up the Rural Economy 	50
17.05.23	Seminar: Rural Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Transport Association: More than a bus • Understanding and establishing the Rural Mobility Centre of Excellence • A new approach to solving the rural bus crisis • Launching demand responsive bus in North Somerset 	66
28.06.23	Seminar: Rural Affordable Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A whole system approach to the cost of living crisis • Understanding and addressing rural homelessness • Designing and delivering a good retrofit project 	106
25.10.23	Seminar: Rural Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural Exception Sites • Biodiversity Net Gain and what it may mean for rural places • Planning appeals in rural areas 	72
29.11.23	Seminar: Rural Health and Social Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The rural workforce journey • Case study of Cumbria – Health workforce • National priorities for the rural healthcare workforce and opportunities of the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan • Harvesting talent in rural Lincolnshire 	60

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RSN Meeting Programme:

We have hosted a range of meetings for our different organisations in membership throughout the year.

Date	Event	Issues covered	Attendee Total
12.01.23	Rural Fire Fair Funding Group	Rural Fair Funding for Fire Authorities	2
16.01.23	SPARSE Meeting	Rural Fair Funding	22
17.03.23	RMTG Clerks Advisory Panel	RSN manifesto asks Rural Homelessness Project	10
27.03.23	RMTG Meeting	Rural Fair Funding RSN Manifesto asks	18
17.04.23	RSN Campaign meeting	Developing 'Winning the Rural Vote' – asks of political parties	48
24.04.23	RSP Vulnerability Group	Rural Cost of Living Survey and Summary	17
19.06.23 26.06.23	Member Induction	Introduction to the RSN Rural Policy and key challenges	95
01.08.23	RMTG Older People Sounding Board	Key issues for older people in rural areas	14
03.08.23	RMTG Younger People Sounding Board	Key issues for younger people in rural areas	10
18-21.09.23	National Rural Conference	Key issues in 'Winning the Rural Vote'	496
05.10.23	RSVG Annual Meeting	'Winning the Rural Vote' and asks of political parties	5
09.10.23	RMTG Meeting	Rural Fair Funding 'Winning the Rural Vote' Key issues facing rural market towns	24
22.11.23	Countryside COP meeting	Rural Heat Networks Rural Net Zero asks of political parties	50
22.11.23	RSP Vulnerability Group	'Winning the Rural Vote' and asks of political parties	13

**Not including RSN Staff or Speakers*

The National Rural Conference 2023 took place 18-21st September online with almost 600 delegates attending sessions throughout the week. Speakers included Lord Benyon, representatives from National Innovation Centre for Rural Enterprise (NICRE) and many member organisations of the RSN sharing best practice and experience at key issues affecting rural communities. Events covered a wide range of topics including the rural economy, rural transport, rural affordable housing, rural health and care,

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rural net zero, rural fair funding and rural connectivity. [A highlights video of the conference is available at this link.](#)

Member Insights

We provide a range of information for our member organisations in our [Member Insights](#) section of our website.

These analysis are available at local authority level for member organisations and provide a range of statistics exploring the [Rural Economy](#), [Rural Housing](#), [Rural Health and Care](#), [Rural Travel and Transport](#) and other key areas.

We have also published for our Sparse member authorities, analysis of the Levelling Up Missions enabling them to view their local statistics against rural and national averages. [These can be accessed at this link.](#) [For our Rural Market Town Group members we have published area profiles available at a Parish level](#)

Publications

- Weekly publication of the Rural Bulletin sent to over 20,000 subscribers, sharing key rural news stories and research relevant to those working in rural areas.
- Monthly publication of the Funding Digest, which sets out grants and funds available which may be of interest. This publication also highlights key Government Consultations.
- Quarterly RSP Spotlight publication – highlighting best practice from RSP member organisations
- Quarterly Rural Economic Spotlight
- Quarterly Rural Housing Spotlight
- Quarterly Rural Beacon Members Publication
- Bi monthly Rural Market Town Group publication

LARGE RURAL NETWORK



We represent a range
of organisations in
rural areas across
England

The Rural Services Network is a membership organisation representing a wide range of organisations across the length of England.

Rural Local Authorities – we have 86 Principal rural local authorities in membership, working on their behalf to campaign for fair funding and rural policies that take into account the needs of rural areas.

Rural Services Partnership Membership continue to hold strong with 221 different service The RSP membership includes Rural Housing Associations, Health Trust and National Charities and organisations. You can see the membership [at this link.](#)

Rural Market Town Group – the group continues to grow in membership and has started to explore some of the key issues pertinent to rural market towns.

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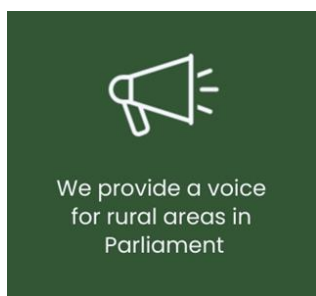
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Rural Services Villages Group – recruitment to this group is only starting now and aims to represent villages across England.

