

From: David Inman <david.inman@sparse.gov.uk>

Sent: 22 April 2022 15:59

To: Town Clerk <info@wem.gov.uk>

Subject: Membership of the Rural Market Town Group (RMTG) of the Rural Services Network - Wem.

Dear Penny,

As you will recall the Rural Services Network is a Special Interest Group of the Local Government Association and works as a voluntary body on a not-for-profit basis. We are totally non-political in our operation, and we would emphasise that point. Subscriptions are our modus operandi. We cannot operate without them.

Wem Town Council have elected to receive a period of free RMTG membership (January to November 2021 – and now further extended to end of June) in relation to the Rural/Market Town Group of the Rural Services Network. We asked for consideration of full membership in 2021 but this was not possible for your Council at that time. The position has however become even more critical now, as we seek to explain why here, and we do hope the elements we outline can now be considered by the Council. We apologise for having to bother your Councillors again with this, but it is important.

- (1) We are now working with the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and if your Council are members of your county ALC organisation and through that automatically of NALC we can offer you a 15% annual subscription discount bringing your fee this year down to £85 plus vat (the VAT is often recoverable) for the period 1st July to the 31st of March 2023. This 15% discount will also remain for future years. NALC argue 'local council'; we argue 'rural'. This is a very useful alliance.
- (2) There is a very important government grant (Funding Distributional) review that the government has announced it would wish to undertake this year (2022-23) and we do need therefore to now demonstrate this particular year the very fullest community backing. The number of RSN and RMTG members we can cite is really important. RMTG members spread across the country would be an important weapon. Urban areas can list support from cities who are household names; we can only match that by showing a very long list of Counties, Districts and Towns in support of what we are doing. To successfully argue the rural case the numbers in membership this year, to demonstrate that support, are critical. We hope Wem Town can now be with us. Its in everyone's interest to all be involved.
- (3) The rural services situation is becoming increasingly dire in many rural areas, and we need parliamentarians to be picking up and arguing our case. They will do this if we can show sufficient local support. Below is a summary of the first attachment here - the comparison position between what the average person living in an English rural area (including a rural town) receives annually in services support from Government, compared to their urban counterpart. Remember please this is the per head position so the fact that rural areas having lower populations and lower numerical service demands have already

been accounted for here. Its grim reading. We are very much hoping the review will assist this position and showing universal support is vital.

The Choking of Services in Rural Areas

- **Government grant to principal councils has become on average 28.7% lower per head of population for people living in rural areas and rural towns when compared per head to people living in urban areas - over the last four years that difference has on average been increasing.**
- **Even grant in relation to adult social care provision (a massive current problem area of course) is 12.8% lower when compared to urban areas and again the difference has been significantly increasing over these last four years.**
- **Consequently, hard pressed local authorities in rural areas have had to increase council tax so that some more limited services can continue, and these council taxes are now 20.5% higher than council tax in urban areas per head of population.**
- **Even so rural councils have available to spend a third of the money (per head of population) available for discretionary services when compared to the per head calculation for urban areas. That is a truly massive difference.**
- **The higher council tax in rural areas must be paid for out of the 10% lower workplace- based earnings in rural areas when compared to urban areas.**

We detail the overall average English rural position. It will vary from rural area to rural area of course but it is still of great concern and for some the position is still worse than the position detailed.

This is not just a technical argument it is a position that directly affects adversely the lives of people in many rural areas and the towns serving them and all need to come together to indicate that this is wrong and to secure a fairer position.

The Rural Services Network have been arguing the rural area and rural town case for coming up to 30 years. Unfortunately, we now, are the only remaining organisation presenting that rural case on a full - time basis. We have started the Rural/Market Group (RMTG) because the wider our membership can be demonstrated to be, the stronger that rural case inevitably becomes. We also believe rural towns themselves need wider support than they have currently received, and a focused Grouping of Rural/Market Towns is in itself necessary. We will prove to your Council and your citizens full benefit from the relatively low RMTG subscription, as a crucial part of England's rurally based network (RSN).

We are certain these statistics would have been still worse had we not been supported and been in operation for the past decades, but they continue to remain very concerning. The outcomes from these statistics will be impacting

upon your town economically because they dictate less services and less spend availability. We do need now to demonstrate the fullest possible community backing for our work and our submissions.

There is one point we need to emphasise perhaps. We are not asking the Council to input massively in terms of input hours here - we appreciate how busy people are, but we do need support for our general rural arguments and that comes about by joining this Group. As we describe this is very much of a numbers game if we are to be persuasive on government. We need to show balanced support from across rural England and importantly from varying forms of Councils and locations.

In return we will give you useful information from various sources. For example, we will send out a targeted towns newsletter like this every two months:

<https://mailchi.mp/rsnonline/rural-market-town-group-roundup-april-2022>.

This newsletter covers General Town Matters and News, Climate Change Information, Finance Opportunities and Rural Services Network updates. It is worth the sub on its own.

Rural areas don't come together as naturally as urban communities do, but there is every reason that rural areas and their rural towns from across England do that at this time. Please do examine this attachment carefully. It is worrying.

Markets.

We also attach details of the service we provide as a Group which in themselves give very full value, and we also attach our 2021 Achievements Leaflet. You will note from the services offered leaflet that we wish to see more extensive promotion of both market towns and their markets. We feel a town's market is often the hub stone for its success as a community and we are very keen that both information is exchanged nationally on the issues surrounding town markets and best practice broadcast about good practice. Town Markets are a vital element of the successful economy of rural market towns. We read with interest about your range of Markets taking place both on Thursdays and on other occasions , and we want the Town involved in our Group. We need to work together. (We are aware of the history over your 1202 founded market and whether it received a royal charter or not and we would be very happy indeed to work with people on this one! .)

We will extend your free membership to the end of June to assist but can this matter and its attachments, particularly the first attachment, please go before your members at their June meeting in the hope that they can assist and work with us on a subscribing membership basis at this time. We do try to keep the subscription fee affordable.

We do try to keep the subscription fee affordable. If however there are nerves because of ongoing situations created by the COVID years, please let us know and we will see what we can do. We need to create a really strong group at this critical time, and we are happy to discuss. All in the group currently, as they continue with us, will be registered as Founder Members of the Group

Please can you let us know your council's decision at the end of June. We hope we can work together. Together, we need to improve the rural position and promote town markets and market towns.

Kindest regards

David

David Inman

Director

[Rural Services Network](#)

[Twitter @RSNonline](#)

Email: david.inman@sparse.gov.uk

Mob: 07792 106 133 (Best number to currently reach me on)

Tel: 01822 851 370

The Rural Services Network seeks to provide a voice for rural communities by representing rural services, networking between rural service organisations and establishing and broadcasting best practice in rural service provision. It comprises SPARSE Rural, the Rural Assembly, the wider Rural Services Partnership and the RSN Community Group. The organisation works with Rural England, a stand-alone CIC research group.

The Rural Services Partnership Limited is a registered company (0696 0646) in England & Wales.