



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Rural proofing

Practical guidance to consider the outcomes of policies
in rural areas

November 2022

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Summary

This document is intended to help policy makers and analysts in government to consider how to achieve the outcomes they want from their policies in rural areas.

Thriving rural communities are vital to the English economy. A fifth of us live in rural areas and they are home to a quarter of England’s businesses. Policy outcomes in rural areas can be affected by the lack of economies of scale, distance, sparsity and demography and it is important that government policies consider these properly.

Rural proofing ensures that these areas receive fair and equitable policy outcomes. This guidance sets out a four- stage process to achieve this objective.

Figure 1: Rural proofing process

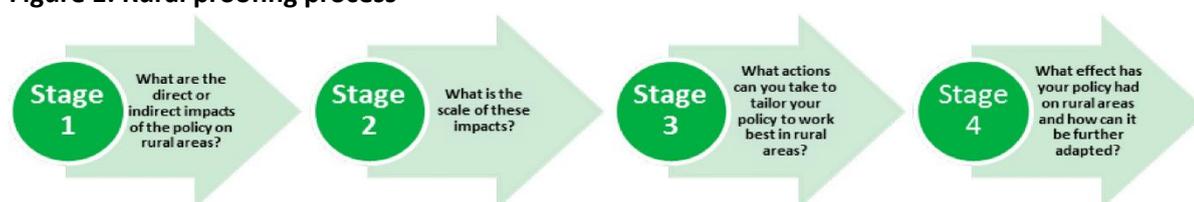


Table 1: How to assess the rural impact

Stage	Key question to consider	How can this question be answered?
1	What are the direct or indirect impacts of the policy on rural areas?	To identify if a policy intervention is likely to have an impact on rural areas, you should review available evidence and, where necessary, consult rural stakeholders. We give some examples of potential rural impacts in this guidance.
2	What is the scale of these impacts?	The focus of this assessment should be on the change that occurs as a result of the policy intervention. Your analysis should help you understand if the impact in rural areas is different to urban areas and the scale of the impact.
3	What actions can you take to tailor your policy to work best in rural areas?	Where you have identified rural impacts that are different to urban impacts and are large enough to warrant mitigation, you should look to tailor the policy to ensure that it is delivered in a way that addresses the needs of rural areas. This guidance provides an overview of different delivery mechanisms that could be used in rural areas.
4	What effect has your policy had on rural areas and how can it be further adapted?	Rural proofing should be applied at all stages of the policy cycle, including after the policy has been implemented. Where you find rural issues to be significant, this should be considered as part of the monitoring and evaluation phase and included in the Post Implementation Review or evaluation plan. You should review policies regularly and update them to ensure delivery is as intended.

Introduction

Rural proofing aims to understand the intended outcomes of government policy intervention in a rural context and to ensure fair and equitable policy outcomes for rural areas. Rural proofing is about finding the best ways to deliver policies in rural areas. This could mean that implementation might need to be designed and delivered differently compared to urban areas. It is possible to overcome undesirable policy impacts in rural areas by designing and delivering proportionate solutions. The analysis that is required for rural proofing is in line with the HM Treasury's Green Book¹ and the Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy's Better Regulation Framework Manual.

Most government policies can affect people, businesses, or the environment in rural areas directly or indirectly. The rural proofing of policy intervention or implementation is important in ensuring that government policies show an understanding of, and take into account, the specific characteristics that exist in rural areas. Policy makers and analysts should be considering the potential impacts and differences for rural areas in their analysis where possible. This analysis could be included in business cases, Impact Assessments² or other forms of internal or external analysis. The process should be started at an early stage and policy makers and analysts should be working collaboratively in order to identify intended or unintended impacts and differences.

This guidance allows users to undertake rural proofing in a way that is not overly burdensome, while providing the necessary information on how to develop the evidence base required to inform a policy decision and evaluation of the policy. It sets out the four key stages and questions to ask. The principles in this document should be used where rural proofing needs to be carried out by policy makers and analysts across government departments. Local authorities, agencies and delivery bodies can also make use of this guidance.

This document was produced in response to a government commissioned independent review of rural proofing led by Lord Cameron of Dillington. This document is intended to provide a framework and further analytical detail for how rural impacts should be identified and assessed.

