

Rural challenges, local solutions

Building on the Rural Delivery Pathfinders in England

A report by Defra on behalf of the Rural Delivery Pathfinders



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Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Nobel House 17 Smith Square London SW1P 3JR

Telephone: 020 7238 6000 Website: www.defra.gov.uk

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Preface

The Rural Delivery Pathfinder programme was launched jointly by Defra and local government in March 2005 to look at innovation in rural service delivery, test opportunities for more joined-up approaches to rural delivery and look at local priority setting. Since then, the pathfinders have been engaged in intensive experimenting in numerous aspects of rural delivery.

This report is a summary of the outcomes and key messages of the programme. There are many lessons to be learned and shared by others including other local authorities – both rural and urban.

The report was commissioned by Defra's Rural Policy Division and written by Peter Cleasby (Quantera), a member of the external panel of the In-House Policy Consultancy,¹ in close co-operation with the lead officers for each Pathfinder, on whose behalf it is presented. The report was reviewed by a wider range of stakeholders at the Rural Pathfinders National Discussion Forum, held in Lancashire on 20/21 June 2007 and in the months running up to publication in February 2008.

The summary nature of the report is deliberate, so that the key messages and recommendations are easily accessible. Consequently, a wealth of detail is excluded. How this information is stored and accessed is discussed in the report, but meanwhile the individual Pathfinder websites² provide a valuable resource.

The report is not an evaluation – at national level, that has been a function of the Audit Commission.

¹ The In-House Policy Consultancy serves Defra, the Department for Communities and Local Government, and the Department for Transport

² Accessible via the IDeA website (http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageld=5569390) or the Defra website (http://www.defra.gov.uk/rural/ruraldelivery/pathfinders/default.htm).

Executive summary – The Pathfinder Manifesto

The eight Rural Delivery Pathfinders – one for each English region³ – were an innovative and unusual attempt to tackle head-on the challenges faced by all levels of government in achieving agreed rural policy outcomes. They empowered rural interests within individual local authorities and their partner organisations to develop and test different solutions to making a reality of the goals of the Government's Rural Strategy 2004. How to make a success of devolving delivery closer to rural communities was the overarching aim. With modest additional funding and minimal central direction from Whitehall, local governance arrangements encouraged individual officers and teams to innovate and take managed risks in developing new responses to what the evidence was saying.

In March 2005, when the prospectus for the Pathfinder programme was launched, there was a recognition in central government that local authorities had a key role in securing delivery of rural policy goals for their communities. Yet there was little clarity about how that role worked out in practice. Defra had relatively little experience of working with local authorities outside clearly defined service areas, such as waste and trading standards. And the 2006 Local Government White Paper setting out central government's new vision for empowering citizens and communities, and the role envisaged for local authorities in achieving that vision, was still 18 months away.

The Pathfinders have a record of substantial achievement

The achievements of each Pathfinder are distinctive, reflecting local priorities and circumstances. *Collectively, they generated a list of important policy-specific learning points captured in Part 4 of this report*. From a national perspective, what is important is how the work of the Pathfinders:

- can *influence future policy* at national, regional, sub-regional and local levels by demonstrating new approaches to local solutions which work and identifying blockages that get in the way of effective delivery. Examples of pathfinder activities that have provided lessons on how to translate policy into delivery include:
 - working with local communities and experts to develop options for managing coastal and marine issues;
 - using energy crops to cut a school's heating costs and at the same time educate children about climate change;
 - showing how procedural and institutional obstacles to local food sourcing can be overcome given the engagement of the right partners and sufficient commitment;
 - encouraging communities to understand and exploit the potential of technology to meet their access to services needs, by a community-focussed roll-out of broadband facilities in local venues;
- developed practical tools and resources, which can be applied more widely, such as "how to do" guidance or toolkits, information resources and joined-up service delivery. Examples include:
 - an electronic parish library giving parish and town councils online access to information and best practice;

³ Excluding London – details are in Annex B to this report.

- an integrated advisory service for land managers in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB);
- issue-based policy frameworks and intervention toolkits (or similar), to test the effectiveness
 of proposed actions, so that funding and interventions are targeted at the right areas for
 the right purposes;
- generated *learning and good practice*, which can be acted on by policy-makers, service delivery managers and solution facilitators. Examples include:
 - good practice in engaging with rural communities;
 - using grant funding as part of a sustainable solution rather than a quick fix;
 - making use of community knowledge as a bottom-up input to planning and service delivery.

Although there were different starting points and circumstances, several common themes recurred across the Pathfinders

While the diversity of approach found in the individual Pathfinders requires some caution about making generalisations, there were several recurring themes.

- Partnership working is critical to success. Partnerships take many forms, ranging from formal structures such as Local Strategic Partnerships to less formal engagement and consultation with communities on specific issues. Getting the right organisations and individuals involved and ensuring that the partnership is inclusive of all those with a legitimate stake at local, sub-regional, regional and national level is key. Private sector and third sector businesses and voluntary and community organisations all have distinctive roles and contributions. Building trust between partners will transform a co-ordinating mechanism into a genuine partnership working to common goals.
- Local authorities can be the catalyst for solutions, if they show leadership and are ready to innovate. The Pathfinders provide many examples in practice of the leadership role for local authorities outlined in the 2006 Local Government White Paper and taken forward in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. This can take many forms, including: developing shared outcomes, driving partnership working, facilitating and enabling others to deliver, and acting as service commissioners rather than providers.
- **Structure and process are important**. Higher tier bodies are less likely to be comfortable about devolving decision-making if the machinery for making decisions is weak and there is a risk of losing focus on agreed outcomes. Putting in place clear, proportionate and accountable governance arrangements for the delivery of both major programmes and smaller projects helps provide the necessary confidence. These arrangements can range from standing partnership machinery to inter-authority protocols on one-off issues.
- Engaging communities directly in defining what they want and how to deliver it provides valuable bottom-up input to plans. Top-down pressures, often target-driven, and a lack of joined-up working across and within public bodies can lead to sub-optimal solutions being put into practice. Local communities hold much relevant information not available at local authority level. Accessing it whether through parish and town councils, community associations or other interest-based or neighbourhood-based groups means decisions are more likely to meet community needs and aspirations.

- "Mainstreaming rural" into policies, programmes and services is the way forward but it carries risks. Available rural proofing techniques have limitations and the guidance is not readily understood by many service managers. There is some divergence of view about whether identifying distinctive "rural issues" is a helpful way of embedding fair treatment for rural communities into authority-wide spending and delivery plans: some see identification of "issues which impact on rural areas" as a more helpful approach. There is agreement that current approaches to rural proofing, and the reasons for doing it at all, should be reviewed and refreshed. Future approaches to rural proofing and "mainstreaming" should take account of the place shaping agenda. Good mainstreaming takes into account local issues and delivery with locally empowered people. Local solutions to local issues are the heart of place shaping and mainstreaming.
- Access to services is not just a transport issue. Decisions on funding rural transport are most sensibly made as part of a wider process of deciding how best to ensure access to services which may be through transport or non-transport (e.g. IT-enabled) solutions. The Pathfinders are promoting new tools to support authorities in making these decisions.

The impetus for innovative local solutions generated by the Pathfinders needs to be sustained and broadened

To exploit the value of what has been achieved, action is recommended across three fronts:

• mainstreaming the successes and good practices generated by the Pathfinders, both within the Pathfinder authorities and more widely across local government in England;

see paragraphs 25–45 of the main report for full detail

• **improving the pathways for effective delivery** by building on the achievements of the Pathfinders and by responding to the factors that hindered delivery;

see paragraphs 46–61 of the main report for full detail

• **capturing the learning** from the Pathfinders and making it easily accessible to those who would benefit from applying it in the future;

see paragraphs 62–76 of the main report for full detail

The recommendations for action – which are about seizing existing opportunities rather than proposing new initiatives – are spread across all tiers of government and agencies.

Each **Pathfinder authority** should:

- ensure that completed projects and those continuing beyond 2007 are properly evaluated and the learning captured;
- make the learning and case studies easily accessible to those who would benefit from using them in the future – this will include other local authorities (not just those within their region);

 promote their own achievements, particularly locally and regionally, including making use of the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships as a vehicle for sharing good practice and building rural delivery capacity across local government.

Local government across England whose jurisdiction includes rural communities should develop and sustain a leadership role – political and managerial – in rural delivery by:

- drawing on the learning and achievements of the Pathfinders and recognising that innovation and managed risk-taking can be the key to finding the best delivery options;
- making full use of the changes set out in the 2006 Local Government White Paper and the subsequent legislation and guidance, including impacts of opportunities and challenges posed in some areas by local government restructuring;
- implementing the reforms from the Review of sub-national economic development and regeneration. In particular, the plans for enhancing the roles of local authorities as strategic leaders and place-shapers, working through the strengthened Local Strategic Partnerships and Local Area Agreements with the full involvement of elected members;
- ensuring they are fully engaged in rural local partnerships and regional mechanisms on which decisions on funding are taken, such as the Rural Development Programme for England.

Government Offices have a pivotal role in brokering constructive relationships between central and local government, Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and others operating at the regional level, and in supporting delivery of central priorities across their areas. They should:

- continue to keep up the pressure for joined-up and coherent policies and programmes from central government and to eliminate unhelpful "silo working" wherever possible;
- support local authorities to learn from one another and to adopt and develop tried and tested good practice in rural delivery and support Pathfinder authorities to share their learning regionally;
- provide the means by which local authorities can deliver important messages on learning and good practice to central government departments.

At national level:

The Commission for Rural Communities should:

- consider a review of the aims and methods of rural proofing at national, regional and subregional levels. This should include a specific intention of supporting local authorities seeking to ensure rural communities' needs are addressed through mainstream programmes;
- hold other relevant government departments and agencies to account to act on the findings, detailed in the main report, that certain policies and practices can hinder rather than facilitate delivery of intended outcomes. This will include initiating specific action to address concerns about rural proofing, silo-working and devolution; and taking into account the list of policy-specific learning points in Part 4.

The **Improvement and Development Agency** should:

• co-ordinate the "mainstreaming" of the Pathfinder learning into the web-enabled, topic-based guidance and case study material which it manages, and encourage other website owners to do the same.

Defra took the lead in establishing the Pathfinder programme and has the key role in setting the direction of future travel.

Defra should:

- ensure that central government guidance on Local Area Agreements supports local authorities seeking to serve well their rural communities. In particular the measurement of the core set of 200 national indicators will need to be carried out with rural as well as urban needs in mind;
- if the pilot on Local Land Management Frameworks⁴ proves successful, explore with the agencies making up the "Defra family" particularly the Environment Agency, Natural England and the Rural Payments Agency the scope for ensuring that their field operations are delivered in conformity with the integrated approach that LLMFs are designed to achieve;
- encourage devolved decision-making by initiating a dialogue between Regional Development Agencies and local and other parts of government to help RDAs build capacity with local authorities; and to form a shared view of the conditions affecting rural areas that would give RDAs the confidence to devolve funding decisions to sub-regional and local mechanisms;
- ensure that the improved understanding of, and relationships with, local government it has gained are not lost when the Pathfinder programme closes – this should include using local authority representatives engaged on the Pathfinder programme as a 'sounding board' for relevant policy development;
- consider the case for a more formal relationship with local authorities, through a Defra/local government rural policy group, or similar body;
- lead consideration, with the Commission for Rural Communities, of how to maintain a national network for rural policy and delivery practitioners, including assessing the scope for using the National Rural Network to be established under the EU Rural Development Regulation;
- facilitate engagement with key stakeholders with a view to securing commitments to a more precise action plan to follow on from this report, aiming for it to be agreed and in place by 1 April 2008.

