

Notice of Meeting

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING & RURAL ASSEMBLY MEETING of the membership of THE RURAL SERVICES NETWORK is to be held on MONDAY 2nd DECEMBER 2019 at approximately 1.00 p.m. to 3.30 p.m. at the LGA, 18 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ when the business set out below is to be transacted.

Dated:

Graham Biggs MBE
Chief Executive
Rural Services Network

PART 1: RSN AGM SPECIFIC ISSUES

1. **Apologies for absence**
2. **Consider the Minutes of the last RSN AGM meeting**
Held on 12th November 2018. (Attachment 1)
3. **Appointment of Chairman for the ensuing year (to also be the Chair of the SPARSE-Rural sub-sig)**
Present Chair - Councillor Cecilia Motley.
4. **To approve the Revised Constitution** (Attachment 2)

The AGM in 2018 agreed to consult on an amended version which took account of changes which had occurred since 2016. There appeared to be no concern from authorities and there was just the one representation which we have looked to deal with at 1.6 and 1.9 in the attached version. This version has already been approved by the RSN Executive on 30th September 2019.

5. **Appointment of Vice Chairmen for the ensuing year (to also be the Vice-Chairmen of the SPARSE-Rural sub-sig)**

Current Vice Chairs:

First Vice Chair (Yorkshire) – Cllr Robert Heseltine

Vice Chair (Unitary) – Rob Waltham

Vice Chair (County 1) – Cllr Philip Sanders

Vice Chair (County 2) – Cllr Gill Heath
Vice Chair (West Midlands) – Cllr Roger Phillips
Vice Chair (East) – Cllr Peter Stevens
Vice Chair (North) – Cllr Mary Robinson
Vice Chair (North East) – Cllr Trevor Thorne
Vice Chair (South West) – Cllr Adam Paynter
Vice Chair (Without Portfolio) – Cllr Sue Sanderson
Vice Chair (Without Portfolio) – Cllr Jeremy Savage
Vice Chair (Without Portfolio) – Cllr Mark Whittington
Vice Chair (Without Portfolio) – Cllr Peter Thornton

Present Vacancies:

Vice Chair (South East)

6. Any Other Business

Next RSN AGM will be held on 16th of November 2020.

PART 2: RURAL ASSEMBLY SUB-SIG ISSUES

7. Consider the Minutes of the last Rural Assembly meeting
Held on 8th April 2019. (Attachment 3)

8. Consider the Minutes of the last RSN Executive meeting
Held on 30th September 2019. (Attachment 4)

9. Membership (Constitutional Requirement)

To consider the annual report on membership (verbal report).

10. Member Contributions

To consider the Executive's Recommendation that, as previously agreed, all subscriptions be increased by 2% for 2020/21 beyond the staged increases already approved.

11. Budget 2019/20 and Estimates 2020/21 (Constitutional Requirement)

To approve the budget for 2019/20 with the Actual to end on October 2019 and the Estimates for 2020/21. (Attachment 5)

12. National Rural Conference 2019

To receive a verbal report from Kerry Booth (Assistant Chief Executive, RSN).

13. Meeting Dates for 2020 (Attachment 6)

14. Speaker Presentations

Andrew Lee, South Downs National Park – On Our Work Supporting the Economy in the National Park Area.

Alison Farmer, Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning – Developments in Protected Landscapes

15. Time for a Rural Strategy Campaign

Report (Attachment 7) and Presentation as to the latest position and the suggested way forward from Kerry Booth (Assistant Chief Executive, RSN) and Graham Biggs (Chief Executive, RSN).

16. Any Other Business

Next Rural Assembly meeting will be held on 6th of April 2020.



THE RURAL SERVICES NETWORK (RSN) SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP of the Local Government Association

DRAFT November 2019
Suggested changes in red

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CONSTITUTION

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CONSTITUTION

1. Title and Membership

- 1.1 The Organisation shall be known as The Rural Services Network Special Interest Group [“the Group”].
- 1.2 The Group shall be open to those **English** Authorities who are classified as **Mainly or Largely Rural or Urban with Significant Rural Area (all including hub towns)** by the Government and to previous members of the Rural Commission of the Local Government Association. **Other Principal Councils which have large rural areas within their boundaries may apply to become members and their applications will be treated on their merits.**
- 1.3 The Group will consist of such Principal Councils and Fire and Rescue Services in England, as The Rural Services Network desire to be and remain in membership [“Member Authority”].
- 1.4 The Group shall act in a non - political way concentrating on achieving consensus views on rural best practice and service interests.
- 1.5 The Group meetings will not be preceded by political meetings.
- 1.6 **Member authorities may be represented by a Councillor or Officer or both.**

- 1.7 Those authorities who are eligible to become members of the Group as specified under 1.2 above may instead of becoming members elect to have a straight contractual relationship with the group that is based solely on service provision and is non- representational. Under such a relationship the group will enter into a service level agreement with the authority involved and provide financial monitoring, best practice, performance, community, rural and economic services available for a flat rate annual payment constituting 95% of the charge which would have been levied on the authority had it joined in the normal way. Authorities who elect to take this arrangement will not be formal members and will therefore not be entitled attend or vote at meetings of the Group and will not receive agendas and minutes or be involved in the representational work of the Group.
- 1.8 Whilst all membership shall be with the Group, operationally much of the work of the Group will be through **three** sub groups; namely SPARSE Rural; The Rural Assembly; and The Rural Fire and Rescue Services Group
- 1.9 **The Group shall have power to establish such Associate and Alliance arrangements including any necessary definitions as it considers to be appropriate to its and the general rural interest. Such arrangements shall however require the approval of an Executive meeting of the Group (see Section 9 below).**

2. Purpose of the Group

- 2.1 To be a voice for councils with a rural interest within the Local Government Association [LGA] and to influence appropriate work so that the views and rural interests of these councils are fully considered.

- 2.2 To research, promote and lobby for the rural interests of communities served by member authorities
- 2.3 To establish in as many work areas as is feasible collective working targeted to the benefit of individual member authorities and their communities including the sharing of best practice.

3. Objectives and Powers of the Group and ways of working

- 3.1 To provide forums in which member authorities can exchange views and initiate shared activities on issues of common interest/benefit, particularly relating to rural service delivery, rural policy generally and the rural economy.
- 3.2 To raise awareness of the contribution member authorities make to rural service and rural community issues.
- 3.3 To provide greater capacity for member authorities to contribute to and influence the national agenda by direct representation to government departments and other decision makers/**opinion formers**.
- 3.4 To represent, wherever possible by consensus, the interests of member authorities in national government, to Parliament, political parties, European and other international institutions and other bodies, and the LGA and other decision makers/**opinion formers**.
- 3.5 To organise collective working to achieve potential cost savings for member authorities
- 3.6 To formulate sound policies and practices in respect of rural issues particularly those relating to rural services and rural communities.
- 3.7 To promote the policies of the Group to national government and other relevant organisations.
- 3.8 To develop relationships with other the LGA Special Interest Groups, with its People and Places Board and with other appropriate Service Boards **as** may be established from time to time.
- 3.9 To do anything that is calculated to facilitate or is conducive or incidental to the discharge of the objectives of the Group.
- 3.10 To promote innovation and best practice in furtherance of the achievement of greater efficiencies across member authorities.
- 3.11 To work with other Service Providers and those interested in rural services (grouped together as The Rural Services Partnership Limited – **(RSP)**) and the Rural England Community Interest Company and with the RSN Community Group as a section of the umbrella partnership known as The Rural Services Network to represent rural services generally, facilitate best practice and create the strongest network possible in support of continuous improvement of services and well being in general in the rural areas of England.
- 3.12 **In addition to the formal sub groups referred to in 1.7 above the Group may from time to time at an Annual General Meeting decide to establish service specific or topic groups based on the Groups Priorities for Action. All members will be entitled to attend such meetings. In respect of such meetings, in addition to each member authority's normal representatives, the Portfolio Holders and Chief Officers (or their representatives) will be invited to attend.**
- 3.13 **Unless the group at an Annual Meeting decides to the contrary, each year a series of "Regional Meetings/Seminars" will be organised. Whilst all member authorities will be**

“allocated to a Region” their representatives will be able to attend in a different “region” if they prefer

. **Purpose of Sub Groups**

- 4.1 The Group will undertake its work through the operation of a series of Sub Groups
- 4.2 These Sub Groups shall be named SPARSE Rural, The Rural Assembly, The Rural Fire and Rescue Services Group.
- 4.3 The purposes of the Sub Groups shall be as follows-

A. SPARSE RURAL :

This sub group will represent the financial interests of Principal Councils classified as Predominantly Rural and those Significantly Rural authorities which stand to gain by the Group's financial representations.

To promote the financial interests of the most rural local government authorities and to make representations to Government and other relevant bodies on the allocation of funding to the most rural authorities and other publicly funded bodies serving their areas.

To establish comprehensive e networking to allow members to discuss in detail rural considerations relating to the range of service areas they provide and where appropriate for these networks to also involve community representatives and **non-local** authority service providers to allow service issues to be viewed holistically.

To seek to facilitate collective working across authorities with a view to achieving both maintenance of service and cutting of cost. This to include the financial and non- financial performance analysis and comparison services and service groupings provide through the service charge for this sub group

B. THE RURAL ASSEMBLY

To provide to all members appropriate information on rural matters generally.

To act as a conduit on rural issues between authorities with rural areas and those rural areas themselves with the LGA's People and Places Board and other appropriate Service Boards, with Parliament and Government Departments and with other organisations with a rural interest.

To allow a consensus view to be established on current issues between authorities with a rural interest so as best to inform the LGA's operational structures of the position relating to rural areas in England and Wales.

To facilitate discussions between rural authorities and other bodies with an interest in issues which affect rural areas/communities/businesses in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland with a view to establishing rural best practice and inter organisational learning.

To where possible assist in establishing a rural dimension to appropriate LGA conferences.

C. THE RURAL FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES GROUP

The group shall be open to representatives of the Rural Fire and Rescue Authorities and to Chief Fire Officers or their nominees.

To seek to achieve maximum linkage between the operation of Fire and Rescue Services in rural areas and the communities involved.

To seek to share operational experience and best practice established through providing services in rural areas

To argue the financial case relating to the additional costs of Fire and Rescue Services operation in areas classified as **Mainly Rural or to have Significant Rural areas**.

Address the Fire & Rescue Service issues which are unique or more prevalent in rural areas (retained fire **and rescue** service operation, rural vulnerability and disadvantage issues, open countryside fires and flooding and accidents involving classified roads are examples.)

5. The Annual Meeting

- 5.1 The Group will meet as an Annual Meeting to appoint the office holders.
- 5.2 The Annual Meeting shall meet towards the end of each calendar year to approve the accounts of the Group, agree the budget of the Group, to set the annual service charges and approve the work programme. Other meetings including where considered necessary Extraordinary Annual General Meetings will be held as required and the meetings shall deal with such other business as may be determined by the Executive.
- 5.3 The Annual Meeting may from time to time make standing orders for the regulation of the Group's proceedings.

6. Membership of Meetings and Sub Group Meetings

- 6.1 The Meetings shall comprise the appointed representatives of the Member Authorities or Leaders of those authorities who have not made such an appointment. Elected members may be accompanied by an Officer of the Member Council if they so wish. Meetings of the Rural Services Network as a whole may follow on from Group Meetings and where necessary separate votes may be taken of the Rural Services Partnership's membership. Meetings of **service specific or topic groups as referred to in 3.10 above will meet prior to either SPARSE-Rural or Rural Assembly sub group meetings.**
- 6.2 The names of members appointed by member authorities to serve at meetings and any appointed substitute appointments shall be given to the Corporate Director in writing by the Chief Executive of their Member Authority (or other officer nominated to act on their behalf) as requested.
- 6.3 The period of office for members shall normally begin with effect from member authorities Annual Meetings in each year and shall end immediately before their Annual Meeting in the following year, provided that representatives shall cease to be eligible for membership when they cease to hold office as members of their authority or when their authority ceases to be in membership **of the group.**
- 6.4 Member Authorities may if they wish appoint different members to serve on different Sub Groups but one member must be named as the representative of the Council for the purposes of Annual Meetings of the Group.

7. Voting at Meetings

- 7.1 Each Member Authority shall be entitled to cast one vote at all meetings on occasions when it is decided to proceed by vote and a decision is not reached by consensus (which will be usual practice).
- 7.2 In the case of an equality of votes the Chairman of the meeting shall have the casting vote.
- 7.3 A member may nominate another member being a currently serving member of any member Authority and attend a meeting on his or her behalf and exercise his or her vote(s) provided that written notice is given to the Director of the Group before the start of the meeting by the Chief Executive or other appropriate officer of the Member Authority or by the originally nominated member.

