

RURAL PROOFING DELIVERY CHECKLIST

What is Rural Proofing?

The Government is committed to ensuring that all its domestic policies take account of specific rural circumstances and needs (Rural White Paper, 2000¹). It has made 'rural proofing' a mandatory part of the policy making process. This means that, as policies are developed, policy makers should systematically:

1. Consider whether their policy is likely to have a different impact in rural areas from elsewhere, because of the particular characteristics of rural areas;
2. Make a proper assessment of these impacts if they are likely to be significant;
3. Adjust the policy, where appropriate, with solutions to meet rural needs and circumstances.

Government works with and through other bodies; public, private and voluntary; local, regional and national. So better policy making for rural areas should mean all those involved in the design or delivery of policy adopting rural proofing as good practice.

What is the Delivery Checklist?

The Countryside Agency provides a *Rural Proofing Policy Makers' Checklist* to central Government Departments to help them identify rural aspects when developing policies, programmes or initiatives. The role of Government Offices and other regional policy bodies is different, with a greater emphasis on delivery. The Delivery Checklist serves this emphasis and together with the national checklist it assists with the following types of regional rural proofing activity:

- Identifying rural issues that need addressing in any GO strategies or programmes;
- Working with partners to ensure that the rural dimension is considered in their work;
- Ensuring that bidding rounds target rural needs and organisations, and that any regional guidance to bidders is rural proofed;
- Ensuring that pilots or pathfinders of new policies include rural examples;
- Ensuring that programme monitoring reveals rural outputs and outcomes;
- Ensuring partnerships have some representation from rural bodies or people (or have a rural champion);
- Ensuring consultations within the region reach rural people or bodies and their views are assessed to identify any distinctive rural issues;
- Commenting on the applicability of national policies to rural circumstance in the region, when such advice is sought from Government Departments.

¹'Our countryside: the future', DETR and MAFF (November 2000).

How to Use the Delivery Checklist

The Delivery Checklist is used simply by applying all the questions to the initiative being considered. Note that it is a screening tool only, covering the most typical rural delivery issues. It cannot cover every eventuality and the advice of countryside experts in the regions should be sought when there is uncertainty.

The checklist is not a substitute for consultation with rural communities, organisations or businesses. It is designed to be used alongside, without duplicating, the national Rural Proofing Policy Makers' Checklist and other appraisal systems, such as Policy Appraisal and the Environment, the Green Ministers' Biodiversity checklist and Regulatory Impact Assessment.

What to do after using the Delivery Checklist?

The results of using the checklist should be fed into the decision making process and a record kept for reporting purposes. Rural proofing has a reporting requirement. Government Offices for the Regions are to include a specific rural report within their annual reports and will be collecting information on rural proofing activity and results. The Countryside Agency also publishes an annual report on central and regional Government's overall rural proofing performance. Feedback to national policy makers on how policies work (or not) on the ground will enable improvements to be made.

When significantly different impacts in rural areas seem likely or where there is uncertainty, the second and third steps of rural proofing should be taken. That is:

- a proper assessment of impacts should be made and;
- alternative means of delivery or adjustments to the policy should be considered.

At all stages, if required, seek advice from the Rural Team in the Government Office or the Rural Proofing contact at the Countryside Agency regional office.

DELIVERY CHECKLIST

Before using the checklist, it will be helpful to consider some general questions about the proposal:

- What are the objectives and what social groups, institutions, geographical areas and economic sectors is it intended to affect?
- What is the proposed means of delivery?
- Is it meant to apply equally to urban and rural areas?

Then, consider each of the following questions to see whether the policy is likely to be affected by the challenges that rural areas frequently present:

Targeting: Is the initiative targeted on particular areas or groups? Is there sufficient flexibility within the policy to ensure it meets needs in rural areas where disadvantage tends to be scattered, rather than concentrated in neighbourhoods?

Bidding rounds: Will the initiative involve a bidding round? Will small rural communities and institutions (including district councils) need longer timescales or extra support to form partnerships and put together successful bids?

Partnerships: Does the initiative require local partnerships? Will these include people or bodies from the rural part of the area to be affected? Is there scope to include representatives from parish councils? Do rural institutions, especially from the voluntary sector, have the capacity to function as full partners?

Consultation: Will there be consultation on the initiative with local people or groups? Is the method used capable of reaching those with poorer access to information points such as libraries or post offices. Is there scope for specifically targeting rural groups and identifying their views?

Pilots/pathfinders: Will the initiative be tested through pilots? Will there be some rural pilots to see if there are different issues or success factors in rural areas? Are the rural pilots designed to test particular rural issues or solutions?

Monitoring: If the results of the initiative are to be monitored, can this be done in such a way that the results in rural areas can be separately identified?

Sparsity costs: Will the initiative cost more to deliver in rural areas, where travel times to clients are likely to be longer and outlets may be smaller and lacking economies of scale? Is there scope to introduce a sparsity factor within funding allocations to take account of any higher (unit) delivery costs? Is there scope to overcome extra costs through other means, such as sharing premises with other service providers?

Development opportunities: Will the policy, plan or programme result in a physical development and, if so, does this help deliver development plan policies which seek to improve the quality of life in the area? Will the differences between planning regulations in rural and urban areas affect location and the distribution of benefits and costs? Is the policy sufficiently flexible to allow developments tailored to the particular character of rural areas and, if there are few suitable sites for development in rural areas, are there alternative ways of delivering the policy?

Market driven: Does the initiative rely on private sector supply or demand? What can be done to ensure services are still delivered in rural areas where costs may be higher, the market smaller because of the scattered and small population, and the potential for profit lower? Is it possible to stimulate demand for a service, perhaps by

aggregating demand? Could the private sector be encouraged to take on less profitable markets - perhaps by arranging for less profitable areas to be “bundled” with those that are more profitable (as in Quality Contracts for bus services)?

Accessibility: Will the initiative depend upon local service outlets or a good transport network for clients and do these exist in rural areas? Could joint provision, telephone or IT-based delivery, mobile or outreach delivery or flexible transport options be used to ensure services reach populations where transport links are poor and service outlets few?

Will clients eg. for business advice or training, have the time or spare capacity to access them and, if not, is it possible to provide a temporary ‘relief service’.

Joined up working: Is it possible to link up the initiative with others in the area? What opportunities are there for joint working with those developing other strategies and initiatives?

Rural variations: Will the initiative be applied in different types of area (eg. market towns and remote rural areas) and, if so, does it need to be tailored to the different circumstances and needs? Is there sufficient flexibility to allow this?