⁴ Local Land Management Frameworks (LLMF) seek to complement and draw together existing strategies by taking their objectives, policies and targets and applying these to the management of the land in a given locality in a way that reflects national and local needs (including the views of young people) and local character and identity.

Part 1: What the Pathfinders did

Objectives of the Pathfinders

- 1. The Pathfinder programme was designed to explore and test what "modernising rural delivery" could mean in practice, by trying out innovative, joined-up, flexible and effective approaches to rural delivery at local level. The programme enables the experiences of the eight regional Pathfinders to be incorporated into future policy on and delivery of the needs of rural communities and rural businesses. This report summarises what those experiences were and puts forward proposals for building on what has been learned.
- 2. The *Pathfinder Prospectus*⁵ was published by Defra in collaboration with local government in March 2005, as one of the vehicles for giving effect to the Government's Rural Strategy 2004. Strategic leadership by local authorities was seen as a key element of achieving the Rural Strategy 2004 outcomes.
- 3. The Prospectus defined the overall goals of the Pathfinders as the identification of more effective, more efficient and more customer-focussed delivery, and of ways to achieve greater local accountability for public investment in rural areas. It provided further guidance labelled as non-prescriptive which refined these overall goals, explained the intended scope of the Pathfinders and set out expected generic outcomes. For ease of reference, this further guidance is summarised at Annex A.
- 4. The Pathfinders were not established in isolation. Other elements of the Rural Strategy were significant for the operation of the Pathfinders, in particular:
 - (a) the Modernising Rural Delivery Programme which included the production of Regional Rural Delivery Frameworks and the implementation of Defra's Rural Social and Community Programme from April 2006;
 - (b) the restructuring of English Nature, Defra's Rural Development Service and part of the Countryside Agency into a single new statutory agency, Natural England;
 - (c) the development of the new Rural Development Programme for England.
- 5. There was also a broader context, extending beyond rural policy. In parallel with the development of the Rural Delivery Pathfinder concept, central government was actively:
 - (a) developing a new vision for local government, with the empowerment of citizens in their local communities as a central theme;
 - (b) examining ways of devolving decision-making as close to communities as possible, including redefining its relationships with local government, for example through the development of Local Area Agreements (LAAs) or through enhanced scrutiny processes;⁶
 - (c) continuing to encourage public authorities to work in partnership with each other, and with private sector and third sector organisations, to deliver outcomes.

⁵ Available at http://www.defra.gov.uk/rural/pdfs/pathfinders/prospectus.pdf

⁶ Other government proposals had regionally-specific impacts: for example the referendum in the North East on whether to have an elected regional assembly provided a particular degree of uncertainty for the West Durham Pathfinder.

The 2006 Local Government White Paper⁷ confirmed the community focus of local government in the future and – of particular relevance to the Pathfinders – reinforced the importance of strategic leadership by local authorities.

- 6. Although not articulated in the Prospectus, the Pathfinder process was also intended to explore how local authorities could work more effectively with RDAs and Natural England in delivering rural policy outcomes. In addition, it was seen as an opportunity for Defra to improve its understanding of local government, and for local government as represented by the Pathfinder authorities to secure new insights into the way Whitehall worked in practice. The Pathfinder programme complemented the wider work being undertaken in developing the role of local government in rural policy and delivery, including the Rural Excellence programme and Beacon Council scheme for identifying and sharing excellence and innovation in local government.
- 7. One Pathfinder was selected for each region by the relevant Government Office (GO): the detail on each is given at Annex B. Defra provided each Pathfinder with £100,000 in start-up money and grants of £50,000 in 2005/06 and £65,000 in 2006/07. There were only minimal conditions attached to the funding: in line with the encouragement to innovate, Pathfinders were given a generally free hand as to how the money was used. That said, the GOs had a critical role in helping the Pathfinder authorities to shape their programmes. This included facilitating the partnerships, linking the pathfinder work to the development of Regional Rural Delivery Frameworks and playing a 'critical friend' role.
- 8. Funding was also secured by individual Pathfinders from other sources, including RDAs, Natural England, Environment Agency and local authorities. In some cases Pathfinder authorities were able to use the funds provided from Defra for match funding.

Composition of the Pathfinders

- 9. All eight Pathfinders reflect the particular circumstances of their area and, as a result, started from different places and developed different ambitions and structures. Some had a strong county focus, whereas others were more visibly operating within a distinctive subregional structure. Three were coalitions of authorities, district or county, operating across an area smaller than that of the constituent counties. One built links with authorities outside the Pathfinder area, and another straddled a regional boundary. A large number of partners worked with the individual Pathfinder authorities including agencies and organisations at national, regional and local levels, the voluntary and community sector and environmental organisations.
- 10. Each of the Pathfinders comprises a suite of linked projects.⁸ The nature of the projects varies across a broad spectrum, from testing and making available practical toolkits to designing new governance structures. In terms of subject matter, most Pathfinders ran projects across several themes, while a minority focussed on one topic only, such as business support. All were dependent for their success on operating and in some cases creating partnerships.

⁷ Strong and Prosperous Communities – the Local Government White Paper http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/strongprosperous.

^{8 &}quot;Projects" is used here as a convenient shorthand for a diverse range of activities undertaken by the Pathfinders.

- 11. The selection of topics to be developed into projects was influenced by a variety of factors, including:
 - (a) a wish to pilot a pre-existing concept;
 - (b) the need to address issues previously identified in community strategies or evidence-based studies;
 - (c) partners' priorities;
 - (d) views expressed in stakeholder engagement;
 - (e) availability of people to lead projects;
 - (f) topics not being looked at elsewhere.
- 12. A summary of the goals and key activities for each Pathfinder is included in the information in Annex B.

Achievements

- 13. The projects scored some significant achievements, which reflect the diversity of approach adopted by different Pathfinders. The achievements are, broadly, of three types:
 - (a) demonstrating new approaches to managing rural delivery and using the results to *influence policy* at national, regional, sub-regional and local levels;
 - (b) developing and road-testing **tools and other resources** visible to, and useable by, the practitioner⁹ community and the wider public;
 - (c) capturing *learning* for sharing around practitioners.

Many projects have delivered all three. Each set of achievements is illustrated more fully below. Full details are available from the individual Pathfinders.¹⁰

Influencing policy

14. Good policy is driven by the desired outcomes but is also informed and influenced by what is deliverable in practice. Influencing national and regional policy was an explicit objective of some Pathfinders. The results from the Pathfinders constitute a rich resource of innovative practices which have demonstrated, or are in the process of demonstrating, how to improve the delivery of rural policy goals. These results are available to policy-makers and service delivery planners at all levels of government.

^{9 &}quot;Practitioner" refers primarily to people in central, regional or local government engaged in the formulation, planning and delivery of outcomes for rural communities; but academics, trainers and others with a professional interest would also wish to access the resources.

¹⁰ Website addresses are shown in Annex B.

- 15. Key lessons from the Pathfinders which are intended to influence national and regional policy (the focus of this report) include the following.
 - (a) Sustainability in rural areas is a balance between potentially conflicting pressures: they include the requirements of current versus future residents, productivity versus "quality of life", conservation versus development. Current ways of doing business do not always support achievement of this balance: the management of spatial planning and the extent to which communities are, or are not, engaged in decisions are two examples. Private sector and third sector businesses and voluntary and community organisations all have distinctive roles and contributions.
 - (b) Effective partnership working is critical to securing optimal decisions, whether about strategic direction, funding plans or design of service delivery; and it can secure administrative savings. In particular, structured, integrated and robust governance is needed to achieve sustainable sub-regional rural development, which optimises the process of channelling investment into cost-effective and integrated programmes of activity, avoiding duplication and poor targeting.
 - (c) Enabling people in rural communities to access services is not solely a transport issue. Technology allows face-to-face communication to be achieved remotely, for example through transactional video-conferencing. Collecting and holding information which facilitates identification of access solutions on a community-oriented, rather than service-oriented, basis is critical: this involves matching current and prospective delivery options with what is known about community needs.
 - (d) There is no single model for developing and implementing access solutions. Devolution of investment decisions will usually depend on funding bodies having confidence that resources will be targeted effectively and in line with programme priorities. Regional or sub-regional access to services and transport policy frameworks is one way of achieving this. The development of local partnerships including a single partnership dealing with all rural access issues capable of effectively targeting devolved resources and taking informed decisions on interventions is essential if cost-effective delivery is to be ensured.

Community Broadplaces: an opportunity for rural delivery



Broadplace located at a local pub

Switch on Shropshire (SoS) was a £4.79 million project which provided communities with funding towards the installation of a broadband facility and computers in local venues, known as Broadplaces. A total of 35 Broadplaces were opened by the end of March 2007. Through a process of community engagement, the location of each Broadplace was determined locally. Communities chose locations such as a village hall, community centre, post office or local pub. Those communities that have engaged with SoS have begun to see the potential

of technology to bring a wider range of information, services, ideas, activities and opportunities to their doorstep. Working with SoS, the Shropshire Rural Pathfinder has been able to trial and evaluate a range of rural delivery pilots. For example:

- secure video conferencing links to support community learning and access to Citizens Advice Services:
- homework clubs for children who are bussed to school and cannot benefit from after-school clubs:
- "Customer First Point" services using the broadband connection to access information and to track user needs on Customer Relationship Management software in order to better target service delivery;
- transactional video conferencing to enable direct access to a range of services down the line.
- (e) Mainstreaming funding into rural proofed programmes is likely to be the most effective way of securing improvements to rural services and local economies. In doing so, the existence of the "rural premium" the additional costs of delivering certain services to certain groups needs to be recognised. Sustainable Community Strategies, as the basis for Local Development Frameworks and Local Area Agreements, need to be rural proofed.
- (f) Service standards ranging from national to local which are sensitive to the needs of rural areas are essential to underpin citizen engagement, service planning and design. Accessibility of services is central to this.
- (g) The willingness and capability to carry out effective rural proofing at different levels of government is variable and, on balance, insufficient.
- (h) Clear criteria and tools to support decisions on interventions are both desirable and achievable (see paragraph 17(d) below).

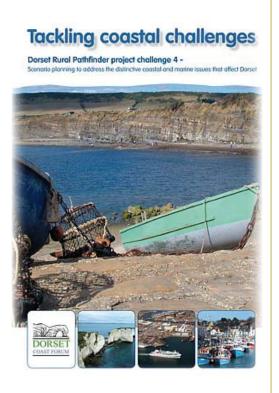
16. In addition, the Pathfinders have generated findings and conclusions in relation to specialised policy areas, including skills training, transport, local foods, biofuels, housing and coastal management issues. A fuller list is given at Part 4 of this report. In some cases, these findings have been secured through a deliberate process; as, for example, where the results of structured local engagement and consultation were used to provide practical input into a Defra consultation on proposed marine legislation. In others, the conclusions have been a by-product of the project; for example, where experience on the ground has confirmed an assumption, such as the critical role of local food groups in increasing procurement from local sources.

