
Agenda

SPARSE Rural Services Network Special Interest Group meeting

Hosted: Online via Zoom
Date: Monday, 12th October 2020
Time: 11:00am – 12:30pm

1. **Attendance & Apologies**
2. **Notes from the previous SPARSE Rural meeting.** (Attachment 1)
Held on 27th January 2020 to consider any relevant updates and approve the minutes.
3. **Notes from the previous RSN Executive meeting.** (Attachment 2)
Held on 2nd July 2020 to consider any relevant updates.
4. **Notes from the previous RSN Executive.** (Attachment 3)
Held on 28th September 2020 to consider any relevant updates.
5. **Presentation on Local Government Finance by Adrian Jenkins, Founder and Chief Analyst at Pixel Financial Management.**
6. **Any Other Business.**
The next SPARSE Rural meeting is scheduled for Monday, 25th January 2020.

Providing a voice for rural communities and service providers

David Inman, Director
Kilworthy Park, Tavistock, Devon PL19 0BZ
Tel: 01822 813693

www.rsnonline.org.uk email: david.inman@sparse.gov.uk twitter: [@rsnonline](https://twitter.com/rsnonline)

Notes of last SPARSE Rural Sub-Special Interest Group meeting

Title:	Rural Services Network Special Interest Group
Date:	Monday 27 January 2020
Venue:	Westminster Room, 8th Floor, 18 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ

Attendance

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

Item	Decisions and Actions
------	-----------------------

1. Attendance & Apologies.

The Chair, Cllr Cecilia Motley welcomed colleagues to the meeting. Apologies were noted. (The list of attendees/apologies can be found in **Appendix A**)

Cllr Motley outlined the plans for the day.

2. Notes from the previous SPARSE Rural meeting. (Attachment 1)

Notes from the previous SPARSE Rural meeting which took place on the 24th of June 2019 were accepted as a true record.

3. Notes from the previous RSN Executive. (Attachment 2)

Notes from the previous RSN Executive meeting which took place on the 13th of January 2020 were accepted as a true record.

Members noted overall discussions from the recent meeting of the Executive including conversations about the Rural Strategy campaign.

The group noted progress on the Rural Market Towns Group and were reminded to publicise the initiative through their own contacts. So far there had been a gratifying uptake of the initiative.

4. Provisional Settlement 2020/21 and Fair Funding Review – Update.

(a) Provisional Settlement 2020/21

Mr Graham Biggs provided colleagues with updates on the provisional settlement for 2020/21 and the Fair Funding Review. He apologised that it had been difficult to nail down the analysis of the funding per head difference between urban and rural areas

Providing a voice for rural communities and service providers

David Inman, Director
Kilworthy Park, Tavistock, Devon PL19 0BZ
Tel: 01822 813693
www.rsnonline.org.uk email: admin@sparse.gov.uk twitter: @rsnonline

arising from the Provisional Settlement. Changes to authority structures had made it difficult to obtain the information on a like for like format since the consultation.

Members noted that the provisional settlement for next year is likely to be similar to this year, however an extra billion pounds per year is expected for social care for the period of this Government. The 2% adult social care precept and the reduction in the maximum increase in core Band D council tax from 2.99% to 1.99% were noted.

Over the period from 2015/16 to 2020/21 Government Funded Spending Power per head for rural areas had decreased by 7.36% compared to urban at a reduction of 6.65%. For 2020/21, based on the Provisional Settlement, the gap between rural and urban GFSP per head was 42% (some 5% wider than in 2015/16).

The Improved Better Care Fund shows a difference of around a 21% gap between urban and rural per head. Members noted differences in council tax which also show a gap of over £105 per head.

The fundamental position remained that rural areas get less government grant per head, pay more Council Tax per head but receive fewer services, and indeed the rural/urban funding gap was getting worse.

Mr Biggs informed members that the Pixel Report would be published within the RSN Bulletin the following day.

(b) Fair Funding Review

Mr Biggs summarised the background to the Fair Funding Review and business rate retention.

He confirmed that there had never been any intention for authorities to keep 100% of all business rates generated in their area although business rate growth would be retained between re-sets.

Should income exceed assessed needs, this would be taken and distributed to those who's assessed needs exceeded their income. Members noted that legislation would be required to enable retention of 100% and therefore the current position was for 75% retention. It was felt unlikely that this would change in the near future given that the Government has announced a fundamental review of the whole business rates system.

Mr Biggs referred to a new needs-based formula to determine each council's position and therefore drive the redistribution of retained business rates. Initial findings showed that rural areas collectively could be in a positive position from this. Members heard that worryingly, certain features could impact negatively on the most sparsely populated District Councils/Borough Councils.

