

## Note of last SPARSE Rural Special Interest Group meeting

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**Title:** Rural Services Network Special Interest Group

**AGM Meetings:**

- Rural Services Partnership Limited (RSP)
- Rural Services Network (RSN)

**Date:** Monday 4 December 2023

**Venue:** Online via Zoom

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### Attendance

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

Item	Decisions and actions
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**1 Welcome to the Joint AGM by Cllr Roger Phillips, Chair of RSN**

Apologies had been received from the Chair, Cllr Roger Phillips (Herefordshire County Council).

In his absence, Deputy Chair Cllr Peter Thornton (Westmorland and Furness Council) welcomed colleagues to the Annual General Meeting of the Rural Services Partnership Ltd and the Rural Services Network.

**2 Apologies**

The Chair had provided a summary which Cllr Thornton read to the group, providing information about upcoming meetings with Ministers. In the summary was an outline of the RSN's work to examine government legislation and concerns for rural areas, in preparation for the next General Election.

Cllr Phillips had also expressed his gratitude to colleagues and officers and commented that engagement with fellow member organisations has been so important in raising the profile and value of the group.

**3 Rural Services Partnership AGM - Nik Harwood, Chair of RSP**

Nik Harwood (Chair of RSP) echoed Cllr Phillips' sentiments with thanks to colleagues and officers for their engagement in working together to try and ensure a fair deal for rural areas.

**3a Minutes of Previous Meeting held on 16th October 2023 ([see link](#))**

Members received the minutes of the previous meeting held on 16 October 2023.

**Decision:**

Members noted the minutes.

**3b To receive and consider the Minutes of the AGM held on 7th December 2022 ([see link](#))**

Members received the Minutes of the AGM held on 7th December 2022.

**Decision:**

Members agreed the minutes from the previous meeting.

**3c To note the Company Accounts for the year ended 31st March 2023 ([see link](#))**

Members received the Company Accounts for the year ended 31st March 2023.

**Decision:**

Members noted and approved the company accounts for 2022/23

**3d Re-appointment TaxAssist of Ludlow as the Company's Tax Accountants**

**Decision:**

Members noted the re-appointment by RSP Directors of TaxAssist of Ludlow as the Company's Tax Accountants

**3e Appointment of Directors**

Members were informed that David Inman was now stepping down as Director. Mr Harwood expressed the gratitude of the whole group for all his work and valuable experience over the years.

Mr Graham Biggs announced that there had been no nominations or further notice of resignation received. Given this, he asked colleagues to consider re-appointment of all existing Directors until the next AGM - as follow:

Kerry Booth (ex officio Director as Chief Executive)  
Cllr Roger Phillips (RSN Chair)  
John Birtwistle (Transport)  
Martin Collett (Housing)  
Nik Harwood (Youth)  
Vacancy - Rural Economy

Members were invited to submit any interest in the vacant positions to the Chief Executive Kerry Booth.

**Decision:**

It was agreed that the all the existing Directors be re-appointed.

**3f Small Break during which RSP Directors will appoint the Chair**

Mr Harwood temporarily left the meeting so that members could consider the Chairmanship of the RSP.

Mr Biggs invited comments and Kerry Booth nominated Mr Harwood to be re-

appointed as Chair. This nomination was seconded.

**Decision:**

Nik Harwood to be re-appointed as Chair of the Rural Services Partnership.

**4 Rural Services Network AGM Chaired by Kerry Booth, Chief Executive RSN**

Cllr Thornton invited Kerry to introduce the process for making the following appointments to the Rural Services Network Executive Board:

Chair: Cllr Roger Phillips (Herefordshire County Council)

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 Philip Atkins OBE (Staffordshire County Council)

Vice Chair: Cllr Cecilia Motley (Shropshire Council)

Vice Chair: Cllr Trevor Thorne (Northumberland County Council)

Vice Chair: Cllr Adam Paynter (Cornwall Council)

Vice Chair: Cllr Mark Whittington (Lincolnshire County Council  
South Kesteven District Council)

Vice Chair: *Vacancy*

Vice Chair: *Vacancy*

**4a Appointment of Chairman, Deputy Chairman and Members of the Executive.**

Members noted an additional nomination for Cllr Sarah Pugh.

Cllr Janet Duncton raised a concern about a lack of south east of England representation on the Board.

