Ex-post evaluation of the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC)

Report to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)

December 2014
Contents

Executive Summary .............................................................................................................. i
1. Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1
2. Background to CRC ..................................................................................................... 3
3. Structure, scale and purpose of CRC .......................................................................... 7
4. Stakeholders’ assessments of – and reflections on – CRC and its activities .......... 12
5. The process of influence ............................................................................................. 22
6. Impacts and additionality ............................................................................................ 30
7. Perspectives on value for money ................................................................................. 33
8. Conclusions and lessons .............................................................................................. 36

Annex A: Methodology ................................................................................................... A-1
Annex B: List of consultees .............................................................................................. B-1
Annex C: List of acronyms .............................................................................................. C-1
Executive Summary

Context and purpose

1. Against a backdrop of the Rural White Paper (2000), the Foot and Mouth Disease crisis (2001) and Lord Haskins’ report on Modernising Rural Delivery (2003), the case for the formation of a “new Countryside Agency” was made in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs’ (Defra) Rural Strategy (2004). The legal basis for the new organisation was set out in the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. This described three main functions for what became the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC), namely those of advocate, adviser and watchdog.

2. The CRC became an independent organisation on 1st October 2006. On 29th June 2010, the decision to abolish it was announced. CRC formally ceased to exist on 31st March 2013. The overall life of the CRC (as an independent organisation) was therefore about 6.5 years. Over this period, it spent some £37.4m executing its three key functions.

3. In late 2013, Defra commissioned SQW to complete an ex post evaluation of the statutory functions carried out by the CRC. Its purpose was to codify and capture the lessons and insights that might be gleaned from CRC’s activities. The evaluation itself was small scale and largely qualitative, relying mainly on different forms of consultation and case studies.

Reflecting on CRC’s activities

4. The evaluation found that the activities undertaken by CRC in support of its three main functions evolved constantly. The functions of advocate, adviser and watchdog were underpinned by: a number of “set piece” products (e.g. State of the Countryside reports and Rural Proofing reports); wider outputs linked to Inquiries (e.g. housing, uplands), thematic studies (e.g. rural disadvantage) and best practice guides (e.g. tackling financial exclusion); and more general processes of engagement and influence.

5. Stakeholders’ reflections on activities linked to the three functions included the following:

   - Both commissioners and staff were involved in executing the advocacy function on a day to day basis, and the role of the Rural Advocate – who was also the chair of CRC – was extremely important. However accountabilities were complicated – with the Rural Advocate reporting direct to the Prime Minister and the CRC reporting to Defra. Some stakeholders considered that this led to synergies and impact; others talked more in terms of confusion. Nevertheless the role of the Rural Advocate in bridging the gap between rural communities and government ministers was widely acknowledged even if there was not always total alignment between the Rural Advocate’s work and that of the CRC (as set out in its Business Plans).

   - In relation to the adviser function, the quality of evidence and analysis produced by CRC was widely applauded, as was its accessibility: “State of the Countryside” reports, in particular, were widely used and seen as exemplary while the various Inquiries and thematic studies were judged to be independent, well-reported and balanced. Some commented that CRC perhaps tried to cover too much ground and that greater
stakeholder engagement in the choice of research topics and the delivery of research might have been helpful. But in the round, this function was considered to have been executed well

- Less effective – on balance – was the watchdog function, and some described CRC as a “watchdog without teeth”. Whilst it succeeded in keeping rural proofing on the agenda, CRC’s limited powers, together with the implications of a reporting line to Defra (rather than, say, the Cabinet Office), meant that most considered it to have had limited effect.

The overall conclusion was therefore that CRC’s effectiveness had probably been greater with regard to its advocate and adviser roles than in relation to its watchdog function. More fundamentally, some considered that the watchdog role actually sat very uneasily with the other two functions.

**Understanding the process of influence**

7. CRC’s activities were prompted by different influences (sometimes involving Defra, sometimes Other Government Departments, sometimes the Prime Minister and sometimes the Rural Advocate). On occasion, major pieces of work were launched “in responsive mode” with the agendas essentially set by others (e.g. with regard to its work on broadband) or by the prospect of rural crises (e.g. work on the rural economy in the context of a possible FMD outbreak in 2007). At other times, CRC very largely took the initiative and forced the agenda; the Uplands Inquiry was frequently cited in this context.

8. In combination, the prompt for action and the link into government had some bearing on the process of influence. For example, effectively commissioned by the Prime Minister, the rural economies workstream was seen by some as “too close to the centre” to be “independent”. Conversely, the Uplands Inquiry was wholly independent – but policy makers then had no real compulsion to act. Work in the domain of broadband and housing was somewhere between these two extremes and was reviewed as “generally helpful” (as changes were already afoot through the wider machinery of government), although few stakeholders went further in their assessment.

**Outcomes, impacts and additionality**

9. A review of successive Corporate Plans and Business Plans suggested that through its three statutory functions, CRC sought to achieve three main outcomes:

- to ensure that the voice of rural communities was heard in mainstream decision-making
- to raise awareness of – and commitment to – rural issues amongst stakeholders
- to influence mainstream decision-making, policy, delivery, targets and funding to ensure that the “rural dimension” was embedded in decision-making at appropriate levels.

10. Although relying on a highly fragmented evidence base (which undoubtedly has decayed over time), the evaluation found that CRC made progress in relation to all three, and particularly...
the first two outcomes. Specific examples included better housing targets in rural areas; the development of community-level broadband solutions; and the evolving approach to payments for ecosystems services.

11. However there were sharply differing views on the additionality of CRC’s role. Those closest to CRC argued that key outcomes would have happened later or not at all without CRC, and that the key aspects of CRC’s work that had made the difference were (a) the robust and trusted evidence base, which was grounded in “real world” experience and tackled cross-cutting issues, and (b) the Advocate providing a consistent and coherent rural voice. Conversely, external observers were more cautious in their judgements. For them, CRC’s work was relevant and there was some awareness of it, but concluding that a particular policy or initiative would not have achieved its final form without the benefit of CRC’s inputs and influences was a step too far. Some were sceptical; most simply did not know.

12. It is not possible to comment on the extent to which these outcomes led to enduring impacts across rural communities in England; CRC was one factor among many across a hugely complex set of delivery processes. Further, many consultees considered that a judgement of this nature was inappropriate: the role of CRC was to gather evidence and to use it to influence policy but CRC’s ability to determine the consequences for rural communities was very limited.

Conclusions and lessons

13. Whilst “independent”, CRC was ultimately accountable to – and strongly influenced by – government. Therefore, as an organisation, there was a basic tension at its core. In the main, CRC navigated this effectively, certainly in relation to the first two outcomes listed above. The watchdog function was much more challenging and here, “independence” was double-edged, limiting its traction with both Defra and OGDs. Ultimately, CRC had no real clout akin, say, to Ofsted inspectors visiting schools, or the National Audit Office reviewing public expenditure; all it could do was to generate and use evidence relating to rural communities to “inform” and subsequently “influence”.

14. Whether its achievements were worth £37m of tax-payers’ money is – clearly – a judgement call. CRC did raise awareness of rural issues, and it took steps to ensure that the voice of rural communities was heard, but – particularly in an era of austerity – some would question whether a role of this nature should be funded entirely through the public purse. To a significant extent, these functions ought to be being fulfilled through voluntary/charity sector bodies, both individually and collectively; and in this context, the role of groupings like the Rural Coalition – which was actually initiated by CRC in 2008 – should be important.

15. Where voluntary arrangements of this type may struggle is in relation to the watchdog function. Yet CRC also made limited headway in this domain. Particularly in relation to central government, there was (and is) a need to influence both ministers and civil servants to “make things happen”. Even within individual departments, these two constituencies were very different. Moreover from the vantage point of England’s rural communities, neither of these appetites was easily satisfied.

