



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

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The Government response to the Independent Rural Proofing Implementation Review by Lord Cameron of Dillington

December 2015



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Foreword

This Government is committed to ensuring the interests of rural communities and businesses are accounted for within our policies and programmes, working for all parts of the Country. Rural communities and businesses rightly expect to contribute to, and benefit from, economic and productivity growth. They also expect that all Government policies and programmes should be sufficiently flexible that they deliver quality services to meet their everyday needs.



Lord Cameron's report makes a clear statement. For rural proofing to work effectively, all government departments need to make rural issues a routine policy consideration. This is true across all policies and programmes.

Rural proofing will focus especially on the issues that matter most. Recently, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and I launched a 10-point plan for boosting productivity in rural areas. It complements the government's wider efforts to promote access in rural areas to high quality public services, focusing on ten specific areas we believe could make a real difference to productivity. The plan is wide-ranging and will require action across government, as well as close working with others outside of government. This is where mainstreaming rural issues into policies and programmes can make a real difference.

I want to see rural areas fully connected to the wider economy, with strong conditions for rural growth and a highly skilled rural workforce. It should be easier to live and work in rural areas, with greater local powers balanced by strong local governance. To achieve this, the Government's key rural priorities for action are;

- Broadband and mobile coverage
- Housing and planning
- Education & skills
- Childcare

In our response to Lord Cameron's review, I am keen to capitalise on the level of enthusiasm and involvement demonstrated by all Government departments to engage fully with their rural proofing responsibilities. As well as our expectations for other Departments, we also have our rural policy capability within Defra - with specialist statistical, evidence and policy experts focussing on the key priorities and working to support our response to this review.

I'd like to thank Lord Cameron and his independent review team for their work in producing this report.

Elizabeth Truss

Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Background to the Review

Most government policies impact on rural as well as urban communities. Rural proofing involves departments ensuring their policies take into account the specific issues faced by rural communities, that public services are accessible and appropriate for rural as well as urban areas, and that the potential of the rural economy is maximised.

In order to gauge the effectiveness of its rural proofing, in autumn 2013 the previous government commissioned an independent review, led by Lord Cameron of Dillington, to look at how effectively government departments had adopted and implemented the principles and guidance set out in a package of rural proofing support information issued by Defra in July 2013.

The review sought to identify the extent to which departments were designing their policies in order to deliver effective outcomes in rural areas, including how well they were:

- Identifying the rural impacts of their policy responsibilities;
- Gathering and utilising evidence on rural opportunities and need in their policy-making;
- Engaging with rural communities, businesses and other interests in their policy-making; and
- Ensuring that rural needs and interests were fully reflected in their policies and programmes.

The review was published in January 2015. It includes a package of recommendations and these are set out below, along with the Government's response.

Responding to the Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Defra Ministers should work with Cabinet Office to strengthen and improve rural proofing guidance when the impact of policies is being assessed, to ensure that rural policy impacts are given clear and robust attention. Rural proofing must be applied more systematically in Departments and described more openly and transparently.

The current rural proofing guidance was published between 2012 and 2013 to support national and local level activity. Overall, this has been well received and used extensively. However, the existing document can be improved further by providing more in depth analytical guidance that gives details of how to quantify the impacts of policy options (in cost / benefit monetary terms) on rural areas and also how to ensure proper comparison between urban and rural geographies. This will bring the approach more in line with the principles of HM Treasury Green Book policy appraisal and evaluation. Defra will work with HMT to scope and produce supplementary guidance for rural proofing that is set against a clear statement of our vision and priorities for rural England.

Defra will strengthen the rural proofing guidance to reflect this new approach. This will explain more clearly how rural proofing is part of successful policy appraisal, evaluation and impact assessment. This will include further information and guidance on how all potential policy impacts on rural communities can be better analysed, articulated and assessed.

Defra will also work with Cabinet Office and BIS to further embed rural proofing into the formation of government policy and the impact assessment process.. Departments will also need to include as part of their annual reporting process information about how their policies have been rural proofed and what changes this has resulted in. This will enable their actions and resulting outcomes to be fully scrutinised and monitored.