8. Office Holders

- 8.1 The Annual Meeting of the Group shall in each year appoint from amongst the members representing Member Authorities the following office holders:

(a) A Chairman;

(b) Vice-Chairmen (The number of which shall be determined by the Annual Meeting making the appointment. One of the vice-chairmen shall be identified as First Vice-Chairman).

- 8.2 The Chairman and Vice-Chairmen of The Group shall to achieve continuity of overall operation also hold the same offices on the Executive and on the SPARSE Rural Sub Group.
- 8.3 The Rural Fire and Rescue Services Sub Group shall appoint their own Chair and Vice Chair.
- 8.3 Voting on all appointments shall be as follows:
- Where there are more than two persons nominated for each position, and of the votes given there is not a majority in favour of one person, the name of the person having the least number of votes shall be struck off the list and a fresh vote shall be taken and so on until a majority of votes is given in favour of one person.
- 8.4 The Chairmen (and in their absence Vice-Chairmen) will have the following responsibilities:
- (a) To promote The Group and Sub Groups as a whole;
 - (b) To uphold and promote the purposes of the Constitution and to interpret the Constitution where necessary;
 - (c) To preside over meetings so that its business can be carried out efficiently; and
 - (d) To ensure meetings are a forum for the debate of matters of common interest.
- 8.5 The Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen will hold office until:
- (a) The next Annual Meeting of The Group or in the case of the Rural Assembly the Rural Unitary Councils and the Rural Fire and Rescue Services Sub Groups the first meeting in any calendar year
 - (b) They resign from the office; or
 - (c) They are no longer a Councillor; or
 - (d) They are removed from office by resolution; **or**
 - (e) The member authority they represent ceases to be a member of the group**
- 8.6 In the event that a Chairman ceases to be the Chairman as a result of Article 8.5 (b), (c), (d) or (e) above the Group or Sub Group shall forthwith appoint a new Chairman and pending the appointment of a new Chairman all powers and functions of the Chairman shall be vested **respectively** in the First Vice-Chairman in relation to the Group and the SPARSE Rural Sub Groups and the Rural Assembly **sub group**, and **the Vice-Chairman of the Fire and Rescue Services** Sub Group.
- 8.7 The Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Fire **and Rescue** Sub Group shall be members of the Executive

9. The Executive

- 9.1 There shall be an Executive whose purpose shall be to provide strategic direction and conduct the normal day to day business of the Group apart from work delegated to the Group's Officers.
- 9.2 The Annual Meeting shall determine the terms of reference, delegated powers, size and composition of the Executive and may, if felt necessary, make Standing Orders for the regulation of their proceedings.
- 9.3 The Executive will where appropriate meet together with the Board of Directors of the Rural Services Partnership Limited and up to 6 further nominees of their choice to achieve overall Rural Services Network purposes. Where **it is felt** necessary separate votes will be taken when formal decisions are required to be made by the Directors of the Rural Services Partnership Ltd.
- 9.4 The Chairman of the Group from time to time shall be Chairman of the Executive.
- 9.5 The Chairman and Vice-Chairmen of the Group may nominate another member being a currently nominated member of any member Authority to attend an Executive meeting on his or her behalf and exercise his or her vote(s) provided that written notice is given to the Director of the Group before the start of the meeting.

10. Responsibility for Action

- 10.1 In matters of local government in general or which concern all member authorities of the Sub Groups, the Group and its Sub Groups will speak for all its member authorities. The Group and its Sub Groups, however, cannot commit their individual member authorities to any particular course of action or to support or not support any particular policy position.

11. Meetings of the Group, Sub Groups and Executive

- 11.1 Meetings of the Group and Executive shall be held on such days and at such places as may be decided by the Executive.
- 11.2 The Corporate Director shall ensure:
 - (a) Not less than twenty-eight clear days before each ordinary meeting including Extra Ordinary Annual Meetings of the Group and not less than two months before the Annual Meeting there shall be posted on The Group's website, a notice stating the date, time and place of the meeting; and
 - (b) Not less than ten working days before the meeting send to each Member Authority by email or post an agenda specifying the business to be transacted.

12. Nominated Officers and Staff

- 12.1 There shall be a Chief Executive and a Corporate Director of the Group appointed on such terms and conditions as the Executive may think fit and such other staff as may be necessary for the purpose of implementing the Group's and the Sub Groups aims and objectives. These staff individually and collectively will support the working of the Group and the Sub Groups.
- 12.2 The Group and Sub Groups shall, where considered necessary, ask the Chief Executives of Member Authorities to provide advisors to support the work programme as necessary including financial and strategic service advisers.

13. Finance

- 13.1 The Executive shall submit for consideration to the Annual Meeting of the Group in each year a statement of estimated expenditure for the year commencing on the following first day of April. The Executive shall have delegated authority to vary the budget within the financial year as necessary – subject to report at the next Group meeting.
- 13.2 The service charges for each year commencing on the 1st of April shall be at rates to be determined from time to time by the Group and those rates shall vary across groups having consideration to the running costs involved.
- 13.3 The Chief Executive shall be responsible for the preparation of an Income and Expenditure Account involving the Rural Services Network Special Interest Group and the Rural Services Partnership Limited jointly, each year, for the preparation of Company Accounts by professional tax accountants and for the submission of those accounts to the Group.
- 13.4 The income and property of The Group shall be applied solely towards the promotion of the Group's objectives.
- 13.5 The Group may invest, lend, or otherwise deal with monies not immediately required for its purposes in such manner as may be thought fit by the Executive and may borrow or raise money in accordance with financial regulations agreed by the Annual Meeting.
- 13.6 The Group may purchase, take on lease or otherwise obtain land to provide accommodation for the use of staff provided that if land or buildings are leased from a Member Authority this shall be on a basis that the rent paid is no more than a reasonable and proper rent in the circumstances.
- 13.7 The Chief Executive and the Director, or in their absence another appointed officer shall be authorised to enter into and execute all instruments, deeds or assurances on behalf of the Group.

- 13.8 The cost of attendance, travel and subsistence in connection with meetings of the Group and Sub Groups shall be met by the member or officer's own authority. The Group itself will meet those costs in respect of members of the Executive attending Executive Meetings or otherwise representing the Group.

14. Resignation of Member Authorities

- 14.1 Any Member Authority wishing to terminate its membership shall give not less than twelve months' notice, in writing, to the Director to expire on 31 March in any year.
- 14.2 Any Member Authority shall, upon ceasing to be a member of the Group, forfeit all right to and claims upon the Group and its property and funds, and, without prejudice to Article 15, shall pay such amount representing the authority's share of responsibility towards liabilities incurred by the Group on behalf of member authorities, including payments due to contractors, during the currency of the authority's membership, such share to be calculated having regard to the proportion which the subscription paid by that authority bears to the total annual subscription of the Group from its members in total.

15. Dissolution

- 15.1 A motion for dissolution of the Group must be notified in advance as an agenda item for the Annual Meeting or an Extraordinary General Meeting.
- 15.2 A motion for dissolution shall require a formal majority of at least two-thirds of members present with at least two-thirds of such authorities represented at the meeting, or through a postal vote procedure authorised by an Annual Meeting decision under the procedures outlined in 16.1 below.
- 15.3 In the event that the Group's funds should prove to be insufficient to discharge its liabilities Member Authorities shall contribute such additional sum as is required collectively to eliminate the deficiency pro rata to the level of their subscription.
- 15.4 In the event of a dispute between a member or former member authority and the Group as to the amount which an authority should contribute under this rule the matter shall be referred to arbitration.
- 15.5 The arbitration shall be conducted in accordance with the Arbitration Rules of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators and the Arbitrator shall be asked to determine the extent to which an authority or authorities should contribute and to determine the matter in accordance with what is fair in all the circumstances. In the event that the Arbitrator issues a determination providing that a member or former member Authority is liable to contribute a specified sum under this Rule the authority shall pay the monies which the Arbitrator determines it ought to pay within sixty days of the issue of the award. The Arbitrator shall be appointed by agreement of Chief Executive and Director or in default of such agreement by the President for the time being of the Law Society.

16. Amendment to the Constitution

16.1 The Annual Meeting (or an Extraordinary General Meeting convened for the purpose) shall have power to amend this Constitution:

(a) save that no amendments may be made to articles 13.4 or 14.1 and any purported amendments to those articles shall not be effective; and

(b) provided that a motion in favour of each such amendment shall be passed by at least two thirds of members present **and voting (in person or by Proxy)** and if necessary through the following additional procedure:

If 10% of the members signify to the Corporate Director in writing prior to the meeting that they wish the amendment to be put to a postal ballot of the membership. The amendment shall be carried if it receives the support of at least two thirds of the ballot papers returned.

17. Urgent Decisions

17.1 The Chairman in consultation with the First Vice-Chairman may take a decision which is a matter of urgency and is not delegated to the Officers. However, the decision may only be taken:

(i) if it is not practical to convene a quorate meeting of the Executive; and

(ii) if the Chairman of the Group agrees that the decision is a matter of urgency.

17.2 The reasons why it is not practical to convene a quorate meeting of the Executive and the consent of the Chairman to the decision being taken as a matter of urgency must be noted on the record of the decision. Following the decision, the Chairman will provide a full report to the next meeting of the Group or Executive explaining the decision, the reason for it and why the decision was treated as a matter of urgency.

Note of last SPARSE Rural Special Interest Group meeting

Title: Rural Services Network Special Interest Group

AGM Meetings:

- SPARSE Rural Sub SIG
- Rural Services Partnership Limited
- Rural Services Network

Date: Monday 12 November 2018

Venue: The Westminster Archives

Attendance

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

Item	Decisions and actions
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1	Appointment of Chairman for the ensuing year (to also be the Chair of the SPARSE-Rural sub-sig)
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Nominations for the existing Chair to continue in her position were accepted without opposition.

Cecilia expressed her gratitude to SPARSE Members for their confidence in her position as Chairman and to the officers for all their efforts.

2	Apologies for absence
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The Chair noted apologies for the meeting as listed on the Appendix.

3	Note of the Previous Meeting
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The notes of the previous meeting were agreed.

4	Appointment of Vice Chairmen for the ensuing year (to also be the Vice-Chairmen of the SPARSE-Rural sub-sig)
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It was moved that, in addition to the existing members willing to continue in office, Cllr Mark Whittington, Lincolnshire County Council, and Councillor Jeremy Savage, South Norfolk Council, be appointed as Vice-Chairmen of SPARSE for the year. This was agreed by members.

The Chairman expressed her gratitude to Cllr Robert Heseltine for his support as First Vice-Chairman.

5 IF DEEMED NECESSARY AND BENEFICIAL. To appoint a Chair and Vice Chair(s) of the RURAL ASSEMBLY SUB-SIG

It was agreed that there would not be a separate Chair for the Rural Assembly Sub-Sig.

6 CONSTITUTION: SUGGESTED CHANGES TO REFLECT EVENTS SINCE LAST REVIEWED SHOWN IN TRACKING (Attachment 2)

Graham Biggs, Chief Executive of the Rural Services Network, introduced the attachment detailing suggested changes to the constitution.

Members agreed the suggested changes to the constitution subject to the ballot procedures currently in force in the constitution.

7 NEXT MEETING: Next RSN AGM to be held on Monday 11th November 2019

Members agreed to move the date of the next RSN AGM to be held on 18 November 2019, as the previous proposed date was on Armistice day.

8 Minutes of the last full meeting – 9th April 2018

The minutes of the last full meeting, 9 April 2018, were agreed.

9 RURAL CRIME SURVEY 2018: Presentation by Julia Mulligan PCC North Yorkshire and Chair of the National Rural Crime Network

Julia Mulligan, PCC North Yorkshire and Chair of the National Rural Crime Network, gave a presentation on the Rural Crime Survey for 2018. Julia explained they had 20,252 responses, including nearly 4 thousand business owners, and that 50 per cent of responders were aged 55-75. Key findings from the responses to the survey included:

- County lines had continued to be a growing issue in rural areas.
- That the perception of policing in rural areas had worsened in recent years, an 11 per cent drop in people who think the police are doing a good job in their rural community since the 2015 survey.
- That for the most part rural communities think that crime is worsening.
- The issue of fly tipping was also raised often.
- There was a significant sense that a lot of rural crime was organised.
- That the financial impact on rural residents has gone up by 13 per cent in recent years.
- The survey results also indicated rural communities feel they are not understood.

As a result of the Rural Crime Survey, the National Rural Crime Network has proposed a number of recommendations which Julia highlighted:

- It was evident more had to be done to understand rural crime and the impact.
- More work needs to be done to counter organised crime in rural areas.
- Additional help was needed for residents around crime prevention.

- The need to ensure victims of fly tipping are not left to pay the price of others actions. This was emphasised as a major issue, as the only crime where the victim has to pay for the clear up.