16. Based on the evidence considered in the course of this ex-post evaluation, ten overarching lessons are summarised in the table below.
Table 1: Overall lessons arising from the work of the Commission for Rural Communities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: “Independence” from government is important – but it is also double edged</td>
<td>“Independence” is – arguably – crucial in relation to evidence, for it confers a level of credibility and robustness that makes it very powerful, and far more likely to be used. However “independent” organisations will struggle as “watchdogs” within government, particularly if they are also ultimately accountable to government</td>
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<td>2: The roles of adviser and advocate/watchdog may not always be compatible</td>
<td>The impartiality of evidence and expertise may be called into question if it is also used as the basis for advocacy. There needs to be some level of separation between these functions to mitigate the risk of “evidence statements” being seen as lobbying documents with limited currency</td>
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<td>3: Much credibility can be gained through one, consistently high quality, flagship publication</td>
<td>Although not “invented” by CRC, “State of the Countryside” was – arguably – its most important “product”. It was widely used and it conferred on the organisation a high level of credibility and legitimacy as a real authority in relation to the nature of the rural condition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: Exercising real influence with government ministers depends crucially on networks/relationships and the ability to respond quickly</td>
<td>There are several examples – usually through the work of the Rural Advocate and/or other Commissioners – of CRC engaging effectively with ministers, including with the Prime Minister. This engagement was premised on relationships, however, and in most cases it also demanded very quick responses. At times, this imperative placed real pressures on CRC</td>
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<td>5: There is a balance to be struck between “responsiveness” and seeking to set the agenda in relation to rural issues</td>
<td>CRC was – at times – accused of being too reactive and insufficiently strategic (i.e. deciding what its priorities should be and seeing them through). There is an important balance to be struck in this context – and its complex relationship with government was again a factor. However in some respects, it appeared to achieve most at those points when it took the initiative and essentially set the agenda. The Uplands Inquiry is an important example</td>
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<td>6: The language of economics is very important in seeking to influence senior civil servants within the policy-making process</td>
<td>At times, CRC struggled to engage with senior civil servants and one of the explanations was its limited capacity in relation to “hard” economics – particularly robust value for money assessments. Equally, it needed expertise in policy development. Particularly in the early years, CRC may have lacked the appropriate balance</td>
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<td>7: The relationship between the role of Rural Advocate and the role of CRC Chair needed greater clarity</td>
<td>The Rural Advocate and the Chair of CRC were the same person, but the two roles had different reporting lines – the first to the Prime Minister and the second to Defra. This led to some tensions. While these might, at times, have been creative ones, they were a complication</td>
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<td>8: It may not be appropriate for an organisation charged with rural proofing across government to report to Defra</td>
<td>There was a case for CRC sitting completely outside of Defra, particularly given its imperative to work across all government departments in relation to its most challenging function, that of rural watchdog. Had it been vested in the Cabinet Office, the cross-cutting role might have been easier to implement. However it would be perverse for an organisation charged with generating impartial rural evidence to be separated completely from government’s rural department. This suggests, again, that the three statutory functions might have been delivered more effectively had they been split up</td>
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<tr>
<td>9: Effective rural evidence and advocacy is not wholly premised on an organisation’s own capacity in relation to rural delivery – although it is important that some staff have rural delivery experience</td>
<td>When CRC was first formed, there was real concern that it would struggle to be effective in the absence of a programme delivery function (which had characterised its predecessor, the Countryside Agency). This study has found very little evidence that this was in fact the case. CRC’s advice might have been taken more seriously if there had been the “carrot” of some kind of funding programme – and there was some evidence of this – but there was little feedback to suggest that the quality of CRC’s advice was compromised. That said, CRC benefitted from staff that had knowledge of delivery “on the ground” (many of whom had transferred across from CA). This legacy experience was an important asset for CRC.</td>
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<td>10: Particularly with the internet and social media, an elaborate sub-national staffing structure is not a pre-requisite for influence at a local level although local networks are still important</td>
<td>CRC did not have an elaborate regional office structure, unlike its predecessor, the Countryside Agency. When it was first formed, there was concern that it could not function without a significant local presence. This evaluation has found no real evidence that it lost anything – in part because it could draw on the legacy of a network of relationships through staff transferred from CA and in part because it could reach far and wide through the internet and the use of social media. There is some evidence (from our e-survey) to suggest that the impact of CRC might actually have been greater at local than national levels, despite the absence of a local staff resource.</td>
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Source: SQW – based on findings from the evaluation
1. Introduction

1.1 SQW was commissioned by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) in autumn 2013 to complete an *ex post* evaluation of the statutory functions carried out by the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC).

1.2 The evaluation was a relatively small scale – and largely qualitative – exercise. In the context of a fast-changing policy environment, its purpose was mainly to codify and capture the lessons and insights that might be gleaned from CRC’s 6.5 years of activity. Hence whilst the study adhered to the principles of impact evaluation, it was never intended as a technical or quantitative exercise. For a range of pragmatic and conceptual reasons, it was also agreed at the outset that robust empirical evaluation would, in practice, be inappropriate.

1.3 The study was divided into two main phases of work. Following a review of literature and the development of outline logic chains, the first phase relied substantially on a programme of consultations, both with those who had been involved in CRC (whether as a Commissioner or staff member) and those who had observed the work of CRC from the vantage point of an external stakeholder. The second phase was structured around three main strands: an e-survey of wider stakeholders, four case studies (which sought to examine specific policy initiatives in more detail), and a comparator assessment. The overall approach – agreed with our steering group – is summarised in the graphic below.

*Figure 1-1: Overall approach to the ex post evaluation of the Commission for Rural Communities*

1.4 The report that follows is divided into seven further chapters:

- In Chapter 2, we explain in some detail the context for the work of CRC
- In Chapter 3, we describe the structure and purpose of the organisation, including with regard to its statutory functions
- Chapter 4 seeks to distil stakeholders’ assessments of CRC’s activities – including its statutory functions, its “set piece” products, its wider outputs, and its wider engagement and influence
• In Chapter 5, we examine in more detail the process of influence, drawing particularly on four case studies

• Chapter 6 examines harder measures of impact and additionality, consistent with the requirements of an *ex post* evaluation

• In Chapter 7, we reflect on the extent to which CRC – and its activities – constituted value for money

• Finally, in Chapter 8, we draw together some conclusions and we distil ten headline lessons from CRC’s 6.5 years of operation.

1.5 There are three supporting annexes to this report, one explaining our study methodology and a second providing a list of acronyms[^1]. The third annex lists the individuals who have been involved in this study through consultations and/or case studies; we would like to acknowledge the time they made available to contribute to this evaluation.

[^1]: Separately, we have provided a technical volume which sets out in detail the findings from the primary and secondary data that have been gathered and analysed in the course of this study, and used to inform our overall findings.
2. Background to CRC

Key Points:

- CRC was the latest in a long (and continuous) line of quasi-independent organisations set up by government to consider socio-economic issues in England
- It was set up against a backdrop of the Rural White Paper, the food and mouth disease crisis and the report to government on Modernising Rural Delivery
- The legal basis for CRC was the NERC Act 2006 which identified three key functions: adviser, advocate and watchdog

2.1 Over recent decades, there has been a series of independent – or quasi-independent – organisations set up by government in response to socio-economic issues and concerns in rural England. Key milestones within this have included the following:

- 1988-99 – formation (and then closure) of the Rural Development Commission (RDC), following a merger of two previously independent bodies, the Development Commission and the Council for Small Industries in Rural Areas
- 1999-06 – formation (and then closure) of the Countryside Agency (CA), following the merger of the RDC and the Countryside Commission
- 2006-13 – formation (and then closure) of the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) and Natural England (on-going), from the old Countryside Agency and old English Nature, following the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006.

2.2 Compared to its forebears, CRC differed in three key respects (which are important in framing the ex post evaluation of its impact):

- CRC was **focused more exclusively on socio-economic issues:** the Countryside Agency’s remit had included a strong environmental element (which it inherited from the Countryside Commission and eventually passed onto Natural England), and the earlier RDC had promoted a stronger economic development objective (which was passed, in part, to the emerging Regional Development Agencies)
- CRC had **no delivery responsibilities** unlike both the RDC and CA (examples included RDC’s Redundant Buildings Grant programme and CA’s programmes promoting Vital Villages, Wheels to Work, and the Market Towns Initiative)
- CRC was **not succeeded by a rural body which was independent of government:** instead, in establishing the Rural Communities Policy Unit (RCPU), Defra strengthened its own role in rural proofing, synthesising evidence, and research on rural economic and social issues.
Context for the formation of CRC

2.3 In seeking to evaluate the impact of CRC, it is important to understand the context for the organisation (and hence its rationale). Two key elements need to be recognised.

**Rural White Paper (RWP)**

2.4 In 2000, the (then new) labour government published a Rural White Paper (RWP), entitled “Our Countryside: The Future – A fair deal for Rural England”. This set out a vision of a living, working, protected and vibrant countryside “with its voice heard by government at all levels”. The RWP contained major spending commitments, most of which were subsequently taken forward by either the emerging RDAs or CA.

2.5 It also included two important commitments that were intended to ensure that the rural voice was properly heard:

*We will create the new role of Rural Advocate to argue the case on countryside issues and for rural people at the highest levels in government and outside.* The Rural Advocate will have direct access to the Prime Minister and his Ministers and will attend the Cabinet Committee on Rural Affairs, providing a voice at the heart of government for rural concerns. Together with the Countryside Agency, the Government’s statutory advisor on the countryside, the Rural Advocate will play a key part in rural proofing policy decisions and implementation. The Rural Advocate will be a member of the National Rural Sounding Board, bringing to it expertise and an authoritative voice, and taking away from it messages based on the wide range of rural advice and experience available there. The advocate role will be taken on by the Chair of the Countryside Agency as an addition to his other responsibilities.

