



Monitoring rural proofing 2007

Who we are what we do

The Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) was established in April 2005 and became an independent body on 1 October 2006, following the enactment of the Natural England and Rural Communities Act 2006. The role of the Commission is to provide well-informed, independent advice to government and ensure that policies reflect the real needs and circumstances of people living and working in rural England, with a particular focus on tackling disadvantage and economic under-performance.

It has three key functions:

Rural advocate: the voice for rural people, businesses and communities;

Expert adviser: providing evidence-based, objective advice to government and others; and

Independent watchdog: monitoring and reporting on the delivery of policies nationally, regionally and locally.

Further information about the Commission for Rural Communities and its work can be found at www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk and in our Annual Review 2006/07.

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Foreword

This is the second rural proofing report prepared by the Commission for Rural Communities. Seven years ago the government made a clear and continuing commitment to rural proof its policies and programmes. This year, as with many of our previous monitoring reports, we have to report that we are disappointed in the overall performance of government departments in meeting this commitment.

Specifically, the findings from this year's monitoring show that the commitment to rural proof government policy is not being delivered consistently; and that it is reliant on the approach of individuals rather than built into the day to day work of departments.

However, and more positively, where a policy has a clear spatial element to its implementation, then rural proofing is more likely to have occurred. Stakeholder engagement and consultations are also effective at bringing about rural proofing.

The importance of rural proofing hasn't diminished. There are a number of current initiatives that will shape the future context within which rural proofing takes place. These include the development of the new Local Area Agreements to focus the efforts of local authorities and other local service providers; and, perhaps most significantly, the Sub-National Review of Economic Development and Regeneration which aims to assist all areas in achieving their full economic potential. In addition, I have a personal desire to see a greater emphasis on reporting on outcomes for rural communities, rather than the current emphasis on the process of rural proofing.

Consequently, we are looking to re-establish rural proofing over the coming months. The principle of rural proofing remains; but we want to consider how best to reform the process. The publication of this report marks the beginning of a period of consultation and reflection which will see rural proofing refreshed. I welcome your involvement in this so together, we can ensure that the principles of rural proofing can be translated into better outcomes for rural communities.

Stuart Burgess

Chairman and Rural Advocate

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1. Introduction

This section provides an introduction to rural proofing and sets out the purpose of this report.

1.1 What is rural proofing?

Rural Proofing is the mechanism used by government, at national and regional levels, to ensure that rural needs and circumstances are taken into account in policy development and delivery. As a process, it is intended to ensure that as policy is developed and implemented, government and other relevant bodies:

- consider whether their policy is likely to have a different impact in rural areas, because of particular circumstances or needs;
- make a proper assessment of those impacts, and, where they are thought to be significant;
- adjust, where appropriate, policy and delivery with solutions to meet rural areas' needs and circumstances.

Rural proofing was formally introduced by government in the Rural White Paper 2000¹. It was then refreshed by government in the Rural Strategy 2004², giving the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) a statutory role to monitor and report on how policy is developed and the extent to which those policies are meeting rural need³.

1.2 Purpose of this report

This is the second rural proofing monitoring report produced by the Commission for Rural Communities and the sixth in the series since rural proofing was introduced in 2000⁴.

This report, like the others, reviews the extent to which government has fulfilled its commitment to meet the needs of rural people, businesses and communities, by examining how policy development and delivery is taking account of rural needs and circumstances. It reports on activity at the national and regional level during the year from April 2006 to March 2007.

This report is aimed at policy makers in government departments and staff in Government Offices for the Regions who undertake rural proofing activities. It will also be of relevance to Defra, as the champion of rural proofing across government; as well as to other organisations that work with and represent rural communities; and to rural communities themselves.

By monitoring and reporting regularly on how rural proofing is being implemented across government, this report aims to help improve practice and policy making. This then benefits rural communities with better policy making that is more able to take account of their needs and circumstances.

¹ www.defra.gov.uk

² www.defra.gov.uk

³ Her Majesty's Government (March 2006) Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act

⁴ Previous reports were undertaken by the Countryside Agency, the predecessor body of the CRC

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2. Context

This section provides a picture of rural England today in order to understand the importance of rural proofing, and also looks to the future to predict how rural proofing will be influenced by future policy drivers and agendas across government.

