

RURAL CHALLENGES, LOCAL SOLUTIONS

BUILDING ON THE RURAL DELIVERY PATHFINDERS IN ENGLAND

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Rural Delivery Pathfinder programme, launched jointly by Defra and local government in 2005, is an innovative and unusual attempt to tackle head-on the challenges faced by all levels of government in achieving agreed rural policy outcomes. Operating within a set of continually evolving policy and organisational frameworks, the Pathfinders have empowered rural interests within individual local authorities and their partner organisations to develop and test different solutions to a range of issues, with minimal central direction or prescription. Learning, from what worked well and what was less successful, is as much a success criterion for the Pathfinder programme as the delivery of beneficial change on the ground.

The programme is now in its closing stages. The achievements of the Pathfinders, which are still being rolled out and documented, are broadly of three types:

- Demonstrating new approaches to managing rural delivery and using the results to **influence policy** at national, regional, sub-regional and local levels.
- Developing and road-testing **tools and other resources** visible to, and useable by, the practitioner community and the wider public.
- Capturing **learning** for sharing around practitioners.

This report, written from a national perspective, summarises the achievements and recommends specific actions intended to ensure that the findings of the Pathfinders are incorporated into the future development of rural delivery. It identifies three sets of actions:

- 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, in particular by seizing the opportunities offered by:
 - (1) the changes set out in the 2006 Local Government White Paper, particularly the plans for enhancing the roles of local authorities as strategic leaders and place-shapers, making full use of Local Strategic Partnerships and Local Area Agreements; and
 - (2) the implementation of the new Rural Development Programme for England.
- 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, in particular by Defra:
 - (3) inviting relevant government departments to act on the findings that certain policies and practices can hinder rather than facilitate delivery of intended outcomes;

- (4) ensuring that its rural-proofing activity is directed to ensuring that central government guidance on Local Area Agreements supports local authorities seeking to serve well their rural communities, specifically influencing the design of the core set of 200 national indicators;
 - (5) with the Commission for Rural Communities, Government Offices and other partners, keeping up the pressure to eliminate “silo working” at all levels of government;
 - (6) initiating a dialogue between Regional Development Agencies and local government to form a shared view of the conditions that would give RDAs the confidence to devolve funding decisions to sub-regional and local mechanisms.
- Action to **capture the learning** from the Pathfinders and make it easily accessible to those who would benefit from applying it in the future, in particular:
 - (7) by individual Pathfinder authorities ensuring easy access to the learning and case studies, and promoting the results;
 - (8) by the “mainstreaming” of the Pathfinder learning into the web-enabled topic-based guidance and case study material promoted by the Improvement and Development Agency and by other bodies;
 - (9) by Defra taking steps to ensure that the improved understanding of, and relationships with, local government it has gained are not lost when the Pathfinder programme closes;
 - (10) by Defra leading consideration 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.

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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 Prospectus¹ 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 implementation of Defra’s Rural Social and Community Programme from April 2006;
 - (b) the restructuring of English Nature, Defra’s Rural Development Service and most of the Countryside Agency into a single new statutory agency, Natural England;
 - (c) the development of the new Rural Development Programme for England, to run from 2007, to be administered by Natural England and the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs).
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; and, to support this vision,
 - (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 processes²; and
 - (c) continuing to encourage public authorities to work in partnership with each other, and with private sector and third sector organisations, to deliver outcomes.

¹ Available at <http://www.defra.gov.uk/rural/pdfs/pathfinders/prospectus.pdf>

² 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 Paper confirms the community focus of local government in the future, sets out specific changes to deliver the new vision, and – of particular relevance to the Pathfinders - reinforces 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.

7. One Pathfinder was selected for each region by the relevant Government Office: the list is at Annex B. Defra provided to each Pathfinder £100,000 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.

8. Funding was also secured by individual Pathfinders from other sources, including RDAs, Natural England, Environment Agency and local authorities. In some cases this was through match-funding in response to the funds provided from Defra.

Composition of the Pathfinders

9. All 8 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 sub-regional 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 of the Pathfinder area, and another straddled a regional boundary.

10. Each of the Pathfinders comprises a suite of linked projects³. 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.

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 at Annex B.