Tackling coastal challenges

The fourth challenge of the Dorset Pathfinder was to devise a programme to address the distinctive coastal and marine issues that affect Dorset. This was overseen by the Dorset Coast Forum, and involved the production of a series of scenarios, covering such issues as:

- rising sea levels and coastal erosion, and their impacts on coastal communities; and
- the tensions between the demands of a tourism-dependent coastal economy and resisting development on protected or other environmentally important sites.

The scenario approach is a proven method for collecting and collating contemporary information from a wide range of experts and interested parties. The collated information has been used to inform local, regional and national stakeholders and will assist in policy and decision-making processes.



Energy crops

The Humber Rural Pathfinder supported the installation of a wood fuel boiler and local fuel supply chain agreement at Luddington Primary School in North Lincolnshire.

This reduces the school's carbon emissions by 50 tonnes per annum and cuts its heating bills by around 50 per cent. The school's head-teacher sees this project as having valuable educational spin-offs, giving pupils a real practical insight into action to tackle climate change.

Pupils learning about climate change at Luddington Primary School, North Lincolnshire



Tools and resources

- 17. Deliverables from the Pathfinders have taken several, often inter-linked, forms, including:
 - (a) Toolkits of the "how to do" type for use by community groups, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other local authorities (including parish and town councils), covering such topics as: managing community halls; preparing parish and community plans; using such plans to influence service delivery.
 - (b) Resources to help users access information to solve problems including:
 - (i) an electronic parish library giving parish and town councils online access to information and best practice;
 - (ii) a 'how to' guide to producing welcome packs and a package of generic information for migrants (planned to be adopted regionally and in which central government departments are showing interest as a vehicle for delivering information to migrants).
 - (c) Improvements in joining up services, including:
 - (i) a single portal tailored to rural business needs for accessing business support services;
 - (ii) an integrated advisory service for land managers in an AONB;
 - (iii) taking opportunities to develop shared outcomes and targets with partners;
 - (iv) introducing common application forms for different funding streams;
 - (v) introducing technology which enables services from a wide range of providers to be transacted from a single access point.



Single entry point for business information

The Peak District Rural Delivery Pathfinder had the additional challenge of working across a regional boundary. It set out to provide a 'one way in' for business and communities to access information and services to support enterprise across the Peak District. Recognising that there was unmet demand for "information about where to find information" the Pathfinder developed an internet-based portal – Peak Directions, at www.peakdirections.co.uk – to provide a signposting service to organisations that support enterprise amongst businesses and communities in the area. In its first six months of operation, Peak Directions received some 15,500 unique 'hits'. The site brings together public, voluntary and community sector services which support enterprise. The service also contains news, a business directory and a document library. Peak Directions is fully accessible and is hosted by High Peak Community and Voluntary Support on behalf of the partnership.

An early example of a successful use is from Youth Enterprise East Midlands. They were struggling to set up a 'Dragons Den'-style enterprise competition in the Derbyshire Dales and High Peak for 16–18 year olds. Within four hours of being told about Peak Directions, their Youth Enterprise Co-ordinator had lined up business champions, public sector representatives and guest speakers, all of which were found on the site, enabling him to deliver a flagship event.

The Pathfinder is now developing links between Peak Directions and the new Business Link regional Knowledge Banks.

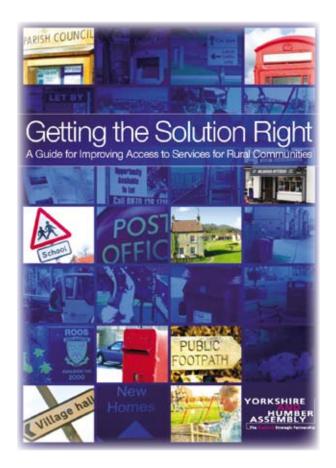
(d) Issue-based policy frameworks and intervention toolkits (or similar), which are used to test the effectiveness of proposed actions, so that funding and interventions are targeted at the right areas for the right purposes. For example, interventions in support of rural public or community transport would be viewed as part of the wider process of determining how best to ensure access to services, rather than as decisions about provision of a "service" in its own right.

Regional Rural Access to Services Framework and Toolkit

The Humber Rural Pathfinder has initiated work with regional partners to commission research to establish a regional rural access to services policy framework and an associated guide for practitioners and community representatives working in this field. The framework introduces the key policy contexts, assesses regional problems and opportunities, and develops a coherent approach to defining, assessing and reviewing access to services solutions. The Practitioner's Guide, or toolkit, presents this approach

in an easy-to-use, seven-step format applicable to any organisation (e.g. local authority, service deliverer or community organisation) and can be used to guide development of both transport and nontransport solutions. It promotes a clear methodology for assessing, analysing and considering a particular access challenge in order to help the practitioner deliver the most appropriate and costeffective solution for that problem. The Pathfinder has therefore led the way in developing a policy and delivery tool which "will provide both a helping hand and a common approach to ensure that the most important, appropriate and sustainable services are delivered to residents and communities in our region".

(Peter Box, Chair, Yorkshire and Humber Assembly)



Learning

- 18. The amount of learning is substantial. Commonly occurring generic points include:
 - (a) Effective partnership-building is not a quick win. Time is needed to build mutual understanding and trust. Capacity in partner organisations will also be limited and their ability to respond constrained accordingly. Multi-tiered local government adds to the challenge.
 - (b) Additional challenges created by cross boundary working. This requires partners to want to work in partnership for collective benefit, rather than feel they have to. Effective partnerships have greater influence, as their focus is on making changes to strategy, rather than on attempting to change process, which has limited success.

Peak District Partnership Protocol Agreement

The Peak District Rural Delivery Pathfinder successfully negotiated a Partnership Protocol Agreement with partners within the Peak District Rural Action Zone (RAZ) and associated networks and organisations, to simplify access to and join up the promotion of services that support enterprise growth across the RAZ. The protocol has 17 signatories. By signing, they agree to share economic information, and to jointly promote and deliver services that support enterprise across the Peak District. The protocol forms the 'umbrella' for joint working between East and West Midlands partners to further initiatives once the Pathfinder has come to a close, as well as act as the lead group for Peak Directions. Already partners have contributed to a series of Pathfinder Pocket Guides that provide local communities and businesses with information and contact details on different sectors. These Pocket Guides cover construction, tourism, engineering and manufacturing, creative industries, training, land-based businesses and social enterprise. Providing this information in hard copy format (as well as online) has improved access to information for businesses which lack fast broadband connections.

Current members of the Peak District Protocol Agreement











east midlands









development agency









- (c) Building a strategic relationship with partner organisations as opposed to a purely operational level, case-by-case relationship strengthens partnership working and is more likely to allow a serious discussion to develop about how funding can be deployed in support of strategic aims.
- (d) Short-term funding ("grants") needs to be carefully targeted and managed if it is to have any benefit beyond the duration of the funding. Ceasing a service or facility when the funding runs out risks breeding scepticism about the value and motives of interventions. Using grants as an investment in a sustainable solution rather than an operating subsidy improves the chances of securing mainstream support for the future.

- (e) Consulting and engaging with rural communities is an essential part of the process of securing optimal decisions on rural delivery. It adds value, but presents challenges. In particular:
 - (i) effective engagement can be resource-intensive, although there are models for efficient and effective consultation;
 - (ii) securing genuinely representative input from a community presents particular difficulties, especially from hard-to-reach groups and individuals;
 - (iii) local groups and individuals need time to respond, and their timescales will not always be the same as those of statutory authorities or well-organised NGOs;
 - (iv) talking to a representative cross-section of the community can achieve better results than sending out consultation papers;
 - (v) engagement can be damaged if the local authority makes prior assumptions about the likely results, or assumes that a particular group is actually representative of the breadth of opinion in a community.
- (f) Knowledge is available at local community level that is not visible to the local authority and other agencies, hence the importance of engagement. Communities often see their needs differently to the service planners, and will need to have influence over the engagement process. Yet the outputs for example, parish/community plans should be presented in terms that make sense to service planners and deliverers. A good delivery plan will combine the top-down and bottom-up inputs.

Value of using community knowledge

The West Durham Rural Pathfinder facilitated and enabled young people to have a stronger voice and influence over transport policy and service, particularly decisions to address the impacts of a policy change on transport to post-16 education provision. Young people in West Durham anticipated that the new policy would have a negative impact on remote rural areas and, using their local knowledge, questioned whether it had been adequately rural proofed. By working through the Pathfinder with the Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and their Participation Workers, local schools and other statutory and community groups, they have been able to influence key decision-makers (both public and private sector) in the county. Some positive change has resulted, but further work is needed to ensure the policy is fully rural proofed using a 'bottom-up' approach. The work illustrates the importance and value of effective partnership working through the LSPs, and establishing meaningful dialogue between policy-makers and service deliverers and their communities and service users. It also highlights the difficulties around this.

One example of this work is the Weardale Local Links, a school/ nursery transport project which provides a Nursery Taxibus to give access to Stanhope Nursery for toddlers and their parents. A 16-seater vehicle runs on a scheduled service contract managed by Durham County Council and co-ordinated through the local taxi operator with the support of local parents. Eligible passengers (parents and their children) book directly with the



Adults and young children alongside minibus, Stanhope, Durham Copyright: Natural England

operator to ensure seats on the service. The service is supported by a trained and police-checked escort who is also employed by the operator.

Added value, hazards and risks

- 19. Would these achievements have been delivered in any case without the Pathfinders? To some extent this is an evaluation question, but evidence indicates that:
 - (a) the Pathfinder brand, and the weight that the Government attached to it, helped to engage senior officers and members of local authorities, as well as regional partners, to an extent that would probably not have been achieved without it;
 - (b) where the Pathfinder was integrated into the Local Strategic Partnership, the LSP itself gained in confidence;
 - (c) activities were carried out to a higher standard than would otherwise have been the case, not least because of the extra resources generated by Pathfinder status;
 - (d) the central funding on the table from Defra encouraged other agencies to contribute additional resources.

A national pilot - Parish Plan Toolkit

The Hampshire Rural Pathfinder ran a series of inter-linked projects on community planning. One led to the development of a Parish Plan Toolkit, and this is now being piloted nationally by ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England), the Rural Community Councils and interested local authority partners. Based on good practice from across the country, the toolkit provides a consistent and robust model for preparing a Parish Plan and meets the needs of both the community and statutory sectors. The project has also made national use of the Parish Plan DVD produced by the Shropshire Pathfinder.



Community action through a Parish Plan enabled residents of Woodgreen, Hampshire to save their village shop

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Users can benefit from:

- a process for embedding rural service delivery, including community delivery of services into the mainstream LAA process, through the Local Strategic Partnership and Sustainable Community Strategies;
- consistent support to communities throughout the parish planning process;
- a process for increasing community awareness and involvement in local democratic processes, and stronger relationships between communities and elected members;
- a process which can be adapted and improved to reflect emerging good practice, changing needs and government policy.

