



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Government Policy Priorities and Rural Proofing Activity

**Briefing pack to the Lord Cameron Rural Proofing Implementation
Review Team**

January 2014

Contents

Item	Departmental Activity	Page No
1.0	Department of Health	3 - 4
2.0	Department for Transport	5 - 6
3.0	Department for Communities and Local Government	7 - 8
4.0	Home Office – Policing and Crime	9-10
5.0	Department for Work and Pensions	11
6.0	Department for Education	12
7.0	Department for Business Innovation and Skills	13-14
8.0	Department for Culture Media and Sport (VisitEngland and Broadband Delivery UK)	15-18
9.0	Department of Energy and Climate Change	19 - 20
10.0	Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs	21
Annex A	Planning Policy – general background and key activity	22 - 25

1.0 DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

- 1.1 Background:** The Department of Health (DH) helps people to live better for longer. They lead, shape and fund health and care in England, making sure people have the support, care and treatment they need, with the compassion, respect and dignity they deserve.
- 1.2** DH has engaged proactively with Defra over the Public Health Outcomes Framework and our strongest links with the department are through their Health Inequalities lead who has supported much of our rural proofing work through joint presentations at stakeholder events (such as the ACRE conference). Recently, RCPU officers have met with the Director of Health Equity at PHE as part of their stakeholder engagement programme.

Key points of interest

- 1.3 Rural Proofing Workshop:** Defra and Department of Health (DH) held a well-attended rural proofing workshop on the 16th July 2013. Our DH contact ensured a good turnout of DH, NHS England and Public Health England staff. Considerable interest in rural proofing has been expressed by attendees and we are currently following up various policy areas.
- 1.4 Rural Proofing for Health Toolkit:** Defra, working with DH and the Institute for Rural Health developed a Rural Proofing for Health Toolkit, launched in November 2011. The online toolkit contains guidance and case studies on health care in rural areas and is designed to support health service policy makers, practitioners and commissioners to better understand the issues in rural areas and what to consider when commissioning health services in rural areas.
- 1.4.1** The toolkit continues to receive good feedback from health practitioners. However it now needs formal endorsement and a long term home where it can be further developed and maintained. We see the best 'home' for this toolkit to be within NHS England as the lead on commissioning support. We are currently seeking NHS England support to secure this. NHS England have shown early interest in developing a link to their Health Inequalities Hub. We hope to meet the new National Rural Clinical Director to discuss the future of the toolkit.
- See: <http://www.ruralproofingforhealth.org.uk/>
- 1.5 Unavoidable costs of rurality: Recognising that evidence is lacking about the true costs of delivering health services in rural areas.** After considerable engagement we still remain unsuccessful in securing support from NHS England (previously the DH Resource Allocation team). ACRA have committed to looking at the costs of rural service delivery but recognise that evidence gaps exist. They had

anticipated using the Community Services Minimum dataset (developed by the Health and Social Care Information Centre), but this is behind schedule and may not be available in time to inform the funding allocations. We will not be taking forward any further detailed engagement on this issue but will retain a watching brief on developments

- 1.6 Adult Social Care:** Following the Dilnot review of Social Care and the Adult Social Care White Paper 2012, DH are undertaking an in depth a review of the costs of social care and the Relative Needs Formula. LG Futures have been commissioned to gather evidence and Defra are engaged with the project advisory group to ensure that rural issues are addressed. We continue to work closely as LG futures develop their evidence, due to report in early 2014.
- 1.7 Public Health Outcomes Framework.** Throughout 2012 Defra teams across Environment, Air and Noise teams worked in conjunction with RCPU to ensure that Defra and rural policy interests were taken into account as part of the review of the Public Health Outcomes Framework. DH engaged proactively and enthusiastically with us on several fronts to amend the outcomes. Defra remain closely engaged with DH through strategic links via Defra Director lead on public health areas (Colin Church).
- 1.8 Minimum Practice Income Guarantee.** We have identified evidence indicating a number of vulnerable rural GP practices that might be affected as result of the withdrawal of MPIG. As a priority RCPU challenged Department of Health and National Health Service England regarding the MPIG. These responses do not provide sufficient clarity regarding the analysis of rural impact. Through Ministers we have invited NHS England to work with us to identify rural impacts more closely. We have yet to take this forward with DH or NHS England but an early meeting in 2014 is planned with DH.
- 1.9** Within NHS England a new **Clinical Director on Rural Health** has been appointed. We hope to initiate early engagement.