³ "Projects" is used here as a convenient shorthand for a diverse range of activities undertaken by the Pathfinders.

Achievements

13. Progress to date has 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 practitioner⁴ community and the wider public.
- (c) Capturing **learning** for sharing around practitioners.

Many projects have delivered all three. Other projects, not yet complete, can be expected to add to the sum of the achievements. Each set of achievements is illustrated more fully below. Full details are available from the individual Pathfinders⁵.

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.

15. Key results from the Pathfinders which are intended to influence national and regional policy (the focus of this report) include:

- (a) Sustainability in rural areas is a balance between potentially conflicting pressures: they include the requirements of current vs future residents, productivity vs “quality of life”, conservation vs 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.
- (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

⁴ “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.

⁵ Website addresses are shown in Annex B.

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

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. 35 Broadplaces were opened by the end of March 2007. Through a process of community engagement the location of each Broadplace was determined locally and can, for example, be within 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, ultimately, 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) The willingness and capability to carry out effective rural-proofing at different levels of government is variable and, on balance, insufficient.
- (g) 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.
- (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. Skills training, transport, local foods, biofuels, housing and coastal management issues are particularly significant. A selective list of such points is at Annex C. In some cases, these 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
- 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 has supported the installation of a wood fuel boiler and local fuel supply chain agreement at Luddington Primary School in North Lincolnshire. This will reduce the School's carbon emissions by 50t per annum and cut its heating bills by around 50%. 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.

Tools and resources

17. Tangible and generally available deliverables from the Pathfinders have taken several forms, including:

- (a) Toolkits of the "how to do" type for use by community groups, NGOs and other local authorities, 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 without reinventing the wheel, 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, 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.

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 negotiated a Partnership Protocol with partners within the Peak District Rural Action Zone, and associated networks and organisations, to simplify access to and join up the promotion of services to support enterprise across the area. Working through the Protocol, the Pathfinder developed an internet based portal - *Peak Directions*, at www.peakdirections.co.uk - to provide a signposting service to information on the enterprise services available to business and communities in the area. Eventually the aim is for the portal to link directly with the new Business Link Knowledge Banks and expand the services offered by encompassing a 'front line' publicly accessible resource for businesses.

- (d) As an aid to joined-up decision making, some Pathfinders are promoting the concept of issue-based policy frameworks and intervention toolkits (or similar). These 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 7-step format applicable to any organisation (eg. local authority, service deliverer or community organisation) and can be used to guide development of both transport and non-transport 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 cost-effective 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 (rural) 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. Two-tier local government adds to the challenge.
 - (b) 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.

- (c) Short-term funding (“grants”) needs to be carefully targeted and managed if it is 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.
- (d) 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:
- Effective engagement can be resource-intensive, though there are models for effective and economical consultation.
 - Securing genuinely representative input from a community presents particular difficulties, especially from hard-to-reach groups and individuals.
 - 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.
 - Talking face-to-face achieves better results than sending out consultation papers.
 - 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.
- (e) 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 – from (d) above – 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. West Durham young people anticipated the new policy having 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 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.

Added value, hazards and risks

19. Would these achievements would 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 engage senior officers and members of 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 a Parish Plan Toolkit , and this is now being piloted nationally by ACRE, the RCCs and other 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.

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 encourages 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 now is being tested by 900 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 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 cooperate between partners. The reasons for this varied, but included policy 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 implementation⁶. None of this invalidates the work undertaken: indeed, it adds to the learning.

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⁶ These are identified, with causes, in the Audit Commission report “Rural Delivery Pathfinders Programme Evaluation – Phase 2”, May 2007.

PART 2: THE PATH FORWARD

22. The current Pathfinder projects are now concluding. If the value of what has been achieved – and what is in prospect – 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 future⁷.

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 being planned by individual Pathfinders during 2007 provide an opportunity to address at a local or regional level many of the issues raised by these recommendations.

Mainstreaming success and good practice

25. Although the Pathfinder funding provided by Defra ends in 2007, it was never the intention that the type of activity generated by the Pathfinders should cease⁸. 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, **ensuring that both completed projects and those continuing through 2007 and beyond are properly evaluated and the learning captured and made accessible**. This is discussed further in paragraphs 57-66. 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 Pathfinders, there is evidence of tangible benefits, illustrated throughout the report.