The toolkit can be localised to achieve full community ownership, and is currently being tested by 850 communities across England.

- 20. Although the overall experience of people involved in the Pathfinders has been very positive, some constraints and frustrations were identified. The most common and/or significant were:
 - (a) Changes in government policies and public institutions created an uncertain context for decision-making. The restructuring of the Countryside Agency, English Nature and the Defra Rural Development Service into Natural England meant that the engagement of these bodies with the Pathfinders was not always as strong as it could have been;
 - (b) Access to data restrictions inhibited good joint working. Some were cultural, including a reluctance on the part of some partner authorities to release information to others. Others were contractual, such as restrictions on access to Ordnance Survey mapping products;
 - (c) In some cases there was a lack of willingness to co-operate between partners. The reasons for this varied, but included policy and performance management rigidity, lack of trust and a "not invented here" mentality;
 - (d) People with the right skills or expertise were not always available.
- 21. It is worth recording that there was no expectation at the outset of the Pathfinder programme that everything undertaken would be successful. The encouragement to innovate, coupled with the lack of strings attached to the funding, embedded risks into the programme. Across the Pathfinders there are examples of changing direction, stopping or replanning activities, and delays to implementation.¹¹ None of this invalidates the work undertaken: indeed, it adds to the learning.

¹¹ These are identified, with causes, in the Audit Commission report, *Rural Delivery Pathfinders Programme Evaluation – Phase 2*, May 2007. Available at www.idea.gov.uk/idk/aio/7854168

Part 2: The path forward

- 22. If the value of what has been achieved by the Pathfinders is to be maximised, there are three sets of actions to be taken:
 - (a) action to *mainstream the successes and good practices* generated by the Pathfinders, both within the Pathfinder authorities and more widely across local government in England;
 - (b) action, principally by central and regional government, to *improve the pathways for effective delivery* by building on the achievements of the Pathfinders and by responding to the contexts and policies that in some cases hindered those achievements;
 - (c) action to *capture the learning* from the Pathfinders and make it easily accessible to those who would benefit from applying it in the future.¹²
- 23. In responding, it is important to avoid creating a new raft of discrete initiatives. One of the obstacles to progress cited by some Pathfinders was the continually changing public sector institutional and funding landscape and the volume of central initiatives to be managed. The recommendations set out in this report are therefore linked as far as possible to opportunities already in place or in prospect.
- 24. The "closure" conferences by individual Pathfinders during 2007 provided an opportunity to address at a local or regional level many of the issues raised by these recommendations but further opportunities should be identified at regional level to share the learning.

Mainstreaming success and good practice

- 25. Although the Pathfinder funding provided by Defra ended in 2007, it was never the intention that the type of activity generated by the Pathfinders should cease.¹³ There is a consensus that the momentum generated by the projects should not be lost and that the improvement trend must continue. Some projects are planned to continue into post-Pathfinder development phases; in other cases the outputs of completed projects are already, or soon will be, available for adoption more widely.
- 26. There is no single prescription for sustaining the momentum because circumstances differ from place to place. What is common across the Pathfinders is the importance of two things.
- 27. First, to ensure that both completed projects and those continuing beyond 2007 are properly evaluated and the learning captured and made accessible. This is discussed further in paragraphs 62–76. Although the extent to which the innovative approaches developed have translated through into improved outcomes for communities and businesses themselves is not yet visible across all the work of the Pathfinders, there is evidence of tangible benefits, illustrated throughout the report.

¹² Recommendation 5 of the Audit Commission's Phase 2 evaluation report on the Pathfinders highlights the importance of effectively disseminating the learning. Available at www.idea.gov.uk/idk/aio/7854168.

¹³ See paragraph 15 of the *Pathfinder Prospectus* which states that the aim is "to seek to demonstrate progress" in delivering the various objectives.

Using transport and mobile provision to access services

Based on guidance in the Yorkshire and Humber Strategic Rural Transport Framework, the Humber Pathfinder has helped rural transport practitioners to develop 12 new and 10 enhanced (22 in all) demand-responsive Rural Community Transport routes. In the one-year trial period these routes delivered 16,713 passenger journeys at an average subsidy of £3.70 per passenger journey: well within guidance on maximum cost for service type/area profile in the Strategic Framework (£6.00 per journey). Of these routes, 13 have now been tendered and incorporated into East Riding of Yorkshire Council's supported rural bus network with Community Transport operators securing three-year contracts to provide them. The pathfinder has also developed mobile service solutions, delivering popular, cost effective and wide ranging advice sessions (on parenting, health issues, welfare etc) in small rural villages, through bringing advice workers and practitioners to communities on a converted low-floor bus.



Launch of the Humber Rural Pathfinder's mobile Rural Advice Project – Wetwang, East Riding of Yorkshire

Delivering services to remote communities

In Shropshire, services have been delivered to remote communities using a range of technologies in community-chosen venues. In particular, transactional video



conferencing has been used to deliver Citizens Advice Bureau and Council services. "Customer First" services have also been provided to rural communities in village halls or through the Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service outreach vehicle.

Shropshire Fire and Rescue outreach vehicle

- 28. Second, to **consolidate rural policy and delivery issues into the mainstream corporate frameworks of local authorities and partner organisations**. Real opportunities for doing this are presented by the Government's plans for:
 - (a) changing the way local government works, particularly through enhancing the role of local authorities as strategic leaders and place-shapers, as set out in the Local Government White Paper and taken forward in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007;¹⁴
 - (b) implementing EU rural development policy through the Rural Development Programme for England.

Much of the work in the Pathfinders illustrates how such opportunities can be put into practice.

(a) Local Government White Paper and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007

Community empowerment

29. The work of the Pathfinders on engaging rural communities provides evidence on good practice in mobilising community influence over what services are needed and how they are delivered. In implementing the frameworks eventually adopted by the Government for facilitating community ownership and management of assets and for extending the Community Call for Action process to a much wider range of local government matters, local authorities can usefully draw on the Pathfinders' experience on how to bring communities and local authorities, and their partners, closer together. Provided that the learning and case studies are made sufficiently accessible, communities themselves can identify good practice and use this as evidence when they experience difficulty in getting their local authority to listen to them.

Local Strategic Partnerships

- 30. The involvement of elected members in Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) executive and scrutiny roles has been strengthened. The LSP will be the forum for setting the strategic vision for an area, for translating that vision into the Sustainable Community Strategy, and for agreeing priorities for improvement in the LAA. In future, a greater degree of integration of cross-cutting and strategic issues and of spatial planning with service delivery using the Sustainable Community Strategy as the base document is envisaged. This offers significant opportunities for mainstreaming rural delivery issues into key plans.
- 31. With the changes to LAAs, the LSP becomes a key vehicle for ensuring that issues affecting rural areas are:
 - (a) fully incorporated into the process for developing LAAs and Local Development Frameworks, and implementing agreed plans as some of the Pathfinders have demonstrated; all partners including Rural Community Councils have a key role here;

¹⁴ Available at http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2007/20070028.htm

- (b) recognised and championed at the political level, since the Government proposes stronger involvement of elected members in both executive and scrutiny roles in the work of LSPs.
- 32. The Government has indicated that thematic partnerships should be kept to a manageable number. Pathfinders have adopted different approaches to the issue of rural-focussed partnerships: solutions range from full integration into the LSP to having a distinct rural partnership body.

Local Area Agreements

- 33. Local Area Agreements (LAAs) set out the priorities for a local area, agreed between central government and the local authority/Local Strategic Partnership, and other key partners at the local level. Responsible authorities are required, by section 106(2)(c)(i) of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, to have regard to the Sustainable Community Strategy, which sets out the key priorities for the area, when preparing their LAA. County and unitary authorities are under a duty to agree targets in the LAA with named partners, and named partners in turn are required to take account in their own work of relevant targets in the LAA. The list of named partners includes District Councils, Natural England, Environment Agency, RDAs, Joint Waste Disposal Authorities, and National Park Authorities, amongst others. The Area-Based Grant will be a non-ringfenced general grant. And local areas will be free to use the totality of their non-ringfenced funding as they see fit to support delivery of local, regional and national priorities. The challenge for rural delivery will be to ensure that the smaller number of agreed targets allowed in LAAs in future will also support solutions that work for rural areas, where the needs may be the same as for urban areas but delivery options may be very different.
- 34. Designing LAAs which effectively address issues in rural areas will be challenging. Pathfinders have had varying success in influencing the LAA processes, with challenges particularly in counties where a more urban focus to economic development has emerged and where cross boundary working is taking place. The work of the Pathfinders in using evidence from a variety of sources ranging from formal studies to views expressed by community groups rather than relying primarily on data from individual services or departments, demonstrates what is necessary if a cross-cutting and programmatic approach is to be secured. Yet, it is clear that those charged with drawing up LAAs and other elements of the strategic framework would benefit from more support in how to "rural proof" plans. This might be a suitable topic for the mutual support between local authorities, either through the rural network recommended in paragraph 75 or through the capacity-building activities of the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships (see paragraphs 36–37).

Using LAAs to improve environmental management

Local authorities in the Fens Rural Partnership area are piloting the use of Local Area Agreements to improve the management of the Fens environment for conservation and as a socio-economic asset for the East of England region. Public sector intervention has been seen as fragmented: local authorities deal with their "patch" of the Fens (the area spans four counties, seven districts and two regions) and the policies and funding of central government and its agencies tend to flow through separate conservation, social or economic programmes. Cambridgeshire, Lincolnshire, Norfolk and Peterborough Councils have now adopted a shared outcome in their LAAs backed up by:

- a delivery plan with interventions and targets; and
- a joint-area group established to lead on implementation and reporting as part of the LAA process.

This initiative is showing how core Defra interests can be incorporated in LAAs. It is also exploring the limits of LAAs by testing shared outcomes and targets that cross county and regional boundaries in line with the emerging principles of Multi-Area Agreements (see paragraph 35 below).



Fens landscape

Multi-Area Agreements

35. Although much of the impetus behind the development of Multi-Area Agreements (MAAs) comes from the city region concept, this can benefit rural areas attached to city regions. There is also no reason why this approach should not be adopted in sub-regional partnerships with a rural focus. An MAA can strengthen cross-boundary working and increase flexibility in determining the nature of interventions in the sub-region.

Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships

- 36. As part of the national improvement strategy being developed following the Local Government White Paper, ¹⁵ Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships (RIEPs) will have the key role in co-ordinating and focussing capacity building and performance improvement support from central government. Regional plans will be bottom-up, informed by the priorities of local authorities in the region.
- 37. It will be for authorities in rural areas to identify any particular capacity building initiatives they might wish to develop within the RIEP strategy. The proposed National Rural Network outlined at paragraphs 72–76 could provide a national dimension to this capacity-building activity for rural practitioners.