2.0 Department for Transport

2.1 The work of the Energy and Transport Team: the role of the Energy and Transport Team within the Rural Community Policy Unit (RCPU) can be separated into five components: identifying the rural impacts of policies; evidence gathering and analysis to inform policy influencing; engagement with rural stakeholders; influencing DfT to ensure that rural needs and interests are reflected in its policies; and, evaluation and monitoring of policy outcomes.

2.1.1 We engage with DfT to rural proof transport policies affecting rural communities: we collect intelligence from stakeholders and groups in the community transport sector set out in 2.1.2 below, and work closely with other RCPU teams, economists, statisticians, and social scientists to examine trends and impacts on rural areas. We also act as Defra's lead on major transport infrastructure projects to ensure effective mitigation and environmental compliance within a framework of support for growth. In this latter role, the team's interests are England-wide.

2.1.2 We have established excellent working relationships with DfT colleagues, rural stakeholders (through Action with Communities in Rural England and their Rural Community Action Network), the Community Transport Association (CTA), Wheels to Work Association (W2WA), commercial coach and bus operators, local government, and environmental and transport NGOs. The team also coordinates inputs from Natural England, the Environment Agency, and the Forestry Commission to large scale transport infrastructure initiatives and projects (for example, Davies Commission, HS2, roads reform), and acts as a single focal point for the collection and strategic dissemination of the views of the Defra "family" on these.

2.3 Community Transport - Changes to Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG) have resulted in the devolution to local authorities of funding for tendered bus services since 1 January 2014. In conjunction with this, work is being carried out within DfT to set up a monitoring and evaluation framework for assessing the impacts of the reforms, and RCPU and DfT economists are discussing how they will measure the possible impacts of changes to the bus subsidy regime on rural areas.

2.4 Gaps in rural transport provision continue to be a focus of the Energy and Transport Team's work with DfT. Using the 2012 report by the Youth Select Committee on transport and young people as a focus, the Energy and Transport Team worked with DfT to convene a meeting of key stakeholders including those in 2.1.2, to discuss novel and practical, sector-led responses, to the problems affecting rural areas. This work began in June 2013 and its outputs will be reviewed, and potential for change to rural provision evaluated, in late spring 2014.

2.5 We invest time in relationships with key community sector players like the CTA and W2WA to produce a heightened dialogue framed around RCPU as a facilitator for change. In collaboration with DfT, we have emphasised that real change needs to come from the experts in the sector who understand the needs of rural communities and can mobilise local resources.

2.5.1 We have tried to focus our dialogue with stakeholders around **'transport for (rural) communities' rather than 'community transport'**. By this we hope to challenge accepted, but unhelpful, definitions of what community transport looks like (e.g., that it's about transport for old people) and encourage innovative ideas and solutions.

2.5.2 We have also reconstructed our dialogue with the Rural Community Councils to focus on what we can do to help them to deliver their local priorities. As such, we facilitate a **Rural Transport Reference Group** which ensures that they are brought together with key governmental and non-governmental actors like the DfT, other Government departments and agencies, the CTA, W2WA, and others for direct dialogue about their ideas and concerns. The group's current work programme is focussed on rural access to non-emergency patient transport to health and wellbeing services, and encouraging the greater sustainability and growth of Wheels to Work schemes.

2.6 The provision of Non-emergency Patient Transport (NEPT) is an ongoing concern for many of our rural stakeholders who report that responding to requests for transport to appointments is inconsistent across the country, and that increasing demands for transport are resulting in a growing strain on the resources of community transport operators. Furthermore, existing inconsistencies in providing NEPT across England are being exacerbated by new arrangements for health delivery that are giving rise to greater uncertainty. Through the Rural Transport Reference Group, we are working with Rural Community Councils and the CTA to develop a greater understanding of the issue and collect examples of good practice, and the Department of Health, NHS England and Public Health England have entered into dialogue with us on this. NEPT seems to be the last element considered in providing health and wellbeing services in many cases, and there is evidence to suggest that it is too often a stressful element for vulnerable patients. We hope that through the Reference Group's attention we can raise the profile of this issue in both Whitehall and in local NHS delivery boards and commissioning groups

2.7 Transport infrastructure: RCPU's Energy and Transport team represents Defra's interests in environmental compliance and appropriate mitigation on an England-wide basis on large infrastructure projects such as HS2 and the Lower Thames Crossing. Alongside this we are working to support Lord Deighton's HS2 Growth Taskforce by promoting the need for positive dialogue about growth with LEPs and local authorities responsible for rural areas which will be disproportionately affected by HS2 construction

3.0 Department for Communities and Local Government

3.1 The RCPU Planning and Housing Team's main focus is on the development and impact of housing and planning policies, led and developed by DCLG, on Defra's interests and concerns. We work closely with a range of other departments and in particular with DCLG who are the lead department for planning and housing policy as well as our agencies FC EA and NE and a variety of stakeholders.

