

Rural Strategy 2004 Fact Sheet:

Streamlining rural funding and better advice

Why is this important?

- The current rural funding framework is complex and confusing for our customers – whether they be farmers, other rural businesses or voluntary organisations.
- There are too many schemes, and too many organisations involved in delivery.
- Customers find it difficult to access funds, application is perceived to be hard, frustrating and time-consuming, and sources of help are unclear.

What will be new?

- Instead of the 100-plus existing rural funding schemes, there will be a simplified funding framework around three major funds linked to Defra strategic objectives:
 - Natural Resource Protection
 - Sustainable Food and Farming
 - Sustainable Rural Communities.
- Administrative procedures will be streamlined and simplified, with unnecessary rules and procedures swept away.
- There will be better and more accessible advisory services for rural businessmen and women, providing advice that is more relevant to them and to the area in which they work and live:
 - an integrated Defra-family wide information service via a helpline and website;
 - an improved service for rural businesses via the Business Links network, including through putting £2 million into Business Links this year for rural areas.
- We will encourage the spread of good partnership working methods that already exist, to provide a quality 'first port of call', and will seek feedback from rural businesses to check that their needs are being met.

What will be better?

- Future rural customers will benefit from:
 - a simplified clearer, funding framework;
 - better advice and a first contact point to guide them through the system; and
 - support that is better targeted, tailored to local needs and easier to access.
- There will be efficiency gains for the taxpayer through:
 - better targeting of need;
 - greater clarity about what the funding is buying; and
 - better, more efficient administration.

How and when?

By April 2005, Defra will:

- begin a dramatic simplification of funding streams;
- have invested £2m in Business Links to help improve the accessibility of business advice to people in rural areas;
- begin to establish a single Defra helpline and user-friendly, web-based information service to signpost customers to the most appropriate source of business or technical help;
- with the Small Business Service and Regional Development Agencies, help develop a rural pathfinder project for 2005/06 that will join up access to a wide range of publicly funded services, such as tax advice, skills training, and national, regional and local funding schemes.

By April 2007, Defra will:

- have completed the replacement of the current 100-plus schemes with a simplified framework of just three major funds.

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are available from:**

**Defra Publications
Admail 6000
London SW1A 2XX
Tel: 08459 556 000**

**PB9958L
Nobel House
17 Smith Square
London SW1P 3JR
www.defra.gov.uk**

