

Minutes of SPARSE Rural SIG Fair Funding meeting

SPARSE Rural SIG Fair Funding

10 November 2025

Online via Zoom

Attendance

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

Minute	Decisions
SPARSESIG25 1	<p>Attendance & Apologies</p> <p>Kerry Booth (KB), Chief Executive of Rural Services Network, welcomed colleagues to the meeting.</p> <p>Apologies were noted from the Chair, Cllr Roger Phillips, Herefordshire Council.</p> <p>Attendance details are provided below.</p>
SPARSESIG25 2	<p>Notes from the previous SPARSE Rural SIG Fair Funding meeting</p> <p>Members noted that there were no outstanding actions arising from the previous meeting held on 15 January 2025.</p> <p>Decision: By consensus, the SPARSE Rural SIG:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Approved the minutes of the SPARSE Rural SIG Fair Funding meeting held on 15 January 2025 as a correct record.
SPARSESIG25 3	<p>Update on Local Government Funding</p> <p>Members received a presentation from KB which provided an overview of government funded spending power and comparisons between rural and urban expenditure. KB spoke about developments since the group last met and referred to evidence submitted by the RSN on behalf of the membership to the Fair Funding 2.0 government consultation.</p> <p>Members noted key points of difficulties identified within the submission, leading to significantly higher costs for rural areas, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased travel times for service providers. Increased number of service centres required.

- Transport and access issues.
- Problems in acquiring markets and a lack of competition / tenders available.

Colleagues were invited to share examples where similar issues exist in their own areas with the purpose of using evidence as case studies to show comparisons between rural areas going forward.

A further update was provided on other developments and members noted plans for meetings as well as two online MP briefings.

Members noted the update on local government funding and KB outlined concerns as to how Fair Funding 2.0 could impact rural areas. KB referred to the settlement formula and spoke about analysis of total core spending power.

Members noted a summary of actions and current work carried out in relation to the delivery campaign. Colleagues were reminded to contribute any comments to the RSN.

From the chat function in the meeting, the group received several links as follow:

Delivering for All campaign

<https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/delivering-for-all>

Fair Funding Review 2.0

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/the-fair-funding-review-20>

RSN response Fair Funding Review 2.0 Consultation

https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/consultations/RSN_Fair_Funding_2_Response.pdf

Latest RSN Funding Press Release

<https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/category/press-releases>
<https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/rural-councils-must-not-lose-out-in-funding-reform>

RSN Delivering for All Survey

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

Colleagues were reminded to encourage their communities to take part in the survey.

	<p>Members' comments and questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members felt that regional diversity of providers/ suppliers was important and scale and the cost of doing business were key. • Members felt that there were difficulties in understanding extra costs around tendering and accessibility and needed evidence of what exactly constitutes the additional costs for delivery. • Members raised concerns about the impact of traffic diversions in rural areas and pressures around faster delivery which cost more. • Some concerns were raised about supply of goods rather than services, to LAs and problems as a result of consolidating into larger distribution centres, • Members referred to the national schedule of allowances for construction workers and the need for overnight accommodation which further impacted costs to councils. • Members noted delivery of a new policy statement was expected next month (late December). • Members raised concerns about lack of input from county councils and that the RSN follow up with these. • Members recognised the work of RSN, saying that they appreciated the updates and information. • Members referred to additional costs for county council residents due to the lack of public transport services. Members spoke about provisions of their own bus services but agreed that these did not address issues for residents who had to travel outside the county boundaries. <p>Decisions: By consensus, the SPARSE Rural SIG:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Noted the update on Local Government Funding.
SPARSESIG25	<p>4 English Indices of Deprivation 2025: Rural Report</p> <p>Members noted the recent report released by Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) on English Indices of Deprivation 2025 (rural areas).</p> <p>KB presented key findings from the report which highlighted the most obvious pockets of deprivation and particularly those within rural areas.</p> <p>Colleagues welcomed the report and noted the relevance of its delivery prior to the November budget.</p> <p>Members' comments and questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graham Biggs (Rural Services Network) raised concerns about how the formula would be applied within such tight timescales.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Members said that there needed to be an understanding about distribution of funds and how this would affect changing of weighting and direction. Members referred to the importance of local intelligence and the success of partnering which had where already utilised, provided extra funding and therefore benefits to communities. <p>KB acknowledged that many councils were already using and sharing best practice. KB informed the group that briefings and meetings were underway, including plans to meet with the new DEFRA Minister as part of the DEFRA Taskforce to raise and hopefully address the issues discussed.</p> <p>Members received a summary of current work around the impact on rural communities in accessing health services and KB assured colleagues of an opportunity to respond.</p> <p>Actions:</p> <p>RSN to circulate presentations.</p> <p>Decisions:</p> <p>By consensus, the SPARSE Rural SIG:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Noted RSN's key findings on English Indices of Deprivation 2025: Rural Report
SPARSESIG25	5	<p>Any Other Business</p> <p>There was no other business, and the meeting was closed at 12.00pm</p>
SPARSESIG25	6	<p>Close of meeting</p> <p>The next SPARSE Rural Fair Funding meeting would take place on 12 January 2026.</p> <p>Please click the link to book your place</p>

Appendix A - Attendance

Kerry Booth (Chief Executive)	Rural Services Network
Nadine Trout	Rural Services Network
Maryann MacAulay	Rural Services Network
Natalie Birch	Rural Services Network
Graham Biggs	Rural Services Network
Fatima de Abreu	LGA Member Services

Cllr Gale Waller	Rutland County Council
Cllr John Evans	Uttlesford District Council
Cllr James Cantwell	Boston Borough Council
Cllr Martin Murray	Staffordshire County Council
Cllr Peter Thornton	Westmorland and Furness Council
Cllr Ramsay Ross	Rutland County Council
Cllr Robert Heseltine	North Yorkshire Council
Cllr Roger Evans	Shropshire Council
Cllr William Gray	East Lindsey District Council
Jude Antony	East Cambridgeshire District Council

Apology for absence

<u>Position/ Role</u>	<u>Councillor</u>	<u>Authority</u>
Chair	Cllr Roger Phillips	Herefordshire Council
Councillor	Cllr Janet Pearson	Mid Suffolk District Council
Chief Finance Officer and Section 151 Officer	Lorraine Rogers	East Suffolk Council
Councillor	Cllr Alison Wilson	Wealdon District Council