

LGA Special Interest Group Annual Report to LGA Leadership Board

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Membership

The RSN has 2 main subsidiary SIG's. **Sparse-Rural** which has 106 members which deals with our financial representational (distributional) work and the **Rural Assembly** (with 126 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 at <http://www.rsonline.org.uk/page/how-we-work>.

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 work focuses on four priorities, and we also recognise Rural Vulnerability as a cross cutting issue.

- Public Sector Funding
- Barriers to Access
- Future of Rural Areas
- Health and Wellbeing

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 four priorities set out above.

Key Activities / Outcomes of work undertaken

The major outcome from our work this year was the increase in Rural Services Delivery Grant to £81 million, an increase of £16million more than was planned for 19-20 which was £65Million.

We recognise however that this is a temporary solution and more importantly have been working hard to gather evidence for rural authorities to support the Fairer Funding Review which is taking place. We have a representative that sits on key technical working groups alongside MHCLG putting across the rural perspective.

In the year 2018-2019 the SPARSE-Rural and Rural Assembly collective debated:

- Brexit – the impact on rural communities
- Sounding Board survey on access to cash difficulties
- Rural Conference 2018
- Community Banking
- Rural Bus Services
- Findings of the Rural Crime Survey
- Time for a Rural Strategy Campaign
- Business Rate Retention Consultation
- Needs and Resources Consultation

In addition, thematic groups further explored the specific challenges facing the Economy in rural areas and Health and Social Care in rural areas. This led to discussions about the House of Lords Select Committee on the Rural Economy, the challenges facing the rural economy, the long - term funding of adult social care, the use of assisted health and social care technology in Shropshire and Hampshire and a presentation from the Bank of England.

The RSN hosted a successful conference at the University of Gloucestershire in Cheltenham in Sept 2018 which focused on “Delivering services differently in rural areas”. This enabled the member authorities to attend and hear from expert speakers and debate key issues around rural service delivery.

We hosted six free seminars/networking meetings for member authorities to attend at venues around England offering the opportunity for further explore and discuss key topics impacting on rural local authorities.

We provide the Secretariat to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Rural Services and have this year established the House of Lords Panel on Rural Issues. We also gave evidence to the Lords Select Committee on the Rural Economy.

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.rsnonline.org.uk