



## **Policy Making for People** **19 May 2009**

Feedback from facilitated briefing sessions

### **Mainstreaming, rural proofing and equalities impact assessment**

- A number of groups raised the issue of equalities assessment. Groups thought that rural proofing should be more effectively integrated within and linked to the equalities assessment process. One group used the term 'spatial equality' as an example of how rural proofing should be considered within the equalities framework.
  - A group noted that including rural as an equality issue would help stop the rural – urban polarisation and may help reframe how the issue is viewed.
- Groups also highlighted how important it is not think of rural communities as a separate part of the policy making process. The need for more inclusive mainstreaming was highlighted. Most participants understood the intention of 'mainstream' policy delivery but emphasised that rural proofing had not yet had a strong enough influence to tailor mainstream policies.
  - One group highlighted the need for rural proofing to have a higher profile and noted participants' collective responsibility to promote the rural message.
  - Another group raised the impact that changes at Local Government level are likely to have on policy making for rural areas. It was noted that CLG procedures on reviewing Local Government structures needs rural proofing.
  - The mix of rural and urban requirements in all communities was also highlighted.
  - One group noted that having a 'bespoke' rural focus is, at times, appropriate and crucial.

### **Improving data collection and use**

- Improving data collection and use was also raised. Groups highlighted the need for accurate and detailed data based on measures relevant to rural communities. Groups also raised the need for clear measures and impacts rather than simply collating data.
- Another group noted that regeneration funding focussed on the most deprived areas which misses most rural deprivation.
- It was also emphasised that decisions are often made on financial criteria and quotas, where in reality there is a need to consider the full economic and *social* impact. One group mentioned that it was *impacts* that should be measured, not *outputs* – that a policy should positively impact it's community (by improving transport services to one community health centre), not deliver a large number of poor quality services (have a physician make numerous home visits that may reduce time spent on patients and quality of diagnosis), for example.

## **Watchdog**

- The need for a more robust watchdog or monitoring system was also raised as another way of strengthening the rural proofing agenda.
- As noted above, a number of groups raised the issue of more coercive powers to encourage government to rural proof. Some groups suggested that the CRC ask for enhanced legislative power akin to the Welsh model; others suggested that a rural watchdog be incorporated into each department.

## **Consultation**

- Nearly every group raised the issue of enhanced consultation with rural communities. It was widely felt that ineffective policy making could be mitigated through consultative processes, engaging rural communities early on the process. Building on this point, one group suggested that the conference could have been called 'Policy Making for People' addressing the fundamental reason for rural proofing.
  - One group added that rural proofing should be seen as active engagement, rather than 'ticking boxes'.
  - Another group noted that the aim of rural proofing was to address the needs of rural communities, not the 'wants'.
- Many groups encouraged the 'outside – in' approach to policy making that had been mentioned by previous speaker Matthew Taylor, MP for Truro and St Austell. The term refers to identifying the real world needs of communities prior to developing policy. Devolved decision making was also seen as an important part of the consultation process.
- Groups also highlighted the challenges of rural proofing at regional and local levels of governance, one group noted the 'legitimate but often difficult challenges of local politics.'
- One group came up with the idea of a rural proofing web based forum to which people could go to comment on rural proofing issues and get advice on rural proofing and policy making.

## **Community hubs: effective service delivery**

- To provide effective, accessible services to rural areas a number of groups highlighted the approach of community hubs (or multiservice outlets) which combine a number of services in one geographic location. Groups felt that this was a best practise model which should be promoted to policy makers.
  - One group also mentioned the need for more emphasis on rural proofing training being promoted to policy makers. Another group raised the idea of rural proofing 'associates' to provide support to Local Service Providers specifically.

## **Other sectors and rural proofing**

- Participants mentioned the capacity of other sectors – specifically voluntary and private sectors to assist in improving outcomes for rural communities, if their influence could be brought to bear on government decision making.
  - Groups identified a few specific examples where voluntary sector schemes were not being recognised and/or supported at County Council level.
  - Other influencing bodies such as select committees were also raised as possible avenues through which rural proofing could be promoted.

- A number of groups thought that structures to enable good rural proofing – through parish and town councils, for example – already exist, but that it is a matter of improving their engagement in the *processes* of policy making.

### **The future**

- Groups raised the importance of considering the kind of vibrant and sustainable rural communities we wish to see in the future. This aim should form a key part of 'thinking rural' in policy making and service delivery.
- Similarly, one group referenced Matthew Taylor's concept of 'future proofing' rural communities.