

Attachment B

Note of decisions taken and actions required

Title: Rural Services Network SIG Rural Assembly

Date and time: 1.00pm, 14 July 2014

Venue: Rathbone 1&2, Local Government House

Attendance:

Cllr Cllr Cecilia Motley (Shropshire Council); Cllr Carol Clarke (South Northamptonshire Council); Cllr Cameron Clark (Sevenoaks DC); Cllr Hilary Carrick (Cumbria CC); Cllr Nick Daubney (Kings Lynn and West Norfolk BC); Paul Over (Chichester DC); Cllr Myles Cullen (Chichester DC); Cllr Gordon Nicolson (Eden DC); Cllr Owen Bierley (West Lindsey DC); Cllr Lewis Strange (Lincolnshire CC); Cllr Ann Carter (Daventry DC); Revd Richard Kirlaw (Church in Wales); Stewart Home (BID); Cllr Robert Heseltine (North Yorkshire CC); Cllr Margaret Squires (Mid Devon DC); Cllr Jane Mortimer (Scarborough BC); Cllr Malcolm Leeding (Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils); Cllr Peter Stevens (St Edmundsbury BC); Ken Pollock (Worcestershire CC); Andrew Bennett (Swindon BC); Lindsey Cawrey (North Kesteven DC); Madge Shineton (Shropshire Council); Cllr Michael Hicks (South Hams DC).

Officers: David Inman (RSN); Graham Biggs (RSN);

Apologies for absence:

Adam Norburn (Rugby Borough Council); Cllr Rupert Riechhold (ENC); John Birtwistle (UK Bus); Patrick Begg (National Trust); Cllr Eddie Tomlinson (Durham Council); William Jacobs (South Oxfordshire DC & Vale of White Horse); Cllr Jane Evison (East Riding of Yorkshire Council); Cllr Philip Sanders (West Devon BC); Cllr Chris Knowles-Fitton (Craven DC); Ian Miller (Wyre Forest DC); Alison Turner (Sedgemoor DC); Cllr Barry Rickman (New Forest District Council); Cllr Ken Potter (East Devon District Council); Richard Kemp (Suffolk Council); Cllr Jeremy Savage (South Norfolk District Council); Cllr Yvonne Bendle (South Norfolk District Council); Cllr Raymond Singleton-McGuire (Boston Borough Council); Cllr Mary Robinson (Eden District Council); Cllr Nigel Ashton (North Somerset Council).

Item	Decisions and actions
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1	Apologies for absence
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Cllr Motley welcomed all to the Rural Services Network SIG Rural Assembly meeting.

Apologies were noted and would appear in the minutes.

An introduction to the work of the Rural Assembly

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Graham Biggs gave an introduction to the work of the Assembly. He said that the Assembly was designed to pick up some of the non-financial issues for rural communities following the disbanding of the Rural Commission in the LGA's Governance review in January 2014 as there was concern that rural issues would get lost in the focus on cities. He highlighted that the Assembly is open to any authority with rural interests and also incorporates the Rural Services Partnership Ltd for non local authority partners either who provided services or had a stake in rural issues.

Asked where County Associations of Local Councils fitted in this membership, Graham said that they subscribed via the Rural Services Partnership.

On whether there were plans to extend the Assembly's membership more widely to the private sector, Graham said that at this stage the network would look to follow the membership format established with the LGA, but agreed that more needed to be done to identify opportunities for cross-sector working. It may be that this might be talked through the research arm of the organisation, Rural England.

Members asked about the lobbying mechanism work for the new Assembly. They approved of the format whereby any member could raise an issue.

Graham said that the intention was to produce a rural manifesto and one forthcoming workstream would be to take this vision forward and monitor progress. David Inman also envisaged a more community based approach to research, with the Rural England CIC looking to establish a research unit for particular areas of concern.

3 Minutes of the last full meeting – 17th March 2014

The minutes the last full meeting were agreed.

4 Minutes of the last Executive Meeting – 23rd June 2014

The minutes of the last Executive Meeting were agreed.

5 Budget report

This report was repeated from the preceeding RSN SIG SPARSE Rural meeting for the benefit of Assembly members (Please see **Attachment A, item 5**).

6 Rural Sounding Board

David Inman said that the network sought to utilise the views of a wide variety of organisations in developing its evidence base on a range of rural issues. He announced that the network currently had a communication group of approximately 10,000 organisations with as high as a 10% response rate to

some calls for evidence.

David said that there was value seen in establishing a rural councillors sounding board as part of this group. 500 parish councillors have so far expressed an interest and the network would like to bring the membership from district, unitary and county authorities up to 100. He sought volunteers from those members present. The first survey exercise would take place in August.

7 Arts Council Support in Rural Areas

Paul Bristow, Arts Council England, Director of Strategic Partnerships and Laura Dyer, Arts Council Executive Director, North, Midlands and South West presented on the work of the Arts Council with rural communities to ensure people were not disadvantaged by where they lived.