*The Countryside Agency will submit to Government on an annual basis its Report on the State of the Countryside in addition to its annual ‘rural-proofing’ report on the rural aspects of Government policy.*

2.6 The RWP was therefore the source of some of the key themes that subsequently came to define the work of CRC. But in 2000, most of these were vested in CA.

**FMD, MRD and RS04**

2.7 The Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) crisis of 2001 was a major shock for rural England and it elevated rural issues to the top of the political agenda. It prompted significant soul-searching in relation to the “rural condition” and the manner in which government should respond. Lord Haskins – then chair of Northern Foods – completed a report on Modernising Rural Delivery (MRD), and in response, Defra published its Rural Strategy in 2004 (RS04). A key theme within all of this was that there should be a strict division in terms of responsibility for developing strategy and delivering it.

2.8 Many of the key themes from the RWP were retained but – against the philosophical backdrop of MRD – RS04 made the case for major institutional changes. Specifically, it committed to the formation of a “new Countryside Agency”:

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At the national level, partnership between Defra Ministers and the Countryside Agency has achieved significant successes. Government Departments now rural proof their policies as a matter of course. This is a crucial way of ensuring equitable access to services for people in rural areas. But we are not complacent, and believe that the role of the Rural Advocate is as important now as ever. In the light of the better evidence we have about economic and social trends in rural areas we believe this role should be more clearly focused on social and economic rural disadvantage. And it should not be distracted by – or potentially have its impartiality affected by – delivery functions of its own. We have therefore decided to create, from the Countryside Agency, a small and refocused organisation, to provide strong and impartial advice to Government. This will be a new and distinctive role, building on the successes of the Countryside Agency and Lord Cameron of Dillington, as Rural Advocate, in rural proofing and challenging government. The new organisation, unfettered by delivery functions, will become the watchdog and advocate for rural communities and people in need. It will make rural disadvantage a priority. It will fulfil (sic.) a need that no other organisation can do at national level, including monitoring the delivery of sustainable solutions. But its remit will also need to fit within a sustainable development umbrella, to ensure that in championing people, the relationship between people, their communities and their environment is enhanced not weakened.

The detailed size, design and organisation of the new Countryside Agency has yet to be determined. We will learn from high-profile and well-respected expert bodies such as the National Consumer Council and the National Employment Panel, although we would expect the New Countryside Agency to have a larger budget than these bodies; something approaching £10 million. This will allow it flexibility, for example to hire in experts in particular subject areas, consider evidence from abroad, and commission specific thematic studies. Initially, the new body will remain largely based in London, but will in due course be located in a lagging rural area, to strengthen its links with its focus of effort, as well as with its interlocutors at regional and local level.

The legal basis for CRC: NERC Act 2006

2.9 From these premises, the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Bill was considered by parliament in 2005. The Bill received Royal Assent on 30th March 2006 to become the NERC Act.

2.10 Within the legislation, the “general purposes” of CRC were simply stated. CRC was required to “promote awareness among relevant persons and the public of rural needs” (where “rural needs” meant “the social and economic needs of persons in rural areas of England”); and to meet rural needs “in ways that contribute to sustainable development”.

2.11 Beyond this, the Act directed CRC to pay particular regard to (a) persons suffering from social disadvantage; and (b) areas suffering from economic performance.

2.12 Within the Act, the functions of the new body were described in terms of “representation, advice and monitoring”: }

SQW
The Commission must take such steps as appear to it to be appropriate for—

(a) representing rural needs to relevant persons,

(b) providing relevant persons with information and advice about issues connected with rural needs or ways of meeting them, and

(c) monitoring, and making reports about, the way in which relevant persons’ policies are developed, adopted and implemented (by rural proofing or otherwise) and the extent to which those policies are meeting rural needs

2.13 These three functions were therefore enshrined in legislation through the NERC Act. They have been widely summarised as the roles of advocate, advisor and watchdog.
3. Structure, scale and purpose of CRC

**Key Points:**

- CRC became an independent organisation on 1st October 2006 and it formally ceased to exist on 31st March 2013. Its overall life was 6.5 years, although a third of this was in the context of pending abolition.

- In total it spent £37.4m executing its main functions.

- Its organisational structures and priorities evolved significantly through its lifetime.

- In pursuit of its three main functions, it produced set piece products; instigated thematic enquiries; and exercised more general engagement and influence.

3.1 CRC operated as a division of CA between 1st April 2005 and September 2006. It became an independent organisation at vesting on 1st October 2006. On 29th June 2010 – about six weeks after the general election – the Secretary of State announced, in a written statement to the House of Commons, that CRC would be abolished. CRC formally ceased to exist on 31st March 2013. **The overall life of CRC (as an independent organisation) was therefore about 6.5 years; although the final third of this period was in the context of pending abolition.**

3.2 Within this context, the graph below summarises the scale of CRC activity – defined in terms of the number of staff and Commissioners, and net expenditure. **In total – over 6.5 years – CRC spent some £37.4m executing the three main functions outlined in Chapter 2.**

**Figure 3-1: Changing scale of CRC’s operation – from its first full financial year through to its closure**

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(Note that there are some inconsistencies in data between sources)
Activities of CRC

3.3 Over the 6.5 years of CRC’s existence, organisational structures and priorities evolved significantly. A review of Business Plans and Annual Reports suggests broadly that:

- in the early years (2006/07), CRC defined and organised its own activities clearly in relation to its three statutory functions
- in the “early middle” years (2007/08-2008/09), it adopted a matrix-like structure with three statutory functions defining cross-cutting programmes, but also six policy-centred programmes
- in the “later middle” years (2009/10-2010/11), its focus shifted to four impact statements (with a lower apparent level of focus attached to the statutory functions); for the most part, these appear to be concerned with “influencing” other parties and there is less overt reference to bespoke inquiries and the like
- in the later years (2011/12-2012/13) – and with far fewer resources than previously – its activities were linked to specific themes and issues.

3.4 In practice, summarising CRC’s principal activities is difficult as there was little/no consistency from one Corporate Plan to the next. For the purposes of impact evaluation it is important that there is clarity on CRC’s activities. Over the 6.5 years, the following appear to be the principal activities (noting that there is unavoidable overlap):

- **Statutory functions**
  - **Rural advocate** “representing rural needs to relevant persons”
  - **Expert adviser** “providing relevant persons with information and advice about issues connected with rural needs or ways of meeting them”
  - **Watchdog** “monitoring, and making reports about, the way in which relevant persons’ policies are developed, adopted and implemented (by rural proofing or otherwise) and the extent to which those policies are meeting rural needs”

- **“Set piece” products**
  - **State of the Countryside** reports/reporting
  - **Rural proofing** process and reporting, which evolved into **rural champions**

- **Wider outputs**
  - Participant in / instigator of ad hoc **“Inquiries”** – e.g. housing inquiry, uplands inquiry
  - Author/commissioner of **thematic studies** – e.g. on rural disadvantage, social isolation and ageing, rural economies
  - Author/commissioner of **best practice guides** – e.g. on tackling financial exclusion

- **Wider engagement and influence**
Participation in formal consultation processes

➢ Wider stakeholder engagement and dissemination activities (e.g. mailshots, events, conferences, bilateral stakeholder engagement, award ceremonies).

3.5 Consistent with these different elements, a summary timeline (Figure 3-2) and logic chain\(^3\) (Figure 3-3) are presented overleaf.

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\(^3\) Note that the process through which the logic chain was developed is explained in Annex A
Figure 3-2: CRC Summary timeline

- **CRC statutory functions:**
  - Advocate – e.g. reports, visits
  - Expert Adviser – e.g. State of the Countryside
  - Watchdog – e.g. rural proofing

- **Activities structured under:**
  - Policy programmes (e.g. planning for sustainable communities)*
  - Cross-cutting themes (e.g. rural advocate, rural proofing)
  - Corporate Programme (e.g. strategic communications)

- **Illustrations of the CRC’s thematic focus:**
  - Rural Disadvantage
  - Housing
  - Health care
  - Planning & sustainable rural communities
  - Participation & the role of Councillors
  - Access to services
  - Rural economic potential
  - Financial inclusion
  - Uplands
  - Rural economies
  - LEPs & rural best practice
  - Housing
  - Big Society
  - Social isolation & ageing
  - Young people

- **Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) established as an independent body**
  - Chairman & non-Executive Board of Commissioners (x10-11 members)
  - Executive Board & staff team (x84 staff 2006/07)
  - Net expenditure (annual)
    - £9.3m (2006/07)
    - £8.3m
    - £6.3m
    - £6.5m
    - £6.0m
    - £620k
    - £496k

- **Government proposal to abolish CRC & establish RCPU within Defra (June 2010)**
  - Parliamentary debates & consultation process
  - RCPU phased in
  - Closure of CRC confirmed (March 2011)

- **CRC closure (March 2013)**

- **RCPU**

Figure 3-3: Summary logic chain

Rationale and context
- Rural Strategy 2004: In response to Lord Hutton’s report on Modernising Rural Delivery in 2003 and Foot and Mouth Disease in 2001. This set out plans for “a new countryside agency” to “provide expert advice to Government and act as watchdog and advocate on behalf of rural people and communities, especially those suffering disadvantage”. More generally, it sought to improve mainstreaming of government’s response to rural needs, and to separate responsibilities for strategy and delivery.
- A need to address socio-economic disadvantage in rural areas (e.g. housing affordability, access to services, low workplace earnings and productivity, income poverty).
- A need for a body to act as a rural advocate/voice, expert adviser and independent watchdog, with a strategic focus, not one of delivery.
- Institutional context: devolution of economic and social regeneration policies to RDAs and more local delivery arrangements through RSG.
- The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006: creating the CRC to promote awareness of rural needs and ensure sustainable development, with a need to focus on social disadvantage and economic under-performance in rural areas.