2.1 Rural England today

The social and economic needs and circumstances of the 9.5 million rural people in England are, of course, highly varied. However, as outlined in the latest State of the Countryside Report⁵, there are some important common characteristics and issues. These are highlighted below.

a. Ageing

Over the last 20 years, rural and urban areas have become more demographically different, with the median age of people living in rural areas currently six years older than those in urban areas. In addition, rural areas are much more likely to have individual areas which have even more pronounced age profiles, for example, there are some rural/coastal areas within which the median age is over 60.

b. Housing

Although housing affordability is a challenge in most areas of England, it is clear from the evidence, that the problem is most pronounced in London and in rural England. Rural areas have to contend with constrained supply, caused in part, by less investment in new houses over recent years than has been the case in urban areas, and with continuing high demand.

c. Services

The number and accessibility of many physical service points continues to decrease in both urban and rural areas. However the basic geography of rural areas⁶ means that the consequences of service closure continue to be more dramatic than elsewhere, particularly for those without access to private transport, who are often also those in greatest need.

d. Disadvantage

There are over 900,000 rural households that have an annual income of less than £16,700 (60% of the English median). However in contrast to equivalent low-income urban households, the disadvantaged in rural areas tend not be concentrated in specific locations, but are, as a rule, highly dispersed throughout rural areas. This dispersal means that rural needs are often not recognised in the targeting mechanisms adopted by government to tackle specific forms of disadvantage.

⁵ Commission for Rural Communities July 2007

⁶ Smaller settlements which are further from other centres of population

2.2 Drivers for the future

There are a number of current initiatives that will shape the future context within which rural proofing takes place. These include the development of the new Local Area Agreements to focus the efforts of local authorities and other local service providers and, perhaps most significantly, the Sub-national Review of Economic Development and Regeneration⁷ which aims to assist all areas in achieving their full economic potential.

The core, devolutionary, agenda claimed in both developments has the potential to be of great benefit to rural areas, bringing the prospect of decisions on local priorities, and on the most appropriate measures for responding to them, being made closer to the ground. However it seems clear that such developments will only be meaningful if local areas have the appropriate resources to engender real positive change.

⁷ www.hm-treasury.gov.uk

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3. Methodology

This section explains how we gathered the evidence for this year's report and sets out how this evidence has been analysed and interpreted.

3.1 Gathering the evidence

Building on the approach developed last year, gathering material for this Rural Proofing Monitoring Report was undertaken independently by a professional research consultancy, GHK.

As in our approach for the 2005/06 report, we agreed a range of policies, see Table 1, to use as examples for understanding how rural proofing happens at the national and regional levels. These policies were selected to identify those that:

- were likely to have significant impacts on and implications for rural communities;
- gave a suitable spread across government and would include policies Government Offices (GOs) were engaged with implementing regionally;
- represented different phases and types of policy development;
- could begin to assess the longer term impacts of rural proofing.

To gather evidence of rural proofing these policies, GHK considered:

1. whether and how policy making had been rural proofed by officials in government and GOs, and at what stages;
2. how rural proofing is supported across government and the GOs, and;
3. stakeholder views on the process and success of rural proofing.

The evidence was collected through face-to-face interviews with policy makers in government departments and Government Office staff, and telephone interviews with a range of national and regional stakeholder organisations who had the opportunity to challenge the information collected.

Table 1: Policies included in rural proofing monitoring 2006/07

Development phase	Ratification phase	Implementation phase
Future Builders Fund	Legal aid reform and Bill	Financial Inclusion Fund
Draft Climate Change Bill	Local Government and Health Bill (part)	Digital switchover Bill and Help Scheme
School funding formula	Planning Policy Statement 3 (housing)	Licensing Act
Hospital travel services	Handling, transfer and transport of waste	LAA's framework*
Anti-social behaviour powers	Raising Skills & Further Education Bill	Youth opportunities, Youth Matters*
Low skilled Immigration	Mental Health Bill	Crime and disorder partnerships, Crime Reduction*
Energy efficiency commitments	Concessionary fares Bill	Drug use interventions*
Reform of Renewables Obligation, Energy White Paper	Vehicle excise levy (Budget)	Pathways to Work, New Deal for Welfare
Putting Passengers First & Draft Road Transport Bill	SME corporation tax (Budget)	Business Link Advisory Services
Transport Innovation Fund	Housing benefits regulations, New Deal for Welfare	Supporting People
European Social Fund 2007-2013 proposals		*GO interviews

3.2 Assessing the evidence

Building on the evaluation framework for last year's rural proofing monitoring report, a good practice framework (see Annex one) was developed that set out a broad classification of expected policy making activities that would indicate rural proofing had taken place. Activity associated with each policy was then considered against the framework to assess the extent to which it had been rural proofed. This assessment has led to the identification of the good practice examples in this report and our judgement on rural proofing activity during 2006/07.