The Group noted the use of data to assess added costs of travel within areas for services such as refuse collections and providing certain services to householders in their own homes such as social care. It was accepted that allowance should be made for the fact that remoteness has market failure consequences. This travel time data was initially going to be added to the Foundation Formula. Now it appears that this could only be included within the Area Cost Adjustment (ACA) element of the

Providing a voice for rural communities and service providers

David Inman, Director
Kilworthy Park, Tavistock, Devon PL19 0BZ
Tel: 01822 813693

www.rsnonline.org.uk email: admin@sparse.gov.uk twitter: @rsnonline

Foundation Formula. ACA was created to recognise some geographical features, which is only a part of the full Foundation Formula.

Members noted that Pixel (RSN Finance Consultants) are currently working hard to look at this in detail and a meeting of the Fair Share group would be called in February to discuss this. There are now many new MPs who may not currently be aware of these issues and it was agreed that it would be vital to push and flag these issues with them should the research done by Pixel show a potential problem.

Mr Biggs invited the group to share concerns. Members raised the following:

- The current formula is far too complicated;
- A short report summarising key points would be useful. Mr Biggs stated that Pixel would prepare a briefing document for SPARSE-Rural member authorities;
- Clarity of implications in terms of actual money differences between different types of councils would be vital in the report from the consultants;
- A clear demonstration showing that rural authorities will receive less allowance for rurality costs will enable MHCLG Ministers to consider their decisions on the fair funding review;
- Members noted uncertainty about possible changes to Ministerial responsibilities and the need to be prepared. Mr Biggs confirmed that this may be an issue but until a proper scale of the financial position is clear, RSN would need to continue to deal with current contacts including in MHCLG. Everything is dependant at this point on the data being produced by Pixel before any decisions on progress can be made;
- Members referred to the extra 2% chargeable for adult social care and whether this features within the funding formula. Mr Biggs acknowledged that this was the case within the Social Care Block and that it would be used when calculating needs of individual councils. Members noted plans for the green paper which would address personal funding contributions for adult social care. They acknowledged that it was too early to know the direction of the new government at this time but that there is a crisis in local authority funding for adult social care which needs to be urgently addressed;
- Members noted a definite pressure for district councils to merge together or to be re-organised into unitary councils. It was felt that the most rural sparse areas would be penalised because of a lack of knowledge and understanding in Westminster of real accessibility in delivery of services and actual travel times;
- Members were worried about rural deprivation not being given due weight.

Mr Biggs acknowledged major costs but said that there are also downfalls. He clarified the position on discretionary services between each kind of authority. The group noted the index of multiple deprivation scores on access to services and that urban issues are better indicated by the deprivation indicators.

Cllr Motley said that a clearer view would be seen once the data is received from Pixel.

Further information would be passed to colleagues in due course.

5. **Budget Report as at 1st January 2020.** (Attachment 3)

Mr Biggs informed members that a balance of circa £12k was expected providing all

Providing a voice for rural communities and service providers

David Inman, Director
Kilworthy Park, Tavistock, Devon PL19 0BZ
Tel: 01822 813693

www.rsonline.org.uk email: admin@sparse.gov.uk twitter: @rsonline

subscriptions are paid. The position is the same as previous and outstanding subscriptions were being chased.

Mr Biggs confirmed no anticipation of fund-flow issues for the forthcoming year.

Members recalled the last increase to subscriptions in order to pay for Senior Posts at market rate in due course and this should still be achievable. The Chair expressed her gratitude at the 'voluntary' work of the Chief Executive and the Corporate Director and, indeed, for all the hard work of all RSN employees etc.

6. Any other business.

There was no other business.

The next meeting will take place on Monday 1st of June 2020.

Providing a voice for rural communities and service providers

David Inman, Director
Kilworthy Park, Tavistock, Devon PL19 0BZ
Tel: 01822 813693
www.rsnonline.org.uk email: admin@sparse.gov.uk twitter: @rsnonline

Appendix A

Attendance

Cllr Cecilia Motley	RSN
Cllr Chris Mapey	East Suffolk Council
Cllr Harry St John	West Oxfordshire District Council
Cllr Mark Whittington	Lincolnshire County Council
Cllr Mary Robinson	Eden District Council
Cllr Michael Rickman	Harborough District Council
Cllr Owen Bierley	West Lindsey District Council
Cllr Peter Schwier	Braintree District Council
Cllr Peter Stevens	West Suffolk Council
Cllr Robert Heseltine	North Yorkshire County Council
Cllr Sue Tucker	Scarborough Borough Council
Cllr Trevor Thorne	Northumberland County Council
Cllr Virginia Taylor	Eden District Council
Cllr Yvonne Peacock	Richmondshire District Council
David Inman	RSN
Graham Biggs	RSN
Jeremy Savage	South Norfolk Council
Marina Di Salvatore	West Lindsey District Council
Neil Irving	North Yorkshire County Council
Fatima de Abreu	Local Government Association

