

Part 4

a vibrant countryside

We want to see a vibrant countryside, which can shape its own future and whose voice is heard by government at all levels

- 12. local power for country towns and villages
- 13. thinking rural

local power for country towns and villages



The issues

- Rural communities could play a much bigger part in running their own affairs, influencing and shaping their future development but they often lack opportunities, and support.
- Lack of involvement can result in an adversarial approach to change and less well targeted services.
- There is a need for better partnership between all types of authorities, a greater willingness to work together and deliver locally managed services.
- Rural areas often have a strong sense of community and a valuable network of voluntary groups, but these are under threat as ways of life, people and attitudes change.

The future – what we want to see

- People living in rural areas being fully involved in developing their community, safeguarding its valued features, and shaping the decisions that affect them.
- Flourishing local councils acting as the voice of the local community.
- Strong partnerships between county, district and town and parish councils, supporting and encouraging rural communities on matters which local councils can manage themselves, and working in partnership on wider local services.
- Support for established local voluntary networks in rural areas.

Summary of measures

- The quality parish – a new role for town and parish councils;
- Town and parish councils working in partnership with counties and districts to deliver more services locally, where this is best value, including Community Information Points;
- Help for over 1,000 rural communities to prepare Town and Village Plans to shape their future;
- Training and support for parish councils;
- Better consultation between counties, districts and town and parish councils;
- Increased support for voluntary groups.

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12.1. Introduction

12.1.1. People in rural communities care strongly about the places where they live, about the services and activities that hold the community together, the local landscape and its features, and how it is likely to evolve in the future. Every country town and village has its own priorities, local strengths and distinctive features which are special and unique.

12.1.2. We recognise that diversity and local pride. We want to enable rural communities to improve their quality of life and opportunity. We want to give them a bigger say in managing their own affairs and the chance to give everyone in the community a say in how it develops. To achieve this we will:

- Encourage all town and parish councils to reach the standards of the best, to achieve a new status in local government as the voice of their community and enable them to work more closely with their partners;
- Enable larger and efficient towns and parish councils to deliver a wider range of local services in partnership with principal authorities;
- Help all rural communities develop Town, Village and Parish Plans to indicate how they would like their town or village to develop, to identify key facilities and services, to set out the problems that need to be tackled and demonstrate how its distinctive character and features can be preserved;

- Create stronger local partnerships in rural areas through more modern local government, including the Community Strategies prepared by Counties and Districts;
- Help rural communities train and attract volunteers to support local projects.

12.2. Strengthening town and parish councils – the most local tier of local government



An active community meeting in Amebury, Wiltshire
Credit: Salisbury District Council

12.2.1. We want to give rural communities a bigger chance to run their own affairs. For most country people, the town or village is the defining measure of local identity and the parish or town council, as the most basic unit of local government, is closest to their communities. But there is a large variation in the size, role and vigour of local councils. Some represent a hamlet of 50 people and others a town of 25,000 and it would not be right to seek the same role for all. While some already set an outstanding example in community leadership, a large number could or would like to do more and we will help them achieve that.



Polesworth Parish Council's website, providing up-to-date information on the work of the Council, plus links to other useful sites
Credit: © Adam Craig

Quality town and parish councils

12.2.2. The potential for towns and parishes to take on a stronger role has been highlighted over the last decade but too often the right framework of support from Government or local partners has been missing. We will put this right. We envisage a new concept of a **quality town or parish council** to equip local councils to take on a stronger role and which would be achievable by any parish council, whatever its size or role. We will be consulting widely, including with the Local Government Association in the Central/Local Partnership, on how best to achieve this. We will want to see piloted innovative and imaginative partnerships involving such quality councils, their principal authorities (counties, districts and unitary authorities) and others so as to give rural communities a better deal on local services and a stronger voice in decisions affecting people's day to day lives. A quality parish council will:

- Be representative of all parts of its community;
- Meet a **quality test** – show that it is effectively managed, with audited accounts and a trained clerk (See Box);
- Be committed to work in partnership with principal authorities;
- In proportion to size and its skills, deliver local services for principal authorities;
- Work closely with voluntary groups in the town or village;
- Lead work by the community on the Town or Village Plan;
- Working with its partners, act as an information point for local services.

- **A quality test** would operate through a series of simple criteria which can be easily validated. **We will be consulting further on the details of these but we think they are likely to include**

- Electoral mandate – for example all parish councillors to have stood for election;
- Minimum number of meetings in year (greater than the 3 meetings and annual meeting already required to show activity of council);
- Trained parish clerk (to indicate a basic competence);
- Published annual report describing its activities;
- Up-to-date, unqualified and properly audited accounts;
- For Best Value parish councils the test could include that the annual performance plan had been cleared by the auditor, and that no adverse report following an inspection had been issued;
- A further test – of minimum size (perhaps based on annual expenditure) – would be used for councils wishing to consider taking on services from district councils. It would be

open to smaller parish councils to meet this test through a partnership with a neighbouring parish council. It may be possible to require that councils wishing to qualify as 'quality' parish councils, who are below the best value income threshold (£500,000 pa) but above, say, £100,000 pa, 'opt in' to the best value arrangements and have their compliance certified by the auditor.

How a Quality Parish would work

The first requirement of a quality parish council is that it is representative of its community. To demonstrate that, it will actively engage all its residents, businesses and surrounding landowners and managers in its work through regular meetings and events, newsletters, surveys, working groups, youth councils etc. In conjunction with them it will identify the needs of its community and set out its priorities for action in a readable and widely available parish plan. Working in partnership with principal local authorities (counties, districts and unitary authorities) and other agencies affecting its village, it will be a key part of their local consultation processes – contributing to housing, transport, health and other local plans. Already, those parish councils who are **best value parish councils** (budgeted income in excess of £500,000 a year – see paragraph 12.4.7) will be doing many of these things to fulfil their best value duties.

The quality parish council, working with partners, including the voluntary and community sector, will **undertake services funded from its own resources – looking after the village environment** (litter, bus shelters, village green, cemeteries etc) and provide public facilities such as playgrounds and village halls. It will help to draw up a **town or village plan**, and support local biodiversity action plans. To promote **inclusive communities** it will support community transport schemes and childcare provision; seek suitable sites and projects for affordable housing, and help develop youth activities and services for the elderly. The quality parish council in partnership with its principal authority and others, may wish to **take on the delivery of some services** (eg facilities management, litter collection, street lighting) on behalf of its partners, where this represents best value and gives the local community the best deal.

Wired up through ICT, the quality parish council will be an access point for information about local services (bus times, taxis, community transport, concessionary fares, housing applications, council tax rebates/housing benefit, council agendas/minutes, local plan/planning applications etc) and for further advice.

"Do you feel that you get left out when it comes to sharing the money around?"

