

Rural Services Partner Group Inaugural Meeting

Tuesday 9th April 2019

Venue – 63, Bayswater Rad, London.

Present:

Jane Mordue (Citizens Advice), Nik Harwood (Chief Executive, Young Somerset), Steven Bland (Regional Housing Manager, English Rural Housing Association), Digby Chackfield (Rural Enterprise East, East and Otley College), Harriot English (Head of Engagement, Plunkett Foundation), Revd Elizabeth Clark MA (National Rural Officer for the Methodist and United Reformed Churches, Germinate The Arthur Rank Centre), Amanda Fearn (Development Director, The National Youth Agency), Revd Richard Kirlaw (The Sherborne Deanery Rural Chaplaincy), Laura Cochran (Parkinson's UK), John Birtwistle (First Group), Emma Bould (Programme Partnerships Project Manager, Alzheimer's UK), Henry Lee (External Policy & Research Co-ordinator, Hastoe Housing), Tony Price (Trent and Dove Housing), David Rowe (Chief Executive, CSW Group), Mr Leeding (Oxfordshire Association of Parish & Town Councils)

RSN Officers Graham Biggs (GB) (Chief Executive RSN/RSP), David Inman (DI) (Corporate Director RSN/RSP) Jon Tuner (JT) (Policy Director RSN)

Apologies for Absence:

Rod Hammerton (Shropshire Fire & Rescue), Nigel Wilcock (Institute of Economic Development (IED)), Martin Roehorn (Director of Finance, Hereford & Worcester Fire), Darren Henley (Chief Executive, Arts Council England), Matthew Isom (Chief Executive, Dispensing Doctors' Association Ltd), Marcus Clinton (Reaseheath College), Cllr Roger Phillips (Hereford & Worcester Fire)

GB was asked by the Chairman Rev Kirlaw to provide a short explanation about the work of the Rural Services Network. (RSN). For more details please refer to the RSN website – link

<https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/>

Group Responded

A membership diagram was requested. It was agreed that this would be circulated with the meeting notes. To view the latest version of this diagram [click here](#)

1. Election of Chair and Vice Chair of the Group

The Chairman explained that this item would form part of the next meeting to take place in November, which will take place as part of the formal Rural Services Partnership Ltd AGM on 19th November.

2. Rural Services Partnership

GB outlined the formal structure of the RSN and the role of the Rural Services Partnership Ltd which is a membership organisation. GB explained that the RSP Ltd is a Private Company limited by Guarantee, the legal and financial part of the organisation, and is the non-local government part of the RSN. It works predominately with both the private and third sector service providers/interest groups across rural England.

The Rural Services Network is a Special Interest Group of the Local Government Association. It comprises two sub Special Interest Groups, Sparse-Rural and the Rural Assembly, (both also membership organisations) which are local authority members of RSN.

Now that the RSP has increased its membership in the past 12 months, it was considered necessary to avoid confusion between the RSP Ltd and the RSP. As a result, a new sub group was proposed The Rural Services Partner Group (RSPG). This would avoid the group being constrained by Company rules and regulations in its deliberations. A formal decision regarding the setting up of the RSPG would need to be ratified at the RSP Ltd AGM on 19th November

3. Ruarl Services Partner Group Protocol

GB outlined the suggested purpose of the paper and asked for members to review the document and forward comments to JT in May. The Protocol will be considered in more detail, including feedback from members, at the RSP Ltd AGM

4. The Remit of the Ruarl Services Partner Group

JT outlined the suggested future remit and purpose of the RSPG and the 'tools' available for members to inform the RSN's policy work and representation and lobbying priorities. Members were asked to feedback their comments to JT about the sectors represented and whether others need to be approached and to suggest other organisations which RSN could approach to join the network.

The Group Responded

Members were keen to engage with colleagues and partners organisations and encourage them to join the RSPG.

5. Feedback from the RSN Health & Care Meeting and the Rural Assembly meeting held on the 8th April.

GB explained that there were two presentations at the Health & Care Meeting by Hampshire County Council and ACRE. The Hampshire CC presentation outlined the benefits of data technology in the delivery of adult social care services and ACRE's presentation considered aspects of rural health in the NHS's 10 Year Plan.

The Rural Assembly received a presentation on Rural England CIC's "State of the Rural Services Report 2018"

All three presentations slide will be available on the RSN website.

6. Feedback on the Rural Vulnerability Panel Meeting

DI reported on the morning's meeting and the purpose and role of the RSPG Vulnerability Panel. DI emphasised the need for rural areas to be given special consideration by Government and services providers, as the challenges experienced by rural people and communities were exacerbated by many factors which were different to those experienced in urban areas.

The Group Responded

Some members who were not present in the morning asked if they could attend the next panel meeting.

The next panel meeting will take place on 19th November.

