

MINUTES

Rural Economy Group

Venue: The LGA, Smith Square, London SW1P 3HZ

Date: Monday 24th June 2019 at 1 p.m.

The meeting was held at the **LGA, 18 Smith Square, Westminster, London, SW1P 3HZ.**

Attendance

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

1. Apologies for Absence

An apologies list is attached as **Appendix B** to this note

2. To Confirm the Minutes of the Last Meeting

Held on the 28th January 2019 and agreed as a correct record.

3. Presentation by Fadekemi Abiru, Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy – An Introduction to LISA analysis and evidence

Fadekemi explained the purpose and thinking behind the LISA exercise which would be undertaken by LEPs throughout the country. Her presentation can be reached through the following link:

https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/meetings/specialist-subject-meetings/rural-economy-group/24.06.19/Fadekemi_Abiru_presentation.pdf

This was an ambitious plan. It was felt this would give local areas the opportunity to take responsibility for their own areas. Analysis through the plan would ensure they were quality assured. It was understood the exercises should be valid until 2050.

It would be a LEP Economic Report in conjunction with a Capability exercise and an Engagement Programme. The exercise involved working through a (national) Policy Prospectus Pack setting out ground rules and allowing

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Ministry input as the exercise proceeded.

This was seen as an exercise involving and integrating public and private sector thinking. It should set out mapping equalities and evidence about the LEP area and incorporate what was felt to be relevant data.

There appeared no requirement for rural proofing at the moment and Fadekemi agreed to feedback the Group's concern about that.

Local Chambers of Commerce would be asked to analyse and say what they felt were the drivers and the obstacles.

Policies should be long-term and ambitious and the supply side should be commented upon. It was important to join the evidence with the negative influences.

Adjacent LEPs might also be involved to allow the exercise to consider how the proposals would fit with wider planned aspirations.

The Group felt that the rural considerations might be being missed with the way the exercise had begun. It was felt that LEPs should be being required by the national framework to rurally proof – and make the evidence that they had done so – and conclusions reached publicly available for wider scrutiny - matters in their area in any event.

Fadekemi would report back and the Group would be kept informed. She said the pack was constantly being updated as LISA was intended as a long - term exercise.

Local Authorities, she said, would be kept informed of proposals as they emerged. Members were keen to point out that rural considerations should not just be as after-thought. Rural areas could play a very positive role to the national economy as a whole in their view.

- 4. To discuss the sections of the House of Lords' Select Committee Report into the Rural Economy which are most directly related to the Rural Economy; namely Chapters 1, 2, 4 and 6 (including the Conclusions and Summary of Recommendations for each)**

The Call for a Rural Strategy

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Graham Biggs explained in detail how the RSN had arrived at its present position in making this call and how advisory papers had been formulated to assist the exercise. These papers had been presented to the Group at previous meetings and approved.

Graham reported that the process had received an enormous boost as the House of Lords, through Select Committee, had themselves produced a Report and Recommendations to the Government entitled "Time for a Strategy for the Rural Economy". The title suggested this was a little narrower than the RSN "Call" as it was based around the rural economy but in practice it covered many aspects not normally associated with an economic strategy and there was a large percentage of common ground between the two processes. RSN had given verbal evidence to the Lords' enquiry on two occasions and there was much common thinking. The Government were by law obliged to respond to this Lords' report by the end of the coming week. The report, it was felt, would be a challenge for Government as it covered a very wide areas in some depth. It was then up to the Lords to decide when they would publicise this response.

The Lords' report would, in many areas, provide some of the depth and texture the RSN required to push on with its own Representations to Government

Graham explained that three or four (depending on budget/resources) Roadshows would be organised after an initial event which had been held in Taunton in the South West in the early spring. It was hoped that sponsorship would be obtained for these shortly.

The Roadshows planned were being organised in a partnership with ACRE, The Rural Coalition and the Plunkett Foundation and would consider two things:

- What were the reasons and the thinking behind the RSN Call?
- What was required to assist the process?

At this stage, Councillor Giles Archibald, Leader of South Lakeland District Council, offered to sponsor an event in the North West at their offices. This kind gesture was willingly accepted and a North West Roadshow would be

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added to the programme. It would be available to Cumbrian and Lancashire authorities and organisations.

The first Roadshow would be on Thursday 11th July in the North East. The Northern Rural Network at Newcastle University had agreed to assist with this.

Political Meetings around the Party Conferences in the autumn were being held at the Liberal Democrat and (hopefully) at the Labour conferences. A meeting with Conservatives Rural Issues Group might be held (in London) in November. An exercise would be undertaken looking at the Lords' report asking

- Where have we common ground
- What is omitted
- How can we deal with issues where there might be some variances?

A document setting out the above would be sent to Members of the Group for comment – especially on the issues raised in the Lord's Report where there was no established RSN policy.

House of Lords' Report

To assist the exercise just described, the Group were then asked to discuss the section of the Lords' report:

Chapter 1 – The Importance of the Rural Economy

Chapter 2 – The Rural Economy and Public Policy (combined)

Chapter 4 – Digital Connectivity

Chapter 6 – Access to Skills and Rural Business Support

They were asked as follows:

- Are there any of the Lords' recommendations the Group disagree with?
- Are there any of the recommendations which it is felt should be prioritised?