⁷ Recommendation 5 of the Audit Commission’s Phase 2 evaluation report on the Pathfinders highlights the importance of effectively disseminating the learning.

⁸ 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 to access services

Based on guidance in the Yorkshire and Humber Strategic Rural Transport Framework the Humber Rural Pathfinder has helped practitioners to develop 30 new demand responsive Rural Community Transport routes. In the trial period 2006/7 these routes delivered 39,821 passenger journeys at a subsidy of less than £4.00 per journey. On average minibuses carried 12.5 passengers on return journeys - i.e. operated at 85% capacity. Half of these routes have now been tendered and incorporated into East Riding of Yorkshire Council's supported rural bus network with Community Transport operators securing 3 year contracts to provide them.

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.

28. Second, **consolidating rural policy and delivery issues into the mainstream corporate frameworks of local authorities and, where suitable, 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 2006 Local Government White Paper⁹; and
- (b) implementing EU rural development policy through the forthcoming 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*

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 the learning and case studies are made sufficiently accessible, communities themselves can identify good practice in engaging them and use this as evidence when they experience difficulty in getting their local authority to listen to them.

⁹ The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill which would give legislative effect to the proposals, where necessary, is currently before Parliament.

Local Area Agreements

30. The LAA will be confirmed as the mandatory key delivery plan for the community strategy. County and unitary authorities will be under a duty to agree targets in the LAA with named partners, and named partners in turn will be 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 and National Park Authorities. More area-based funding streams will be brought into the LAA and will not be ring-fenced. The challenge for rural delivery will be to ensure that the smaller number of Government-agreed targets to be allowed in LAAs in future will 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.

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 4 counties, 7 districts and 2 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

Local Strategic Partnerships

31. The involvement of elected members in LSP executive and scrutiny roles will be 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. The proposals envisage a greater degree of integration of difficult cross-cutting issues, and of spatial planning with service delivery using the Sustainable Community Strategy as the base document. This offers significant opportunities for mainstreaming rural delivery issues into key plans.

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 LSP to having a distinct rural partnership body.

Multi-area Agreements

33. Although much of the impetus behind the development of multi-area agreements comes from the city region concept, there is no reason why this approach should not be adopted in sub-regional partnerships with a rural focus. A MAA can strengthen cross-boundary working and increase flexibility in determining the nature of interventions in the sub-region. The mechanism may become even more significant for rural areas if changes are made to the sub-national institutional arrangements for encouraging economic growth

and regeneration following the Treasury-led review¹⁰ in the run-up to the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review.

Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships

34. As part of the national improvement strategy being developed following the Local Government White Paper¹¹, Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships will have the key role in coordinating 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.

35. If LAAs and LSPs can be used to mainstream rural delivery priorities, then there is scope for a virtuous circle in which the regional capacity-building resource is influenced by LAA priorities and so channels resources back to support improving rural delivery in individual authorities. The proposed National Rural Network outlined at paragraphs 67-71 could provide a national dimension to this capacity-building activity for rural practitioners.

Implementation

36. The experience of the Pathfinders leaves those authorities – and others who learn from them – well-placed to act on these opportunities. The Government envisages that mainstreaming will be achieved primarily at the local authority level¹². However, if rural delivery issues are to be given proper weight, they should not be disadvantaged by the central guidance to be issued underpinning the new arrangements. Defra has a role here in securing adequate recognition of rural issues – see paragraphs 46-48 below.

(b) Rural Development Programme for England

37. 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 purposes to which funding under the EU regulation are tightly defined, it can be used in parallel with mainstreamed funding to create a coherent overall programme of rural delivery interventions.

38. Defra is currently finalising the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) for approval by the European Commission. 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. The minority – about 15% - will be channelled through RDAs to support economic and social objectives.

39. This presents challenges for local government if authorities are to influence regional-level decisions on the allocation of RDPE funding. Ministers have said that RDAs will need to work closely with sub-regional partners, particularly LSPs, in developing spending plans. The Pathfinders have shown that there is no single model for doing this, and relations between individual Pathfinders and their RDA have varied in quality.