Parish and town councils

- 38. The size, performance and effectiveness of parish and town councils varies across the country. The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (and the Local Government White Paper 2006) aim for new community empowerment roles for parish councils. The goal is to improve the performance of all parish and town councils.
- 39. The Act requires regular reviews of parish and town councils to ensure the council meets the needs of the local electorate by being effective and reflects the community's identity and interests. The Act allows for grouping orders to brigade smaller councils into larger groups, which may increase effectiveness by allowing local devolvement of services and increased influence on service providers. In addition, the Act grants parish and town councils the right to rename themselves "village, community or neighbourhood councils". This may build more community involvement and sense of place.
- 40. The Act grants the power of well-being. A parish or town council is eligible if the council meets the conditions prescribed by the Secretary of State. The detailed guidance granting this power is due in mid 2008. The power of well-being will allow parish and town councils to use locally raised precepts to improve local conditions not currently legislated for, such as broadband provision or funding for a community-owned shop.

(b) Rural Development Programme for England

41. Although effective mainstreaming should target mainstream funding to rural areas where it is needed, there is some central funding explicitly for meeting rural needs. In particular, the EU Rural Development Regulation provides for member states to target funds in this way. So, although the EU regulation tightly defines the purposes to which funding can be put, it can be used in parallel with mainstreamed funding to create a coherent overall programme of rural delivery interventions.

¹⁵ See paragraphs 6.60–6.63 of the White Paper. Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships (RIEPs) will be based on merging existing regional improvement partnerships with Regional Centres of Excellence. The RIEPs will develop strategies for channelling central support funding to capacity-building, influenced by the priorities of constituent local authorities.

- 42. The new Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) was approved by the European Commission in December 2007. The majority of RDPE resources will be used to support the environmental performance of farmers and other land managers, with funding being managed by Natural England and the Forestry Commission. However, there will be £550 million which will be disseminated throughout all rural England by RDAs (plus £50 million specifically for Cornwall), primarily to support a designated range of activities by land based and other rural businesses.
- 43. In anticipation of programme approval by the EC, RDAs worked throughout 2007 to put delivery mechanisms for the RDPE in place. Consultations, which began in 2006, took place in each region with a cross section of partners, including local authorities. Government Offices co-ordinated the consultation work, which has resulted in the drafting of a series of RDPE Regional Implementation Plans (RIPs). Those consultations centred on a smaller anticipated budget than is now available via RDAs. However, much of the additional funding under the voluntary modulation arrangements will be to assist the livestock sector as required by Defra Ministers.
- 44. A minimum of £105 million from the RDA's £600 million of the RDPE funding is to be spent via the Leader approach, which is designed to enable local community and business involvement in rural development in specific areas, delivered via broad public—private partnerships called Local Actions Groups (LAGs). In many cases, local authorities will be leading partners, bringing their experience of community engagement and community-led regeneration, and ensuring that community ambitions are recognised in LAAs and other intervention plans.
- 45. Successful development and delivery of the RIPs for the RDPE depends on effective partnerships. Delivery partners for RDPE (RDAs, Natural England and the Forestry Commission) will work closely with sub-regional partnerships, (particularly for Axis 1 and 3 activity) and this aspiration is reflected in the RDPE governance arrangements which the delivery partners are currently putting in place in each region, in consultation with, and supported by, their Government Offices. The issue of devolving decision-making below the regional level is discussed in paragraphs 58–61.

Improving the delivery pathways

- 46. The record of the Pathfinders has principally been one of successful achievement and learning. At the same time, their experiences have identified opportunities for improving the routes to rural delivery, including addressing obstacles where they exist. The main generic ones have been identified in paragraph 18 above.¹⁶
- 47. Some of these obstacles have their origins in attitudes rather than policy instruments or constraints. Changing such attitudes depends in large measure on the willingness of people and organisations to respond positively both to policy signals from government and to demonstrated successes achieved by others. Good partnership working does not happen simply by bringing organisations around a table: a shared willingness to co-operate is also needed, and the Pathfinders have demonstrated the truth of this.

¹⁶ A selective list of issues on specialised policy areas is given in Part 4.

Access to services: cross border issues

The Shropshire Rural Pathfinder team has been working with rural communities to determine whether current service provision could be improved. One approach has been to hold "Parish Cluster" events where residents in neighbouring parishes join service providers to discuss the key concerns raised in parish plans and identify solutions. Events at Bucknell and Llanymynech both identified cross border issues. The cluster event held at Llanymynech – where the parish straddles the Shropshire–Powys border – identified a number of cross border issues. Results include:

- Customer Services officers from Shropshire and Powys County Councils discussed how to adopt a collaborative approach in responding to queries.
- Public transport teams from both authorities plan to work together to disseminate information and will also look into the possibility of running a joint initiative on safer routes to school.
- As some residents felt that the parish's cross border location had caused problems for the emergency services, the possibility of producing cards with grid references for every property is being considered.
- Evidence collected from the event enabled Shropshire County Council to be a signatory and active supporter of a "Memorandum of Understanding on Cross Border Collaboration" seeking joint action on policy development and service delivery.



Local parish cluster event, Bucknell, South Shropshire

- 48. Other obstacles arise from current government policies. The fact that a policy was perceived as an obstacle by a Pathfinder does not mean that the underlying policy is wrong. However, feedback about the impact of policies on the ground is an essential element of good policy-making, and some obstacles identified by the Pathfinders have already been acknowledged by central government.¹⁷
- 49. It is recommended that the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) with the help of Defra should take the lead in initiating specific action, discussed below, to address concerns about:
 - (a) rural proofing;
 - (b) silo working and joining-up;
 - (c) devolving decision-making.

Rural proofing

- 50. Concern exists among the Pathfinders that central government continues not to rural proof its policies and programmes effectively, despite the commitment given in the 2000 Rural White Paper. This concern was reflected in the 2007 monitoring report¹⁸ from the CRC, which concluded that the Government's commitment to rural proofing "is not being delivered consistently or systematically across departments or policy areas". On the other hand, at regional level, it was reported that "GOs have generally taken a more proactive role and have supported the Regional Rural Affairs Forums to undertake rural proofing of the various regional strategies as and when this has been appropriate". The factors identified by the Commission which impede widespread and effective rural proofing have been known for some time. That they persist, despite efforts by Defra and the Cabinet Office to encourage better practice, suggests that there is no quick fix.
- At the same time, there is some confusion about what is meant by "rural proofing". The concept implies there is something distinctive about rural areas which risks being ignored if policies and programmes are not explicitly examined, and modified if necessary, to ensure they will not unfairly disadvantage rural areas when compared to urban communities. Hence the concerns that have emerged about the likely trend towards "mainstreaming" rural issues into LAAs and other plans. However, some of the Pathfinder work suggests that this may be looking the wrong way through the telescope. Rather than seek to defend rural interests by basing policies on rural needs, the argument is that rural areas themselves make a positive contribution to the overall health economic, environmental, social - of an area, and so should benefit from interventions directed at improving this overall health. This does not set aside the need for techniques to ensure that interventions work in rural as well as urban areas, since the delivery solutions may differ between the two. In addition, recognising the existence of the "rural premium" in costing service delivery, confirmed by the Pathfinders, is crucial when resource allocation decisions are driven in large measure by an efficiency agenda. However, the analysis does suggest that the concept of rural proofing, and the tools applied to it, could usefully be reviewed and refreshed. There is considerable support, within the Pathfinders and more widely, for the Commission for Rural Communities to undertake such work. In the 2007 Monitoring Report, the CRC acknowledge that "the process of rural proofing needs reviewing" and it "will be considering how best to reform the process".

¹⁷ For example, the difficulties in data sharing are acknowledged at para 5.30 of the Local Government White Paper.

Monitoring Rural Proofing 2007, available at http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/events/stillaneedtostrengthene28098ruralproofinge28099ofgovernmentpolicy

- 52. That said, the Pathfinders have shown what can be achieved if rural delivery issues are given prominence and impetus within a local authority or sub-region. This can be supported by the development of local rural proofing policies and practices, underpinned by service standards which ensure that rural people are not unfairly disadvantaged.¹⁹ On the basis that mainstreaming rural issues into LAAs is seen as the way forward across all authorities whose jurisdiction includes rural communities, then it follows that Defra's rural proofing efforts would most usefully be channelled into ensuring that central government guidance on LAAs supports the ambitions of those local authorities who aim to serve well their rural communities. In particular, the measurement of the core set of 200 national indicators will need to be carried out with rural as well as urban needs in mind. That should involve the application, where possible and appropriate, of the rural/urban definition. With their experience of the LAA process to date, their own rural proofing remit and their understanding of their own regions, the Government Offices should provide an invaluable source of information and expertise in helping Defra deliver this objective.²⁰
- 53. Since the Government's aim is that the core indicators should normally be outcome measures (rather than output measures), there will be challenges for local authorities and their partners to design delivery measures that deliver those outcomes. But the hands of rural communities and their advocates will be strengthened if the outcome indicators themselves, and the service standards intended to deliver the outcomes, have been rural proofed. Specific rural targets will not necessarily be the best approach. What is important is that the outcome indicators should facilitate local 'tailoring' of mainstream funding, such as that coming through RDAs, where this is needed to achieve them. This would be in line with the notion of "place shaping" and "community-proofing", under which national policies are tailored to local circumstances, whether rural or urban.²¹

 $^{^{19}}$ A good example of a service standard which disadvantages rural communities is one in which an authority can close all its rural libraries yet still meet the target for x% of its population living within y miles of a library.

²⁰ Recommendation 1 of the Audit Commission's Phase 2 evaluation report on the Pathfinders highlights the importance of rural proofing.

²¹ This policy was promoted by David Miliband when he was Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Rural proofing public service delivery

The Lancashire Rural Pathfinder developed a model to ensure the consistent and robust rural proofing of public service delivery throughout the county. This involved:

- Completing a Rural Proofing Report highlighting the implications for service managers across the Lancashire Local Area Agreement. Their buy-in was found to be crucial in securing commitment and accountability;
- Creating and implementing a rural tagging and targeting framework for the Local Area Agreement, with the aim of ensuring that decisions on mainstream funding were consistent with equitable accessibility of services to urban and rural consumers;
- Engaging communities to road-test assumptions about priorities and service design.

The Pathfinder reached the following conclusions for effective rural proofing:

- Service 'catchments' that relate to how consumers engage with and access services need to be recognised and understood by service delivery planners and policy makers

 these cross administrative boundaries.
- Sustainable Community Strategies (as the bedrock of Local Public Service Agreements (LPSAs) and Local Area Agreements) must be effectively rural proofed; and LPSAs and LAAs themselves must include a targeting and monitoring framework appropriate to the needs of the rural socially excluded as well as the urban. There is a need to develop an approach to creation of locally relevant 'service standards'.
- Communities need to be effectively involved in planning and delivery of services.



Joining-up

54. The issue of "silo working" – at all levels of government – was cited as a continuing barrier to joining-up services at ground level. It needs to be noted that this view was not universally held across the Pathfinders, and that this is a problem not confined to delivery of services in rural areas.

55. Joining-up is a process that appears to be evolutionary. Specific measures – such as the changes to the Business Link service implemented following the transfer of responsibility from DTI to RDAs – are expected to show improvements over time. Experience from the Pathfinders shows that local authorities themselves are not immune from silo working. However, strong corporate management from the top, coupled with willingness to engage with communities and look at delivery in terms of community needs rather than service provision (a particular Pathfinder theme), gives grounds for optimism.