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4. Findings

This section now sets out the evidence gathered and main findings, and considers the process and examples of rural proofing policy development and delivery during 2006/07.

4.1 Approaches taken

There are a range of approaches that have been taken by policy makers and others to rural proof policies during 2006/07. They are considered here and examples of good practice highlighted.

4.1.1 Acknowledging “rural”

To carry out rural proofing, there needs to be recognition that policy can have a differential impact in different places. In addition, a recognition that rural areas have a different context for policy impacts and applications is important. This section outlines the evidence that demonstrates how policy makers have acknowledged rural needs and circumstances.

a. Specific consideration of place

The evidence shows that a systematic consideration of rural areas as a *place* where policy may play out differently is unusual, although not wholly absent, at the *early* stages of policy development. It tends to occur where there is thought to be a prejudged *clear* differential impact of policy, for example in the analysis undertaken by the Home Office (HO) of the Accession Eight countries' migration data and the potential impact on the rural economy.

More commonly, where policy makers recognise that there are *probable* differences to be explored, then there is evidence of a range of rural proofing activities. These include visits to different parts of the country; meetings with representatives and practitioners; and holding road shows and conferences in different settings and locations.

In the lead up to the Local Government White Paper, the Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) arranged Ministerial visits to a variety of areas to understand and debate current models of local government; locations included Lincolnshire and Shropshire. Officials were able to engage with a range of stakeholders and listen to a range of issues and solutions to help inform the development of the White Paper.

There is a reliance on making a personal judgment about whether policy will impact differently in different places. This shows a lack of a systematic⁸ approach to rural proofing. As a result, it is not surprising that systematic tools such as the Rural Proofing checklist, the Regulatory Impact Assessment⁹ and other support tools that are available, are generally not used to assist rural proofing.

⁸ i.e. built into departmental systems, cultures and processes

⁹ Now termed the Impact Assessment

b. Stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder engagement is a feature of good policy making. When government consults and talks to stakeholders, this can, and does, play an important role in assisting with rural proofing at all levels. This often means discussing policy issues with reference groups, sounding boards or expert advisers, and it tends to include engagement of rural representatives and groups with expert knowledge or experience of rural areas. Again, this tends not to occur systematically, but most frequently where a policy is perceived to have a differential impact in a rural context. Such stakeholder engagement informed the development of number of policies considered in this report.

In developing the national concessionary fares scheme and its subsequent implementation, the Department for Transport (DfT) engaged a range of stakeholders, including beneficiaries, operators and local authorities, to draw in experience and understand area differences in order to ensure better policy delivery.

c. Consultations

Generally, formal consultations on proposals as they are developed are almost always undertaken. Whilst there is no systematic approach to ensuring rural representation as part of the formal consultation process, rural views and circumstances are generally included. This is achieved in the main by the consideration of rural as a place .

In the reform of the Renewables Obligation, led by DTI, consultation at different stages was informed by a stakeholder engagement plan. This included relevant rural business groups such as the National Farmers Union, the Country Land and Business Association, as well as the wind energy sector.

In addition, by casting the net widely at national, regional and local levels, this can help pick up response on different issues and at different levels. However, the analysis of responses of most consultations does not differentiate between rural and urban representations. Obviously this does not help policy makers to undertake rural proofing effectively.

In the reform of Legal Aid, the Department for Constitutional Affairs¹⁰ and the Legal Services Commission received over 2,000 responses to their consultation. The published analysis highlighted concern about the supplier base in rural areas where not enough work of different types might be available.

4.1.2 Design features

In almost all policies where an effect on rural areas was acknowledged by policy makers, the evidence shows there are some clear design features that those policy makers have built to reflect the needs and characteristics of rural areas. This section discusses some of the design features used to rural proof policies during 2006/07.

¹⁰ Now The Ministry for Justice

a. Safeguards

Safeguards are used to ensure rural areas are not disadvantaged. There are a number of examples from the policies considered where it is possible to identify such features. This includes the setting of minimum access standards, as exemplified by the Further Education Bill (Department for Education and Skills¹¹); in the development of rights and entitlements to services, as set out in the Department of Health's (DH) Mental Health Bill; and in the Concessionary Fares Bill set out by the DfT.

In implementing the Digital Switchover Bill, the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) has required the BBC to provide a digital satellite service and all providers (commercial and not-for-profit) to build out their network of transmitters to ensure a greater proportion of the population can access digital signals. Furthermore, for the Help Scheme, the BBC is required to meet the standard required of providing help to those eligible in all areas. Digital UK is required to provide advice and assistance to those not eligible for help through stakeholders and community groups in all areas and will be expected to use outreach and mobile services in rural areas to achieve this.