¹⁰ The review's terms of reference are at http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/5/E/csr07_subnatecon_tor.pdf

¹¹ See paragraphs 6.60-6.63 of the White Paper.

¹² See for example section on mainstreaming in the speech by the Minister for Biodiversity, Landscape and Rural Affairs to the LGA's Rural Commission on Friday 16 March, available at <http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/ministers/speeches/barry-gardiner/bg070316.htm>

40. At least 5% of the RDPE funding is to be spent via the Leader approach. The Leader approach is designed to enable bottom-up community involvement in rural development in specific areas, delivered via broad public-private partnerships. In many cases, the local authority will be a leading partner, bringing their experience of community engagement and community-led regeneration, and ensuring community ambitions are recognised in LAAs and other intervention plans.

41. Successful development and delivery of the regional implementation plans for the RDPE will depend on effective partnerships. Ministers expect RDAs to work closely with sub-regional partnerships, and the Pathfinders are well-placed to deploy their experience on behalf of local government in their region to support effective partnership working. The issue of devolving decision-making below the regional level is discussed in paragraphs 53-56.

Improving the delivery pathways

42. 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 above¹³.

43. 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 round a table: a shared willingness to cooperate is also needed, and the Pathfinders have demonstrated the truth of this.

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. The cluster event held at Llanymynech - where the parish straddles the Shropshire-Powys border - identified a number of cross border issues. Responses include:

- Customer Services officers from Shropshire and Powys County Councils have 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

44. Other obstacles arise from current government policies. The fact that a policy was perceived as an obstacle by a Pathfinder does not mean the underlying policy is wrong. However feedback about the impact of policies on the ground is an essential element of

¹³ A selective list of issues on specialised policy areas is at [Annex C](#).

good policy-making, and some obstacles identified by the Pathfinder have already been acknowledged by central government¹⁴.

45. This report recommends that Defra should:

- (a) build in the learning points identified in this report into its own good practice guidance and ask the Cabinet Office to adjust its Whitehall-wide guidance on good practice in policy-making to incorporate relevant findings;
- (b) take the lead in initiating specific action, discussed below, to address concerns about:
 - (i) rural-proofing
 - (ii) silo working and joining-up
 - (iii) devolving decision-making.
- (c) draw the attention of the relevant departments to the list of specialised issues at Annex C;

Rural-proofing

46. Concern exists among the Pathfinders that central government continues not to rural-proof its policies and programmes effectively, despite the commitment to do so given in the 2000 Rural White Paper. This concern was reflected in the latest available monitoring report¹⁵ from the Commission for Rural Communities, which concluded that rural-proofing "is not part of systematic policy development and programme delivery mechanisms in most government departments". 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.

47. 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 disadvantaged¹⁶. If mainstreaming rural issues into LAAs is seen as the way forward across all authorities with rural constituencies, 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, ensuring that the core set of 200 national indicators are designed with rural as well as urban needs in mind will be critical. 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 objective¹⁷.

¹⁴ For example, the difficulties in data sharing are acknowledged at para 5.30 of the Local Government White Paper.

¹⁵ "Challenging Government to meet rural needs: Rural Proofing Monitoring Report 2006", available at http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/files/5308_Accessible%20Report_art.pdf

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ Recommendation 1 of the Audit Commission's Phase 2 evaluation report on the Pathfinders highlights the importance of rural-proofing.

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 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

48. Because 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 the bending 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 “community-proofing”, under which national policies are tailored to local circumstances whether rural or urban¹⁸.

Joining-up

49. 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.

50. Joining-up is a process that appears to be evolutionary. Specific measures – such as the changes to the Business Link service now being 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, but strong senior corporate management from the top coupled with – a particular Pathfinder theme – willingness to engage with communities and look at delivery in terms of community needs rather than service provision gives grounds for optimism.

¹⁸ See the blog run by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, at http://www.davidmiliband.defra.gov.uk/blogs/ministerial_blog/archive/2006/11/30/3786.aspx

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:

- 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.

Whilst joint visits were successful in integrating advice, it was clear that the main environmental agencies did not have the capacity at present 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: change in 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.