¹ www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-green-book-appraisal-and-evaluation-in-central-government

² An Impact Assessment summarises the rationale for government intervention, the options considered and the expected costs and benefits

Background to rural areas

Urban areas are defined as settlements with populations of 10,000 or more people³. Rural areas are those areas outside of these settlements. They make up over 80% of England's land and are home to around a fifth of the English population. However rural areas are not all the same and they will include towns (below 10,000 population), villages, hamlets and isolated dwellings, or open countryside. Rural area types can vary from sparsely populated areas in the country through to areas adjacent to larger urban areas. It is important that the individual characteristics of these differing rural areas are considered. The rural urban classification is the basis for the analysis undertaken when rural proofing, but it may not be sufficient.

The consideration of rural areas is important because:

They provide positive opportunities

- **Demographics:** There are proportionately more elderly people and fewer younger people in rural populations compared with urban ones.
- **Access to services:** The combination of distance, transport links and low population density in rural areas can lead to challenges in accessing and providing services.
- **Service infrastructure:** Lower levels of infrastructure such as low broadband speeds and variable mobile coverage can be a barrier for rural businesses and limit the growth in rural productivity.
- **Employment:** The variety of employment opportunities, the availability of people with the right skills, and access to training can be lower in rural areas.

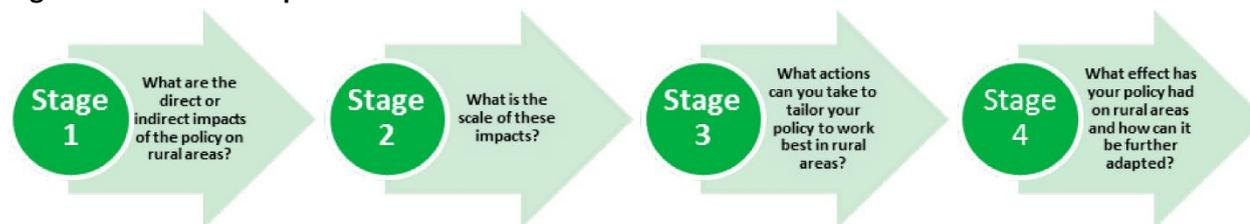
³ Official government definition: www.gov.uk/government/collections/rural-urban-definition

Rural proofing process

Rural proofing should start at an early stage of policy development and continue beyond policy evaluation. This does not need to be complicated and can be built into any consultation and policy development process.

Figure 2 outlines the process for rural proofing, covering four key questions that need to be answered.

Figure 2: How to rural proof

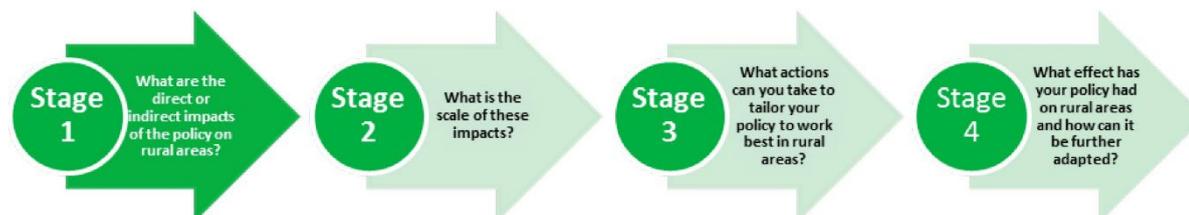


The subsequent sections of this guidance provide further detail on how each of the questions can be answered. Whilst the document will not cover every possible impact, it provides a framework of questions to be considered to ensure that policy has been appropriately rural proofed. Further support is available by contacting Defra at: rural.proofing@defra.gov.uk. The team has expertise in the rural area and the application of economics, statistics, and social research.

Stage 1: Identify impacts

This section provides guidance on stage 1 of the rural proofing process. The first stage involves the identification of potential impacts on rural areas.

Figure 3:



Early on in the policy making process, analysts and policy makers should be considering the effect that their policy could have in rural areas or how it might need to be implemented differently. There could be a number of

different types of social, economic, and environmental issues to consider. Table 2 provides a list of the most common issues and questions. There may also be other issues that are not covered in the table, which should be considered where they occur. Early review of literature and consultation with rural stakeholders⁴ and experts should help to identify these issues.

⁴ A list of rural stakeholders is included in the Further Guidance and Resources section.