Perhaps the most significant and most often used policy design feature, although not strictly a safeguard, is the requirement that the policy is able to respond to *local need* and to set targets and measures appropriately. This report points to this approach being taken with the policies on the Transport Innovation Fund (DfT), Business Link policy (Department for Trade and Industry¹²), Further Education provision (DfES¹³) and Crime and Disorder Partnership funding (HO).

Government Offices in particular, highlight this approach of local needs driven implementation as a good way of rural proofing delivery. However, it is also the case that many public service providers do not accept that these refinements are sufficient to meet the actual additional cost pressures being faced in order to implement policy and deliver services in rural areas.

b. Refinements and adjustments

Refinements are a means of adapting policy to ensure that the needs of rural areas can be met. There are a number of ways of refining policy and again, this seems to occur where there is recognition of the different characteristics of rural areas compared to urban.

One of the most common refinements found from this year's evidence was the provision of additional funding to support delivery in rural areas, where there were recognised additional costs of delivery. This approach, often using a sparsity allowance, was used in the development of the Concessionary Fares policy (DfT), Schools Funding Formula (DfES¹⁴) and for Supporting People (CLG).

Other special provisions recognising the particular characteristics and needs of rural communities, during 2006/07, have included the temporary continuation of the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme (HO), and maintaining a variable fee for legal aid in magistrates courts due to additional costs of travel in rural areas.

¹¹ Now the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills

¹² Now the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform

¹³ Now the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills

¹⁴ Now the Department for Children, Schools and Families

Making policy adjustments are the third measure identified from the evidence gathered. Some of the examples show adjustments made as a result of learning from pilots and experiences from other similar policies and approaches. This includes the adjustments and flexibilities in the draft Road Transport Bill (DfT), which draw on the experience of both contracting out and operating rural public transport effectively.

There are some examples of where new provisions have been built into policy development as a result of consultation with rural stakeholders. This includes the development of the Local Government White Paper (CLG) where parish and town councils were specifically identified as well placed to assume functions and responsibilities, where appropriate, from upper tier councils in the proposed new shire unitary authority areas. It was also identified that as part of the Licensing Act review (DCMS), there was a need to alter some specific licensing requirements, as it was agreed they could pose a risk to the viability and functions of village halls across rural England.

4.2 Understanding the impacts

In a considerable number of policies considered for this report, there has been no prior systematic consideration of the impact that implementation of the policy would have on rural people, businesses or communities. For some, policy makers argue that safeguards and other design features are sufficient tools and formal impact assessment is not required. Others argued that data to understand rural impacts was unavailable, or could not easily be obtained or was not needed as (implicitly) they did not recognise differential spatial impacts. However, there are several ways that impact assessment can take place and this section highlights these.

a. Impact measurement

Measurement of impact and subsequent analysis rests on the ability of policy makers to forecast effects on different groups and areas, and can form part of a decision-making process in policy development. This more commonly occurs where there are financial effects though it often tends to be aggregated for larger geographical areas.

One example where impact measurement did occur was in the reform of Legal Aid (Department for Justice).

As part of the review of legal aid, the Legal Services Commission undertook an analysis to compare the case costs for urban and rural solicitors and not-for-profit agencies. The analysis took account of client profiles, types of case, and outcomes to produce a range of average costs of types of case. In this instance, it found little variation between average costs between rural and urban providers.

This example clearly illustrates the benefits of excellent data gathering and analysis systems, as they concluded that in fact in this case, there was no special provision needed for serving rural areas. Had the judgement been made based on intuition, then perhaps the same conclusion would not have been reached.

However, for the majority of policies, the evidence shows that the official rural and urban area definition 2004¹⁵ is not used for this purpose. Furthermore, the evidence suggests that very little impact measurement has taken place through the various phases of those policies considered in this report.

b. Impact analysis

Whilst some impact analysis can be part of the decision-making process, using specific research and evaluation to consider impacts can be more informative. This includes techniques such as learning from pilots and pathfinders that are specifically designed to inform policy implementation and testing for rural/urban differences, graduated roll out and interim evaluations, and examining existing research through literature reviews.

Digital Switchover, led by DCMS, was piloted in a small rural community in Wales and the Help Scheme was simulated in Bolton which helped policy makers develop their plans for a national region-by-region roll out which will be evaluated at each stage.

