

Mid-term evaluation of Defra's investment in RCAN/ACRE 2011-15

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Report commissioned by Defra

Report written by Brian Wilson, David Atkinson and Rob Hindle

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Annex A: Analysis of the Defra investment and the funding from other sources

Table 1: Expenditure from Defra and other funding sources, by priority theme and by financial year

Priority theme	2011/12				2012/13				2011-13 (two years combined)			
	Defra £'000s	Other £'000s	Total £'000s	Ratio Defra:other	Defra £'000s	Other £'000s	Total £'000s	Ratio Defra:other	Defra £'000s	Other £'000s	Total £'000s	Ratio Defra:other
1 Housing and planning	1,085	2,263	3,348	1 : 2.09	963	2,284	3,150	1 : 2.37	2,048	4,547	6,595	1 : 2.22
2 Transport and services/facilities	1,014	3,443	4,457	1 : 3.39	914	5,283	6,198	1 : 5.78	1,928	8,726	10,655	1 : 4.53
3 Fuel poverty and energy generation	405	665	1,070	1 : 1.64	365	684	1,049	1 : 1.87	770	1,349	2,119	1 : 1.75
4 Broadband	374	278	652	1 : 0.74	294	251	544	1 : 0.85	668	529	1,196	1 : 0.79
Total (all themes)	2,878	6,649	9,527	1 : 2.31	2,535	8,502	11,037	1 : 3.35	5,413	15,151	20,564	1 : 2.80

Source: Analysis of information in ACRE Annual Monitoring Reports.

Footnote: Figures for Defra funding exclude the ACRE management fee and the RCAN Reserve Fund.

Table 2: Proportion of Defra and other funding sources being spent under each priority theme

Priority themes	2011/12			2012/13			2011-13 (two years combined)		
	Defra	Other	Total	Defra	Other	Total	Defra	Other	Total
1 Housing and planning	37.7%	34.0%	35.1%	37.8%	26.9%	28.5%	37.8%	30.0%	32.1%
2 Transport and services/facilities	35.2%	51.8%	46.8%	36.1%	62.1%	56.2%	35.6%	57.6%	51.8%
3 Fuel poverty and energy generation	14.1%	10.0%	11.2%	14.4%	8.0%	9.5%	14.2%	8.9%	10.3%
4 Broadband	13.0%	4.2%	6.8%	11.6%	3.0%	4.9%	12.3%	3.5%	5.8%
Total (all themes)	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Footnote: Percentages may not add up 100 due to rounding. Figures for Defra funding exclude the ACRE management fee and the RCAN Reserve Fund.

Table 3: Number of local RCAN members with other (non-Defra) funding sources, by priority theme and by financial year

Priority themes	Number of RCAN members, out of 38, with other funding sources	
	2011/12	2012/13
Housing and planning	34	35
Transport and services/facilities	37	37
Fuel poverty and energy generation	32	34
Broadband	15	14
Total (all themes)	38	37

Source: Analysis of information in ACRE Annual Monitoring Report.

Annex B: Outcomes recorded by the eight visited RCAN members during 2011-13

Those shown in *italics* come from detailed RCAN member reports submitted to ACRE (and do not appear in the summary annual reports).

Some outcomes come from 2011/12 monitoring reports and some from 2012/13 monitoring reports, so two entries are possible for each RCAN member on any topic. They record different outcomes and do not double count.