Integrated environmental advice and support to land managers

The Hampshire Rural Pathfinder project in the North Wessex Downs AONB set out to improve the integration of environmental advice and support to land managers. This required the co-ordination of advisors and agencies and the development of systems that provide guidance for land management. Three projects were piloted:



North Wessex Downs AONB, Hampshire Reproduced with kind permission of Des Hobson, Hampshire County Council

- Undertaking joint visits to farmers;
- Developing a web-based management plan for the North Wessex Downs AONB;
 and
- Developing guidance on integrated land management for chalk downland and archaeology.

While joint visits were successful in integrating advice, it was clear that the main environmental agencies did not have the capacity to mainstream the practice. However, the independent advisory sector does possess both the skills and willingness to do so. Feedback on this and on the guidance mechanisms piloted indicate enthusiasm and support. Key recommendations to government include:

- Changing national guidance for AONB management plans;
- National support and funding to develop the work in the North Wessex Downs;
 and
- Reducing barriers to sharing public sector information.

56. The Pathfinders addressed the joining-up issue in a variety of ways (see paragraph 17). This demonstrates that much of the joining-up effort needs to be made, not only at national and regional level, but also at sub-regional and local levels, and is often most suitably carried out there. However, central government could facilitate a focus on outcomes and community needs, rather than on the performance of individual services, by ensuring that all PSA targets and tasking frameworks meet the standard achieved by the best of being genuinely cross-cutting. And, at the regional level, the Government Offices have a crucial brokerage and bridging role in joining up plans and programmes to suit the circumstances of individual regions.

57. With one exception (see box below), this report makes no recommendation for new action on this point. The challenges are well-documented and the importance of joining up well understood. Further sustained effort is what is required, with Defra and the Commission for Rural Communities keeping up the pressure.

Testing a new approach to sustainable land managment in the wider countryside

The Hampshire Rural Pathfinder included a project which was unusual in that it set out to pilot an initiative already developed by a national body – Natural England – for the use of Local Land Management Frameworks (LLMFs)²² as a practical means of achieving the integrated delivery of public interventions relating to land management across a defined area (not tied to administrative boundaries). In protected landscape areas, National Park and AONB management plans can provide this degree of integration, but no such mechanism existed outside the protected areas until the LLMF was conceived. If the pilot proves successful, this report recommends that

Defra should explore with the agencies making up the "Defra family" the scope for ensuring that their field operations are delivered in conformity with LLMFs. Of particular significance is the fact that LLMFs are seen as an effective way of delivering one of the Pathfinder programme's key objectives, that of achieving greater visibility of, and accountability therefore for, public spending in rural areas.



High quality farmland management is essential for producing public benefits to the countryside

²² Local Land Management Frameworks (LLMF) are a relatively new initiative. They seek to complement and draw together existing strategies by taking their objectives, policies and targets and applying these to the management of the land in a given locality in a way that reflects national and local needs (including the views of young people) and local character and identity.

Devolution

58. Although not universal, there was a strongly held view in some Pathfinders that more could have been done to devolve resources and decision-making. Such a view was particularly strong in relation to funding streams managed by some RDAs, including the "single pot" and, in future, the economic and social funding under the RDPE.

Devolution in practice – the Peak District Rural Action Zone

Local delivery is essential to ensure effective services and project delivery. The Peak District Rural Action Zone (RAZ) covers the rural localities within West Derbyshire and North East Staffordshire. It is the *only* rural designation in the sub region solely dedicated to improving economic opportunities and services for rural communities. It has delegated funding from both regional and sub-regional levels to enable it to achieve this goal. As such, the RAZ is an essential counterweight to urban-focused economic development interest in some county and regional level agendas. The Pathfinder has been used to review current mechanisms in the RAZ with a view to further enhancing rural delivery.



Agricultural Business Centre, Bakewell – home of the Peak District rural hub

59. However, under current legislation, RDAs are accountable for their spending and must in most cases have the final say about how their funds are used and the mechanisms for allocating them. Therefore, scope for devolving funding and decision-making is limited. RDPE funds are governed by strict rules laid down in European legislation. RDAs are engaging with a wide section of their region, including sub-regional partners, local authorities and local community representatives to agree priorities for the region.

- 60. That said, there have been concerns among some although not all Pathfinders that RDAs, and other RDPE delivery partners, have not taken the opportunity of the RDPE to consult and engage with all local authorities and other sub-regional partners on the development of regional implementation plans. The reasons for this are speculative in the absence of a detailed survey and it should be noted that the prescribed process for RIP preparation did include a consultation phase.
- 61. The local government agenda is designed to enhance the leadership role of local authorities and secure improvements in their performance. HM Treasury's Review of subnational economic development and regeneration²³ proposed a number of reforms aimed at ensuring that local areas can play a greater strategic role in tackling the challenges they face. In particular, the review proposed that local authorities and sub-regions be given greater autonomy in the allocation and management of regional funds²⁴ (although legislation will be required to implement this). The RDAs will provide capacity support for local authorities to enable them to take advantage of such opportunities and are keen to see the Treasury's review recommendations implemented. Meanwhile RDAs are effectively delegating decisionmaking to LAGs in respect of the element of RDPE which is being delivered through the Leader approach.

Devolution in practice – Lancashire Economic Partnership

The North West Development Agency has invested £1.8 million to help deliver the Lancashire Rural Pathfinder project. Funding was awarded to the Lancashire Economic Partnership for 'Pathfinder in Practice', a pilot project to improve access to local

services by developing Community Resource Centres (CRCs) or small scale service hubs in ten rural areas across the county. In addition to this, a Rural Premium Fund is helping to encourage a variety of key service providers, including Primary Care Trusts, social services, tourist information and children's centres, to locate to the CRCs.

Hornby Community Resource Centre, Lancashire – "Bringing services to the people"



²³ http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk./media/9/5/subnational_econ_review170707.pdf

²⁴ Review of sub-national economic development and regeneration, paragraph 6.115 (page 98).

Accessing the learning

- 62. Individual Pathfinders have views and plans about disseminating the results and the learning from their projects, including:
 - (a) dissemination through corporate communications, local, regional and national websites, and partnerships;
 - (b) setting up demonstrations, or holding conferences;
 - (c) pilots to test out new delivery structures developed through Pathfinder trials;
 - (d) securing funding for facilitators to carry forward specific pieces of consolidation work.
- 63. Not all project outputs have the same learning status: some have been road-tested and shown to work successfully, whereas others are essentially theoretical approaches, not yet fully operated and evaluated. There is no one-size-fits-all approach.
- 64. In deciding how best to capture and design access to the learning, judgements are needed about the nature and motivations of the potential users. Specifically, users may be searching for information about one or more of the following:
 - (a) the collective experience of the Pathfinders;
 - (b) the experience of the Pathfinder in a particular region;
 - (c) setting up and operating effective partnerships and related governance arrangements;
 - (d) approaches to generic issues, such as how to secure really effective engagement of rural communities;
 - (e) specific topics, such as parish and community planning, affordable housing, coastal management.

Such users will not necessarily want to limit themselves to referring only to material within their own sub-region or region.

65. This analysis points to a need to manage the Pathfinder learning at two levels: by each Pathfinder and through a national-level signposting service.

Individual Pathfinder level

- 66. At the individual Pathfinder level, the key is to try to ensure that interested users are able to access the Pathfinder material even if their starting point is a different knowledge resource. This can be achieved by:
 - (a) identifying relevant knowledge resources usually websites²⁵ and arranging for a link from that resource to the relevant part of the Pathfinder website. It will be helpful if the Pathfinder websites themselves can be structured so that access to the

²⁵ Examples at the national level are: IDeA, Improvement Network, New Local Government Network, Ruralnet UK, ACRE, National Association of Local Councils, Commission for Rural Communities, the resources sites of universities with rural studies departments.

- underlying documentation can be maintained through local authority websites, even after the Pathfinder portal ceases to be managed actively;
- (b) promoting the results of the Pathfinder to colleagues and stakeholders by whatever channels are available, such as generic regional networks, national/regional subject-based networks, circulars and journals. The outcome reports produced by the individual Pathfinders are valuable promotional tools. Government Offices could be helpful in identifying opportunities for Pathfinder authorities to share the learning.

National level

- 67. At the national level, the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) already has a "Rural Knowledge" section on its website. Although views on its effectiveness are mixed, it functions as a portal to a range of relevant resources. It would be consistent with IDeA's role as the central disseminator of good practice for local government to commit a modest amount of funding to ensuring that the links to the learning from the Pathfinders are mainstreamed into relevant web pages not necessarily solely "rural" ones thus providing a more focussed set of links than the dedicated Pathfinder page which exists at present. The process recommended at paragraph 66(a) will facilitate this work.
- 68. The Local Government Association Rural Commission is an established forum for discussion of issues relevant to local authorities with interests in rural affairs. A presentation and outline action plan for promoting the work of the Pathfinders could usefully be offered by one or more of the Pathfinder authorities as an agenda item for a future Rural Commission meeting.
- 69. The Audit Commission has noted that communicating innovative practices around the local government sector is challenging. A 2007 report²⁶ commented: "Few authorities are able to access examples of successful innovation, while many innovators lack mechanisms for sharing experience". If the Pathfinders can demonstrate excellence in communicating the learning, there is a clear benefit to local government beyond the rural practitioner community.

Defra and Government Offices

70. It is also challenging to identify ways of capturing the informal learning acquired within Defra and the GOs about how local government works, and vice versa. Defra and the GOs engage with local government generally, not just rural authorities, across a range of issues, and some aspects of the Pathfinder learning are transferable beyond rural issues. For example, Defra's lead responsibility for responding to climate change will necessarily involve local government as a key player, not least because of the direct interface between local authorities and their populations.

²⁶ Audit Commission, Seeing the Light – Innovation in Public Services, May 2007 available at: http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/reports/NATIONAL-REPORT.asp?CategoryID=&ProdID=687E80A7-C07E-4d2e-9197-D70A9F271463

71. This report, and the background material assembled to support its preparation, demonstrates the breadth of solutions developed by the Pathfinders. The material is available in Defra, although not in a particularly digestible form. This report recommends that Defra and the GOs consider how the lessons from the Pathfinder experience that are relevant to its other responsibilities which involve local government can be identified and made readily accessible. This is a potentially important exercise in knowledge management which, if carefully handled, could make a significant practical contribution to raising Defra's and the GOs' game as learning organisations.

