



Rupert Reichhold
Councillor for Oundle Ward

Home Address:
2 Warren Bridge, OUNDLE, Peterborough PE8 4DQ
Tel: 01832 274315

Date 27th November, 2014.

James McLaughlin,
Democratic Services Manager,
East Northamptonshire Council

Dear Mr McLaughlin,

**MEETING OF COUNCIL ON 15th DECEMBER, 2014: OUTSIDE BODIES:
COUNCIL'S REPRESENTATIVE'S REPORT**

This letter with the attachments comprise my report to our Council on the Outside Bodies at which I represent the Council and I would be grateful if you would arrange for its inclusion on the Agenda for the Council's meeting on 15th December, 2014.

2. These organisations are the SPARSE Rural Special Interest Group; Supported Housing; Volunteer Action; and CHAT Youth Counselling.

SPARSE Rural Special Interest Group

3. The SPARSE Rural SIG continues to maintain a steady pressure on central Government with a view to amending the Grant Distribution formula which, at present, still does not take full account of the greater cost of delivering councils' services in rural areas. This work has yielded some success. Copies of my reports on the SPARSE Meetings on 21st March and 19th November this year are attached.

4. In the 2014/15 Settlement, the one-off efficiency grant of £8.5M provided to some rural authorities for 2013/14 was increased to £9.5M, re-named the Rural Services Delivery Grant and made a permanent fixture of the Local Government Financial Settlement. An additional "one off" £2.M has been paid in 2014/15, meaning that for 2014/15 the Rural Services Delivery Grant is £11.5M. This is welcome: however, the current amounts, when factored in, result in only minimal gains.

5. DCLG and DEFRA are planning to carry out research into "the additional costs of providing services in rural areas". We agreed at the 17th November meeting that SPARSE leaders should press the Government not to assert this research as a justification for deferring a re-visiting of the Grant formula.

6. I conclude that it is well worth ENC continuing its membership of the SPARSE Group. We are more secure with allies than on our own. If SPARSE did not exist many rural councils would be at a disadvantage.

SUPPORTED HOUSING Including Childrens Champion

7. NCC's regular funding for Accommodation-Based Support (previously known as "Supporting People") ended on 30th September. To the extent that authorities provide the "supporters" – e.g. Social Workers, Probation Service personnel, etc., our Council, as the Housing Authority, would engage best endeavours to facilitate the provision of appropriate housing. In this work our Housing Team, led by Carol Conway, need to rely on Midland Heart Housing Association as ENC's Agent for the Housing Register and Homelessness duties.

8. As our Council's observer for Supported housing and as "Childrens Champion" I keep in contact with Carol Conway to ensure that I am alerted to any problems. In this context, Cllr Joan Kirkbride, Chairman of the NCC Corporate Parenting Board asked the Leaders of all DCs in the County to appoint Member Champions to provide a Member channel to enhance cooperation between NCC and the District Councils.

9. The Leader nominated me to be Childrens Champion for East Northamptonshire. I was already aware that our ENC Housing Team maintain close liaison with NCC Childrens Services Leaving Care Team, who look after Children Leaving Care at the age of 18, to guard, for example, against any slide into homelessness. Since these Young Adults do not have birth parents to fall back on as they progress into employment or higher education, good cooperation between our authorities is critical to their continued well being and future.

VOLUNTEER ACTION - VA

10. Volunteer Action, based in Oundle and linked to SERVE are a good and long-standing registered charity who continue to provide a car service for people with no access to public transport for door to door travel to medical and other appointments and activities. VA have 75 volunteer drivers. VA also have a Befriending Scheme. VA receive grant aid from ENC and NCC. I attended VA's AGM on 23rd September this year and continue to be very impressed by the efficiency and dedication of this excellent organisation.

