



The Rural Services Network (RSN)

Special Interest Group (SIG) of the Local Government Association

Constitution

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Constitution

1. Title and Membership

- 1.1 The Organisation shall be known as The Rural Services Network (RSN), a Special Interest Group of the Local Government Association and shall be referred to throughout this document as “the Group”.
- 1.2 The Group shall be open to those English Authorities who are classified as Mainly or Largely Rural or Urban with Significant Rural Area (all including hub towns) by the Government and to previous members of the Rural Commission of the Local Government Association. Other Principal Councils which have large rural areas within their boundaries may apply to become members and their applications will be treated on their merits.
- 1.3 The Group will consist of such Principal Councils and Fire & Rescue Services in England, as The Rural Services Network desire to be and remain in membership (“Member Authority”).
- 1.4 The Group shall act in a non - political way concentrating on achieving consensus views on rural best practice and service interests. The focus of the Group is for the betterment of the rural areas of England and the people who live and work in these areas. The Group cannot and does not deal with any matters relating to disputes or potential disputes between the various tiers of local government serving these rural areas.
- 1.5 The Group meetings will not be preceded by political meetings.
- 1.6 Member authorities may be represented by a Councillor or Officer or both.
- 1.7 Whilst all membership shall be with the Group, operationally much of the work of the Group will be through two subgroups; namely SPARSE Rural and The Rural Assembly.
- 1.8 The Group shall have power to establish such Associate and Alliance arrangements including any necessary definitions as it considers to be appropriate the general rural interest. Such arrangements shall however require the approval of an Executive meeting of the Group (see Section 9 below).

2. Purpose of the Group

- 2.1 To be a voice for councils with a rural interest within the Local Government Association (LGA) and to influence appropriate work so that the views and rural

interests of these councils are fully considered.

- 2.2 To research, promote and lobby for the rural interests of communities served by member authorities.
- 2.3 To establish as many work areas as is feasible of collective working targeted to the benefit of individual member authorities and their communities including the sharing of best practice.

3. Objectives and Powers of the Group and ways of working

- 3.1 To provide forums in which member authorities can exchange views and initiate shared activities on issues of common interest/benefit, particularly relating to rural service delivery, rural policy generally and the rural economy.
- 3.2 To raise awareness of the contribution member authorities make to rural service and rural community issues.
- 3.3 To provide greater capacity for member authorities to contribute to and influence the national agenda by direct representation to government departments and other decision makers/opinion formers.
- 3.4 To represent, wherever possible by consensus, the interests of member authorities in national government, to Parliament, political parties, international institutions and other bodies, and the LGA and other decision makers/opinion formers.
- 3.5 To organise collective working to achieve potential cost savings for member authorities.
- 3.6 To formulate sound policies and practices in respect of rural issues particularly those relating to rural services and rural communities.
- 3.7 To promote the policies of the Group to national government and other relevant organisations.
- 3.8 To develop relationships with other LGA Special Interest Groups, its People and Places Board and with other appropriate Service Boards, as may be established from time to time.
- 3.9 To do anything that is calculated to facilitate or is conducive or incidental to the discharge of the objectives of the Group.
- 3.10 To promote innovation and best practice in furtherance of the achievement of greater efficiencies across member authorities.
- 3.11 The Special Interest Group (SIG) to work with other Rural Service providers and those interested in rural services (grouped together as The Rural Services Partnership (RSP); as a section of the umbrella partnership known as The Rural Services Network - to represent rural services generally, facilitate best practice and create the strongest network possible in support of continuous improvement of services and wellbeing in general in the rural areas of England.

- 3.12 The Group may, from time to time, at an Annual General Meeting decide to establish service specific groups or topic groups based on the Group's Priorities for Action. All members will be entitled to attend such meetings. In respect of such meetings, in addition to each member authority's normal representatives, the Portfolio Holders and Chief Officers (or their representatives) will be invited to attend.
- 3.13 Unless the Group at an Annual General Meeting decides to the contrary, each year a Seminar Programme will be organised. All of those paying membership to the Sparse, Rural Assembly, RMTG, RSP groupings of the RSN will be entitled to attend.

4. Purpose of Subgroups

- 4.1 The Group will undertake its work through the operation of two Subgroups.
- 4.2 These Subgroups shall be named SPARSE Rural and the Rural Assembly.
- 4.3 The purposes of the Subgroups shall be as follows.

A. SPARSE RURAL:

This subgroup will represent the financial interests of Principal Councils classified as Predominantly Rural and those Significantly Rural authorities which stand to gain by the Group's financial representations.