Apologies

Cllr Ken Pollock	Worcestershire County Council
Adrian Welsh	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr Adam Paynter	Cornwall Council
Cllr Anthony Trollope-Bellew	Somerset and West Taunton Council
Cllr Daniel Cribbin	Daventry District Council
Cllr Donald Davies	North Somerset Council
Cllr Giles McNeill	West Lindsey District Council
Cllr Gill Heath	Staffordshire County Council
Cllr Gwilym Butler	Shropshire Council
Cllr Louise Richardson	Leicestershire County Council
Cllr Malcolm Brown	Cornwall Council
Cllr Margaret Squires	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr Richard Foss	South Hams District Council
Cllr Richard Sherras	Ribble Valley Borough Council
Cllr Richard Wright	North Kesteven District Council
Cllr Rob Waltham MBE	North Lincolnshire Council

Providing a voice for rural communities and service providers

David Inman, Director
 Kilworthy Park, Tavistock, Devon PL19 0BZ
 Tel: 01822 813693

www.rsonline.org.uk email: admin@sparse.gov.uk twitter: @rsonline

Cllr Ros Wyke	Mendip District Council
Cllr Rupert Reichold	East Northamptonshire Council
Cllr Sarah Butikofer	North Norfolk District Council
Cllr Stephen Arnold	Ryedale District Council
Dominie Dunbrook	North Devon Council
Gary Powell	Teignbridge District Council
Gary Taylor	South Holland District Council
Helen Harris	Leicestershire County Council
Jenny Poole	Cotswold District & West Oxfordshire District Councils
Katherine Fairclough	Cumbria County Council
Kathy O'Leary	Stroud District Council
Lorraine Gore	King's Lynn & West Norfolk Borough Council
Paul Henry	Suffolk County Council
Peter Wilding	Chichester District Council
Sally Nelson	North Devon Council
Stacey Burlet	Ryedale District Council
Tony Galloway	Ryedale District Council
Toyubur Rahman	Chichester District Council

Providing a voice for rural communities and service providers

David Inman, Director
 Kilworthy Park, Tavistock, Devon PL19 0BZ
 Tel: 01822 813693

www.rsonline.org.uk email: admin@sparse.gov.uk twitter: @rsonline



Minutes

SPARSE Rural and Rural Services Network Executive and Board of Director of the Rural Services Partnership Ltd meeting

Incorporating SPARSE Rural Members, Rural Assembly and Rural Services Partnership Members. All nominated members & officers of RSN are invited to attend this meeting.

Hosted: Online via Zoom
Date: Thursday, 2nd July 2020
Time: 3.15 pm

Attendance:

Cllr Cecilia Motley (Chair)	Shropshire Council / Rural Services Network
Graham Biggs	Rural Services Network
John Birtwistle	First Group
Kerry Booth	Rural Services Network
Martin Collett	English Rural Housing Association
Nik Harwood	Young Somerset
Cllr Gill Heath	Staffordshire County Council
David Inman	Rural Services Network
Cllr Adam Paynter	Cornwall Council
Cllr Roger Phillips	Herefordshire Council
Anna Price	Rural Business Group
Cllr Mary Robinson	Eden District Council
Cllr Sue Sanderson	Cumbria County Council
Cllr Jeremy Savage	South Norfolk Council
Cllr Peter Stevens	West Suffolk Council
Cllr Trevor Thorne	Northumberland County Council
Cllr Peter Thornton	South Lakeland District Council
Nadine Trout	Rural Services Network
Cllr Mark Whittington	Lincolnshire County Council

Apologies:

Cllr Robert Heseltine	North Yorkshire County Council
Cllr Rob Waltham MBE	North Lincolnshire Council

- Notes from the previous RSN Executive meeting held on 16th of March 2020.
(Attachment 1)

Agreed as a correct record.

Providing a voice for rural communities and service providers

Rural Services Network

Kilworthy Park, Tavistock, Devon PL19 0BZ

Tel: 01822 813693

www.rsonline.org.uk email: admin@sparse.gov.uk twitter: @rsonline



2. **Thoughts for the Future of the Network – report from Corporate Director.**

(Attachment 2, Attachment 2A)

A detailed paper was presented to the Executive from the RSN Corporate Director. The paper set out the current situation in relation to the Network. It set out perceived strengths and weaknesses.