"I'm sure we do, yeah, I'm sure we do"

"The town was a lot better off when we had our own council"



Standon Parish Information Centre, Hertfordshire, where villagers can access information on jobs, training and use office facilities
Credit: National Association of Local Councils

Towns and parishes influencing and delivering local services

12.2.3. A parish council which meets the quality standard is demonstrating that it is active, competent and representative and, in relation to its size is able to play **an enhanced role in partnership with principal authorities**. We see the key elements of this role as being:

- an integral part of all **consultation** and co-ordination arrangements set up by principal authorities and other service providers on how services are delivered in its area including Community Planning (see paragraphs 12.4.3–5);
- partnership with principal authorities on the discussion, **management and delivery of services** which they, as parishes may carry out and deliver, on their partners' behalf, or using their existing powers, to give best value to local communities;
- quality parishes to work with partners on provision of **access points to information on services of principal authorities** and linked to their IT systems, for example through operation of high street kiosks, information points or a community office which can be used by a range of different services (County, District, Parish and other service providers).

12.2.4. In most local areas strong links already exist between parish and town councils and the principal tiers. Following the joint Local Government Association/National Association of Local Councils concordat on relations between the tiers, many local authorities have agreed **local level concordats** and agreements on consultative and other links. These agreements can help parish and town councils, whatever their size, to contribute more effectively to local governance.

- We will set out in **guidance**, which we will publish in draft for consultation, **how a Quality Parish might work**, what tests it should meet, and, building on the LGA/NALC protocol, how principal authorities and town/parish councils can work together in partnership to better meet the needs of their communities. We will include a model 'charter' based on existing Best Practice by Counties and Districts which will enable principal authorities to set out the basis on which well managed parishes could act in partnership with principal authorities and deliver on their behalf neighbourhood services including provision of public information, management of facilities such as car parks, markets, or local amenities and maintenance and cleaning of public space;
- Subject to consultation, we will amend our guidance on Best Value (see paragraphs 12.4.6-7) so that **principal authorities include their terms for partnership with parishes on neighbourhood service delivery** and to enable Town and Parish Councils who wish to do so to put their own proposals on service delivery. To support this process we will also consider changes to bring more Town and Parish Councils into the Best Value regime (as set out in paragraph 12.4.7).
- We expect to see over time a significant increase in the number of **service delivery partnerships between principal authorities and parishes** which meet Best Value principles. These would entail Town and Parish Councils who are able and willing, taking on more of the most basic local functions, such as running the local market, car parks or providing public information, with the support of their partner authorities.



Bramshott and Liphook Parish Council's Information Point, Hampshire, which offers local people access to a Citizen's Advice Bureau, East Hampshire Housing Association, and access to the County Council Information Centre via a free-phone link
Credit: Bramshott and Liphook Parish Council



A lengthsman involved in highways maintenance – one of the duties devolved to parishes under Staffordshire County Council's Parish Council Charter
Credit: Staffordshire County Council

Support and training for parish councils



Students on the residential Level 1 Local Policy Course at Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education
Credit: Cheltenham & Gloucester College of Higher Education

Case study – Staffordshire Parish Council Charter

The **Staffordshire** Parish Council Charter between Staffordshire County Council and the Staffordshire parish and town councils was agreed in 1995 and reviewed and renewed in 1999. It covers themes such as consultation, service provision, practical support and information and complaints. Under the charter, parishes have agreed to undertake routine highways maintenance (grass cutting, sign cleaning etc); to manage local public footpaths, and to assist in monitoring waste management sites for the county council. The county council has also led a number of training courses for local councils and has agreed the use of its central Print and Design Unit for local council publications and leaflets. The principles of the charter are also carried through into locally agreed charters between district councils and local councils. There is general agreement that the Charter has been a real benefit to improved inter-tier working in the county.

12.2.5. Our modernising local government agenda will promote much closer working between authorities – for example through community planning and Best Value. These give principal authorities a strong incentive to work in partnership with parishes among other local partners. And **we want to encourage both parishes and principal authorities to work much more closely together.** Our goal is greater co-operation between all tiers. As part of our consultation on Quality Parishes (as in paragraph 12.2.4) we would welcome ideas on how best to achieve this, including the contribution that conciliation based on local government best practice might make in bringing this about.

12.2.6. To help parish councils to meet the quality standard we will give them support and assistance. We will making available £2m over the next three years to help:

- A national strategy to provide **training and support** for parish and town councils in partnership with NACC, LGA and IDeA – the local government training organisation;
- The Countryside Agency will equip every town and parish council with access to an **internet linked management and best practice toolkit** to help provide simple guidance, learn from experience elsewhere, and make parishes more effective, representative and accountable.

Funding for parish councils

12.2.7. We want to make sure that the financial arrangements for parish councils will help them take on the new quality parish role. We are consulting in our Green Paper *Modernising Local Government Finance* on several reforms including:

- Increasing or removing the limit on the amount that parishes can raise for expenditure that will benefit their area and for which they have no specific powers;
- Strengthening the prevention of 'double taxation' of parish residents – where they pay for a service to be provided in their area by the parish but also have to contribute to the cost of provision of that service elsewhere by the principal authority;
- Simplifying the financial regime for funding capital expenditure by parishes and reducing the auditing requirements for small parishes.

12.2.8. The Green Paper also looks at whether different financial regimes should apply to smaller and larger parish councils (including the possibility of the latter having similar controls, freedoms, responsibilities and access to government grants and the business rate as principal authorities; and at how access to such funding could be managed in practice). To ensure that parish councils act with propriety the new ethical framework being introduced by the *Local Government Act 2000* will apply to parish councils and provide a mechanism for upholding their ethical standards.

12.2.9. To help parishes do more to support their local communities we have also decided to give parishes more direct access to government funding for parish led **transport schemes** (as set out in chapter 6) and for the development of parish plans (see 12.3.3) and community projects identified in them (set out in chapter 3).

12.3. Town and village plans

12.3.1. We want to give rural communities the chance to set out what their town or village should look like and to guide its future development. The best decisions on these issues result from giving local people a share in those decisions. That means not only the opportunity to comment on individual proposals, but the ability to set out a vision of what is important, how new development can best be fitted in, the design and quality standards it should meet, how to preserve valued local features and to map out the facilities and services which the community needs to safeguard for the future. This can include the surrounding countryside, for example including Estate Plans and farm diversification.

12.3.2. By taking the policies set out in the local Development Plan and setting out their views on how those should be achieved, local communities have a real opportunity to influence the nature and quality of future development. Town and parish councils are well placed to lead this process and providing their Plan is consistent with the local Development Plan, and the relevant national planning guidance, the design and land use aspects can be endorsed by the planning authority as **Supplementary Planning Guidance**. This approach has the potential to reduce the adversarial nature of new proposals and reduce costs for all, but this will only be achieved if everyone in the community has a real opportunity to contribute their views.



Part of the village of Dalton, Lancashire and its Village Design Statement

Credit: Dalton Parish Council. Photo and drawing: J M Goodger

12.3.3. Some communities and local authorities have prepared local design guides and some have carried out **parish appraisal and Village Design Statements** but overall less than 2% of rural communities have a plan or appraisal which is specific to their community. Creating such plans takes time, effort, and the commitment to try to achieve a common vision for the future. We will help local communities achieve that:

- We will set up a new £5m programme administered by the Countryside Agency to help **1,000 rural communities prepare their own town or village plan**;
- We will set out in **national planning guidance the role that town or village plans** can play now as Supplementary Planning Guidance. We will also examine whether and how the role of more locally based plans in the planning system might be further developed.