Table 2: Issues to be considered

Issue	Consideration	Question 1 to consider for analysis	Question 2 to consider for analysis	Question 3 to consider for analysis	Question 4 to consider for analysis
1. Access to services and infrastructure	Services	What is the impact on access to or the availability of private and public services in rural areas (e.g., healthcare, childcare, transport)?	Do appropriate delivery mechanisms already exist in rural areas, and can they be adapted?	Could the cost of delivery be higher in rural areas due to geographical dispersion? How can formulae for determining funding best reflect these additional costs?	Could the costs of using services in rural areas be higher and so exclude rural users?
	Infrastructure	Could there be an impact on the availability of or access to infrastructure in rural areas (e.g., transport, broadband and mobile)?	Is the current infrastructure suitable for delivery, will improvements need to be made or alternative solutions developed?	Could it cost more to develop infrastructure in rural areas (including landscape and environmental costs) and who would bear these costs (developer, end user, government)?	
2. Living and working in rural areas	Business	Could there be an impact on rural businesses or those that are self-employed in rural areas?	How does regulation and planning influence businesses operating in rural areas, and does it create the right conditions for growth?	What is the impact of the fact that a greater proportion of businesses operating in rural areas are SMEs compared with in urban areas?	Could the policy have an impact on primary extraction/land based industries?
	Employment	Could there be an impact on employment in rural areas?	Does the assessment of impact show any changes to the level or composition of employment and have the fewer sources of employment in rural areas been accounted for?	Could there be an impact on incomes in rural areas?	

Issue	Consideration	Question 1 to consider for analysis	Question 2 to consider for analysis	Question 3 to consider for analysis	Question 4 to consider for analysis
	Housing, planning and education	Could there be an impact on access to and the provision of housing in rural areas?	Could there be an impact on skills, education and apprenticeship provision in rural areas?	Would the most remote rural customers be able to access skills, education or apprenticeships?	Could there be an impact on the ability of providers of education to meet demand?
3. Environment	Environment (e.g., air and water quality)	Could the policy lead to positive or negative environmental impacts in rural areas?	Could the policy have an impact on those wishing to visit the countryside for recreation and enjoyment?	Is the policy likely to have an impact on the natural or built landscape?	
4. Distribution, equality, devolution and funding	Distributional and equality	What impact could the policy have on different population demographics and social groups in rural areas?	Could the policy affect those with low wages or part-time seasonal employment, deprived households or different population demographics?	What is the impact of an older population on the needs of rural areas?	
	Devolution and funding	Could there be an impact arising from the devolution of power and service provision in rural areas?	Do those with devolved powers have all the information available to assist them with delivery in their rural locations?	Is an equitable proportion of your funding programme going to rural areas?	

Example box 1 provides an illustration of how stage 1 of the rural proofing process was applied in practice in a real example. The example is continued throughout this document and is referred to at each stage. It reflected the policy position in 2017.

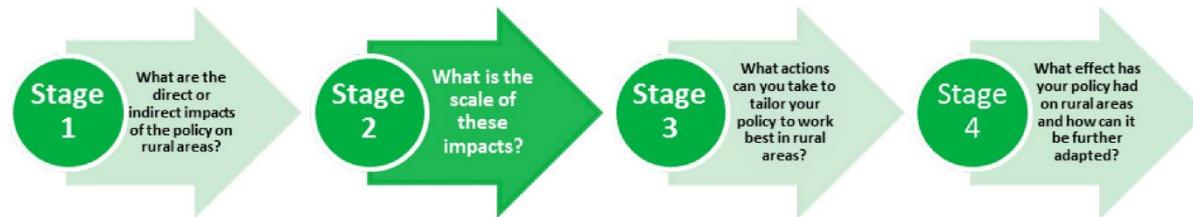
Case study: 30 hours free childcare: Stage 1

The Government made a commitment to extend the existing free childcare entitlement and deliver 30 hours of free childcare to support working families with the costs of childcare.

To establish how the policy would work in practice, eight local authority ‘early implementer’ pilot areas started the scheme, a year ahead of the national rollout. To test that the scheme would be workable in rural areas two rural authorities, predominantly rural Northumberland, and significantly rural Staffordshire, were among the eight authorities selected as pilot areas. This pilot approach was designed to help identify the direct and indirect impacts of policy in different types of rural area and inform how the impacts can be assessed for a national rollout.

Stage 2: Assess the scale of impacts

Figure 4:



Stage 2 of the process is to assess the scale of the issues. Issues related to all aspects of living and working in rural areas should be considered in the analysis.

This section includes a decision tree that should be worked through to gather rural proofing evidence. Access to services and infrastructure, living and working in rural areas, environmental and distributional / equality and devolution impacts are likely to be the main issues from policy intervention. Further guidance on how to assess these is provided in this section.