The Executive agreed as follows:

Engagement with Member Councils

- (a) Strengthen the Nominated Member situation by establishing with all member authorities both a **Nominated Member and a Deputy**. If these nominees were not already on the authority's Cabinet, or Executive Arrangements, there would be a request for a Cabinet Member to also be involved - at least with the Annual Rural discussion meetings referred to in (c) below.
- (b) The establishment of an **'RSN Insider' publication** which would be sent out four or five times a year to those involved Members and to Key Officers. This would provide a full briefing on the Networks current activities.
- (c) A series of **Annual Rural Discussion Meetings** for each member authority would be introduced. These meetings would be conducted online and would involve a senior member of the RSN staff and the Nominated Member and Deputy, a Cabinet member, and at least one of the Key Officers. These meetings would seek to establish the Authority's rural views across the spectrum of the RSN's operation. This would include in respect of Fairer Funding (Sparse Rural members only), Rural Service Provision, Current RSN Campaigns, the Rural Economy and issues surrounding Rural Vulnerability and Disadvantage. Discussion would also take place at these meeting about the way in which member authorities dealt with Rural Issues and whether that had any individual special arrangements.
These Annual Rural Discussion Meetings would ensure annual input and discussion with all member authorities, facilitating RSN policy making. They would take place in addition to the current formal meetings, regional seminars, and the annual National Rural Conference in September.
- (d) There would be **annual requests to all member authorities for** specific named **'Key Liaison (Senior) Officers'** in relation to Public Relations, Democratic Services, Economic Activity, Public Health and Finance. We anticipate that this would allow some specialist work in these areas. All Management Board members, traditional cross section officer appointees and all Council Members would in the future also receive RSN service.

Towns and Parishes

Providing a voice for rural communities and service providers

Rural Services Network

Kilworthy Park, Tavistock, Devon PL19 0BZ

Tel: 01822 813693

www.rsnonline.org.uk email: admin@sparse.gov.uk twitter: @rsnonline



- 1) It was decided to try to recruit to the RSP Rural/Market Towns Group at least one Town within each member area - thus, hopefully, materially widening this emerging Grouping.
- 2) A system of local social & economic profile of our Principal Council's area to be established to support engagement with the Rural/Market Towns Group members in those areas.
- 3) The Executive at its next meeting will review the existing 'categories' of membership of the Rural/Market Towns Group.
- 4) The suggestion of creating an English Rural Parishes Group was not endorsed at this juncture. The issue would be considered further if the future role and responsibilities etc. of Parish Councils is set out in the Government's proposed Devolution White Paper.

Sounding Boards

Sounding Board surveys will be operated by the RSN at least twice a year focussed on Rural Strategy themes. The Sounding Boards will continue to operate at the levels of:

- Principal Councils in membership
- Parishes in RSN Community Group membership
- Rural/Market Towns Group
- Rural Small Business
- Rural Young People

3. RSN Budget Report. (Attachment 3)

The report was accepted, and new format agreed subject to the % of budget column being removed and a new column added to show variances to the original budget.

4. Rural Strategy Campaign Progress – report from Chief Executive. (Attachment 4)

The Chief Executive's report informed the Executive of the progress on implementing the agreed workplan to produce the Reinvigorating Rural: Realising the Vision document. It also outlined the proposed member consultation processes which were agreed.

The documents needed to reflect the impacts of COVID-19 set out in the papers for the next item on the Agenda.

The RSN Executive accepted that the policy asks (once determined) would form the basis of the RSN's representational work over the life of the current Parliament. The Chief Executive stressed that it was important that the document – especially in respect of the 'current policy context' and the 'policy asks' – was maintained as a 'live-document' and updated as things changed. Lobbying/representational work may

Providing a voice for rural communities and service providers

Rural Services Network

Kilworthy Park, Tavistock, Devon PL19 0BZ

Tel: 01822 813693

www.rsnonline.org.uk email: admin@sparse.gov.uk twitter: @rsnonline



be based on opportunities as they arise on individual topics in the various sections of the document. The budget had no expenditure in it for future financial years and that would need to be addressed.

5. COVID-19 Related Issues.

(a) Draft RSN Position Statements on various COVID-19 issues (Attachment 5)

This paper was agreed.

(b) For consideration as part of the Rural Strategy work - Assessment of Rural Issues and 'Asks' for a COVID-19 Recovery Plan (Attachment 6)

This paper was agreed for the purposes of the consultation with members referred to in Minute 5 above.

(c) General Discussion on the work of the RSN and member engagement 'during lockdown' (Attachment 7)

Kerry Booth outlined the different ways that RSN has been providing services to its members during lockdown, including online seminars, targeted surveys to feed into DEFRA on key issues such as the Rural Economy and Domestic Abuse, and an increased social media presence. The Executive noted the report.