Priority themes >	Housing and planning	Transport, services and facilities	Fuel poverty and energy generation	Broadband
Pillar 1: Local influencing				
Policy document shaped	<p>Core Strategy Preferred Options document.</p> <p>CLPs to be LPA material plng consideration.</p> <p>Draft Core Strategies took account of CLP.</p> <p>Strategic Housing Market Assessment.</p> <p>Local Development Plan, housing provisions.</p> <p>Whole Valley Planning Approach.</p> <p>CLP built into Council's Rural Strategy.</p> <p><i>CLP built into 2 District Community Strategies.</i></p>	<p>LAs agree to include W2W scheme in funding bid.</p> <p>County transport community involvement strategy.</p> <p>District service devolution protocol produced.</p> <p>Asset transfer schemes produced.</p>	<p>County strategic framework on climate change.</p>	

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Policy position of partner changed	<i>Local authority agrees to rural exception sites.</i>		Younger people included in fuel poverty scheme.	Successful LEP negotiation.
New funding stream for RCAN member	<p>District Council funds new RHE post.</p> <p>Five year funding for RHE posts.</p> <p>EA paid for input to flood prevention scheme.</p> <p><i>District Council re-starts CLP funding for RCAN.</i></p> <p><i>IIC funding for CLP in three valleys.</i></p>	<p>Won contract for Digital TV Switchover support.</p> <p>Three year funding for a W2W scheme.</p> <p><i>Extension funding for village halls advice service.</i></p> <p><i>Increased County grant fund for village halls.</i></p> <p><i>Grants to subsidise village halls advice/website.</i></p>	<p>Three year funding from Managing Money Better.</p> <p>Successful Warm Homes Healthy People bid.</p> <p>Successful Energy Best Deal programme bid.</p> <p><i>Successful bid to Cheaper Energy Together initiative.</i></p> <p><i>Secured DECC/LEAF funds for Energy Champions.</i></p> <p><i>Two sources agreed funds for Energy Best Deal events.</i></p>	<p><i>UK Online funding for a Community Hub.</i></p> <p><i>Commissioned to undertake demand stimulation.</i></p>
New funding for rural initiative (not via RCAN)		<p>Community transport initiative.</p> <p>County grant scheme for community buildings.</p> <p>Three year funding for a W2W scheme.</p> <p>Continuation funding for Volunteer Car Service.</p> <p><i>Funding for county's Rural</i></p>	<p>Helped negotiate fuel poverty scheme funding.</p> <p><i>Helped win Community Living Sustainability funding.</i></p>	

		<p><i>Challenge programme.</i></p> <p><i>Funding for 2 new seasonal bus services.</i></p>		
Revise allocation of existing funding so it benefits rural	Planning for affordable housing amended.	<p>County's fund for transport innovation allocation.</p> <p>Local Sustainable Transport Fund allocations.</p> <p>Transport fund deployed for access to healthcare.</p> <p>Further year of the transport to healthcare funding.</p>	Revised project criteria result in more rural awards.	
Partnership created or altered to represent rural interests		RCC rural rep on the Health & Wellbeing Board.	New partnership to address fuel poverty issues.	
Other pillar 1 outcomes	Apply new Whole Valley Planning Approach.			<p>Helped Defra RDPE team resolve RCBF issues.</p> <p>Promotion led to 24,000 registering their BB interest.</p> <p>Council agrees RCC review of BB speeds and need.</p>
Pillar 2: Direct community support				
Supported new community plans	Dozens (inexact) of CLPs completed.			Successful local bid to the RCBF.

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	<p><i>6 new CLPs completed.</i></p> <p>9 new Parish Plans and 5 more updated.</p> <p>2 new CLPs completed.</p> <p><i>1 new CLP completed.</i></p> <p><i>6 new CLPs completed.</i></p> <p><i>6 new CLPs completed.</i></p> <p><i>11 new CLPs completed.</i></p> <p><i>Accountable body for NP group, which passed referendum.</i></p> <p><i>2 new CLPs completed.</i></p>			<p>Successful local bid to the RCBF.</p>
<p>Supported start-up of initiative/project for communities</p>		<p>Community building fire safety checks service.</p> <p><i>Youth Partnership formed to commission services.</i></p> <p><i>40 websites built for community building groups.</i></p>	<p>Oil bulk buying scheme launched, 356 members.</p> <p>Winter fuel payment donor scheme for elderly.</p> <p>Oil bulk buying scheme launched.</p> <p>Oil bulk buying scheme launched.</p> <p>Oil bulk buy scheme reached 400 members in a year.</p>	

