



**RMTG Meeting
Online via Zoom
16:30pm-18pm, Monday, 29th 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) meeting.

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

1. **Matters Arising from the last RMTG meeting.**

Highlights

Notes from RMTG meeting which took place on Monday, 9th 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

Cllr Anthony Hiron (Lutterworth Town Council) & Cllr Jenny Bartlett (Leominster Town Council) both highlighted the importance of ensuring that this grouping represents all areas of England and RSN has agreed to work towards that.

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4. 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 could 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 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

Cllr Anthony Hiron (Lutterworth Town Council)

Highlighted that in Leicestershire and Rutland areas one of the issues is that through their association of local councils they have managed to

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get about £50 000 for town and parish councils which have been given by the Government to district councils to be distributed down. It was difficult to obtain due to district councils being unaware of how smaller councils work. Cllr Hirons wished to point out that he is sure this has been the case in other areas of England.

Graham highlighted that the survey would include questions in relation to this, all to seek evidence and see the outcomes of the survey.

Cllr Jenny Bartlett (Leominster Town Council)

We are based in a unitary authority, in our case we did not received funds but received things such free PPE, advice etc. We did get help but not with money. I noticed that the attachment states that:

“Mixed messages have been received from the Government and principal authorities with regard to hardship funding. The Minister for State suggested that principal authorities should pass on hardship funding to Parish and Town Councils (see letter attached). Very few have done this. No funding has been provided direct to Parish and Town Councils in relation to the pandemic other than through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.”

We have asked if we could apply as a parish council for this scheme, to help our officers who are not working, and we were told that we could not because we were paid from their precept.

Graham mentioned that there were some mixed messages in the attachment and from Government. The Government did imply early on that councils should not use the furlough scheme, but I am aware of some upper tier authorities who did put some of their staff on furlough. What we want to discuss is not the Hardship Fund. What we are seeking to achieve here is to gain evidence about the scale relevant to budgets and precepts of both loses of income and increased expenditure. We will also seek to capture lost opportunity cost, expenditure that otherwise would have gone into services which has gone towards Covid-19 support, losing the opportunity to spend those funds on what was originally forecasted in your respective budgets.

Cllr Amanda Brown (Great Dunmow Town Council)

When talking about the Hardship Fund, Essex County Council have been giving money to groups money for free school meals for children. Is this what you mean?

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Graham, I do not know what Government classes as a Hardship Fund. But I do know that over and above that fund, they have had recompense for lost income and extra expenditure. That is why the survey and research we are seeking to do needs to be investigating extra expenditure incurred by towns and parishes.

We will seek to run this survey as soon as possible and will keep the group updated on this work.

5. 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

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,

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

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

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

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

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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.

In the future in the effort to keep this campaign and documents live and up to date, we will seek for input from RMTG members on relevant chapters. We will seek to keep you updated and have further discussion on this campaign in future RMTG meetings.

6. A Short Live Poll and Discussion with RMTG Members.

Highlights

Graham, briefed RMTG members that going further we will seek to look at the previously discussed campaign Revitalising Rural through the eyes of older people, working age families, young people, and rural businesses. By doing this we will seek to bring this campaign to life and reflect rural communities across England.

Poll

To help us focus our activities on behalf of the RMTG, please prioritise the following from your Town's perspective when looking forward at issues facing these groups of people over the next 3 years. Please just indicate your top priority.

Results:

- 1.** Working Age Families – 15 voted out of 32.
- 2.** Young People – 13 voted out of 32.
- 3.** Older People – 4 voted out of 32.

7. Rural Perspective – Government's Place Based Funds.

Attached is a report undertaken by RSN staff and Graham Biggs MBE, Chief Executive.

Highlights

Graham mentioned that this is a position in time, these funds came out one after another. We tried to look at these funds from a rural perspective. The reality is that we cannot change the funds for current and this financial year. What we want to do if we can gain sufficient evidence to influence what Government does in the future with the Levelling Up Fund and the Shared Prosperity Fund. We reviewed the

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methodology applied and looked at where it appears not to produce a level playing field for rural areas.

RMTG Member Comments

David Wright (Market Harborough Town)

Is there a role for this group to share ideas and funding ideas that might be available in different other market towns on these funds? As we have looked at them and struggled to find things that are needed or might be prioritised, as we see that both schemes will be quite competitive processes.