6. National Rural Conference 2020 – report from Kerry Booth, Assistant Chief Executive. (Attachment 8)

Due to the pandemic, the National Rural Conference cannot take place in Cheltenham and is going to be moved online for this year. Kerry outlined the format for the event which will take place over the course of a week with a range of plenary and seminar sessions taking place online focusing on key issues relating to Revitalising Rural.

The Executive agreed the proposed format which they felt was a positive and exciting way forward.

7. Fairer Funding Review: Update.

The Chief Executive reminded members that due to the pandemic the Government had (again) postponed the Fair Funding/Needs and Resources Review. No new timetable had been set.

The move to 75% Business Rate Retention was now uncertain given both the impact of the pandemic and the fact that the Government is to carry out a fundamental review of Business Rates (again no timescales have been set).

Kerry Booth reported on the very successful and well attended recent Zoom Finance Seminar led by Adrian Jenkins (Pixel).

Providing a voice for rural communities and service providers

Rural Services Network

Kilworthy Park, Tavistock, Devon PL19 0BZ

Tel: 01822 813693

www.rsnonline.org.uk email: admin@sparse.gov.uk twitter: @rsnonline



The Chief Executive reported that he had recently commissioned a short piece of work from Pixel on the costs of 'remoteness'. Members agreed that it was important that the RSN continued to build and evidence the case for rurality costs being much more than travel time.

The Chief Executive referred to the announcement earlier that day on the government's new funding package for councils to help address COVID-19 pressures and cover lost income during the pandemic. He stated that the RSN would try to assess the impact (in terms of Council Tax and percentage of net budgets) of extra costs/lost income not covered by government support for rural areas.

8. Work of RSN and iEDO on LIS and rural economy opportunities – report from Nadine Trout, Member Development & Support Manager. (Attachment 9)

Work of RSN and iED on LIS and a proposed Rural Economy Opportunities Toolkit.

Nadine took the Executive through the proposed content of a Rural Economy Opportunities Toolkit. The Executive were supportive of the content with one member citing the importance of referencing agriculture, supply chains and Brexit in the toolkit.

It was agreed that the Rural Economy Opportunities Toolkit content be approved and the Member Development and Support Manager be tasked with launching the Toolkit in partnership with the iED (Institute of Economic Development), at the Rural Services Network National Conference in September 2020.

9. To note the Annual Report to the LGA. (Attachment 10)

This was an annual report for LGA purposes, but the Chairman commended the document saying it represented an excellent overview of the RSN's work. She asked that it be sent to members on a suitable occasion and included on the website.

10. Regional Seminars 2020 update.

North East & West Midlands Regional Seminars took place online on 19th May and 30th of June 2020 and were received well. The team will endeavour to continue organising meetings online for the foreseeable future where possible. It was agreed that face to face meetings were unlikely to be held in this calendar year.

The Chief Executive suggested, and the Executive agreed, that we would try to organise the SPARSE Rural and Rural Economy Group meetings (which were postponed earlier in the year) online via Zoom.

Event	Rescheduled Date	Format and Platform
East Midlands Regional Seminar	28.07.2020	Online via Zoom

Providing a voice for rural communities and service providers

Rural Services Network

Kilworthy Park, Tavistock, Devon PL19 0BZ

Tel: 01822 813693

www.rsnonline.org.uk email: admin@sparse.gov.uk twitter: @rsnonline



(Rural Skills & Education)		
National Rural Conference 2020	14 Monday 15 Tuesday 16 Wednesday 17 Thursday 18 Friday 09.2020	Online via Zoom and possibly other platforms
North West Regional Seminar (Rural Vulnerability)	05.10.2020	Online via Zoom
SPARSE Rural meeting	12.10.2020	Online via Zoom
Rural Economy Sub Group meeting	12.10.2020	Online via Zoom
Yorkshire Regional Seminar (Rural Housing)	02.11.2020	Online via Zoom
Rural Social Care & Health Sub Group	16.11.2020	Online via Zoom
RSN AGM	16.11.2020	Online via Zoom
Rural Assembly	16.11.2020	Online via Zoom

11. Any Other Business

The next RSN Executive is scheduled for Monday, 28th September 2020.