Impacts
- England’s rural communities are more sustainable, thriving and diverse
  - Impact 1: Policy and delivery become more integrated and progressive, encouraging rural places to become more sustainable
    - E.g. increase in supply of affordable rural housing
  - Impact 2: Services in rural areas improve, particularly for people experiencing disadvantage
    - E.g. improved access to services via digital technology
  - Impact 3: Economic agencies are committed to overcoming rural economic disadvantage and releasing the economic potential of rural areas
    - Including strengthening economic wellbeing, business competitiveness and future resilience
  - Impact 4: The distinctive rural dimension is embedded in decision-making at appropriate levels.
    - Rural needs are mainstreamed effectively

Vision: “England’s rural communities should be diverse, thriving and sustainable, where everyone is able to play a full part in society and where no one is disadvantaged.”

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Three functions and their aims:
- Rural advocate – the rural voice is heard and rural needs are recognised, prioritised and reflected in policy and delivery
- Expert adviser – policies and delivery are based on well-founded, trustworthy, credible and strong evidence of rural needs and good practice (that policy makers understand and act upon)
- Independent watchdog – activities of government and other key decision makers reflect rural needs as a routine part of their work, and the voice of rural communities is heard in mainstream decision making.

And from 2009/10 onwards, 4 strategic impacts:
- Impact 1: Policy and delivery become more integrated and progressive, encouraging rural places to become more sustainable
- Impact 2: Services in rural areas improve, particularly for people experiencing disadvantage
- Impact 3: Economic agencies are committed to overcoming rural economic disadvantage and releasing the economic potential of rural areas
- Impact 4: The distinctive rural dimension is embedded in decision-making at appropriate levels.

Outcomes
- The voice of rural communities is heard in mainstream decision making
- An increase in the extent to which rural people feel they are listened to and can influence decisions
- Increased awareness, understanding and commitment to addressing rural issues amongst stakeholders
- Uptake of CRC recommendations and advice, with reference to CRC evidence
- Stakeholders have the tools and capacity to take account of rural issues and implement change (e.g. children’s service commissioners)
- Good practice is shared amongst policy-makers and practitioners
- Influencing mainstream decision-making, policy, guidance and delivery (e.g. by transparent and participatory processes)
- Improved understanding of rural need and incorporate good practice
- Government targets (e.g. for broadband and funding) are increased in/allocated more equitably to rural areas
- More audit, inspection, scrutiny and watchdog bodies include the rural dimension in reporting
- Evaluations of Government programmes bring visibility to rural experiences of issues (e.g. worklessness, low pay, low job choice)

Inputs and resources
- Executive Board: Chief Executive & Executive Directors (5/6)
- Non-Executive Board of Commissioners (10/11) and Chairman (who was also a rural advocate)
- Executive body of staff (ranging from 84 at operational peak in 2009/10 to 41 in 2012/13)
- Net annual expenditure range from £6.3m (2008/09) to £4.9m (2012/13)

Activities and outputs – a typology

Statutory functions
- Rural advocate “representing rural needs to relevant persons”
- Expert adviser “providing relevant persons with information and advice about issues connected with rural needs or ways of meeting them”
- Watchdog “monitoring and making reports about the way in which relevant persons’ policies are developed, adopted and implemented (by rural proofing or otherwise) and the extent to which those policies are meeting rural needs”
- “Set piece” products: State of the Countryside report/monitoring, rural proofing process and reporting, which morphed into Royal Commission

Wider outputs
- Participant in: (instigator of ad hoc “inquiries” — e.g. housing inquiry, uplands inquiry
- Author/commissioner of thematic studies e.g. rural disadvantage, rural isolation and ageing, rural economies report
- Author/commissioner of best practice guides e.g. tackling financial exclusion
- Wider engagement and influence: Participation in formal consultation processes
- Wider stakeholder engagement and dissemination activities e.g. mailshots, events, conferences, award ceremonies

SQW
4. Stakeholders’ assessments of – and reflections on – CRC and its activities

Key Points:

- Stakeholders considered CRC’s advocacy role to have been generally effective although the lines of accountability were complicated
- CRC’s advisory role was reviewed very positively and the quality and accessibility of its evidence and analysis was widely acknowledged
- CRC’s watchdog role was assessed in more mixed terms
- State of the Countryside – one of CRC’s flagship publications – was widely used and was considered to have acted as a key reference point in relation to rural issues (although it was seen as “expensive”)
- CRC’s work in relation to rural proofing was welcomed, although there were tensions inherent within it and some comments about its effectiveness
- The wider Inquiries and thematic studies in which CRC engaged were reviewed positively
- CRC was also considered to have been effective in disseminating the findings from its work

4.1 As a first substantive tranche of work within the ex-post evaluation, around 25 consultations were completed with former Commissioners, ex-CRC staff, officers from Defra and other government departments (OGDs), and wider stakeholders. The purpose of these consultations was to consider the effectiveness and impact of CRC’s activities. Subsequently, we completed a wider e-survey of stakeholders which covered similar ground (and is reported in detail separately, in Annex A). In this chapter, we draw on the evidence from both to reflect – in overarching terms – on the effectiveness of its management and governance; its three statutory functions; and specific activities/outputs. In this chapter, we draw on the evidence from both to reflect – in overarching terms – on the effectiveness of its management and governance; its three statutory functions; and specific activities/outputs.

Management and Governance

4.2 CRC had a non-executive board of Commissioners with a Chair who was also the Rural Advocate. It was supported by an Executive Board and team of staff. Overall, these arrangements were seen to work well. They were supported by a solid business plan, against which staff were effectively held to account. In the main, good relationships existed between the Executive Team and Commissioners, with clear lines of responsibility, and staff were seen as sharp and committed to rural issues, by internal and external stakeholders alike.

4.3 In terms of the Commissioners, it was widely recognised that they brought strong networks, specialist knowledge and important opportunities to influence strategic

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Note thought that in practice, it is difficult to disentangle CRC’s statutory functions from CRC’s key outputs, and their associated impacts – they were often closely interrelated.
partners. Their performance and knowledge levels was seen to vary, as was their level of engagement with new stakeholders and grassroots issues, but in general the diversity of their backgrounds enabled a creative tension and stimulated an invigorating work environment. In some elements of CRC’s work, the Commissioners were very “hands on”\(^5\). Several consultees suggested that there was overlap between the Commissioners’ backgrounds, but this may have reflected how their input was coordinated, and the relatively large number of Commissioners in post.

4.4 Within the organisation more widely, the management and governance arrangements were praised. Corporate planning was seen as inclusive, making staff feel empowered and autonomous, and the organisational culture was non-hierarchical and flexible. A few consultees commented that staff struggled to know at times what they were trying to achieve, but it was appreciated that this tended to be a “hangover” of the transfer from CA, and that most roles bedded down over time.

4.5 CRC’s high-calibre staff were widely commended. Many of the original staff were transferred (under TUPE) from CA and this process was recognised to be double-edged. On a positive note, the ex-CA staff brought delivery experience with them and hence had a good understanding of delivery (even if CRC did not deliver interventions itself); and some saw this as critical in relation to CRC’s influence over delivery bodies. However, this knowledge could have been better balanced with more staff who had experience and understanding of how the policy world operated, and how to influence it – there was a sense that CRC had insufficient understanding of policy-making, and this became increasingly important over CRC’s lifetime\(^6\). Because of this, some commented that CRC would have established itself more quickly – as a distinctive organisation with a new remit – had the legacy from CA (in terms of personnel) been somewhat less.

Delivering the statutory functions

**Advocate**

4.6 Consultees considered that CRC’s advocacy role was multi-faceted and complicated. Advocacy took place openly (in the media, at conferences, etc.) and behind closed doors (for example, through one-to-one meetings with Ministers), and both approaches were important. CRC had a clear advocacy function – as set out in the legislation – and this was executed by both its Commissioners and staff. Specifically:

- CRC’s executive team was involved in advocacy mainly through its involvement in disseminating the work of CRC on a day-to-day basis. This included building and using networks (including through the employment of regional affairs managers), sitting on policy/programme steering groups, and attending and presenting at events (see below for further feedback on dissemination).

