Minutes of the Meeting of the RSN Executive held on Monday 19 January 2015 at the LGA London

Present – Cecilia Motley, (Chair),Robert Heseltine, Roger Begy, Hilary Carrick, Derrick Hayley, Gordon Nicolson, Peter Stevens, Stewart Horne (BIP),John Birtwistle (Transport), Graham Biggs (RSN), David Inman (RSN), Kerry Booth (RSN), Andy Dean (RSN).

Apologies – Cllr Lewis Strange, Cllr Peter Thornton, Barbara Shaw (Community),

The Chair, Cecilia Motley, welcomed those present and formally opened the meeting. Barbara Shaw, who had a spell of ill health, had written to say she would have to step down. Her replacement would be appointed by the CAB. Members asked we write to Barbara, wishing her well and thanking her for all her input over the years.

1. Minutes of the Executive Meeting held on 15 September 2014.
   Agreed as a correct record.

2. Minutes of the Main Meeting held on 17 November 2014.
   Agreed as a correct record.

Arising:

(1) The Group would assist with the challenge on the Section 106 Agreement position established by DCLG (Brandon Lewis) in respect of the local affordable housing requirements in rural areas.

(2) Discussion would be sought with TCPI over:-
(a) Agricultural barn conversions' policy.
(b) How RSN might get involved in more planning matters generally.

3. **Budget 2014/2015 – 2015/2016**
   Graham Biggs reflected the position to the end of December. There were a small number of subs still outstanding but there was a small surplus anticipated and the bottom line was still positive for both years.

4. **Report about the Development of the Rural England Group.**
   David Inman detailed the position about this separate research group. Membership of the Steering Group was increasing and officers had held discussions with the Prince's Countryside Fund, CCRI and others. These had been encouraging. John Craven was also in support as were Exeter and Gloucestershire Universities.

   The support of 250 firms at £500 a year would be sought through 5 tranches of approval.

Infrastructure providers would be approached first of all.

5. **Rural Fair Shares Campaign.**
   Graham Biggs reported

   Provisional Settlement.

   A A £4m increase (to £15.5 million) in RSDG over the existing 94 Authorities was proposed. However, even with this, the gap between urban and rural in grant terms remained practically unaltered***.*** We were asking for an increase in RSDG to £30 million over a wider field of Authorities.

   B The DCLG/DEFRA research study had, as expected, been supportive in some areas but found lack of evidence in others. The Executive felt an increase in RSDG of £4 million was totally inadequate recognition for the findings to date. Discussions had taken place with the Minister (Kris Hopkins) and he had indicated the research would continue.

   C Campaign this year. It was a difficult year as MPs could not be as forceful as the Election approached. We would target Manifestos and try to be as active as was possible. There was fresh work to be done as new MPs arrived in Parliament. The call would be as per the manifesto, for the amounts set out in the 2012 Consultation to be implemented through annual increases to 2020 (perhaps in the region of c30m per year), by changes to the formulae or by extending the Rural Services Delivery Grant.

6. **Combining Administration of Authorities – should this impact on subscription fee scale.**
   There was a detailed discussion on this – clearly Authorities had to cut costs and might expect some reduction in subscriptions as they worked together in shared services arrangements. These might be closer and closer towards 2020 when there was talk of some total coming together taking place.
   On the other hand, if RSN was to remain to be of continued value to Authorities it needed to, at the very least, retain its current level of annual overall income (£300,000). Joint working was also being undertaken in different ways in different areas so ‘setting a benchmark for this could be difficult.

   It was decided that whilst there was insufficient flexibility for current subscriptions to change over the next year or two, during that time the Executive should be considering the options (including moving to a population basis for subscription levels) for achieving the same level of income from

changing administrations as legal entities also got closer and closer to changing.

7. Unitary Group Meeting Issues.

Some difficulties had been encountered by this Group reporting back to Sparse Rural. It was decided that normally reports back would be to the Rural Assembly meeting, unless the reports were from a financial base, when they would go to the Sparse Rural meeting in the morning.

8. Going Forward for the RSN – Recruitment Report.

David Inman presented this report. Members however, had some concerns about the three section RSN approach suggested and asked for a reworking of the report. If the new proposals were acceptable to members of the Executive, delegated authority was given through the Chair for the amended report to be implemented allowing a recruitment drive to proceed without delay. (n.b..Revised arrangements subsequently agreed)

9. Report from RSN Groupings:

(1) Housing

Work, in partnership, with the Rural Housing Alliance was proceeding very well. It was now intended to widen out this work to involve Local Authority Housing Officers. (Andy Dean).

(2) Transport

Exploratory discussions were taking place with a number of possible partner organisations. These possibilities looked quite promising (Andy Dean and John Birtwistle).

(3) Health

A third Rural Health Network Conference was planned for Truro in June. However staffing changes at NHS England including the loss of a post of clinical lead for Remote and Rural Services from April would create difficulty.

Graham was having a meeting about a possible CCG and Public Health Grouping. Things were getting difficult in terms of the representation of rural health with the Institute of Rural Health now closing.

(4) Crime

A strong Rural Police Commissioner Group (NRCN) had been established with the assistance of a 2 year Home Office Grant. The Group was led by the North Yorkshire Commissioner and involved 28 Commissioners in total. The Group was now ambitiously viewing significant work and the establishment of a website. (Nick Payne)

(5) Fire and Rescue Services

There was a grouping currently of 12 Fire and Rescue Services which would now seek to meet twice yearly. Its long term viability for 2 meetings a year would need to see an enlargement to some 20 members (a fee scale had been agreed). Representations would be made to the current Provisional Settlement and ongoing financial monitoring was possible. However for research work of its own to take place in relation to Fire, extra levies would be necessary.

(6) Rural Unitary Group

Strong officer working was taking place as topics dictated. There was a need for a further member meeting. (David Inman/Graham Biggs)

10. The Threat to ACRE.

The Executive discussed the funding threat to ACRE. The storm clouds gathering over the few rural organisations remaining were of great concern. Officers were asked to offer anything that might be considered of value to the organisation and the Community Council network.
(n.b. Acre subsequently awarded the funding for 15/16)

11. Launch of the Manifesto

The details of the Manifesto launch were given. The coverage in the Sunday Observer and the Yorkshire Post had been really encouraging.

12. Rural Conference 2015 and Seminar Programme for that year.

Although the 2014 conference had broken even because the LGA had not achieved the level of profit they normally sought, the LGA had decided not to be involved in 2015. If a conference was to be held it would have to be staged solely by RSN. The People and Places Board were prepared to provide speakers but did not want any joint event. It was decided to proceed with a Conference. Investigations would be made to see whether one at Cheltenham in September was a viable possibility.

It was also decided that the seminar programme would comprise 4 free seminars on mainstream issues.

(n.b Subsequently decided to try for the Conference to be held in Cheltenham on Wednesday the ninth of September)

13. Any Other Business

DEFRA/DCLG Rural Classifications.

David Inman detailed the new classification adopted by DEFRA/DCLG. They were not perhaps quite as supportive of the RSN case and had been rushed out without any consultation following a Working Group.

The Executive asked that the matter be taken up urgently with DEFRA who be requested to reconsider the position.

Kerry Booth reported that the next Sounding Board survey would be going out in the next few weeks and would be focusing on services for Older People.

Kerry has also been approached by DEFRA inviting RSN to be part of the Programme Monitoring Committee for the 2014-2020 Rural Development Programme for England. This is the programme through which extremely large amount of money flow from the EU to rural areas. The RSN has asked for more information and is likely to appoint a representative to sit on this committee.