Providing a voice for rural communities and service providers

Rural Services Network

Kilworthy Park, Tavistock, Devon PL19 0BZ

Tel: 01822 813693

www.rsnonline.org.uk email: admin@sparse.gov.uk twitter: @rsnonline

Minutes

SPARSE Rural and Rural Services Network Executive and Board of Director of the Rural Services Partnership Ltd meeting

**Incorporating SPARSE Rural Members, Rural Assembly and
Rural Services Partnership Members. All nominated members & officers of RSN are invited to
attend this meeting.**

**Hosted: Online via Zoom
Date: Monday, 28th September 2020
Time: 11:15am – 2:30pm**

Attendance:

Cllr Cecilia Motley (Chair)	Shropshire Council / Rural Services Network
Graham Biggs	Rural Services Network
John Birtwistle	FirstGroup plc UK Bus Division
Cllr Malcolm Brown (attended on behalf of Cllr Adam Paynter)	Cornwall Council
Kerry Booth	Rural Services Network
Martin Collett	English Rural Housing Association
Nik Harwood	Young Somerset
Cllr Robert Heseltine	North Yorkshire County Council
David Inman	Rural Services Network
Cllr Roger Phillips	Herefordshire Council
Anna Price	Rural Business Group
Cllr Mary Robinson	Eden District Council
Cllr Sue Sanderson	Cumbria County Council
Cllr Peter Stevens	West Suffolk Council
Cllr Peter Thornton	South Lakeland District Council
Nadine Trout	Rural Services Network
Cllr Mark Whittington	Lincolnshire County Council

Apologies:

Cllr Gill Heath	Staffordshire County Council
Cllr Adam Paynter	Cornwall Council
Cllr Jeremy Savage	South Norfolk Council
Cllr Trevor Thorne	Northumberland County Council
Cllr Rob Waltham MBE	North Lincolnshire Council

Providing a voice for rural communities and service providers

1. Notes from the previous RSN Executive meeting held on 2nd July 2020.

(Attachment 1)

Agreed as a correct record.

Matters Arising:

- 1.1. The Devolution White Paper will be issued later in the year, or at the start of the New Year.
- 1.2. Some felt that the Fair Funding Review, which had been delayed once, would be further delayed with a 'hold over' LG settlement occurring for 21/22.
- 1.3. The Comprehensive Spending Review may now just be relating to the 1 year and not be the exercise spanning the life of the current Parliament as initially intended.
- 1.4. The Pixel study into 'remoteness' referred to in the minutes will begin shortly. Pixel will be contacting 4 or 5 authorities asking if they would like to participate and provide evidence of additional costs associated with remoteness.

2. Revitalising Rural: Realising the Vision. (Attachments 2 & 2A)

[Please click here to view all campaign documents¹](#)

The Chief Executive outlined the current situation. Apart from the Fair Funding document (which will be circulated to the RSN Executive members for approval when it becomes available) members expressed their approval both for the chapters and the campaigns approach.

There had been a strong response from RSN members and considerable involvement in the consultation from several members too. It is felt to be a substantial document but one that fully reflects member input.

Going forward to keep the document alive and current it will be important to incorporate on-going consideration of all chapters into all appropriate RSN meetings. It was recognised that keeping the document updated and current would provide a constant challenge as matters move on quickly and this needed to be a rolling plan to reflect this. A Dissemination Plan is being developed and discussions held with Lexington about media coverage. RSN Executive members would be kept updated on progress.

Members congratulated the officers and Brian Wilson on what is a truly comprehensive document. They felt it had been produced with a high standard achieved in all chapters.

Suggestions made:

¹ <https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/revitalising-rural>

- It was felt the word 'reform' might be an appropriate term to use in some areas as opposed to the word 'change'.
- Councils need to be consulted about their views on current Government planning proposals. Their views will need to be considered when updating the Revitalising Rural document.
- National lockdown situation emphatically emphasised the need for comprehensive good standard broadband and the need for the Universal Service Obligation to be improved, including consideration of affordable connectivity.

3. Rural/Market Town Group – Update. (Attachment 3) Corporate Director, David Inman made a presentation showing the membership achieved to date and showing the distribution of RMTG members across RSN membership.

- 3.1. Our initial aim has been to recruit parishes and towns with a population ranging from 3,000 to 30,000 into the Rural/Market Town Group. The larger of these towns have been identified by Defra as Rural Hub Towns. In the future it possible that ceiling figure of 30,000 will increase after the 2021 census results.
- 3.2. We currently have 119 parishes and towns in membership. 75 are paying members, 40 are on a one-year free trial membership. The sub for membership varies in accord with community population:
 - Towns with population size of 5,000 charged £110 per year.
 - Towns with population size between 5,000 and 10 000 charged £130 per year.
 - Towns with population size of 10,000 and over charged £150 per year.
- 3.3. The initial purpose of this initiative was recruit as many members across England following the c200 rural areas that Defra have identified as rural areas of reasonable size across England. The first invites covered all these areas. Obviously as would be anticipated success has been mixed. Where a Local Council has declined, we have sought out a substitute. If that substitute has declined, we have sought a further town or parish substitute.
- 3.4. At the last RSN Executive members requested that every RSN member has at least one RMTG member in their area. Currently this is the case in respect of about 100 of our current 123 member areas.
- 3.5. Some of the 200 Defra rural areas have no or few market 'towns' and in those cases, we have engaged in discussion with larger parishes. The current group is made up of 87 % local councils named 'town' and 13% local councils named 'parish'.
David noted that terminology regarding town and parish varies, and in the SE in particular the phrase local councils prefer is 'parish' despite its size, when the phrase 'town' is more likely used in other regions.
- 3.6. During this recruitment exercise process the government has been 'hinting' at its enthusiasm for a move towards Unitary Local Government model. Time