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			<p><i>Oil bulk buy scheme started and another saved.</i></p> <p><i>Supported launch of 2 oil bulk buy schemes.</i></p>	
Supported ongoing initiative/project for communities			Energy Champion helped households gain insulation [number unstated].	110 taught how to use the internet/e-mail.
Supported start-up of local service		<p>Community transport service.</p> <p>3 community run shops.</p> <p>Community run petrol station.</p> <p><i>District youth hubs – number unstated.</i></p> <p><i>Good Neighbour schemes – number unstated.</i></p> <p><i>1 community-run shop.</i></p> <p><i>1 community food garden.</i></p>		
Supported ongoing local service		<p>W2W gave 118 access to employment or training.</p> <p>Community take-over of a threatened post office.</p>		

		<p>Commercial take-over of 2 community centres.</p> <p>Replacement minibus for community transport.</p> <p><i>Threatened PO turned into Post Office Local.</i></p> <p><i>Extension of Village Agents scheme for older people.</i></p> <p><i>6 libraries saved as asset transfers.</i></p> <p><i>11,000 passenger journeys on volun' car/bus schemes.</i></p>		
<p>Assisted building of new community assets</p>	<p>Development of 275 affordable homes.</p> <p>Delivery of 212 affordable homes.</p> <p>Completion of 65 affordable homes.</p> <p>Completion of 39 affordable homes.</p> <p>Former village pub land for affordable homes.</p> <p>4 affordable home 'sites' after needs surveys.</p>	<p><i>New village hall built.</i></p>		

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	<p>3 affordable housing 'schemes' completed.</p> <p>Completion of 21 affordable homes.</p> <p>Influenced type/tenure of homes on S106 sites.</p>			
<p>Assisted improvement of existing community assets</p>		<p>Refurbishment of 12 community buildings.</p> <p>2 local bodies to manage community facilities.</p> <p>£56k of grants to improve community buildings.</p> <p><i>Refurbishment of 2 village halls.</i></p>	<p>17 community buildings from energy audits.</p>	

Annex C: Results from the online survey of parish and town councils

Responses came from 197 parish and town councils located in the areas covered by the eight RCAN members visited for this evaluation.

Notes:

Those who hadn't used RCAN advice/support inevitably skipped later questions.

Percentages refer only to those who answered each question.

Percentages in columns may not add exactly to 100% due to rounding.

Where stated a number of boxes could be ticked, so percentages add to over 100%.

Q. Are you familiar with [name of the local RCAN member]?

	Number	Per cent
Yes	185	94%
No	12	6%
Skipped question	0	n/a
		(n = 197)

Q. Has your parish/town council (or its community) used support or advice from [name of local RCAN member] during the last two years?

	Number	Per cent
Yes, on a number of occasions	76	39%
Yes, on at least one occasion	69	35%
No, it has not	44	22%
Don't know	7	4%
Skipped question	1	n/a
		(n = 196)

Q. If yes, what the support or advice about? Tick all the boxes that apply.

	Number	Per cent
Housing needs, including affordable housing	33	24%
Neighbourhood plans	43	32%
Community-led plans e.g. parish plans	76	56%
Village shops or pubs	12	9%
Village hall or community building	53	39%
Community transport	9	7%
Community renewable energy scheme	21	15%
Broadband provision in the area	24	18%
Computing skills and getting people online	5	4%
Other, please state	30	22%
Skipped question	61	n/a
		(n = 136)

Q. If yes, what format did the support or advice take? Tick all the boxes that apply.

	Number	Per cent
We attended training or learning events run by them	51	37%
We contacted them for some advice over the phone	88	64%
We received ongoing assistance or advice from one of their staff	89	64%
We used published advice (online or printed) written by them	51	37%
We had them take up a concern with another organisation on our behalf	9	7%
We used them to find other communities to speak to, to learn from	20	14%
We received some grant funding from them	21	15%
Other, please state	25	18%
Skipped question	59	n/a
		(n = 138)

Q. Overall, how useful do you feel this support and advice has been?

	Number	Per cent
Very useful	111	73%
Fairly useful	29	19%
Not particularly useful	8	5%
Unhelpful	0	0%
Don't know/can't recall	5	3%
Skipped question	44	n/a
		(n = 153)

Q. As a result of the advice or support you received, what was your Parish or Town Council able to do better or differently?