To promote the financial interests of the most rural local government authorities and to make representations to Government and other relevant bodies on the allocation of funding to the most rural authorities and other publicly funded bodies serving their areas.

To establish a comprehensive networking system to allow members to discuss in detail rural considerations relating to the range of service areas they provide and where appropriate for these networks to also involve community representatives and non-local authority service providers to allow service issues to be viewed holistically.

To seek to facilitate collective working across authorities with a view to achieving both maintenance of rural service and the cutting of cost. This work to include financial and non-financial performance analysis and comparison of services and working through service groupings.

B. THE RURAL ASSEMBLY:

To provide to all members (including members of the Rural Services Partnership) appropriate information on rural matters generally.

To act as a conduit on rural issues between authorities with rural areas. As well as act as a conduit to those rural areas themselves with the LGA's People and Places Board and other appropriate Service Boards, with Parliament and Government Departments and with other organisations with a rural interest.

C. The SPARSE AND RURAL ASSEMBLY:

To allow a consensus view to be established on current issues between authorities with a rural interest in order to inform the LGA's operational structures of the position relating to rural areas in England

Where appropriate, to facilitate discussions between rural authorities in England and other bodies with an interest in issues which affect rural areas/communities/businesses in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland with a view to establishing rural best practice and inter organisational learning.

To where possible assist in supporting a rural dimension to appropriate LGA conferences.

5. The Annual Meeting

- 5.1 The Group will meet at the Annual Meeting to appoint the office holders.
- 5.2 The Annual Meeting shall meet towards the end of each calendar year to approve the income and expenditure Accounts of the Group, agree the budget of the Group, to set the annual service charges and approve the work programme. Other meetings (including where considered necessary Extraordinary Annual General Meetings) will be held as required and the meetings shall deal with such other business as may be determined by the Executive.
- 5.3 The Annual Meeting may from time to time make standing orders for the regulation of the Group's proceedings.

6. Membership of Meetings and Subgroup Meetings and Roles

- 6.1 The Meetings shall comprise the appointed representatives of the Member Authorities or Leaders of those authorities who have not made such an appointment. Elected members may be accompanied by Officers of the Member Council. Meetings of the Rural Services Network may follow on from Group Meetings and where necessary separate votes may be taken of the Rural Services Partnership's membership.
- 6.2 The names of members appointed by member authorities to serve at meetings and any appointed substitute appointments shall be given to the Chief Executive in writing by the Chief Executive of their Member Authority (or other officer nominated to act on their behalf) as requested. For the avoidance of doubt each member authority may appoint a substitute member to act in the place of the nominated member. To assist continuity and representation both the nominated member and the substitute member can attend meetings but only one may vote on an issue.
- 6.3 The period of office for members shall normally begin with effect from member authorities Annual Meetings in each year and shall end immediately before their Annual Meeting in the following year, provided that representatives shall cease to be eligible for membership when they cease to hold office as members of their authority or when their authority ceases to be in membership of the Group.

Roles within Membership Local Authorities

- 6.4 **Nominated Member** – This will be the RSN's main point of contact with the Councillors of each local authority in membership. The Nominated Member is often nominated at Councils Annual Meeting and is likely to be a member of the Cabinet or ruling party. The Nominated Member will be invited to attend meetings of the Rural Services Network, (currently held online) and will be sent information about RSN's campaigns on behalf of rural local authorities. (See substitute arrangements in clause 6.2 above.)
- 6.5 **Nominated Officer** – This will be the RSN's main point of contact with the Officers at each local authority in membership. The Nominated Officer will be copied into correspondence with the Nominated Member and will also receive invitations to meetings. They will be sent information about RSN campaigns on behalf of rural local authorities and may also be sent information about Government Consultations where the RSN is collating a rural response. The Nominated Officer should distribute information across the authority as they feel appropriate. A back up contact for this role is desirable.

7. Voting at Meetings

- 7.1 Each Member Authority shall be entitled to cast one vote at all meetings on occasions when it is decided to proceed by vote and a decision is not reached by consensus (which will be usual practice).
- 7.2 In the case of an equality of votes the Chair of the meeting shall have the casting vote.
- 7.3 A member may nominate another member being a currently serving member of any member Authority to attend a meeting on their behalf and exercise his or her vote(s) provided that written notice is given to the Chief Executive of the Group before the start of the meeting by the Chief Executive or other appropriate officer of the Member Authority or by the originally nominated member.

