



**RMTG Clerks Advisory Panel meeting
Online via Zoom
10:30am-12pm, Thursday, 4th March 2021**

Notes

Graham Biggs MBE, Chief Executive and David Inman, Corporate Director of Rural Services Network welcomed everyone to the second meeting of the Rural Market Town Group (RMTG) Clerks Advisory Panel.

Please note that attendance & apologies have been noted at the end of this document.

1. Matters Arising from the last RMTG Clerks Advisory Panel meeting.

Highlights

Notes from RMTG Clerks Advisory Panel meeting which took place on Monday, 30th November 2020 was agreed as a correct record.

2. Current Membership.

RMTG from a regional perspective.

[Please click here to view the RMTG page](#)

3. RMTG Officer Steering Group.

Highlights

David briefed members on the brief of this group and asked any volunteers that wish to be a part of it to email us on

admin@sparse.gov.uk.

RMTG Member Comments

Nicola Young (Ledbury Town Council) noted that the Officer Steering Group was lacking a representative from West Midlands and volunteered her colleague to be added as a representative for this group. The offer was accepted with thanks.

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4. Review of Government's (1) Towns Fund and (2) Future High Street Fund Criteria and Allocations.

Highlights

Graham raised the issue that according to recent budget announcement, it seems that the Towns Fund has been subsumed into the Levelling Up Fund. We are currently in the process of reviewing the new budget announcements through the rural perspective. He also explained the purpose of this fund. Levelling Up Fund – is a new fund that was formed seemingly without detailed supporting data being released. Every Local Authority in England has been categorised in the Levelling Up Fund into categories one, two and three. It does include district councils but not include county councils. In category one there is a good representation of rural areas with a caveat that these categorisations do not mean that all funds will be for areas in category one, but we can be certain that category three might not get as much as the others. We are yet to hear more information on the Levelling Up Fund and its implications for rural areas.

- We are pressing Defra to find out what metrics and data were used to create these categories because without it we cannot rural proof any of these decisions or allocations. If we will ever receive any information on this (or if it is made public), we will inform RMTG members.
- Overall, we welcome this fund as we see it as a good starting point in tackling rural issues. Nevertheless, our analysis shows that there is still some way to go to address the issues faced by rural areas based on the initial allocations.
- We will continue to press the case that levelling up must be more than just capital projects.

Overall, this fund would marry up well with the work that we already do on financial distribution.

We recently published a report on the Treasury's Green Book, which outlines the process by which decision are made and found it lacking nuanced consideration of the rural context. We will be seeking engagement with both Treasury and other Government bodies on this topic. All these funds: Towns Fund, Future High Streets Fund are integral to all of that too. Due to yesterday's announcements, please note that this is new and will be ongoing work.

The formula under which funds are being distributed is an ongoing item. From RMTG perspective, if you feel you have any evidence to add or bids you made were unsuccessful, or if you think that the criteria

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applied by government is worth scrutiny, please get in touch with us on admin@sparse.gov.uk.

RMTG Member Comments

Vanessa Saunders (Holsworthy Town Council) highlighted that she got the impression that many of our Town and High Streets were too small to be considered and asked Rural Services Network if there is a possibility of putting combined bids in which small town could bid into. For example, forming a South West group of councils of similar size to Holsworthy to submit combined bids. As we believe we do face similar issues to areas of a similar size and potentially this could help us to access funding. She also asked that when we lobby Government, we make sure to mention that county boundaries are very limiting to some market towns, because we are very near other counties. Vanessa's point was supported also by Emma James (Okehampton Town Council).

Graham mentioned that he will be having an interview with Channel 4 on fund allocations, and he will make sure to mention this point. He also noted that Government has not properly considered smaller market towns, or the geographical areas they serve directly or indirectly. We feel we have a case there to ask for a more proportional investment into much smaller towns which are themselves transformative in terms of the areas they are serving. Graham commented that Government is unlikely to consider combined bids from joint areas that are from different districts or counties. He also noted that local authorities do acknowledge that regarding economic areas, county lines are more to do with history rather than defined economically functioning areas.

