

SPARSE Press Release 22nd December 2014

Countryside communities will be hit hard by the latest round of government cuts, England's largest rural network has warned.

The government's finance settlement for local authorities [1] fails to meet the needs of hard-pressed rural councils, said the Rural Services Network [2].

Network chief executive Graham Biggs said: "This settlement will hit countryside communities hard - and will see some services cut to the bone."

A welcome £4m funding increase which takes the government's rural services delivery grant to £15.5m would not be enough when spread across the country as a whole.

A government study which recognised the higher cost of delivering some rural services, should now be extended to cover all service areas, said Mr Biggs.

Mr Biggs said: "The Rural Services Network has long campaigned for fairer funding for rural areas which have long been underfunded and we will continue to do so."

"Despite some additional funds, cuts to the overall grant for local authorities hit rural communities hard because they already start from a disadvantaged position."

"More importantly rural residents receive £153 less in government grant compared to urban areas and their council tax is on average £81 higher."

"We call on the Government to right the historic wrongs and provide a fair distribution of the settlement to rural residents."

ENDS.

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Notes to editors

1. Local Government Minister Kris Hopkins announced the provisional local government finance settlement for 2015 to 2016 on Thursday (18 December 2014). His oral statement to Parliament can be seen at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/provisional-local-government-finance-settlement-2015-to-2016>

2. The Rural Services Network is a group of more than 200 organisations working together to improve the delivery of rural services across England. The two operating arms of the network are the Sparsity Partnership for Authorities Delivering Rural Services (SPARSE) and the Rural Services Partnership. Further information and a full list of members are available at

<http://www.rsnonline.org.uk>

3. The Rural Services Network seeks to establish best practice across the spectrum of rural service provision. The network has representation across the complete range of rural services, including local authorities, public bodies, businesses, charities and voluntary groups. We are devoted to safeguarding and improving services in rural communities across England. We are the only national network specifically focusing on this vital aspect of rural life.

4. The Rural Services Network exists to ensure services delivered to the communities of predominantly and significantly rural England are as strong and as effective as possible. The term 'predominately rural' refers to counties and Local Authority districts with at least 50 percent of their population living in rural settlements (ie. rural towns, villages, hamlets and dispersed dwellings) as identified in the Office for National Statistics' rural definition, and including larger market towns as identified in the Defra classification of Local Authority districts. The term 'significant rural' refers to those Local Authorities who are between 25% and 50% rural under the same classification. The rural definition and classification were devised by the Rural Evidence Research Centre (RERC) at Birkbeck College. Further information on these can be found on the RERC website at www.erc.ac.uk.