

Rural Services Network
Special Interest Group
SPARSE Rural Sub SIG
Agenda

Monday 13 April 2015
11.15am – 12.30pm

City of Westminster Archives Centre
10 St. Ann's Street
London, SW1P 2DE

Notification

The meeting of the **SPARSE Rural Sub SIG** will be held on **Monday 13 April 2015** at 11.15am at City of Westminster Archives Centre, 10 St. Ann's Street, London SW1P 2DE.

Refreshments will be provided.

Order of Business

The order of business and papers are attached.

Location

A map showing the location of the meeting is printed on the back cover.

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Agenda

SPARSE RURAL Sub SIG

Monday 13 April 2015

11.15am – 12.30pm

City of Westminster Archives Centre, 10 St Ann's Street, London SW1P 2DE

Please note this meeting cannot be held at the LGA due to building works. St Ann's Street is at the Westminster end of Victoria Street and close to the St James Street Underground Station). A location map is attached

	Item	Page
1.	New Vice Chairman for the ensuing year To report that Cornwall Council have appointed Councillor Adam Paynter to be their representative in place of Councillor Alex Folkes. It is proposed that Councillor Paynter becomes the Vice Chair representing the South and South West Region.	
2.	To confirm the minutes of the last meeting (attached as Appendix 'A') held on 17 November 2014 (A.G.M.) and to discuss any matters arising	1
3.	To receive the minutes of the Executive Meeting held on 19 January 2015 (attached as Appendix 'B') and to discuss any matters arising	7
4.	RSN Executive It is proposed that Janice Banks, the Chief Executive of Acre, joins the Executive. Graham Biggs to report.	
5.	Constitution A revised Constitution reflecting the Group's change in structure was sought to be adopted at the Annual General Meeting. This revised constitution was put out to postal ballot. For adoption a revised constitution requires a two thirds majority from councils voting. The revised document received such backing (thirty six yes votes to two no votes). It will therefore be formally adopted by the AGM in November.	
6.	Fairer Funding Campaign 2015-16 A presentation on the current position and to receive a report detailing aspirations for the coming year. Dan Bates and Graham Biggs to report. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Key Actions taken by Rural Services Network b) Defra/DCLG Study c) Outcome of settlement on Rural Local Authorities d) Next Steps... 	

7.	Neighbourhood Planning Evidence Base Service To receive a report on this service. Appendix 'C' <u>attached</u>	13
8.	Any Other Business	

Attachment A**Note of decisions taken and actions required**

Title: SPARSE RURAL Sub SIG AGM

Date and time: 11.30am, 17 November 2014

Venue: Westminster Suite, Local Government House

Attendance:

Cllr Cecilia Motley (Shropshire Council); Cllr Cameron Clark (Sevenoaks DC); Cllr Hilary Carrick (Cumbria CC); Cllr Myles Cullen (Chichester DC); Cllr Gordon Nicolson (Eden DC); Cllr Owen Bierley (West Lindsey DC); Cllr Lewis Strange (Lincolnshire CC); Revd Richard Kirlew (Church in Wales); Cllr Malcolm Leeding (Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils); Cllr Peter Stevens (St Edmundsbury BC); Cllr Lindsey Cawrey (North Kesteven); Cllr Madge Shingleton (Shropshire Council); Cllr Robert Heseltine (North Yorkshire CC); Cllr Rupert Riechhold (ENC); Cllr Roger Begy (Rutland CC); Cllr David Ireton (Craven DC) - standing in for Cllr Richard Foster; Cllr Les Kew (Bath and NE Somerset); Cllr Robert Whiting (Suffolk CC); Cllr Jeremy Savage (South Norfolk DC); Cllr John Savage (Wycombe DC); Cllr Jane March (Tunbridge Wells BC); Cllr Ken Pollock (Worcestershire CC) Cllr Neil Butters (Bath and NE Somerset); Keri Lawrence (Tendring DC); Elizabeth Ridout (Tendring DC); Suzanne Clear (National Union of Farmers); Councillor John Clarke (Gedling); David Wakelin (Gedling); Cllr Rosemary Doyle (Canterbury)