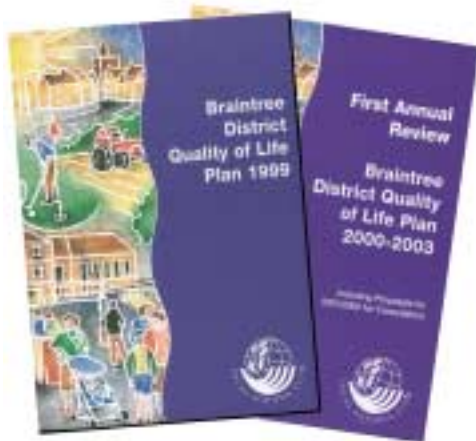
Case study – Taunton Deane planning scheme

Taunton Deane Borough Council in 1993 initiated a trial scheme devolving minor planning decisions to eight parish councils (with populations ranging from 380 to 1,200). Planning Officers employed by the Borough Council attended and advised meetings of the parish councils discussing applications, at which applicants and members of the public had the right to speak. By the end of 1996, 249 planning applications had been decided by parish councils – in 237 cases the Planning Officer’s recommendation had been followed, 10 had been approved against recommendation, and 2 refused against recommendation. No appeals were lodged in the first three years of the scheme’s operation and the scheme has been judged very successful.

12.3.4. A town or village plan is also about much more than design and land use issues. Developing or safeguarding local services such as shops and leisure facilities and addressing community needs such as the availability of space for playgroups or a meeting room are issues which a comprehensive plan can tackle. The plan is an opportunity to develop community agreement on local priorities and options for addressing them and is an important input to the wider community planning by districts and counties described in paragraphs 12.4.3-6. below.

Case study – Braintree Quality of Life Plan

Braintree District Council's Quality of Life Plan 1999 was produced following extensive consultation and opinion polling, including active encouragement for parish and town councils to carry out their own community appraisals. A 'Village Appraisal Fieldworker' was appointed to assist parish and town councils and community groups in carrying out the appraisal process. The 54 parish and town councils with the district have also formed 14 parish cluster groups which provide forums for bottom-up feedback to the district council and other service providers on local issues needing action, and an opportunity for neighbouring parishes to discuss issues of common concern.



The Braintree Quality of Life Plan, along with its Annual Report, detailing what the Plan achieved for local people during its first year

Credit: Braintree District Council

12.4. Modern local government for rural areas

12.4.1. Town and Village Plans are an important input to a wider framework. To improve the full range of local services for rural communities needs a broader partnership approach which involves not only counties, districts, towns and parishes

but the other key public service providers such as health and police authorities. In many rural areas, particularly those which need regeneration, the Regional Development Agencies will have a key role to play. Progress entails a commitment to working together to the principles of continuous improvement, building on success and best practice, using new technology to improve services and to engage the communities they serve in their decision making.



The Government's e-envoy visited Rutland, to see how Rutnet works
Credit: Rutnet

12.4.2. Rural areas will benefit from more modern local government which contributes to a process of democratic renewal by ensuring that councils are accountable, open and responsive to local needs. Key reforms are: the duty to prepare community strategies; the changes to the constitutions of councils; the introduction of the best value regime; and local Public Service Agreements. Each of these is being implemented to reflect rural issues. We are also intending to modernise the local government finance system.

Case study – LGA Website of the Year 2000

The **Rutnet** (www.rutnet.co.uk) site is a partnership between Rutland County Council and Rutland On Line Ltd to provide an essential virtual community and information resource. The site raises awareness of the potential of the internet and e-commerce for local businesses, enhancing on-line information on lifelong learning opportunities and encouraging village communities to join and contribute to the information network.

Community strategies and community planning

12.4.3. Community leadership is central to the role of modern local government and counties and districts are well placed to provide a clear co-ordinated overview of a community's needs across a wide range of services and to ensure that action is taken to respond to them. We have therefore introduced a new duty on principal councils to produce community strategies which promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of their communities. They will be expected to bring together parish and town councils, other public agencies, the private and voluntary sectors and all sections of the local community, to identify and work towards a long term vision and action for improving the quality of life in their area. The town and village plans set out in Section 12.3 will be an important contributor to the community strategy for the wider local authority.

12.4.4. The community planning approach can particularly benefit rural governance because:

- Typically rural areas have three (and four in areas with national park authorities) layers of local government – encouraging joint working and service co-location between these authorities (and others) can therefore be particularly fruitful;
- There may be a perception which a plan can dispel that rural communities and their needs can be overlooked in some more urban dominated local authorities with rural fringe and/or hinterlands within their area;
- Rural communities can be widely dispersed within a local authority area and can have, for various reasons, widely different access to services and different needs and aspirations. The community planning process should help to identify and meet these needs;
- The integrated planning of services in dispersed communities is particularly critical to ensuring reasonable access to services and preventing social exclusion.

12.4.5. We believe that local authorities themselves, with the local strategic partnerships they establish and with the active involvement of local people, should determine the process for preparing their community strategies. However, we will:

- Make clear in the **community strategies guidance** that the approach to preparing them should take account of rural circumstances in relevant areas, also setting out the role that effective parish and town councils can play;
- Work with the LGA on the production of companion guidance on good practice for community strategies which will include examples from rural areas.

Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs)

We are currently consulting widely on our proposals for Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) which have the goal of improving public services by bringing together all service providers at local level, in partnership with their local communities and business sectors. We are not asking authorities to duplicate existing partnership arrangements, but rather to build on the arrangements they have already established. Partnerships set up in line with the guidance on community strategies would, by definition, be LSPs.

"I just think they need to stop lumping everyone together and think about places as individual rather than looking at one thing overall and saying, 'Well that's good for everybody', 'cos it doesn't work like that, 'cos it's quite unique here – there's not many places that are this far away from anything. I just think it needs to be realised that it is different and needs thinking about in a different way"

Case study – New Commitment to Regeneration

The "New Commitment to Regeneration" approach developed by the Local Government Association provides models of how a Local Strategic Partnership can work. The twenty two local authority-led strategic partnerships comprising public, private, voluntary sector and community partners have included a number covering rural areas.

Herefordshire

The partners in Herefordshire are committed to the concept of 'One Partnership, One Plan' to provide an overarching framework to link the needs of local people to specific policy agendas and individual organisations' business plans. But although comprehensive it is intended to keep the concept streamlined. The plan will, therefore, serve as a:

- Community Plan;
- Local Agenda 21 Plan;
- Regeneration Strategy;
- Local Performance Plan.

As a rural area, Herefordshire's main need is for the plan to provide for a widely scattered population where poverty and relative prosperity exist in close proximity. Community involvement and consultation is a crucial feature of a Herefordshire approach.