INFLUENCING PARLIAMENT

The RSN provides the secretariat to the **Rural Housing Alliance**.

The RSN also delivers the **Rural Health and Care Alliance** working in partnership with the National Centre for Rural Health and Care.



We are the **national champion for rural services**, ensuring the people in rural areas have a strong voice. We are fighting for a fair deal for rural communities (and support the Rural Fair Share Group of MPs) to maintain their social and economic viability for the benefit of the nation.

This means that we work to influence parliament and the RSN provides the Secretariat for the **ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP (APPG)**, Chaired by Derek Thomas MP.

Parliamentary Meetings

Event	Topic	Who can attend	Date	Attendees Total
APPG for Rural Services Meeting – AGM	Election of new Chair – Derek Thomas MP	Invited MP's from APPG Group and Observers	28.02.23	8
APPG for Rural Services Meeting	Off Gas Grid rural properties and Rural Transport	Invited MP's from APPG Group and Observers	25.04.23	11
APPG for Rural Services	Off Gas Grid Rural Properties Rural Fair Funding	Invited MP's from APPG Group and Observers	21.11.23	2

Wider Rural Groupings

We are also part of the [Rural Coalition](#), a group of 13 national organisations who seek to be more influential by joining in common cause. This includes ACRE, PLUNKETT, NFU, RTPi, Nat Housing Federation and others.

We are also members of the Board of Directors of the National Centre for Rural Health and Care and of National Rural Crime Network's Executive Board

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The RSN is represented on the **Rural Impact Forum**, a group set up by DEFRA during the pandemic and which now provides a forum for regular discussions between rural stakeholder organisations and Defra on the issues faced by rural residents, communities, and businesses, enabling open and regular dialogue.

[Rural Lens Work](#)

The Rural Lens series published by the RSN, is where we have reviewed Government strategies and plans from a rural perspective, highlighting your attention to key parts that may affect your rural communities and service delivery.

We share these Rural Lens with the Government department that produced the strategy, highlighting to Government key issues they need to consider. You can view them at the links below.

[Rural Lens Review on Wireless Infrastructure Strategy](#)
[Rural England Prosperity Fund Prospectus](#)



[Winning the Rural Vote](#)

This year we have developed our asks of the political parties in 8 key policy areas ahead of the general election. It has been the focus of discussion at many meetings to ensure that the asks align with the needs of our member organisations.

COMMISSIONED RESEARCH

This year the RSN has been part of research into key issues for rural communities, to enable it to present evidence to Government of the impact of their policies and decision making.

[Rural Homelessness](#)

The study, by academics at the University of Kent and the University of Southampton, on behalf of a coalition of rural charities, rural organisations (including the RSN) and housing associations, shows rural areas being paid a fraction of what they need to tackle homelessness in their communities.

- A year-long study exposes a surge in rural rough sleeping since the pandemic has been worsened by the cost-of-living crisis
- According to analysis of official statistics, rough sleeping in rural areas shot up 24% in just one year.
- High housing costs in prosperous areas blamed for a 'hidden homelessness' crisis – with 'shame and stigma' keeping most vulnerable not recorded in official statistics

The countryside is battling a 'hidden homelessness' crisis driven by soaring housing costs and a gaping shortfall in local authority funding

[Rural Cost of Living Survey](#)

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Further to the research by Kovia commissioned into the cost of living crisis in rural areas in 2022, this year the RSN, along with the Rural issues Group of Citizens Advice conducted a survey to determine the impact of the cost of living in rural areas.

We received almost 7000 responses to the survey and key finding included:

- More than 75% of respondents say that their financial situation has got worse over the last year.
- After paying for essentials, two thirds of respondents are in households with a little income left over for other things. However, a fifth of respondents live either in households with no income left over, or in households where the essentials alone exceed their income. These essentials included rent or mortgage, food and drink, essential car or travel costs and childcare.
- Rural residents are cutting back on spending across the board and this is especially true for low income households where notable examples are reduced spending on home heating (90%) and visits to hospitality venues (91% of such households).

Rural Exception Sites

The RSN helped to circulate a planning questionnaire on behalf of a project into the effectiveness of Rural Exception Sites as a way of delivering affordable housing in rural areas. [The research was published and is available at this link.](#)

Government Consultations

The RSN responds to a wide range of Government consultations to ensure that the rural voice is heard. The RSN consults with its membership, sometimes all and sometimes, targeted at specific interest organisations to compile a response reflective of the situation in rural areas.