Business Link implementation, led by DTI¹⁶, drew on pilots in three regions to test the delivery model in different circumstances including in rural areas and with rural businesses.

4.3 Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation is an important component of policy development and delivery. Making a commitment to monitor and evaluate in its widest sense is important. A commitment to monitor impacts for rural communities and then subsequent implementation of such plans are important steps if rural proofing is to be properly embedded and understood. Many of the policies examined for this report have not yet reached the stage where this has been considered.

Where they have, monitoring and reporting systems are often not set up specifically to allow the effects on rural areas to be assessed and compared to effects on other areas, or indeed for an effect against a baseline to be measured at the national level. There are a couple of exceptions to this where measures are in place; however again, these tend to be on policies where there is an obvious spatial element to their implementation.

Guidance developed for PPS3 by CLG placed an expectation on the need for local monitoring of permissions and completions with a distinction between rural and urban areas.

¹⁵ www.statistics.gov.uk/geography/nrudp.asp

¹⁶ Now the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform

In the delivery of the Business Link service, initiated by DTI, Regional Development Agencies will monitor delivery of services by sector and by geography.

There tends to be more evidence of such monitoring and reporting at the sub-national level. The GOs involvement in the development and implementation of policies provided opportunities for monitoring and ensuring local need is taken into account, through advice, influence and sign off processes.

In the process for agreeing Local Area Agreements (LAAs), the evidence shows that Government Offices have actively attempted to advise on targets and their coverage, and monitored drafts to ensure that rural areas are given appropriate consideration.

Where research has been undertaken, post implementation, some of the policies considered have shown evidence of assessing the effects on rural areas as a result.

The implementation of the Licensing Act, undertaken by DCMS shows how an assessment can consider rural areas. Policy makers have retained a rural sounding board, undertaken visits and studies, reviewed key concerns of rural representatives and consulted widely.

4.4 Supporting rural proofing

There are a range of tools available to policy makers to help them undertake effective rural proofing. These include their internal staff resources, access to information, training and access to expert advice from the Commission for Rural Communities and more widely from rural interest groups and advisers. Overall however, the evidence suggests that use of these is patchy and inconsistent.

a. Within government

Government departments tend to have individual staff, such as in DfES¹⁷, who have a designated responsibility for promoting and supporting rural proofing in policy making within their department. This generally forms part of a wider portfolio of work. A small team in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) additionally provides rural proofing advice across government. Other departments, such as DH, combine the responsibility for rural proofing with the role of the Better Policy Making team.

Of those staff with responsibility for rural proofing, the evidence points to variations in practice. Generally, there is awareness of the sources of information available on rural proofing which in turn can then be used to support rural proofing within departments. In DfES, these comprised case studies and publications by relevant rural organisations, including the CRC.

¹⁷ Now the DCSF and DIUS

Staff with rural proofing responsibilities tended to respond to requests for information and offer advice and support to colleagues, rather than simply directing them to advice to then interpret unaided. However, there was no evidence to suggest that staff had been proactive in promoting rural proofing within their departments. As a consequence, the evidence suggests that policy makers are generally not aware of rural proofing as a requirement of their work. For some it is intuitive and for others it is not. Furthermore, monitoring of the Regulatory Impact Assessment is not generally undertaken by staff championing rural proofing so usually there is no follow through to ensure rural needs are considered as part of the policy making toolkit.

b. Regionally and locally

Government Offices continue to have staff with responsibility for rural proofing, generally as part of the Defra portfolio of work. They see their role as mainstreaming rural proofing across the GO. In GOSE for example, staff have briefed locality managers on rural proofing in preparation for their work on LAAs. In addition, GOs have generally taken a more proactive role and have supported the Regional Rural Affairs Forums¹⁸ (RRAFs) to undertake rural proofing of the various regional strategies as and when this has been appropriate. This evidence points to the importance of specialised rural knowledge and experience at all levels of government to bring about effective rural proofing.

¹⁸ www.defra.gov.uk/rural/voice/regional.htm

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5. Overall assessment

For each of the policies examined for this report, we have reviewed the evidence, assessed this against the good practice framework developed from last year's rural proofing report, and identified good practice. This section sets out the overall assessment of rural proofing activity during 2006/07 and highlights the strengths and challenges for rural proofing based on this year's findings.

The government's commitment to rural proof policy development and implementation was only partially fulfilled during 2006/07.

Our evidence shows that the commitment is not being delivered consistently or systematically across departments or policy areas. However, the evidence also suggests that where a policy has an obvious or clear rural element to its design or implementation, then the process of rural proofing is more likely to have occurred. This relies on the knowledge and awareness of individual policy makers rather than being embedded within the systems and processes of departments.