The assessment of the issues should focus on the marginal change that occurs between what would have happened without the intervention being considered and what would happen as a result of that intervention. It should also take into account the policy context and other factors in rural areas that could affect the policy and its implementation.

Assessment could range from a very simple quantitative or even descriptive approach where the scale of the effect is relatively low to an in-depth appraisal and detailed calculation of the distributional impacts where the scale is significant. Where impacts are significant for the group concerned, further analysis, identifying gaining and losing groups and estimating the impacts on their welfare and income is required. This approach helps to ensure that impacts of decisions are properly understood and where necessary options for mitigation can be considered.

Figure 5: Decision tree for considering the data requirements for stage 2

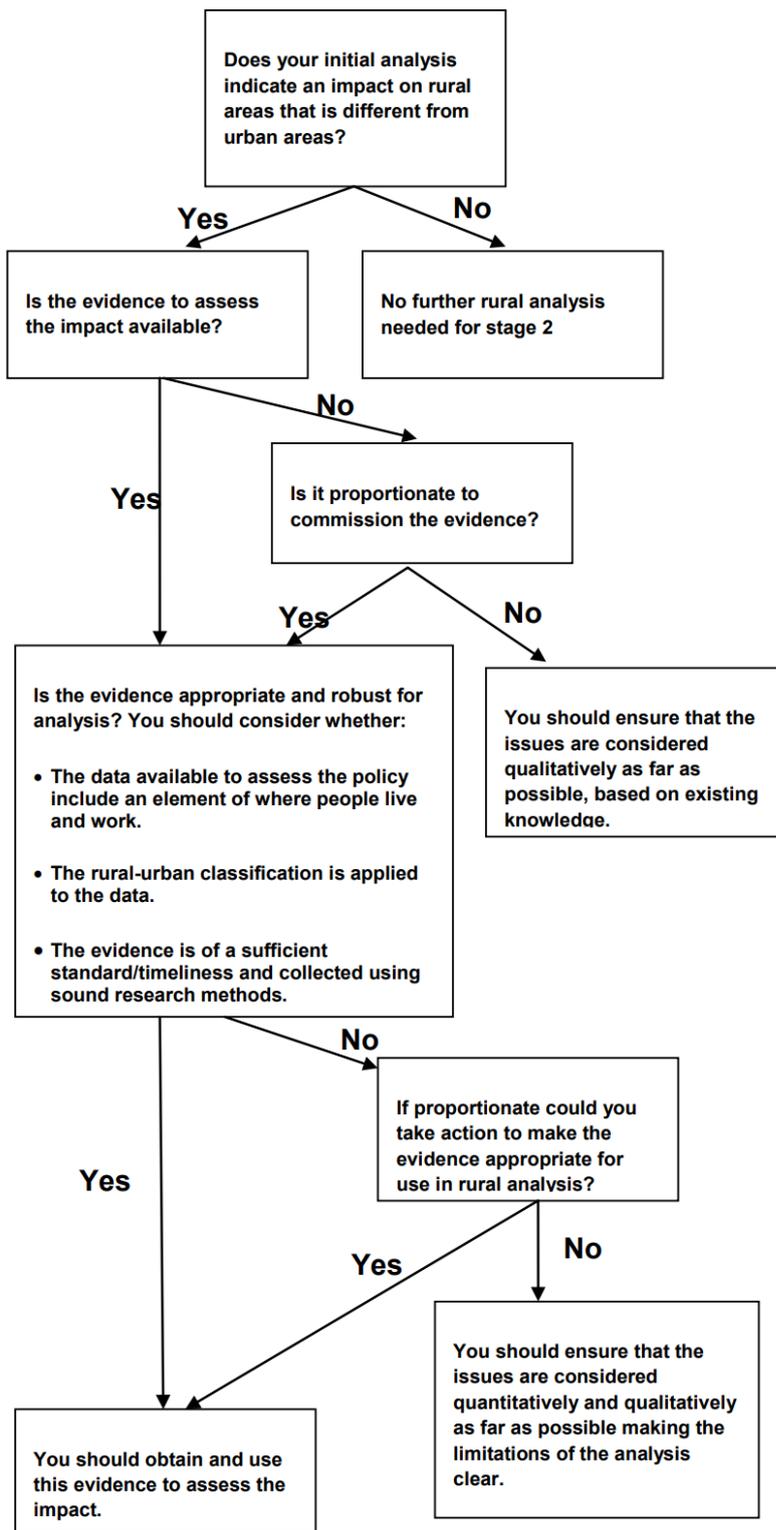


Figure 5 provides a list of the key considerations for carrying out rural proofing analysis. Defra maintains evidence which helps to highlight why rural areas can be different, experience different impacts, or need different delivery mechanisms. Defra also provides details of the official statistical rural urban classification and guidance on how to apply it to datasets.