This year, the RSN has responded to consultations on:

- Technical consultation on the Infrastructure Levy
- Registration scheme for short-term lets in England
- Major Conditions Strategy
- Permitted Development Rights
- Proposed amendments to the Boiler Upgrade Scheme Regulations
- Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill: reforms to national planning policy
- House of Lords Select Committee - Communication and Digital Committee Inquiry into Digital Exclusion and Cost of Living– call for evidence
- Local Government Finance
- Improving Broadband for Very Hard to Reach Premises
- Universal Broadband Obligation (USO)

Networking and Influencing Role

- Kerry Booth attends the Defra Rural Impact Forum

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- Kerry Booth attends the Rural Coalition meetings and the RSN is a key member of this national influencing group
- Kerry Booth and previously Graham Biggs attends periodic meetings set up by Arts Council England.
- RSN attended the NALC Parliamentary Reception and helped to judge one of their STAR award categories
- RSN attended the Parliamentary Reception for the CPRE report launch on Rural Affordable Housing
- RSN attended a Fabian Society Roundtable at the Labour Party Conference on Transport
- The RSN is part of the Rural Homelessness Coalition
- RSN is part of the BT Digital Voice Group, supporting BT with the transition from PSTN to VOIP, effectively telephone lines being only available through the internet. The impact on rural areas where there is no mobile telephone signal and poor broadband has been emphasised.
- The RSN has supported the Broadcast 2040+ campaign.
- The RSN was a panellist at the launch of Britains Leading Edge Manifesto
- The RSN presented to the People and Places Board at the LGA to share our work and campaigns
- Kerry took part in a roundtable event in person in Westminster with the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Minister as a result of the Homelessness in rural areas research.
- We have circulated to our membership a query about disposals of housing stock in rural areas for reasons such as poor energy efficiency to determine the impact and have had a good response.
- We have circulated a planning questionnaire on behalf of some research into the capacity of rural planning departments to support and enable affordable housing.
- Nadine and Kerry attended the LGA Conference in Bournemouth and had the opportunity to meet a number of our rural Councillors and Senior Leaders to discuss all things rural.
- Kerry attended a meeting with Rt Hon Michael Gove to brief him on rural fair funding on 12th June.
- The RSN has briefed DHLUC officials on the impact of rural unfair funding
- The RSN arranged a meeting with DEFRA to feedback on issues experienced by local authorities with Rural England Prosperity Fund
- The RSN is part of a Good Design Guide project facilitated and led by English Rural Housing and key national players.
- Localis Think Tank Report published on 'Unlocking the socio-economic potential of our nation's pubs.' Included quote from RSN <https://www.localis.org.uk/research/inn-valuable/>

In the News

The RSN is often quoted in the media, both local and national as the voice for rural.

[You can read more of these stories at this link.](#)

In Parliament

The Rural Services Network has been mentioned or quoted in Parliament a number of times in recent months including:

[House of Lords Debate on Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, 17th Jan 2023](#)

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[House of Lords Debate on Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, 20th Feb 2023](#)

[Rural Health Debate in House of Lords, 23rd Feb](#)

[House of Lords Debate on Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, 24th May 2023](#)

[House of Lords Debate on Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, 11th July 2023](#)

[House of Lords Debate on Housing Crisis: Rural and Coastal Communities 24th July 2023](#)

[House of Lords Debate on Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, 23rd October 2023](#)

[Westminster Hall Debate on Rural Funding, 29th November 2023](#)

In the Press

We have featured in a number of national and local press outlets this year, representing rural communities and their service providers. You can see this coverage of the Rural Services Network at this link:

[RSN Press Coverage 2023](#)

This also included:

Interview on BBC Radio 4 Farming Today

Kerry focused on the importance of rural services:

<https://rsnonline.org.uk/rsn-chief-executive-on-bbc-radio-4-talking-about-rural-services>

The Rural Coalition set out a stark warning to the Government not to ignore the 9.7million people living in rural areas. The Coalition, an alliance of thirteen national organisations including the RSN, set out an urgent appeal for all political parties to empower rural areas in election manifestos to improve the prospects and opportunities for rural businesses and communities:

- RSNONLINE - **Rural Coalition makes further calls on the Government**
- The Mirror - **Almost 10million rural voters risk being left behind at next election, campaigners warn**
- Shropshire Star - **Future government 'must improve prospects and opportunities for rural communities and firms'**

BBC Midlands Today

Kerry Booth, Chief Executive of the Rural Services Network, spoke to BBC Midlands Today to discuss the RSN's support of a petition to save the Post Office network.

View a clip of the story from BBC Midlands Today by [clicking here](#). You can sign the petition [here](#). Paper copies are also available at your local Post Office.

Kerry Booth, had an article published in Care Management Matters periodical, asking the question how can we ensure an ageing rural population can access the care services they need?

- Care Management Matters - **Fairer funding for rural communities**

The Broadcast 2040+ campaign (A coalition of groups which includes the RSN) is expanding its campaign to guarantee access to Freeview and radio beyond the year 2040:

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Rising numbers of people in the countryside are becoming homeless in a crisis deepened by the cost-of-living crisis, a study (*commissioned by a rural homelessness task force bringing together experts from organisations including the RSN*) has found:

The Independent - **'Hidden countryside homelessness' crisis fuelled by cost of living**

BBC News - **'A village's goodwill saved me from life on the streets'**

rsnonline - **Rural homelessness getting worse**

Countryfile aired an episode which featured research by the Rural Services Network. In a story focusing on Levelling Up and the investment by the Government into this policy approach, raised questions as to whether rural is getting its fair share of the funding.

You can see more of the episode which is available for a limited time, at this link

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