



## Minutes for the Rural Services Partner Group meeting

Online via Zoom

Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2020

2pm-3:30pm

### Present:

Graham Biggs MBE (Chief Executive, Rural Services Network & Company Secretary RSP) (GB)  
John Birtwistle (Head of Policy, First Group & Director RSP) (JB)  
Kerry Booth (Assistant Chief Executive, Rural Services Network) (KB)  
Pam Bushby (Divisional Manager Communities & Well Being, Chichester in Partnership) (PB)  
Daniel Carey-Dawes (Head of Rural Economy & Communities, CPRE) (DCD)  
Ian Cass (Managing Director, The Forum of Private Business) (IC)  
Amy Cobbett (Business and Rural Affairs Adviser, NFU) (AC)  
Martin Collett (Chief Executive, English Rural Housing Association & Director of RSP) (MC)  
Ben Colson (Chair, Bus Users) (BC)  
Richard Dowson (Director, RACE Ltd) (RD)  
Nik Harwood (Chief Executive, Young Somerset & Director RSP) (NH)  
David Inman (Corporate Director of Rural Services Network & Director RSP) (DI)  
Rev Richard Kirlew (Lead Chaplain, Sherborne Deanery Rural Chaplaincy) (RK)  
Sarah Lee (Head of Policy, Countryside Alliance) (SL)  
Nic Millington (CEO, Rural Media), (NM)  
Cllr Cecilia Motley (Chair of RSN, Director of RSP & Councillor for Shropshire Council) (CM)  
Alex Phillimore (Marketing & Communications Manager, Farming Community Network) (AP)  
Amanda Philips (Priority Services Partnership & Engagement Lead, United Utilities) (AP)  
Kay Sentence (Artist, R-U-here) (KS)  
Nadine Trout (Member Development & Support Manager, Rural Services Network) (NT)  
Elizabeth Warwick (Stakeholder Engagement Manager, Wales & West Utilities) (EW)  
Rich Watson (Director of Finance, SWAHSN) (RW)

Bethan Aldridge (minute-taker) (BA)

### 1. Welcome

The Chair, Nik Harwood, welcomed everyone to the Partner Group meeting.

### 2. Apologies for Absence

Morag Bailey (Wrekin Housing Group), Wayne Bowcock (Glos CC Fire & Rescue Service), Andy Clowes (South East Water), Harriet English (Plunkett Foundation), Martin Fagin (The Community Heartbeat Trust), David Fisher (The Community Heartbeat Trust), Maddie Fitzgerald (The Prince's Countryside Fund), Prof Anne Green (Birmingham Business School), John Green (Shropshire Rural Housing Association), Jane Hawkard (NGS North Yorkshire CCG), Stewart Horne (Managing Director BIP & Director of RSP), Stacey Hunter (Salisbury NHS Foundation Trust), Jim Hume (National Rural Mental Health Forum), Caroline Killeavy (Community Lincs), Emma Marrington (CPRE), Jo Martin (Rural Business Network), Rich Matthews (Rural Media), Elizabeth McNabb (Blackdown Support Group), Peter Moore (Cornwall Rural Housing Association Ltd), Ian Morrell (Nailsea Town Centre), Brian Norris

(Living Memories CIC), Elaine O’Leary (Northants ACRE), Jonathan Owen (NALC), Julie Pink (Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust), Claire Purcell (Meadow Arts), Dr Mark Rawlinson (Isle of Wight NHS Trust), Ian Sherriff (University of Plymouth), Claire Smith (Wessex Water), Niz Smith (Linkage), Doug Stewart (Green Energy UK), Kayleigh Wainwright (UK Youth)

### **3. RSP achievements for the year to date (NT)**

NT gave a presentation which was a quick overview of RSP achievements for the year. There are currently 215 members. NT was pleased to report that membership has gradually evolved through either interested organisations contacting to join, or from member recommendations.

**Action:** NT asked if members could look at the information held about them on the RSP section of the RSN website to ensure it is up-to-date and working for them.

The seminars that we hold are used to showcase and network best practice and many of our speakers come from the membership. This year most of the seminars have been held on-line as we quickly adapted to working from home. This has allowed more participants to be able to take part and there will be a wide range of seminars set up for 2021.

NT thanked the RSP membership for taking part in consultation and specialist surveys, particularly those covering the effects of government support and the impact of Covid-19 etc.