Case study – South Wiltshire Alliance

The South Wiltshire Alliance (a partnership involving 12 local stakeholders including Wiltshire CC and Salisbury DC) has been developing a joint approach to community planning since June 1998. Community plans have been developed for each of the six identifiable communities in South Wiltshire. Some 32,000 local people have contributed to the area plans which include 'action plans' setting out targets for the local agencies on the priority themes: young people; crime; rural life and services; rural transport; and health and welfare.



South Wiltshire's six community plans
Credit: Salisbury District Council

New constitutions for councils – The Local Government Act 2000

12.4.6. The *Local Government Act 2000* provides the powers and structures to help every county and district council to meet the needs of local people more effectively. The changes brought about under Part II of this Act will see the implementation of new constitutions for councils which will ensure everyone knows who is in charge of the local council and the services it provides. It gives authorities greater flexibility to adopt systems to suit their area; for example area committees may bring particular benefits to rural areas. Most councils will have the choice of three styles of executive governance: mayor and cabinet; leader and cabinet; and mayor and council manager. In addition to the executive arrangements available to all councils, there is an additional framework based on a modernised committee system with integral overview and scrutiny available to small

district councils in two-tier areas. These options will enable rural councils to develop political management arrangements that will put in place the strong and accountable leadership that is necessary for building thriving rural communities.

Best Value

12.4.7. A central objective for both local and central government service delivery will be to develop clear and published targets for accessibility of all services, and the duty of Best Value (see Box) placed on local authorities sets the framework for this. While this process is still underway and it will take time for the full benefits to feed through, the approach has already helped authorities to improve their services in rural areas. Best value also applies to some 41 larger **town and parish councils** and we will look again at whether it would be helpful to bring more town and parish councils within this regime particularly where it supports partnership arrangements for the delivery of services on behalf of principal authorities by towns/parishes. In the meantime we will amend Best Value guidance to enable town/parish councils to make proposals on service delivery on behalf of principal authorities.

Best Value is a key element of the government's initiative for local democratic renewal.

The Local Government Act 1999 places the duty of Best Value on local authorities. It aims to improve accountability between local authorities and their communities by requiring best value authorities to produce Best Value Performance Plans showing their record of delivering local services and their plans to improve upon them. Local authorities are expected to set challenging targets for year on year improvements, covering both cost and quality. They need to establish and set out their priorities. These priorities flow from engagement with the wider community and from an authority's performance as an organisation and as a provider of services. Authorities have to draw up a programme of fundamental performance reviews of all their services over a five year period, which require them to:

- **Challenge** why and how a service is being provided;
- **Compare** with others' performance across a range of relevant indicators, taking into account the views of both service users and potential suppliers;
- **Consult** with local taxpayers, service users and the wider business community in the setting of new performance targets; and
- Use fair and open **competition** as a means of securing efficient and effective services, taking into account the opportunities for partnership with others in the public, private and voluntary sectors.



Carrick District Council in West Cornwall held a door-to-door review of the 'community alarm service' as part of its Best Value pilot project. The alarm service allows local residents to remain in the rural home they have often lived in all their lives. An action plan was produced following the review identified the need for closer links to social services, the health authority and CCTV monitoring. Credit: Carrick District Council

12.4.8. We are determined to make sure that Best Value delivers better services for rural communities. To achieve this:

- **The Best Value performance indicators which we are introducing include 'fair access' to services (in terms of ease and equality of access).** 'Fair access' embraces both getting services to the people who need them and providing services to 'hard to get at' groups. In both cases an important feature of the Best Value regime is to ensure that 'fair access' embraces geographic accessibility for dispersed communities and people, for example villages or clusters of villages and market towns;
- We will **amend Best Value guidance** so that principal authorities include the terms on which they would work in partnership with town/parish councils on delivery of neighbourhood services (see paragraph 12.2.4) and ask principal authorities to report on their consideration of town and parish proposals in their Performance Plan. To help parishes who wish to take on a stronger role we will also consider how to bring more town and parish councils within the Best Value regime without creating an unacceptable burden;

- We are supporting the setting up of rural networks for authorities to develop and disseminate best practice within the local government community and promote joined-up and partnership working amongst the various stakeholders;
- We are asking the Audit Commission as well as the Countryside Agency to review and report on how Best Value is promoting greater accessibility to councils' services in the light of experience;

Funding for local government

12.4.9. We will be providing average real increases of 3% a year for local authorities over the next three years. The extra costs for rural authorities in delivering services to a dispersed population are taken account of, along with other factors, in the current system for distributing revenue grant. In 1998 (before the current three-year freeze on grant distribution formula changes was introduced) we made an adjustment for the extra costs to social service departments of delivering domiciliary care (such as home helps) in rural areas.

12.4.10. Local authorities in rural areas and elsewhere have been contributing to the review of how grant is distributed to them. We have now issued a Green Paper consulting on proposals to modernise local government finance *Modernising Local Government Finance* and invited responses by Friday 8 December 2000.

Local Public Service Agreements (PSAs)

We are currently working with 20 local authorities to develop and pilot local Public Service Agreements from April 2001. The intention is that individual councils will be able to sign up to challenging targets in about twelve areas of national or local importance. In return, they will receive agreed operational freedoms and flexibilities to help them deliver their services more effectively, some limited financial assistance up-front and rewards for success if they meet their targets. Local PSAs therefore provide an opportunity for direct discussion between central and local government taking into account local circumstances, including the needs of rural areas.

The pilots include a number of counties with large rural areas (Kent, Cambridgeshire, Norfolk, Derbyshire and Warwickshire). We are currently discussing their proposals, which include targets for rural issues such as better rural transport, improved accessibility to services and pupil achievement in rural schools

12.5. More active rural communities

12.5.1. A healthy and active voluntary and community sector is essential to the effective functioning of society – urban and rural. The voluntary sector often steps in to meet local needs and fill gaps in services, and the social networks which link local residents also encourage mutual aid. Activity ranges over a very wide spectrum from organising leisure activities through relatively informal volunteer-run welfare activities (meals on wheels, community transport schemes, play groups etc), to professionally-run projects by non-profit making organisations. The report by the Social Exclusion Unit Policy Action Team on *Community Self-Help (PAT9)* concluded that community activity needs sensitive, well directed support by local authorities, government agencies, and other public bodies in the form of commitment, training, and the will and capacity to work across organisational boundaries. Women are often at the heart of the social networks which link local residents and encourage mutual support. They play a key role in understanding and responding to the needs of rural communities.

Case studies – Chillington Village Care Scheme and Benington, Aston and Watton at Stone Transport Survey

Chillington village in Bedfordshire is running a Village Care Scheme. Volunteers have given every resident in the village a number which they can call and ask for help with virtually anything from a lift to the shops or changing a light bulb, to filling in a form or picking up a prescription.

The parishes of **Benington, Aston and Watton at Stone** in East Hertfordshire have undertaken transport needs surveys for their communities, identifying journey patterns, modes of transport and volunteers for a voluntary car scheme. A community bus scheme for elderly residents has also been piloted in Aston as a result of the surveys, and local transport timetables showing all modes of transport (including buses, trains, taxis community and voluntary transport) have been produced for each village and distributed to every household.