- In parallel, the Commissioners worked flexibly in the advocacy function. This could involve taking the evidence gathered by CRC (either through visits or CRC’s wider

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\(^5\) For example, the commissioners played a major role in the Uplands Inquiry but were much less directly involved in other areas of work (e.g. affordable rural housing)

\(^6\) In addition, the point was made that there may have been a structural barrier to civil servants engaging fully with CRC staff in relation to policy issues because of the concern that CRC was seen as a lobbying organisation; to some extent, this points to the challenges of reconciling CRC’s different roles
advice/research function) and using it to raise awareness of the “rural voice” amongst stakeholders, or providing immediate responses on issues (for example, in response to Ministerial questions).

4.7 In addition, the Rural Advocate – who was also the chair of CRC – had a prominent role. Formally though, the Rural Advocate function was not part of CRC – and while CRC reported to Defra, the Rural Advocate reported to the Prime Minister. The balance of accountabilities and responsibilities was complicated and – through our discussions – many consultees found it difficult to distinguish between them. **Whether this complexity led to genuine synergies and additional impact – or simply confusion – was a matter of some debate.**

![Figure 4-1: Accountabilities in respect of rural advocacy](image)

4.8 Consultees acknowledged that **the Rural Advocate provided a bridge between rural communities on the ground and senior civil servants and Ministers.** It was reported that the Rural Advocate – Dr Stuart Burgess – “travelled tirelessly” across the country and listened to the experiences of rural people. Specifically, stakeholders commented that rural communities felt listened to by an influential advocate, and could see their views reflected in the Advocate’s Report, which gave them confidence in his work. Dr Burgess also built good working relationships with a range of stakeholders with an interest in rural issues, and raised the profile of CRC and the rural voice in the media as much as possible (this was reflected in media reviews undertaken by CRC, where key messages from the advocate function were most likely to be picked up in the media). Crucially, he had direct links to senior civil servants and Ministers, and reported to the Prime Minister, which gave him credibility and a powerful route to influence.

4.9 The approach of the Rural Advocate was seen by some consultees as *ad hoc,* and not always in alignment with CRC’s wider strategy, and on some occasions, Commissioners’ messages were not always fully aligned with those coming out of CRC’s evidence and analysis reports. The CRC did recognise these issues, and tried to move towards a more structured approach to the production of the Rural Advocate’s report, with more consistent reporting and systematic analysis of the evidence gathered. However, arguably there would always be some degree of flexibility needed in the advocacy role – indeed, it is becoming increasingly recognised within literature that policy advocacy is, by its nature, an adaptive, uncertain and non-linear process, with events and stakeholders acting in unpredictable ways that produce unexpected windows of opportunity that advocates need to seize on.7

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Adviser

4.10 This function primarily covered evidence and data gathering, analysis and the production of outputs such as the State of the Countryside reports, inquiries, thematic papers and best practice guides (all covered in more detail below), and providing advice to relevant stakeholders through the use of reports, one-to-one meetings and large-scale dissemination events.

4.11 Again, this function was recognised by consultees as being important and effective. The evidence and analysis produced by CRC was high quality, accessible to a wide audience and (mostly) timed well. A key strength of CRC was its holistic approach, providing evidence and analysis which joined up multiple and complex issues; the comment was made that no other organisation connected issues in this way.

4.12 However on reflection, consultees did identify some weaknesses/concerns in relation to this function:

- First, there was a sense that CRC tried to cover too many policy issues and spread itself too thinly, which meant it did not always have sufficient resource to ensure that research findings were fully embedded. Perversely, some consultees commented that this improved during the later years of CRC, as budget cuts forced a clearer, more focused and targeted schedule of work.

- Second, a number of external stakeholders felt that the selection of research topics was not sufficiently transparent (they suggested this was too strongly steered by the personal interests of Commissioners) and that they could not influence this.

- Third, the research undertaken by CRC was more effective when partners were engaged during the research. During the early years of CRC, some consultees argued that there was too much consultation with partners (especially those who already had a rural interest) – although arguably, this reflected CRC’s role in gathering evidence. More joint working to undertake the research would have been helpful, and engagement of the target audience (such as OGDs) during the research. Where this was done, the research had a greater impact (see below). As budgets became tighter, the need for partnership working to deliver research increased, partly out of necessity.

Watchdog

4.13 The role of watchdog was the least well defined of CRC’s three functions, and – in the view of consultees – the least effective. This message was consistent across all types of consultee. In sum: CRC was effective in arguing that policy did not meet the needs, or address issues in, rural areas, but the extent to which this was listened to and actioned upon was debatable.

4.14 In part, this was explained in terms of a (lack of) clarity in role (which in turn relates to the way in which CRC was set up). The status of CRC in this role vis-à-vis government was never clearly defined, and there were mixed views amongst consultees on the extent to which CRC could be expected to deliver against this role given the way in which it was constituted. Whilst it was independent, both ex-CRC staff/Commissioners and external stakeholders argued that CRC was restricted in what it was able to report, especially in
relation to Government departments – Defra was seen as risk adverse (and the relationship between CRC and Defra was complex), and Government as a whole was quite defensive.

4.15 Some argued that the watchdog role was very difficult to implement when CRC was sponsored by Defra – and argued that CRC would have been in a stronger position had it sat within the Cabinet Office. The CRC also lacked the weight, legislative power, and resources needed to undertake this function properly – it was described as “a watchdog without a “bite” and without “teeth””. Some consultees argued that CRC could only offer limited help to OGDs to help solve the issues raised (partly due to resource constraints). It also raised often complex issues – and OGDs wanted simple answers and deliverable solutions.

**Bringing together the three functions**

4.16 On the whole, consultees thought that the advocate and adviser functions worked well together and were complementary, but there were some tensions with the watchdog function.

4.17 Broadly, this assessment also mapped onto the findings from the stakeholder e-survey. In that context, respondents were asked to assess various elements of CRC’s work (e.g. advocacy; advice and evidence; watchdog and rural proofing work; events, conferences and presentations; reports and briefing notes; toolkits and guidance) on a scale of 1 to 5, with one being ‘poor’ and 5 being ‘excellent’. The graphic below shows that, on the whole, CRC’s work was well received, especially in terms of its written outputs. Across CRC’s three functions, “advice and evidence” and “advocacy” received the highest number of excellent ratings (i.e. a score of 5), followed by the “watchdog and rural proofing” work.

*Figure 4-2: Responses to the e-survey question “Please rank the quality of CRC’s work in terms of the following activities: (ranked on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is poor and 5 is excellent)”*

Overall, from the total 42 respondents, 21 (50%) gave CRC’s written outputs a rank of 5 (i.e. “excellent”) and 20 respondents (48%) indicated that CRC’s advice and evidence was similarly rated as “excellent”. However, nine respondents gave CRC’s watchdog and rural proofing work a rank of 3 or less.
“Set piece” products

State of the Countryside reports/reporting

4.18 The State of the Countryside (SoC) reports were very highly regarded by all consultees. They provided a robust evidence base that was clear and accurate, easy to read, and made good use of images and graphics. They often used OGDs’ own data (which OGDs in turn trusted), but analysed and presented in a different and compelling way, and complemented this with experiences of rural areas across the country. CRC was seen as the objective, unbiased expert in this arena. Stakeholders commented on the high levels of quality control employed by CRC, which meant that the reports were reliable and credible. One external stakeholder described the report as the “bible” in terms of rural issues. Nothing else like this existed at the time – and nor has it been replaced subsequently.

4.19 The reports were designed with a dissemination plan and its audiences in mind, and they generated good media coverage. CRC regularly gathered feedback from stakeholders on what was useful to help shape future reports. The report, and feedback from stakeholders, also helped to guide CRC’s own research agenda (for example, rural migration was highlighted as an issue in the SoC and was subsequently followed-up with more in-depth research).

4.20 SoC was widely used and referenced by a range of organisations in their own work. It helped CRC to open doors and played a significant role in engaging stakeholders (such as OGDs). For example, it provided a basis for the Advocate to address fringe meetings at all of the main party conferences, and in this way it was able to influence policy debates and decisions. When coupled with the more general role of advocate, it became very influential. The report provided a “common reference point” and “shared resource” for policy-makers and stakeholder groups, which encouraged greater coherence as they were “singing from the same hymn sheet”.

4.21 Consultees could point to a number of influences and impacts of the SoC reports specifically. For example:

- The data were used to inform the development of rural-specific targets (e.g. by the HCA to develop rural housing targets)

- The reports were used by local authorities, regional development agencies and government offices to inform their own analysis, policies and programmes. Areas with more of an urban/rural mix that found it particularly useful to inform the development of programmes, partly because they had less capacity and rural expertise in-house.

- The reports were used by interest groups and policy makers to evidence their arguments, and support funding bids. For example, the Plunkett Foundation referenced evidence from SoC in funding bids and presentations.