**Decisions:**

- Cllr Thornton proposed that Cllr Phillips continue as Chair of the Executive. The proposal was seconded by Cllr Paynter and agreed.
- Members agreed that the Executive Board be re-appointed en-block.
- Cllr Gale Waller (Rutland) expressed an interest in joining the Executive.
- Members agreed the vacant positions be filled by Cllr Waller and Cllr Pugh.
- It was noted that the Executive would review it's membership by geographical location and expertise/ range on contacts and if a further nominee(s) was required, they could be co-opted by the Executive onto the Executive Board throughout the year.

**4b To receive and consider the Minutes of the AGM held on 14th November 2022 ([see link](#))**

Members received the Minutes of the previous AGM.

**Decision:**

Members agreed the minutes from the last meeting.

**4c Report of the RSN Executive: (1) 2023/24 Budget Report (2) 2024/25 Estimates and (3) Membership Subscriptions 2024/25 ([see link](#))**

The Chair invited Graham Biggs to introduce the Budget Report for 2023/24, Estimates for 2024 and Membership Subscriptions for 2024/25.

Members received the Budget Report and Mr Biggs reminded them that the estimates regarding subscriptions, have taken into account recommendations by the Executive Board.

Kerry Booth summarised details of these recommendations included in the papers.

Members received these and questioned the difference between the percentages (5% for subscriptions and 3% for RSP). Mr Biggs explained that the greater amount has taken into account a pay award for RSN staff. RSP is a much smaller organisation and there has always been a huge difference in the amount generated.

He asked members to note that the assumption is that all of the provisions in the budget would be spent. However, at this point, it is likely that some will be carried into next year. Members should note that the budget is regularly considered by the Executive.

**Decision:**

The following recommendations were agreed:

- **That the Revised 2023/24 budget report be noted.**
- **That SPARSE and Rural Assembly membership fees both be increased by 5% with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024.**
- **That the fees for all other membership Groups be increased by 3% with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024.**
- **That, assuming recommendations 3.1 - 3.3 above are accepted, the Draft Estimates/Budget for 2024/25 be approved.**
- **That in accordance with current practice the RSN Executive be authorised to approve in year variations to the Budgets.**

**Cllr Thornton moved onto joint AGM Items:**

**5 Future on-line meeting dates and seminars 2023/24 (see link below)**  
**<https://rsnonline.org.uk/future-meetings-and-events>**

**Decision:**

Members noted the dates of future on-line meetings and seminars. These can be found [here](#).

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

Cllr Thornton invited Kerry Booth to introduce the annual review of RSN's work.

Members received a presentation which outlined the range of work carried out to ensure that the issues faced by councils and other service providers to deliver services to rural areas are presented to Government and opinion formers.

The Group were informed of a range of events and seminars hosted by the RSN and noted details of future sessions. Mrs Booth referred to the previous National Rural Conference and colleagues heard about the range of speakers present at that event. Colleagues were encouraged to attend the next one planned for 2024 as a very useful resource and source of relevant information as well as an opportunity to influence discussion around fair funding.

Mrs Booth outlined 3 main points:

- Successive governments have underfunded rural councils.
- Rural residents pay more in council tax.
- It costs more to deliver services in rural areas.

Members were reminded that the funding formula has been frozen for some years, leading to an unfair settlement for rural areas. Mrs Booth spoke about the introduction of an additional grant to deal with this but told members that not all rural councils had received it.

The Group heard about further representation of the RSN on other important Forums and groups in order to raise its profile and have a greater impact on the issues facing rural areas. Also noted was the work of the RSN with the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Rural Services as a way of highlighting the key issues affecting rural areas.

Their attention was drawn to the Rural Lens Reviews etc. which had been undertaken by RSN and they were encouraged to refer to these as a useful and informative source of information. Members were reminded that RSN Publications were also being sent directly to inboxes of members which included research undertaken on homelessness, cost of living, impacts on mental and physical health amongst others. This evidence is used to inform press and other key organisations.

A copy of the presentation can be found [here](#).

### **Actions:**

Colleagues to email [admin@sparse.gov.uk](mailto:admin@sparse.gov.uk) if they are not receiving publications.

Secretariat to share the presentation and relevant links with colleagues after the meeting.

### **Decision:**

Members noted the presentation.