Watton at Stone's local transport information leaflet
Credit: Watton at Stone Parish Council

Voluntary and community sector

12.5.2. In rural areas, the voluntary and community sector is highly varied: individuals and purely local groups; branches or members of national organisations; and local development agencies working to support voluntary action. The 38 county-based Rural Community Councils are an important part of the voluntary sector in rural areas. They work to promote the welfare of local communities through voluntary effort and self-help. They undertake research, collect and disseminate information, provide technical and professional support and represent the voluntary sector.

Case study – Wensleydale Community Office

Yorkshire Rural Community Council (YRCC) was involved in setting up a Community Office in Wensleydale. The office is an access point for both district and county services ie housing, planning, social services etc, plus a Job Centre; Citizens' Advice Bureau; a police contact where crime can be reported and documents processed; business advice; trading standards advice; community education; tourist information; and, through links with the local college, training and work placements. They also provide internet access for the public; a laptop computer loan scheme for students; community printing; and paypoints for gas and electricity. Over 10,000 visits are made to the centre each year. The Community Office is the culmination of YRCC work over a long period of time with communities in the Upper Dales area through the Upper Wensleydale Community Partnership consisting of community organisations, businesses and county, district and the parish councils. The office now runs with little YRCC involvement but their role in setting it up was crucial. The office has been so successful that other communities are asking for YRCC's involvement to set up similar offices in other parts of Yorkshire.

12.5.3. We have increased support for the rural voluntary sector which now receives it from a wide variety of sources. These include local authorities, National Lottery Charities Board, and funding from the EU Leader Programme (in designated areas). The Countryside Agency provides funding for Rural Community Councils and for the NCVO Rural Unit; and for specific initiatives such as the Local Heritage Initiative, Millennium Greens, and Parish Path Partnerships.



'The Village Hall' by Katie Gresswell
Credit: East Markham Village Design Statement, © Trade Link Publications

Village halls and community centres

12.5.4. A key part of the infrastructure for much local voluntary activity is an adequate community centre – both as a place for meeting and to host activities. Rural communities will generally not have the access to the range of public buildings which voluntary groups in some urban areas will have but will depend on a village or church hall or other community centre. Current availability of such facilities is quite good (70% of parishes have access to some kind of facility) although the size may be limited and quality is very variable. Increasingly village halls are being used as access points for a wider range of services and other activities and we are encouraging this.

Case study – Mickleton Village Hall

Mickleton Village Hall (Teesdale, County Durham) provides a range of facilities for its local community including art, needlework, dance and women's self-defence classes. The hall is also used for badminton, a youth club, playgroup, film showings, theatre performances and a day club for older people. The Hall has its own website, courtesy of www.teesdalehalls.co.uk, detailing exactly what and when events are taking place, and people are encouraged to come along to the hall's monthly management committee meeting to offer any ideas or views they may have.



Mickleton Village Hall, Tynedale – a multi-function activity centre for the local community
Credit: Mickleton Village Hall Association

Supporting voluntary activity in rural communities

12.5.5. To strengthen the rural voluntary and community sector we will be taking the following steps

- **Making sure new government voluntary and community sector initiatives are accessible to rural communities.** For example the two new Home Office funding projects for small community groups (the Community Resource Fund and the Community Development Learning Fund) which arose from recommendations in the *PAT 9 report* are both being piloted in rural as well as urban areas;
- We will continue to support through the Countryside Agency the infrastructure for the voluntary sector in rural areas (the Rural Community Councils) including support for village halls. We are providing additional funds for community development work on social exclusion (see 4.4.14) and for community projects (see 3.2.5)



The issues

- The impact of government policies on rural people, businesses, and the countryside has not always been properly considered, and they have not always been adjusted to take account of specific rural problems.
- A lack of co-ordination of government policies and activity in rural areas has meant that programmes are not best managed to resolve conflicts and get the results everyone wants.
- Rural people feel that they are not sufficiently listened to.

The future – what we want to see

- Systematic assessment of the rural dimension of all government policies as they are developed and implemented – nationally, regionally and locally.
- Programmes targeted on management of the countryside, for aims which have been agreed with local communities and businesses, co-ordinated to maximise their impact and avoid duplication and conflict.
- Better arrangements to ensure that government knows what rural communities want, and that the communities themselves are involved in the implementation of policy.

Summary of measures

- Annual report by the Countryside Agency on the rural aspects of government policies, as well as their annual *State of the Countryside* report;
- A rural 'check-list' for Government Departments to ensure that they take account of the rural dimension in developing policy;
- Better regional co-ordination of Government activities, with MAFF regional strategy staff joining Government Offices;
- Establishment of National and Regional Rural Sounding Boards.

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13.1. Introduction

13.1.1. Our consultation with people in preparing this White Paper revealed some clear messages about the way that Government deals with rural issues:

- That the government often appears not to ‘think rural’ when developing and implementing its policies. We have been urged to make sure all our policies are ‘rural-proofed’;
- It was emphasised that the need for ‘joined-up’ government is particularly important in rural areas. The gain from working together can be very great. The use of a village outlet, such as a Post Office, by many different services, can mean the difference between viability or closure;
- Made clear they felt that rural communities are not always listened to, and that they need to be more directly involved themselves.

13.1.2. Our aim is therefore to:

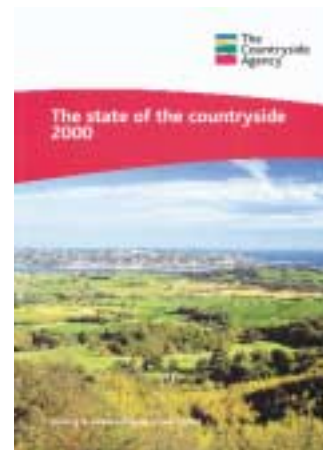
- Ensure that our policies take account of specific rural needs;
- Encourage better coordinated programmes and projects both locally and regionally;
- Strengthen the ways in which we listen to the rural voice

13.2. Rural proofing

What does rural proofing mean?

Rural proofing means that as policy is developed and implemented policy makers should systematically:

- Think about whether there will be any significant differential impacts in rural areas;
- If there are such impacts assess what these might be;
- Consider what adjustments/compensations might be made to fit rural circumstances.