We will seek to update RMTG members on the Levelling Up Fund in the future.

5. Rural Market Town Group Survey – Rural Transport outcomes.

At the first RMTG meeting of Councillor Representatives the group asked to be surveyed on rural buses, to see if there were immediate discernible trends across the group in relation to bus service cutbacks and the impact on rural towns. In an exercise of this nature, it is inevitable there will be variation of outcomes because we are dealing with differing communities. Although this has been an exercise that required Councillors in many ways to give a best guess, as opposed to statistical information, the overall picture is interesting.

Highlights

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David informed members that we have shared the survey results with our colleague Brian Wilson at Rural England CIC. We often work with them on similar research. Over this year our colleague is compiling a report on the state of rural services, to be published in January 2022. Therefore, he might seek to create a further survey on the impacts in rural areas. David also noted that it would be useful if RMTG members could all agree a similar survey on shops and services in their area to be broadly done at the same time, as we would like to seek to consult you on this topic as well on the number of closures, fall in footfall, changes in takings, etc. As we would need evidence to establish a national lobbying position on these topics.

RMTG members agreed to proceed with the consultation discussed later in the year. RSN will seek to draft such survey to seek hard evidence from members.

6. Revitalising Rural: Realising the Vision.

Our Revitalising Rural campaign launch took place this past Monday, 1st March 2021.

[Click here to read the Revitalising Rural chapters](#)¹

We would like to strongly advise you to look into two specific chapters most relevant to this group:

- [Parish Councils and Rural Community Action](#)²
- [Rural Town Centres and High Streets](#)³

Highlights

Updated RMTG members on the formal national and membership launch of the Revitalising Rural campaign events held in the past month. We will keep pushing for appropriate rural proofing.

At the same time, we ran our previous campaign called It's Time for a Rural Strategy, a Lord's select committee on rural economy was formed which reached the same conclusions as we did in our campaign. Our new campaign, Revitalising Rural, builds on the previous campaign but also highlights how our rural economies can reach their full potential and play a key part in achieving Governments currently set national goals.

[Please click here to view report on Revitalising Rural campaign launch.](#)⁴

¹ <https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/revitalising-rural>

² <https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/revitalising-rural/parish-councils-rural-community.pdf>

³ <https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/revitalising-rural/rural-town-centres.pdf>

⁴ <https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/revitalising-rural/launch-report.pdf>

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Graham encouraged all RMTG members to read through the campaign papers and contact us on admin@sparse.gov.uk with any case studies members deem relevant.

Please note this report was also sent to all relevant Government departments Select Committees, All Party Parliamentary Groups, relevant civil servants, all MP's representing rural constituencies and other rural interest groups. All to try and gather support for the campaign and asking all people in parliament to take opportunities to debate, discuss, question, and follow other processes to engage with rural issues outlined. As before we will seek to engage with the House of Lords, especially members of the HoL Select Committee on the Rural Economy.

7. [The National Innovation Centre for Rural Enterprise](#)⁵ (NICRE).

Highlights

David updated the RMTG member on the NICRE initiative which will be spun over a 3-year period. It will involve three universities: Newcastle (where a physical centre will be established), Warwick and Gloucestershire, all working together to foster and assist Rural Enterprise across England. This is an important initiative and having been one of the supporters of the funding bid that allowed it to proceed, RSN will be looking to work with the initiative wherever possible. We hope that some of this work will relate to Rural Market Towns and to the RMTG.