Providing a voice for rural communities and service providers

frame and methodology are likely to be considered in the promised Devolution White Paper, seemingly to be issued prior to the end of 2020. Although it may be that the drive to Unitary is not to be as extensive as once was recently surmised; it is likely that even the narrower Unitary system being suggested might still influence our foreseen income situation.

- 3.7.** As with all our services the role and the focus on the RMTG (and indeed local councils as a whole) will need to be revisited in the context of such relevant passages in the Devolution White Paper as we seek a widening of the RMTG's membership and scale of operation at that time. Local groups of market towns within a Region or County or Unitary Council area, where they do not exist currently, could become a possibility to look at. It is felt they would need to involve annual meetings (conducted virtually for each such grouping). In the meantime, it is clearly important to do all we reasonably can to maintain membership at the current or if possible, at an increased level.
- 3.8.** A review of the existing 'categories' of membership of the Rural/Market Town Group will be undertaken and considered at the next RSN Executive meeting on 11th 2020.

4. Subs for 2020-2021.

Members considered the position very fully and decided the increase to be recommended to the Annual General Meeting for 'inflation' would be one of 2.75% to match the pay award for local government staff to which RSN staff contracts were tied.

5. Engagement with Member Councils and Nominated Members. (Attachment 4) Report from Graham Biggs, Chief Executive.

During the previous 2nd July RSN Executive meeting, members considered and recommended the introduction of a series of supplementary individual online Zoom meetings with each RSN member authority based largely around greater focus on the nominated member role. The recommendation has been subject to the staff giving consideration as to how this would be undertaken, and the additional workload involved. The Chief Executive reported this has now been successfully done. It was agreed the system would therefore be adopted. A report would be given to the RSN AGM on 16th November outlining the system for all Local Authority members of the RSN.

6. RSN draft response to the 'Changes to the Current Planning System' Consultation which closes on 1st October.

The RSN draft response was approved.

- 6.1.** Members expressed real concern about Government's proposals, particularly regarding housing. It was felt that organising the RSN Discussion Event on

Providing a voice for rural communities and service providers

the Planning White Paper for the 20th October is timely. The RSN Executive strongly held the view that affordable house renting schemes are in urgent need in rural areas. Current Government suggestions relating to quotas from development sites were very disappointing in that context.

- 6.2.** It was agreed that a Special RSN Executive meeting on Housing will be arranged in November to discuss rural housing policies we should be promoting.
- 6.3.** **Members noted that a future APPG is seeking to invite the Secretary of State or a Minister to a special APPG in November to discuss the planning proposals for which the date is yet to be set.**
- 6.4.** **It was felt micro policy was likely to affect macro areas, and at this stage there was obviously no attempt at rural proofing policies.**

[Please click here to view RSN's draft response to the MHCLG Consultation: Changes to Planning Policy and Regulation²](#)

- 7. RSN's response to the 'Planning for the Future' consultation which must be submitted by the end of October 2020.**

A specific seminar for RSN members - RSN Discussion Event on the Planning White Paper has been arranged for Tuesday, 20th October. RSN will prepare a draft response and circulate to attendees at that meeting for consideration. We will consult RSN Executive members by email on the draft response before submission.

- 8. To approve the RSN response to the Treasury regarding Comprehensive Spending Review.**

This has been considered by the RSN Executive members via email. This item was added to agenda to get a formal resolution of the RSN Executive to approve the submission which had to be made by 24th September.

[Please click here to view the final submission paper sent to the Treasury³](#)
[Please click here to view Appendix with supporting information paper⁴](#)

It was formally resolved, and the document was unanimously agreed.

- 9. A Plan for Jobs: Rural Analysis.**

The analysis of the Treasury Plan for Jobs from a rural perspective was noted and endorsed by the RSN Executive.

