

Rural Strategy 2004 Fact Sheet:

What it means for Defra family members

The big picture

- Through the Modernising Rural Delivery project we will be creating two exciting new Defra organisations (the Integrated Agency and the New Countryside Agency). They will be here for the long term. This will provide positive opportunities for staff development, as individuals and in delivering our business.
- People most affected by the changes are in the Rural Development Service (RDS), English Nature (EN), the Countryside Agency (CA), and core Defra itself.

The Integrated Agency

- Will be about 2,300 strong. It will include all of EN, most of RDS and access, recreation and landscape from CA. It will work in close partnership with others, especially the Forestry Commission, Environment Agency, English Heritage, Regional Development Agencies and local authorities.

The New Countryside Agency

- Will be a small expert body created as a strong voice for rural people and communities, especially those suffering disadvantage, to suggest innovative solutions to their needs and monitor and report on progress in delivery.

Policy Core of Defra

- Will have a unique, value-adding role at the strategic level, with sole responsibility for policy development, carrying out analysis, allocating resources according to strategic priorities, demanding results from delivery organisations, and holding deliveries to account through a robust performance management framework.

Regional Delivery

- The functions previously carried out by the Countryside Agency will be devolved to regional organisations, the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and the Government Offices for the Regions. RDAs will also have control over socio-economic England Rural Development Funding.

What this means for staff

- There will inevitably be some disruption as we move to the new arrangements, but any transfers will be managed in compliance with TUPE (Transfer of Undertaking (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 (as amended)) and the Cabinet Office 'Statement of Practice' on staff transfers in the public sector. In broad terms TUPE protects employees' contractual terms and conditions.
- Staff will be engaged fully in developing and testing the vision, structures and ways of working for the Integrated Agency, New Countryside Agency, and Defra policy core. This will be done as part of delivering normal outputs, to minimise the risk to delivery, and embed the change in reality.

- The Integrated Agency will need a structure at national, regional and local level best suited to its business. This means some posts may be relocated. People will be expected to move with their posts if within reasonable travelling distance of their home, with excess travel costs available to those who qualify. Any move that necessitates a move of home will be on a voluntary basis.
- The legislation establishing the Integrated Agency will include provision for it to be part of the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme.
- The New Countryside Agency will start its life by remaining in central London, but will move in due course to a lagging rural area, to be close to its constituency.
- In devolving to regional partners, we wish to ensure that the expertise built up over the years by staff in the Countryside Agency continues to be available. Further discussions are needed on issues such as staff transfers.
- Some posts will be lost. This was anticipated in Lord Haskins' Rural Delivery Review. This may mean some redundancies, but we will aim to make use of natural turnover and voluntary departures wherever possible. A range of resettlement actions will be available, including a 'Placement Service'. The Civil Service Commission have agreed to allow Defra to transfer their NDPB public servants to Defra civil service vacancies.
- We will keep staff and unions up to date with progress.

The new structures offer staff:

- Clearer roles, with real responsibility for making things happen, not diluted by being shared by a number of organisations.
- Fewer organisational barriers preventing staff from helping customers.
- More rewarding careers in organisations that are here to stay.

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