This was an open question, so the answers given do not tabulate. The main types of answer are noted in the main part of this report (chapter 6).

Q. What, subsequently, were the main benefits of this for your local residents or local businesses?

This was an open question, so the answers given do not tabulate. The main types of answer are noted in the main part of this report (chapter 6).

Q. Which one of these statements do you consider to be correct?

	Number	Per cent
We were not aware of another local organisation	90	61%

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providing that type of support or advice		
We could have asked another local organisation, but doubt its support would have been as relevant to our needs	42	28%
We could have asked another local organisation and we think it would have provided support just as relevant to our needs	16	11%
Skipped question	49	n/a (n = 148)

Q. If you ticked 'c' at question 8 above, which other organisation are you thinking about that could have provided relevant support or advice?

This was an open question, so the answers given do not tabulate. The main types of answer are noted in the main part of this report (chapters 6 and 9).

ANNEX D: MID-TERM EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted for this mid-term evaluation had a number of components, thus:

Project inception: amongst other things, this was used to confirm the methodology and review the main project risks;

Document review: this included a review of programme set-up and management documents, to understand its operation. It entailed a review of the full suite of monitoring reports submitted by ACRE to Defra, a review of detailed monitoring reports submitted by eight local RCAN members to ACRE and a review of Defra's 2011/12 feedback reports. This enabled all activities and outcomes mentioned in the monitoring reports to be logged in a structured way;

RCAN interviews: eight local RCAN members were selected to be a fair cross-section of the network. They varied in terms of the size and complexity of their geographic area. Furthermore, one was located in each region (outside London) and two were chosen because they operated as conjoined RCAN members and CVSSs. More information about the selection method is in annex E. In depth interviews were held with each of these RCAN members to understand better how they operated, how they used the Defra investment, how their work was shaped by that investment and by local circumstances;

The eight RCAN members selected for detailed evidence gathering:

- Action with Communities in Cumbria
- Cambridgeshire ACRE
- Community Action Hampshire
- Community Action Northumberland
- Gloucestershire Rural Community Council
- Humber and Wolds Rural Community Council
- RCC (Leicestershire and Rutland)
- Shropshire Rural Community Council

Stakeholder interviews: semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with eight local and three national stakeholders for this RCAN work. The eight local stakeholders were based in the eight RCAN areas noted above and were organisations that RCAN members are partnering or seeking to influence. The three national stakeholders were recipients of the rural intelligence that ACRE/RCAN is producing under this programme to inform policy. More information about these stakeholders is given in annex D;

Stakeholder survey: an online survey was distributed to parish and town council contacts in the eight areas selected above. This sought views about the advice and support they had received from local RCAN members, how useful it had been, what had changed as a result and whether alternate sources of support existed. The survey had 197 responses spread across the eight areas. More information about it is at annex C;

Management interviews: in depth interviews were held with ACRE, as the accountable body for this Agreement, and with the officer in Defra's Rural Communities Policy Unit (RCPU) responsible for managing that Agreement. This was an opportunity to gain further understanding about the programme's operation, how it had developed over the two years and the context for its operation (including challenges, barriers and the like). Four other civil society sector networks were contacted to gather some material about their operations and the extent to which they worked in rural areas;

Analysis and report writing: this methodology generated a considerable body of evidence, much of which required analysis e.g. the logged data from monitoring reports, the interview responses and the survey results. It was then structured to answer the evaluation questions for this report. Having evidence from different sources was useful, in order to test the validity of findings;

Case studies: additional published outputs from this evaluation are five short documents. Three are good practice case studies, illustrating success stories from the programme. The others are learning notes on issues of particular importance to the programme, being: adapting to a tough funding climate; local partnership working and funding for broadband work; and making a difference on rural economic growth. These have been published alongside this report as separate documents.