Graham also noted that NICRE applied for funding, got the funding, and are now contractually obligated to deliver what they proposed. We are yet to hear what research they will be doing in the future. But as mentioned by David, in their bid they have made specific reference to Market Towns, therefore we got in touch with them about RMTG. **We will seek to keep members updated on the possible future work with NICRE.**

8. **A RMTG Rural Information Exchange.**

At the first RMTG meeting of councillor representatives, we were asked to look at ways the RMTG could facilitate exchange of views, information, and best practice between group members across the RMTG. This is a matter RSN officers wish to take forward as soon we are able, and it is something we wish to give a future high priority to.

⁵ <https://ncl.ac.uk/nicre/about/>

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As with all networks there is a need for people to work consistently with them acting as facilitators. We have had discussion with the RMTG Officer Steering Group members about this and we feel the creation of an efficient way to exchange information and good practice will considerably assist this initiative.

Highlights

David informed the group that we will work on a proposition and options for the forum, and we will keep you updated on the progress of this. We believe that creating a platform specifically for RMTG members to share best practice and discuss relevant topics between members would be of utmost importance in the long term for this group.

9. Extra expenditure occasioned by local councils because of the pandemic and the sheltering of vulnerable people.

Attachment outlines St Austell's correspondence exchange with the Ministry. We discussed this at the last meeting of this group and David Pooley (St Austell Town Council) agreed to provide details of their position in relation to extra expenditure in their town. Clearly there has been additional expenditure and loss of income, particularly in rural areas by both local councils and Principal Councils. Our preliminary view is that we do not feel MHCLG have currently taken full account of this. However, if we are to seek to pursue this matter in anyway, we will need evidence to facilitate the ongoing discussion with the Ministry. Subject to the views of this meeting we will be surveying all members on this matter.

Highlights

David informed the group that we believe Government should be made aware of the issues and consider the situations that have occurred at the local council level across the nation. Hence, why we are seeking direct and evidence and input from you to understand each local council's financial position and present an evidence-based case to the Government. We will seek to consult you on the question of extra expenditure incurred or income lost related to Covid-19.

Graham noted that we will seek to get precise information, to narrow down the data. We are aware that district, county, and unitary authorities have been sending in returns to central Government of increased expenditure and lost income due to Covid-19. We know that central Government has been reimbursing them (at least in part), but they have not been doing this for the parish and town council sector. Here is the group that is not eligible to receive any recompense for the

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community support that you made available, but they are also not getting the same as other tiers of local Government in terms of lost income. We would need to demonstrate how big a proportion those expenses are in your overall budgets and we realise that the sums of money for the Government might look small, but they might look like big percentages of your budgets. Therefore, the survey on this topic will be quite narrow, looking at these specific things. Please note that this survey does not seek to dismiss all the other work that you have done to help your local communities.

RMTG Member Comments

Lynda Walker (Keswick Town Council)

In the last 20 years had 3 significant flooding events which have devastated our parks and have cost us a lot of money. We have taken these issues to the Government but have not successful ever got any money back to cover those costs. Now in the case of Covid-19, we see that everyone has been affected by it nationwide so we think that we might have a strong case here, but I do have a lack of optimism in us getting any money from the district or Government level for the parish and town councils and this opinion is based on our previous experience.

Vanessa Saunders (Holsworthy Town Council)

Mentioned that her district council were quite good with funding even though they had a hard time delivering it as it was tied up in red tape that made it difficult for them to at a town and parish level. But they gave us some money additional to the precept, and they also gave their district councillors more grant, so that meant that in Torridge each councillor had a grant which they can use to fund projects/activities in their local areas for parishes and towns. That is one of the ways we have received additional funds, through this scheme created by our district council. But regarding county council level – we did not receive any support.

Graham thanked all members for their comments and added that we realise that some of you might have received some funding and we will seek to collect information on if you did receive support from your principal authorities or not.

RMTG members agreed to be surveyed on this topic. And in September we will seek to consult members further on the impact of Covid-19 on your local businesses.