Mr Bristow announced that grants for the arts were to be increased from £64 million in 2013/14 to £70 million in 2014/15. Members welcomed this news and several councillors highlighted the benefits that small grants from ACE had made to their communities.

Mr Bristow said that as part of a review of its operations, the Arts Council was looking to gather data on how culture relates to rural communities to ensure policy in this area was based on sound evidence. This would include improving how it assesses where cultural spending has benefit for rural areas and the role of art and culture in stimulating local economic growth. The results would be used to inform a guidance note on Local Arts Grants and how ACE can make a difference to these communities.

Several councillors highlighted the benefits that small grants from the Arts Council had made to their communities.

Action

Officers agreed to circulate the presentation from the Arts Council to members.
Steve Service

8 Royal Mail - the Universal Service

David Gold, Head of Public Affairs and Jenny Hall, Deputy Head of Public Affairs at Royal Mail presented on end- to-end competition and the Universal service. They highlighted the threat posed to a universal postal service by mandated access and delivery standards which other mail suppliers were not subject to. They sought the support of Assembly members to lobby MPs and Ofcom on this issue via early day motion 151.

Members emphasised that the Government may be subject to further criticism of Royal Mail following the handling of its sell-off may be exacerbated if people hear that a universal Service Obligation is under threat. Mr Gold responded that the risk was identified in the prospectus at the time of the sell-off and emphasised that it was not usual for Royal Mail to come out so publically on an issue. He said that the risk of doing so needed to be weighed against the risk of being accused at a later date of not doing anything to highlight the issue

when they could have done.

Members highlighted a potential opportunity to share information on the cost of delivering rural services across different regions. Some saw the Rural Conference in Chester in September as an opportunity to highlight this point. Mr Gold agreed that it would be useful if a means of sharing this information could be found. However, he stressed that Royal Mail did not work out the price of delivering individual letters.

Cllr Motley suggested that Mr Gold and Ms Hall be invited to attend the Rural Conference in September.

Action

Graham Biggs and David Inman to write OFCOM on the issue on behalf of the RSN as a first step. **Graham Biggs**

Royal Mail to be invited to Rural Conference on 9 September. **Graham Biggs**

Officers to circulate the presentation from Royal Mail to members. **Steve Service**

9 & 10 **Update on APPG on Rural Services / Development of the RSN Manifesto 2015 and beyond**

These items were taken together.

Graham Biggs said that in light of the poor attendance from MPs at the last APPG, officers would be reviewing what they were asking of MPs to ensure better attendance.

In respect of the consultation with the membership on the Manifesto, while there was little difference within the membership on key issues, how these were prioritised between authorities varied slightly. The intention is for a first draft of the revised priorities paper to go to the Executive in September and then put to the AGM on 17th November for adoption.

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LGA / RSN Rural Conference

Graham Biggs reminded members that this would be in Chester on 9 September, run in conjunction with the LGA and had moved from a 2 day to a 1 day event. It was at authorities' discretion as to whether they picked up travel costs and expenses for this. On the cost of the conference fee, Graham said that this was currently fixed at the LGA's standard conference rate but that the RSN would be looking to negotiate on this going forward.

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On the format for the day, Graham said this had been changed to make it more interactive and dialogue based. Initial delegate numbers have not been as high as might have been anticipated, but RSN are currently waiting on the latest figures for attendance as the LGA events team have been collating these.

Rural England Community Interest Company

Graham Biggs said that this had been developed to address research questions outside of financial accountability. The Company will meet every 6 months and will be looking at the issue of accessing grants/financial support for the CIDs work. This will include talking to the business community.

- 13 On rural communities' relationship with LEPs, David Inman acknowledged that this was a difficult area. However, RSN have stepped back from engaging with LEPs specifically, since DEFRA have now convened a group involving LEPs to look at rural issues.

RSP Service Groups

David Inman summarised developments in the work of the RSP Service Groups as follows:

- On **housing**, a booklet is being produced by the Housing group which focuses housing opportunities with parish councils.
 - On **health**, Nick Payne was currently organising a health conference in Cornwall to take place in the spring of 2015.
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- The Rural **CrimeNetwork** are attempting to network rural Police and Crime Commissioners, hopefully with the aid of a Home Office grant (since obtained).

Other business

Cllr Malcolm Leeding (Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils) highlighted that the **Office of National Statistics** had indicated in a letter that they were looking to aggregate parish councils where meetings took place with less than 100 people. He warned that this could have significant implications for those councils affected.

Graham Biggs asked for a copy of the letter to be sent to him to take forward with ONS.

David Inman drew members' attention to a report on **whether rural areas were adequately represented in BBC coverage**. RSN had given evidence and the report was calling for changes. Members' agreed that RSN officers should write to the BBC on this issue offering assistance to ensure that the reality of everyday life and the problems in these communities were accurately conveyed.

Action

Copy of ONS letter on parish councils to be sent to Graham Biggs for follow up. **Cllr Leeding / Graham Biggs**

RSN officers write to the BBC on issue of rural coverage. **David Inman**



Cllr Motley thanked all for attending and closed the meeting.

NEXT MEETING 17TH NOVEMBER 2014