The Countryside Agency State of the Countryside Report 2000 – monitoring and evaluating the state of the rural areas, and advising Government accordingly, is an important part of the Agency’s work

At the national level

13.2.1. The Prime Minister has already set up the Cabinet Committee on Rural Affairs to coordinate our policies for rural areas and to consider major rural policy issues. We need to build on this. As announced in *Spending Review 2000*, we will now be underpinning the work of the Cabinet Committee through a number of measures:

- We are providing for a fuller role for the **Countryside Agency, the Government’s statutory adviser on rural issues**. We established the Agency in April 1999 as a rural champion. It will be advising Government and its partners across the range of rural issues, conducting research and highlighting, piloting and spreading best practice. The Agency is establishing a rural-proofing studies unit to look at particular service areas;
- The Agency will make annual reports on the rural aspects of the Government’s policies. This will be published, and considered by the Cabinet Committee on Rural Affairs and the **Rural Sounding Board** along with the Agency’s annual *State of the Countryside* report (see 13.4.1.);
- The Agency is preparing a **rural checklist** to help policy makers take account of the rural dimension as policy is developed. Our Cabinet Office guidance on better policy making (being developed in the light of the Cabinet Office’s report on improved policy making in government *Professional policy making for the 21st century*) will identify rural impact as an issue to be routinely considered, and will give contacts for further advice and assistance;

- **Each Government Department will make an annual report to the Cabinet Committee on Rural Affairs on how their policies have been rural proofed.** A central rural contact point within each department will be established to co-ordinate their rural proofing of policy. This will include periodic meetings with Countryside Agency on current policy development and research programmes. Where appropriate, departments will undertake rural pilots of programmes and policies and develop targets and monitoring systems for key programmes that identify rural impacts;
- **We will equip policy makers with rural policy skills and awareness.** Staff training and development, with help from the Centre for Management and Policy Studies (the main civil service training organisation), will include training on rural policy issues. We will also promote secondments between Government Departments, the Countryside Agency and rural bodies so as to develop wider experience and perspectives on rural issues.

Case study – rural proofing in practice: Sure Start

The Sure Start national unit in the Department for Education and Employment has worked with the Countryside Agency to make Sure Start (see box at 4.4.12) work effectively in rural areas. Changes to the Sure Start catchment model will make it more suitable for rural areas where children living in poverty are dispersed over a wide geographical area. This follows research carried out by the Countryside Agency earlier this year which suggested changes to the Sure Start criteria to help rural areas participate. The key ones: were greater flexibility over numbers; a broader understanding of the term ‘coherent neighbourhood’; an appreciation of the higher per capita cost of providing services for dispersed rural populations; and a recognition of the low existing service base on which to create new services and facilities.

A small number of programmes among the third wave of Sure Start programmes will try out new models in rural areas with a view to developing further guidance. The new models are likely to include proposals for small villages targeting individual families and working out from a small town into a small rural area.

Regional level

13.2.2. It is also important that Government takes full account of the rural dimension regionally. The nine Government Offices act as the voice of central government in the regions, managing regional programmes on behalf of departments and facilitating effective linkages between local partners and programmes. There is already a network of rural contact points within each regional Government Office. These meet periodically and also have meetings with central government Departments. Similarly the Regional Development Agencies have a rural network. **The Government Offices** have a crucial role to play in taking forward our rural agenda. To ensure that they play this role effectively:

- Government Offices’ annual reports to central Government will in future include an explicit rural report and will report collectively on the regional implications of national rural policy developments;
- We will encourage secondments and exchanges of staff between organisations with a rural remit so as to broaden their rural expertise;
- The Countryside Agency’s regional offices will advise and assist other regional organisations in taking forward the rural dimension of their work.

13.3. Better co-ordination of policies in rural areas

Better regional co-ordination by government

13.3.1. The PIU report *Reaching Out* on the role of Government at the regional and local level found that, while there was a great deal of good work going on at regional level, the regional networks of Government Departments were fragmented, with no part of Government responsible for co-ordinated action in the regions. The clear message was that Government would need drastically to improve the way it develops and implements policy affecting regional and local areas. To follow up the PIU report:

- We have set up a new cross-departmental **Regional Co-ordination Unit (RCU)** to modernise the way Government works at regional and local level. Through the RCU we will improve the delivery of public services by overhauling the way in which we identify priorities and develop policies which affect the regions. This will involve changing the way we work both in Whitehall and the regions;

- We are strengthening the presence of key Government Departments in the regional offices. From 1 April 2001, **MAFF will participate fully in the work of the Government Offices for the Regions** by providing a senior member of its staff (with support) to join each office. This will strengthen MAFF's contribution to developing and implementing policy in the regions and building relationships with regional stakeholders.

13.3.2. The Government Offices will work in partnership with the Regional Development Agencies, the Countryside Agency, English Nature and others in delivering our rural policies and programmes.

- **We will encourage more co-ordinated rural data collection and sharing of information** at the regional level between different Government Departments and other organisations, for instance through joint commissioning of research and sharing the results from research programmes.

13.3.3. The preparation of the regional chapters of the England Rural Development Programme (ERDP) has already been a major step forward in a more integrated approach to rural development bringing together agricultural and forestry organisations with those with an interest in the environmental, social and wider economic issues to develop the strategy for the Programme. The mid-term review of the ERDP in 2003 will consider whether further integration of the regional delivery activities within the Government Office framework would be appropriate.

- We will build on the skills of staff in the Farming and Rural Conservation Agency and MAFF's Regional Service Centres **to create a new delivery service for the England Rural Development Programme;**
- **We will create a new CAP payments agency,** merging the functions of MAFF's nine Regional Service Centres and the Intervention Board to provide top quality customer service using modern electronic systems.



The England Rural Development Programme
Credit: MAFF

Budget co-ordination

13.3.4. One obstacle to joined up delivery is that budgets for complementary activities are held by separate organisations. At a local level, local authorities already have considerable budgetary flexibility. We have increased the scope for flexibility through:

- **The new power for local authorities to take any action they consider necessary to promote or improve the economic, social, and/or environmental well-being of their local area and communities,** introduced by the Local Government Act 2000;
- **The new power for Health Authorities to fund non-health functions** introduced by the *Health Act 1999*. The Health Act also from April 2000 gave NHS bodies and local governments wider powers to develop joint funding and delivery of services where they wish to do so.

13.3.5. We will continue the development of a **joint countryside planning process** which will entail co-ordinating the use of resources for rural areas at regional level across a range of bodies including MAFF, DETR, English Nature, the Countryside Agency, English Heritage and Regional Development Agencies. This will make sure that the best value is obtained from the interaction of these programmes and that local activity such as one-stop shops can be facilitated.

Case study – Somerset Joint Commissioning Board

Somerset Health Authority and Somerset County Council have formed a Joint Commissioning Board which also involves representatives from the voluntary sector and users of services. At the same time staff from health and social services were brought together into one service delivery organisation. The benefit for clients is that they have a single care plan, a single key or link worker and a unified multi-disciplinary team to deal with whatever health or social care need they have.

Case study – urban rural compacts: local authority pilot example

The East Lancashire Partnership is a sub-regional regeneration strategy and action plan. It is one of the 22 LGA New Commitment to Regeneration Pathfinder areas. It involves seven constituent authorities (Blackburn with Darwen, Burnley, Hyndburn, Pendle, Ribble Valley and Rossendale together with Lancashire County Council), together with a range of supporters including the North West Development Agency and the Government Office for the region.

The underlying vision of the Partnership is to transform East Lancashire from a collection of small and medium sized towns into an area based on 'city living in a rural context'. The area is home to half a million people living in a collection of small and medium sized towns surrounded by countryside. Yet it lacks many of the economic, social and cultural strengths and facilities which one would expect in a single city of the same size. Some of the key urban-rural interdependencies being developed by the strategy include access, transport and health issues. Single Regeneration Budget funding is being used to develop a number of the strands of the Strategy.

