

Rural proofing: Improving access to services

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Why rural proofing?

- England: a largely urban country
- Policy: with an urban (if not London) mindset
- Type: issue or sector based (not geographic)
- Approach: top down and inflexible
- Failure: to recognise a differing rural context



Rural White Paper 2000

Chapter 13: Thinking rural

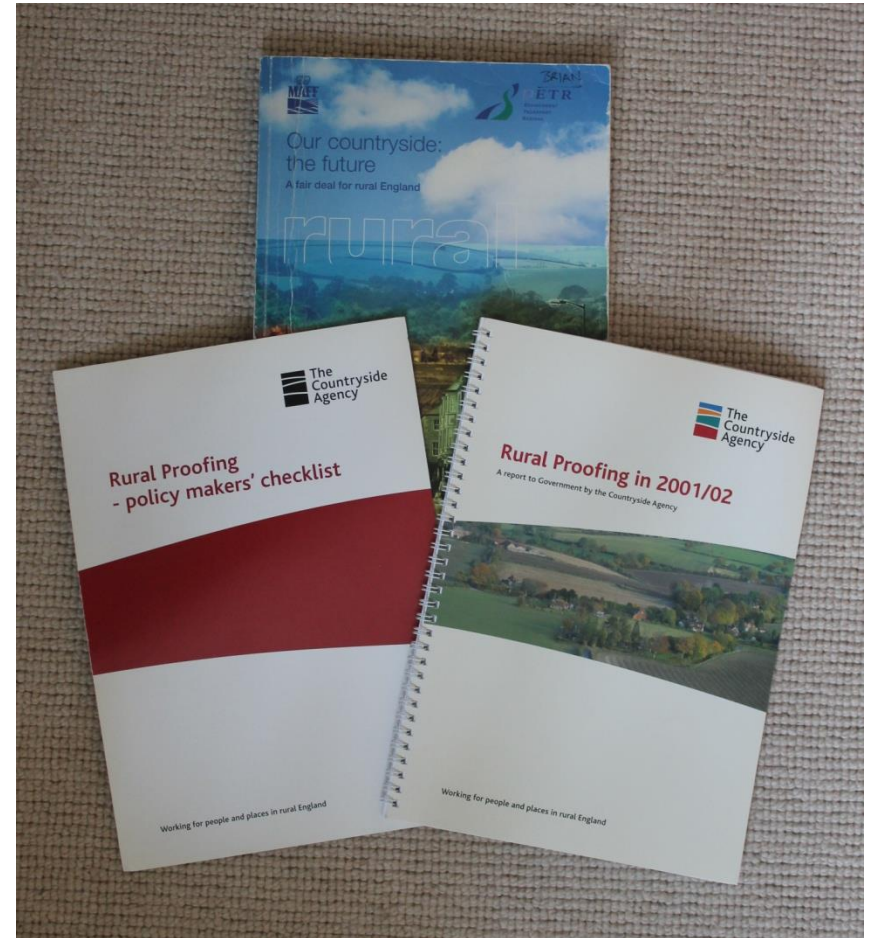
“Rural proofing means that as policy is developed and implemented policy makers should systematically:

- 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 adjustment/compensations might be made to fit rural circumstances.”

Rural White Paper 2000

Countryside Agency to:

- Prepare a rural proofing checklist;
- Produce an annual report on rural proofing;
- Advise across Whitehall on rural issues;
- Speak up for rural people, via its chair as 'Rural Advocate'



What were the reactions?

On the one hand .. the critics:

“It’s not constructive, but is critical of policy-making”

“It’s an anti-urban approach”

“Our policy is already national and applies everywhere”

“As if policy-making isn’t hard enough already”

On the other ... the supporters:

“How can we help make this work in practice”

“It’s a statement from the top that rural matters”

“Rural proofing is a catchphrase that has stuck”

Rural proofing: independent implementation review (2014/15)

The Cameron review:

- Improve Defra's rural proofing guidance
- Create a cross-departmental rural group of officials
- A Cabinet level forum giving rural input to new policies
- Make more use of the rural definition for analysis
- Build a rural proofing stage in policy-making processes

The Defra response:

- ✓ A rural evidence hub
- ✓ Use of the rural definition
- ✓ Training for departments
- ✓ Senior civil servant 'Rural Ambassador'
- ✓ Annual Reports to cite rural proofing work
- ✓ Cabinet Office oversight

Local level rural proofing project

Published in 2012 by Defra, with the RSN, CCN, ACRE, NALC and CRC

Resource 1: Introductory text

Resource 2: Some real world examples and underlying principles to apply

Resource 3: A presentation slide pack

<http://randd.defra.gov.uk/Default.aspx?Module=More&Location=None&ProjectID=18130>

Underlying principles of good rural practice

They are:

- Facets which can be seen again and again in examples of good rural practice.

Hence:

- Services which apply them seem more likely to operate effectively and to generate positive outcomes for rural areas.

It should be noted that they:

- Are not prescriptive and recognise local variation
- Have been applied successfully in different sorts of rural areas
- Suit any type of service area
- Could be applied to a wide range of policy processes
- Can be used to influence both policy design and delivery

The 18 underlying principles

1

- Making an upfront commitment

2

- Seeking broad (sustainability) outcomes

3

- Understanding geography (using evidence)

4

- Harnessing rural strengths

5

- Reducing the fixed costs of provision

6

- Accounting for a range of outcomes

7

- Taking a user focussed approach

8

- Starting from first principles (i.e. needs)

9

- Considering settlement interdependencies

10

- Designing in flexibility to delivery models

11

- Increasing use of existing assets

12

- Offering a portfolio of solutions

13

- Targeting spatial gaps in provision

14

- Focusing on hard to reach groups

15

- Using incentives or penalties in contracts

16

- Seeking collaborative approaches

17

- Testing new models before mainstreaming

18

- Monitoring outcomes at local levels

Underlying principles in practice

Herefordshire Council opened a branch library in the church bell-ringing chamber at Peterchurch village, making good use of an existing asset.

It is a viable approach because they have reduced fixed costs, through co-location with the church and the use of volunteers to run the library.

Another key part of the approach is collaboration with the community, diocese and others. Library opening hours coincide with a community cafe.

It fills a spatial gap in library provision, opening for 10 hours per week. This replaces a mobile library which visited once every three weeks.

Herefordshire Council is exploring options with other parish councils, taking a flexible approach to the type of service offered and to locations.

Why rural proof locally?

Because it:

- Helps ensure all communities benefit from policies and service delivery
- Supports a local (place) focus to policy making, service design and commissioning
- Recognises different levels of rurality, as well as urban-rural differences
- Helps optimise the outcomes achieved by your organisation

Other benefits:

- ✓ Designs out unintended gaps in service accessibility
- ✓ Helps you take advantage of all available resources and assets
- ✓ Identifies opportunities to innovate and collaborate with local communities
- ✓ Demonstrates commitment to providing fair access for all
- ✓ Embeds good practice in the heart of your organisation

Thank you for listening!

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