8. Office Holders

- 8.1 The Annual Meeting of the Group shall in each year appoint from amongst the members representing Member Authorities the following office holders:
- 8.1.1 A Chair and (if considered appropriate) a Deputy Chair;
 - 8.1.2 Vice-Chair (The number of which shall be determined by the Annual Meeting making the appointment. One of the vice-chair shall be identified as First Vice-Chair).
- 8.2 To achieve continuity of overall operation, the Chair, Deputy Chair and Vice-Chair of the Group will also hold the same offices on the Executive and on each Subgroup.
- 8.3 Voting on all appointments shall be as follows:

Where there are more than two persons nominated for each position, and of the votes given there is not a majority in favour of one person, the name of the person having the least number of votes shall be struck off the list and a fresh vote shall be taken, and so on, until a majority of votes is given in favour of one person.

- 8.4 The Chair (and in their absence, The Deputy Chair or in their absence, the First Vice Chair or in their absence one of the Vice-Chair) will have the following responsibilities:
- A. To promote the Group and Subgroups as a whole;
 - B. To uphold and promote the purposes of the Constitution and to interpret the Constitution where necessary;
 - C. To preside over meetings so that its business can be carried out efficiently; and
 - D. To ensure meetings are a forum for debate on matters of common interest.
- 8.5 The Chair, Deputy Chair and Vice-Chair will hold office until:
- A. The next Annual Meeting of the Group,
 - B. They resign from the office; or
 - C. They are no longer a Councillor of the member authority which appointed them; or
 - D. They are removed from office by resolution; or
 - E. The member authority they represent ceases to be a member of the Group.
- 9. If a Chair ceases to be the Chair as a result of Article 8.5 (B), (C), (D) or (E) above the Group shall forthwith appoint a new Chair Pending the appointment of a new Chair, all powers and functions of the Chair shall be vested in the Deputy Chair. The Executive**
- 9.1 There shall be an Executive of the Special Interest Group whose purpose will be to provide strategic direction and conduct the normal day to day business of the Group (including budget management) apart from work delegated to the Group's Officers.
- 9.2 The Annual Meeting shall determine the terms of reference, delegated powers, size, and composition of the Executive and may, if felt necessary, make Standing Orders for the regulation of their proceedings.
- 9.3 The Executive will, where appropriate, meet with the Board of Directors of the Rural Services Partnership Limited and up to 6 further nominees of their choice, to achieve overall Rural Services Network purposes. Where it is felt necessary, separate votes will be taken when formal decisions are required to be made by the Directors of the Rural Services Partnership Ltd.
- 9.4 The Chair of the Group shall be Chair of the Executive.
- 9.5 The Chair, Deputy Chair and Vice-Chair of the Group may nominate another member being a currently nominated member of any member Authority to attend an Executive meeting on his or her behalf and exercise their vote(s) provided that written notice is given to the Chief Executive of the Group before the start of the meeting.
- 10. Responsibility for Action**
- 10.1 In matters relating to local government in general or which concern all member authorities of the Subgroups, the Group and its Subgroups will speak for all its member authorities. The Group and its Subgroups, however, cannot commit their individual member authorities to any particular course of action or to support or not support any particular policy position.

11. Meetings of the Group, Subgroups and Executive

- 11.1 Meetings of the Group and Executive shall be held on such days and at such places (or virtually) as may be decided by the Executive.
- 11.2 The Chief Executive shall ensure:
- A. Not less than twenty-eight clear days before each ordinary meeting including Extra Ordinary Annual Meetings of the Group and not less than two months before the Annual Meeting there shall be posted on the RSN website, a notice stating the date, time and place of the meeting; and
 - B. Not less than ten working days before the meeting send to each Member Authority by email or post an agenda specifying the business to be transacted.

12. Nominated Officers and RSN Staff

- 12.1 There shall be a Chief Executive and a Deputy or Assistant Chief Executive of the Group appointed on such terms and conditions as the Executive may think fit, and such other staff as may be necessary for the purpose of implementing the Group's and the Subgroups aims and objectives. These staff members individually and collectively will support the working of the Group and the Subgroups.
- 12.2 The Group and Subgroups shall, where considered necessary, ask the Chief Executives of Member Authorities to provide advisors to support the work programme as necessary, including financial and strategic service advisers.