3.2 Planning - our current work priorities: Government has been undertaking a major review of the planning system making it more focused transparent and easier to operate with less rules and bureaucracy.

3.2.1 Planning guidance review – building on Lord Matthew Taylor's earlier work on planning reform - to reduce 7000 + pages of guidance to a more up to date, relevant and easy to use web based resource. The Team have been leading for Defra on a number of topics: including biodiversity, local plans, statutory consultees, minerals etc. We have been assessing the proposed new guidance, coordinating inputs from across Defra and our agencies and then raising these with CLG. The new planning guidance is now out for public comment

3.2.2 Red Tape Planning Challenge - we are working closely with DCLG on the likely changes that could be enacted including the roles and responsibilities of our agencies as statutory consultees in the planning process to reduce regulatory burdens and speed up the process.

3.2.4 Regulation and Process - we have been closely involved with DCLG over the changes to permitted development rights and increasing the flexibility of alternative uses for redundant agriculture buildings without the need for planning permission.

3.2.5 Major Infrastructure - we have been representing Defra and our agencies interests in how the Development Consent process for large infrastructure can be improved including the setting up of the Consent Service unit offering a one stop shop approach for non planning consents and as part of a cross Whitehall groups looking to encourage and facilitate delivery

3.3 Housing – we are working closely with DCLG on a range of housing issues and looking to ensure that both the rural implications as well as Defra policy concerns are met. We also are part of the Rural Housing Advisory Group which meets to address rural housing issues.

3.4 Streamlining regulations and processes –along with other Government Departments we have been working on streamlining the rules and processes

around existing and new EU proposals on Environment Impact Assessments and on simplifying national Housing Standards and Building Regulations to make them clearer, less burdensome and easier to follow.

See also Annex A

4.0 The Home Office - Policing and Crime

4.1 Key Headlines: Both police recorded crime statistics and the results of the Crime Survey for England and Wales show that the crime rate in rural areas is lower than the crime rate in urban areas for all crime types captured. Furthermore falls in crime rates in rural areas have been roughly similar to that seen in urban areas. As such this has been a lower priority activity for the RCPU.

4.2 The RCPU has, however, been engaged in the following activity:

4.2.1 Engagement on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) task group. RCPU submitted evidence on the rural proofing of policies and has been invited to attend meetings of the implementation group where it can challenge Departments action plans to tackle VAWG and ensure the needs of rural communities are taken into account.

4.2.2 The ONS have reviewed data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) to divide the data, where possible, into rural and urban areas. This has enabled Defra/Home Office to check that police recorded crime figures for rural areas as compared against recorded crime figures for urban areas is accurate.

4.2 Through our analyses we have drawn out some points of interest that the review team may wish to consider.

4.2.1 Racism/Hate crime – There is anecdotal evidence that this is high in rural areas. Police statistics show that of the ten areas where hate crime incidents are increasing a number of these could be considered rural type areas e.g. North Yorkshire, Norfolk, Wiltshire. A short desk review of Police and Crime Plans for the areas concerned show they are aware and are considering plans to tackle this.

4.4.2 Confidence in the system - The proportion of people who feel the police can be relied on when needed is higher in urban areas (60%) than rural areas (54%). Similarly confidence that the criminal justice system is fair is lower in rural areas (61%) than urban areas (63%) and confidence that the criminal justice system is effective is lower in rural (40%) than urban areas (45%). Police record crime outcomes and re-offending rates which show the effectiveness of the system. However, no rural vs urban split is currently imposed upon this data.

4.3 Possible Areas for further discussion: The election of Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) to decide on local crime priorities gives rural communities a stronger voice in determining the priorities in their area. The Home Office also gives street-level information through crime maps to enable communities to hold local forces to account. Police and Crime Commissioners were elected in Nov 2012 and have been charged with securing the policing of areas of England and Wales.

They are required to produce a police and crime plan setting out their objectives for policing and what resources will be available and how performance will be measured.