In the discussion that followed, the following points were raised;

- Views were expressed that policing in rural areas had been struggling in its interactions with traveller communities.
- It was highlighted that “county lines” was now designated as a national threat and that policing was starting to get to grips with the issue, in particular the importance of police forces sharing information was emphasised.
- A view was expressed that a further look into scams would be necessary.
- A concern was raised that the changing nature of crime had been taking more police officers off the streets and focusing on online crime.
- It was emphasised rural policing was at a disadvantage and that this needed to be addressed.

The Chair thanked Julia for her presentation – a copy of Julia’s slides is attached to these minutes.

10 To approve (with or without amendment) the RSN Draft Rural Strategy Template(Presentation by Graham Biggs)

Graham Biggs outlined the RSN Draft Rural Strategy Template (copy of slides attached to these minutes) that had been developed and asked the RSN AGM to approve and agree the draft subject to some changes to reflect the recent Budget.

In the discussion that followed, the following points were raised;

- The importance of parity in the availability of mental health services between rural and urban areas.
- Including mention of the ACRE network on page 59 of the strategy was suggested.
- The importance of affordable housing in rural areas was emphasised.
- A new Affordable Housing Commission chaired by Lord Best has been established with funding from the Nationwide Foundation.

The RSN AGM was very supportive and approved and adopted the RSN Draft Rural Strategy Template , with the inclusion, as appropriate, of suggestions from RSN AGM members.

11 Membership (Constitutional Requirement)

Members noted the membership report from David Inman, Corporate Director. He raised that the number of organisations in membership was decreasing.

Graham Biggs also raised that they were looking to engage in more commercial activities in response to the decrease in income coming from membership fees.

Members noted the update.

12 Member Contributions

Graham Biggs introduced this item as a recommendation from the RSN executive. He

brought Members' attention to the schedule attached to the report which set out the current charging level for current member authorities be increased by two per cent p.a. to reflect inflationary increases in costs. This would require rescinding the existing formula in paragraph 1.2.

The RSN AGM agreed and approved the Executive's recommendations for the level of member contributions from 2019/20 onwards.

13 Budget 2018/19 and 2019/20 (Constitutional Requirement)

Members noted the current budget report and approved the estimates for 2019/20.

14 Rural Conference 2018

Kerry Booth, Assistant Chief Executive, introduced the item on the Rural Conference 2018.

She highlighted the following information;

- Feedback had been broadly positive.
- Officers had started to plan the conference for next year.
- Officers were looking to replicate the exhibitors and sponsors that were achieved this year to assist with the cost of running the event.
- In response to a query Kerry informed the AGM that the negative feedback she had received was around poor lighting, poor heating and a preference for more breaks over the course of the day.

The RSN AGM noted the update from Kerry Booth.

15 Sounding Board Survey

Kerry Booth introduced an update on the Sounding Board Survey on Access to Cash.

The survey had shown that there many concerns amongst rural residents in regards to having access to banks, ATMs and post offices and the impact of a lack of access to these services on smaller rural economies. Kerry emphasised that there continued to be real concerns for elderly and disabled rural residents. Responses were still being received and a report will be issued in due course.

The RSN AGM noted the update on the Sounding Board Survey.

16 Meeting Dates for 2019

Members noted meeting dates for 2019. Subject to the change noted earlier in the meeting

17 Any Other Business

Graham Biggs brought Members' attention to the review of designated landscapes.

There was no other business.

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
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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
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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
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The minutes of the last Executive meeting were noted.

4	Regional Meetings/Seminars
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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
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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://rurallengland.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 addition 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 issues 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

**MINUTES FROM RURAL SERVICES NETWORK
EXECUTIVE AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING**

Venue: No 63 Bayswater Road, London W2 3PH

Date: Monday 30th of September 2019

Time: 11.15am to 2.30pm

Attendance & Apologies for Absence

Attending:

Cllr Cecilia Motley, Chair – RSN, Shropshire Council

Graham Biggs MBE, CX – RSN

David Inman, Director – RSN

Cllr Robert Heseltine, First Vice Chair (Yorkshire) – North Yorkshire County Council

Cllr Roger Phillips, Vice Chair (West Midlands) – Herefordshire Council

John Birtwistle – First Group, Buses

Martin Collett – English Rural Housing Association

Mary Robinson, Vice Chair (North) – Eden District Council

Apologies:

Cllr Sue Sanderson – Vice chair (Without Portfolio)

Cllr Adam Paynter – Vice Chair (South West)

Anna Price – RSP Director - Small businesses

Cllr Mark Whittington – Vice Chair (Without Portfolio)

Cllr Gill Heath – Vice Chair (County 2)

Jeremy Savage – Vice Chair (Without Portfolio)

Peter Thornton – Vice Chair (Without Portfolio)

Cllr Peter Stevens – Vice Chair (East)

Richard Kirlew – RSP Chair – Community

Stewart Horne – Business Information Point (BIP)

1. Notes from the 2018 AGM.

Held on 12th November 2018 – were agreed as an accurate minute.

2. RSN Constitution.

The RSN Constitution presented on the 12th November 2018 AGM had been circulated to all RSN members as required by the present constitution. Only one council had made representations/comment. These had been dealt with in the new revised Constitution draft circulated to this meeting.

The Executive agreed this revised draft will now go forward to the AGM on the 2nd of December 2019. Electronic decision making by the Executive may be referenced in any future changes.

3. Notes from the previous RSN Executive meeting.

Held on 20th May 2019 – were agreed as an accurate minute with no matters arising.

4. Notes from the SPARSE Rural Special Interest Group meeting.

Held on the 24th of June 2019 – were agreed as an accurate minute with no matters arising.

5. Notes from the Rural Economy Group meeting.

Held on the 24th of June 2019 – were agreed as an accurate minute.

LEPs item – it was agreed that EDO's in member areas would be asked to let RSN know when their LEP had produced a (draft or final) Local Industrial Strategy and if they had comments as to the extent they considered it "fair, evidence based and fit for purpose" as far as their rural areas were concerned.

The RSN would produce a report on the extent to which the Local Industrial Strategies were sensitive and responsive to rural needs.

6. Associate Group.

A report from the Corporate Director was received suggesting that those who had rural local connections could form an Associate Group – on the basis set out in the report - for those local authorities who did not wish to be members of the RSN SIG. The report was agreed.

7. A Rural/Market Towns Group.

Over two hundred invitations have been sent out to a group of towns and large parishes across England. Details would be sent out to Executive of the towns/parishes approached to date.

8. The National Rural Conference 2019.

Held on the 3rd and 4th of September, Cheltenham.

The CEO reported that attendance and income had been at a record high this year. This was however due to wider interest particularly from RSP members, while Local Authority attendance had fallen compared to previous years.

Individual feedback from those attending was good. A survey will be taking place asking local authorities why they are not sending a representative to the annual conference and what their authorities might find of value in 2020.

CCRI were thanked for their assistance which was of particular value.

Members agreed that if possible, Cheltenham would continue as the venue for the conference in future years.

A fuller report would be presented to the next Executive as information comes to hand.

9. AGM, Assembly, Rural Social Care & Health Group.

Meeting will be held on the 2nd of December 2019.

(a) It was agreed that the rise in subscription levels be held at 2% for inflation.

10. Schedule of dates for RSN and Executive meetings in 2020.

The schedule of dates circulated appeared to be acceptable to the Executive members, but they would come back in the week if there were any concerns.

11. RSN Budget, 2019/20 and First Estimate 2020/21.

Whilst subs were coming in as slowly as in previous years, the present situation as known about at the time seemed to be on budget.

Members did feel that in addition to the current flow diagrams (available on the website to all members), a third 'short, sharp' diagram (varying between authorities) showing the calculated benefit for SPARSE rural authorities, might be of real value if this was possible. Officers agreed to look at this and report back to the next meeting.

12. Fairer Funding Review: Draft Paper from Pixel on "measuring success".

Graham Biggs detailed the position in relation to this work on which member consultation would be necessary. However, the Executive themselves were happy how Pixel had approached the situation to date and the work so far undertaken. A report would be presented back to the Executive after consultation had taken place and members observations had been received.

13. Spending Review Discussions about Finance based Aspirations with the Chief Secretary Treasury and with other Rural Groups.

The Executive heard that Rishi Sunak had moved into this position, in place of Elizabeth Truss. It was appreciated that current times were very difficult but felt it would clearly be desirable for work to continue around Housing and Transport that had started under the previous administrative team at the Treasury.

It was decided that discussion would take place with Phillip Dunne MP about how and when this could be pursued. Some members felt that these discussions might be held in conjunction with North Yorkshire County Council given that Rishi Sunak was one of their Constituency MPs.

John Birtwistle felt that although Electronic Buses may not directly benefit rural areas at this stage the technology should still be encouraged. He agreed to undertake to write and present a two-page document on busses for rural areas which RSN should be concentrating on in the short term.

14. Post of Policy Director.

Members received a report from the Chief Executive and the Corporate Director as the current postholder had secured alternative employment. It was suggested the post would have somewhat varied emphasis – with slightly less emphasis on direct recruitment and slightly greater emphasis on retention working. Sponsorship and attraction of exhibitors for the Annual Conference was also very important.

It was decided to trial the situation by advertisement. The job would continue to be foreseen as being based in the South West. However, the Executive considered there ought to be an opportunity to discuss with applicants a working pattern of 3 or 4 days a week, advertising on hours per week rather than days a week. It was felt this might present a more flexible package for would-be applicants.

15. Rural Strategy Campaign.

- (a) The Government response to main points in the Lords Select Committee Report on the Rural Economy was circulated together with a draft RSN Commentary on each of the issues. Although the Executive had received this close to the meeting it was on first reading to be a good document. Nevertheless, Executive Members will look at it in more detail over the next week and come back with any further comments before the document goes out to the RSN membership for comment. This would also give the opportunity for those who were unable to attend this meeting to comment.

The Government's response was felt to be very disappointing. It demonstrated the considerable amount of work that would need to be undertaken.

- (b) Proposed Rural Strategy Regional Roadshows.

Calor had agreed to sponsor these.

Having had a successful Roadshow in the North East, the next one will be held in Kendal on 17th October for the North West. Others were planned for the East and West Midlands and South East. There was a possibility of an additional one in the South West if the money stretches that far.

The main points from the North East Roadshow were comments on Climate Change, De-Carbonisation and Rural Crime, which were not referred to in the RSN Template Strategy. No specific Regional “differences” had been highlighted.

(c) Engaging with RSN/RSP Members.

An email had gone out to all Leaders asking for their authority to become involved by signing up to the Campaign and encouraging their networks to do so. The Executive would be kept updated in relation to the response.

16. Report on the Priorities of the Rural Services Network.

The Executive received the new document which they felt was excellent and they would like it to be used extensively. The Chief Executive was asked to congratulate Richard Inman and Kerry Booth. The meeting agreed to the RSN Priorities being re-expressed (and the website amended accordingly) to accord with the Template Rural Strategy. The RSN Priorities therefore being:

- A thriving rural economy;
- An affordable place to live;
- A digitally connected countryside;
- A place everyone can get around;
- A place to learn and grow;
- A rural proofed policy framework;
- A fair deal on health and social care;
- Fairer funding to address the rural penalty.

17. Regional Meetings 2019 update.

The situation was noted.

Date	Region	Town	Primary Topic being considered
28.06.19	North East	Durham County Council	Sustainable Communities
31.07.19	East Midlands/East Anglia	West Suffolk Council	Rural Health and Wellbeing
07.10.19	North West	Lancashire County Council	Delivering Local Services
09.12.19	Yorkshire & the Humber	Hambleton District Council	Barriers to Access – Connectivity and Rural Transport

18. Election Questions to Candidates at a General Election.

The Chair referred to discussions between herself, Peter Thornton and the Chief Executive at the Annual Conference around this issue.

