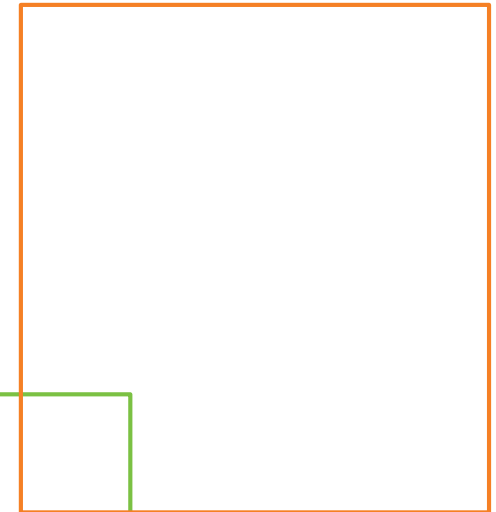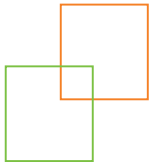# Rural proofing in practice

Ivan Annibal

What is rural proofing

"Rural proofing is a means to achieve equally effective and successful outcomes for communities, businesses and individuals from policy and in the design and delivery of publicly funded services, regardless of their size or location ."

Why rural proof? What are the benefits?

Because it:

- Helps optimise the outcomes achieved by your organisation
- Helps ensure all communities benefit fully 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

Other benefits are that it:

- Designs out unintended gaps in service accessibility
- Ensures you take advantage of all available resources and assets
- Identifies opportunities to innovate in collaboration with local communities
- Demonstrates commitment to providing fair access for all
- Embeds good practice in the heart of your organisation
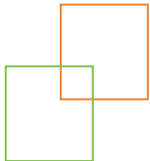
Who is this information for?

Anyone involved with local public service design and delivery.

Whether they are in the public, private or civil society sectors.

Whether working at a strategic level or an implementation level.

Important note: it is a matter for the organisations responsible for designing, commissioning and delivering local services to decide whether these principles should apply and how best to use them.
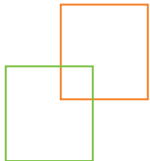
The national policy driver context

<u>Localisation</u>: decisions about design, commissioning and delivery taken closer to and engaging with service users.

<u>Personalisation</u>: further encouragement for bespoke and locally-specific delivery approaches.

<u>Collaboration</u>: looser organisational boundaries, with more scope for integrated delivery focusing on place.

<u>Open access</u>: greater opportunities for new service providers to enter the market from outside the statutory sector.

<u>Volunteering</u>: a desire to leverage the capacity and resources of local people and organisations.

<u>Growth</u>: an emphasis upon development which better meets economic and housing needs.

These are not rural specific, but may have particular rural implications.
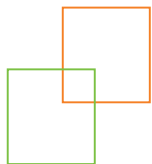
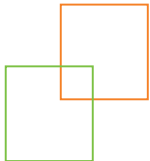# Underlying principles of good rural practice

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.

Some 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.
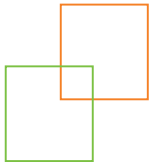
The 18 underlying principles

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
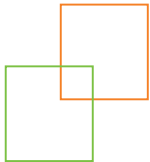
Further resources

Also available in this series:

- Resource #1 What is rural proofing and what are the benefits

- Resource #2 Rural proofing in practice

Further information on rural proofing is available on Defra's website.