

Rural District Council Network – Scrutiny of Rural Access to Health.

Lead Officer: Emily McGuinness, Scrutiny Manager

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Purpose of report

The Rural Services Network aims to support its member authorities by making representations on issues affecting rural services and communities. They promote active networking between service providers, establish and broadcast best rural practice and promote debate and interaction between agencies and sectors across many areas of joint interest for example rural crime, rural housing and rural health.

In the past, the main focus of their work has been on Fairer Funding for Rural Areas and they have campaigned strongly in this arena on behalf of rural authorities. They are currently looking to develop their work to support rural local authorities and their scrutiny function, particularly in the area of health in rural areas.

They have approached all member district Councils in England to join in a project looking at rural access to health. If members of South Somerset District Council agree to participate in the project, it is proposed that the project is conducted jointly with other interested District Councils within Somerset.

Action Required

1. That members of the Scrutiny Committee agree to participate in the Rural Services Network Access to Health Scrutiny project jointly with other Somerset District Councils.
2. That members consider the questions provided by the Rural Services Network, as attached at Appendix A to this report, and submit any additional suggestions to Emily McGuinness – Scrutiny Manager.

Outline of project

This project will aim to encourage rural Councils to scrutinise issues surrounding rural health and rural access to health services using a set list of questions. Councils are to be encouraged to further this study by using their own questions which are appropriate to their local area.

By coordinating the standard questions used which are then collated centrally by the Rural Services Network, it is anticipated that the resulting report will be able to make comparisons and contrasts between rural areas in England and produce an overall picture of Access to Health services in rural areas.

Feedback from Local Authorities has suggested that they may not be able to call in external bodies given the timescales and current agenda schedules. It will be permissible therefore for Local Authorities to issue questions to Clinical Commissioning Groups and to receive written responses. Participating local authorities are asked to provide some commentary on the responses, giving local context and perspective.

Outcome of project:

The project aims to produce a report which can be used to campaign on behalf of rural communities and can also be presented to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Rural Services. It will also be shared at the Rural Assembly meeting of the Rural Services Network.

Project Timeline:

Invite to local authorities:	End of May
Questions to Local Authorities:	Early June
Scrutiny period by Local Authorities –	Summer 2016
Final responses to be received by the Rural Services Network:	End October 2016
Report produced:	End November 2016

SSDC Next Steps

If members of South Somerset District Council's Scrutiny Committee agree to participate in the project, a joint Somerset approach will be drawn up to comply with the project outline above.

It is suggested that 4 members for each participating authority form the project group and an invite to SSDC Members will be issued in the normal way.

For further information on this project please contact Emily McGuinness.