The engagement of stakeholders and the use of consultation processes has helped rural interests to articulate rural issues and needs to inform policy development and implementation.

This approach is a strength in some of the policies considered, with some showing evidence of seeking to consult widely and at all levels to ensure those who were aware of rural needs and circumstances were able to participate and to respond. However, the evidence also shows that some policy makers continue to undertake the minimum consultation required, with little effort made to engage proactively with rural interests.

Where the need is recognised, there is some use of specific design features to help safeguard rural interests and to ensure rural communities are not disadvantaged. This happens where policy makers acknowledge that there will be an impact or effect on rural communities and therefore seek to mitigate it.

Policy makers do not make sufficient use of the rural-urban definition and are therefore unable to undertake adequate impact assessments. Collectively, CRC, Defra and the Office of National Statistics have been working to improve the use of the rural-urban definition across government. However, during the 2006/07 period, there was little evidence of its use in policy making. As a result, policy makers have been ill equipped to interrogate existing data sources sufficiently in order to understand the potential impacts of policy implementation in different geographic areas.

There are some good examples of where policies have been rural proofed, and these are set out in this report. Where policies have been rural proofed, the evidence points to a number of key components:

- acceptance and acknowledgement of the significance of "rural" as a place, in the early stages of policy development;
- awareness and knowledge of the characteristics of rural areas brought by either stakeholder interest or research;

- stakeholder engagement and a willingness to include expert advice and representation in order to bring out any rural perspectives;
- inclusion of stakeholders at both development and delivery phases;
- a willingness to learn from experience, to develop pilots and to consider impacts on communities and locations as part of the developmental process;
- building in appropriate design features, and;
- appropriate monitoring and evaluation to ensure rural needs and circumstances are met.

It is clear that there is more to be done to mainstream properly and systematically, “rural” into the work of government departments.

5.1 Strengths and challenges

The table below sets out the main strengths of and outstanding challenges for rural proofing based on the evidence gathered for this report.

Table 2: Strengths and challenges

Aspects of rural proofing	Strengths	Challenges for improvement
Acknowledging rural	Consultation and external advice generally picks up stakeholders who can speak for rural areas' needs	Developing systematic consideration of policy changes that will impact on “place”
		Better consideration as a mainstream approach of Impact Assessments
		Policy makers familiar with who to consult and engage to capture rural issues
Design features	Some positive adaptations and refinements are made which reflect rural areas' needs	Reducing current over-reliance on safeguards with greater monitoring and evaluation in place
	Safeguards in place which can protect rural areas	
Understanding impacts	Some forecasting and modelling is attempted	Systematic assessment of impact
	Learning from pilots and staged processes is widely used	Promotion and greater use of rural – urban definition
		Analysis of evidence at a level to discern rural impacts
Monitoring and evaluation	Intentions to monitor and evaluate	Explicit analysis of rural responses to consultations
		Considering rural impacts separately in both periodic evaluations and in monitoring implementation
Supporting rural proofing	Embedded in some policy makers' thinking and actions	Greater active promotion of information, advice and guidance
	Understanding and knowledge of GO staff	More proactive work by departmental champions

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6. Way forward and lessons

This final section highlights some key learning points based on the evidence from this year's monitoring report and sets out how the CRC suggests rural proofing ought to move forward, taking into account the actions that were identified from last year's monitoring report.

6.1 Actions from last year

In the 2005/06 rural proofing monitoring report, we proposed a number of actions that were necessary to bring about better rural proofing at all stages of policy development, ratification and implementation:

- that government should enforce compliance with its presumption in favour to rural proof all domestic policies to ensure positive outcomes for rural communities;
- that scrutiny of rural proofing should develop, including by parliamentary select committees, particularly the Efra Select Committee, the National Audit Office and Audit Commission, and by the RRAFs and Regional Assemblies;
- that policy makers should conduct well informed needs assessment, taking into account the diversity of rural characteristics;
- that senior officials in departments take responsibility for ensuring rural proofing takes place effectively throughout the department;
- that Defra should provide leadership to rural proofing across government;
- that the advice and support that GOs offer be well used and secured, and;
- finally, that third sector bodies be encouraged to develop their approach to rural proofing.