Graham responded that in terms of Towns Fund, the allocations have been made. In terms of the Community Renewal Fund, the timescales involved are tight, that for this first round, which is the last round for this fund, my best advice is to engage with the lead authority in your area on these particular funds. Regarding the Levelling Up Fund, the initiative there is on capital. We will be doing a survey of our members and after that we will look at what funds have been utilised and after that we would be happy to share those results with the wider RMTG group. Meanwhile, if we look at the Towns Fund that the Government started with a list of 1,084 towns as numerated by the Office of national statistics, in which any town with a population less than 5 000 was excluded. That is quite a big town size for a rural area to exclude. Methodology of the Towns Fund has been questionable when it came to allocations that relate to population size and further changes made to bring the number of Towns reviewed down to 100 eliminated (were it not, in some case, for ministerial discretion) towns with the population of 15 000. The methodology used for the Towns Fund and the questions on population size are still something we push for reviewing in our discussions with Defra.

Cllr Jenny Bartlett (Leominster Town Council)

Highlighted that besides having a good relationship with the principal authority in your individual area there are very few opportunities for market towns to get funding from Government. Therefore, it would be useful in the future to investigate how we in this group could develop best practice and use it, especially when it comes to finding information and applying for funding.

David Wright (Market Harborough Town)

We have started having discussions with our county council, and we came up with two ideas which might have wider relevance across the country and other rural areas. What we were looking for are ideas that would benefit market towns county wide. One of them was – buying

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some consultancy advice on how small businesses within small market towns could take account of the green economy, i.e. early feasibility work on how small businesses in a small market towns could be more efficient. The second idea was also similar, county wide or town wide project around creative industries and using closed, empty shops. We understand that similar discussions must be ongoing, but we were hoping that these sorts of ideas might help push things forward.

Cllr Mary Phillips (Chalfont St Giles Parish Council)

We are based in Buckinghamshire and last year we were made into a unitary authority. The county council spent a year trying to get the right people in the right jobs and practically did very little. Last year some funding came out that intended to improve bus services. There was a 6-month window to come up with opportunities, canvass to local MPs, local parish councils and then submitted for approval to Government. No canvassing happened and our clerk found out about this funding about a month before the submission to Government deadline. Our local public transport situation is in a very poor state, therefore why I wrote a very long report, detailing all the issues and making recommendations and sent it to Buckinghamshire with no expectation of it getting as far as Government, but to my surprise the bus service was doubled in our area and in the nearby small village the bus service was also improved. I would advise all RMTG members that if you do have a burning issue, please contact your principal authority asking for funding, improvements etc.

Cllr Alison Trener (Uttoxeter Town Council)

Are second-home owners counted into community's income?
Graham replied that the answer should be no, but if they were resident in that property during the census day it might be yes.

Going forward the RMTG group agreed that they would wish to have further discussions on "shovel-ready schemes" and best practice for market towns. Graham encouraged all RMTG members to contact us on admin@sparse.gov.uk with any relevant ideas, project and best practice and we will seek to inform all members.

8. Rural Market Town Group Survey – Rural Transport Outcomes.

At the first RMTG meeting of Councillor Representatives the group asked to be surveyed on rural transport, see if there were immediate discernible trends across the group in relation to transport 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

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required Councillors in many ways to give a best guess, as opposed to statistical information, the overall picture.

Highlights

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.

9. [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.**

10. **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 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

⁵ <https://ncl.ac.uk/nicre/about/>

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something we wish to give a future high priority to. 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 would be of utmost importance in the long term for this group. Once we take this forward, we will inform all members on how they can use this platform to share best practice and have discussions within the group outside of our meetings.

11. Planning Gain.

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 outlined 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.

RMTG Member Comments

Cllr Jenny Bartlett (Leominster Town Council)

Noted that there must be more than 10 houses in a rural setting before you can get planning gain is a big problem.

Graham noted that we are very aware of the issue of exemptions from the planning gain, including affordable housing contributions and we are battling with that all the time and for those of you that attended our Revitalising Rural Campaign launch for members event earlier

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today, you will have heard Lord Richard Best talking about the same subject. This is something which we discussed and continue to discuss at our APPG on Rural Services.

12. Any Other Business.

RMTG Member Comments

Cllr Anthony Hiron (Lutterworth Town Council)

I am disappointed that this agenda has not raised the item that despite pressure, lobbying and a proposed challenge by Hertfordshire, the Government has still come out and said that virtual meetings will finish in May 2021. Where we have noticed as many other parish councils as possible that we had at least a 20% increase in attendance for meetings. And there has been a huge pressure from elsewhere.