Officers: David Inman (RSN); Graham Biggs (RSN); Dan Bates (RSN); Kerry Booth (RSN); Brian Wilson (RSN) and Andy Dean (RSN)

Apologies for absence:

Cllr Jane Mortimer – Scarborough Borough Council; Cllr Derrick Hayleyh – Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council; Geoff Holdcroft – Suffolk Coastal District Council; Cllr Philip Sanders – West Devon Borough Council; Cllr Michael Hicks – South Hams District Council
Alex Folkes – Lib Dem Cllr Launceston Central & Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources Cornwall Council; Nigel Williams – Fire Service, Norfolk County Council; David Dickinson – Newark and Sherwood District Council; Cllr Mary Robinson – Eden District Council (Cllr Nicolson to attend instead); Cllr Yvonne Bendle – South Norfolk District Council (Cllr Jeremy Savage will attend instead); Cllr Alan Rhodes – Nottinghamshire County Council; Cllr Jennifer Mein – Lancashire County Council; Cllr Richard Foster – Craven District Council (Cllr David Ireton will attend instead); Margaret Squires – Mid-Devon District Council; Cllr R J Phillips – Herefordshire Council; Cllr David Walsh – North Dorset District Council & Dorset County Council; Cllr Carole Clarke – South Northamptonshire Council; Cllr Hayden Phillips – North Warwickshire Borough Council; Cllr David Worden – North Devon Council

Decisions and actions

Apologies for absence

Apologies were noted and would appear in the minutes.

Minutes of the last full meeting – 14 July 2014

The minutes the last full meeting were agreed.

1. Election of Chairman for the ensuing year

Cllr Cecilia Motley was agreed as the Chairman for the coming year.

2. Election of Vice Chairmen for the ensuing year

It was **agreed** that the following Vice Chairs would remain in post:

Cllr CL Strange - Lincolnshire
Cllr R Begy - Rutland
Cllr G Nicholson - Eden
Cllr R Heseltine - North Yorkshire
Cllr P Stevens - St Edmundsbury
Cllr P Thornton - South Lakeland

Without Portfolio:

Cllr H Carrick - Cumbria
Cllr D Haley - Mid Suffolk

Members highlighted that there was currently no formal Vice Chair representation for the East of England. It was agreed that Cllr Stevens would take on this role.

Action

It was decided to enquire of Cornwall who their representative should be since Cllr Folkes who had been the South West Vice Chair had left their cabinet. The Executive would then appoint a Vice Chair from the South West.

David Inman / Graham Biggs

3. Election of First Vice Chair

Cllr Robert Heseltine was agreed as the First Vice Chair for the coming year.

4. Constitution

Graham Biggs highlighted paragraph 8.3 of the constitution that the provisions



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relating to position of the Chairman of the RSN and the Rural Assembly Sub Group be applicable from the 2014 AGM. He suggested that the date was changed to 2015 to ensure structural consistency in the run-up to the general election and this was agreed by members.

While members were broadly in agreement on the content of the constitution, members commented that Melton Borough Council had previously expressed a concern. Graham Biggs responded that the council had been contacted in March and had been provided assurances. However, it was agreed that as the constitution had to be put to a ballot Melton still had an opportunity to indicate if they did not wish to see the proposed changes go ahead and the reasons they held this view.

Action

The new constitution go out to postal ballot and the results be reported to the April meeting.

5. Fairer Funding Campaign

Dan Bates gave a verbal update on the latest position with regards to the Fairer Funding Campaign.

On the Government's evaluation of the rural funding gap, Dan said that he had seen a draft copy of the results but because the RSN was part of the Steering Group for the work and the report had not yet been made public, he could only give broad advice about the research.

On this DCLG and DEFRA commissioned research by LG Futures to investigate the comparative costs for delivering services for rural authorities, Dan said 30 rural and urban authorities had taken part and the conclusions were now going to the minister. There is enough in the results to suggest that discretion could be applied on sparsity. Graham Biggs had written to the Minister with some suggestions on the position. This letter would be circulated when the confidential period had ended.

