

RURAL LENS REVIEW



Levelling Up White Paper

CRITIQUE: Overarching rural issues,
plus actions proposed by the RSN

Published March 2022



**Presentation by Graham Biggs MBE
Chief Executive, Rural Services Network**



White Paper Content – Key Points

CHAPTER 1 : The UK's Geographical Disparities, Drivers and Potential Policy **Nowhere is there any analysis of rural.** The data used is at a regional level and means that the data for rural areas gets masked by regional/county averages.

CHAPTER 2: Systems Reform If the Government believes in local empowerment, it should not penalise those areas which opt for an approach without a Directly Elected Mayor. Creating a combined population of at least 500,000 will mean either enormous geographical areas or rural areas being combined with predominantly urban areas. Neither of which make sense for any concept of local. **The 500,000 population criteria may well prove to be the undoing of potential devolution deals in many rural areas of England.**

CHAPTERS 3 & 4: The Policy Programme and Next Steps In terms of reviving high streets government must address the fact that rural towns and high streets serve exactly the same function as urban towns to the residents and businesses in the town and their rural hinterlands. **The metrics for Towns Fund etc. are biased against rural areas.**



General Reflections

- The White Paper **touches on all** of the issues raised by our **“Revitalising Rural”** campaign and come as no surprise.
- The key question is whether or not the proposals are fit for purpose in a rural context.
- Most **interventions are major town or city focused** - leaving rural areas overlooked.
- The measurable initiatives have an achievement date of 2030 - **‘jam tomorrow’**.
- With support **the potential of rural communities and economies could be unlocked**.
- Government needs now to set out its **vision for rural England** and to set out a cross-cutting strategy for how levelling up can be achieved for rural areas. **One-size-fits-all policies will fail**.
- If Levelling-Up is to be given the force of law then **rural proofing should be embraced**.
- No real details on which bodies are going to be charged with delivery. **Local Government seems to have a major role** - but no explanation of additional funding to meet change on the scale envisaged (let alone addressing the current funding gap).

Local Government Funding



- The starting point for rural authorities can be seen through analysis of the Final Local Government Finance Settlement for 2022-23:
 - **Rural areas** in 22/23 will still **receive some 37%** (£105) per head in Settlement Funding Assessment grant **LESS** than their urban counterparts
 - **Rural residents will pay**, on average, **21%** (£104) per head **MORE** in Council Tax than their urban counterparts due to receiving less government grant
 - **Rural residents will get 14%** per head **LESS** in social care support overall
- Public Health Allocations recently announced are yet again failing to deliver for rural communities. The allocations for 2022/2023 show that predominantly **urban local authorities receive 57% more** per head compared to rural local authorities. This is despite the fact that it costs more to deliver services across rural areas.
- It should be remembered that the underfunding by government of rural councils' costs relating to the statutory duties in respect of social care has wider service impacts. The last decade or so has shown that to fulfil their statutory duties **rural councils have had to reduce other service budgets** classed as 'discretionary services'.

WE NEED A STRATEGY THAT RECOGNISES THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL BENEFITS OF DELIVERING LEVELLING UP IN RURAL AREAS: WITHOUT SUCH RECOGNITION RURAL ENGLAND WILL BE OVERLOOKED, BY-PASSED AND PUSHED DOWN FURTHER, RATHER THAN LEVELLED UP. SUCH A STRATEGY NEEDS TO BE DELIVERED ACROSS DEPARTMENTS AND FOCUSED ON GENUINELY LEVELLING UP AND REVITALISING RURAL AREAS/ECONOMIES.

Actions by RSN

- **Send a levelling up critique** to the Ministers in the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities; Cabinet Office; DEFRA and to rural MPs and relevant Select Committee Chairs.
- **Commission economists** (Pragmatix) to review the Levelling Up Missions and Metrics from a rural perspective.
- **Develop case studies** including examples of rural best practice.
- **Produce practical suggestions for policy responses** linked to the Levelling Up White Paper.
- **Coordinate meetings with Civil Servants and Rural Coalition partners** to present the rural case.
- **Engage with rural MPs and rurally supportive Lords** and encourage the use of Prime Minister Questions, Departmental Questions, Back Bench and/or Westminster Hall debates.
- **Invite Minister to Rural Services APPG** and seek discussion at other APPGs



Access the full RSN Rural Lens Review of the Levelling Up White Paper at:
[Rural Lens Review of Levelling Up White Paper - Rural Services Network \(rsnonline.org.uk\)](https://rsnonline.org.uk)



Questions?