



Helping to secure proportional outcomes for rural communities through Local Area Agreements

1. Introduction

The Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) has the following three roles:

- Listening to and representing the views of rural communities
- Giving expert advice
- Acting as an independent watchdog.

Our job is to provide independent advice to government and others to make sure that policies reflect the real needs of people living and working in rural England, with a particular focus on tackling disadvantage and economic under performance.

The CRC is working on a project – with the involvement of Essex, Cumbria and Devon county councils - analysing the extent to which the National Indicator¹ set can - in a practical way – be disaggregated to below the Local Area Agreement² (LAA) geography level. This will enable local authorities and their partners to monitor and performance manage delivery within their areas to ensure that all localities and communities are served proportionately and fairly. This could also help councillors and communities by providing them with information about performance at the local and neighbourhood level.

This information note provides a brief outline of this project.

2. Project overview

The overall purpose of this project is to undertake a comprehensive assessment of the potential to disaggregate the national indicator set to a below LAA geography level in

¹ The National Indicators will measure how well Governments' priorities, as set out in the Comprehensive Spending Review, are being delivered by local government and local government partnerships over the next three years

² LAAs are the primary delivery agreement between central government and local authorities. LSPs and upper level councils (unitary and county) have agreed up to 35 targets from a selection of 198 national targets that best reflect the priorities set out in the Sustainable Community Strategy. The 35 indicators, along with the targets, are negotiated between LAs, GOs and become the LAA.

order to help performance management of delivery at a below LAA level (including to localities and neighbourhoods, both urban and rural) to help secure proportional delivery of LAA targets to rural communities.

The process of designing LAAs for the period 2008-2011 has been completed and 150 have been agreed between local and central government. The CRC and Defra were involved in providing “light touch” rural proofing³ advice to the development of the LAAs, largely via the Government Offices. This rural proofing advice has sought to ensure that LAA targets and therefore delivery are applicable to all communities and places within the LAA reach, rural and urban. Now the LAAs are signed off, so rural proofing attention needs to shift to implementation and monitoring arrangements.

4. Broader context

A new performance assessment process for service delivery is being developed by the Audit Commission, and we anticipate that this project will act as a useful tool to help inform the development and delivery of the incoming Comprehensive Area Assessment. As part of this, the new Place Survey will be one tool which is available to councils and their partners to understand the views of local people. It will supply the data by which a number of national indicators will be measured, and therefore is an important component of this project.

5. Audience

This project will be of practical interest to local authorities and their partners responsible for monitoring the delivery of LAA targets, and of wider interest to local strategic partnerships and local councillors. In addition, the results of this project should be a useful tool for organisations such as neighbourhood/town partnerships, area committees and forums, RCCs and other local voluntary and community sector bodies, including the Rural Affairs Forums. It will also be of wider strategic interest to a range of national stakeholder organisations, including government departments, inspectorates, and scrutiny bodies of various types, notably the Audit Commission.

6. Project activity

The project will deliver two main results:

1. a comprehensive assessment of the potential to disaggregate the National

³ Rural Proofing is a range of activity and intervention that seeks to ensure that rural communities can benefit from and contribute to the objectives of all policy agendas.

- Indicator set to local and neighbourhood levels; and,
2. a commentary based on progress being made in Essex, Cumbria and Devon LAAs, on the extent to which such disaggregation can help local authorities and their partners better performance manage to the benefit of all their local communities.

Taken together, this work will be developed into a guide for local authorities and LSPs to demonstrate how disaggregated reporting is practical, desirable and valuable, in order to secure proportionate impact from LAAs for rural communities.

These results will be produced from November through to next Spring.

The CRC also hopes that this project will also help provide evidence for *recommendations* to local authorities and their partners, to central government and to audit and inspection bodies. Recommendations emphasising the importance of securing, where possible, neighbourhood based reporting of LAA targets and of service delivery more generally. This relates not only to good and fair service delivery to citizens wherever they live but also relates to the practical implementation of the new Duty to Involve being placed on local authorities.

7. Contact details

For further information about this project please contact Laura Jacobs on 01242 534060 or email info@ruralcommunities.gov.uk

October 2008