

LGA Special Interest Group Annual Report to LGA Board

SIG Name: Rural Services Network

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Membership

The RSN has 2 main subsidiary SIG's. **Sparse-Rural** which has 100 members which deals with our financial representational (distributional) work and the **Rural Assembly** (with 115 Members, including the SPARSE members) which deals with all the non-financial distribution issues and rural policy generally. These both meet twice a year when all members are entitled to be represented. All Sparse-Rural members are members of the recently created Rural Health & Care Alliance – a Partnership between the RSN and the National Centre for Rural Health and Care.

The other LGA recognised sub-group includes the **Rural Fire and Rescue Services Group** which has 10 members and seeks to present arguments common to County and Combined Services operating in areas that have significant rural areas.

The [Rural Services Network](#) is however much more widespread than these Special Interest Groups and further information can be found on their website. This includes information about the Rural Services Partnership, a membership organisation for non-local authorities such as rural Housing Associations, Health Trusts, charities and national organisations delivering services in rural areas. The Rural Market Town Group has been established in recent years which has over 200 Town or larger Parish Councils in membership.

Aim

Our main aim is to act as 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 as a whole

Our campaign, [Revitalising Rural: Realising the Vision](#), sets out 14 policy areas important to rural areas with a number of asks of Government. These policy areas include rural affordable housing, the rural economy, transport, connectivity and access to health and care services.

For Sparse Rural our main priority is the funding formula and working to ensure that rural areas receive fair funding to enable them to deliver their services, taking into account the additional costs of service delivery in rural areas.

For the Rural Assembly, our main priority will be to seek to influence Government and policy makers across a whole range of issues facing rural service providers and communities in line with the priority areas set out in Revitalising Rural.

Key Activities / Outcomes of work undertaken

The major outcome from our work this year was the increase in Rural Services Delivery Grant to £85 million, an increase of £4 million, the highest ever amount.

We recognise however that this is a temporary solution and more importantly have been working hard to press Government to implement the findings of the Fair Funding Review.

During the pandemic, we moved our meetings online to enable local authorities to come together.

In the year 2020-2021 the SPARSE-Rural and Rural Assembly collective debated:

- Local Government Finance and the impact of Covid
- Provisional Finance Settlement for 2021-22
- Revitalising Rural: Realising the Vision Campaign
- APPG on Rural Services

In addition, thematic groups further explored the specific challenges facing the Economy in rural areas. This led to discussions about The Rural Opportunities Toolkit, the planned Economic Recovery in Cornwall, Rural Apprenticeships, Social Value Engine, Treasury's Green Book Process and the economic impact of lockdown on rural economy. In addition specific challenges in relation to Rural Health and Care led to discussions about High Street Health Hubs and Nuffield Trust Research.

The RSN hosted a very successful conference week online in Sept 2020 which focused on our campaign Revitalising Rural. The focus throughout the week was on Rural Economies, Rural Affordable Housing, Connectivity, Rural Health Services and the Environment. Almost 400 delegates attended sessions throughout the week. This enabled the member authorities to attend and hear from expert speakers and debate key issues for rural.

We hosted seven free seminars/networking meetings for member authorities to attend online throughout the year, each featuring 3 expert speakers offering the opportunity for further explore and discuss the following topics, rural transport, rural education training and apprenticeships, rural housing, rural vulnerability, rural health and wellbeing, rural connectivity and rural skills and education.

We provide the Secretariat to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Rural Services which has met to discuss Rural Connectivity, and Transport, the Comprehensive Spending Review and Digital Connectivity.

This year we have submitted a wide range of evidence to Parliamentary Inquiries and consultations to ensure that a rural view is represented. More information about these is available [on this flyer which highlights our 2020 achievements](#).

The RSN however is not just about meetings and we provide a wide range of services to our member authorities which include:

- E-bulletins featuring rural news stories, commentary and analysis
- Rural Observatory providing a statistical view of rural life
- Neighbourhood Planning Evidence Base for Parishes of Member Authorities
- Bulletin of Funding opportunities

Further information about our work and services can be found at our comprehensive website on www.rsonline.org.uk