

Rural Economy Group

Government Levelling Up Funds and
the application process for rural areas



Levelling Up

- Government's ambition is to LEVEL UP the places and economies across the UK
- The Conservative party manifesto included a commitment:

“levelling up every part of the UK – not just investing in our great towns and cities, as well as **rural and coastal areas**, but giving them far more control of how that investment is made”.



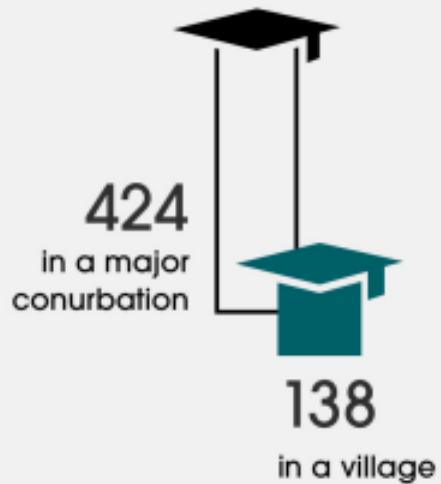
Level up

The rural challenge

Rural areas face a triple whammy

Higher costs

(rural areas lack economies of scale)
Average number of pupils per school



Lower funding

Local authority capital expenditure per person



Greater need

Median full-time wage per hour



The way in which government allocates spending spatially is placing rural communities at a disadvantage - and failing to unlock the opportunities they can offer to the nation as part of a digitised, decarbonised and decentralised modern economy.

Levelling Up Funds



Towns Fund

A £3.6 billion fund for 'struggling' towns across England to support local economic growth

Through the Towns Fund the Government is giving 101 towns the tools to design and deliver a growth strategy for their area.



Community Renewal Fund

The UK Community Renewal Fund will provide £220 million additional funding to help places across the UK prepare for the introduction of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

To ensure the UK Community Renewal Fund funding reaches the most in need, the Govt have identified 100 priority places for investment based on an index of economic resilience across Great Britain which measures productivity, household income, unemployment, skills and population density.



Levelling Up Fund

The Levelling Up Fund will invest in infrastructure that improves everyday life across the UK. The £4.8 billion fund will support town centre and high street regeneration, local transport projects, and cultural and heritage assets.

While the Fund is open to every local area, it is especially intended to support investment in places where it can make the biggest difference to everyday life, including ex-industrial areas, deprived towns and coastal communities.

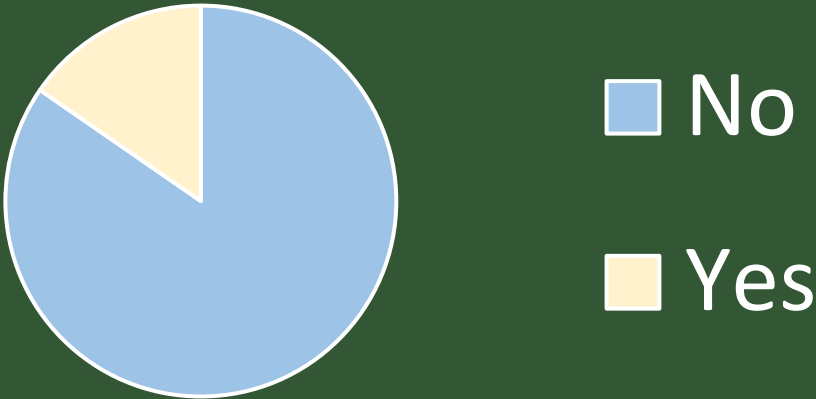
The Rural Services Network is the national champion for rural services, and provides a strong voice for rural areas

To gather views on the processing and allocation of the Funds, RSN surveyed its membership



Feedback from the applications?

Did you receive feedback on your bid?



“No feedback was given on the future of the high street application or the towns fund. We had ministerial visits but no feedback. We are hoping for feedback on the levelling up fund”

“This was an application to the Future High Streets Fund. All that was given was a short email outlining the characteristics of the successful applications. This was particularly galling as these were all featured in our own application so didn't give us any indication at all as to where our application fell short.”

Do you have any suggestions as to how the application process could be improved?

- Quite a lot, but key areas are a need to simplify the process for smaller authorities that do not have the same resources as larger authorities; a need to have more realistic delivery timescales and where applications have not been successful, proper and detailed feedback on why that is so.
- A little more transparency up front would have been helpful. If the funding was only going to be going to certain prioritised areas then it would have saved a lot of time and effort if that had been clear up front.

- More time from announcement to EOI/application date. We do not have the resources of the large unitary or municipal authorities (for example we do not have a data department). Pulling together supportive information is extremely time consuming. The real criteria for a successful application are not clear and we need to know if it is even worth applying if at the end of the day, they are just going to look at the deprivation index for example.
- More clarity over the assessment methodology/scoring matrix
- The application needs to make sense and match the guidance given. Its very onerous and time intensive for small local authorities that do not have resource to pay consultants or have the staff to fill out the applications. This put small councils at a disadvantage from the start

What next?

- RSN shared key messages with Rural Impact Forum
 - Lack of capacity for making applications
 - Time spent on applications diverts staff from other priority tasks
 - Lack of feedback on unsuccessful applications

Rural Impact Forum = key stakeholders and organisations that meet regularly with DEFRA to enable open and regular dialogue