5.0 DEPARTMENT FOR WORK AND PENSIONS

- 5.1 Universal Credit:** DWP have initiated a series of pilots in selected areas to test the new Universal Credit benefits system prior to roll out nationally. Defra offered rural policy advice late last year to explore the impacts of the system in rural areas and how implementation might be affected. DWP reported back to us in May 2013 and again in November 2013 with positive indications that rural issues were being logged and addressed. The pilots have been extended until December 2013. We retain good communication links with officers on this activity.
- 5.2 Ageing:** DWP have actively promoted a broad ageing agenda (not just pensions), particularly through their stakeholder forum UK Advisory Forum for Ageing. Defra recently accepted an invitation to become a formal member of this stakeholder group. The department continues to ensure that ageing issues are addressed across government, not just within DWP and Defra has offered support to promote this message.
- 5.3 Defra has just completed an evidence project to identify the impacts of an ageing population** upon rural service delivery. This project was initiated with proactive DWP resource support – however internal resourcing issues and adjusted departmental priorities mean that support is arms-length. The research has progressed well with much interest from stakeholders, as demonstrated at a recent project event (a ‘national learning lab’ to exchange ideas and inform stakeholders about the research early findings). The research was published in December 2013
- 5.4 Housing Benefit (specifically the Spare Room Subsidy):** We engaged with DWP last year as part of our rural proofing activity and subsequently the Housing benefit team approached us for rural proofing advice regarding the removal of the spare room subsidy which was implemented for the social rented sector on 1st April as a result of the Welfare Reform Act 2012. This policy has received considerable negative press and concerns from Ministers has initiated a brief departmental review. It should be noted that the original Impact Assessment indicated no rural impact – and evidence quoted has not been analysed at the relevant rural urban definition level. As a result of rural proofing support from RCPU, DWP reviewed the Discretionary Housing Fund and has announced a package of £35m of additional in-year funding for local authorities, including an additional £5m to support those affected in the 21 least densely populated areas, of which twelve are in Scotland, three are in Wales and six in rural England. DWP is currently evaluating the impacts and realisation of benefits. Further to this, Defra recommended that evidence of lessons learnt from the funding could be gathered to show other Local authorities what mitigating measures could be undertaken. A workshop is to be held with the 21 beneficiary authorities in the first half of 2014

6.0 Department for Education

6.1 Schools Funding formula: The Department for Education are reviewing the schools funding formula. For 2012-13 interim formula adjustments and new criteria have been introduced as part of a move towards a national funding formula. We are concerned that any sparsity adjustments will be based upon distances “as the crow flies” and not by journey time or road distances

6.1.1 For 2013-14 a funding allocation has been issued for Local Authorities based upon feedback from the 2012-13 formula implementation. Existing measures, have been adopted for 2013-14 including a sparsity weighting for rural schools.

6.1.2 Further analysis will be conducted by the Education Funding Agency (schools funding delivery body). Defra have been invited to participate in this review to ensure that rural issues are taken into account and relevant policy adjustment is applied.

7.0 DEPARTMENT FOR BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

7.1 Background: The Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS) invests in skills and education to promote trade, boost innovation and help people to start and grow a business. BIS also protects consumers and reduces the impact of regulation. Currently the main areas of interest for rural policy are:

7.2 Economic growth: BIS, alongside Treasury, led on the Government's Growth Review which in 2011 included a look at the Rural Economy to ensure that rural needs and interests are firmly embedded within the Government's overall growth strategy. The review led to a package of measures to help the rural economy including the establishment of 5 pilot Rural Growth Networks¹(RGN) and a £25 million package to support rural tourism. We engage closely with BIS to review and report on progress with implementing these measures. We also have ongoing contact with BIS local growth teams on particular issues (for example they are part of the RGN Oversight Group and attend Defra roundtable for LEPs) and Defra are part of the Whitehall wide group of officials looking at LEP draft strategies for local economic growth.

7.3 Business and Enterprise: A wide range of national level policies and initiatives have been introduced to promote businesses, to raise skills levels and particularly to support start-up and expanding small and medium sized businesses. These businesses are of particular relevance to rural areas given that SMEs represent 70% of rural employment and so play an important part in the rural economy. These initiatives include schemes such as the Enterprise Finance Guarantee (EFG), loan guarantee scheme, and the Business is GREAT Britain Campaign to inspire and motivate small businesses to grow. BIS led the development of *Small Business: GREAT Ambition* (SB:GA), the Government's commitment to make it easier for small businesses to grow, which was published on 7 December. RCPU are part of the group who were working with BIS to cover off Defra's interests in SB:GA. An action flowing from the document relates to better business support for SMEs (the Business Support Integration programme) and BIS have previously worked with us to ensure that needs of rural businesses are recognised in this programme and that any lessons learned in future from the experience of the Rural Growth Network pilots are taken into account. We also worked in partnership with BIS on a project resulting from the Rural Statement commitment to research the degree to which rural businesses are accessing mainstream national employer - led skills programmes and government business support programmes. The results of this research (published on 23 September 2013) will be taken into account in future policy development.