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- Is there any more evidence needed to progress the case to Government?
- Do members have any case studies/evidence they could offer in support?

The Lords' response was then looked at thoroughly by the Group and the following comments were made:

Funding	It was absolutely essential successor funding was established allowing similar exercises to the ones facilitated by the EU funding to properly continue community involvement schemes.
The Challenges	The Group totally agreed with the report. Evidence was however going to be important. All authorities were asked if they could consider whether they could provide such evidence
Economic Performance Distinctiveness	Totally agreed. It was felt the economic importance of rural areas was being very much understated by Government. There were massive opportunities but Government had a major role to play.
Crime	It was felt there had been a clear and significant erosion of essential services.
Crime	It was felt the extent of rural burglary should be sought to be properly quantified and given far more attention.
Crime	National Rural Crime Network would be considering this chapter.
Crime	The penalties for illegal dumping should made considerably more severe. The present fines were woefully inadequate and a very poor deterrent. It was unfair to

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	expect Land Owners to pay for clearing sites
Rural Economy Transport	It was suspected that loss of services was having a very adverse impact on the rural economy. Remedial measures were in the national as well as the local interest.
Rural Economy Transport	It was felt that studies needed to be undertaken about emerging options facilitated by advancing technology. Better transport arrangements were necessary to kick-start the economy.
Defining a successful rural economy	It was felt t the definition given was a strong one
Box 2 Key Aspects	It was felt that these made really important points.
Objectives	Again, it was felt this was really strong drafting.
Economy (General)	It was felt that work was necessary evaluating how a rural area can benefit from large scale national infrastructure schemes that took place and the degree of adaptability required to take full advantage of any such schemes.
Rural Policy in England	This was a key paragraph. Its importance could not be understated. It was felt the points made needed to be expanded as this constituted the crux of the case.
Design	It was considered that all public buildings in rural areas should now be required to be constructed with fibre to the premises
Case for a Rural Strategy	It was felt the outcomes of the recent DEFRA Select Committee Inquiry would also provide important evidence towards this Call.
Rural Strategy	It was felt that all LEPs with a rural area should by law be required to rural proof all of their considerations. Too often

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	decisions were unfortunately solely urban based and rural issues were often masked by whole area data.
Rural Strategy LIS	Rural Strategy and Rural Policy needed to be fed into the LISA work straight away.
Essential Elements	These were fully agreed and it was felt the drafting was strong.
Replacing EU Funding	There was total agreement with the final bullet point. This was felt essential if rural economic potential was to be unlocked and that would clearly be in the overall national interest.
Conclusions Replacing EU Funding	A scheme where universal credit had been successfully employed re Hill Farming in Eden was referred to. It was felt it would be a good case study.
Conclusions	Rurality checks on all legislation and policy changes would be in the national interest. The importance of a buoyant rural economy was not fully appreciated and its importance not appreciated.
Conclusions- Threats.	Absence of data. The Group felt the report was very sound on and totally agreed. This was a very significant problem.
Points 58, 59 & 60	The point was made that this however needed to be a comprehensive package which including suitable resources to accompany it . It was felt these points needed to be developed by further wider consideration and proposals by Government.
Rural proofing.	The plurality of rural views was noted. It was felt the point here was an important one.

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Box 3	The bullet points on rural proofing however had not been universally adopted by government and --- this was THE problem.
Minister working between Treasury & DEFRA	This was felt to be an important and valid point.
Components of Rural Proofing	The importance of the limited scale of rural operation was yet again emphasised.
Pg. 26 Point 89	There was total agreement with the point made by Sarah Lee. It summed up the position well.
Apprenticeships	The group were in total agreement with the point being made by the Lords' report.
Arts Council operation	Whilst the Arts Council were congratulated there was still a need for some rural proofing over grant allocation.
National Parks	There appeared to be maybe a lack of consideration over how National parks and other protected areas should be considered. The degree of rural proofing necessary here perhaps needed to be even greater.
EFRA Select Committee	It was felt the EFRA Select Committee considerations might again be relevant. There clearly should be an attempt to incorporate their views when they were known into this chapter. in taking forward our own work. Combining three thought patterns would be really powerful.
Vocational Education	There appeared to be a decline in vocational education. Presumptions seemed to be made about the levels of skills and learning. This might not be the same as in an urban context.

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35	Essex CC offered the expertise gained by their Skills Board. They could offer some best practice here.
Pg. 61 & 62 Loneliness in rural areas	Again, the Group felt there was a need for a specific rural approach in this area. It was time to re-think things but there was also a need for money to support initiatives. They could not occur otherwise.
Diversity	The role of rural areas in climate change and providing diversity of services were not necessarily appreciated nationally. There should be more emphasis on the importance of these considerations and how rural areas could be playing a yet wider role in the national interest.
Tourism Zone	These could be brought back if it was felt necessary. They had had merits.

It was agreed that these minutes as a draft would be circulated to all nominated members so that they could input any further information they wished to include at this stage.

The meeting closed at 3:15pm.

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