A supplementary action to support recommendation 1 is for all departments to routinely invite Defra's RCPU to run a rural proofing workshop to improve awareness, highlight the available data and evidence available that can be examined on an urban/rural basis and bring policy teams together with their analysts to explore the policy problems and appropriate interventions.

One of the review's key findings is confirmation that, for rural proofing to work effectively, it is for all Government departments to make rural issues a routine policy consideration. Whilst Government acknowledges the popularity of previous rural proofing workshops, taking responsibility for rural proofing activity means relying less on Defra in the future.

It is important to continue to highlight the available data, evidence and guidance to help Departments access this. Defra will therefore establish a dedicated online data and

statistics site, accessible to all, that brings together for the first time a comprehensive set of rural proofing materials to help Departments better help themselves. This will include:

A rural proofing, guidance and evidence section, including;

- Refreshed guidance on rural proofing, with Green Book supplementary guidance to be scoped and developed with HMT as part of their overall review and how to use it for policy appraisal, evaluation and the impact assessment process;
- Detailed guidance on the use of the urban / rural classification and its application to datasets to appraise policy options;
- Rural proofing case studies, examples of best practice, thematic ‘toolkits’ e.g. health
- Evidence and research reports.

A data and statistics section, including;

- Monitoring and evaluation information related to the Rural Productivity Plan and Single Departmental Plan
- Presentation of data statistics for key priority areas of connectivity, planning, housing, skills and childcare
- Presentation of other rural statistics with in some cases underlying data (based on an evolution of the current Rural Stats Digest, Rural Economic Bulletin and other statistical outputs)
- Links to other disaggregated (published) Government data and portals such as Office for National Statistic GeoPortal and NOMIS
- Direct presentation of or links to other aggregated datasets / statistics as and when produced by other Government departments

Recommendation 2

Defra Ministers should establish an Inter-Departmental Rural Oversight group, it would bring together all the main Departments, at a senior level, to discuss particular/topical rural issues and identify where policies or delivery could be adjusted.

Government recognises the benefit of Departments talking to each other and sharing ideas around policy interdependencies. However, establishing an additional, separate formal committee risks detaching rural proofing activities from where policy issues are discussed and resolved. That is why, in order to bring more substance to the process of rural proofing our approach in future, Government will ‘mainstream’ rural issues within the various Ministerial level ‘implementation task forces’ set up in order to tackle key issues such as digital connectivity, housing and childcare.

Defra Ministers, supported by senior officials, as part of the key implementation task forces will champion rural issues in Government and prompt others to take on responsibility and properly consider issues when making decisions. Defra Ministers already sit on the Digital and Housing Taskforces. Defra will monitor closely progress on implementing the Rural

Productivity Plan, via actions embedded in the Single Departmental Plans across Government.

In addition, Defra Ministers will meet their counterparts in other departments to give even greater focus to priority areas through a series of bilateral meetings.

Defra will work with Cabinet Office to scope out a central rural proofing oversight role, monitoring the rural proofing actions across all government Departments.

Recommendation 3

Defra, with support and input from other government departments, to develop a Rural Proofing Forum, working closely with the inter-Departmental Rural Oversight Group to share best practice, information and key messages across government.

Providing access to a comprehensive package of guidance for rural proofing ‘practitioners’ will undoubtedly help them undertake a more thorough analysis and lead to better outcomes. Government also recognises the benefit that exchanging information brings, through reviewing best practice examples, highlighting interdependencies and also sharing possible solutions. The dedicated online rural resource, set out in our response to Recommendation 1 will act as a ‘community of practice’ for those involved with rural proofing activity.

Recommendation 4

All government departments should adopt the use of Office of National Statistics and government wide urban/rural classifications in their analyses of data and evidence, with support from Defra on statistical analyses as required.

