



# Rural Assembly

# Time for a Rural Strategy

## Kerry Booth



# What do we want?

*“If rural communities are to be sustainable, the Government must seize this opportunity to work with communities to produce **a long-term, funded rural strategy** which recognises the contribution rural areas make and have the potential to make to the wellbeing and prosperity of the nation as a whole.”*







# Why do we need a Rural Strategy



# What would RSN include in a Rural Strategy?



# What would RSN include in a Rural Strategy?

-  A thriving rural economy
-  A digitally connected countryside
-  A place everyone can get around
-  An affordable place to live
-  A fair deal on health and social care
-  A place to learn and grow
-  Fairer funding to address the local rural penalty
-  A rural proofed policy framework



# A thriving rural economy

Businesses of all types, sizes and sectors should be supported to prosper, grow and provide decently paid employment opportunities.

547,000  
businesses

£246 billion  
productivity

84% working  
in SMEs

22% of jobs  
home based

£21,400  
average wage



# A thriving rural economy

– what would make a difference?

- A dedicated rural business support programme
- A rural proofed Industrial Strategy
- A re-purposing of Local Enterprise Partnerships
- A training offer to suit small rural businesses
- A further education system accessible to rural pupils



# A digitally connected countryside

All rural households and businesses should have the option of affordable and reliable access to broadband and mobile networks. Digital infrastructure should be considered essential for a modern economy and to enable fair access to services and other opportunities.

In rural areas, 11% of premises are unable to access broadband connection of 10Mbps

A basic phone call cannot be made inside 41% of rural buildings on all 4 mobile networks



# A digitally connected countryside – what would make a difference?

- A USO that is fit for purpose
- A focus on full fibre roll out
- A drive to connect rural business
- A review of mobile connectivity





# A place everyone can get around

People of all ages must have the means to travel to services, jobs and other opportunities. Not least those in the 1 in 9 rural households that do not own a car. Transport is crucial to life opportunities and its absence can compound isolation and loneliness.

Low income households are 70% more likely to own a car in rural areas

In 2012, less than half of households in rural areas had access to regular and nearby bus service



# A place everyone can get around – what would make a difference?

- A fair deal from Local Government funding
- A viable deal for transport operators
- A sustainable approach to community transport
- A realistic concessionary fares scheme
- A search for new rural solutions





# An affordable place to live

Rural communities are only likely to thrive economically and socially if they are home to residents from a mix of age groups and backgrounds. This includes providing those brought up locally or working there with a chance to buy or rent a home they can afford.

Affordable house prices are £44,000 higher in rural areas than in urban

Only 8% of households in rural villages live in social housing compared to 19% in urban



# An affordable place to live – what would make a difference?

- A planning policy to fit rural circumstances
- A realistic definition of affordable
- A dedicated rural affordable housing programme
- A bolstering of landowner and community support
- A replenishing of social housing



# A fair deal on health and social care

Rural communities, like communities everywhere, need access to high quality healthcare and some require extra support from social care services.

By 2039, nearly half of all households in rural areas will contain people aged 65 or over.

In 17/18 rural residents funded 76% of the cost of adult social care through Council Tax compared to 53% in urban



# A fair deal on health and social care

-what would make a difference?

- A fair allocation of funding to rural areas
- A rural proofed model for health care delivery
- A stronger focus on filling vacancies
- A joined up approach to health and social care
- A housing policy ready for an ageing population





# A place to learn and grow

Rural schools typically play an important role at the heart of their community and provide a high quality education. It is imperative that education policies – focused on the needs of children – support them and help them to face particular rural challenges

Almost 27% of total number of schools in England are in rural areas

More than 33% are defined as very small (<110 pupils)





# A place to learn and grow

## -what would make a difference?

- A presumption against school closures
- A fair and realistic funding basis
- A stronger focus on rural recruitment
- A workable approach to collaboration



# Fairer funding to address the local rural penalty



The needs of rural communities are best met when policy decisions are taken locally by those who understand the area. This means fairly funding services.

Urban areas in 19/20 still receive 66% (£119) per head in Local Government Settlement Funding Assessment grant more than their rural counterparts

Rural residents pay, on average, 20.7% (£98) per head more in Council Tax than their urban counterparts due to receiving less government grant

# Fairer funding to address the local rural penalty

-what would make a difference?

- A properly resourced local authority sector
- A realistic deal for parish and town councils
- An underpinning for local action
- A support package for communities
- A local response to extreme weather
- A fair funding deal for all rural public services



# A rural proofed policy framework

Mainstream policies, such as those on housing, health, education, planning and economic growth must be workable in rural areas where there can be distinct challenges delivering to small and scattered settlements or where economics of scale are harder to achieve.

DEFRA have a Rural Proofing process for other departments to follow

BUT Lord Cameron's review found that:

- implementation is patchy
  - Does DEFRA have sufficient staff resources working on rural affairs?



# A rural proofed framework

## -what would make a difference?

- A proper legal basis for rural proofing
- A more transparent proofing process
- A better resources team within DEFRA
- An effective approach to local policy delivery



# House of Lords Select Committee on the Rural Economy: The Government Responds!



# House of Lords Select Committee on Rural Economy

- Chaired by Lord Foster of Bath
- Report published 27 April 19 with a large number of recommendations for Government
- Received evidence from number of key rural organisations – including the RSN - Parliamentarians and communities
- Government has now published its response

# What was the Government's response?

- Some positive elements:
- *"Over the coming months, the government will expand on its strategic vision and set out how, working across departments and working with stakeholders, it is putting in place a range of measures to ensure that rural areas continue to thrive.*
- The Government will work to improve rural proofing and DEFRA will publish an annual report on rural proofing
- The Government is reviewing Local Authority funding and has proposed including an Area Cost Adjustment to capture sparsity costs.



# Government response to House of Lords Report

BUT....

- The Government believes that rather than a distinct Rural Strategy, it is best to ‘embed an appreciation of rural issues at all levels of delivery’- rather than “risk rural areas being placed in a silo through having a single rural strategy”
- It mentions that the ‘UK Shared Prosperity Fund will allocate funding to those places with the greatest need’...will rural areas with their scattered geography fit into these categories?
- Government doesn’t want to ‘interfere’ in other agencies or organisations responsibilities to force them to be proactive about rural areas and issues

# Government response to House of Lords Report

- Defra will establish a Rural Affairs Board to support and steer work on rural proofing
- 'Final decisions are due to be made following the Spending Review – appears numerous times!!!

# House of Lords Debate – Oct 2019

- Key points raised
  - Governments do not treat the countryside with any degree of equality or fairness
  - One of the overall problems is the lack of proper data collection
  - Affordable housing is ‘critical to the very survival of rural communities’.
  - Rural communities feel a sense of separation from urban areas.
  - Many aspects of rural life are disadvantaged by the unwillingness of successive Governments of all parties to take steps to secure those who live and work in the country.

# House of Lords Debate – Oct 2019

- Lord Gardiner concluded that
  - ‘Nurturing rural communities’ is a goal that everyone shares.
  - The Government agrees with the Committee’s objectives, but thinks that there is a ‘different way forward’.
  - Rural leads have been nominated in each department. These departmental leads regularly meet Defra officials to ensure that rural-proofing is at the heart of the policy agenda.
  - A rural affairs board has been established and is chaired by Lizzie Noel, Defra non-exec director.
  - The Government will publish annual reports on rural proofing.

# Next steps...

- Develop mini manifesto focusing on priority areas
- Host roadshows in East & West Midlands, South East and South West gathering regional perspectives
- Convene meeting of House of Lords Select Committee to explore next steps