Dissemination: the consultants have also drawn up a dissemination plan for Defra and the project Steering Group, to help them promote the learning from this mid-term evaluation.

Annex E: Organisations from whom evidence was gathered

This listing is additional to the considerable evidence that was generated by reviewing the programme documentation and monitoring reports. That document review gathered evidence about all 38 local RCAN members.

Local RCAN member interviews

Action with Communities in Cumbria

Cambridgeshire ACRE

Community Action Hampshire

Community Action Northumberland

Gloucestershire Rural Community Council

Humber and Wolds Rural Community Council

RCC (Leicestershire and Rutland)

Shropshire Rural Community Council

Management interviews

Action with Communities in Rural England

Department of Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Rural Communities Policy Unit)

Local beneficiary/stakeholder interviews

Cambridgeshire County Council

Gloucestershire County Council

Hampshire County Council

Hinckley & Bosworth District Council

East Riding of Yorkshire Council (unitary)

Lake District National Park Authority

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Groundwork (county branch)

Midwest Rural Enterprise

National beneficiary/stakeholder interviews

Policy Team Leader in Rural Communities Policy Unit, Defra

Department of Energy & Climate Change

Department for Culture, Media & Sport

Parish and town councils surveyed

Those located in the following local authority areas and whose contact details were held by the Rural Services Network were invited to complete an online survey form:

Allerdale, Carlisle, Copeland, Eden and South Lakeland (districts).

Cotswold, Forest of Dean, Stroud and Tewkesbury (districts).

East Cambridgeshire, Fenland, South Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire (districts).

East Riding of Yorkshire, North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire (unitaries).

Harborough, Hinckley & Bosworth, Melton and North West Leicestershire (districts) plus Rutland (unitary).

Hampshire (county).

Northumberland (unitary).

Shropshire (unitary).

Civil society network organisations contacted

Locality

National Association for Voluntary and Community Action

Plunkett Foundation

Campaign to Protect Rural England

Annex F: Approach to the selection of eight local RCAN members for detailed analysis

Introduction

This annex explains the analysis that was undertaken to identify a group of 8 RCAN members for use as a representative sample on which to base the primary elements of the evaluation research.

The Rural Community Action Network

The Rural Community Action Network is made up of 38 Rural Community Councils (RCCs) and ACRE. Each RCC is an independent organisation with its own constitution and governance. Each operates in a defined geographical area which is usually based on an English county, though in some instances (for example, Tees Valley) they are based on more recent administrative geography.

The network has been organised into 8 regions; North West, North East, West Midlands, East Midlands, East of England, South East, South West and Yorkshire & Humber. The formality of these regions has reduced recently with the loss of some regional federated bodies that were set up at the height of regionalism within English governance in the mid 2000s. Despite these changes there is still a strong element of networking amongst RCCs and within regions, so regional stratification remains relevant.

Diversity

The 38 RCCs all operate in different places and in different conditions on the ground. Each has its own history and legacy; some are part of larger voluntary sector organisations, including CVSs which work across rural, urban and metropolitan areas, whilst others are relatively small and work solely in a rural area. This diversity of structure and context has been recognised in the allocation of Defra funding across the network using a formulae. This formula includes different variables in order to take account of the impact of local context on the activity of each RCC.

The variable factors included in the current version of the funding formula (2010) are:

- Geography – the scale of the RCC territory;
- Rural population – the size of the rural population (each RCCs customer base);
- Rural disadvantage – the proportion of rural households in income poverty;
- Administrative complexity – the number of local authorities each RCC has to deal with in order to carry out its influencing role.