A national support network

- 72. A consequence of the Pathfinder programme has been the establishment of what is, in effect, a national network of the Pathfinder leads and key partners coming together from time to time to share experience and to engage directly with Defra. The consensus, with some reservations, is that these meetings have been valuable. The ending of the formal Pathfinder programme implies the discontinuation of these meetings in their present form, although Defra is keen that the benefits available from this network should continue to be available.
- 73. Regional Rural Affairs Forums, through their Chairs and the annual conference, have a structured programme of meetings with Defra Ministers. And the Leader groups network provides a vehicle for exchanging experience and know-how. However, neither of these networks is wholly suitable for policy and delivery practitioners from the various tiers of government to engage systematically with each other. Government Offices have opportunities for encouraging formal and informal networks, for example through their responsibilities for supporting Regional Rural Affairs Forums and through their regular meetings with local authority chief executives; but it seems very unlikely that the GOs would have the capacity to take on specific new rural functions. Central government's dedicated capacity, including that of its agencies and Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs), for work on rural affairs has been reducing significantly, and an effective informed rural voice within government will be increasingly dependent on input from external rural practitioners.
- 74. Again, there is an opportunity that could contribute to a way forward. The EU Rural Development Regulation requires the establishment of a National Rural Network, with the following functions:
 - (a) the identification and analysis of good transferable practices and the provision of information about them;
 - (b) the organisation of exchanges of experience and know-how, including on administrative topics and procedures;
 - (c) the preparation of training programmes for local action groups in the building process;
 - (d) technical assistance for inter-territorial and transnational co-operation.

- 75. Defra is developing detailed proposals on how this network might be operated in the UK. This report recommends that serious consideration is given to using the England component of the network as a vehicle for sustaining a national network for rural delivery, involving local government representatives as well as those organisations RDAs, Natural England and the Forestry Commission charged with overall delivery of the RDPE. The Commission for Rural Communities has been invited to set up and manage the network.
- 76. As part of its function, and subject to further work on the development of the network, the network might facilitate loans of staff with relevant Pathfinder experience to other authorities as a means of developing a group of rural delivery specialists within the local government community. This would enable the network to extend its remit beyond delivery of the RDPE.

Part 3: Next steps

- 77. This report has yielded a series of recommended actions for consideration by local, regional and national bodies. These arise following more than two years of intensive experimenting in numerous aspects of rural delivery under the Pathfinder programme.
- 78. On the evidence of stakeholder feedback, as well as the views of the Pathfinders themselves, there is widespread support for taking steps to ensure that the impetus for improvement generated by the programme is not dissipated.
- 79. If accepted, the recommendations in this report make up a package which should sustain the momentum for improvement over the medium to long term. In the short term, there will be value in detailed discussion of the recommendations and other issues highlighted in the report, involving all of the players at local, regional and national level, with a view to securing commitments to a more precise action plan from those involved. This report therefore recommends that Defra facilitate engagement with key stakeholders either directly as part of its continuing work on maintaining dialogue with rural interests, or indirectly through a body such as the Commission for Rural Communities or the Local Government Association.

Recommendations

80. The following recommendations for action – which are about seizing existing opportunities rather than proposing new initiatives – are spread across all tiers of government and agencies.

Pathfinder authorities

- 81. Each Pathfinder authority should:
 - (a) ensure that completed projects and those continuing beyond 2007 are properly evaluated and the learning captured;
 - (b) make the learning and case studies easily accessible to those who would benefit from using them in the future this will include other local authorities (not just those within their region);
 - (c) promote their own achievements, particularly locally and regionally, including making use of the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships as a vehicle for sharing good practice and building rural delivery capacity across local government.

Local government

- 82. Local government across England whose jurisdiction includes rural communities should develop and sustain a leadership role political and managerial in rural delivery, by:
 - (a) drawing on the learning and achievements of the Pathfinders and recognising that innovation and managed risk-taking can be the key to finding the best delivery options;
 - (b) making full use of the changes set out in the 2006 Local Government White Paper and the subsequent legislation and guidance, including impacts of opportunities and challenges posed in some areas by local government restructuring;

- (c) implementing the reforms from the Review of sub-national economic development and regeneration. In particular, the plans for enhancing the roles of local authorities as strategic leaders and place-shapers, working through the strengthened Local Strategic Partnerships and Local Area Agreements with the full involvement of elected members;
- (d) ensuring they are fully engaged in rural local partnerships and regional mechanisms on which decisions on funding are taken, such as the Rural Development Programme for England.

Government Offices

- 83. Government Offices have a pivotal role in brokering constructive relationships between central and local government, RDAs and others operating at the regional level, and in supporting delivery of central priorities across their areas. They should:
 - (a) continue to keep up the pressure for, and contribute to, joined-up and coherent policies and programmes from central government and to eliminate unhelpful 'silo working' wherever possible;
 - (b) support local authorities to learn from one another and to adopt and develop tried and tested good practice in rural delivery, and support Pathfinder authorities to share their learning regionally;
 - (c) provide the means by which local authorities can deliver important messages on learning and good practice to central government departments.

CRC, IDeA and Defra

- 84. At national level:
 - (a) the **Commission for Rural Communities** should consider a review of the aims and methods of rural proofing, at national, regional and sub-regional levels. This should include a specific intention of supporting local authorities seeking to ensure rural communities' needs are addressed through mainstream programmes;
 - (b) the **Commission for Rural Communities** should hold other relevant government departments and agencies to account to act on the findings, detailed in the main report, that certain policies and practices can hinder rather than facilitate delivery of intended outcomes. This will include initiating specific action to address concerns about rural proofing, silo-working and devolution, and taking into account the list of policy-specific learning points in Part 4;
 - (c) the **Improvement and Development Agency** should co-ordinate the "mainstreaming" of the Pathfinder learning into the web-enabled, topic-based guidance and case study material which it manages, and encourage other website owners to do the same.

Defra took the lead in establishing the Pathfinder programme and has the key role in setting the direction of future travel. It should:

- (d) ensure that central government guidance on Local Area Agreements supports local authorities seeking to serve well their rural communities. In particular, the measurement of the core set of 200 national indicators will need to be carried out with rural as well as urban needs in mind;
- (e) if the pilot on Local Land Management Frameworks proves successful, explore with the agencies making up the "Defra family" particularly the Environment Agency, Natural England, and the Rural Payments Agency the scope for ensuring that their field operations are delivered in conformity with the integrated approach that LLMFs are designed to achieve;
- (f) encourage devolved decision-making by initiating a dialogue between Regional Development Agencies and local and other parts of government to help RDAs build capacity with local authorities, and to form a shared view of the conditions affecting rural areas that would give RDAs the confidence to devolve funding decisions to subregional and local mechanisms;
- (g) ensure that the improved understanding of, and relationships with, local government it has gained are not lost when the Pathfinder programme closes this should include using local authority representatives engaged on the Pathfinder programme as a 'sounding board' for relevant policy development;
- (h) consider the case for a more formal relationship with local authorities, through a Defra/local government rural policy group, or similar body;
- (i) lead consideration, with the Commission for Rural Communities, of how to maintain a national network for rural policy and delivery practitioners, including assessing the scope for using the National Rural Network to be established under the EU Rural Development Regulation;
- (j) facilitate engagement with key stakeholders with a view to securing commitments to a more precise action plan to follow on from this report, aiming for it to be agreed and in place by 1 April 2008.

Part 4: Policy-specific learning points from Pathfinders for referral to Central Government Policy Departments

(See paragraph 16 of the report)

85. The table below identifies the principal issues that arose across the Pathfinder programme, which relate to a specialised policy area. It is not intended as a summary of all the issues and learning points from the programme which are addressed to central government – that is provided in Parts 1 and 2 of the report.

POLICY AREA	CONCLUSION
Advice services	Greater integration of advice and support to land managers can deliver improved services.
AONBs	Flexibility needs to be built into policy on AONBs as Natural England takes shape, if it is to be able to support the delivery of AONB policies and management plans that reflect the priorities and distinctive landscapes and circumstances of each AONB. An approach that is too top-down will lead to missed opportunities. The AONB funding model could usefully be revisited in the light of the experience of the Pathfinders.
Coastal management	Sub-regional coastal partnerships can engage the range of stakeholders necessary for exploring and resolving complex policy issues, and local partnerships can work with communities to implement change in a managed way. Their roles could usefully be recognised in the Marine Bill. Defra's communication of national coastal policy has had weaknesses.
Community engagement	Providing opportunities to establish closer links and dialogue between service providers and local communities can be a very constructive and positive mechanism to respond appropriately to local needs and priorities if well facilitated. The benefits of community engagement should be recognised and the principles adopted where possible.
Cross border	Residents living on county borders have particular issues in accessing the range of services they require and will not always look within the county to access the services they need. Particular efforts are required within these communities to enable effective delivery across administrative boundaries.
Economic	A key blockage to improving economic performance is that rural towns are perceived by businesses as: lacking workspace and broadband, suffering from excessive development control, restricting inward migration because of high house prices, and generally poor places to do business in.
Energy	Generic business advisers have limited understanding of renewable energy issues and of how they might be proactive in encouraging businesses to meet sustainable development and climate change challenges.

POLICY AREA	CONCLUSION
Energy crops	Localised supply chain arrangements – which reduce transport requirements – are needed for maximum impact in securing emissions reductions. Stability of supply of crops is important. Proposals to develop supply chains in the public sector based on energy crops should be subject to a sustainability appraisal (e.g. to assess transport and land use impacts).
	There is widespread confusion over government policy on biofuels. National guidance for people planning to further develop local biofuel supply and procurements would be valuable. A reduction in fuel duty could do much to kick-start industry.
Farm wastes	The aim was to identify and address planning rules obstacles to the efficient management of farm wastes by promoting "permitted development rights" locally and nationally, the latter through an amendment to relevant legislation. Collecting data to support the case has been problematic.
Government funding	There is too little of the pooling of funding by government agencies that is needed to deliver cross-cutting projects. The result of that is poor delivery of outcomes and less efficiency than ought to be achievable.
ICT access to services	Providing increased access to services for rural communities is a complex issue which involves the movement of services to people as well as the movement of people to services and using improving technology to bridge the gap. Developing technology is making it possible to deliver services both locally and sustainably and is supporting service providers to overcome many of the barriers to rural delivery.
Improved access to publicly funded business support	Better promotion of activities as well as more sector-specific delivery of services are needed within rural areas to ensure that all businesses are aware of the support on offer. The use of a single entry point and the provision of outreach facilities are essential in achieving this. At a strategic level, considerations of rural needs and environments are essential when designing delivery strategies for services. Better co-ordination of service delivery will enable a more cost-effective and appropriate service offer supported by enhanced linkages into existing partnerships.
Information	A concerted effort is needed across government to reduce costs and other barriers to sharing public sector information, including a legislative change in favour of a presumption that public sector information will be available for re-use unless overriding reasons (e.g. data protection) require it to be withheld.
	Ministers to override the part of the Ordnance Survey commercial framework which prevents public bodies from sharing user-derived data with third parties responsible for the management of natural resources and with local communities. OS needs to look at new licensing arrangements to permit mapping data to be sold on a per capita basis.