More information and web links are included in the Further guidance and resources section of this document. Further advice can be sought by contacting Defra at: rural.proofing@defra.gov.uk

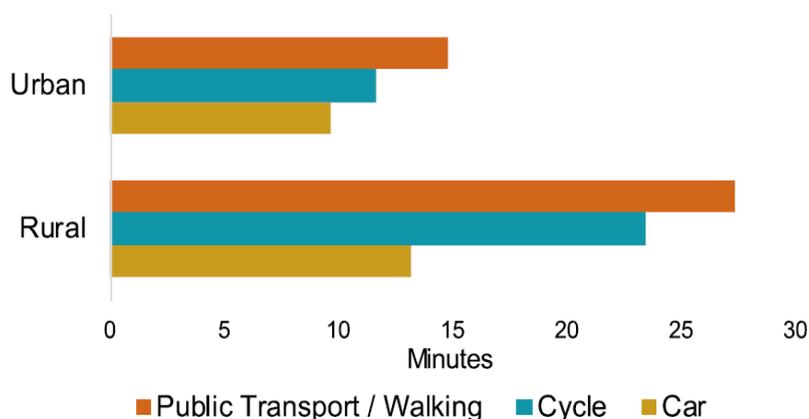
Further guidance for assessing some of the main rural proofing issues is set out below.

1. Access to services and infrastructure

Access to services, such as hospitals or further education, is a key issue given the remoteness of rural communities and poorer public transport (compared with urban areas). Access could be restricted due to a number of factors including the lack of provision in the local area or the distance or the time taken to travel to the service. This may be having a negative impact on the wellbeing and quality of life of rural dwellers.

Figure 6 illustrates how travel times to key services can be higher in rural areas compared to urban areas using public transport/walking, cycling and by car.

Figure 6: Illustration of differences in average travel times to key services



Analysis should be carried out to understand the impacts on accessibility where policy intervention is to open, close, change, move or co-locate services. Alongside traditional services, consideration should also be given to access to infrastructure such as roads, broadband and utilities, as well as services that are delivered virtually.

If assessing access to infrastructure services such as roads, broadband or utilities it is important to understand the geographic coverage of these services. Use of postcode databases can be a vital source of information when planning geographic coverage for rolling out or renewing infrastructural services and can inform estimates of levels of population (household and business) connectivity to the infrastructure. The Office for National Statistics maintains the National Statistics Postcode Directory which combines both Royal Mail and Ordnance Survey data and is available under licence via the ONS Open Geography Portal geoportal.statistics.gov.uk.

Journey time statistics can be used to assess the impacts on accessibility. DfT publish journey time statistics for key services based on car, cycle, and public transport modes of transport. Table 3 shows examples of key services that are directly impacted by government policy and those that could be indirectly impacted by government policy.

Table 3: Examples of key services

Services directly impacted by government policy	Services indirectly impacted by government policy
1) Primary schools	6) Food stores
2) Secondary schools	7) Town centres
3) Further education colleges	8) Medium sized employment centres
4) GP surgeries	
5) Hospitals	

Services 1 to 5 are impacted by government policy directly and should be considered when assessing accessibility. Services 6 to 8 could be impacted by policy indirectly and should also be considered if it is thought that the policy intervention will lead to changes in this service. A proportionate analysis should be carried out, depending on the scale of the impact.

Figure 7 outlines the levels of accessibility analysis that could be carried out, ordered by the level of work require

Figure 7: Levels of accessibility analysis

- A) Utilise evidence from published journey time statistics: Use or tailor currently published evidence.
- B) Obtain other statistics: Request statistics that are not currently published but based on the 8 key services.
- C) Model accessibility of a new service that is currently not included: If deemed proportionate, policy makers should discuss with Defra and DfT the possibility of modelling a new service that is not currently included by the DfT model.

Further information can be found via DfT’s published statistics⁵. Further advice is available by contacting Defra at: rural.proofing@defra.gov.uk

⁵ www.gov.uk/government/collections/journey-time-statistics

2. Living and working in rural areas

A. Business impacts

Rural businesses account for around a quarter of all businesses. A large number of rural businesses are small or micro businesses and a higher proportion of people employed in rural areas work in small or micro business compared with people employed in urban areas.