Their successful bid for funds from the Single Regeneration Budget round 6 aims to provide access to quality outdoor space and facilities, particularly for the sub-region's most deprived communities; to improve the image/environment of East Lancashire as a place to live and invest; and to provide communities with recreational, cultural and sporting facilities in a countryside environment. The re-use of derelict sites, reclamation of brownfield land and diversification of agricultural land will be priority activities.



Willow weaving at the Burnley Forest, an initiative funded by the East Lancashire Partnership

Credit: East Lancashire Partnership

13.3.6. We wish to see more co-ordination of funds from different agencies to support an integrated plan for a local area, to achieve a specific local objective or to deliver joint service plans for particular communities or joint initiatives to tackle social exclusion. We are proposing a more co-ordinated approach in market towns (see chapter 7). We are already developing land management initiatives with a more 'one-stop' approach such as the MAFF Uplands Experiments (see box in section 8.2). The Countryside Agency's study into restoration of the South Downs and English Nature's proposals for Lifescapes (see section 10.3) will also develop more co-ordinated approaches.

13.3.7. The Local Government Association is piloting an initiative, Urban/Rural Compacts, to look at how to make a reality of an integrated approach and the urban-rural connections.

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13.4. Listening to the rural voice

Listening nationally

13.4.1. It is important that Ministers should be fully informed of the state of the countryside and should have regular and direct contact with the main rural groups so that they know what is going on and what countryside people think.

- **We will create the new role of Rural Advocate to argue the case on countryside issues and for rural people at the highest levels in government and outside.** The Rural Advocate will have direct access to the Prime Minister and his Ministers and will attend the Cabinet Committee on Rural Affairs, providing a voice at the heart of government for rural concerns. Together with the Countryside Agency, the Government's statutory advisor on the countryside, the Rural Advocate will play a key part in rural proofing policy decisions and implementation. The Rural Advocate will be a member of the National Rural Sounding Board, bringing to it expertise and an authoritative voice, and taking away from it messages based on the wide range of rural advice and experience available there. The advocate role will be taken on by the Chair of the Countryside Agency as an addition to his other responsibilities.
- **The Countryside Agency will submit to Government on an annual basis its *Report on the State of the Countryside*** in addition to its annual 'rural-proofing' report on the rural aspects of Government policy.
- **We will establish a National Rural Sounding Board, as set out in *Spending Review 2000*.** It will meet at least once a year. It will be chaired jointly by Ministers from DETR and MAFF, and will bring together Ministers from Government Departments with a wide variety of organisations and individuals with an interest in rural policy. It will be informed by the Countryside Agency's assessment of the Government's performance in its 'rural-proofing' report.

Listening locally

13.4.2. We want to do more to ensure that local people are directly involved in public sector activities so that their voice can be heard, and their knowledge and experience can be fully used. One way that this can be done is by the establishment of consultative groups so that those making and implementing policy locally can hear local concerns at first hand. Many regions have already established rural forums to address rural issues.



Case study – The Rural Forum for the North West of England

Established in May 1998 by the Government Office for the North West and MAFF, the Rural Forum for the North West of England aims to facilitate a 'rural voice' which can quickly respond to challenges in times of change, and advise regional decision makers and central government on rural policy issues. The Forum enables the exchange of information between rural interest groups including central government. Since 1998, the Forum has agreed a programme of work and now has 230 members. It has been able to co-ordinate a coherent rural response on emerging issues such as the Regional Strategy, and Regional Planning Guidance Review and the ERDP. More recently, the Forum has set-up a Social Inclusion Sub-Group to consider the issues of rural poverty and deprivation and to search out examples of best practice which can be propagated throughout the region. It also plans to organise a sub-group to monitor rural cross-regional border issues that range from land-use planning through to the stewardship of biodiversity in transitional areas.

13.4.3. But more can be done:

- **We will establish Regional Rural Sounding Boards** bringing together rural stakeholders within regions to inform and monitor the regional and local delivery of policy in rural areas. These will build on existing Rural Forum arrangements in each region, taking account of further developments in community involvement;
- We will set up a **Rural Sub-Group of the Central-Local Partnership**. This partnership brings together Ministers from relevant Departments with Councillors from the Local Government Association. The aim is to ensure that central government works more closely with the local government players who are close to their local communities. The sub-group will begin immediately to assist the implementation of this White Paper.

13.4.4. We also want the voice of local people to be heard and heeded by giving them more direct involvement in local policies. For instance, well integrated affordable housing for local people will best be achieved where the community has a say over its siting and design, and chapter 12 describes the encouragement we are giving to village appraisals and Village Design Statements.

13.4.5. Another example is the NHS Plan which will put **more responsibility in the hands of local professionals and local people**, to allow them choice in deciding the best way for their area to meet the national standards of care. Resources and greater responsibility have already been devolved to local groups of doctors and nurses working together with patient and community representation, in **Primary Care Trusts** and their precursor **Primary Care Groups**. At October 2000 43 Primary Care Trusts have been established to take direct responsibility for over 80% of the local healthcare budget and spend it in the best way to meet local needs. Some of these already cover rural populations where they have sought to ensure rural representation and the NHS Plan envisages 100% coverage by 2004.

13.4.6. Following the 1999 Health Act, NHS bodies such as PCTs and PCGs already have the discretionary power to work with local authorities to pool funds to enable more closely integrated services (see case study on Somerset Joint Commissioning Board). We now propose to make it possible for health and social services authorities to take the extra step to establish new multi-purpose legal bodies, to be known as Care Trusts, to be responsible for all health and social care. The first wave of Care Trusts could be in place next year.

Case study – Herefordshire Primary Care Trust

Herefordshire is one of the smallest mainland Health Authorities in Britain in terms of population but one of the largest in terms of area covered. From October, its new Primary Care Trust will among other things:

- Devolve decision making and resources to local primary care professionals;
- Implement the second wave Personal Medical Service and Personal Dental Service pilots, improving health for the travelling community and enhancing dental services.

Part 4

a vibrant countryside – objective and spending

Objective:

- To promote government responsiveness to rural communities through better working together between central departments, local government, and government agencies and better co-operation with non-governmental bodies.

£m	Spending (£ million)			
	1996–7	2000–01	Projected for 2003–4	Projected 2001/2–2003/4
National Lottery awards	n/a	189	n/a	
Countryside Agency (community support)	–	7	7	21
Community development, parish support and village plans	–	–	3	12

reviewing progress



14.1. We have set out the future we want to see for our countryside and how we, in conjunction with all the other players, will work to achieve this. We intend to monitor and report on our progress in achieving the objectives we have set. (see introduction para 1.17)

14.2. Tracking progress

14.2.1. We must monitor our progress carefully and review our success to see if further changes are needed. There are a number of important sources of information which will tell us how we are doing including:

- The annual report of progress against the Public Service Agreement Targets set out in the Spending Review earlier this year and referred to above;
- The annual report of progress against the 15 headline indicators and selected examples from the 147 'Quality of Life' Indicators set out in the UK sustainable development strategy;
- The annual review of performance against Best Value indicators;
- Report on MAFF's sustainable agricultural indicators in 2003
- English Nature's annual State of Wildlife and Natural Features Report and regional biodiversity indicators.