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9 For example, Yorkshire Forward introduced its rural observatory “on the back of” SoC. SoC raised rural issues enough for the RDA to decide a specific rural observatory was required. NWDA also used SoC to develop its own rural needs analysis, which was then used to inform the development of programmes. An example of an area with an urban/rural mix was Bradford City where the Council used SoC “a great deal” to inform the development of their economic development programme in rural parts of the area.
The analysis contained within SoC reports resulted in some changes to national approaches to data collection and analysis. For example, following SoC analysis of HM Revenue and Customs data to assess the impact of the Government's NI contribution holiday in rural areas, HM Revenue and Customs added a rural cut to their own analysis of these data.\(^{10}\)

4.22 Set alongside this very positive feedback, however, was the consistent comment that the State of the Countryside report was “very expensive” to produce. Indeed, in later years, the frequency of publication was reduced because of the costs. Whilst consultees universally welcomed and valued SoC, whether it constituted good value for money is another question altogether.

**Rural proofing process and reporting, which evolved into rural champions**

4.23 Rural proofing activities and reporting formed part of CRC's watchdog activities, and feedback on the effectiveness and impacts of this role was mixed; this finding was consistent across both our stakeholder consultations and our e-survey (see Annex B).

4.24 The CRC successfully kept rural proofing on the agenda, but was less effective in embedding rural proofing practice in government and agencies. There appeared to be some buy-in to rural proofing at senior level within OGDs, but a number of consultees felt that this failed to filter down to the day-to-day running of departments. Rural proofing was still seen as a “tick box exercise” by many. At the Local Authority level, CRC appeared to make more progress in embedding rural proofing (on specific topics, such as planning), particularly during CRC's early years, when CRC's regional affairs managers played a key role in this domain.

4.25 Rural proofing worked best when it featured at the very earliest stages of developing legislation, and was more successful in some policy areas (e.g. housing and deprivation) than others. However, during its early years, CRC's rural proofing process was seen more as that of ex-post critic, which was arguably less useful than an ex-ante informer\(^{11}\). CRC found it difficult to be negative about government (particularly as its funder), and equally, government departments did not like being criticised. One consultee described the rural proofing reports as “fraught”, and a process that required a lot of negotiation with government over what could be published.

4.26 As noted above under the watchdog function, CRC's effectiveness with regard to rural proofing seemed to be limited by a number of factors:

- CRC's lack of weight and authority (especially with OGDs): It was difficult for an independent body to get purchase within OGDs, especially in departments that were "further away from rural issues". Some argued that CRC suffered from a lack of back-

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\(^{10}\) The CRC explored whether rural areas were benefitting fairly from the Government's NI contribution holiday during the recession in the SoC using data provided by HM Customs and Revenue. This showed that more rural businesses were taking advantage of this scheme, but the amount saved in rural areas was proportionally less than in urban areas. The SoC report raised awareness of the issue within HM Customs and Revenue, and the Department then changed its own national statistics to include a rural cut thereafter, and this data was subsequently used in regional updates on the economy by RDAs.

\(^{11}\) Note that there are some examples of precisely the opposite direction of travel. Our case study suggested that in relation to housing, for example, CRC served as ex-ante informer (e.g. for formation of ARHC) during the early years, but as time went by, it functioned more as an ex-post critic.
up from Defra, and that Defra could have been more helpful in securing buy-in from across Whitehall.

- **Scale of resources**: Rural proofing was a significant task in itself, and CRC lacked the capacity to do it effectively (one consultee argued that to embed rural proofing, they effectively needed to “sit next to” policy-makers). Some also argued that CRC’s effectiveness was limited by a lack of partnership working.

- **Clarity around the “route to impact”**: Some consultees (ex-CRC and externally) also argued that CRC lacked understanding of who they were trying to influence through rural proofing, and lacked the networks and relationships with the right people to do it effectively.

4.27 In the latter years of CRC, the approach to rural proofing moved towards rural champions. These were piloted in DWP, DfT and DECC. Consultees who were involved with the role argued that, on the whole, champions were a much more effective way of influencing change in OGDs than previous approaches to rural proofing (especially in DWP and DECC).

**Figure 4-3: DWP Rural Champion Experience**

The purpose of the rural champion role within DWP was to influence policy at both the national and local government level, with a specific focus on financial exclusion.

At the time, DWP had 14 in-house financial exclusion teams who were spread across the country. Their purpose was to influence local partners and help develop financial inclusion policies in local areas and influence potential funding. The CRC seconded a financial exclusion champion into DWP to ensure that the activities of these in-house champions, and DWP more generally, took rural issues into account. DWP led on the credit unions aspect of financial exclusion, so the Rural Champion ensured that funding for credit unions was invested into rural areas (by providing data to evidence gaps in investment in rural areas), and tried to encourage the uptake of good practice. The Champion also worked with the Money Advice Service to rural proof its commissioning requirements for delivery.

The DWP Rural Champion also worked with BIS to rural proof its debt advice. However, the Champion’s ability to influence policy/programmes here was limited because of the way BIS managed its contract for debt advice (it had already been let for a number of years, so the Champion couldn’t really change anything). The Champion also worked with the Treasury as part of this role, which involved presenting at the Treasury’s financial exclusion strategy task force meetings.

At this time, the national strategy for financial inclusion had already been published, so the Rural Champion did not have the opportunity to influence the priorities or objectives in this strategy. However, he did influence how this strategy was implemented by ensuring that funding associated with the strategy went to rural areas and/or was not cut in rural areas. The Rural Champion noted that funding to credit unions in rural areas quadrupled during the time of the Rural Champion, and he argues this may not have happened without CRC.

**Source:** SQW, based on consultation feedback

**Wider outputs**

4.28 From the outset, CRC engaged in a wider range of research outputs and processes, including ad hoc Inquiries, thematic studies and best practice guides. Like the State of the Countryside reports, these were generally well regarded. The Inquiries and thematic studies were seen as independent, well-reported and balanced, drawing proactively on the perspectives of rural communities and therefore serving as an important forum for rural voices to be heard. They covered a range of environmental, social and economic issues, including ‘connecting’ issues (e.g. rural broadband), which were not always being picked up in research conducted elsewhere. **Content was high quality, concise and easy to read**, although perhaps less

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12 Note again though that there are exceptions. For example, rural proofing appeared to work well when there were structures in place that brought all relevant stakeholders together (e.g. Rural Housing Advisory Group)
focused than was required at times. While designed to be short and sharp, it was broadly recognised that it was the in-depth analysis that really "made the difference" to the more effective studies.

4.29 A number of Inquiries and thematic studies were identified by consultees as being particularly useful or important, as presented in Table 4-1 below.

### Table 4-1: Feedback on specific Inquiries and thematic reports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inquiry</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uplands Inquiry</td>
<td>• Well-timed and structured around a clear set of recommendations that government could act upon; these were welcomed by stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Raised awareness around what was previously quite a hidden issue; and prompted further debate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Brought together economic, social and environmental aspects and demonstrated synergies between them (previously uplands work had been too narrowly focused on environmental issues)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Involved multi-stakeholder engagement on the issue (i.e. not seen to be backing one interest group)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Led to the development of sustained training for young upland farmers and influenced other new approaches (e.g. Payments for Ecosystems Services)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadband report</td>
<td>• Provided a compelling case on the benefits of investing in broadband for the first time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Based on sound economic reasoning and not seen to be too closely affiliated with particular interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Well-timed, offered solutions and engaged key decision-makers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Disadvantage report</td>
<td>• Led to more informed thinking in government on issues relating to rural poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Generated significant government debate – led to seven government departments coming together to consider the report findings and four stakeholder engagement events at regional level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Emphasis in report on innovation triggered further research by Defra on innovation in rural businesses. Also facilitated better working between rural and innovation leads in RDAs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Isolation report</td>
<td>• Raised awareness and changed perceptions about social isolation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Published late into CRC’s lifetime, leaving limited time to embed the findings of the report into policy or practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation Inquiry</td>
<td>• Provided a clear set of recommendation for local government on issues affecting parish councils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Developed in partnership with external stakeholders (e.g. NALC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Developed in alignment with another government commission, which focused on the role of parish councillors in policy making and implementation. Good lesson sharing between the two commissions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Continues to be used by external stakeholders (e.g. NALC) for advisory and advocacy purposes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SQW – based on stakeholder feedback

4.30 Knowledge of the **best practice guides was more limited**. Specific reference was made to the Financial Exclusion guidance, which was co-produced with the DWP and seen as successful, though consultees provided limited insight into the impact of the best practice guides. This finding resonates strongly with those from the e-survey of stakeholders, reported in Figure 4-2 above; across CRC’s work, “toolkits and guidance” received the lowest number of “excellent” ratings.