13. Finance

- 13.1 Each year the Executive shall submit for consideration to the Annual Meeting of the Group a statement of estimated expenditure for the year commencing on the following first day of April. The Executive shall have delegated authority to vary the budget within the financial year as necessary – subject to report at the next Group meeting.
- 13.2 The service charges for each year commencing on the 1st of April shall be at rates to be determined from time to time by the Group and those rates shall vary across groups, taking into consideration the running costs involved.
- 13.3 Each year the Chief Executive shall be responsible for the preparation of an Income and Expenditure Account involving jointly the Rural Services Network Special Interest Group and the Rural Services Partnership Limited, for the preparation of Company Accounts by professional tax accountants and for the submission of those accounts to the Group.
- 13.4 The income and property of the Group organisation shall be applied solely towards the promotion of the Group's objectives.
- 13.5 The Group may invest, lend, or otherwise deal with monies not immediately required for its purposes in such manner as may be thought fit by the Executive, and may borrow or raise money in accordance with financial regulations agreed by the Annual Meeting.
- 13.6 The Group may purchase, take on lease or otherwise obtain land to provide accommodation for the use of staff, provided that if land or buildings are leased from

a Member Authority this shall be on a basis that the rent paid is no more than a reasonable and proper rent in the circumstances.

- 13.7 The Chief Executive and the Deputy or Assistant Chief Executive, or in their absence another appointed officer, shall be authorised to enter and execute all instruments, deeds or assurances on behalf of the Group.
- 13.8 The cost of attendance, travel and subsistence in connection with meetings of the Group and Subgroups shall be met by the member or officer's own authority. The Group itself will meet those costs in respect of members of the Executive attending Executive Meetings or otherwise representing the Group.

14. Resignation of Member Authorities

- 14.1 Any Member Authority wishing to terminate its membership shall give not less than twelve months' notice, in writing, to the Chief Executive to expire on 31 March in any year.
- 14.2 Any Member Authority shall, upon ceasing to be a member of the Group, forfeit all right to and claims upon the Group and its property and funds, and, without prejudice to Article 15, shall pay such amount representing the authority's share of responsibility towards liabilities incurred by the Group on behalf of member authorities, including payments due to contractors, during the currency of the authority's membership, such share to be calculated having regard to the proportion which the subscription paid by that authority bears to the total annual subscription of the Group from its members in total.

15. Dissolution

- 15.1 A motion for dissolution of the Group must be notified in advance as an agenda item for the Annual Meeting or an Extraordinary General Meeting.
- 15.2 A motion for dissolution shall require a formal majority of at least two-thirds of members present with at least two-thirds of such authorities represented at the meeting, or through a postal vote procedure authorised by an Annual Meeting decision under the procedures outlined in 16.1 below.
- 15.3 If the Group's funds should prove to be insufficient to discharge its liabilities Member Authorities shall contribute such additional sum as is required collectively to eliminate the deficiency pro rata to the level of their subscription.
- 15.4 In the event of a dispute between a member or former member authority and the Group as to the amount which an authority should contribute under this rule the matter shall be referred to arbitration.
- 15.5 The arbitration shall be conducted in accordance with the Arbitration Rules of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators. The Arbitrator shall be asked to determine the extent to which an authority or authorities should contribute and to determine the matter in accordance with what is fair in all the circumstances. In the event that the Arbitrator issues a determination, providing that a member or former member Authority is liable to contribute a specified sum under this Rule, the authority shall pay the monies which the Arbitrator determines it ought to pay within sixty days of the issue of the award. The Arbitrator shall be appointed by agreement of Chief

Executive and Deputy or Assistant Chief Executive or in default of such agreement by the President for the time being of the Law Society.

16. Amendment to the Constitution

16.1 The Annual Meeting (or an Extraordinary General Meeting convened for the purpose) shall have power to amend this Constitution:

16.1.1 Save that no amendments may be made to articles 13.4 or 14.1 and any purported amendments to those articles shall not be effective; and

16.1.2 Provided that a motion in favour of each such amendment shall be passed by at least two thirds of members present and voting (in person or by Proxy) and, if necessary, through the following additional procedure:

If 10% of the members signify to the Chief Executive, in writing prior to the meeting, that they wish the amendment to be put to a postal ballot of the membership. The amendment shall be carried if it receives the support of at least two thirds of the ballot papers returned.

17. Urgent Decisions

17.1 The Chair in consultation with the Deputy Chair or First Vice-Chair may take a decision which is a matter of urgency and is not delegated to the Officers. However, the decision may only be taken:

17.1.1 If it is not practical to convene a quorate meeting of the Executive; and

17.1.2 If the Chair of the Group agrees that the decision is a matter of urgency.

17.1.3 If the Executive is quorate meaning it should have at least 3 Local Authority representatives present to make a decision.

The reasons why it is not practical to convene a quorate meeting of the Executive and the consent of the Chair to the decision being taken as a matter of urgency must be noted on the record of the decision. Following the decision, the Chair will provide a full report to the next meeting of the Group or Executive explaining the decision, the reason for it and why the decision was treated as a matter of urgency.