7. The Call for a Rural Strategy.

GB explained that RSN had approached a number of other rural organisations to work collectively to call on the Government to consider rural communities in a post BREXIT world and not just think of rural as food/farming/environment. Unfortunately, a consensus could not be reached within the group about the some of the terminology and so the RSN decided to proceed on its own to prepare a Template Rural Strategy. This was launched as a national campaign on 1st March, 2019

The RSN was carrying out work to add depth and texture to the Template Rural Strategy. To that end GB was also seeking input from members to engage in themes workshops to develop and strengthen the evidence base to put before Government. RSN were in the process of organising themed video conference workshops with members over the coming months.

GB also commented that the House of Lords Select Committee on the Rural Economy is due to publish their findings on the 2^{7th} April, in which there may be a recommendation for a Rural Strategy. Furthermore, following a meeting in Taunton on the 8th March led by Lord Cameron, the RSN, working with ACRE, The Plunket Foundation and the Rural Coalition were considering a series of 3 or 4 regional seminars which would provide the opportunity to consider rural issues at a regional level.

GB asked members to review the RSN website which outlined the purpose of the Call for a Rural Strategy, and if they had not done so already sign up and support the campaign. Please refer to the following link for details

<https://www.rsonline.org.uk/time-for-a-rural-strategy>

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/time-for-a-rural-strategy>

GB also asked if members could provide 'real life' case studies where rural communities and residents were experiencing challenges as a consequence of living in rural areas. This would assist the media interest.

The group agreed to respond if they had not done so already.

A group member raised concern about the need for Parish Councils to be encouraged to be engaged in the process, especially small councils. GB replied that NALC were RSP members

Other group members raised concern about the digital economy in rural areas, where banks and other financial service providers withdraw services. Their commitment to upskill the community to use digital technology was very light touch.

8. Housing in Rural Areas – Presentation by Henry Lee, Hastoe Housing Group

Henry outlined the ground breaking work of Hastoe Housing and the Rural Housing Alliance and current national housing policy relevant to rural areas.

To review the presentation please refer to the [following link](#)

9. Alzheimer’s work from a rural perspective. – Presentation by Emma Bould, Alzheimer’s UK.

Emma provided a very useful introduction to the work Alzheimer’s UK has been undertaking in rural areas and a review of their Dementia-friendly rural communities guide.

To review a copy of the Dementia – friendly rural communities guide please visit www.alzheimers.org.uk/rural

10. Public Transport in rural areas where do we go from here – presentation by John Birtwistle, First Group.

John raised the following points during his presentation about the challenges that bus operators experience in today’s market place.

- bus is the glue linking facilities services and people; politicians need educating about how buses work
- small local family businesses are giving up and closing
- local authority spending cuts lead to greatest reduction in discretionary spend – LTAs are only required to identify missing socially necessary services, not fund them
- there have been cuts but don’t take the stats at face value
- Bus Services Act 2017 provides toolkit for urban areas – voluntary partnership remains the best approach
- Open data already available but will become greater in scope – fares, buses moving on maps
- Concessionary reimbursement is still falling
- Ideas put to Lords Rural Economy Select Committee – tax breaks for Total Transport successes; a new “rural bus grant” – capital assistance for buses used >50% in rural areas
- Local authorities need joined up thinking across functions and get the facts clear on what you can do legally – don’t be led by procurement
- Industry needs a national bus policy, long term stability/funding commitments

11. Rural England Community Interest Company

GB outlined the purpose and background behind RE, for more details please refer to the following link: <https://ruralengland.org/>

GB outlined the recent publication of the State of the Services Report 2018, which presents the most recent evidence regarding the provision of services to residents and businesses in rural England. The report covers 8 service areas which are: Local buses and community transport, Broadband and mobile connectivity, Public library services, Hospitals, Public health services, Young people’s services, Shops and online shopping and Personal advice services. To see a full version of the document, please refer to the following link:

<https://ruralengland.org/state-of-rural-services-report-2018/>

RE is also undertaking some work on Rural Fuel Poverty and access to post 16 education.

12. The National Conference and Regional Seminars

This year the Conference will take place on the 3rd and 4th September hosted by the University of Gloucestershire at their Cheltenham campus. The title for the 2-day event is ‘Creating Vibrant Rural Communities’. Two key note speakers have already confirmed their attendance – Lord

Gardiner of Kimble, and the Chair of the House of Lords Select Committee into the Rural Economy, Lord Foster of Bath. The focus of the Conference will be the call on the government for a Rural Strategy. The 2 days will include workshops and plenary speakers from local authorities, voluntary and private sector.

7 Regional Seminars are being held this year, which include hot topics from Public Sector Funding to Health and Wellbeing for details please refer to the following link: <https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/category/seminars>

GB explained that the seminars are free for RSP members, and encouraged non-local authority partners to attend and participate.

13. Any Other Business

There was no other business and the meeting was closed.

Date of next meeting **19th November, 2019**