Small businesses (<50 full time employees) and micro businesses (<10 full time employees) may experience disproportionate impacts from regulation and the Better Regulation Framework Manual requires impact assessments to carry out a small and micro business (SaMBA) assessment. The SaMBA assessment could also be used to consider the impacts on rural areas.

Defra produces rural evidence on:

- Number of businesses
- Number of start-ups
- Business composition (by area)
- Average turnover
- Business by industry type

For a more detailed analysis, the raw data can be obtained from the Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR) www.ons.gov.uk/aboutus/whatwedo/paidservices/interdepartmentalbusinessregisteridbr. The IDBR includes data on UK businesses that are VAT and PAYE registered. Users must register to use the IDBR through a government email address and have access to VML software. For smaller businesses, data can be obtained from the Longitudinal Small Business Survey⁶.

B. Employment impacts

It is important to understand the impacts that policy intervention has on employment in rural areas. Defra rural evidence can help to understand this impact and includes statistics on:

- Employment
- Unemployment
- Economic inactivity
- Workplace based annual earnings.

Where rural employment impacts are expected to differ from those in urban areas, these impacts should be analysed and accounted for. The first step is to refer to the rural evidence hub to obtain data and statistics on rural employment. If further evidence is needed, bespoke analysis could be carried out. Further advice is available by contacting Defra at: rural.proofing@defra.gov.uk

⁶ www.gov.uk/government/publications/small-business-survey-2015-businesses-with-employees

C. Housing, planning and education

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) ⁷ sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. The core principles of the NPPF should be taken into account when considering the impact of housing and other development planned for rural areas.

Owing to their remoteness and smaller size, rural schools experience higher costs for the recruitment and retention of staff and have fewer opportunities for economies of scale and efficiency saving from sharing

resources and governance arrangements. These higher running costs mean that rural schools may not be able to operate on the basis of their per-pupil funding only. Schools in rural areas also tend to have lower school rolls and are more vulnerable to changes in local population. These issues need to be considered when assessing rural education issues.

3. Environmental impacts:

The environmental impact of policy interventions in rural areas should be analysed. Supplementary Green Book guidance for environmental impacts should be followed: www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-green-book-appraisal-and-evaluation-in-central-government

4. Distribution, equality, devolution, and funding

A. Distributional and equality impact

Distributional impact is a term used to describe the distribution of the costs or benefits of interventions across different groups in society. Policy proposals may have different impacts on individuals according to their income, gender, ethnic group and age and these differences may also be more pronounced in certain rural locations. Annex 5 of the Green Book provides further guidance:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-green-book-appraisal-and-evaluation-in-central-government

Equality Impact Assessments are an important framework for considering evidence and analysis to help identify the likely positive and negative impacts that policy proposals may have on certain protected groups, and to estimate whether such impacts disproportionately affect such groups.

www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/equality-act-technical-guidance#h2

⁷ www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2

B. Devolution and funding

Devolution is the process of agreeing extra decision-making powers with localities. Devolution deals in England are bottom up, where areas negotiate their proposals with government so that they are tailored to meet local needs.

Devolution may have a number of impacts on rural areas. It is likely to impact on delivery mechanisms and so this effect should be assessed in stage 2 of the process. Stage 3 of the process then allows policy makers to think about the best way to deliver in rural areas.

Where national funding programmes are being developed it is important that they meet the need of rural and urban populations. Assessing that an equitable proportion of your funding programme can be delivered in rural areas alongside urban areas is a good criterion of success for a national programme. This assessment could combine demographic, per head of population, cost of delivery and sparsity analysis to create an evidence base to deliver an equitable proportion of funding to rural and urban areas.

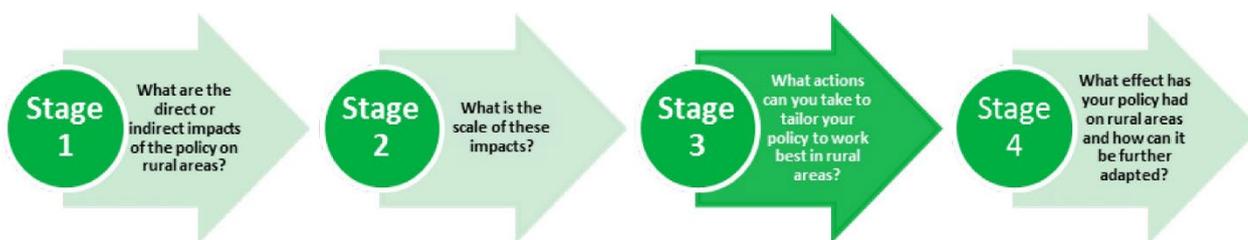
Case study: 30 hours free childcare: Stage 2

A consultation on the delivery model was undertaken to establish how to increase flexibility, improve access for those with disabilities and additional needs, make the local delivery model more efficient and improve access to information about childcare (access to services impacts).