51. The Pathfinders have 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 at sub-regional and local levels, and is often most suitably done there. But 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.

52. 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 Commission for Rural Communities keeping up the pressure.

Devolution

53. Although not universal, there was a strongly held view in some Pathfinders that insufficient opportunity was taken to devolve significant resources and decision-making to the optimum level. This was particularly true in relation to funding streams managed by some RDAs including the “single pot” and, in future, the economic and social funding under the RDPE.

54. Once plans have been agreed with central government, RDAs are accountable for their spending and must therefore have the final say about how their funds are used and the mechanisms for allocating them. Attempts to impose a standard model beyond what is already agreed between central government and the RDAs would be inconsistent with government policy on recognising regional differences.

55. That said, there have been concerns among some – though not all – Pathfinders that RDAs have not taken the opportunity of the RDPE to consult and engage with local authorities and other sub-regional partners on the development of regional implementation plans. The reasons for this are to some extent speculative in the absence of a detailed survey, but the most likely cause is a lack of confidence within the RDA that particular partnerships or authorities could achieve sufficient integration of programmes and services across traditional boundaries to deliver regional economic objectives.

56. The local government agenda is designed to enhance the leadership role of local authorities and secure improvements in their performance. This report recommends that Defra should facilitate engagement between RDAs and local government (through the LGA) aimed at collectively agreeing a set of “indicative conditions” which, if met, would give every RDA the confidence to devolve funding decisions to sub-regional mechanisms. This work might be taken up within the wider framework of eventual decisions on the Treasury-led review of sub-national economic development and regeneration. However, the RDPE offers an opportunity to pilot this approach in a specific policy context.

Devolution in practice

The North West Development Agency has awarded £1.8 million 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 10 rural areas across the county. In addition to this a Rural Premium Fund is helping encourage a variety of key service providers, including Primary Care Trusts, social services, tourist information and children's centres, to locate to the CRCs.

Accessing the learning

57. 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.

58. 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.

59. 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) how best to set up and operate partnerships and related governance arrangements;
- (d) approaches to generic issues, such how to secure really effective engagement of rural communities;
- (e) what has been done in relation to 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.

60. 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

61. At the individual Pathfinder level, the key is to try and 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 websites¹⁹ – 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 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 being produced for the individual Pathfinders are valuable promotional tools.

National level

62. 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 61(a) will facilitate this work.

63. 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.

64. The Audit Commission has noted that communicating innovative practices around the local government sector is challenging. A recent report²⁰ 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

65. Also challenging to structure is a means of capturing the informal learning acquired within Defra about how local government works, and vice versa. Defra engages with local government generally, not just rural authorities, across a range of issues, and some aspects

¹⁹ 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

²⁰ Audit Commission: “Seeing the light – Innovation in Public Services”, May 2007

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.

66. 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, though not in a particularly digestible form. This report recommends that Defra considers 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 across the Department. This is a potentially important exercise in knowledge management which, if carefully handled, could make a significant practical contribution to raising Defra's game as a learning organisation.

A national support network

67. 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, though Defra is keen that the benefits available from this network should continue to be available.

68. 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 Offices would have the capacity take on specific new rural functions. Central government's dedicated capacity 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. The Commission for Rural Communities similarly needs to supplement its own resources with this sort of input.

69. 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:

- The identification and analysis of good transferable practices and the provision of information about them
- The organisation of exchanges of experience and know how, including on administrative topics and procedures
- The preparation of training programmes for local action groups in the building process
- Technical assistance for interterritorial and transnational cooperation.

70. Defra and the devolved administrations are about to begin 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 involvement of the Commission for Rural Communities would provide an independent “champion” of rural interests.

71. As part of its function, 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.

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A NOTE ON THE REPORT

- The report was commissioned by Defra’s Rural Policy Division and authored by Peter Cleasby (Quanteria), a member of the external panel of the In-House Policy Consultancy²¹, in close co-operation with the lead officers for each Pathfinder, on whose behalf it is presented. Though published by Defra, the report is not a statement of government policy, but the recommendations are consistent with what the government is seeking to achieve in its rural strategy.
- 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 websites²² provide a valuable resource.
- The report is not an evaluation – that is being completed by the Audit Commission. The recommendations are addressed primarily to national and regional bodies but to have any practical effect they also require the active support of local government.
- The report may be revised in the light of the Rural Pathfinders National Discussion Forum, being held in Lancashire on 20/21 June 2007.

