

Meeting of the Rural Unitary Councils Community Group on Monday 28th of September 2015.

Attending.	
Name	Organisation
Cllr Cecilia Motley	Shropshire Council/RSN Chair
Cllr Roger Begy	Rutland Council
Cllr Neil Butters	Bath & North East Somerset
Cllr Les Kew	Bath & North East Somerset
Cllr Roger Phillips	Herefordshire
Cllr Rachel Bailey	Cheshire East
Matthew Barton	Lead Officer - Cornwall
Helen Briggs, Chief Executive	Rutland Council
Graham Biggs	RSN
David Inman	RSN
Apologies received:-	
Cllr Jane Evison	East Riding Council
Cllr Jonathan Owen	East Riding Council
Cllr Eveleigh Moore-Dutton	Cheshire West & Chester

The group was made up of eleven authorities:- Bath and NE Somerset, Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Cornwall, East Riding, Herefordshire, North Lincolnshire, North Somerset, Redcar and Cleveland, Rutland, and Shropshire.

(of the other Unitaries:- Isle of Wight, South Gloucestershire, Telford and Wrekin, West Berkshire, could be approached.)

The meeting had been convened to think about the continuation of the Group after two years of operational experience allowing the membership to decide that if the Group continued what roll was it likely to be most successful in undertaking.

It was decided as follows:-

- (a) Future of the Group.

The Group it was felt had been successful in some areas and less successful in others. Involvement of officers at a time of continual upheaval because of the austerity measures had been a clear problem. On the other hand it was felt the Group had been able to give some profile nationally and inside the RSN and the LGA to some issues such as broadband and mobile phone coverage.

Roger Begy wishes to vacate the Chair at this stage but felt the work should continue. Helen Briggs was however willing to continue as Lead Officer.

The members present had a very full discussion on this. It was decided the Group been able to carve out a meaningful role in an area not covered by other groups.

It was unanimously decided the Group would continue.

(b) Workings of the Group.

Again long discussion took place. It was decided as follows:-

- (1) The group would, in future, work on the basis that an overview document would be arrived at on two topics each 6 months to enable a suitable paper to be sent to the appropriate Government Department; to the LGA: to the Efra Select Committee, and to the Rural Services APPG and the Parliamentary Fair Share Group of MPs and possibly press releases issued on the areas selected.
- (2) The Members would meet every 6 months to formally receive this documentation and the reaction to it and to decide what areas should be considered in the following 6 months.
- (3) Drafts of documentation would be shared with all members through their Chief Executives and Leaders to allow all member authorities to input. Helen Briggs would have the final say on the drafting.
- (4) The group would continue with its current Broadband, Finance and Transport Officer Working Groups but acknowledged that any output was likely to be that from the Lead Officer if other member authorities did not respond to issues.
- (5) The Group would be given one of the 4 annual Rural Services All Party Parliamentary Groups to present its Agenda and its identified problem areas and concerns.
- (6) The Group would have two member meetings each year; normally one around this APPG; the second around either the LGA Conference in July or the RSN Rural Conference in September. Attendance by officers at these meetings would also be welcome.
- (7) The Chair would in future rotate between members. (Until the next meeting it would be held on an interim basis by the RSN Chair).

(c) Current Issues.

It was decided that two papers would be prepared before the Comprehensive Spending Review presentation which would be presented to the Treasury.

They would be on the following matters:-

- (1) The continuing threat to many rural areas and their businesses being caused by the continuing foreseen lack of broadband and adequate mobile phone services and the impact this would have on the economy and growth of these rural areas and the accumulative impact this would have on the English national economy.**
- (2) The compounding impact on rural Health and Well-Being services (which while already very expensive to operate because of rurality - a fact inadequately reflected in government grant) of two recent government decisions in relation to:-**
 - (i) The announcement of a Fair Living Wage measures.**
 - (ii) The 30 minute care visit rule.**

(d) Devolution

Cornwall kindly agreed to undertake a presentation to the Group on the Devolution Services Package offered to them by Government and the foreseen impact in relation to the County.

It was decided to hold a special seminar, available to all RSN members and prospective Unitary Group members, which Bath agreed to host, to facilitate this presentation and allow full cross authority discussion.

(e) Consultations

Cornwall thought it was vital local authorities took up the opportunity to comment on Government consultations particularly now as Devolution thinking may be coming forth. The County kindly agreed to circulate all their draft consultation responses to assist other member authorities across this Group.

Time and date of next meeting to be arranged.