6.2 Lessons from last year

As is clear from this report, whilst there is some evidence of rural proofing in some of the policies reviewed, this continues to be inconsistent and patchy. Where a policy has an obvious or clear spatial element to its implementation, then the process of rural proofing is more likely to occur during policy development. Where rural proofing does occur, it is reliant on individual action and it is not usually embedded within departmental systems, processes and cultures. In addition, representations and lobbying from external interest groups, including advice from CRC, help to bring about rural proofing activity. There has also been activity within the third sector to support rural proofing, notably through the work undertaken by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations. The NCVO's rural project¹⁹ has been offering support, advice and information on how to rural proof existing and future work within NCVO work teams. They have also developed rural proofing resources and a rural proofing guide for all voluntary and community organisations. The work with Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) and the county-based Rural Community Councils has also been valuable in promoting rural proofing.

¹⁹ www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/policy/rural

6.3 Where we go from here

The importance of rural proofing hasn't diminished. It remains government policy and this has not changed. It is still the case that there needs to be an active policy of promoting and supporting rural proofing, as it continues to be applied patchily. Rural needs are not being consistently addressed through policy making.

There are a number of ongoing policy agendas that are impacting on how rural proofing is taken forward. This includes the importance of "place" and "mainstreaming" as two significant government agendas, as well as the continued drive for devolution of decision-making and subsidiarity. These are important cross-cutting themes the government is seeking to bring into many policy areas and will present an opportunity for rural proofing to be refreshed to complement these approaches and agendas.

The messages from this year, taken with messages from the last few reports, conclude that in order to see better outcomes for rural communities, the process of rural proofing needs reviewing. Where it is undertaken well, it brings about material changes in policy that then serve the needs of rural communities better. We want to build on this and help improve the practice of rural proofing.

Clearly, the principle of rural proofing remains. We will be considering how best to reform the process. We welcome your involvement in this and want to ensure that your views help rural proofing develop for the benefit of rural communities across England.

Aspects of rural proofing	Development of policy	Ratification of policy	Implementation of policy
<p>Active consideration of rural areas' needs</p>	<p>In developing options and proposals, consideration is given to whether there are issues around accessibility, availability, affordability and economic opportunity where there might be an adverse impact on rural areas drawing on evidence of how any current policy affects rural areas</p> <p>Options and proposals are routinely and systematically assessed against the rural proofing checklist or a similar list of considerations to determine if rural areas are advantaged or disadvantaged and in what ways...and whether these apply to all or some rural areas (and which types)</p> <p>Options and proposals are discussed with non-governmental organisations representing the groups that might be affected in time for them to influence proposals affecting rural areas</p> <p>Options and proposals are discussed with local government and government agencies representing rural areas that might be affected in time for them to influence proposals affecting rural areas</p> <p>Options and proposals are discussed with other government departments with a policy interest in meeting the government's targets/standards for rural areas/delivering the Rural Strategy and with GOs</p> <p>Consultation with residents and businesses includes an adequate sample from rural areas</p> <p>Consultation is routinely analysed to reveal the response of rural residents, communities and businesses</p> <p>The results of consultation and discussions with rural interests and residents are taken into account in refining proposals, options and delivery frameworks</p>	<p>Regulatory impact assessments which include rural proofing are carried out when statutory changes are being actively considered or taken forward</p> <p>Any further consultation and discussion includes non-governmental organisations representing the groups that might be affected in time for them to influence legislation or ministerial decisions affecting rural areas</p> <p>Any further deliberation is discussed with local government and government agencies representing rural areas that might be affected in time for them to influence proposals affecting rural areas</p> <p>Any further deliberation is discussed with other government departments with a policy interest in meeting the government's targets/standards for rural areas/delivering the Rural Strategy</p> <p>Decision makers are aware of the effect on rural areas when taking decisions about changes</p> <p>Evidence is drawn from forecast modelling and from the experience of pathfinders and pilots to re-examine impacts</p> <p>Decision makers are aware of the significance and extent of any impacts when they are taking decisions</p>	<p>In developing a delivery framework and implementation plan, consideration is given to how this might work in rural areas drawing on evidence of what has worked in similar circumstances</p> <p>Options and proposals for implementation are discussed with non-governmental organisations representing the groups that might be affected in time for them to influence action plans</p> <p>Options and proposals for implementation are discussed with local government and government agencies representing rural areas that might be affected in time for them to influence action plans</p> <p>Options and proposals for implementation are discussed with other government departments with a policy interest in meeting the government's targets/standards for rural areas/delivering the Rural Strategy</p> <p>The results of consultation are taken into account in refining proposals for delivery</p> <p>Steering groups and implementation arrangements include representatives of rural areas or experts who understand rural areas needs</p> <p>Delivery agents (GOs, NDPBs) are aware of the need to consider rural areas in their roll out of strands of the policy</p>