¹ The RGNs have been established in Swindon and Wiltshire, the North East (covering areas of County Durham, Gateshead and Northumberland), Heart of the South West (covering Devon and Somerset), Cumbria, and Warwickshire – they aim to help businesses in rural areas to reach their potential by breaking down barriers to economic growth such as a shortage of work premises, slow internet connection and fragmented business networks. They expect to create up to 3,000 new jobs and support up to 700 new businesses

7.4 Post Offices: In November 2010, BIS announced that 2,000 sub-post offices would be converted to a new operating model, 'Locals' and 'Mains' under the PO Network Transformation Programme (PONT). 'Locals' are the model which will be used for smaller POs, such as those in rural areas, and represent a fundamental shift in how services are provided, a change from the traditional sub-post office model, with services offered from a dedicated counter, to services offered from a main counter in existing retail premises such as convenience stores, corner shops and even petrol stations and pubs. While it is clear that many individual POs are economically unsustainable, delivering the PONT programme in rural areas will be challenging as there are fewer retail premises to convert to 'Locals', reductions in public transport make it harder for people to get to POs, and access can be an issue due to the topography of rural areas and 'as the crow flies' being used to measure access. We are working with BIS to ensure the issues faced by rural POs are taken into account during the change process and the importance of rural POs is recognised and respected.

The ongoing Post Office Network Transformation Programme is giving rural Post Offices the opportunity to modernise their stores and increase opening hours. In December 2013 Jo Swinson announced that a £20 million investment fund would be allocated specifically to community Post Offices which will enable the improvement and modernisation of these branches to strengthen their long term sustainability.

8.0 Department for Culture, Media and Sports

8.1 Defra is working closely with DCMS, and its associated non-executive agencies, on a number of key areas of interest to rural communities and business.

8.2 **Public Library Services in rural areas research:** Public library services are highly valued by the communities they serve. However, like other public sector services, public libraries are facing both enormous financial challenges and changes to the services they provide and the way they provide them. Many library authorities are testing new approaches and working with communities in order to build sustainable library services for the future. The aim of this project is to carry out an Action Research project with a small representative group of rural libraries to better understand the issues, challenges and opportunities for rural areas arising from changes to library services.

8.2.1 The objectives of this research project are to:

- Identify the issues, challenges and opportunities for rural areas arising from changes to library services
- Identify good practice and share learning on how to shape rural library services to meet local need
- Consider the future role of rural libraries in the light of the *Envisioning the library of the future research* project undertaken by the Arts Council in 2012/13²

8.3. **Fresh engagement with rural communities on cultural policy- working with DCMS and Arts Council England.** We have participated in the Arts Council England dialogue with rural stakeholders on a new set of principles underpinning their approach to rural communities. These included ongoing commitments to

- respond positively and proactively to the needs and aspirations of England's rural communities
- recognise the particular characteristics, needs and strengths of rural communities and rural culture
- work in partnership with Defra to take account of rural proofing including an ongoing review of the evidence base
- sustain a national dialogue with rural stakeholders.

² www.artscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/supporting-libraries/library-of-the-future

8.4. Growing the tourism economy – working closely with Visit England: Defra has a championing role for rural communities and businesses. We want to see a thriving, living, working and sustainable countryside. The Rural Statement underlines government's commitment to Rural England. Defra operates within the context of government and industry wide strategic activity on tourism spearheaded by DCMS as the lead department and sponsors of our national tourist board, Visit England. Government recognises that tourism is a priority industry and makes a real contribution to our national and local economies through its interaction with other businesses in the supply chain.

8.4.1 There is huge opportunity to grow the sector if the tourism industry can integrate and improve its offer. Much of the key to this success lies in the work of local bodies, in particular, destination management organisations (DMOs) set up to encourage businesses and organisations to work in partnerships to market their area in the most effective way. Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) can also play a key role in helping to create the right conditions for tourism in rural areas which in turn benefits the local economy.

8.4.2 We are working closely with DCMS, VisitEngland (the National Tourist Board) and other industry partners to:

- Deliver government strategic objectives for attracting visitors to the countryside
- support industry's strategic objectives under the Rural Tourism Action Plan
- advise LEPs on how the visitor economy can contribute to their strategies to grow local economies under the EU SIF Growth Programme
- support the food strand of the GREAT campaign
- encourage and support the work of DMOs

8.4 Working closely with DCMS and Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) on the roll out of broadband across rural areas. The Government is investing in a £530m rural broadband programme to support the rollout of broadband across the country. The aim is to enable at least 90 per cent of households and businesses in every county to have access to a superfast broadband service (on track to be reached by early 2016), as well as providing a minimum of at least 2 megabits per second to all, including hard to reach areas which won't get superfast broadband as part of this programme. This is being delivered by local bodies. An additional £250m is available to extend superfast broadband to 95% of UK premises by 2017. Local body allocations are expected to be announced shortly. In addition, a £10m competitive fund has been established by BDUK to test innovative solutions for delivering superfast broadband services to the most difficult to reach areas of the UK. Defra continues to work closely with BDUK over development of the Superfast

Extension Programme. Ensuring SMEs, citizens and communities have the awareness, confidence and skills to take advantage of a faster and more reliable broadband network is also a top priority for Government.