Graham Biggs had responded to a letter from the Shadow Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Hilary Benn. Mr Benn's letter seemed to indicate that the focus of a Labour government might swing back towards urban areas if elected.

Members were invited by the Chairman to ask questions.

Members asked if it was worth looking at increasing council tax beyond the election. Graham Biggs responded that setting council tax levels was a matter for individual authorities rather than for the group. Dan added that the group could look to provide some general information to Government to evidence that current policy was further forcing rural authorities to use council tax limits.

Following a comment on money which had been removed as a result of formula changes, Graham agreed that councils should have got this money pre-damping. While post-damping money was made available, damping and other changes had still wiped out a high proportion of the gains from the improved formulae. However, he said that so many changes around the rural formula had



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taken place that it was now impossible to recalculate remaining pre-damping money owed retrospectively. Hence, the RSN have returned to arguing for the pre-damping sum to be introduced.

Members commented on the new burden of community value. While cost was unlikely to be treated separately over the next few years, there was a risk that authorities could lose that money if it were not treated separately.

Graham replied that the problem with the new burden was its obscurity. He advised members in authorities affected to keep track of costs to allow RSN to see if there were other authorities in the same position. Dan added that the RSN was looking to build on evidence suggesting that new burdens do not have a pro-rata effect.

Members asked what the political consequences of maintaining the status quo on council tax would be. Dan highlighted the table at the bottom of page 12 of the document pack. He said that the Government tend to quote spending powers while hiding how these are made up. He said that the comparative percentages of money from the taxpayer and from the Government would be outlined in the RSN's summary of local authorities' spending powers.

On Community asset legislation, some members indicated that the Government were giving grants to some authorities regarding neighbourhood planning.

Decision

Members **agreed** the Local Government Funding section of the manifesto.

6. Performance

Kerry Booth gave a presentation on the RSN's performance benchmarking. She said that RSN's performance benchmarking service now included unitary authorities and allowed users to compare like with like in relation to other similar authorities as oppose to just other rural or unitary authorities.

In response to a question from Cllr Motley, she confirmed that RSN would update the website on a quarterly basis.

7. Rural Broadband

Matt Smith, on behalf of the Rural Unitaries Group, updated the RSN on the latest situation regarding rural broadband.

Graham Biggs highlighted that at present, any broadband in rural areas had to be funded in large part by rural authorities with costs being much higher in rural areas to reach the same number of residents. This was another cost burden which urban authorities did not have to meet.

The following points were made in discussions:

The Government is increasingly moving online to save costs. However, they are not paying significant attention to the roll out or the huge potential savings it



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could offer to services such as adult social care, with increased telecare delivery.

Suffolk has been awarded money to get fibre optic cabling in place by 2015 and is the first county to sign an agreement with BT. However, they accept that the strong relationship to date may be influenced by the location of BT's technology and research labs in the county. Other authorities reported that BT's relationship with them had not always been as productive, with caution urged regarding the figures they quoted on coverage.

Some members also raised concerns about BT acting as the sole contractor and emphasised that phases 2 and 3 would need to include a wider range of technologies. However, Matt responded that he couldn't see any wireless providers being able to deliver under current state aid restrictions.

Members noted that in farming communities, resources were needed to help people use the internet as well as access it.

Several members felt that the Government was not being told the truth on the number of "not" spots and the length of time it would take as the message was being stifled by providers. Some said that BT would not tell them what the uptake figures were. BT's capacity to deliver was also questioned, with the amount of resources to undertake the scale of the project in doubt.

Matt responded that local authorities needed to be steadfast in making sure contracts are delivered. On capacity, he said that this is already causing service and equipment delays in other parts of the business.

Members suggested that the current delivery of broadband created a false impression as providers cherry-picked the easiest projects in the first instance.

On data transparency, Matt said that there were issues affecting Councils' ability to let communities know what, when and where work would take place.

Business parks were also discussed, with Members highlighting that a number were not included in delivery plans as they inherently have low business volumes

Matt felt there might be advantage in the group having a group of Economic Development Officers who could assist in pursuing issues of this nature. The officers agreed to consider his remarks .