10. Planning Gain

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One of the items discussed, by a recent meeting of the RMTG Officer Steering Group, was the lack of correlation between infrastructure and other community benefits promised on the back of outline planning applications and the resultant outcomes from a series of smaller and incremental planning applications made by developers on the back of the original outline planning consent. It was felt that there may be merit in a survey across the group on this topic to establish whether this pattern was widespread. We would like to kindly request views from the RMTG Clerks Advisory Panel.

Highlights

Graham suggested that we look at what comes out of the next iteration of the planning changes which outlines Government intentions, that includes things the Government's Planning White Paper covers which must be legislated for. We will seek to look at this later in the year when more detail is available.

- 11. Items for the RMTG meeting of Councillor Representatives.**
RMTG meeting will take place from 4:30pm to 6pm on Monday, 29th March 2021. We have already circulated the invitation to relevant appointed representatives (and clerks where there was no appointee made).
- 12. Any Other Business**

Highlights

Graham raised that we had a request from Cumbria County Council. Cumbria like North Yorkshire and Somerset have had their May elections postponed whilst there is a consultation on unitary status. The councillor in question, who serves on our executive, said we are wanting to look, as part of this process, at the issues of service devolution to parish and town councils. His plea is if anybody thinks they have or are a good parish or town council, taking on duties around culture and arts and other areas, Cumbria would like to explore some of those good examples. If members would like to put themselves or another parish/town council that fits this bill, please get in touch with us on admin@sparse.gov.uk.

We just wanted to highlight to members that we do record RMTG meetings but only for not taking purposes, we do not publicise them or stream the meetings live. After we make the notes available to you, recordings are deleted.

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Attendance and Apologies

Attendance

Julie Abbott	Hythe Town Council
Graham Biggs MBE	Rural Services Network
Lesley Bruton	Tenbury Town Council
Julie Debbage	Leominster Town Council
Sarah Greatorex	Halstead Town Council
Esther Greig	Camelford Town Council
Carol Grey	Penrith Town Council
Helen Griffiths	Chalfont St Giles Parish Council
Catherine Hibbert	Clare Town Council
Paul Hodson	Buckingham Town Council
Angela Howells	Westerham Town Council
David Inman	Rural Services Network
Emma James	Okehampton Town Council
Tina Jeffery	Uttoxeter Town Council
Katie Jeffreys	Earby Town Council
Catherine Marlton	Totnes Town Council
	Middleton-in-Teesdale and Newbiggin Parish Council
Judith Mashister	Hunstanton Town Council
Jan Roomes	Holsworthy Town Council
Vanessa Saunders	Alton Town Council
Wendy Simson	Harworth and Bircotes Town Council
Karen Tarburton	Faringdon Town Council
Sally Thurston	Keswick Town Council
Lynda Walker	Ledbury Town Council
Nicola Young	

Apologies

Louise Powell	Thornbury Town Council
Will Austin	Bridport Town Council
Emma Baker	Oundle Town Council
Jo Barker	Luddesdown Parish Council
Christina Bewley	Totnes Town Council
Maggie Birtles	Brewood and Coven Parish Council
Jane Coleman	Maldon Town Council
Leah Coney	Alton Town Council
Christopher Drake	Launceston Town Council
Ryan Hayman	Swanley Town Council
Julie Holden	East Grinstead Town Council
Ginette James	Lechland on Thames Town Council
Terry Jordan	Wisbech Town Council

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Charlotte Kirkby
Tracey Mangold
Dave Mullington
Samantha Parkin
David Pooley
David Pooley
Angela Price
Samantha Rawle
Allison Riddell
Alison Rood
Samantha Shippen
Steven Singleton
Ian Cruise-Taylor

Great Torrington Town Council
Guisborough Town Council
Cheadle Town Council
Moretonhampstead Parish Council
St Austell Town Council
St Austell Town Council
Ledbury Town Council
Minehead Town Council
Brampton Parish Council
Stroud Town Council
Bicester Town Council
Clowne Parish Council
The Gorge Parish Council

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