Sample factors

To identify a representative sample of RCCs for this mid-term evaluation, the research built on work carried out by Rob Hindle (then of Rural Innovation) for the RCAN in 2010 and it analysed the 38 RCC areas through a series of factors. The factors applied were:

- Administrative complexity – the number of local authorities. The number of local authorities also reflects the type of local authority structure. Some RCCs work with a single unitary local authority (examples include Northumberland, Durham and Wiltshire), whilst others work in a two tier area with one county council, around ten

district councils and perhaps a National Park Authority. Examples of this type of area include Cumbria, Kent and Derbyshire;

- Rural sparsity – this indicator represents the distribution of rural population across the geographical territory. Sparsity is at the heart of the ONS rural and urban definition, and it is known from previous work and experience that sparsity is an effective indicator of different types of rural context;
- Per cent of population that is rural per local authority area – this indicator tells us the relative value of the work that an RCC does with each local authority. It is a good indicator of the local area context and the type of task that the RCC has in persuading local authorities to effectively rural proof their activities;
- Number of parishes – the parish is the basic customer unit for much RCC delivery. The number of parishes therefore equates well to the size of each RCC's customer base. It is a function of different rurality types; that in some areas parishes are much smaller (in population terms) than in others. These differences are relevant to the way RCCs go about their business and the outcomes they achieve;
- Number of parishes per 10,000 hectares – this indicator takes account of the impact of geography on the way each RCC goes about its business. The lower the ratio, the more ground the RCC has to cover and the more extreme the influence of geography is likely to be on the living and working conditions of its rural communities.

Determining the sample RCCs

The 38 RCCs were analysed against each of the factors listed above and then split into four quartiles for each factor. A score was given to each quartile and then an aggregate score calculated for each RCC, based on its quartile positions across all of the factors. The list based on those aggregate scores was then split into four quartiles and two RCCs were selected from each quartile. This was done in a way which (additionally) selected one RCC from each of the eight regions and made sure that two of them were conjoined with a CVS.

The chosen sample

Based on this approach the 8 RCCs or local RCAN members that were chosen (and agreed with the evaluation Steering Group) were those for:

- Cumbria;
- Northumberland;
- Humber & Wolds;
- Shropshire;
- Leicestershire & Rutland;
- Cambridgeshire;
- Hampshire;
- Gloucestershire.

ANNEX G: Context to the Defra Agreement

By way of context this annex provides some information about earlier agreements between Defra and ACRE/RCAN, and some information about central Government policy for civil society networks such as RCAN.

Earlier investment

Central Government has invested in the RCAN network over a few decades, some of which took place through public sector agencies, such as the former Countryside Agency.

The predecessor to the current Agreement was the RCAN Investment Programme 2008-11, through which Defra invested over £10.3 million (£3.45 million per year). That paid for RCAN members to partner local authorities, public service providers and other civil society organisations, to: make them aware of rural needs and priorities; influence their policies and programmes; and encourage them to respond with rural initiatives and investment. RCAN delivered this by undertaking influencing activities and supporting rural communities on things like community led planning, affordable housing and village hall management.

An evaluation of that investment¹ concluded it had broadly been effective. In part this was due to an approach which created synergies by linking policy work (with organisations) and practical support work (with rural communities).

Some findings from that evaluation are relevant to the 2011-15 investment, including:

- That RCAN members had built-up their capability, so were not starting from scratch in 2011 (albeit there was then a shift in emphasis for the Defra investment);
- That RCAN members generally had raised their profiles and credibility with statutory and other local partners, often being seen as 'honest brokers' with rural communities;
- That policy developments, such as "localism", being introduced in the last year of this investment (2010-11), whilst slowing delivery in the short term as almost all change does, were expected to generate new longer term opportunities for RCAN;
- That some traditional sources of funding for RCAN members, from the public sector, were under considerable pressure and new funding sources were being explored.

