

RURAL SERVICES APPG: BRIEFING NOTE FOR DEBATE ON LEVELLING UP RURAL BRITAIN

MAIN CHAMBER - WEDNESDAY 9TH NOVEMBER 2022

GENERAL POINTS

“Levelling Up... requires us to end the geographical inequality which is such a striking feature of the UK.”

“Levelling up means giving everyone the opportunity to flourish”

We read great sentiment from the Levelling Up White Paper but the reality for rural areas has not delivered.

Were England’s rural communities a distinct region, **their need for Levelling Up – based on the Governments figures would be greater than that of any other part of the country**, [according to research by Pragmatix Advisory and commissioned by the Rural Services Network](#).

However, the research also found that the Government’s metrics are too urban-focused, and do not account for disadvantage in rural economies within regions. They do not properly account for the pressures facing our smaller towns and villages and as a result effectively side-line 12 million people.

There are a range of additional metrics that could be used to supplement those already in the white paper, which would better identify those areas most in need of levelling up at a local level and help Government achieve its levelling up objectives. These include:

- Proportion of households in fuel poverty
- Work place-based incomes
- House price relative to local earnings
- Ratio, and rates of seasonal employment
- Frequency of public transport services to access key service
- Distance to Further Education provider and the range of courses available
- Referral for treatment waiting times, rates of delayed discharge and levels of self-harm amongst younger people
- Percentage of premises with super-fast broadband

In response to the above report DLUHC commented

“Rural areas are at the heart of our levelling up agenda. Our white paper is a plan for everyone, including rural communities, who rightly expect and deserve access to better services, quicker transport and quality education.”

We've designed our funds to ensure we reach places most in need and we continue to keep them under review as we develop each levelling up mission."

The Minister should be pressed to renew that commitment

We also have the following response to the DLUHC statement, rural areas are often severely lacking in any public transport, they do not necessarily want quicker transport, but any services at all would be beneficial. Recent allocations of the Bus Service Improvement Funding have not prioritised rural areas where services are currently non-existent leaving communities forced to rely on expensive private car ownership to access employment, training, and public services.

In addition, education is mentioned explicitly in the above response statement however there is only one single mention of education in the White Paper and that is in a list of what's included in the term 'infrastructure'. Education and schooling should be acknowledged explicitly in the Levelling up and Regeneration Bill, in the same way housing and transport are. It is unacceptable that the importance of education and schooling in levelling up generally and in particular in rural areas is not acknowledged at all in this bill.

Overall Comments from RSN

- 1. The Government must urgently address the funding formulae for the allocation of national funds to local authorities (and other public service organisations) to enable rural areas to have the opportunity to flourish.**
2. Levelling Up in general and specifically the 'Improving Public Services' outcome sought will never be equitably achievable in rural areas unless, and until all the funding formulae for the allocation of national funds to local authorities (and other public service organisations) are fair and reflect the additional costs of service delivery in rural areas. Rural Local Authorities still receive 37% less in Settlement Funding Assessment per head compared to urban areas and yet it costs more to deliver those services in rural areas.
3. Government must ensure that across all of the Policy Programmes, they are nuanced and designed (and funded) to reach rural areas and to reflect rural issues and circumstances. A one size fits all approach will disadvantage rural areas.
4. Levelling Up must be about much more than capital projects.



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5. The Government in the context of its levelling up agenda should set out its promised vision for rural England and developed a cross-cutting strategy for how levelling up can be achieved for rural people, businesses and places.
6. Levelling up must result in meaningful action appropriate to local areas. The underpinning determinants of poorer access to health and social care are clear and the solutions obvious, including the use of a funding formula that recognises the true costs of service delivery in dispersed communities and coastal towns.
7. Levelling up is not just about socio economic, inequalities, or the north south divide - important though these are - they must also address rural disadvantage as well. And we need a place-based approach when it comes to looking at these dispersed and different communities in rural, remote and coastal areas.
8. It is disappointing that there is no recognition of affordable housing as a cornerstone for levelling up economically and socially. Housing challenges are more than access to home ownership and unfit housing. Both are important but more social housing in rural areas is, at the present time, the overriding need.

THE LEVELLING UP AND REGENERATION BILL

- The definitions in the Bill, (Clause 6) should be amended to specifically include 'rural areas' in the definition of 'geographical disparities' and to specify that the missions and targets must measure improvements within regions and areas, including rural areas, not just between regions.
- The Bill (in Clause 1 (2) (b)) must also require that the metrics for measuring and monitoring progress against the ambitions/targets be set at the lowest possible geographical level for which data is available so as to capture what is happening in more sparsely populated rural areas (often small in population but covering huge geographical areas).
- The Bill (Clauses 1 and 2) should be amended to require that the Statement and the Annual Report must include information on rural as though it were a Region.

Rural Cost of Living Crisis



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You may also be interested in this research into the Cost of Living Crisis in rural areas:

<https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/new-report-shows-devastating-triple-blow-pushes-rural-communities-in-a-cost-of-living-emergency>

This found that rural communities are facing a triple blow in the cost-of-living crisis, as higher domestic and transport energy poverty, coupled with lower wages, pushes rural areas into a cost-of-living emergency,



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