When undertaking rural proofing, developing a ‘rural cut’ of relevant data can help to define the issue and also to identify interdependencies and also potential solutions. Adding the urban/rural classifications to all datasets would be costly and in some cases unnecessary if they are already geographically referenced. Government will use the classification where it is relevant to a policy issue to be analysed. On this basis, statistics split by rural and urban would be produced where there was a clear need to do so.

The Defra Rural Statistics team, working together with the Office for National Statistics and the Government Statistical Service, will develop a training package and guidance on the use of the urban / rural classification and publish this as part of our online rural repository. Further effort will be made to promote the use of the classification and draw attention to best practice examples of how it can support rural proofing.

Government will also enable published statistics from across departments that have been produced using the classification to be linked to our online rural resource as a 'one stop shop'. Defra will continue to advise on the use and application of the urban / rural classification and also continue with the production and publication of aggregated rural statistics.

Recommendation 5:

To see a clear rural proofing stage built into the collective agreement processes so that departments will have to explain their rural proofing measures in their policy considerations.

Understanding the costs, benefits, and risks of *any* new measure or proposal is fundamental to better regulation and better policy making. An impact assessment allows Ministers, and (when published) those with an interest in the proposed new measure or policy proposal to understand;

- Why the Government is proposing to intervene;
- The main options the Government is considering, and which one is preferred;
- How and to what extent new policies may impact on different individuals and organisations; and
- The estimated costs and benefits of proposed measure

Ministers should be aware of the impact of new proposals on rural areas when taking collective decisions. The current guidance on how to conduct an impact assessment includes two 'open' questions on rural proofing, namely;

“Will proposals affect provision of facilities or services that support community cohesion or in other ways that affect the quality of life in the local community?” and;

“Will the impacts on rural areas be different to urban areas and will there be specific regional or local effects?”

The HMT Green Book appraisal guidance refers to the importance of rural issues in these terms;

“The government is committed to ensuring that all its policies take account of specific rural circumstances. Appraisers should assess whether proposals are likely to have a different impact in rural areas from elsewhere. Further guidance is available from Defra”

Government will look to further embed rural proofing into the formation of government policy and the impact assessment process. It is vital that UK wide Government policy continues to be, where applicable, of benefit and relevance to rural areas across the whole of the UK, and needs to be rural proofed. This will provide a more in depth analytical guidance that gives details of how to quantify the impacts of policy options (in cost / benefit

monetary terms) on rural areas and also how to ensure proper comparison between urban and rural geographies.

This will bring our approach more in line with the principles of HM Treasury Green Book policy appraisal and evaluation. We will work with HMT to scope and produce supplementary guidance for rural proofing as part of their overall review, set against a clear statement of our vision and priorities for rural England.

Recommendation 6

I would like to see the creation of a permanent forum for discussion of rural proofing, at Cabinet level, which could intervene consistently and at key decision points as policy is being developed and encourage interdepartmental cooperation to assist in the delivery of those policies.

As set out in our response to Recommendation 2, establishing another separate committee risks detaching rural proofing from where policy issues are discussed and resolved. Government's approach in future is to mainstream rural issues within the various Ministerial level 'implementation task forces' set up in order to tackle key priorities for Government. Defra will establish a programme of Ministerial bilateral meetings to give even greater focus to priority areas identified.

It is important to retain an overview of new policies and programmes from across Government, how these might potentially impact on rural areas and to brief Ministers on any potential opportunities, challenges or risks. To help achieve this Defra will create a new senior level "ambassador" at official level for rural affairs. They will work proactively across Government and report to Defra Ministers on rural issues related to Government policy.

Next Steps

Government expects to have all actions from the response completed by summer 2016. Between now and then Defra will be updating Lord Cameron on progress, including any early indications of where actions have made a positive change to the rural proofing process and outcomes for rural communities.

The implementation of actions in the response will be overseen by a steering group and will also involve a wider network of identified rural proofing practitioners in other Departments who we will meet with to explain the response and what it means for them.

Progress against actions will also be published online, via our online rural data and statistics website.