### Dissemination

4.31 Strong dissemination activity was seen as one of the key success factors of CRC, allowing it – in the eyes of stakeholders – to "punch above its weight" in many ways. All research outputs
were underwritten by a clear **stakeholder engagement and communications plan**, which had regard to the research audience from the outset. Accessibility and interest in research outputs was facilitated through a wide range of communication channels, including online media; CRC was regarded as innovative in this context. **Good use was seen to have been made of national and local media channels** (newspapers, national radio, TV), with local radio leveraged particularly effectively to provide an interface with rural communities.

4.32 However, several consultees suggested that CRC’s relationship with Defra inhibited PR work, as any activity required sign-off from Defra. The situation was particularly strained once the decision to abolish CRC had been taken; this had been publicly opposed by CRC and there were, inevitably, tensions. The use of partner networks to disseminate research outputs was also identified as important, although it varied according to how collaborative the research process had been.

4.33 **The CRC was in touch with a wide variety of different stakeholders**, through a large database and mailing list. While positive, some consultees questioned whether this was the best strategy. Would it have been better to target key policy- and decision-making “game changers” (including those in OGDs) and engage with them more intensively to embed the research findings, rather than a wide database of contacts, many of whom were already engaged in rural issues?

4.34 In terms of rural communities, the **ongoing commitment of the Rural Advocate and other Commissioners was commended**. Local events and visits were seen to have been important in building credibility and trust, and were reported to be well-attended by local communities. Communication activity with parish councils was also quite effective, and supported through research pieces such as the Participation Inquiry. Again however, there was the suggestion that **local activity was a bit staid at times, attended by the same faces and targeting the same audiences**, who had already shown an interest in rural issues. Reference was made in one consultation to local events eventually becoming “talking shops”, with private sector participation dropping off over time.

4.35 More generally, **dissemination activity was deemed to have changed as time went on**. More limited resources meant a move away from the Regional Affairs Officers roles, which in turn was seen to impact on the relationship with bodies such as the RDAs. On the other hand, progressively more limited resources demanded a tighter and more targeted approach, for example by ensuring that the “right people” were at the “right events”. Over time, CRC also continued to make good use of online media and innovative data presentation tools to engage audiences.
5. The process of influence

Key Points:

- CRC was considered to have achieved large numbers of small impacts, rather than permanent changes. Its routes to impact were very indirect ones.
- The catalyst for specific areas of work was highly variable – sometimes workstreams were initiated in response to Defra, sometimes the Prime Minister, sometimes Other Government Departments, and sometimes the Rural Advocate.
- The traction of different activities also varied: wholly “independent” ventures met with little or no compulsion to act within government, but conversely, some pieces of work were seen by stakeholders as “too close to government”.
- CRC’s ability to exercise influence was limited by the fact that for a third of its existence, it was pending abolition.

5.1 The logic chain in Chapter 3 outlined the outcomes that CRC set out to achieve through its three statutory functions. Essentially, these were:

- to ensure that the voice of rural communities was heard in mainstream decision-making.
- to raise awareness of – and commitment to – rural issues amongst stakeholders.
- to influence mainstream decision-making, policy, delivery, targets and funding to ensure that the “rural dimension” was embedded in decision-making at appropriate levels.

5.2 Drawing on our stakeholder consultations, our stakeholder e-survey and our more detailed case studies, we consider in this chapter the influences and impacts of CRC in these terms.

Influences on awareness of rural issues, commitment and policy

5.3 Evidence gathered in the course of this evaluation suggests that CRC had a large number of small impacts in terms of raising awareness and influencing policy, but it was hard to identify large-scale changes. The CRC often influenced stakeholders at an individual level, but struggled to bring about systematic and institutional change in policy-making processes that would be sustained (in the context of staff turnover and ultimately CRC closure).

5.4 Many commented that CRC "punched above its weight" on a number of key issues. As illustrated in the table below, CRC did particularly well in raising awareness of the rural voice, improving understanding of rural issues and securing greater commitment to rural issues. Performance against the aim of influencing policy-making, targeting and investment in rural areas was much more variable – there were some important successes, but they tended to be relatively narrow in focus and ad hoc. Impacts on delivery on the
ground were seen as “patchy”. Some argued that it was unrealistic to expect a relatively small organisation such as CRC to have large-scale impacts, particularly when many of the issues it tackled were huge in scale and inherently complex. Moreover, it became increasingly difficult to influence others once the abolition process began in 2010, so this affected the level of influence CRC could realistically achieve for almost half of its lifetime.

Table 5-1: Summary of CRC performance against intended outcomes, based on consultations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intended outcomes</th>
<th>Initial assessment</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Raising awareness of the rural voice,</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>The CRC was successful in:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and improving understanding of rural</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Championing rural issues and providing a rural voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>issues</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Raising awareness of rural issues such as homelessness, rural isolation and ageing, uplands, housing, broadband, mobile phone coverage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Changing thinking about rural sustainability and diversity, and the way in which rural and farming issues were viewed – in particular, away from rural issues being seen solely through an environmental lens, to the recognition that social, business/economic and physical (e.g. housing) issues were as important (it was noted that other bodies also working towards this goal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In addition:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• There were reasonably good links also with ministers from DWP. In this context, CRC’s work on rural poverty had a big impact on DWP. It “shook the government”, a process that was facilitated in part by the fact that then-Prime Minister (Gordon Brown) really did understand what poverty meant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Lord Darzi’s report on the NHS (2008) was important in terms of health service reforms and it took significant account of the work of CRC (particularly that linked to rural poverty). It included real consideration of rural health issues and also the potential of telemedicine for rural communities at a time when this was not commonplace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• CLG commissioned Sheffield Hallam University to undertake research into coastal communities, and because CRC was on the working group with CLG for this study it convinced CLG that the rural cut was missing and a separate report on rural coastal communities was needed. This was subsequently commissioned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• As part of Michael Parkinson’s work on the impact of the recession for BIS, he asked CRC to ensure that rural aspects were included in the study. As a result, rural issues were embedded in Parkinson’s report to Ministers, who then agreed to have regular reports on the recession in rural areas. BIS set up forums for RDAs to share intelligence on the impact of the recession and CRC were a “regular fixture” at these meetings and fed in rural evidence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>These changes were evidenced by the language and discourse being used (e.g. pockets of rural disadvantage), and references to CRC’s work (e.g. statistics, research findings) in political speeches and policy reports.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment to rural issues</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Following on from the evidence above, a number of consultees felt that commitments to issues of rural poverty were strengthened. As a result, there is more informed thinking within government on this issue. For example, Jim Knight was Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Rural Affairs, Landscape and Biodiversity (Defra). In 2006, he became Minister of State for Schools and Learners (then-DCSF). In the second role, he led some excellent work on schools in rural areas and the thinking within then-DCSF really moved on. This was seen as an important success by CRC. Also, CRC also secured a commitment by government against the presumption of closure of village schools in rural areas, and were then able to hold the government to account against this commitment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision- and policy-making processes</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>The CRC made good progress in a number of areas. For example:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• The CRC helped to shape NALC’s National Training Strategy, and setting standards of practice and improvement processes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Rural Governance structures were influenced through the Participation Inquiry – in particular, the inter-relationship between the different aspects of local governance in rural areas and policy making processes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13 These are informed by the logic chain which is set out at Figure 3-3
Ex-post evaluation of the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC)  
Report to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intended outcomes</th>
<th>Initial assessment</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The CRC put rural broadband (and mobile phone coverage) on the agenda, and informed rural broadband projects and their roll-out across rural areas.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The housing inquiry directly raised the power of local and regional rural bodies to influence planning policies to provide more affordable homes in rural areas. LAs revisited their HMAs and some areas changed their approach to housing in rural areas as a result of CRC’s work. Also, Community Land Trusts were developed as a route to addressing affordable rural housing issues.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Rural Councils are still using the rural planning guidance produced by CRC.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• CRC influenced approaches to cancer care developed by the Department of Health: for the first time, DoH started to consider rural outcomes seriously and explicitly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The Uplands Inquiry resulted in sustained training provision for young upland farmers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• CRC helped to steer the design and promotion of the UKCES’ talent programme to ensure that it reached small rural employers and recognised informal in-house training that often takes place in rural businesses.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• One consultee argued that CRC’s rural proofing was effective in relation to RGF. BIS recognised that it needed to ensure RGF was “accessible to all” so approached Defra for advice on rural proofing; Defra passed on to CRC who provided advice.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Approaches to targeting, level of funding invested in rural areas  
Mixed  
Examples of CRC’s achievements in this area include:  
• Providing evidence to support bids made by various rural stakeholders for funding  
• Influencing rural housing targets, which CRC pushed for. This had an impact on the HCA’s work, and also the work of National Park Authorities  
• Working with DfE on approaches to children’s services through funding models developed for children’s centres  
• Influencing financial products for rural people via the DWP Rural Champion role  
• Housing work encouraged some local authorities to invest the monies they received through an increase in council tax on second properties, to building affordable rural housing  
• Influencing RDA programme spend in rural areas  
• Influencing the targeting of BIS’ Regional Growth Fund in response to evidence that rural businesses were finding it difficult to access the Round 1 Fund due to the minimum thresholds for business match and job outputs, and the project-based approach. The Fund then moved to a programme rather than purely project based approach and the minimum thresholds were changed: CRC “had some influence” on this.  
• Securing additional funding for broadband in rural areas, by influencing Defra’s rural community broadband fund. Key to this was CRC met with all the right people in the relevant policy teams in OGDs  
• Saving post offices: CRC’s co-ordination of a response to post office closures resulted in some rural communities saving their post offices  
• Investing in Uplands: Uplands Inquiry influenced the level of investment in upland areas  

Delivery of interventions on the ground  
Patchy  
Impacts on the delivery of interventions on the ground were described as “patchy” – e.g. rural broadband, cancer care, credit union development – although lack of evidence to back up claims of impact. Also, as noted in previous sections, CRC had some influence on the delivery of rural programmes delivered by RDAs and LAs.  