## 7 Rural Roadmap and campaign

Mrs Booth moved onto another presentation on the campaign for **Winning the Rural Vote**.

She summarised the work of the RSN as part of this work, they had set out a roadmap with both short and long term asks. This outlined the different areas that

need to be considered including:

- Rural Fair Funding
- Rural Health and Care
- Rural Affordable Housing
- Rural Transport
- Rural Net Zero
- Rural Connectivity
- Rural Planning
  
- Rural Economy

Colleagues appreciated the amount of work being done to take every opportunity to bring rural communities and their needs to the fore. It was particularly important and timely to raise the profile of these communities given the upcoming general election. Cllr Thornton also acknowledged the amount of work involved and thanked Mrs Booth for an informative presentation.

Graham Biggs added that the asks are quite high-level and that supporting documents with greater detail and plenty of supporting information are being prepared to help the campaign. Members were invited to submit case studies to be included and reminded to lobby their own MPs to raise awareness at every opportunity.

Further information on the campaign and the publication can be found [here](#).

**Decision:**

The presentations were received and work around the campaign were approved.

**8 Discussion with Members about Key Challenges Facing Rural Areas in 2023/24.**

Discussion about key challenges facing rural areas had taken place earlier within the agenda.

**9 Any Other Business.**

There was no other business and the meeting closed at 3pm.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Attendance & Apologies**

<b>Full Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Alan Gray	North Kesteven DC
Bethan Aldridge	Rural Services Network
Cllr Patrick Kimber	West Devon Borough Council
Chiara Rabbito	New Milton Town Council
Chris Shears	SW Devon Councils
Cllr Adam Paynter	Cornwall Council
Cllr Alison Wilson	Wealden District Council
Cllr Andy Iazard	Boston Council
Cllr Ann Bean	New Alresford Town Council
Cllr Gale Waller	Rutland County Council
Cllr Janet Duncton	West Sussex Council
Cllr Keith Horgan	East Cambs District Council
Cllr Peter Thornton	Westmorland and Furness
Cllr Petrina Lees	Uttlesford District Council
Cllr Philip Atkins OBE	Staffordshire County Council
Cllr Rachael Ellis	Gedling Borough Council
Cllr Richard Stobart	South Cambridgeshire District Council
Cllr Robert Heseltine	North Yorkshire Council
Cllr Sarah Pugh	West Suffolk District Council
Cllr Stephen Pritchard	Malton Town Council
Cllr William Gray	East Lindsey District Council
Dan Worth	Rural Services Network
Dave McAra	Belper Town Council
David Inman	Rural Services Network
Fatima De Abreu	LGA
Frances Simpson	New Alresford Town Council
Graham Biggs	RSP
John Birtwistle	First Bus
Kate Ryan	New Forest District Council
Kerry Booth	Rural Services Network
Kevin Sawers	Action Hampshire
Martin Collett	English Rural HA
Matthew Byrne	The Community Council for Somerset
Nadine Trout	Rural Services Network
Nik Harwood	Young Somerset
Richard Inman	Rural Services Network
Richard Wakeford	Gloucestershire Market Towns Forum
Tracey Parry	Braintree District Council
Virginia Hodge	Tenterden Town Council

## Apologies

<b>Full Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Councillor Steemson	Teignbridge District Council
Rev'd Richard Kirlew	Agricultural Chaplains Association
Cllr Anthony Hirons	Lutterworth Town Council
Cllr Roger Phillips	Herefordshire Council
Kayleigh Wainwright	UK Youth
Cllr Rob Waltham	North Lincolnshire DC
Callum McKeon	North Yorkshire Council
Cllr Amanda Brown	Great Dunnow Town Council
Cllr Glen Sanderson	Northumberland Council
Gary Powell	Teignbridge District Council
Dawn Garton	Melton BC
Cllr Mike Bell	North Somerset Council
Lynda Robertson	
Lydia Allen	National Youth Agency
Alison Hands	Lincolnshire CO-op
Cllr John Ward	Babergh DC
Cllr Andrew Mellon	Babergh & Mid Suffolk Council
Alan Menzies	East Riding of Yorkshire Council
Cllr David Curtis	Stratford DC
Cllr Cecilia Motley	Shropshire CC
Cllr Stuart Cox	Coleford Town Council