CHAT

11. CHAT, based in Oundle, are a registered charity who continue to provide confidential advice by trained counsellors for young people, aged between 9 – 25. In 2013-14 CHAT supported an average of 25 clients per week and provided a total of 1,422 counselling hours. CHAT are mainly funded by the Nene Clinical Commissioning Group. I attended CHAT's AGM on 12th November this year – and consider that they are an excellent organisation who provide a valuable service in our communities.

Yours sincerely,



COPY

FROM Cllr Rupert Reichhold
East Northamptonshire Council

19th November, 2014.

Cllr Steven North,
8, Kings Road,
RUSHDEN,
NN10 0DL

cc Cllr Harwood
Cllr Lewis
Cllr Greenwood-Smith

David Oliver
Sharn Matthews
Glenn Hammons

Dear Steven,

Meeting of SPARSE Rural Special Interest Group – 17th November, 2014.

I represented ENC at a meeting of the SPARSE Rural Special Interest Group in London on 17th November and write to report back to you and other key colleagues here. This was the Annual General Meeting: we elected Cllr Cecilia Motley, Shropshire as Chairman and the Vice Chairmen, who included Cllr R. Begy, Rutland.

Fairer Funding Campaign: Dan Bates's report

2. Dan Bates reported on the Fairer Funding Campaign: we had received his paper in advance of the meeting. The 2014/15 Settlement resulted in fairly equal reductions for urban and rural areas alike. The disparity seen in the 2013/14 settlement remains unchanged. In the 2014/15 Settlement the one-off efficiency grant of £8.5M provided to some rural authorities for 2013/14 was increased to £9.5M, renamed the Rural Services Delivery Grant and made a permanent fixture of the Local Government Financial Settlement.

3. An additional "one off" £2M had been paid in 2014/15 using the same formula meaning that for 2014/15, Rural Services Delivery Grant is £11.5M. While we all welcomed the long-term commitment to allocating funds for rural areas, the current amount, when factored in, results in only minimal gains across recipient authorities.

4. In 2014/15 rural residents are paying Council Tax which is on average £79 higher per-head compared to urban residents, but will then see urban residents receive £178 more in Government funding. The £11.5M Rural Services Delivery Grant equates to £1.10 per head. The current weighting of the Environmental, Protective and Cultural Service element of the formula means that funding for population density is four times greater than for population sparsity. The reason for this is not about service costs: there are economies of scale associated with population density that offset some of the increased costs: it is because the previous Government wanted to reinforce spending choices going back decades in inner city authorities.

5. Dan Bates reported also that the DCLG now plans, with DEFRA, to carry out research into "the additional costs of providing services in rural areas". Dan emphasised that we should press the Government not to assert this research as a justification for delaying further action, in parallel, to reduce the rural inequity. He added – and we concurred, that we welcome the possibility that if the evidence of the joint DCLG & DEFRA research will show – as he expects it will, then DCLG will consider revisiting the funding formula.

Fairer Funding Campaign: Our conclusions

6. We endorsed the recommendation that the SPARSE leadership & experts should continue lobbying Ministers. The All-Parties Parliamentary Group of MPs, led by Graham Stuart, MP were continuing to be very helpful in this work. Any added representations we could feed in through our MPs would help in continuing to draw Ministers' attention to practical examples of the inequity of the funding formula and the need to revisit it.

Rural Broadband Group – Issues

7. Matt Smith delivered a detailed presentation on the roll-out of Broadband. Most roll-out projects, he stated, were ahead of schedule – and SPARSE areas had done well. That said, he was clear that easy to reach areas were being given priority while hard to reach areas were not.

8. Mr Smith pointed to additional, relevant factors –

- BDUK's system for roll-out of Broadband allowed only BT to bid to carry out roll-out;
- Most councils continued to opt for the BDUK Framework to spend their roll-out allocations
- BT set great store by the FTTRN technology but, Mr Smith stated, this was only, at present, operable where there were clusters of habitation; and incurred very considerable power costs.

9. Mr Smith concluded that the obstacles would only be resolved if there was Government aid; and that SPARSE authorities should "speak with one voice" when asking for that.