- 8.5 Rural Community Broadband Fund** - to complement the Government's rural broadband programme, Defra has established the £20m Rural Community Broadband Fund, jointly financed by BDUK and Defra and operated through the Rural Development Programme for England. The Fund is specifically designed to extend superfast broadband into the final 10% hard to reach rural communities that will otherwise only receive standard broadband under the BDUK rural broadband programme. The majority of local authority led applications will now be delivered through BDUK as extensions to main county contracts.
- 8.6 Mobile Infrastructure Project** – the Government is investing £150 million to improve mobile coverage for consumers and businesses in areas where there is no commercially provided service. The Mobile Infrastructure Project (MIP) aims to address voice 'not spots' and support mobile broadband roll-out across the UK in areas where the case for commercial investment is weak. The MIP is being delivered by Broadband Delivery UK, and it is expected that it will:
- Provide coverage for up to 60,000 premises across the UK in complete not-spots;
 - Address coverage problems along an initial 10 key road routes.
- 8.8 Other policy measures to support improvement of broadband and mobile services** - Defra has also worked with DCMS (as well as DCLG and various stakeholders), on a series of other policy measures designed to improve rural connectivity. These include planning changes to support the deployment of both superfast broadband and mobile infrastructure, as well as in drawing up a new code of practice for siting and design of new superfast broadband cabinets and overhead lines, and to update an existing code of practice on deployment of mobile infrastructure. We are currently working with DCMS to explore the options for reform of the Electronic Communications Code, and for future spectrum strategy to support the provision of mobile services.
- 8.9 Digital inclusion and stimulation of demand for broadband** – Defra has started working with the new Cabinet Office Digital Inclusion Unit to ensure that the rural dimensions of digital inclusion are fully understood and addressed. Defra is also working directly with Broadband Delivery UK and others on demand stimulation to raise awareness of the benefits of broadband to businesses and communities.
- 8.10 Rural Growth Networks** - Following the Rural Economy Growth Review of 2011, five pilot Rural Growth Networks in Swindon and Wiltshire, the North East (covering areas of County Durham, Gateshead and Northumberland), Heart of the South West (covering Devon and Somerset), Cumbria, and Warwickshire have been

established. These will help rural areas overcome barriers to growth such as lack of suitable premises and provision of infrastructure (especially superfast broadband and mobile) and other business services. In recognition of the specific issues facing women entrepreneurs in rural areas, the Government Equalities Office contributed £1.65m to support rural enterprises led by women. We continue to liaise with GEO to monitor progress and will disseminate lessons learned, along those from the wider programme, as these become available

9.0 Department of Energy and Climate Change

- 9.1 Introduction:** the responsibility of the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) to secure a constant supply of affordable and clean energy is a growing challenge, particularly in rural areas. The RCPU's Energy and Transport Team work to collaborate with DECC on issues of rural fuel poverty, energy supply to rural areas and the energy efficiency of rural homes.
- 9.2 The work of the Energy and Transport Team** has a number of components in this regard. As well as working to rural proof DECC's energy efficiency and fuel poverty policies and initiatives, the team maintains its own close relations with rural communities of interest to ensure its interventions are based on up-to-date intelligence and concerns. The team also project manages the Rural Community Energy Fund (RCEF), an initiative to support community-scale renewables in rural areas, on behalf of both departments.
- 9.3 Engagement with rural stakeholders:** the Energy and Transport Team has established excellent working relationships with rural stakeholders and meets regularly with representatives from Rural Community Councils. These relationships inform our understanding of the rural impacts of policies and facilitate the evidence gathering which informs our policy influencing. We also act as a single focal point for the collection and strategic dissemination of DECC policy to rural stakeholders.
- 9.3.1** As part of this work, we facilitate a forum for rural interests through our **Rural Energy and Fuel Poverty Reference Group**. This group brings together officials from relevant DECC teams (e.g. Community Energy, Fuel Poverty, Green Deal/ECO) to hear from, and provide detailed information to, our stakeholders, and to act as a conduit for feedback. For example, we are providing opportunities for DECC officials to hear about rural concerns relating to changes to ECO at an early stage of consultation. Work is also underway to establish a work programme focussed on members' priorities for the next year.
- 9.4 Rural proofing DECC's energy efficiency agenda:** the Energy and Transport Team work closely with DECC to ensure that measures which improve household energy efficiency are accessible to rural households and effectively target the rural fuel poor. Through membership of the ECO and Green Deal Steering Group we secured a provision in the Carbon Saving Communities Obligation (CSCo) requiring energy companies to deliver a minimum of 15% of their support to vulnerable households in rural areas.
- 9.4.1** Following the December 2013 announcement of intended changes to the Green Deal and ECO (including plans to extend the CSCo to 2017 and broaden the criteria in order to allow a greater number of households to qualify for assistance), we are working with DECC to shape the consultation

framework and are facilitating rural input through the Reference Group detailed at 1.3.1.