It was agreed that draft questions need to be sent to all members of the Executive for input. These would, once an election had been called, be issued to members (including the Community Group) through the Weekly Bulletin. And by direct email with the suggestion that they be put to candidates at hustings and on the doorstep. They would also be sent to all the main parties Party Headquarters (including minority parties fielding significant numbers of candidates) to enable them to brief their candidates if they chose to do so.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
1											Attachment 5
2		RSN (INCOME & EXPENDITURE) 2019/20 AND									
3		ACTUAL TO END OCTOBER 2019									
4		ESTIMATE 2020/21									
5		INCLUDES 2018/19 ACTUAL AND REVISED ESTIMATE									
6							ACTUAL TO	ESTIMATE	ESTIMATE	ACTUAL	ESTIMATE
7							END MARCH 19	18/19	2019/20	TO END OCTOBER	2020/21
8		INCOME					£	£	£	£	£
9											
10		DEBTORS FROM PREVIOUS YEAR (NET OF VAT)									
11		SPARSE/Rural Assembly held by NKDC at year end					3000	3990	3450	3450	
12		RHA - Website Contris.					300	300			
13		RSP Subscriptions						0	990	990	
14		Coastal Communities Alliance (Gross)							1090	1090	
15		CCN re Bexit Roundtable					381	381			
16		SPARSE Rural/Rural Assembly					300636	303786	306672	266074	296637
17		Ditto Held by WDBC at Month End								7089	
18		RSN Extra £350Levy					35350	35700			
19		RSP Existing Member Fees (NET RHCA)					14195	14195	17742	16987	19319
20		RSP Assumed New Member Fees							0		
21		Commercial Partner First Group Buses					10000	10000	10000	10000	10000
22		Income from Rural Housing Group					7417	7417	7540	7035	7691
23		Income from Fire & Rescue Group					4260	4260	3839	3839	3918
24		FIRE GROUP LEVY RE SPARSITY EVIDENCE					6000	6000			
25		OTHER INCOME									
26		Rural Conference Income					14918		8500	19704	
27		Rural Conference Surplus						7709	14400		12000

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
28		CCN re Joint Needs Group Project							8500		
29		Recharges to Rural England Back Office Support					1400	1400	1428	714	1457
30		RE recharge re Elec NW Commission					1100	1100	1100		
31		RE Secondment Income							8000	4000	
32		RE recharge re Southern Water Commission					1000	1000	1000		1000
33		EE/Other Sponsorship					5000	5000			
34		Coastal Communities Alliance Gross)					3268	4358	4358	2222	4445
35		Income re Rural Strategy Regional Roadshows @							10000	1050	
36		RHCA - Fee Income					8642	11260	5000		6120
37		RHCA Expenditure Reimbursement re 2019					5000	5000	17766		18121
38		RHCA Exp Reimbursement 1/1 - 31/3/2020							4500		
39		RHA Website Re-charge									1560
40		RHA Website Dev/Maint Contributions									665
41		RE Website Maintenance					2040	2040	2286	1060	2332
42		Miscellaneous Survey					979	979		276	
43		Contras - Rural England					3002	3035		3296	
44		Contra - Travel								80	
45		Contra - Accountants								200	
46		Contra - RHCA Sub								180	
47		Contra - Fraud Refund								84	
48		VAT									
49		VAT Refund					3144				
50		VAT Received					17181			16587	
51		TOTAL INCOME					448213	428910	438161	366007	385265
52											
53											

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
54							ACTUAL TO	EST	EST	ACTUAL	ESTIMATE
55							END MARCH 19	2018/19	2019/20	END OCTOBER 19	2020/21
56		EXPENDITURE					£	£	£	£	£
57		General Provision for Inflation (Non Salary)									2000
58		VAT Paid on Goods & Services					17293			12064	
59		VAT Paid to HMRC					160			667	
60		NET WAGES & GENERAL CONTRACTS (NET)							215465	146142	215781
61		Corporate Management				DI,GB,AD, 1 JT, 100% KB 80%	132470	132170			
62		Finance/Performance and Data Analysis				, DW, 100%,	23844	23844			
63		Financial Support - Consultants & Expenses							15000	391	10000
64		Communications - Lexington & Rose R				RoseR,RCM	35371	37121	26091	10705	26091
65		Administrative and Technical Support				AD3, RI, WI,WC,BA, MB 100%	43123	43106			
66		Research and Monitoring				BW, 100%	7025	7025	8000		10000
67		Economic Development Service				AD5 100%	5202	5201			
68		Coastal Communities Contract					3696	3696	3700	1871	3700
69		Rural Communities Housing Group				AD2 100%	6763	6763			
70		Employee Deductions - Tax/NIC					27723	27813	28938	13431	30022
71		Employee Deductions - Pensions							6083	3374	6199
72		Provision for Annual Pay award									3384
73		PAYE - Employers NIC (11 mths)					10374	10373	10906	4658	11251
74		PENSIONS Employer contrib					2362	2438	4591	2539	5000
75		OTHER EXPENDITURE									
76		RSN/CCN Joint Needs Group Project							17000		

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
77		Rural Strategy Campaign					775	775	16000	10558	
78		Rural Strategy Roadshows							12000	3475	
79		Conferences/Seminars									
80		Rural Conference					7209			7105	
81		Rural Conference Drinks Reception					962	962	1000	1058	1000
82		Rural Conference 2019 - IN ADVANCE					250	250			
83		Regional Meetings/Seminars					1946	2145	2200	1280	2200
84		RSP Meetings							1200	579	1200
85		Service Level Agreements									
86		Rural Housing Group (RHG)					782	782	1000	459	1000
87		RHG Website Maint					1224	1224			
88		RE Website Maint					2040	2040			
89		Rural Inland CIC transfer of part of First Group Support					7000	7000	7000	7000	7000
90		Parliamentary Groups					905	905	1500	416	1500
91		RHCA Direct Set Up Costs					4530	4530			
92		Fire Group Expenses					562	712			
93		Business Expenses									
94		Website Upgrade					650	650	500	500	
95		Travel and Subsistence					23685	24000	22000	10211	21000
96		Print, Stat,e mail, phone & Broadband@					4037	4000	4000	2593	4000
97		Meeting Room Hire					1972	1972	2000	1211	2000
98		Website and Data Base software etc					4965	4700	3820	3361	4700
99		Rent of Office & Associated Costs					4827	5061	9918	2952	10800
100		Accountancy Fees							1507	1136	1507
101		Companies House Fees					13	13	13	13	13
102		Bank Charges					92	92	90	55	90
103		IT Support					280	1250	700	165	700
104		Insurance					744	744	800		800
105		Corporation Tax							0		300
106		Membership of Rural Coalition					250	250	250		250

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
107		Corp Man General								253	200
108		CAPITAL 3x Laptops					876				
109		CONTRAS									
110		Rural England @								1790	
111		RHCA Subs Refund@								188	
112		Debit Card Fraud								84	
113		ARREARS - PREVIOUS FINANCIAL YEAR				£24,769					
114		Employee Deductions							2393	2393	2729
115		Employer NIC							1024	1024	1082
116		Employers Pension Contrib							410		410
117		Regional Meetings/Seminars					450	450	240	240	
118		Contact for Service Corporate Management							1917	1917	
119		Contract for Service (ADMIN)					1660	1660	409	409	
120		Communications					500	500			
121		Extra Media by RCM					963	963			
122		Rose Regeneration					2000	2000	1750	1750	
123		Lexington Communications Contract							3482	3482	
124		PIXELL					21958	21958	10692	10692	
125		Research Costs					11420	11420	2100	2100	
126		RSN Online arrears					4523	4523			
127		RHA website Maint					300	300			
128		Travel and Subsistence arrears					823	823	609	609	700
129		Printing, Phone and Stationery (arrears)					9	9	153	153	
130		Office Costs					286	286	3509		
131		Data base etc (arrears)					433	433			
132		TOTAL EXPENDITURE					431307	408932	451960	277053	388609
133											
134		TOTAL INCOME					448213	428910	438161		385265
135		LESS TOTAL EXP					-440818	-418443	-451960		-388609

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
136		DIFFERENCE BETWEEN IN YEAR INC & EXP					7395	10467	-13799		-3344
137		ADD GEN BALANCE BROUGHT FORWARD					25875	25875	24768		10969
138		BALANCE CARRIED FORWARD					33270	36342	10969		7625
139		Less RHCA Balance					-8502				

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
140							24768				
141											
142		RHCA INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT									
143											
144									ESTIMATE	ACTUAL	ESTIMATE
145									2019/20	END OCT	2020/21
146									FROM OCT	2019	
147									2018		
148									£	£	£
149											
150		Subs Received Nov 2018 to 31st March 2019									
151		In respect of 2018/19 Financial year							2148.99	2148.99	
152		In respect of 2019/20 Financial Year							6353.17	6353.17	
153		Subs Due 2019/20									
154		Subs Receivable 1st April 2019 to 3st December 2019							8218	3501.96	23000.00
155		Subs Receivable in Pipeline							2208		
156		TOTAL DUE TO DATE							18928.16	12004.12	
157		ADDITIONAL INCOME NEEDED TO MATCH EXP							8837.84		4766.00
158									27766.00		27766.00
159											
160		LESS EXPENDITURE									
161		RSN Management Fee							-17766.00		-17766.00
162		RSN Share of Fee Income over Management Costs							-5000.00		-5000.00
163		RHCA Share of Fee Income over Management Costs							-5000.00		-5000.00
164									-27766.00		-27766.00
165											

Provisional Dates for 2020

RSN Executive – 13th January

*SPARSE Rural Meeting — 27th January

Rural Economy Sub-Group – 27th January

Week of Rural Parliamentary Day in Westminster – Monday 10th February

Week of Monday 17th February – West Midlands Regional Seminar

Week of c Monday 9th of March – South East Regional Seminar

Meeting of Rural Fire Group p.m. 11th March at the LGA Fire Conference in Blackpool

RSN Executive – 16th March

Week of Monday 23rd of March – South West Regional Seminar

*Rural Social Care & Health Sub-Group – 6th April a.m.

Rural Assembly – 6th April p.m.

Vulnerability RSP Meeting – 7th April a.m.

Rural Services Partner Group – 7th April p.m.

Week of c Monday 11th of May North- East Regional Seminar

RSN Executive – Monday 18th of May

***SPARSE Rural Meeting – 22nd May a.m.**

Rural Economy Sub-Group – 22nd May p.m.

Week of Monday 27th of July East Midlands Regional Seminar

National Rural Conference 2020 –Tuesday 1st & Wednesday 2nd September – Cheltenham

RSN Executive – 28th of September

(Directors Meeting of RSP – 28th September)

Week of Monday 5th October – North West Regional Seminar

Week of Monday 2nd of November – Yorkshire Regional Seminar

Rural Social Care & Health Sub-Group – 16th November a.m.

RSN AGM – 16th November p.m.

RSP Ltd – 16th November p.m.

Rural Assembly – 16th November p.m.

Vulnerability RSP Meeting – 17th November a.m.

Rural Services Partner Group – 17th November p.m.

RURAL SERVICES NETWORK

RURAL ASSEMBLY MEETING 2ND DECEMBER 2019

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE: THE RURAL STRATEGY CAMPAIGN

1.0 BACKGROUND

The RSN launched its Campaign “It’s Time for a Rural Strategy” on 1st March 2019. This followed detailed work by the RSN over the previous 12 months or so, including extensive consultation with its membership.

I would stress that the document which we produced to support the Campaign (which I have generally called a “Template Strategy”) was not – and didn’t pretend to be – a Rural Strategy. It was a document which articulated why the RSN believed a Rural Strategy was needed, and why certain topics/services should be included within such a Strategy. For each of those topics/services the Template set out (a) **some** key facts; (b) **some** of the challenges and (c) **some** thoughts on things which could help

On 25th April the House of Lords Select Committee on the Rural Economy published its Report entitled “Time for a Strategy for the Rural Economy”. Some 90%+ of what was said in the Lords Report was in line with the RSN’s Campaign themes and added substantial “evidence” following its Hearings, Debates and Call for Evidence (In addition to written evidence I, on behalf of the RSN, gave oral evidence to the Select Committee on two occasions).

The Lords Select Committee also took the view articulated by the RSN that a Rural Strategy should be wide ranging and that the needs of rural areas had been, and were still being, overlooked by Government. Its Chairman, Lord Foster of Bath – who was the Key-Note Speaker at the RSN’s National Rural Conference in September - said in the recent House of Lords Debate

“But successive governments have underrated the contribution rural economies can make to the nation’s prosperity and wellbeing. They have applied policies which were largely devised for urban and suburban economies, and which are often inappropriate for rural England. This must change. With rural England at a point of major transition, a different approach is urgently needed.

Inevitably our deliberations were wide-ranging. After all, a thriving rural economy depends on many factors: adequate and affordable housing and work places, decent broadband speeds and mobile coverage and access to finance, business support, skills and training as well as a fair share of funding for local services such as transport, policing and healthcare. No wonder our report is somewhat weightier than is normal for such documents”

Rurality brings special challenges in all those areas but we discovered that relatively little has been done to help rural areas address them. Often the policies—or lack of policies—of successive Governments have created obstacles, hindering the success of rural economies so that rural businesses contribute less per head to the national economy than urban businesses. There is a huge disparity between rural and urban service support”.

No areas in the Lords Report conflicted with the RSN’s position but did touch on several areas which the RSN had not. We subsequently consulted with our membership on those issues saying we were minded to concur with the Select Committee’s thoughts and recommendations. No member organisation objected to that proposition. **The RSN Commentary Document is attached as an Appendix to this report and, in effect, subject to any views from this meeting creates the RSN’s policy position in respect of the Government’s response.**

We should, I suggest, regard the Campaign – with the circa 1,000 supporters signed up to it to date - as having been very successful in significantly raising rural issues up the political agenda. However, we have not (yet!) convinced the Government on the need for a Rural Strategy and so the work must go on.

Set out below is the Government’s Response to the House of Lords recommendation that Government should develop a comprehensive Rural Strategy together with the RSN’s Commentary in respect of the Government’s expressed view.