Decision

Members **agreed** that the Chairman and RSN Officers approve a final version of the broadband proposal included in the draft Manifesto, incorporating comments from the discussion.

Action

Officers to finalise following consultation with the Chairman.

Cllr Motley thanked all for attending and closed the meeting.



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.



Neighbourhood Planning Evidence Base

13 April 2015

LGA

Neighbourhood Planning Evidence Base

- Developed in 2014
- Available to SPARSE authorities
- Wide range of data and statistics are available to Neighbourhood Planning Groups
- SPARSE developed this simple set of data as a starting point for communities.

What is included?

Information available for parishes with comparisons to district/county/national figures

Age Structure	Qualifications and Students
Occupation	Accommodation Type
Average Earnings	Household Composition
Economic Activity	Housing Tenure
House Prices	Car or van availability

What do they look like?

How to use the spreadsheets

1. Select ward or parish here

2. Select your local area here

3. Your areas results are displayed here

2011 census ks501ew - qualifications and students

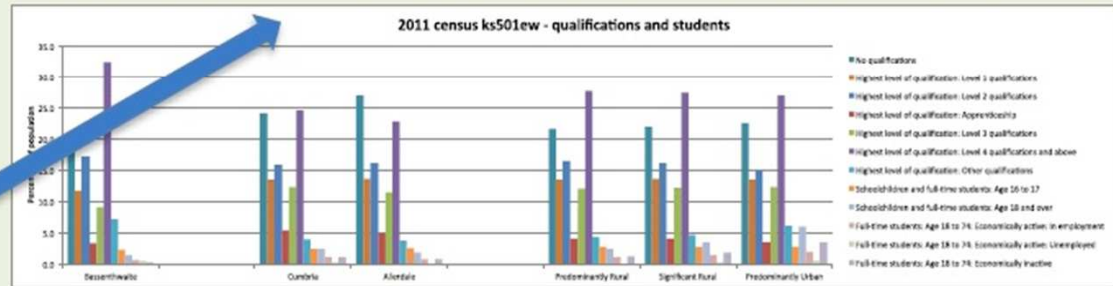
Do you require Parish or Ward Level information? Parish

Select your Parish: Rossettwaite Cumbria Alresford Predominantly Rural Significant Rural

	All Census Highest level of qualification	No qualifications	Highest level of qualification: Level 1 qualifications	Highest level of qualification: Level 2 qualifications	Highest level of qualification: Apprenticeship	Highest level of qualification: Level 3 qualifications	Highest level of qualification: Level 4 qualifications and above	Highest level of qualification: Other qualifications	Schoolchildren and full-time students: Age 16 to 17	Schoolchildren and full-time students: Age 18 and over	Full-time students: Age 18 to 24: Economically active: In employment	Full-time students: Age 18 to 24: Economically active: Unemployed	Full-time students: Age 25 to 74: Economically inactive
Rossettwaite	100.0	19.1	11.7	17.2	3.3	9.1	32.4	7.2	2.3	1.4	0.7	0.5	0.2
Cumbria	100.0	24.2	13.6	13.9	5.4	12.3	24.6	4.0	2.5	2.4	1.1	0.2	1.1
Alresford	100.0	27.0	13.7	16.2	3.0	11.5	22.8	3.8	2.6	1.9	0.9	0.1	0.8
Predominantly Rural	100.0	21.7	13.5	16.4	4.1	12.0	27.8	4.4	2.7	2.5	1.1	0.2	1.2
Significant Rural	100.0	21.9	13.7	16.1	4.0	12.2	27.4	4.7	2.8	2.5	1.4	0.2	1.8
Predominantly Urban	100.0	10.0	13.6	15.0	3.5	12.4	28.9	6.2	2.7	6.0	2.0	0.5	3.5

4. See the figures for your district and county here

5. Compare yourself to other Predominantly Rural or Significantly Rural areas



Evidence Base Service

- <http://www.rsnonline.org.uk/observatory/neighbourhood-planning>
- Good feedback from Parishes who have been able to access their data to start the process of evidence gathering
- Town and Country Planning Association have been recommending the service to Town and Parish Councils as a good starting point

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