A further consultation, on the Early Years National Funding Formula (EYNFF), was undertaken to improve the allocation of funding so that early years providers could deliver free childcare on a sustainable and high-quality basis. The EYNFF aims to ensure the proposed funding rates were fair, efficient, and transparent for all local authorities (funding impacts).

Stage 3: How to tailor the policy for rural areas

Figure 8:



Where analysts identify rural impacts that are different from urban impacts and are large enough⁸ to warrant mitigation, steps should be taken to tailor the policy to ensure that it is delivered in a way that addresses the needs of rural areas as far as possible. Policies do not need to deliver an equal level of resources for rural areas and urban areas but should be fair and equitable and demonstrate proportionality to rural areas.

Often the policy delivery mechanisms that work in urban areas may not work in rural areas. Table 4 shows the different delivery mechanisms that could be considered.

Table 4: Example delivery mechanisms to consider for rural areas

Exemptions or reductions for rural areas

To continue to provide a minimum level of service in rural areas it might be necessary to introduce an exemption or reduction on levies charged e.g. a Rural Fuel Rebate is used across the United Kingdom for vehicle fuel stations in remote locations.⁹

Mobile, outreach and to the home services:

Examples include mobile libraries, outreach Job Centre services or mobile health provision.

Transport timetables:

Make provision to align with existing public transport timetables or support for community transport e.g. dial-a-ride initiatives.

Joint delivery to achieve economies of scale:

Joint delivery with other service providers (shared services) to achieve economies of scale or joint delivery of two different services to achieve economies of scope e.g. waste and recycling collection occurring together.

Virtual delivery:

This can be more accessible and cost effective especially if the service is the provision of information.

Local delivery:

Working with already established outlets for delivery e.g. post offices/schools. Local delivery bodies could help to advise on the best approach for the local area.

⁸This should include a broad consideration of the evidence base including stakeholder consultation and ultimately informed by expert judgement.

⁹ www.gov.uk/government/news/rural-fuel-price-cut-gets-green-light

Innovative delivery mechanisms such as those in Table 4 should be considered alongside traditional delivery mechanisms, to ensure that implementation is appropriate for rural areas. Delivering an innovative approach may require cross government collaboration if another department is responsible for that area of policy. For instance co-locating police services with library and health services in small rural towns may reduce the overhead cost of delivery and maintain a local presence in a rural setting but this solution could be achieved only through cross-government working.

A proportionate approach should be taken to mitigation, but even small inexpensive changes in policy design may make a large difference to outcomes for rural areas.

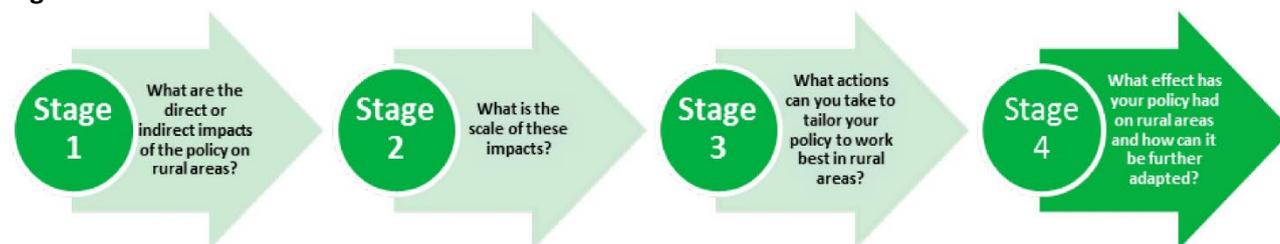
Case study: 30 hours free childcare: Stage 3

As a consequence of the responses received for the delivery model consultation, the Government announced that it would develop best practice case studies, including how this model could support childminders and early year settings in rural areas.

