

Rural Strategy 2004 Fact Sheet:

Rural Strategy

What is the Rural Strategy 2004?

- Much has been achieved since the Government first set out a vision for a living, working, protected and vibrant countryside in the Rural White Paper in 2000. And events and experience have provided new insights.
- The Government's Rural Strategy 2004 draws on that better evidence about trends in rural areas, to set out a new approach to rural policy and delivery. In particular, the evidence allows us better to identify and concentrate on need.
- The Strategy identifies the key priorities for rural policy for the next three to five years and sets out the specific actions that will drive progress forward. These actions include how the delivery arrangements will be improved, building on the evidence and recommendations in Lord Haskins' Rural Delivery Review commissioned by the Secretary of State.

Why a new strategy?

- Of the 261 commitments in the Rural White Paper 2000, 193 have been fulfilled – representing 74%, and of the rest, 48 are on track and 11 overtaken by event.
- Since then we have gained new insights into the challenges facing rural areas, while improvements in the evidence base for rural policy have, for the first time, allowed a better understanding of the many social and economic disparities in rural areas.
- The Government's new approach is based on devolving decisions and action closer to rural communities, targeting greater resources at areas of greatest need, and working in partnership at national, regional and local level.
- The more detailed analyses of the trends affecting rural areas and communities, coupled with a new and more sophisticated definition of what constitutes 'rural' that will allow us to 'tag' policies and their delivery, will help pinpoint those areas and people in greatest need.

How will it make a difference?

- The Government has three priorities for rural policy:
 - **Economic and Social Regeneration** – supporting enterprise across rural England, but targeting greater resources at areas of greatest need.
 - **Social Justice for All** – tackling rural social exclusion wherever it occurs and providing fair access to services and opportunities for all rural people.
 - **Enhancing the Value of our Countryside** – protecting the natural environment for this and future generations.

- The Strategy provides the policy framework, the tools and the evidence base to help all Government Departments and regional and local partners work together in a collaborative way to deliver more sustainable rural communities.
 - Delivery arrangements will be modernised to:
 - rationalise funding programmes and provide more professional and streamlined support for rural people, targeted on their needs;
 - devolve decision making and delivery closer to the community, and ensure clear responsibility and accountability for policy and delivery; and
 - achieve more coherent and effective environmental outcomes through organisational streamlining.

How and when?

- Much work is already underway with our partners – at national, regional and local level – to deliver the policy priorities and to facilitate the changes necessary to modernise rural delivery arrangements.
- Decision-making responsibilities, and the funding to go with it, will be devolved from April 2005.
- Pathfinder joint ventures to identify and test innovative solutions to meeting the needs of rural people more effectively will be carried out in 2004/05.
- By 1 April 2005 the bodies that will make up the future Integrated Agency will have come together as a confederation of partners, and a refocused New Countryside Agency will be established as a distinct and distinctive body.
- In Spring 2005 a draft bill will be published, to stimulate discussion about what is needed for rural communities and the environment.
- The Strategy will be regularly assessed to ensure that policy and delivery on the ground are meeting needs, and lead to real benefits for people, communities and businesses.

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