Between 2007 and 2012 ACRE was also a recipient of BASIS funding from the Big Lottery, which supported actions to develop and strengthen the RCAN network. This was known as the Rural Infrastructure England (RIE) project. Its funding paid for things such as training for RCAN officers, the development of e-groups, peer-to-peer networking, systems for sharing practice and the production of ACRE policy briefings. Funding was also attracted from the Change Up programme (which included an element of funding from Defra) and various local RCAN members won funding from the Transforming Local Infrastructure (TLI) fund which helped frontline organisations to restructure, merge and build capacity. These activities

¹ RCAN Investment Programme evaluation, final report, Brian Wilson Associates with David Atkinson Consulting (2011)

clearly should have grown the capacity of ACRE/RCAN to deliver on Defra's investment objectives.

Wider context

Defra's support for the RCAN network should be seen within the broader context of Government support for the civil society sector and its localism agenda. There has been a cross-Whitehall push, led by the Office for Civil Society in Cabinet Office, to encourage voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations or groups to play a larger part in policy and service delivery. Policy has focussed on creating the conditions to make it easier to set up and run a voluntary, community or social enterprise organisation; promoting social action by encouraging the giving of time and money; and helping to find alternative sources of capital to support the social sector. A number of initiatives and funding streams have flowed from this and ACRE and RCAN members have been in receipt of some of them (see above). Networks like RCAN can contribute both by delivering directly to communities and by supporting communities to help themselves, such as RCAN networks' support for rural communities on Community Rights, asset transfers and Neighbourhood Planning.

The Agreement should also be viewed within the context of the Government's Rural Statement, which was issued in 2012. This confirms the importance of rural proofing, so that those who make and implement policies consider rural needs and circumstances. Pillar one of the Agreement should directly assist local rural proofing and pillar three provides intelligence which can help with national rural proofing. Another section in the Rural Statement emphasises the relevance of 'rural community action', which pillar two of the Agreement was designed to support.

ANNEX H: MEASUREMENT OF ACTIVITIES AND OUTCOMES

Health warning on the measurement of activities

Chapter 3 reports on the scale and types of activities. The numbers of activities that are quoted in that chapter should be taken as indicative and not as precise counts.

It is important to understand some health warnings on the data, including that:

- Some activities would clearly have taken more time and effort than others to complete;
- Certain activities, as described, could arguably have been disaggregated into a number of smaller activities²;
- It seems inevitable that not every activity got reported, even in the detailed reports submitted by RCAN members to ACRE;
- Monitoring took place less often in year two than in year one, making it more likely that activities were omitted.

We do not therefore claim that any figures given for activities undertaken are precise or complete. The numbers for pillar one and pillar two activities may not be particularly comparable, since pillar two activities appear to be generally larger. Moreover, we have avoided comparing the number of activities undertaken by different RCAN members, since part of the variation may be due to their individual approaches to the monitoring reports. However, a few figures are useful, if only to give an impression of the scale and spread of activity that has occurred during the period 2011 to 2013.

The scaling up of activity counts

In total this evaluation logged 1,300 separate activities from the summary monitoring reports that cover all 38 local RCAN members. 268 of those 1,300 activities were generated by the eight RCAN members visited for this evaluation. However, analysis of detailed monitoring returns from these eight has expanded the number of activities identified to 860 i.e. by a factor of 3.2.

If the eight RCAN members are fairly representative of the wider network this indicates that something over 4,000 activities will have been recorded by the whole network over the two years 2011-13. An alternative approach would have been to divide the 860 figure by eight and then multiply it by thirty-eight. This calculation gives a very similar finding.

Defining outcomes from the programme

For pillar one an outcome is defined as something (e.g. policy, delivery plan, funding) which changed in a way that should benefit rural communities as a result of an RCAN member's local influencing activity.

² For example, pillar two activities often refer to supporting a number of different rural communities.

For pillar two an outcome is usually defined as a service, asset or facility in a rural area which has been created or improved after receiving advice or support from an RCAN member. However, it is recognised that some RCAN support does not quite fit this model. For example, when it comes to support for community led planning it seems reasonable to use the creation of a completed plan with agreed priorities/actions as an outcome (as that is the springboard for community action).