Report chapter: Public policy and the rural economy

House of Lords recommendation:

Government should develop a comprehensive Rural Strategy

Government response:

“Over the coming months, the government will expand on its strategic vision and set out how, working across departments and working with stakeholders, it is putting in place a range of measures to ensure that rural areas continue to thrive. This vision is framed in terms of desired outcomes for rural areas which respect their diversity and recognise that success - in terms of quality of life and economic prosperity - and will need different approaches in different parts of the country.”

“The government agrees with the Committee that those living and working in rural areas can face particular challenges stemming, for example, from relatively poor infrastructure and the additional cost of delivering services in sparsely populated areas. Without doubt, these distinct characteristics must be recognised in policy making and the government believes that rural proofing is the best means to achieve that through embedding an appreciation of rural issues at all levels of delivery, rather than risk rural areas being placed in a silo through having a single rural strategy.”

RSN commentary:

This is disappointing and shows not only a lack of Government ambition for rural communities, but also a lack of appreciation how strongly rural communities feel disconnected from Government policy making.

It implies the current approach to rural policy will broadly continue, with rural proofing applied in a fairly ad hoc and uncoordinated manner, instead of adopting the suggested strategic and cross-Government approach to maximise opportunities for rural communities and for the nation as a whole.

There is a considerable difference between a strategy (defined as ‘a long term plan for success’) and a vision (defined as ‘a vivid mental image produced by the imagination’).

The response badly misrepresents proposals for a Rural Strategy, as placing rural areas in a silo and being at odds with rural proofing. Rather, a Rural Strategy should be a cross-Whitehall document (not just owned by Defra). Rural proofing ought to be an integral part of delivering and monitoring such a strategy. These points were clearly evidenced and made in the House of Lords report and the RSN’s ‘call’ document.

Calling for a Rural Strategy to be produced is not a hang-up on words. We agree it is results on the ground that matter. A strategy would offer a clear framework for Government to guide local action. The risk is that a rural vision will be little more than ‘motherhood and apple pie’.

Rural areas play an important role within national life and hold real opportunities to address some of the major challenges, such as climate change and the switch to zero carbon, and improving mental health and wellbeing. A Rural Strategy could ensure such opportunities are not wasted.

Nonetheless, RSN – like other rural interest groups – is willing to work with Government to develop its strategic vision and a range of measures. If the vision and measures are meaningful, transparent and accountable (with SMART targets) they should at least deliver some of what would have been possible through a Rural Strategy.

From the outset the RSN said that over the coming months it intended to “add depth and texture” to the “Template Strategy”. The discussions at the meeting of the Rural Social Care and Health Group earlier on 2nd December are part of that process from the perspective of the Health/Social Care/Loneliness issues. The Regional Roadshows referred to below are also part of that process – along with raising awareness, generating support and seeking to determine any significant regional differences.

2.0 PRESENTATION

Kerry Booth (Assistant Chief Executive) and I will make a presentation to this meeting to aid discussion. This will be based on the presentations we are using at the Rural Strategy Regional Roadshows. There have been two so far – in Partnership with the Rural Coalition, ACRE and the Plunkett Foundation and with sponsorship support from Calor Ltd – one in Newcastle for the North East and the

most recent in Kendal for the North West kindly hosted by South Lakeland District Council. Others are planned for the East and West Midlands and South East (dates and venues yet to be determined). The series will be rounded off with our Regional Meeting/seminar for the South West.

3.0 DISCUSSIONS AT THIS MEETING

In addition to seeking discussion and views from members as to the position overall we will be appraising members- and seeking agreement to - our thoughts as to “where next”, engagement with Parliamentarians and what we do in respect of the expected (!!!) General Election.

Graham Biggs
Chief Executive

1st November 2019

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE HOUSE OF LORDS SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE RURAL ECONOMY: RURAL SERVICES NETWORK COMMENTARY

In late June the Government gave its response to the report of the House of Lords Select Committee on the Rural Economy (April 2019). This note provides a commentary on that response from the perspective of the Rural Services Network (RSN). It does not comment on every part of the Government's response, but focuses on those elements likely to be of most interest to the RSN and its membership.

The RSN's initial reaction to the Government response was set out in a press release published on 5th July 2019, the text of which is repeated here:

PRESS RELEASE: Government response to the report of the House of Lords Select Committee

Graham Biggs, Chief Executive of The Rural Services Network (RSN) said: "It is deeply disappointing that the Government has rejected the Lords Rural Economy Committee's recommendation for a comprehensive Rural Strategy to ensure the health of Britain's rural areas, despite the wealth of evidence in that Report to support the recommendation."

"If everything was as rosy as the Government's response seems to suggest then those who gave evidence to the Committee would not have said what they did. To suggest that if you have rural proofing a Rural Strategy is not needed and to suggest that a Strategy could be a strait jacket completely misses the point and misrepresents the purpose of a Rural Strategy."

"While we welcome the Government's commitment to expand on its strategic vision for rural areas, overall the failure to implement a Rural Strategy constitutes a worrying missed opportunity and risks a continuation of the status quo. We need to see how this strategic vision is to be introduced and whether or not it has SMART targets to be able to monitor its delivery."

"We support the Government's commitment to set out cross-departmental measures to ensure rural areas can thrive, but if these are to succeed it is absolutely essential that the current inadequate piecemeal method of delivery and 'rural proofing' of policymaking is entirely overhauled."

"A robust, open and accountable rural proofing framework must be established to sit across all Government departments to ensure that the needs of rural residents are considered and met by all, from the Treasury to the Department for Transport."

"Yet again the Government's attitude towards rural communities has left them feeling frustrated and ignored. The new Prime Minister must make good on promises to protect and encourage a valuable and significant proportion of the UK."

"The RSN will continue pressing the case for a comprehensive, funded cross-departmental Rural Strategy – backed up by robust rural proofing and it's sure that its many supporters will also do so. This is the start of the journey and definitely not the end".

A more detailed commentary on the Government response follows and is set out in the series of tables below.

Report chapter: Public policy and the rural economy

House of Lords recommendation:

Government should develop a comprehensive Rural Strategy

Government response:

“Over the coming months, the government will expand on its strategic vision and set out how, working across departments and working with stakeholders, it is putting in place a range of measures to ensure that rural areas continue to thrive. This vision is framed in terms of desired outcomes for rural areas which respect their diversity and recognise that success - in terms of quality of life and economic prosperity - and will need different approaches in different parts of the country.”

“The government agrees with the Committee that those living and working in rural areas can face particular challenges stemming, for example, from relatively poor infrastructure and the additional cost of delivering services in sparsely populated areas. Without doubt, these distinct characteristics must be recognised in policy making and the government believes that rural proofing is the best means to achieve that through embedding an appreciation of rural issues at all levels of delivery, rather than risk rural areas being placed in a silo through having a single rural strategy.”

RSN commentary:

This is disappointing and shows not only a lack of Government ambition for rural communities, but also a lack of appreciation how strongly rural communities feel disconnected from Government policy making.

It implies the current approach to rural policy will broadly continue, with rural proofing applied in a fairly ad hoc and uncoordinated manner, instead of adopting the suggested strategic and cross-Government approach to maximise opportunities for rural communities and for the nation as a whole.

There is a considerable difference between a strategy (defined as ‘a long term plan for success’) and a vision (defined as ‘a vivid mental image produced by the imagination’).

The response badly misrepresents proposals for a Rural Strategy, as placing rural areas in a silo and being at odds with rural proofing. Rather, a Rural Strategy should be a cross-Whitehall document (not just owned by Defra). Rural proofing ought to be an integral part of delivering and monitoring such a strategy. These points were clearly evidenced and made in the House of Lords report and the RSN’s ‘call’ document.

Calling for a Rural Strategy to be produced is not a hang-up on words. We agree it is results on the ground that matter. A strategy would offer a clear framework for Government to guide local action. The risk is that a rural vision will be little more than ‘motherhood and apple pie’.

Rural areas play an important role within national life and hold real opportunities to address some of the major challenges, such as climate change and the switch to zero carbon, and improving mental health and wellbeing. A Rural Strategy could ensure such opportunities are not wasted.

Nonetheless, RSN – like other rural interest groups – is willing to work with Government to develop its strategic vision and a range of measures. If the vision and measures are meaningful, transparent and accountable (with SMART targets) they should at least deliver some of what would have been possible through a Rural Strategy.

House of Lords recommendation:

Local government and LEPs should produce local rural strategies

Government response:

“The government believes that local authorities are best placed to decide whether they should prepare strategies to support rural businesses and communities within their geographies. There are good examples where some have done so but local authorities are accountable to their own electorates and should decide their own priorities.”

“The government believes it is better to make sure the needs, challenges and opportunities of rural businesses and communities are properly considered in Local Industrial Strategies rather than to compel Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) to produce separate rural economic strategies. As part of their evidence gathering, LEPs should be looking across their whole geographies and consulting rural businesses. Through the annual review process, LEPs will be accountable for delivery of their local industrial strategy.”

RSN commentary:

Whilst it may not require separate rural economic strategy documents, LEPs with rural areas should at least set out specific rural needs (based on evidence about them), as well as rural actions that have SMART targets for meeting those needs within their Local Industrial Strategies. It will not be sufficient for LEPs simply to look across their whole geographies, which will generally mask rural needs. Similarly, LEP annual review documents should include specific reporting on their actions and expenditure in rural areas, otherwise their rural delivery will continue to be opaque and unaccounted for. The poor rural track record of many LEPs makes this important, so they can demonstrate progress to their rural communities.

House of Lords recommendation:

Government should reform the rural proofing process to address weaknesses

Government response:

“The government accepts, however, that more can be done. It wants departments to see rural proofing as an essential and indeed positive tool for making sure the intended policy outcomes can be understood and delivered successfully in a rural context. Rural proofing should not be seen simply as a question of identifying potential negative impacts but rather as an opportunity to tailor policy so it is delivered as effectively as possible in rural areas.”

“The government will therefore work to develop and promote a greater understanding across departments of the opportunities and challenges in rural areas through a recently established network of departmental rural proofing leads; revise rural proofing guidance and develop other supporting resources to help develop policy outcomes that work in rural areas; and encourage greater engagement with stakeholders in the rural proofing process. To support these activities and improve transparency Defra will establish a Rural Affairs Board to support and steer work on rural proofing.”

“The government notes the Committee’s comments on transparency and accountability. Defra will therefore publish each year an evidence-based report on rural proofing.”

RSN commentary:

The Government's response goes some way to addressing the concerns with rural proofing which have been highlighted by the RSN, including its patchy (and often late) application, a lack of rural stakeholder involvement in the process and limited transparency about the proofing work Departments carry out. The RSN welcomes the decision to produce an annual report on rural proofing, which all relevant Departments must contribute towards. The RSN will be pleased if it and other rural stakeholders are consulted by Departments more often.

Rural interest groups, including the RSN, should have an ongoing involvement with the proposed Rural Affairs Board. If this is an internal (Whitehall) Board, with only occasional input from external interests, it will not improve transparency and will be poorly received. The Board should have an independent chair (or a joint Defra and independent chair).

Report chapter: Rural delivery and place-based approaches

House of Lords recommendation:

Create a dedicated rural funding stream within the UK Shared Prosperity Fund

Government response:

"The UK Shared Prosperity Fund will be a domestic programme of investment to tackle inequality between communities by raising productivity. It will invest in the foundations of productivity as set out in the government's Industrial Strategy to support people to benefit from economic prosperity, especially in those parts of the UK whose economies are furthest behind. The government recognises that places across the country possess their own strengths, opportunities and challenges, and this should be reflected in the approach to investment. The UK Shared Prosperity Fund will allocate funding to those places with the greatest need. Final decisions are due to be made following Spending Review."

RSN commentary:

This fails to make a much-needed rural commitment about rural areas receiving a fair share of the Shared Prosperity Fund and it is hoped such a commitment will be forthcoming after the Spending Review.

The Government reference to allocating the Fund to areas with the greatest need is a major concern. It implies fewer rural areas will benefit than has been the case under the LEADER programme. It also raises a crucial question about the basis for measuring areas of need, since traditional measures (like the Index of Multiple Deprivation) highlight urban patterns of need, but overlook more scattered rural needs. A 'most bangs for the buck' approach, which was applied to funding streams in the past, lets rural areas down badly. The RSN – like the Select Committee – believes it is best addressed by having a dedicated rural programme.

House of Lords recommendation:

When producing Local Industrial Strategies LEPs should adopt rural economic strategies

Government response:

"The government believes it is better to make sure the needs, challenges and opportunities of rural businesses and communities are properly considered in Local Industrial Strategies than to compel

LEPs to produce separate rural economic strategies. As part of their evidence gathering, LEPs should be looking across their whole geographies and consulting rural businesses. The government, however, notes that some LEPs such as SELEP have already published strategies for their rural economy and it welcomes these locally taken initiatives.”

