



The Rural Services Network

National Rural Conference 2024

Delivering for Rural – Unlocking rural prosperity

Monday 16th September

Rural Fair Funding Session

AI GENERATED SUMMARY OF THE SESSION

Rural National Conference: Rural Fair Funding Discussion

Kerry Booth, the Chief Executive of the Rural Services network, welcomed participants to the Rural National Conference. She thanked the sponsors who made the event possible and proceeded to share her slides for the discussion on rural fair funding.

Addressing Rural Council Funding Challenges

Kerry presented the challenges faced by rural councils due to underfunding and the impact on rural communities. Highlighting that successive governments have underfunded rural councils and their services, and that rural residents pay significantly more in council tax. Kerry noted that it costs more to deliver services in rural areas, and that the funding formula for local government is complex. Kerry mentioned that the government has accepted evidence that it costs more to deliver services in rural areas, but the impact of changes made to the funding formula have not all flowed through to rural areas. Kerry also discussed the Rural Services Delivery Grant, which has increased significantly over the years but is not enough to address the funding issues. Kerry concluded by outlining the organization's policy asks for the new government, including applying changes made in 2012 without damping, protecting council taxpayers, and creating a public funding formula that reflects the unique service needs and extra costs of rural areas.

APPG & Spending Review

Kerry mentioned RSN's response to the comprehensive spending review and the inaugural meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Rural Services. The APPG which is cross-party parliamentary group and has set priorities for the year ahead on rural public services fair funding and key policy issues. Kerry discussed the potential for longer-term reform in government funding, with a focus on rural areas.

Rural Challenges in Service Delivery and Funding

Rural areas face significant challenges in service delivery and funding. The population in rural areas is aging, with a higher proportion of people over 65 compared to urban areas. This puts pressure on care and NHS services. Rural councils receive less funding for grants and statutory services, leading to a double whammy when it comes to non-statutory services. Rural areas have higher costs for service delivery, including social care, home to school transport, and youth services. Rural councils also spend less on recreation and sport, further education, public transport, and community transport. The scarcity of rural transport exacerbates issues of access

to jobs, education, training, and health. Libraries and citizens advice services have also been impacted by cutbacks. Broadband infrastructure is crucial for economic growth, but rural areas often have less coverage and funding. The government's focus on economic growth must also consider the significant contribution rural areas make to the nation's well-being.

Fairer Funding for Rural Areas Discussion

Cllr Roger Phillips, RSN Chair, emphasized the need for fairer funding for rural areas and the importance of gathering evidence to support this cause. Hywel Lloyd, co-founder of Labour Coast and Country Group, discussed how to engage with Labour politicians and influence their work, highlighting the importance of developing friendly relationships with new MPs to ensure rural needs are represented.

Addressing Rural Funding Challenges in England

Delegates emphasized the importance of recognizing the economic contributions of rural areas and ensuring that their residents and citizens receive better services. They also discussed the need to challenge perceptions of what rural areas look like and the importance of using the right metrics and measures to capture rural deprivation. Delegates also touched on the issue of balancing budgets and the use of reserves to fund current years of budget. Cllr Laura Crane from Cheshire East discussed the challenges faced by her area, which includes both affluent and deprived areas. She highlighted the issue of social care and children's services costing 70% of their budgets, and the difficulty in getting investment in deprived areas due to the perceived wealth in the area. Cllr Bridget Petty from North Somerset echoed these concerns, mentioning the need for a long-term solution to funding services and the challenges of rural communities being left behind. Cllr Richard Cox from Lichfield emphasized the need to address the perception that rural areas are affluent, as this can lead to a lack of investment in areas that truly need it.

Addressing Rural Community Challenges and Transport

Cllr Richard Cox expressed concerns about the lack of attention given to rural communities and the need for better transport services. He also highlighted the need for governments to wake up to the challenges faced by rural communities. Cllr Diane Hind, a Labour Councillor from West Suffolk, discussed the challenges faced by rural areas in Suffolk and Norfolk, including the lack of motorways and the impact of geography on transport times. She emphasized that these issues need to be addressed in discussions with ministers. Cllr Trevor Roach from the Forest of Dean discussed the decline of rural communities, the impact of a lower standard of living on quality of life, and the need for politicians to focus on both aspects. Carole Barr from ACT Cumbria highlighted the contributions of rural areas to the national economy, including tourism and the local economy, and the need to address issues such as second home ownership and population decline. The session ended on a positive note, with a focus on the potential of rural areas.

Next Steps

- 1.** Rural Services Network to provide template letters for local authorities to send to their MPs regarding rural fair funding ahead of the next provisional settlement due in December
- 2.** Rural Services Network to follow up with Defra on the status of the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) project.
- 3.** Rural Services Network to pursue meetings with new government ministers regarding rural fair funding.
- 4.** Rural Services Network to continue providing briefings and updates to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on rural issues.
- 5.** Local authorities to engage with their MPs to build relationships and share information about rural funding challenges.