

Note of last SPARSE Rural Special Interest Group meeting

Title: Rural Services Network Special Interest Group

- Rural Assembly Meeting

Date: Monday 9 April 2018

Venue: Smith Square 1&2, Ground Floor, 18 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ

Attendance

An attendance list is attached as **Appendix A** to this note.

Rural Assembly Meeting 12.30 – 3.00pm

Item	Decisions and actions
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1 Apologies for absence

Members noted apologies for this part of the meeting. A list is included at the end of the minutes.

2 Minutes of the last Rural Assembly meeting and RSN AGM 20th November, 2017

Cllr Cecilia Motley (Chair), RSN, asked members to approve the minutes of the last meeting. These were agreed as a true record.

3 Minutes of the last Executive meeting – 28th March 2018

The minutes had not been circulated and will be available in due course.

4 A Community Banking Initiative: Presentation by Comoola Tree Ltd

Mr Biggs introduced representatives from Comoola Tree Ltd, Mr Jeffrey Payne, Professor Alan Braithwaite and Emeritus Professor Tony Davies.

The group received a presentation which outlined the ways in which the company proposes to use radical innovations to reverse rural decline and deprivation. They outlined the kind of work they do to enable benefits to rural communities via better accessibility to services such as banking. Their role is primarily as facilitator to support all the mechanisms available and in place, to enable successful community initiatives in a more commercial and effective way.

Members noted stakeholders currently involved and the offers and services

available via Comoola to enable social cohesion and to help bring communities together.

Members were informed of the benefits from a commercial prospective and in terms of career prospects. Profits generated would be returned to the community.

Members comments included:

- Integration between the post office and banking would be useful – but noted that limitations on opening hours was an issue. Mr Payne reminded the group that with their model, accessibility was 24 hours a day;
- They raised issues about the viability of the proposals generally, especially given the cost of keeping hubs consistently open.;
- Although they agreed that community ownership was an incentive to do well, there were still concerns about realistic expectations for communities to actually be able to retrieve the cost of their initial investment;
- They noted that profits made should go to support the most vulnerable, particularly the elderly and to provide facilities and career prospects for the young.

Mr Biggs thanked the speakers for their presentation and agreed to discuss the prospect of taking forward their offer later on with the group.

Further to the presentation, the SIG discussed the proposals and raised several concerns. Mr Biggs suggested that he pass their details onto others who may be interested and wish to broker further discussion, it would be up to them if they wish to take conversation forward. It needs to be clear that it is **not** endorsed by the group. Members generally felt that, without a working example, it was difficult to not be sceptical at this point, but agreed that these kind of initiatives should be considered *at least* as a duty to their communities.

The presentation is circulated with these minutes.

5 Regional Meetings/Seminars

The group had discussed these earlier on in the agenda.

6 Brexit Related

Mr Biggs outlined the outcome of the third meeting of the Rural Brexit round table and the position of the different organisations, as part of it. It became clear that members were reluctant to put any money or resources into the subject and that it was not possible to obtain agreement that lobbying would be done as partners. It was however agreed, that the meeting was very positive in that it was very open and enabled sharing of ideas and joint issues.

Everyone was concerned that issues affecting rural communities as opposed to specific sectors, would not get much attention at all. Mr Biggs had put forward the idea of a rural strategy template as part of the SIG's remit.

Members discussed issues around current spending and how this might change in the future.

Mr Biggs reminded the group of the questionnaire sent out by the LGA Brexit

commission which members had been asked to fill out. There had been very few responses and they were informed that a letter would be sent out as a reminder to engage in the future.

Recommendation: That the group agree work be taken forward in continuing with the rural strategy as part of the SIG's remit.

Members agreed the recommendation.

7 Rural Vulnerability Day and Parliamentary Group

Mr David Inman, RSN, summarised the background and the purpose in setting up the rural vulnerability day. It was clear that rural MPs found it very informative and an interesting event and members noted that attendance had been very good.

Rural England would be taking forward other events.

Members asked that the names of the MPs be shared if possible so that they can be directly lobbied.

Action: RSN to contact MPs who had agreed to be members of a Rural Vulnerability Group of MPs to request whether their attendance can be disclosed to colleagues in the first instance.

8 Government Consultation on National Planning Policy Framework

Members noted the current position on the preparation of a response to the consultation. A draft RSN response would be circulated.

9 Budget Report

Members noted the current position with the budget Members noted the report.

10 Affordable Housing Sounding Board Survey March 2018

Mr Biggs outlined the outcome of the survey which showed that provision of affordable housing is a real issue among all rural areas. Members referred to the exemption of holiday lets from paying any business rates or council tax.

11 Rural Services Network Annual Rural Conference

Members were given an outline of the agenda for both days with much of the focus on relevant workshops.

Confirmed speakers included Tony Travers and Lord Gardiner.

12 Report on the RSP Service Groups/ Network Bodies

The group received updates from the various groups which covered current work and meetings on issues including health, housing, fire and crime in rural

communities.

Members noted dates of upcoming conferences and events.

Concerns were noted on current issues around changes to the location and accessibility to court services which lead to subsequent additional costs to police commissioners.

Members also noted updates on meetings with APPG and Rural England.

13 Any Other Business

There was no other business and the meeting was closed.

Name	Organisation
Graham Biggs	RSN
David Inman	RSN
Cllr Cecilia Motley, Chair	RSN
Andy Dean	RSN
Chris Cowcher, Community Manager	ACRE
Cllr Neil Butters	Bath & North East Somerset Council
Cllr Roger Phillips	Herefordshire Council
Cllr Mark Whittington	Lincolnshire Council
Heidi Turnbull, Economic Development Officer	Maldon District Council
Cllr Robert Heseltine	North Yorkshire County Council
Revd Richard Kirlew	Sherborne Deanery Rural Chaplaincy
Cllr Gwilym Butler	Shropshire Council
Cllr Peter Thornton	South Lakeland District Council
Cllr Gill Heath	Staffordshire County Council
Cllr Peter Stevens	St Edmundsbury Borough Council
Cllr Owen Bierley	West Lindsey District Council
Frances Bolding	Suffolk County Council
Malcolm Leeding	Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils
Cllr Peter Wild	Chichester District Council
Cllr Cameron Clark	Sevenoaks District Council
Sue Sanderson	Cumbria County Council