Pillar three is especially tricky, since there is usually a two step process, with ACRE/RCAN providing intelligence to Defra and Defra then deciding how or whether to use it with other Departments. Ultimately Defra wants to see intelligence having an impact on policy development. As far as an outcome goes, it seems reasonable to include within a definition intelligence which helps Defra carry out its national rural proofing role; where the evidence provided enables it to engage better with the relevant policy Department.

Pillar	Inputs	Activities	Outcomes
One	Defra and other funding. Local RCAN staff time.	Examples: responding to a consultation draft; sitting on a steering group.	Example: policies are reworded in a local plan document.
Two	Defra and other funding. Local RCAN staff time.	Examples: responding to enquiries for advice; running a training session.	Examples: a community shop opens; village hall installs energy efficient measures.
Three	Defra funding. ACRE and local RCAN staff time.	Example: a concern with policy implementation is raised with Defra.	Example: Defra raises the matter with Department X, using RCAN evidence.

Of course, RCAN members are not the only organisations trying to influence locally. Nor is ACRE the only body providing Defra with rural intelligence. Others may provide evidence which is complimentary or they could make a contrary case. No methodology can eliminate this complexity, but our discussions with beneficiaries enabled some exploration of the issue

It should be noted that the approach taken to assess pillar three outcomes is different, because there is little existing evidence to analyse and because of the nature of intelligence provision. Interviews were undertaken with programme managers (in Defra and ACRE) and with some national beneficiaries, to explore what evidence of outcomes exists in policy areas relating to three of the priority themes. This is necessarily a more qualitative approach.

It would be unrealistic to expect that all intelligence should lead to an outcome. Inevitably, some will be of greater and some of less interest to the policy teams in Defra’s RCPU, depending on its own policy priorities at any one time and its capacity to handle the intelligence. Dialogue between Defra and ACRE, through the Keep In Touch group and the expert Reference Groups, should help steer ACRE towards issues that are likely to be of most interest to Defra.

Health warning on the measurement of outcomes

A large number of monitoring reports have been reviewed and during this process things which appeared to be outcomes were logged. As well as looking at the summary monitoring reports submitted to Defra, the document review looked at the detailed reports sent by the

eight visited RCAN members to ACRE. Where this raised questions about an outcome, they were raised during interview with the RCAN member. External views about outcomes were also gathered from some of those who were recipients of the influencing, community support and intelligence, and that aspect is covered in the next chapter.

Three health warnings about the outcomes information are nonetheless made here.

First, despite these efforts to identify as many outcomes as possible, it is almost certain that some have been missed. This stems partly from a tendency in many of the monitoring returns to describe activities, without making clear whether they resulted in outcomes. A lack of clarity may simply indicate that they didn't, but that seems unlikely in all cases. It is noted that some local RCAN members share this unease about outcomes not being adequately measured: one or two are known to have work in-hand to try and improve their recording. Indeed, with pillar two outcomes, some are attempting to monetise them.

Second, there is not necessarily a straight line process from input, through activity, to outcome. This is particularly true with the influencing work. To take one example, lobbying a local authority could result in being invited onto a partnership group (another activity), which is an important step forward, but is not yet an outcome.

Third, it should not be concluded that an activity without an outcome is necessarily a failed activity. There could be a time lag between engaging in activities and the possibility of seeing an outcome e.g. where a Local Development Plan is being produced over a period of (say) two years. It could equally be that different influencing activities have to be tried (e.g. meetings with an authority, producing survey information) before a breakthrough is made. Then some of those whom RCAN members are trying to influence are bound to be harder to win over than others. Any organisation involved in influencing will know that outcomes are not achieved all (or even most) of the time.

It is worth noting again that 26% of the funding for these outcomes was the Defra investment, though this figure will vary markedly between pillars.