“The implementation of Local Industrial Strategies, and therefore any local ambitions relating to the rural economy, will be considered in LEPs’ future Annual Performance Reviews.”

RSN commentary:

The Government’s response seems to misread the Select Committee’s recommendation, which says that rural economic strategies could either be separate from or included within Local Industrial Strategies. We are pleased that LEPs “should be” looking across the whole of their geographies and consulting rural businesses, but believe this should be a firmer expectation (indeed, a requirement) of them. It is similarly vital – not least given past performance in rural areas – that LEPs include rural-specific information about their expenditure and activities within their Annual Performance Reports. If LEP rural delivery remains opaque they should be compelled to do so, to provide proper accountability and transparency about the use of public funds.

House of Lords recommendation:

LEP Boards should include a ‘rural champion’: wider engagement should be achieved by establishing rural sub-groups

Government response:

“It is clear government policy, set out in Strengthened Local Enterprise Partnerships, that LEPs should seek to represent the interests of their communities by engaging small and medium sized business leaders as well as larger firms, and they should draw from a more diverse representation of sectors and all parts of their geography. The government expects LEPs to create more inclusive economies by improving productivity across their areas to benefit all people and communities.”

“The government wants LEPs to be truly business led. It therefore set out in Strengthened Local Enterprise Partnerships its aspiration that Local Enterprise Partnerships should work towards strengthening representation from the private sector so that it forms at least two-thirds of the board. There is also a requirement for LEPs to be chaired by a business leader. As a consequence, the proportion of local authority leaders on LEP boards will necessarily reduce.”

RSN commentary:

Although broad representation on LEP Boards is welcome, this is not the same as ensuring someone on a Board has a particular role to champion rural needs and backing to fulfil that role. The policy to streamline LEP Boards and make them business-led is precisely the reason why rural sub-groups or similar would be so valuable. It would ensure that those representing rural areas or interests still have real voice and input to the process. The new governance arrangements for LEPs risk leaving rural communities and businesses poorly represented.

House of Lords recommendation:

Local government funding allocations should adequately compensate rural authorities for extra service delivery costs

Government response:

“The government is undertaking a review of local authorities’ relative needs and resources to address concerns about the fairness of current funding distributions. In its recent consultation, MHCLG proposed to capture consistently variations in the cost of delivering services, including those caused by rurality, by introducing a new Area Cost Adjustment methodology. The proposed Area Cost Adjustment recognises that local authorities with longer journey times (as a result of traffic congestion, longer distances or poor transport links) may have employees who experience relatively longer periods of ‘down time’ and may have to pay their staff for more hours in order to deliver an equivalent level of service. Local authorities which are more remote may also have variation in the cost of some inputs due to the size of local markets or isolation from major markets.”

“MHCLG has identified two robust and evidence-led measures to account for the additional costs associated with accessibility and remoteness, based on the methodology used by the Department for Transport (DfT) to produce statistics on journey times to key services. This approach is being developed in collaboration with representatives of the sector.”

RSN commentary:

We welcome the work of the Government’s Fair Funding Review, which – after decades of under-funding – it is hoped will lead to an improved allocation of resources among principal local authorities. In rural areas there are often substantial extra costs associated with lost economies of scale, needing to travel further to deliver services and having to maintain more service outlets (to ensure they are accessible). It cannot be right that predominantly urban authorities receive 66% more funding per head from Government than predominantly rural authorities, leaving rural residents to pay significantly higher Council Tax bills whilst receiving fewer services.

House of Lords recommendation:

Plans to fund local government from 75% Business Rates Retention must be rural proofed, given the scope for rural growth and rural businesses eligible for rate relief

Government response:

“The business rates retention system will continue to allow all types of authority to benefit from growth in their local economies. Local authorities estimate that in 2019/20 they will keep around £2.5 billion in business rates growth which includes rural areas. The government is committed to ensuring all local authorities are incentivised to grow their business rates which will continue to be an objective under potential reforms to the business rates retention system.”

“No decisions have yet been made on the way business rate reliefs will be reflected in the design of the reformed business rates retention system. The government is continuing to engage with the sector as a whole to ensure that the reformed system responds to the needs of all local authorities.”

“The government will be taking into account all authority types when moving to 75 per cent business rates retention. The opportunity to pilot has been offered to all areas of England and successful pilot applications have covered a wide range of different types of authorities, including many rural authorities, to test out how the policy will be delivered. MHCLG plans to continue to work closely with all local authorities included in the pilot programme to inform its policy development.”

RSN commentary:

Some rural local authorities represent areas where there is less scope for economic growth, given their location, infrastructure, demography and protected landscapes.

The proposed retention by local authorities of business rates growth between resets of the baseline is likely to disadvantage many rural authorities compared with their urban counterparts.

Rate relief can prove a lifeline for many small or marginal rural businesses. However, central Government should fully fund those reliefs so that rural authority budgets are not further and unfairly squeezed: authorities should not be penalised for having businesses that are eligible for rate relief. It is crucial that MHCLG learns any distinct rural lessons from the pilots.

House of Lords recommendation:

Local authorities' ability to engage with economic growth is constrained by budget cuts

Government response:

"The government welcomes local authorities' contributions to the development of Local Industrial Strategies through their involvement in LEPs and mayoral combined authorities."

"Core spending power is forecast to increase from £45.1 billion in 2018/19 to £46.4 billion in 2019/20, a cash increase of 2.8 per cent and a real-terms increase in 13 resources available to local authorities. This is the final year of a multi-year settlement deal – worth over £200 billion in the five years to 2020 – that was accepted by 97 per cent of councils in return for publishing efficiency plans. The settlement includes extra funding for local services, with a strong focus on supporting some of the most vulnerable groups, whilst supporting and rewarding local economic growth."

RSN commentary:

Local authorities have experienced almost a decade of spending cuts, leaving them with very limited scope to undertake (non statutory) economic development activity. The situation is particularly difficult for predominantly rural authorities, who have historically received less Government funding than urban authorities and who, as a consequence, provided fewer services in the first place.

House of Lords recommendation:

Government should create a Community Capacity Fund to support voluntary action and enhance community leadership

Government response:

"The Civil Society Strategy set out a vision of how the government could help strengthen and support civil society in England, recognising the key role which volunteers play in many aspects of community life. This included its intention to work with partners to develop new models of community funding which would bring together different forms of funding, such as social impact investment, charitable funding, and corporate investment. These models could potentially address the issues for which the Committee has proposed a Community Capacity Fund."

"The government notes the Committee's view, on page 10 of its report, that "The Shared Prosperity Fund should incorporate a Community Capacity Fund, which should be used to build capabilities

and support community leaders in promoting engagement”. The government has confirmed it will consult widely on the design and priorities of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. This will provide an opportunity for all interested parties, including rural communities, to provide their views on the Fund directly to government. Final decisions are due to be made following Spending Review.”

RSN commentary:

If rural communities are to play a growing role in service delivery and asset management it is important they are properly supported with advice, training and the like. Voluntary action may be low cost, but it still requires seed corn funding and in some cases larger grants e.g. when purchasing assets. Sufficient funding needs to be available to back up the vision in the Civil Society Strategy.

House of Lords recommendation:

Government should not pursue its suggestion of imposing a referendum threshold on parish/town councils for increases to their precept

Government response:

“No referendum principles have been set to date for town and parish council precepts, but the government has been clear that it expects the sector to take all available steps to mitigate the need for council tax increases. The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government sets thresholds annually as part of the Local Government Finance Settlement process and reserves the right to consider principles for town and parish council precepts in future years in light of all relevant circumstances, including increases set in previous years.”

RSN commentary:

Government needs to get real. It wants to see more active parish and town councils. Furthermore, many of those councils are having to step in to take on services or assets previously run by principal authorities – something the latter can no longer afford to do, due to Government imposed funding cuts. The threat to cap precept increases should be dropped forthwith. If local voters feel strongly about such increases they can make their views known at the ballot box.

Report chapter: Digital connectivity

House of Lords recommendation:

Ofcom should strengthen the rural obligations placed on new (700 MHz) mobile licences

Government response:

“The spectrum auction design and its obligations are a matter for Ofcom as the independent regulator. The government supports the inclusion of coverage obligations in the proposals for the 700 MHz and 3.6-3.8 GHz spectrum auctions, and is committed to working with Ofcom and the mobile industry to meet the manifesto commitment of ensuring 95 per cent geographic coverage across the UK.”

“The current proposals represent Ofcom’s judgment as to the most ambitious coverage obligations that are consistent with a successful auction. Ofcom has successfully monitored previous coverage obligations for voice coverage and verified that mobile network operators have complied with the requirements of their licences.”

RSN commentary:

Ofcom's revised rural obligations are a step backwards from its earlier proposals. It is disappointing to see that more weight was given to the views of network operators than to the views of rural communities and businesses. Ofcom's own statistics show that rural coverage for 4G networks is poor. It needs to be improved significantly and quickly.

House of Lords recommendation:

The Broadband USO is set too low and should be reviewed before implementation

Government response:

"The government is committed to keeping the USO specification under review to ensure that it keeps pace with consumers' needs as they evolve over time. The Digital Economy Act 2017 provides discretion for government to direct Ofcom to undertake a review at any time but there is a formal requirement for the government to direct Ofcom to undertake a review when superfast broadband has been taken up by 75 per cent of premises. Any review would look not only at the minimum download speed but at all aspects of the USO specification."

"The government does not agree that an immediate review (before the USO is implemented in early 2020) is necessary. It is possible that consumers connected under the current USO will receive higher than the minimum specification. A decision on when to review the USO will be taken in the light of market developments. We will consider the best timing for this after the USO is implemented."

RSN commentary:

A USO (set at 10 Mbps download speeds) is clearly looking out-of-date, as consumer applications use ever more bandwidth. Many rural businesses are home-based and there is significant home working. Even if 10Mbps meets most domestic needs, it is inadequate for business needs. Reviewing the USO after its 2020 implementation implies that it will not be upgraded for at least another two years. This is a missed opportunity.

The network provider chosen to deliver USO requests should be required to connect with nearby available fibre networks, where they exist or are shortly to exist, so that solutions are the best available (and are not just over the 10 Mbps threshold, which will soon need upgrading again, representing poor value for money).

House of Lords recommendation:

Ofcom should encourage mast sharing and review roaming, to aid mobile network coverage

Government response:

"Improving mobile coverage in rural areas is a priority for government. The government has introduced a range of permitted development rights to support the delivery of mobile infrastructure, including legislating for higher masts in 2016, making it easier for industry to roll out or share masts whilst also protecting local amenity. Sharing of sites and network infrastructure, such as masts and antennas, can make the deployment of mobile networks more cost effective. Infrastructure sharing is largely a commercial agreement between operators."

“Roaming in rural areas has the potential to improve consumer choice and could be a solution for the problem of “partial not-spots” (where one or more operators are present, but all four are not). Ofcom published a preliminary analysis of roaming in September 2018. The government is carefully considering this advice alongside other options.”

RSN commentary:

Whilst the Government response indicates an open mind to both mobile mast sharing and roaming, it also indicates a rather passive stance and a reluctance to push these potential rural solutions. We recognise, however, that the industry is, itself, now proposing some progress (albeit this will need proper Ofcom oversight to ensure it happens in a transparent way).

House of Lords recommendation:

Local and national government should take actions to boost digital skills in rural SMEs

Government response:

“The government recognises the importance of improving digital skills in rural areas. Measures such as the digital skills entitlement and apprenticeships in the digital sector need to be part of a wider solution to meet the skills and productivity challenges faced by rural businesses.”

“Last year saw the launch of the first three local digital skills partnerships covering the LEP and combined authority areas of Lancashire, Heart of the South West and the West Midlands. Three Local Digital Skills Partnerships have recently been launched in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, Cheshire & Warrington and the South East, taking these trailblazer partnerships to a total of six regions covering a population of more than ten million people.”

“The trailblazer Digital Skills Partnerships are committed to sharing data, tools and best practice with other regions, all of which will be fed into the local Digital Skills Partnerships Roadmap; a central guide and resource being developed over the Summer of 2019 for all LEPs and combined authorities to use.”

RSN commentary:

The formation of Local Digital Skills Partnerships is to be broadly welcomed. Research has shown that digital skills training needs to be more accessible to rural micro-businesses and sole traders, whilst workforce digital skills are a constraint for many larger rural SMEs. Tackling these issues will boost latent rural productivity and urgent action is required.

Report chapter: Housing, planning and work spaces

House of Lords recommendation:

Government should ensure new rural homes are built to the Lifetimes Homes Standard and Local Plans should allocate sufficient housing for older people

Government response:

“The government agrees that providing homes for older people living in rural areas is an important objective. The revised National Planning Policy Framework, published in July 2018, makes clear that the housing needs of all groups ... should be planned for. It also expects local planning authorities to use the government’s optional technical standards for accessible and adaptable housing, where

this would address an identified need for such properties. This is broadly equivalent to the Lifetime Homes standard. MHCLG will be publishing new planning guidance to help councils put these policies in place.”