- 9.5 Working to understand and address rural fuel poverty:** Defra has worked with DECC on the development of a new fuel poverty definition designed to facilitate better identification of those in, or at risk of, fuel poverty through a 'Low Income, High Cost Indicator'. As part of this process, the Energy and Transport Team supported DECC in the production of a new framework for fuel poverty and will continue to collaborate on related strategies and targets.
- 9.6 Supporting households off the gas grid:** Defra and DECC Ministers meet with interest groups, including rural bodies and MPs, through the Ministerial Round Table on Heating Oil and LPG. The Energy and Transport Team provide advice to Ministers and are working at official level to take forward the actions from this group; for example, by disseminating information about 'Buy Oil Early' schemes and collective buying groups to rural off-grid communities.
- 9.7 Delivery of the Rural Community Energy Fund (RCEF):** the Energy and Transport Team is responsible for the delivery of the RCEF, a £15m joint DECC and Defra initiative designed to help rural communities in England with the up-front costs of developing their own renewable energy schemes. A Rural Economy Growth Review initiative, the RCEF will help tackle rural fuel poverty, encourage the uptake of renewable energy, and will deliver rural growth through job creation and enterprise.

10. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

10.1 Defra's departmental priorities focus our policy attention and efforts toward:

- Growing the rural economy
- Improving the environment
- Safeguarding animal health
- Safeguarding plant health

10.2 Defra is promoting growth in the Rural Economy through the:

- **Launch of the £20 million [Farm and Forestry Improvement Scheme](#)**, this uses Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) funding to provide small grants of between £2,500 up to £25,000 to farm, forestry and horticulture businesses.
- **Launch of the £60m RDPE-funded [Rural Economy Grant Scheme](#)** which is providing larger grants of between £25,000 and around £1m (no set upper cap) with a maximum intervention rate of 40%) to enable a 'game changing' transformation of Farm, Agri-Food, Tourism and Forestry businesses and micro-enterprises in other high growth sectors located in the Rural Growth Networks. For the Tourism specific Theme of the fund the programme is about investing in a variety of rural tourism transformational projects which contribute to 5% year on year growth in the value of tourism through better collaboration and co-ordination to enhance the visitor experience in destinations.
- **Launch of the Rural Tourism package:** a £10m Fund, delivered through the RDPE Rural Economy Grant scheme (designed to complement the VisitEngland campaign funded under RGF) for the development and improvement of tourism destinations, facilities and products. Defra received circa £60 million of outline tourism grant applications, against an available £10 million budget. Higher quality, higher impact projects selected to submit a full application. The RDPE-supported "Paths for Communities" Fund of up to £2m, delivered through Natural England, to enable rural communities to enhance their local tourism offer by improving public rights of way networks. 6 grants totalling £336k awarded and 3 further projects approved 14 March 2013.
- **Training providers invited to deliver the £20m [Skills and Knowledge Transfer programme](#)**, a flexible and locally targetable skills training programme to enable rural business growth, was launched in autumn 2012. Up to £12m of this will be available under the framework with the remaining £8m being already assigned to contracts that are continuing in the south west and north west.

- Publishing a [food and drink export action plan](#), and hosting an [Agri-Food summit](#) to raise awareness of the potential for growth in this key rural sector.

Annex A: Planning – General Background

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) came in to force on 27 March 2012 with immediate effect for plan and decision making. It makes planning simpler and more accessible, acts as guidance for local councils and better supports growth to help create the homes and jobs. It puts power into the hands of communities.

The NPPF sets out the presumption in favour of sustainable development. For decision making this means that where a development plan is absent, silent or relevant policies are out of date, planning permission should be granted unless any adverse impacts would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits.

Local Planning Authorities were given a year from the publication of the NPPF to get Local Plans in place. Currently nearly 75% of LPA's have published, or submitted for examination, found sound or adopted plans.