Yours sincerely,

[sgd]

RUPERT REICHHOLD



Rupert Reichhold
Councillor for Oundle Ward

Home Address:
2 Warren Bridge, OUNDLE, Peterborough PE8 4DQ
Tel: 01832 274315

Date 21st March, 2014.

Cllr Steven North,
8, Kings Road,
RUSHDEN,
NN10 0DL

cc Cllr Harwood
Cllr Lewis
Cllr Taylor

David Oliver
Sharn Matthews
Glenn Hammons

Dear Steven,

Meetings of SPARSE Rural Special Interest Group – 17th March, 2014.

I represented ENC at meetings of the SPARSE Rural Special Interest Group in London on 17th March and write to report back to you and other key colleagues here. These were an Extraordinary General Meeting to debate and approve changes in the SPARSE Constitution to allow for a reshaping of the existing SPARSE structures following the recent abolition of the LGA Rural Commission and a regular meeting.

2. We approved the changes to the SPARSE constitution: the organisation as a whole will keep the name "Rural Services Network". This will comprise two working Special Interest Groups, SPARSE Rural, which will deal with Finance matters; and the Rural Assembly, which will deal with wider rural service and general rural policy issues. ENC qualify for both groups: our subscription remains £2,095: both groups will meet three times a year, on the same days.

3. This reconstitution is eminently sensible, allowing both for an improved focus on central Government Grant and for an enhanced focus on wider rural matters – a better bargain for smaller authorities, like us than the now abolished Rural Commission. SPARSE will work with the LGA systems as a whole.

Progress achieved

4. Graham Biggs reported on the success of the Fairer Funding/Rural Fair Share Campaign – in which we at ENC and many other SPARSE Councils had signed the Petition.

5. Dan Bates reported on the positive results of the Campaign for the Grant Settlement for the coming year. There were improvements for rural authorities in the final Grant Block – which there had not been in the previous Settlement. So the SPARSE case is being taken account of.

Work in under way

6. Dan Bates reported on the joint DCLG and DEFRA study, achieved as a result of SPARSE representations, which was seeking to identify additional cost pressures falling on sparse, rural authorities which were not fully taken account of with a view to considering whether improvements could be made to the Grant Distribution Formula. Dan and also Graham Biggs emphasised that Brandon Lewis, MP, DCLG Minister was taking a keen interest in this study.

7. SPARSE authorities' representatives – member and officer, agreed with Graham's and Dan's conclusion that the on-going work of the All Parliamentary Group (APPG) of Rural MPs, led by Graham Stuart, MP, and briefed by SPARSE officers, had helped wake up Ministers to the inequities of the Grant Distribution Formula for rural authorities.

8. Both Graham and Dan, experienced officers, were, however, very clear that, in the run up to the General Election, next year, all SPARSE authorities should continue to keep up the pressure on central Government and not rely only on the APPG ! This was no reflection on the APPG.

Miscellaneous Briefings

9. We received a briefing by Andrea Da Gama from The Post Office, Government & Public Affairs. She made it clear that the Post Office were committed to retaining a network – of different kinds of local Post Offices. The range comprised traditional Post-Office only offices; Post Office services in private retail premises; Community facilities (not too clear to me how these would work) in remote areas where no retail premises existed or would serve; and mobile van services. I surmise that Post Office Ltd are putting their best feet forward. This is to be welcomed. Local difficulties will be open to be resolved by sensible accommodation !

10. A representative of the National Farmers Union briefed us on a tussle which they are having with the Department of Work & Pensions on behalf of self-employed farmers who may be eligible for Working Tax Credits. The facts are that the incomes of self-employed farmers necessarily fluctuate over the year. Working Tax Credits are being merged into Universal Credit, which DWP are seeking to administer by the month. Until recently, the DWP were taking a hard line, refusing to accept some form of annual assessment. Happily, the NFU sought help from DEFRA and we were told that DWP are beginning to relent and recognise practicalities for the self-employed.

Yours sincerely,



RUPERT REICHHOLD