

Note of last Rural Assembly Sub SIG Meeting

Title: Rural Assembly Sub SIG Meeting
Date: Monday 8 April 2019
Venue: Beecham Room, 7th Floor, 18 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ

Item	Decisions and actions
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1 Apologies for absence

Members noted apologies for this part of the meeting.

Mr David Inman (Rural Services Network) welcomed members to the meeting.
The Chair, Cllr Cecilia Motley (RSN), had sent apologies.
Cllr Robert Heseltine (North Yorkshire CC) substituted in her absence.

2 Minutes of the last Rural Assembly meeting and RSN AGM 12th November, 2018

The minutes of the last meetings of the Rural Assembly and the RSN AGM were both accepted.

3 Minutes of the last Executive meeting – 14th January 2019

The minutes of the last Executive meeting were noted.

4 Regional Meetings/Seminars

Mr Graham Biggs (Chief Executive, RSN) asked members to note upcoming regional meetings for information.

Members understood the benefits of trying to link in with the Rural Strategy Campaign as a means for greater discussion about regional variations in opportunities and examples of best practice. It was noted that the next one would be held - for the first time - in the South East and the agenda would include looking at vulnerability from a range of service providers. Members were encouraged to attend this event on 29 April 2019.

Despite poor attendance levels when held previously at the same venue, the next seminar would be held in Yorkshire in December. Members recognised difficulties around interest at that particular time of year.

5 The ‘Time For a Rural Strategy’ Campaign”: Graham Biggs

Mr Biggs informed members of current work around engagement which included elected members.

The Rural Strategy campaign was launched in March and several individuals have

already signed up. Members noted significant dates regarding the launch of Lords Select Committee Reports and he informed them that he was confident that this will be positive. He has been invited to meet Lord Gove and John Gardiner on 30 April to discuss the strategy.

Members noted details of recent meetings and plans to hold regional roadshows working closely with ACRE to look at ways of identifying issues that need to be addressed within a rural template strategy and to gain support for one. It was agreed that this is a very important piece of work and members were encouraged to engage in the process.

Members noted individuals already signed up for engagement and acknowledged the challenge in raising the profile and publicity when Brexit is at the foreground of all.

They raised several points:

- Clarification of what a rural strategy will contain must be articulated;
- What stage do we try to influence the party conferences? Mr Graham stated that there is no financial capacity to do this – although an offer was made to possibly attend and present at the Conservative party conference. This will be taken forward.
- A request for direct email dialogue with councillors about this, once the May elections are over.
- Backing and support from constituency MPs will be vital – it is important that local authority leaders sign the strategy so that they are encouraged to engage.

They agreed that discussion should continue to be a feature on all forthcoming agendas.

6 Rural Vulnerability Day and Parliamentary Group

David Inman informed members that over 40 MPs have stated their interest at being involved – although obviously no progress has been made as yet because their own agendas are too hectic at the present moment in time.

Members noted the recent success of the rural vulnerability day. It was felt though that the agenda was slightly too ambitious, however it proved popular by all who attended and will continue to be a repeated event. Members were asked to note that it will likely be held each February.

The Group received a presentation from Mr Brian Wilson, highlighting details of the State of the Rural Services Report 2018 <https://ruralengland.org>. A key point found within the analysis was that rurality was rarely an explicit consideration in assessing cost and safety factors.

Several gaps were identified in the evidence base. Mr Wilson informed the group that the launch went well and there had been quite a lot of media interest in the report. More work would be done to ensure that contacts extend exposure to the report amongst their own networks.

See presentation [here](#).

Members referred to examples within their own areas where they had experienced reduced funding to services areas, including subsidised bus routes, youth clubs etc. Digital connectivity is still far behind in rural areas.

- Lack of Policing was becoming a real issue and members said that it should have been included within the report as a key issue. Members noted the national rural crime network – another organisation which is there to look at these specific kind of issues.
- There needs to be a balanced community to ensure that the needs of young and old are recognised.
- They referred to healthy communities of the past and the dangers in losing young families and young people if schools, pubs, shops go from certain areas. These affect the psyche of these particular areas and this self-destructive effect needs to be recognised by government. Members accepted that the context given the advancement of technology also needs to be looked at.
- Rural employment and affordability of homes are linked.
- Addressing rural decline is vital in order to keep communities alive.

The Chair thanked Mr Wilson for an interesting and informative discussion.

7 Rural Vulnerability and Disadvantage Position Statement

Mr Inman reminded members of the background to the issue of this statement.

Colleagues noted the report which highlighted how it is becoming more difficult for people in rural areas to access services. The number of those vulnerable in these areas is increasing and it is important that these services are brought together to devise systems to tackle this issue.

The statement will be issued annually.

8 Budget Report

The group noted the balance position at the present time - £12-15k carried forward to 2019/20.

Invoices for membership are in the process of being sent out. A key disappointment is that the new unitary authority of Dorset Council will not be renewing.

The report was received.

9 Sounding Board Survey Consideration of topic

Members noted that the subject of the next survey is *the economy* and is due to be sent out in approximately a month's time. Following that will be one on cuts to services and finally, there will be one on health and wellbeing.

All data collected will feed into the strategy process.

10 Rural Services Network Annual Rural Conference To note the draft programme for 2019

Members noted the draft programme for the conference. A Keynote speaker for the

first day will be Lord Gardiner, unless there are any unforeseen changes. Lord Foster will also be a keynote speaker.

It was suggested that Alison Farmer Associates, Cambridge, be invited to provide a presentation on Planning in sensitive landscapes. Cllr Peter Stevens agreed to correspond with Mr Biggs with further details.

The Group noted additional suggestions for future consideration.

The draft programme was agreed.

11 Report on the RSP Service Groups/ Network Bodies

Mr Biggs provided an update on the work of specific Service Groups and Network Bodies.

- Crime – no matters of major importance although lack of data and evidence of impact of organised crime in rural areas is an issue. Evidence is quite limited. Communities are losing confidence in the police leading to less reporting and lack of data.
- Fire – the conference was under represented by rural authorities albeit because of rail and weather problems on the day.
- Rural Services APPG – members noted planned meeting in May on rural youth issues to include partnership members which will bring along young people to debate with MPs. It is hoped that many of the members would regard this as an important issue and attend.
- Rural England CIC - Members received an update of the recent meeting of directors and their agreement to publish the state of the rural Services report in 2021, rather than next year. Mr Wilson will prepare some work for the stakeholders to look at in June.

Members acknowledged that all initiatives began with RSN and therefore engagement is key to progress.

12 Any other Business

There was no other business.

The Chair thanked everyone for their input and the meeting was closed.

Appendix A

Name	Organisation
Cllr Robert Heseltine, Chair	North Yorkshire County Council
Graham Biggs, Chief Executive	RSN
David Inman, Director	RSN
Cllr Owen Bierley	West Lindsey District Council
Cllr Cameron Clark	Sevenoaks District Council
Revd Richard Kirlew	Sherborne Deanery Rural Chaplaincy
Cllr Vic Pritchard	Bath & North East Somerset Council
Cllr Louise Richardson	Leicestershire County Council
Sean Johnson, Programme Manager	Lincolnshire County Council
Chris Stanton, Rural Economy Officer	Guildford Borough Council
Cllr Peter Stevens	West Suffolk District Council
Amy Thomas, Head of Operations and T.E.D Programme Manager	Community Lincs
Cllr Trevor Thorne	Northumberland County Council
Claire Walters, Chief Executive	Bus Users
Speaker	
Brian Wilson	Rural England