Neighbourhood development plans

A neighbourhood development plan enables local people to establish planning policies for housing and other development in a neighbourhood area. Plans can be detailed or general, depending what the community wants, but they must be in keeping with the needs of the wider local authority area. This includes taking into account the local council's assessment of housing and other development needs in the area.

There are some 433 neighbourhood plans currently being developed by Neighbourhood Forums. Upper Eden in Cumbria was the first to complete the process, in March 2013, with a 90% vote in favour of the plan in their referendum.

The RCPU have funded a **research project** looking at some of the rural neighbourhood planning front runners which will be published shortly. The report and case studies focussed on how neighbourhood planning can help to address particular rural issues research

Planning Guidance review

In November Lord Matthew Taylor's review of planning guidance made recommendations on the development of an appropriate, much reduced (from the current 7000 pages) suite of government guidance to support the NPPF.

DCLG held an 8 week consultation on the review recommendations. The consultation closed in February and DCLG are considering the responses. Defra and our delivery partners EA, NE and FC are working closely with DCLG to develop new guidance in line with the Government's proposals for implementing Lord Taylor's review recommendations.

The new guidance will be up to date, shorter, planning related and web based. The majority of the new revised guidance should be available by the end of July and will be reviewed annually (Defra has also begun work to review its own guidance).

Defra welcomed the **Red Tape Challenge Planning** theme consultation (which ended on 7 March); both EA/NE are working closely with us and DCLG on reducing regulations.

Reviews of Building Regulations & National and Local Housing Standards are also underway. These reviews aim to significantly rationalise the plethora of Codes, Standards, rules, regulations and guidance that add cost and complexity to the house-building process. A consultation on new proposals is expected soon - after write round clearance. The intention of these reviews are to achieve tangible deregulation which will enable housing developments to be brought forward more easily.

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)

The Government is working to simplify implementation of the current EIA Directive to reduce costs to business.

The EIA Directive establishes a procedure for identifying whether or not a project is likely to have significant effects on the environment and whether there is a need to carry out an EIA. There are two reviews in progress on the EIA Directive, led by DCLG: one examining the existing EIA Directive and the other negotiating revisions tabled by the European Commission where we are seeking to minimise regulatory burdens.

Change of use – reuse of existing buildings

The Government is implementing a number of measures to enable existing buildings to be reused in new ways. Many of these measures will help boost the rural economy by enabling the development of new homes and businesses.

Offices B1(a) to Residential (C3)

This permission will be available for three years. Where there are risks associated with transport, flood or contamination there will be a requirement for prior approval from the Local Planning Authority (LPA) before a change of use can be made. LPA's will be able to seek exemptions.

Redundant existing Agricultural Buildings - change of use to new commercial uses such as retail, offices, cafes, hotel etc will not need planning consent. This came into force on 30 May 2013

Commercial Buildings - Increased change of use thresholds from 235m² to 500m².

Temporary uses – allow temporary use for a single 2 year period buildings currently in shops, business, non residential institutions, assembly and leisure uses to temporarily

change to shops, financial and professional services, restaurants and cafes and business use without the need for planning.

Extending permitted development rights for homeowners and business

This would allow doubling of thresholds for householder extensions and increase thresholds for commercial extensions to shops and professional/financial services, offices and new industrial buildings within the curtilage of existing industrial premises.

- Flats over shops: In October 2012 Permitted Development Rights (PDR) for conversion of space over shops was increased from a “single flat” to “up to 2 flats”

Other measures

Nationally Significant Infrastructure

- Removal of separate consenting and certification requirements
- Extend the principle of a one-stop-shop for non-planning consents for major infrastructure to support developers with the process of seeking a raft of non-planning consents and speeding up the planning process and/or saving costs for developers. (Consents Service Unit will be operational on 22 April)
- Review of thresholds for major infrastructure

Development Management - planning applications

- Appeal of section 106 affordable housing commitments where affordable housing element seen as too onerous and holding back development
- Choice for Developers where LPA Performance is poor can go straight to PINS for a decision

Budget Announcements

- DCLG will run a new £3.5 billion ***Help to Buy: Equity Loan scheme***, Under this scheme existing homeowners will also be eligible to receive a 20% equity loan which will help them buy a new build property;
- A second new option is the ***Help to Buy: Mortgage Guarantee*** which will enable lenders to use Government-backed guarantees to offer £130 billion worth of mortgages with smaller deposits, as little as 5%, on new and existing properties
- DCLG is also **consulting** on new measures which will enable rural communities to grow by ensuring better use is made of their existing buildings. Barns and other farm buildings that are no longer viable for other farming or commercial uses and are near existing homes or the farmstead could be converted to homes by reducing planning burden. Will also cover changes from retail to residential use. Consultation likely to be this summer.