14.2.2. The Countryside Agency's annual *State of the Countryside Report* brings together a wide variety of information on what is happening in the countryside. To provide an improved summary picture of the outcome of our strategy for the changing countryside we are:

- Asking the Countryside Agency **to bring together and report on 15 national rural indicators in its annual State of the Countryside Report.**

14.2.3. These 'headline' rural indicators (set out in Table 14.1 overleaf) will give a broad and balanced overview and will be supplemented by more indicators and information (at national, regional and local level) in the State of the Countryside Report, and the other sources and reports mentioned. The Countryside Agency will work with the Sustainable Development Commission in developing its indicators further and evaluating what they show.

14.3. Evaluation

14.3.1. We are committed to evaluating each of the key policies and programmes within the White Paper over the next 5–10 years in terms of their impact, effectiveness and costs to Government and industry. These include Biodiversity Action Plans and Local Transport Plans.

14.3.2. Results will be made publicly available. Many policies (such as transport) which are nation-wide will nevertheless throw up particular issues for rural areas. In such cases, work will be undertaken to ensure that evaluations of these measures and policies address rural impacts.

14.4. Making sure we keep on the right track

14.4.1. We will make sure the framework set out in this White Paper is implemented across Government:

- The Cabinet Committee on Rural Affairs will be given a specific remit to monitor the implementation of this White Paper. In doing so, it will seek advice from the Countryside Agency.
- We will bring together the information from the evaluations and monitoring and publish a comprehensive report on progress of the strategy in 2005.

Overall

14.4.2. We have set targets for indicators five, twelve, and thirteen as part of the Public Service and Service Delivery Agreements; and we have national targets which are relevant to indicators three, six, and seven, which refer to rural areas only. Where specific targets do not exist, **our aim is for the indicators to move in the right direction over time.** We will review progress and set further targets for specific outcomes in line with the commitments set out in this paper.

Table 14.1: Headline Rural Indicators

What we want to see	How we will know
Themes and objectives	Indicator(s)
A Living Countryside	
1 Equitable access to services	Geographical availability of key services in rural areas: % of households within x km of food shops, post offices, cash points, child nurseries, primary schools, GP surgeries ⁶
2 Tackling poverty and social exclusion	Low income: % of people in rural wards in low income bands ⁵
3 Better education for all	Qualifications of young people in rural areas ⁵
4 An affordable home	Proportion of rural population disadvantaged in access to housing
5 Better rural transport	Proportion of households in rural areas within about 10 minutes walk of at least hourly bus service ¹
6 Safer communities	Recorded crime levels and fear of crime in rural areas ⁵
A Working Countryside	
7 High, stable levels of employment	Employment activity rates in rural areas ⁵ , unemployment rates in rural areas ⁵
8 Prosperous market towns	Proportions of market towns that are thriving, stable or declining (based on service provision, business activity and employment)
9 Thriving rural economies	Business health: new business start ups and turnover of businesses in rural areas ⁵
10 A new future for farming	Total Income from farming and off farm Income ² Agricultural employment (full-time, part-time and seasonal) ²
A Restored Countryside	
11 Protecting and enhancing the countryside	Change in countryside quality including biodiversity, tranquillity, heritage, and landscape character ⁶
12 Restoring and maintaining wildlife diversity	Populations of farmland birds ^{4,7} Condition of Sites of Special Scientific Interest ^{3,4}
13 Protection of natural resources	Rivers of good or fair quality ⁴ Air quality (low level ozone) in rural areas ⁵
14 Increase enjoyment of the countryside	Numbers of people using the countryside and types of visit; kind of transport; and level and type of spend ⁶
A Vibrant Countryside	
15 Community involvement and activity	Community vibrancy: % of parishes in four categories (vibrant, active, barely active, sleeping) assessed on numbers of meeting places, voluntary and cultural activities, contested parish elections

Notes to Table

- A. This set of indicators will be derived largely from the existing sources of information and indicators referred to above (para 14.2.1.). It comprises existing national indicators that are particularly relevant to rural areas (eg populations of farmland birds); indicators looking at the rural part of a national indicator (eg employment levels); and some specific to largely rural issues (eg health of market towns). The Countryside Agency plans to report on most of the indicators in April 2001 but numbers 4, 8, 11 and 15 are still under development.
- B. What is taken as the meaning of 'rural' is currently decided separately for each policy heading. This causes difficulty for clear reporting, and for rural proofing. To tackle this, the Performance and Innovation Unit report on Rural Economies recommended that the Countryside Agency, ONS, DETR and MAFF should agree and promote a small set of rural definitions. We are now taking this work forward for both rural and urban definitions and will conclude it by the summer of 2001.

1	DETR Service Delivery Agreement target	4	'Quality of Life Counts' Indicator	7	MAFF Public Service Agreement Target
2	From MAFF's pilot set of Sustainable Agriculture Indicators A6 and A9	5	Rural 'cut' of 'Quality of Life Counts' Indicator		
3	DETR Public Service Agreement Target	6	Development of 'Quality of Life Counts' Indicator		

Conclusion



15.1. Many of the measures set out in this White Paper mark the start of a process and it will take time, partnership and initiative to realise the potential of the policies we have set out. We want to see:

- a step change in improving access to, and the quality of, the essential services which rural people need;
- an economy in rural areas which can respond to the challenges of remoteness and lack of scale and which builds on the strengths and needs of small country towns and the land based sector, including farming; skills and employment levels as good in deprived rural areas as in the region as a whole;
- a protected countryside, rich in biodiversity and accessible to all, with less development pressure on greenfield sites;
- flourishing local communities taking an active part in influencing and managing the services they need, and in shaping their future.

15.2. Our countryside is vital – vital to those who live and work in it, vital for those who use and value what it produces, vital for all of us as a precious national asset. Tradition and change go hand-in-hand, as they always have. But the challenge of change in country areas is particularly pressing now. While people locally will in many cases provide the best responses to these challenges, there is a broader national perspective. Government has a responsibility to set the best possible framework in which our countryside can survive and thrive.

15.3. An integrated approach to urban and rural areas is essential. Rural and urban areas are different, with different perspectives on issues, and on the difficulties that they face. But they are also interdependent, Policies which promote development on brownfield sites will not only benefit our urban areas. But by easing pressures on rural development, they will also help to secure the future of our countryside.

15.4. The proposals put forward here offer a real way forward for the countryside. We believe in a living, working, protected and vibrant countryside, thriving rural communities, access for all to high quality public services, a diverse rural economy including farming, and a protected and sustainable rural environment which everyone can enjoy. It means a countryside which is listened to by government at all levels, and a countryside which can shape its own future. That is our vision. The measures detailed here will help put that vision into practice. They concentrate on people, and on the issues which matter most to people, in rural as in urban areas: jobs, a healthy economy, a stable and safe society, and better services. A countryside which offers opportunity for all. A countryside for people who live and work there. But a countryside, too, for everyone.