POLICY AREA	CONCLUSION
Local foods	The level of public sector procurement of local food is primarily dependent on the interest and will of the individual purchasing manager rather than on policy statements. Procedural issues – such as EU tendering requirements – can be overcome given the will to source locally. Local food groups are vital in driving up interest in local sourcing, through their promotional, brokerage and quality assurance roles.
Migrant workers	National, regional and local information and advice resources for migrants should link to one another to avoid unnecessary duplication and ensure information is comprehensive and up to date.
Planning	Environmental mitigation should be funded as part of housing developments at all scales, including the cumulative impacts of a series of single developments. In such areas each house should be considered, with a mechanism to pool contributions, rather than mitigation applying only to developments of a certain number of dwellings.
	To manage the environmental impacts of development, particularly in areas constrained by protected sites, it is important to strengthen the links between land management and Regional Spatial Strategy/Local Development Framework processes.
Planning/Heritage	Consideration of the built environment should be incorporated into an inter-disciplinary approach towards managing change in rural areas, and the delivery of social, economic and environmental objectives, particularly in dispersed settlements. A method for understanding and defining local character and issues should be developed, refined and rolled-out nationally, to assist local authorities to comply with planning policy guidance on local distinctiveness.
Rural housing	Central government needs to recognise the importance of securing a balanced range of housing stock to suit different income levels. Planning rules are too restrictive to facilitate the necessary supply.
	Organised resistance to new housing schemes from within communities can be an obstacle. Early community involvement in identifying the need for housing, and the type and location of its provision, are likely to offer better chances of securing consent than imposed schemes.
	The Housing Corporation's three-year funding cycle needs to be more flexible to allow for affordable housing bids to be made at varying times.
	Innovative construction methods to reduce costs are key (supply constraints are not the only factor), and this needs to be recognised by central government, the Housing Corporation and housing associations. Costs can be lowered by addressing planning and procurement constraints and using modern methods of construction.

POLICY AREA	CONCLUSION
Transport	Public transport should be seen as part of the process of delivering rural services, not as a "service" in its own right. The cost of public transport services in rural areas should be considered within the overall cost of delivering a Local Area Agreement and not measured simply against the cost of individual trips. The Government's Transport Analysis Guidance and the associated Appraisal Summary Table fail to provide for an analysis of the <i>value</i> offered by public transport in rural areas and the contribution they make towards economic output, quality of life and mitigating carbon emissions.
	Adopting a sub-regional approach to community rail development brings both economies of scale and a strategic input to planning, so linking the aspirations of local authorities and communities to wider economic development contexts.
Volunteering	Increased regulation, particularly relating to premises and running events, has led to people being reluctant to volunteer to serve as trustees and managers for community facilities.

Annex A

Summary of Guidance from the Pathfinder Prospectus

(See paragraph 3 of the report)

In delivering the aims of the Pathfinder programme, the following factors are relevant:

- The need for the Pathfinders to approach their work from the perspective of sustainable development, as an opportunity to consider ways of improving the whole approach to rural and natural resources protection policy what sustainable development means operationally at a local level and thus the effectiveness of Defra's 'rural' expenditure through better prioritisation and a clear focus on outcomes.
- The need for those leading the Pathfinders to ensure engagement with all relevant partners, working down to the truly local level.
- The importance of exploring more joined-up and innovative approaches to service delivery (including, for example, lead local delivery agents for particular issues; promotion of, or support for, social enterprise or voluntary sector-led service delivery models; facilitation of co-location of rural service providers; new approaches to access to services, or particular solutions to service delivery 'blockages' or gaps).
- Ensuring that better prioritisation of resources is based in large measure upon the best possible information about the nature and quantum of existing public sector funding streams in the Pathfinder areas.

Intended outcomes from the Pathfinders: all Pathfinders should seek to demonstrate progress in delivering:

- clearer targeting to address rural social and economic disadvantage through prioritisation of available resources and better, more joined-up rural delivery, leading to better outcomes for rural communities;
- greater alignment and co-ordination of socio-economic, rural community and natural environment activity and funding to make service delivery more efficient and simpler for customers and ensure sustainable outcomes;
- well-defined and accountable roles for delivery that are understood by sponsors and customers;
- clearer linkage to wider public sector investment in rural areas (e.g. education, infrastructure)
 with opportunities to maximise impact through co-ordination and more joined-up working
 between public agencies and the voluntary and community sectors;
- strengthening of community strategies and other sub-regional plans to provide the direction and local ownership necessary to influence the spending plans of key agencies;
- support in the development of rural-specific (sectoral or geographic) or rural proofed targets that could be incorporated into Local Public Service Agreements;
- support in the development of Local Area Agreements that provide greater local flexibilities in funding and reporting for adopting performance improvements in rural delivery.

Annex B

Summary list of Pathfinder activities

Note: This list is not a description of what the Pathfinders have achieved. It is intended solely to identify the Pathfinders and to give an indication of the issues and topics covered. Contact details can be found on the websites.

Region: North East	Pathfinder: West Durham
Lead Council: Durham County Council	Lead officer(s): John Banks

Website: http://www.westdurhampathfinder.com/page/index.cfm

Area covered: Teesdale District Council, Wear Valley District Council

Objectives: To address issues in four priority areas: building community capability and strengthening social enterprise; skills and enterprise development in support of sustainable tourism; health and quality of life of young people; and development of the knowledge economy.

Principal activities: Case studies on: environmental and tourism re-use; business support for community regeneration; use of LSPs and Community Networks; Community Hubs; co-ordination of rural transport, involving young people. Experiences and lessons to be shared through an Action Learning Set.

Region: North West	Pathfinder: Lancashire
Lead Council: Lancashire County Council	Lead officer(s): Andy Ashcroft, Moira Mortimer

Website: http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/environment/ruralpathfinder/index.asp

Area covered: Lancashire County, and rural areas of Blackburn with Darwen and Blackpool Councils

Objectives: To build on the best mechanisms for devolving delivery closer to rural customers, ensuring that partnership and integration happens to best effect in order to simplify and enhance delivery to the customer.

Principal activities: Evidence-based trials covering: access to housing; facilitating enterprise; access to services; rural transport; investing in the natural environment. Community master planning project. Developing a sub-regional approach to funding and governance.

Region: Yorkshire & Humber	Pathfinder: Humber
Lead Council: East Riding of Yorkshire Council	Lead officer(s): Helen Wright, Colin Walker

Website: http://www.humberruralpathfinder.co.uk/ccm/navigation/home/

Area covered: East Riding of Yorkshire Council, North Lincolnshire Council, North East Lincolnshire Council

Objectives: (a) Rural development policy: looking at sub-regional structures for commissioning and delivery; and (b) Delivery improvement trials: with a focus on testing effectiveness and moving away from "This is how it's done" to "Is this the right way to do it?"

Principal activities: On (a), development of a draft sub-regional delivery model for sustainable rural development. On (b), trials covering: strategic access to services; integrated business skills and support; community engagement for coastline management; community empowerment; strengthening local ownership of environmental management; adding value to local food businesses; local markets for energy crops.

Region: East Midlands	Pathfinder: Peak District
Lead Council: Derbyshire Dales District Council	Lead officer(s): Robert Jones, Steve Capes Derbyshire Dales District Council, Giles Dann Derby and Derbyshire Economic Partnership

Website: www.peakdirections.co.uk

Area covered: Peak District Rural Action Zone (covering Derbyshire Dales, High Peak and parts of Staffordshire Moorlands and the Weaver Ward in East Staffordshire)

Objectives: To demonstrate practical ways of combining services and orientating them more towards the needs of those entrepreneurs in communities and businesses who will make sustainable regeneration happen. In other words, developing innovative means of growing the rural economy in a cross-boundary sub-region surrounded by urban areas.

Principal activities: Developing a Single Entry Point for Information via the Peak Directions website. Co-location of services in a multi-agency hub in a market town. Embedding a local rural delivery mechanism (the Peak District Rural Action Zone) as a counterweight to surrounding urban interests. Implementing a Partnership protocol for information sharing and promoting the rural economy.

Region: West Midlands	Pathfinder: Shropshire
Lead Council: Shropshire County Council	Lead officer(s): Clare Greener

Website: http://www.shropshire.gov.uk/ruralservices.nsf

Area covered: Shropshire County

Objectives: Within the overall goal of addressing access to service issues: involve/ empower the community; improve existing access to services by maximising opportunities to co-locate and co-deliver; develop new and innovative access opportunities and methods of working to identify and address access issues; and improve communication regarding access opportunities thereby reducing duplication and improving collaboration.

Principal activities: Pilots and case studies on improving access to services; a model for community-led service delivery; use of local Community Plans in service development and delivery; a model for community-led scrutiny of services; a framework to assist service providers to target local delivery; a brokerage service for matching service providers with rural venues; improved access to specific services including council services and information; stronger links with partners and increased awareness of accessibility issues across Shropshire; and links with other authorities to share good practice.

Region: East of England	Pathfinder: Fens
Lead Council: Cambridgeshire County	Lead officer(s): Michael Hand Norfolk
Council and Norfolk County Council	County Council, Stephen Vartoukian
(jointly)	Cambridgeshire County Council

Website: http://www.go-east.gov.uk/goeast/environment_and_rural/regional_rual_policy/rural_strategy/pathfinder/

Area covered: Fens area of Cambridgeshire, Norfolk and Peterborough

Objectives: To improve joint working between district and county councils and so target resources more effectively at common issues.

Principal activities: Improving the delivery and uptake of the 'Skills for Life' programme in the Fens; demonstrating how Local Area Agreements (LAAs) can improve the delivery of environmental outcomes by strengthening collaboration between organisations and aligning or pooling funding streams; support for migrant workers, including provision of a common information/advice pack and community websites, and developing a more strategic approach to migrant workers policy through assisting the local authorities to incorporate relevant issues into their LAAs; addressing access to services issues.

Region: South East	Pathfinder: Hampshire
Lead Council: Hampshire County Council	Lead officer(s): Rosalind Rutt, Des Hobson

Website: http://www.hants.gov.uk/ruralpathfinder/

Area covered: Hampshire County, but including projects in Berkshire and Kent

Objectives: To create successful partnerships that (a) improve service delivery on the ground; (b) influence policy and targets at both the regional and national level, and (c) address the key Defra Public Service Agreement targets of rural productivity and access to services, sustainable farming and food, and natural resource protection. To demonstrate close links with local Public Service Agreements and Local Strategic Partnerships. To share learning with the emerging Local Area Agreements Pathfinders and other areas within the South East. To implement individual projects that will make a difference.

Principal activities: Projects in support of the above objectives covering: Community Planning; Parish Plan Toolkit; Electronic Parish Library; Land Management Information System (LaMIS); Transport for Children and Young People; Integrated Environmental Advice and Support to Land Managers; AONB Rural Advice Service; Consenting Procedures in Protected Landscapes; Historic Farmsteads; Biofuels; Local Food Procurement; Farm Waste; Local Countryside & Greenspace Network; Coastal Consents and Coastal Realignment; Setting up a partnership structure in Hampshire to continue the momentum.

Region: South West	Pathfinder: Dorset
Lead Council: Dorset County Council	Lead officer(s): David Walsh

Website: http://www.dorsetforyou.com/index.jsp?articleid=367849

Area covered: Dorset County

Objectives: To combine (a) challenges for local partners to organise effective and simpler delivery that is fully connected to the community; and (b) challenges for government and national agencies to buy into and trust local delivery structures.

Principal activities: Exploring: simpler and quicker access to funding for rural businesses and communities; more effective and simpler rural partnership structures that take an integrated approach to policy and delivery; how to connect rural delivery to community planning; and the distinctive coastal and marine issues that affect Dorset.



















Rural challenges, local solutions

Building on the Rural Delivery Pathfinders in England