²¹ The In-House Policy Consultancy serves Defra, the Department for Communities and Local Government, and the Department for Transport.

²² Accessible via the IDeA website (<http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=5569390>) or the Defra website (<http://www.defra.gov.uk/rural/ruraldelivery/pathfinders/default.htm>)

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 ruralproofed targets that could be incorporated into Local Public Service Agreements (LPSAs); and
- support in the development of LAAs that provide greater local flexibilities in funding and reporting for adopting performance improvements in rural delivery.

SUMMARY LIST OF PATHFINDER PROJECTS

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, Dorothy Gibson
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: reopening a disused railway line; business support for community regeneration; use of LSPs and Community Networks; Community Hubs; coordination 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
Website: http://www.derbyshiredales.gov.uk/LSP/RuralActionZonePathfinder.htm	
Area covered: Peak District Rural Action Zone (covering the Derbyshire High Peak and Dales, Staffordshire Moorlands and East Staffordshire areas of the Peak District National Park)	
Objectives: To create an opportunity 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.	
Principal activities: Developing a single entry point for information. Co-location of services. Simplification of grant and funding access procedures.	

Region: West Midlands	Pathfinder: Shropshire
Lead Council: Shropshire County Council	Lead officer(s): Clare Greener
Website: http://www.shropshire.gov.uk/shroppart.nsf/open/FD263D2C68E90C1080256FF0003761A4	
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: Case studies on improving access to services; a model for community led service delivery; use of local Parish Plans in service development and delivery; a toolkit to assist service providers to target local delivery; a brokerage service for matching service providers with rural venues; improved access to specific services including business support and learning; 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 Council and Norfolk County Council (jointly)	Lead officer(s): David Rothe
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 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 and advice pack 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
Website: http://www3.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 PSA 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; Consents procedures; Parish Plan Toolkit; Electronic Parish Library; Parish Plans; Land Management Information System (LaMIS); Integrated Environmental Advice and Support to Land Managers; AONB Rural Advice Service; Historic Farmsteads; Biofuels; Local Food Procurement; Farm Waste; Local Countryside & Greenspace Network; and Coastal Consents and Coastal Realignment.	

Region: South West	Pathfinder: Dorset
Lead Council: Dorset County Council	Lead officer(s): David Walsh
Website: http://www.dorsetforyou.com/index.jsp?articleid=330161	
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.	

POLICY-SPECIFIC LEARNING POINTS FROM PATHFINDERS FOR REFERRAL TO CENTRAL GOVERNMENT POLICY DEPARTMENTS

(See paragraph 16 and 45 of the report)

Important note: This table 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 the main body of the report.

POLICY AREA	CONCLUSION
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, including working with communities to implement change in a managed way. Their role could usefully be recognised in the Marine Bill. Defra's communication of national coastal policy has had weaknesses.
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.
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.
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 (eg to assess transport and land use impacts)
Energy crops	There is widespread confusion over Government policy on biofuels. National guidance for people planning to develop local biofuel supply and procurements would be valuable.
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.
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.
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 (eg data protection) require it to be withheld.
Information	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.
Planning	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.
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.
Planning	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 interdisciplinary approach towards managing change in rural areas, and the delivery of social, economic and environmental objectives, particularly in dispersed settlements.
Planning/Heritage	A method for understanding and defining local character and issues should be developed, refined and rolled-out nationally, to assist local authorities comply with planning policy guidance on local distinctiveness.
Rural housing	Central government needs to recognize 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.
Rural housing	Organised resistance to new housing schemes from within communities can be an obstacles. 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.
Rural housing	Housing Corporation 3-year funding cycle needs to be more flexible to allow for affordable housing bids to be made at varying times.
Rural housing	Innovative construction methods to reduce costs are key (supply constraints are not the only factor), and this needs to be recognized by central government, Housing Corporation and housing associations.
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 <u>value</u> offered by public transport in rural areas and the contribution they make towards economic output, quality of life and mitigating carbon emissions..

Transport	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.