RSN commentary:

Government should work with local authorities, Registered Social Landlords, and the house building industry so that many more homes get built to the Lifetimes Homes Standard. This is a more efficient approach than having to adapt homes later. The issue is particularly important for rural areas with their ageing populations.

House of Lords recommendation:

Government should remove all rural areas from the policy exempting small development sites from affordable housing provision

Government response:

“As the Committee heard, it is important to strike a balance between meeting affordable housing needs in rural areas and not undermining the viability of building homes. The revised National Planning Policy Framework allows authorities in 27 designated rural areas to set a reduced threshold for affordable housing contributions so that contributions may be secured from schemes of five units or fewer, where it can be shown that it is viable to do so.”

“The Framework also allows new entry-level exception sites to come forward in rural areas generally as a further means of providing affordable homes (and as an addition to the pre-existing policy supporting the creation of rural exception sites in appropriate circumstances). The government has committed to monitoring the impact of this policy in rural areas.”

RSN commentary:

The Government response is disappointing. A large proportion of village development sites have fewer than 10 dwellings and so are being impacted by this policy measure. There is considerable evidence that the small sites exemption policy is having a significant negative impact on the supply of affordable housing in rural areas.

By contrast, there is no known credible evidence which shows that requiring a quota of affordable housing (as was the case in the past) undermined housing development in rural areas. Indeed, many small scale developers say that their cash flow is (helpfully) more certain when some homes are going to Registered Social Landlords.

Affordable housing quotas should be allowed on all development sites at small rural settlements (or local authorities, who understand local needs, should be given discretion to require such quotas in their Local Plan areas). On site affordable housing contributions are essential, since off site financial contributions too frequently end up being used for housing some distance away, given a lack of site options in small rural settlements.

House of Lords recommendation:

Homes England should restore its rural housing target and issue grants that reflect high rural development costs

Government response:

“The agency works alongside key strategic partners in the affordable housing sector to best enable them to deliver effectively across the country, in cities, towns, and rural areas. Through the Shared Ownership and Affordable Homes Programme, Homes England works with a variety of partners to provide grant funding for the development of affordable housing in rural areas. Bids are mainly assessed on a scheme by scheme basis, details of which are provided in the Shared Ownership and Affordable Homes Programme Prospectus.”

“Homes England has recently entered into strategic partnerships with some of the largest Housing Associations in order to manage its development programmes on a portfolio approach. All bids are assessed on value for money and on grant per home. Homes England recognises that scheme costs or the resources available to bidders will vary. There may be occasional instances where higher grant levels are required to facilitate the development and make homes affordable to prospective purchasers. Homes England will work with providers to ensure that, where more grant is required, a robust case can be presented to support approval.”

RSN commentary:

A specific rural target and grants programme – which used to exist – is certainly required, targeted at smaller settlements, to reflect the level of affordable housing need in villages and the challenge delivering at those locations. It is disappointing this is not acknowledged in the programme structure of Homes England. We are aware that Homes England now offers a somewhat more flexible approach to grant levels, which is positive, though the agency’s application of this approach seems rather uneven across its operating areas. Higher development costs remain a frequent issue at small rural sites.

It is very important indeed that support is given to specialist rural Registered Social Landlords who are usually the ones who will take on the time-consuming, complex and riskier small-scale rural projects.

Where they operate across rural geography, the new strategic partners should be required to demonstrate their commitment to rural areas. Homes England should appraise this as part of the process of granting partner status.

House of Lords recommendation:

Government should consider taxation reforms to incentivise land for rural exception sites

Government response:

“The government does not currently have plans to grant tax reliefs such as full Capital Gains Tax relief for land sales to Rural Exception Sites. Tax reliefs have an Exchequer cost, and the government considers that the extent to which such reliefs would incentivise the sale of land to Rural Exception Sites is uncertain.”

RSN commentary:

A more positive signal from Government would help, at least indicating its willingness to explore whether tax reliefs (to incentivise rural landowners to release more land for affordable housing) could work cost effectively and to test the uncertainty that is referred to. Rural exception sites are an important means for bringing forward affordable housing development in small settlements and they have potential to achieve more.

House of Lords recommendation:

Government should establish an inquiry to examine fundamental issues around rural land value increases arising from planning permissions

Government response:

"The Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee recently held an inquiry into land value capture and the government responded on 29 November 2018. The government recognises there is scope for central and local government to claim a greater proportion of land value and is committed to using existing mechanisms of land value capture as effectively as possible."

"The government has already introduced major reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework to help local authorities capture land value for affordable housing and infrastructure. The government is also bringing forward further reforms to the Community Infrastructure Levy and Section 106. The government has committed to report back to the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee on progress with the reforms by the end of 2019."

RSN commentary:

We look forward to reading the Government's progress report on its current reforms, though they seem rather modest in relation to the scale and fundamental nature of the issue raised by the Select Committee report.

House of Lords recommendation:

Government funding for Community Land Trusts should be consolidated for the longer term

Government response:

"The government notes the Committee's views in relation to the Community Housing Fund which is currently scheduled to close in March 2020. It will consider carefully all proposals to extend the scheme beyond March 2020 but decisions on funding for 2020/21 onwards are a matter for the next Spending Review."

RSN commentary:

Short term funding is not helpful when community-led housing projects can take years to be delivered. It is to be hoped that funding beyond 2020 is announced soon to provide some certainty. This should include a dedicated sum allocated for rural projects, thus meeting the original objective for the Community Housing Fund.

House of Lords recommendation:

The Right to Buy, which has depleted the rural affordable housing stock, should be suspended or made voluntary in specific locations

Government response:

"Where homes in rural areas are sold under the Right to Buy, in designated rural areas, landlords can impose a covenant to ensure that they can be resold only to someone who lives or works in the

local area. Following the reinvigoration of the Right to Buy in 2012, local authorities were able for the first time to use receipts from additional sales for new affordable housing.”

“The government does not disaggregate the data for Right to Buy sales and replacements by rural area. Over 140,000 affordable homes, however, have been provided in rural local authorities in England since April 2010 while, since 2015, over 10 per cent of additional affordable homes have been delivered in settlements with a population of fewer than 3,000. Furthermore, Homes England has dedicated rural housing champions in each of its operating areas, who work actively across the rural housing sector.”

RSN commentary:

The policy changes referred to above amount to modest steps in the right direction. However, figures show that in rural areas for every 8 homes sold under the Right to Buy only 1 replacement home is built. Local housing authorities should be able to retain 100% of the proceeds from Right to Buy sales, enabling them to reinvest in and replenish their areas’ affordable housing stock.

House of Lords recommendation:

Delay implementing the Housing Association Right to Buy in rural areas until it is clear how replacement properties will be built in the same locality

Government response:

“The Voluntary Right to Buy is currently being tested through the Midlands Pilot, including the replacement of the properties sold. Housing associations have the discretion to choose not to sell properties in rural areas. A full evaluation of the pilot will be published in autumn 2020 after the pilot concludes.”

RSN commentary:

We await the evaluation, but agree that rural implementation should only be considered after the mechanism is clear to ensure the local replacement of sold properties. If housing association stock is simply lost from rural settlements the already difficult situation on affordability will worsen considerably.

House of Lords recommendation:

National planning guidance should be strengthened to stop planning authorities designating some villages as ‘unsustainable communities’ for development

Government response:

“The government welcomes the Committee’s recognition of the support which the revised National Planning Policy Framework offers to the rural economy and housing. The Framework already makes clear that policies should identify opportunities for villages to grow and thrive, especially where this will support local services. As rural areas vary considerably in character, the government believes that local planning authorities and communities are best placed to decide how to reflect this in their local and neighbourhood plans.”

RSN commentary:

Designating villages as unsuitable for development is not considered to be good practice. However, the Government's response is supported and policy wording should be for local planning authorities to decide based on their local knowledge.

Report chapter: Access to skills and business support

House of Lords recommendation:

The Business Productivity Review should be rural proofed

Government response:

"The Business Productivity Review will benefit small firms wherever they are based and because the proportion of small firms is higher in rural areas, it should have greater impact in these. Through the Business Productivity Review, the government has explored what actions could be most effective in improving the productivity and growth of businesses, including how to spread best practice of our most productive firms to those in the long tail."

"There appears to be more variation between individual businesses, rather than between, regions, sectors, and sizes. This and the untapped productivity potential amongst large parts of the UK business population further underpins the rationale for focusing specifically on firm-level factors. £56 million was announced at Budget to deliver some of the actions of the Business Productivity Review. This includes £11 million for the Small Business Leadership programme, £20 million to strengthen sectoral networks, and £25 million for Knowledge Transfer Partnerships. These initiatives will be accessible to all businesses in both urban and rural areas. The full report will be published in due course."

RSN commentary:

While it may be true that the main variation in productivity is that between individual firms, this does not mean that the need to rural proof policy development becomes irrelevant. How the policy initiatives resulting from this review are made accessible to rural based businesses requires specific consideration to ensure that they benefit.

House of Lords recommendation:

Local co-operation is needed to improve rural provision of public transport to educational institutions

Government response:

"DfT encourages education institutions, local authorities and bus service providers to cooperate on exploring public transport solutions for getting students to local education institutions through the Total Transport principles. These principles involve integrating the transport services provided by different operators and require all transport operators to work together to maximise the transport opportunities provided to passengers in their areas."

"As far as compulsory education is concerned, all local authorities have a statutory duty to provide free home to school travel for eligible pupils together with a discretionary power to provide free home to school travel for children who do not have a statutory eligibility. It is for the local authority

to decide how to meet this duty. The local authority might, for example, provide a dedicated school bus, a taxi, or a pass to travel on a public service bus.”

“The national guidance for the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund recommends that education providers work with other local institutions and the local authority to agree a common approach where appropriate and this would include discussions around transport solutions. It enables them to make decisions and arrangements which best match local needs and circumstances.”

“DfE and DfT are currently preparing a joint proposal for discounted public transport for apprentices. They are keen to work with stakeholders to address how we can best ensure that young people are not deterred from taking up apprenticeship opportunities due to travel costs.”

RSN commentary:

This response fails to address the central issue. It has become compulsory for young people aged 16 to 18 to attend education or training of some sort. However, statutory free travel (funded by Government) is still only for those aged up to 16. The two policies are now misaligned. Rural local authorities, following massive cuts to their budgets, simply cannot generally afford to offer non-statutory free or discounted travel for 16 to 18-year olds, however much they might wish to do so. The contrast with London and many urban centres is stark. Government should raise the statutory age for free travel to education or training to 18 and should fully fund this policy change.

The proposal referred to, for discounted travel on public transport for apprentices, is welcome in principle, although many rural apprentices will not have a public transport option available to them.

House of Lords recommendation:

Government should seek long term funding and more comprehensive coverage for Wheels to Work schemes

Government response:

“The government agrees that independent schemes such as Wheels to Work can play an important part in the transport mix for people – especially young people – living in rural areas by helping those who might otherwise be restricted from accessing work or training opportunities by the lack of personal transport. The government welcomes the recent launch of ‘Wheels 2 Work UK’ (W2W UK), a charitable company set up on 1 April 2019 to award grants to support the development of a national network of sustainable Wheels to Work schemes.”

RSN commentary:

The evolution of the (previous and folded) Wheels 2 Work Association to become a new charity with ambitions for more comprehensive coverage of W2W schemes is welcome. We look forward to hearing more about its work plans and the grant support it can offer, as soon as that information becomes available.

House of Lords recommendation:

Skills Advisory Panels must better coordinate the skills system and LEP Local Industrial Strategies should include a focus on rural skills

Government response:

“The influence of Skills Advisory Panels will be strengthened by providing a high quality analysis of local labour markets and skills needs across the country. In December last year, the Education Secretary announced funding of £75,000 to support each Skills Advisory Panel to build its analytical capability. This funding has now been allocated to all LEPs and mayoral combined authorities. Skills Advisory Panels are important players to ensure Local Industrial Strategies reflect the skills needs of their area. Their analysis will support those strategies and they will promote interventions to provide the skilled labour force local employers need. Individuals can access help to meet the costs of participating in training.”

“The 16 to 19 Bursary Fund is allocated to schools, colleges and other education and training providers to support young people who are disadvantaged with the costs associated with attending education or training. The fund is often used to support travel costs. On 28 February 2019, DfE launched a consultation on the allocations methodology for the 16 to 19 Discretionary Bursary Fund, including seeking views on whether the methodology should incorporate a travel element, and if so, whether distance to travel and rurality should be included.”

RSN commentary:

The local Skills Advisory Panels have potential to bring real benefit. We hope their analyses will identify any particular labour market needs of rural based businesses and that, subsequently, these will be taken into account by their LEPs.