Following responses received for the EYNFF consultation, including concerns that the funding would not always incentivise sufficient providers to participate, DfE announced a minimum funding rate for local authorities. This will benefit many rural areas. Local authorities are also allowed to increase funding for providers operating in sparse/rural areas, in recognition of the extra costs that can be involved. In a similar vein, local authorities can give providers more funding if they are operating flexibly in terms of when they offer their provision. These measures will help to ensure that provision in rural areas meets the childcare needs of working parents.

Stage 4: Evaluate and adapt

Figure 9:



Rural proofing needs to be considered at all stages of the HMT Green Book ROAMEF¹⁰ (Rationale, Objectives, Appraisal, Monitoring, Evaluation and Feedback) cycle, including through the monitoring and evaluation stage after the policy has been implemented.. As part of the development of a monitoring and evaluation or post-implementation review plan, the data to be collected and methods for evaluating¹¹ should be identified. Collecting good quality and relevant monitoring data alongside well-designed research methods will enable an evaluation of the rural impacts and provide an understanding of the success of delivery mechanisms. This will be an important source of learning which could be useful when amending the policy or for implementing other policies in the future.

Case study: 30 hours free childcare: Stage 4

Evaluation of the 'early implementer' areas continued, with DfE monitoring the effectiveness of the delivery of 30 hours free childcare. They also closely monitored the sign-up rate of childcare providers planning to deliver 30 hours free childcare following the publication of the revised EYNFF rates.

DfE announced four 'Early Rollout' local authorities, to deliver 30 hours from April 2017. Three of these areas (Dorset, North Yorkshire, and Leicestershire) were rural, and DfE used the findings from both informal and formal evaluation to consider how to support other rural authorities ahead of the full rollout.

¹⁰ ROAMEF cycle is available in the Green Book, see: www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-green-book-appraisal-and-evaluation-in-central-government

¹¹ The Magenta Book provides guidance on evaluation, see: www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-magenta-book

Further guidance and resources

This section provides further guidance on how to access rural evidence, a list of stakeholders that have an interest in rural areas and a rural proofing checklist.

Civil servants can refer to a short training module, Better policy making – understanding rural areas, which is available on Civil Service Learning.

Rural evidence

Defra's rural evidence provides further helpful resources for rural proofing.

- **rural urban classification**¹ and its application to data
- statistical digest of rural England⁵ **covering businesses, economic activity, earnings, home working, innovation, investment, productivity and Gross Value Added (GVA), skills, tourism**, broadband, crime, education, expenditure, fuel, energy and fuel poverty, health, housing, population and migration, poverty, transport, **travel**, and accessibility
- census analyses⁴ (2011 and 2021 once available)
- rural economic bulletin⁶

1 www.gov.uk/government/collections/rural-urban-classification

2 www.gov.uk/government/collections/rural-economy-statistical-indicators

3 www.gov.uk/government/collections/rural-living-statistical-indicators

4 www.gov.uk/government/collections/census-rural-analyses

5 www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statistical-digest-of-rural-england

6 www.gov.uk/government/statistics/quarterly-rural-economic-bulletin

For further guidance please contact Defra at rural.proofing@defra.gov.uk. Policy officials and analysts and can provide further advice on the process. Specifically in respect of statistical support please contact rural.statistics@defra.gov.uk.

Rural stakeholders

The following list, although not exhaustive, provides an overview of stakeholders with an interest in rural areas:

- Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE)
- Arthur Rank Centre
- Campaign to Protect Rural England
- County Councils Network (CCN)
- Country Land and Business Association (CLA)
- Countryside Alliance (CA)
- Local Government Association (LGA)
- National Association: Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- National Association of Local Councils (NALC)
- National Farmers Union (NFU)
- National Housing Federation
- National Parks England
- Plunkett Foundation
- Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS)
- Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI)
- Rural Community Councils (RCCs)
- Rural Services Network (RSN)

- Rural England
- SPARSE
- Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA)

Rural proofing checklist: actions to take

Allow for higher rural unit delivery costs in funding formulae or allocations.

Look at alternative means of providing and accessing the services in rural areas, for example, through community involvement.

Reduce the need to travel by using outreach, mobile services, or localised delivery

Consider better integration or improvement of transport links.

Allow local delivery bodies flexibility to find the best local solution(s); avoid a “one- size-fits-all” approach.

Use the rural networks and meeting points that exist, for example post offices, village halls, parish notice boards.

Ensure the needs of smaller businesses are specifically addressed.

Use small area-based data to identify social, economic, and environmental differences that need to be accounted for in the policy.

Engage with rural stakeholders and their networks so you can gather evidence and test your proposals.