The Conference this year, instead of being held in its usual place at Cheltenham, also went on-line. In fact, it was extended to 5 days on-line instead of the usual 2 days. The Conference was free to attend and we were grateful for the support of our sponsors: Green Energy, NALC, English Rural Housing Association and NICRE. Feedback has been very good at almost 100% across the board.

**Action:** NT asked if the membership would let her know what has worked well for them this year and what would they like more of.

EW using the chat feature commented “virtual events seem to be the way to go and I would suggest more of these when relevant”

NM commented that he thought the themes for the conference this year were excellent. As an organisation, Rural Media would be very interested to see more focus on culture and creative businesses. He would be happy to work on some of that demographic.

### **4. Revitalising Rural – Revitalising the Vision (including Q&A) (GB)**

GB provided some background information. In March 2019, the Rural Services Network, developed the campaign a “Time for a Rural Strategy”. It noted that rural issues needed addressing and that the “one size fits all” policy decisions did not always work in a rural context. In tandem with this, a House of Lords’ Select Committee on the Rural Economy also produced their own document which supported what we were asking for – namely for the government to produce a national rural strategy. The government is required to respond to the House of Lords’ Committee and did so in June/July 2019. The government of the time rejected the call for a national rural strategy and instead said that it would expand on their strategic vision. It is now 18 months later and are still waiting for the vision, what are the outcomes, the timescales and how we can monitor progress against the outcomes. In fact, the Bishop of St Albans will be asking in the next few days, in the House of Lords, what progress has been made.

The first campaign was showing the need and then making the “Call for a Rural Strategy”. This has now moved on to the second campaign “Revitalising Rural, Realising the Vision”. There are 16 chapters in the Vision calling for investment in rural areas which will have a positive outcome not only in those areas but also the wider national economy. This is a policy document of some 80-90 pages covering high level thematic areas with 63 policy asks. Action is required across all the chapters rather than just picking and choosing and there is a much greater interdependency with social and economic needs. It will be noted that there is no section on some themes e.g. the rural economy or young people and that is because these thread through all these areas.

We are anxious to demonstrate that none of these themes or asks are new and were underlying issues before Covid-19 and that the virus has exacerbated these issues.

The next step is to prepare for a launch of the Vision in February 2021. This date has been advised by the media consultants, Lexington, as they believe this will give the greatest opportunity for media coverage. We will be sharing individual chapters, and the full document, to RSN and RSP members and seeking to engage with Parliamentarians and decision makers.

This is our policy agenda for the life of this Parliament and we will be keeping the key asks high level and relevant depending on initiatives/strategies, the Queen’s speech etc. that the government introduces and their impact on the Asks. We will, with the support of Members be underpinning the asks with a finer grain/nuancing of detail and to develop case studies to support the asks. These case studies will provide the evidence we need to engage with decision makers, so it is very important we receive them so that we can use them.

Currently as has been mentioned, the Bishop of St Albans is asking questions in the House of Lords, Lord Foster who chaired the House of Lords’ Select Committee on the Rural Economy is looking at the Planning White Paper and housing and the Rt Hon Philip Dunne MP, who chairs the APPG for Rural Services and who also Chairs the Environmental Audit Committee, was a speaker at the recent RSN AGM. So, we are using all the levers we must to get the key messages through.

If we need to change the broad messages, then we will consult with members and ask about the impact and for further case studies. GB agreed that in developing specific asks, the arts and cultural sector would be very important.

#### **Q&A:**

**DCD** noted that CPRE is developing a compelling vision for the future of the countryside. It is looking at what sort of a future do we want as foundations for the government to use. The vision will be out in the middle of next year. As this is such a huge topic the CPRE will focus in on a few areas. The CPRE is currently campaigning against the White Planning Paper. Very happy to offer support when things are a bit calmer.

**NM** agreed that there was nothing like communicating great ideas on the ground. NM would be interested in telling a story of the real challenges. He has recently helped to produce a short film which has had 15 million views on Twitter. If we can identify those issues and stories, then we could pull a piece of work together that we could all use across

our own networks. We can work together through the RSP, engage communities and fund participation through our own investment or through mainstream investment.

**GB** also noted that currently the RSN is engaged with the CPRE and English Rural Housing Association would be releasing a report by Pragmatix on the fiscal case for investing in rural affordable housing. This piece of work has been commissioned to provide supporting evidence for the Treasury's Green Book review.

NH thanked GB and NT for their insight and presentations. He noted that the issues we face at work translate across the communities. This is a clarion call for networking, constructive debates and to strengthen this document.

#### **5. Any Other Business**

There were no items brought forward and the meeting finished at 3:10pm.