It is important that the Discretionary Bursary Fund takes account of the particular travel challenges faced by some rural students. Many face long or complex journeys, not to mention infrequent or non-existent transport services. Research shows that this constrains the study ambitions of some rural students, who cannot access their preferred courses.

House of Lords recommendation:

Government should review the impact of small business and rural rate relief on rural pubs, shops and other businesses

Government response:

“The government keeps all taxes and reliefs under review. Since Budget 2016, the government has introduced reforms and measures worth more than £13 billion to business over the next five years. This includes the switch to CPI indexation, worth almost £6 billion to all ratepayers, and a £435 million package of support announced at the 2017 Spring Budget for ratepayers facing the steepest rises in bills following the 2017 revaluation, on top of the £3.6 billion Transitional Relief scheme.”

“The £13 billion package also includes the retail discount announced by the Chancellor at the 2018 Budget that provides eligible retail businesses with a rateable value under £51,000 with a third off their business rates bill. This generous measure will provide support to many pubs, shops, and other retail businesses (including garden centres) in rural communities.”

RSN commentary:

We recognise that rate relief contributes to the viability of many small rural businesses. We also recognise that many businesses in rural town high streets need assistance. Measures to extend business rate relief are supported, though they must be fully funded by central Government. A local authority should not be penalised if its area contains a high proportion of eligible businesses.

House of Lords recommendation:

Government should review the availability and sustainability of ATMs in rural areas

Government response:

“The Payment Systems Regulator regulates LINK, the scheme which runs the UK’s ATM network, and is monitoring ATM market developments closely. The Regulator has used its powers to hold LINK to account over LINK’s public commitments to maintain the broad geographic spread of ATMs in the UK.”

“LINK has put in place specific arrangements to protect remote free-to-use ATMs one kilometre or further from the next nearest free-to-use ATM and has enhanced its Financial Inclusion Programme by significantly boosting the funding available to ATMs in the most deprived areas of the UK.”

RSN commentary:

It is important that Government and its Payment Systems Regulator maintain a close oversight on this issue and intervene if necessary. Evidence indicates that the number of free-to-use ATMs has declined recently (including in rural areas), coinciding with a cut in the transaction payment that is received by the bank hosting the ATM. Access to cash is an issue of growing concern for both rural residents and businesses.

House of Lords recommendation:

Individual post offices should receive a realistic (higher) payment when handling cash withdrawal and deposit transactions on behalf of banks

Government response:

“Since its introduction, the Banking Framework has substantially increased basic banking volumes in Post Office branches, with an increase of 7 per cent for cash withdrawals and 22 per cent for cash deposits. This growth is set to continue, driven in part by continued bank closures. The Post Office has recently renegotiated Banking Framework 2, with the overall aim of rebalancing fees charged by the Post Office to banks to carry out banking transactions on their behalf. This was desirable not only for the long-term sustainability of banking services across the post office network, but also to ensure that any increase in revenues from banking services is adequately shared with postmasters. Banking Framework 2.0 will take effect from January 2020.”

“Under the new agreement the Post Office has agreed a significant increase to the fees that it will receive from the banks for processing transactions. The Post Office’s overall income through Banking Framework 2 will only increase further as transaction volumes continue to grow. The Post Office will double and, in some cases, treble the rate agents receive for deposits. It will pay the increased rates from October 2019, a quarter before the new Banking Framework is implemented, as a gesture of goodwill to postmasters. This will ensure that local businesses and communities can continue to access vital banking services in post office branches up and down the country for years to come.”

RSN commentary:

We welcome the new agreement (Banking Framework 2). It is important that Post Office Limited receives a realistic commercial fee for providing this service to the banks and it is crucial that a fair share of the fee is passed on to individual post offices. Those operating post offices deserve a sum

which properly reflects the time and effort involved handling banking transactions. This will help ensure that the much-valued rural post office network is made more stable and sustainable.

House of Lords recommendation:

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund should provide a source of investment funding for rural businesses seeking to grow

Government response:

“The UK Shared Prosperity Fund will focus on the foundations of productivity, including the business environment.”

“The government recognises the importance of providing stakeholders with an opportunity to contribute their views on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. As such, the government will publish a public consultation on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. This will provide an opportunity for all interested parties, including rural communities, to provide their views on the Fund directly to the government. Final decisions are due to be made following Spending Review.”

RSN commentary:

The EU LEADER programme has clearly shown the value of providing grant funding to enable small rural businesses to grow and invest. Although programme management could undoubtedly be simplified, the evaluation was broadly positive about its impacts. That lesson should be taken forward by developing a similar grant fund facility in future from within the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

House of Lords recommendation:

LEP Local Industrial Strategies should enable targeted support to rural businesses

Government response:

“LEPs and mayoral combined authorities can consider the provision of business support as part of the ‘business environment’ foundation of their Local Industrial Strategy. The government has encouraged places to focus in particular on how their Local Industrial Strategy will support firms in rural areas to:

- scale-up and grow through increasing take up of external finance; building capability to access domestic and international markets; building an innovation culture; accessing and retaining talent.
- improve firm level productivity.
- navigate and access business support available across the public and private sector.

Each LEP also runs a Growth Hub, which bring together national and local business support and make it accessible to all businesses in all areas.”

RSN commentary:

It is important that LEPs make particular effort to target rural businesses for support, recognising this may require some additional effort. The smallest businesses, away from population centres, can be hard to reach. Specific assistance should be put in place for support organisations which can advise rural entrepreneurs and SMEs. Those organisations need to be trusted by businesses and knowledgeable about the rural context.

Report chapter: Delivering essential services at the local level

House of Lords recommendation:

Public funding cuts have had a significant impact on rural bus provision

Government response:

“Most public funding for local bus services is provided through a block grant to authorities in England from MHCLG. Ultimately it is for local authorities, working in partnership with their communities, to identify the right transport solutions that meet the challenges faced in their areas, and deliver the greatest benefits for their communities with the funding streams that are available to them. They are also encouraged to utilise the tools in the Bus Services Act 2017 to help improve rural bus services. These include the ability for local authorities to work more effectively with bus operators through advanced quality partnerships or enhanced partnership schemes, and the potential to establish a system of franchising.”

“More broadly, as part of the 2018/19 local government finance settlement, the government responded to a number of councils’ concerns over rural services funding by increasing the Rural Services Delivery Grant to £81 million. The 2019/20 settlement maintained the Grant at the same increased level. This recognises the extra costs of providing services in rural communities.”

RSN commentary:

After years of budget cuts local authorities have had no option but to take difficult decisions about which public services to stop funding. Since they must continue funding statutory services, the impacts have inevitably fallen hardest on non-statutory provision such as subsidising uncommercial bus routes. The result has been measured by the Campaign for Better Transport, with hundreds of shire bus routes either withdrawn altogether or in some way scaled back.

The Transport Act 1985 needs to be amended so that rather than just requiring local authorities to identify what bus services are not commercially provided to meet social needs, also requires them to take action to meet those needs. Such a change should be fully funded by the Government specifically for the provision of such services.

The £81 million Rural Services Delivery Grant is, of course, welcome. However, it does not nearly compensate for the extra costs faced by rural local authorities across England and across the range of their service provision.

House of Lords recommendation:

Government should seek to develop a ‘single transport investment pot’, learning lessons from the Total Transport Pilots

Government response:

“In terms of funding, strategic policy making authorities are required to cooperate with each other and other bodies when preparing policies which address cross boundary strategic matters such as transport and should consider the distribution of funding streams as part of this. The National Planning Policy Framework also sets out that as part of the plan making process, authorities will need to work alongside infrastructure providers to identify infrastructure requirements, including for public transport and the opportunities for addressing these.”

“Total Transport involves integrating transport services currently commissioned by different central and local government agencies and provided by different operators. Total Transport has the potential to greatly improve the efficiency and delivery of road transport services to local people. It, however, requires all transport providers to work together to maximise the use of the vehicles so that more transport opportunities can be provided to passengers.”

RSN commentary:

There is undoubtedly scope to take forward lessons from the Total Transport Pilots, which sought to make better use of existing resources, not least by pooling vehicles used in different sectors e.g. education, social services and health. At the very least, Government should pump prime similar schemes to the Total Transport Pilots, providing an investment pot which is available to both local and health authorities.

Local NHS Trusts and Education Authorities need to be integrated with the Total Transport concept to bring things like non-emergency transport into scope. School Transport is also not something that should be planned independently from mainstream public transport.

House of Lords recommendation:

Clinical Commissioning Group (NHS) funding allocations should take account of extra service delivery costs in sparsely populated areas

Government response:

“NHS England is responsible for decisions on the weighted capitation formula used to allocate resources between Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs), a process that is independent of Government. NHS England take advice from the independent Advisory Committee on Resource Allocation, a group of academics and other experts. The allocation to each CCG is informed by the estimation of the relative health needs of local areas. Funding is based on a complex assessment of factors such as demography, morbidity, deprivation, and the unavoidable cost of providing services in different areas. Over the past two years, the Advisory Committee on Resource Allocation has been considering the evidence for any additional adjustments relating to the costs of providing healthcare in remote areas. Following this, the Committee has endorsed the introduction of a new community services formula that has the effect of better recognising needs in some rural, coastal and remote areas that on average tend to have much older populations. Further detail on the Advisory Committee’s findings and recommendations can be found in the note on this year’s allocations to CCGs published by NHS England.”

RSN commentary:

The NHS England publication on CCG allocations for 2019/20 describes the main change to the community services formula as giving more weight to age and deprivation profiles, which may benefit some rural areas with older populations. A further likely change to that formula next year, to account for travel time on home visits, could also prove beneficial.

At the same time we are disappointed that, more generally, NHS England cites a lack of usable, consistent evidence for making further allocation changes to reflect rural costs. We hope it will continue to seek out usable evidence and will involve the National Centre for Rural Health and Care.

The proportion of the population that is old or very old is significantly higher in rural than in urban areas. Since the number of older people is by far the largest driver of demand for NHS services, it seems odd that CCG allocations do not more obviously reflect this. The ACRA committee and NHS

England should revisit the CCG allocation formula with a view to making it better reflect actual demand for NHS services in different areas.

House of Lords recommendation:

Further steps should be taken to improve rural access to health services through multi-use health centres and digital solutions

Government response:

“The NHS’s Long Term Plan commits to delivering fully integrated community-based health care. This will be supported through the ongoing training and development of multidisciplinary teams in primary and community hubs. All 42 Sustainability and Transformation Partnerships including those in rural areas, have produced local estates strategies for the first time setting out how they will transform their estate in support of delivering ambitions in the NHS’s Long Term Plan and benefitting patients.”

“In April 2018 NHS Digital published a digital inclusion guide for health and social care aimed at local health and care organisations to help them to take practical steps to support digital inclusion in their communities, including those in rural areas who are more likely to be digitally excluded. DHSC is working closely with the DCMS to ensure that health and care needs are taken into account in national digital infrastructure policy. Two test beds under DCMS’s 5G programme are focused on improving access, and the 5G programme itself will address rural connectivity.”

RSN commentary:

It is important that the objective within the NHS Long Term Plan to create fully integrated community-based health care – which we support – is turned into reality and in ways that bring improved access to non-urgent health care for rural residents. Since many rural communities live far from a main hospital, they stand to benefit considerably if more services are available at local health centres or community hospitals.

Digital solutions (including telehealth) also have considerable potential in rural areas and there are some good examples of its application. If all rural NHS patients are to benefit, one requirement is urgently to address outstanding issues with rural digital connectivity.

House of Lords recommendation:

Government should introduce a rural cost adjustment into funding for mental health services

Government response:

“CCGs are responsible for ensuring adequate access to mental health services locally, including early interventions. Funding allocations to CCGs, including those covering rural areas, vary to meet the needs of local populations, including mental health need and the needs of remote or sparsely populated areas. These allocations are determined by a formula managed for the NHS by the independent Advisory Committee on Resource Allocation.”

“The Advisory Committee is implementing a refreshed mental health and learning disabilities formula which takes account of available data and there are a range of adjustments made in the core CCG allocations formula to account for the fact that the costs of providing health care may vary between rural and urban areas.”

“In 2017/18, all CCGs met the Mental Health Investment Standard, by which they must increase mental health investment by at least their overall increase in funding. CCGs are also best placed to decide on how this investment should be used to meet the mental health needs of their populations living in rural areas.”

RSN commentary:

Changes being implemented to the mental health and learning disabilities element of the CCG allocations formula are to utilise newly available data. This is not a rural adjustment: some rural areas may gain and others may lose from the change. NHS England states that the highest funding allocations are made to large urban centres.

There is an urgent need to remedy the absence of any adjustment within the formula to cover extra service delivery costs in rural areas. An increased policy focus on mental health and wellbeing is welcome, but fair funding is needed for provision to rural communities.

Rural Services Network
October, 2019