(continued)	Aspects of rural proofing	Development of policy	Ratification of policy	Implementation of policy
Active consideration of rural areas' needs	The results of active consideration are taken into account in making final proposals and provided to decision makers	Evidence is drawn from forecast modelling and from the experience of pathfinders and pilots to re-examine impacts	Targets are set to enable impacts on rural areas to be monitored	
Examination of impacts on rural areas	<p>Potential impacts for rural areas (both positive and negative) are researched and analysed to assess the degree of any significant impact on individuals, businesses or communities in rural areas... and consider the degree of impact in different types of rural area</p> <p>Use is made of suitable data for areas defined as rural.</p> <p>Use is made of other relevant studies and evaluations where the experience of rural areas has been distinguished</p> <p>Consideration is given to pilots and pathfinders to establish if there are potential impacts where these cannot be assessed</p>	Decision makers are aware of the significance and extent of any impacts when they are taking decisions		
Policy design reflects needs of rural areas	<p>Following analysis and assessment, proposals are adjusted to reduce any adverse impact in rural areas, including funding adjustments</p> <p>Adaptations are appropriate for rural areas and draw on an evidence base of what works in rural areas to reduce adverse impacts</p> <p>Adaptations are appropriate for rural areas and draw on the experience of pilots and pathfinders</p> <p>Consultees are made aware of any adaptations proposed or not and the reasons why, and consider these to be suitable solutions to meet rural areas needs and circumstances</p>	<p>Evidence is drawn from the experience of pilots and pathfinders</p> <p>Decision makers are aware of policy adaptations that reduce or eliminate any adverse impact on rural areas</p> <p>Consultees are aware of the adaptations made and the reasons why and consider them to be reasonable solutions to meet rural areas needs and circumstances</p>	<p>Adaptations are made to delivery frameworks which are known to be appropriate and work well in rural areas</p> <p>Flexibility allows rural areas to deliver changes in appropriate ways</p> <p>In national roll-outs, consideration is given to staging implementation including some rural areas so that the delivery framework can be tested and adapted</p> <p>Delivery frameworks are adapted where they are found not to work in rural areas or having unanticipated impacts</p>	

(continued)			
Aspects of rural proofing	Development of policy	Ratification of policy	Implementation of policy
Monitoring and evaluation considers rural areas	Following analysis and assessment, the proposed delivery framework includes means to assess the impact in rural areas		<p>Monitoring systems are established to measure whether rural areas are disadvantaged any more than anticipated and that any adaptations work</p> <p>Research and evaluation programmes are expected to assess the extent that policies have not increased rural disadvantage</p> <p>Research and evaluation programmes are expected to assess that delivery frameworks are working in rural areas</p> <p>Information is made available for government and non-government organisations representing rural areas to monitor progress</p> <p>Government and non-government organisations representing rural areas are routinely asked for their views on the impact of the policy change</p> <p>In systematic surveys as part of evaluations, representative samples of rural residents and businesses are included</p>

Supporting rural proofing – evaluation framework

- Specific staff are earmarked to improve rural proofing of policy
- Designated staff have time available to provide guidance and assistance on rural proofing and give feedback
- Intranet resources are available to all staff with guidance (checklists), good practice, contact details for assistance
- Designated staff undertake regular training to update and maintain policy makers' knowledge and skills of rural proofing/rural disadvantage
- Staff are regularly informed about the need for rural proofing and best practice
- Rural proofing is covered as a matter of routine in policy development and RIA training (and materials) provided by the department
- Rural proofing of policy implementation strategies is made explicitly clear to NDPPs as well as policy staff in the department
- There is a RIA compliance checking process in place in the department
- Guidance and help on rural proofing is provided to policy staff and there are examples that this has been effective in ensuring policies have been rural proofed

- ACRE
- Advantage West Midlands
- Age Concern (two interviews)
- Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations
- Association of Colleges (land-based colleges group)
- Association of Directors of Adult Services
- Community Transport Association
- County Councils Network
- Crime Concern
- Friends of the Earth
- LACORS
- Law Society
- Market and Coastal Towns Association
- NACAB
- NACRO
- National Association of Small Schools
- North Yorkshire Police
- Patients Association
- Pub is the Hub
- RAC Foundation
- Rural Community Councils (two interviews)
- SEEDA
- Shaw Trust
- SPARSE
- SWRDA
- Yorkshire Forward

**Commission for
Rural Communities**

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