



Frequently Asked Questions

Most Frequently Asked Questions about Rural Services Network and the Rural/Market Towns Group

What is our mission statement? In other words, why are we here and why we are doing this?

The Rural Services Network is the national champion for rural services, ensuring that people in rural areas have a strong voice. We are fighting for a fair deal for rural communities to maintain their social and economic viability for the benefit of the nation.

The Defra definition of rural dwellers includes those living in market towns (below a population of 30,000) and other centres serving rural areas.

We believe that rural areas in England have frequently been overlooked in a policy environment dominated by urban thinking and policy concerns. This often means that rural communities, and their towns either miss out on the benefits or experience unintended consequences from policies which are poorly thought through from a rural perspective.

The Rural Market Town Group plays an important role in ensuring that the Rural Services Network can effectively represent rural areas.

Is Rural Services Network a quango?

Definitely not! RSN is an independent and completely non-political organisation that has been operating for more than 18 years. We get no government funding whatsoever nor do we want any because government funding can restrict the ability to argue a case that government may not wish to encourage. RSN is a membership organisation, and a Special Interest Group of the Local Government Association, and because we handle money, we are a legal entity – a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee.

Providing a voice for rural communities and service providers

Rural Services Network

PO Box 101, Craven Arms, Shropshire, SY7 7AL

Tel: 01822 851370

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

Why should Town Councils join the Rural/Market Towns Group?

RSN is the national champion for rural services and we can only effectively represent rural areas by giving town councils a voice in the national debate and enable them to have their voice heard. By coming together the rural towns will have a stronger voice on issues that matter to them.

Why is this initiative important for every rural resident?

Rural areas and their intricate network of rural communities have the potential to play a much more important part of the national economy and need to be appropriately recognised and supported in government thinking and actions. We want to help our rural communities to reach their potential, and we think that by working together, it provides all those in rural areas with a collective voice to raise issues.

What are the benefits of membership?

There are a wide range of benefits to membership and the latest list of services provided can be accessed at this link: [RMTG Service Agreement](#)

What is RSN intending to do?

As the national champion for rural areas, the RSN has put together a series of asks which we want to see the parties adopt in their manifestos. The challenges rural communities face cannot be tackled in isolation, our communities need homes they can afford, with good jobs, connectivity to enable businesses to grow and access to public services that are fairly funded.

Our Winning the Rural Vote campaign provides the answers for political parties and policy makers and the benefits would be felt by the nation as a whole. For more information, take a look at our [Delivering for Rural document here](#).

Will there be additional cost above the small subscription?

No additional income other than the subscription will be requested.

What is the cost of membership of the RMTG for the 2025/2026 financial year?

- Town/Parish Councils with below 5,000 residents - £105
- Town/Parish Councils with between 5,000 and 10,000 residents - £123.90
- Town/Parish Councils with above 10,000 residents - £143.85

** Population figures taken from the 2021 Census and prices quoted plus VAT*

Why have we contacted your parish/town council?

Rural areas are all very different as England is a particularly diverse country. We have selected 200 places with seemingly varying rural characteristic to initially invite, with a view to ensuring input can be fairly claimed to be cross national. We

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have largely so far generally avoided using neighbouring parishes/towns for that reason. However, having established such an initial operating platform we do plan to incrementally grow the grouping out from there and all rural parishes towns will in time be involved.

Towns are often members of organisations like NALC and Market Operation Associations. Is there an overlap with other organisations?

No, our role is very different. We are a membership organisation and work on behalf of our members as the national champion for rural services.

We support our member organisations which comprise rural Local Authorities, rural housing associations, health trusts, national bodies and third sector organisations, along with Town and Parish Councils through the sharing of best practice and rural expertise, we advocate to ensure that the rural voice is raised up the agenda with Government; parliamentarians and decision makers.

NALC is the [National Association of Local Councils](#) and is the only national body that represents the interests of 10,000 local (urban and rural parish and town) councils in England. NALC works in partnership with county associations (ALCs) and topic groups to support, promote and improve local councils.

ACRE ([Action with Communities in Rural England](#)) is the national body for England's largest rural grouping of community support charities. They support the network of village halls and the regional community councils and coordinate funded projects, programmes and research.

Has there been a Market Towns initiative before?

Yes, there has, and some good work was done but it was for a time limited period. It was grant and project based, and it included all English Towns. The essential difference is that this initiative is subscription based, and we are a membership organisation representing rural communities across England.

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