[Please click here to view attachment on A Plan for Jobs: Rural Analysis⁵](#)

² https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/changes_planning_system_consultation.pdf

³ https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/FINAL_CSR_SUBMISSION_Aligned_to_.pdf

⁴ https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/Supporting_Information_to_RSN_CS.pdf

⁵ https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/Revitalising%20Rural/RR%20Final%20Docs/A_Plan_for_Jobs_Rural_Analysis.pdf

Providing a voice for rural communities and service providers

Rural Services Network

Kilworthy Park, Tavistock, Devon PL19 0BZ

Tel: 01822 813693

www.rsnonline.org.uk email: admin@sparse.gov.uk twitter: [@rsnonline](https://twitter.com/rsnonline)

10. Rural Economy Toolkit.

The Rural Economy Toolkit produced by the RSN and Institute for Economic Development was noted and endorsed. This was discussed during the Rural Economy Plenary Session of the National Rural Conference 2020 and it will be put to the Rural Economy Sub-Group meeting on Monday, 12th October.

The Rural Economy Toolkit will officially be “launched” at a joint RSN/IED webinar on Monday, 19th October.

[Please click here to view the Rural Economy Toolkit](#)⁶

11. National Rural Conference 2020.

The meeting received a verbal report from Kerry Booth, Assistant Chief Executive. There had been 8 sessions in total spread over the 5 days. The conference week has been extremely successful. Nearly 400 people attended sessions held throughout the week, which is a significant increase in comparison to previous years of running the conference live. The number of officers attending the online conference has massively increased in comparison to previous attendance of the live conference.

Kerry and the staff were congratulated on the week which had been a real success.

12. Fire meeting 2021 and engagement with Fire & Rescue Services.

It seemed certain there would be no LGA Fire Services Annual Conference this year and therefore no opportunity to hold any physical meeting of the Rural Fire Group at the end of the Conference, as had happened in previous years.

It was decided that RSN would seek to set up a Zoom event in place of this Group Meeting which Councillor Roger Phillips would chair. RSN would work to do this during the coming months. The Chief Executive stressed the need for the group to try to present the rural angle in respect of the Fire Settlement whether this was through the existing formula arrangements or any new system being established by the Home Office.

13. RSN Meetings & Events 2021.

- RSN Seminar Programme 2021. (Attachment 5)
- RSN Meeting Programme 2021 and Schedule of Dates. (Attachment 6)

13.1. Attachments were considered. Due to the recent move to online events, seminars will now focus on topics rather than regions, and will be run online,

⁶ https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/Revitalising%20Rural/RR%20Final%20Docs/Rural_Economy_Toolkit.pdf

allowing RSN to engage all our members nationally. Each year we will run 9 seminars.

- 13.2.** In terms of forthcoming meetings there were:
 97 people currently booked for SPARSE Rural meeting;
 130 for the Rural Economy Sub-Group meeting;
 89 for the RSN Seminar: Rural Vulnerability; and
 103 for the RSN Discussion Event on the Planning White Paper
- 13.3.** Online event registrations were considerably more than usual statistics. The meeting agreed the Programme to be put to the 16th November RSN AGM for consideration.

- 14. RSN Budget Report.** (Attachment 7)
 Report was noted.

- 15. RSP Full Accounts; Appointment of Tax Accountants and Appointment of RSP Ltd Chair of Directors.** (Attachment 8)
 This item involved only those who were RSP Directors and only RSP directors voted on this item.
 The Directors considered the papers and accounts put before them.
Agreed:
 Nick Harwood was proposed by Cllr Cecilia Motley, seconded by Graham Biggs as the RSP Chair for 20/21. Motion carried.
 Tax Assist were proposed to continue as RSP Tax Accountants for 2020/21. Motion carried.

- 16. Any Other Business.**

- 16.1. All Party Parliamentary Group Business**
Graham Biggs outlined future events:
 • **APPG for Rural Services meeting – 3:30pm-4:15pm, 13th October 2020**
 Featuring Rt Hon Stephen Barclay MP, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury.
 • **APPG for Rural Services meeting – 11am-12:30pm, 28th October 2020.**
 On how to level-up digital connectivity for rural communities with Matt Warman MP, Minister for Digital Infrastructure and Gareth Elliott, Head of Policy and Communications at Mobile UK.
- 16.2. The Chief Executive reported that English Rural HA, CPRE and RSN had commissioned a study into the economic and fiscal case for the Government investing in affordable rural housing.** Cost to the RSN £2000. As the Chief Executive of English Rural HA, Martin Collett declared an interest in this matter.
- 16.3.** Martin Collett asked how the staff were coping in these days of pandemic and working from home. He wished it to be recorded that if it were felt there was

Providing a voice for rural communities and service providers



anything the Executive could do to assist their welfare the Executive would be delighted to try to assist them.

The next RSN Executive meeting date is Monday, 11th January 2021.

Providing a voice for rural communities and service providers

Rural Services Network

Kilworthy Park, Tavistock, Devon PL19 0BZ

Tel: 01822 813693

www.rsnonline.org.uk email: admin@sparse.gov.uk twitter: [@rsnonline](https://twitter.com/rsnonline)