Graham noted that we support having virtual meetings in the future as they benefit all local councils. But we have left the lobbying for this to our colleagues at NALC and to the National Local Government Association who are also supporting this particular point. We are sure that these national organisations are working hard to put pressure on Government on this issue.

Cllr Doug Smith (Great Torrington Town Council)

One of the things we are suggesting in North Devon, because of the distances involved when it comes to travel are hybrid vehicles and the use of both virtual and in person meetings. We think this is something that should be considered.

Graham mentioned this issue is currently before the courts with the hope that courts will argue that it does not need legislation and that the use of online services is currently covered by the existing legislation. The decision on this should be out very soon.

In answer to Cllr Leighton Penhale's question (Launceston Town Council) 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

Cllr Chris Allen	Burnham and Highbridge Town Council
Cllr Paul Anstey	Fordingbridge Town Council
Roz Barnett	Saxmundham Town Council
Cllr Jenny Bartlett	Leominster Town Council
Graham Biggs MBE	Rural Services Network
Cllr Allan Blakemore	Sedgefield Town Council
Deborah Bond	Edenbridge Town Council
Cllr Amanda Brown	Great Dunmow Town Council
Cllr Colin Carmichael	East Horsley Parish Council
Leah Coney	Alton Town Council
Ian Cruise-Taylor	The Gorge Parish Council
Cllr Robert Danby	Middleton-in-Teesdale & Newbiggin Parish Council
Cllr Jonathan Davies	Penrith Town Council
Cllr Jamie Evans	Cheadle Town Council
Cllr Penny Gimes	Minster Parish Council
Cllr Jan Goffey	Okehampton Town Council
Cllr Hannah Gostlow	Amphill Town Council
Carol Grey	Penrith Town Council
Laura Harley	Overton Parish Council
Catherine Hibbert	Clare Town Council
Cllr Anthony Hiron	Lutterworth Town Council
Julie Holden	East Grinstead Town Council
David Inman	Rural Services Network
Liz Johnson-Idan	Chard Town Council
Terry Jordan	Wisbech Town Council
Cllr Andrew Lay	Maldon Town Council
Vivien Little	Keswick Town Council
Cllr Liz Parker	Oxted Parish Council
Cllr Leighton Penhale	Launceston Town Council
Cllr Mary Phillips	Chalfont St Giles Parish Council
Cllr Doug Smith	Great Torrington Town Council
Karen St Leger	Barlaston Parish Council
Cllr John Stockwood	Bingham Town Council
Cllr Derek Thomas	Wotton Under Edge Town Council
Cllr Alison Trenery	Uttoxeter Town Council
Cllr Victoria Trow	Totnes Town Council
Cllr Martin Tucker	Wotton Under Edge Town Council
Cllr Mike Warner	Moretonhampstead Parish Council
Cllr Sarah Williams	Bridport Town Council
David Wright	Market Harborough Town
John Wright	Lyme Regis Town Council

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Apologies

Tony Allen	Peacehaven Town Council
Brian Angell	Clun Town Council with Chapel Lawn
Will Austin	Bridport Town Council
Chris Bagshaw	Kendal Town Council
Emma Baker	Oundle Town Council
Tara Ball	Penistone Town Council
Cllr Stephen Bunney	West Lindsey District Council
Doreen Collins	Diss Town Council
Cllr Allan Daniels	Keswick Town Council
Sue Foulkes	Amphill Town Council
Margaret Godwin	Clare Town Council
Cllr Trevor Graham	Redenhall with Harleston Town Council
Sara Halliday	Totnes Town Council
Cllr Robert Heseltine	Skipton Town Council
Cllr Andrew Hixon	Guisborough Town Council
Cllr Bob Holt	Westerham Town Council
Ginette James	Lechlade on Thames Town Council
Paul Jennings	Wirksworth Town Council
Jane Kevan	Hexham Town Council
Keli Nolan-Lyons	Tenterden Town Council
David Martin	Corsham Town Council
Cllr Dermot McGeough	Bideford town council
Belinda Richardson	Marlborough Town Council
Sam Roberts	Ripponden Parish Council
Jan Roomes	Hunstanton Town Council
Vanessa Saunders	Holsworthy Town Council
Frances Simpson	New Alresford Town Council
Steven Singleton	Clowne Parish Council
Karen Tarburton	Harworth and Bircotes Town Council
Cllr Mark Thorpe	Verwood Town Council
Deborah Urch	Westbury Town Council
Andrea Vincent	Olney Town Council
Cllr Judith Wright	Biddenden Parish Council

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