Source: SQW based on consultations
Digging deeper

5.5 In order to examine how – through its statutory functions – CRC influenced policy, our four case studies sought to track backwards and forwards to understand the chain of events surrounding particular activities; the consequential outcomes; and the principal influences. The four case studies related to CRC’s activities at different points in time and in different contexts; and – as reported in Chapter 3 – some were viewed by stakeholders in broadly positive terms, others less so. The four case studies were: affordable rural housing, broadband research, realising the potential of rural economies, and the Uplands Inquiry. The rationale for selecting each is explained in Annex A. In the paragraphs that follow, we look across the four case studies to distil similarities and differences in terms of how CRC engaged and how it influenced policy.

Looking backwards

5.6 All four case studies were defined around substantive pieces of work that resulted in one or more CRC publications and were intended to influence policy directly. Across the four, there were however quite different catalysts in relation to CRC’s engagement.

- **CRC – and, previously, CA – had long been concerned about housing and affordable housing in rural areas.** However in 2005 – effectively the point of hiatus between the two organisations – Defra launched an independent Affordable Rural Housing Commission. Subsequently, in 2007, the Prime Minister asked Matthew (now Lord) Taylor, MP, to conduct a review on how land use and planning could better support rural business and deliver affordable housing, and to present the findings to ministers at CLG and Defra. CRC had links – principally through its Commissioners – to both of these processes, although it did not, arguably set the agenda in either; instead it provided evidence and information “behind the scenes”.

- **In relation to broadband, the process of CRC engagement was also largely responsive.** Although our case study found that the issues relating to rural broadband had been picked up by the Rural Advocate during his discussions with rural communities, the immediate prompt for focused action seems to have been a request from a Defra minister: in 2008, BIS and DCMS were well advanced in relation to Digital Britain and – in this context – CRC was asked to provide additional rural evidence and input, working alongside Defra staff. It responded to this request quickly and effectively, but the catalyst appears to have been an external one.

- **The context for CRC’s work in relation to the rural economy appears to have been the threat of an outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease in 2007.** Although ultimately contained, the possibility of an episode on the scale of the 2001 FMD crisis was sufficient to prompt the then-Prime Minister to ask the Rural Advocate to investigate the economic character and potential of rural areas. Again, CRC responded adroitly, but the catalyst was external

- **The Uplands Inquiry was different.** Evidence gathered through our case study appears to suggest that the impetus for this was very largely internal; it stemmed primarily from the Rural Advocate and was then championed by a small group of Commissioners. There is some suggestion that government departments – and
particularly Defra – were ambivalent at the start; they did not prompt it and were, in some respects, wary about it.

5.7 Across all four, it is then clear that the prompt for action was a complex mix of influences – sometimes involving Defra, sometimes Other Government Departments, sometimes the Prime Minister and sometimes the Rural Advocate; and often some combination of all four as the graphic which follows attempts to summarise.

**Figure 5-1: Catalysts for action**

![Catalysts for action](image)

Source: SQW

5.8 Based on our case studies, it was also apparent that all four workstreams generated outputs that were regarded as robust and useful. In the main, CRC liaised with Defra and – where relevant – Other Government Departments around the scope of its work (in part to avoid duplication and in part to secure some level of buy-in). It was also seen as exemplary in involving wider stakeholders and often rural communities. Finally its reports were seen as accessible and well-crafted. Although its outputs were often produced under significant time pressure, their overall quality was generally recognised.

**Looking forwards**

5.9 One of our four case studies was, effectively, commissioned by the then-Prime Minister. Another was a far more independent statement of priority that emerged directly from the Rural Advocate with no “positive endorsement” from within the government at the point it was conceived. The other two – on broadband and rural housing – were far more nuanced: the Rural Advocate had heard about the issues from rural communities, but the immediate catalyst for action was actually from within government; and particularly for housing, the legacy of the Countryside Agency was also writ large. Against this backdrop, it is important to consider how the different workstreams influenced policy-makers, and – with the benefit of hindsight – the extent to which that influence proved to be enduring. Here the evidence is really quite complicated.

5.10 On the face of it, the rural economies workstream – commissioned directly by the Prime Minister – ought to have had a clear run; and it certainly benefited from a very high profile. In practice though, consultees considered that it was “too close” to the centre, such that the
“independence” of CRC was difficult to defend. This meant – for example – that there was significant pressure to avoid critical analytical comments about rural economic performance being misconstrued as negative observations on the government of the day. It also meant that, in dissemination, agencies of government – in this case regional development agencies – featured very strongly. To the average rural stakeholder or community, CRC might have appeared to have become, de facto, government.

5.11 The Uplands Inquiry, by contrast, had no backing from either Westminster or Whitehall. A finding from our case study was that government felt very uncomfortable with it – particularly in the context of CAP negotiations. The Uplands Inquiry certainly could claim “independence”. Yet the suggestion was made that this meant CRC had very little “muscle” in terms of implementation. Policy makers were generally “interested” – but they were under no real pressure or compulsion to act; and while rural communities evidently were “heard”, the routes to impact were relatively unclear.

5.12 In the broadband sphere, the contents of Digital Britain found their way into legislation. CRC had a role in this context, and it did provide rural data and intelligence. However, some years later, only those closest to CRC identified any kind of causal link. CRC contributed, but very much as “part of the mix” – alongside Defra, BIS, and DCMS. Similar arguments applied in the domain of rural housing: isolating the specific influence of CRC is impossible, particularly with the passage of time, and whilst most would comment that it was “generally helpful”, relatively few were willing to go further in their assessment.

Outcomes

5.13 From the four case studies, there are examples of tangible outcomes associated with the work of CRC. These are summarised in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case Study</th>
<th>Outcomes – and the route through which they were achieved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing Inquiry / affordable rural housing</td>
<td>Although part of a complex policy-making process, CRC’s work is considered to have influenced housing targets in rural areas. The route to impact appears to have been an indirect one – through inputs into the ARHC report, the Taylor Review and the provisions of PPS3. Locally, there are examples of local authorities investing council tax generated through second homes into affordable rural housing. Evidence generated by CRC was considered to have prompted this response.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadband research</td>
<td>The “Digital Britain” policy was alert to rural issues and it took account of gaps in supply in rural areas; issues around DSL “not spots”; and the challenges of fibre-optics in rural areas. The evidence generated by CRC was thought – by at least some consultees – to have informed these outcomes. The development of community-level responses to broadband issues was championed by CRC and this gained traction (both locally and nationally) following CRC’s work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realising the potential of rural economies / impact of the recession</td>
<td>Following CRC’s work, steps were taken by ONS to generate better data that could be used to assess the productivity of the rural economy. This was a direct response to the technical difficulties CRC faced in completing its own research. A series of regional summits were organised on the back of CRC’s work, prompted by a Defra minister. Through RDAs, the purpose of these was to highlight further the potential of the rural economy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Case Study Outcomes – and the route through which they were achieved

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case Study</th>
<th>Outcomes – and the route through which they were achieved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uplands Inquiry</td>
<td>The CRC’s publication prompted further discussion and debates in relation to uplands issues – among stakeholders, agencies of government, and within government. There may have been a link to some CAP reforms, and payments for ecosystems services.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SQW analysis of case study findings

### Wider perspectives on “influence”

5.14 The work of CRC did therefore appear to have some level of influence and led to some tangible outcomes. Our e-survey of stakeholders provides a wider perspective on how this “influence” appears to have worked through. As the graphic below shows, almost half of respondents indicated that their “awareness and understanding of rural issues” had been influenced “to a large extent” by CRC’s work; and almost 40% reflected on their “commitment to rural issues” in similar terms.

*Figure 5-2: Stakeholder reflections on the influence of CRC’s work*

5.15 However, CRC appears to have been far less influential in terms of organisations’ willingness or ability to respond in tangible terms. For example, under 20% indicated that CRC’s work had had been influential “to a large extent” in relation to the funding they invested in rural areas, or in relation to the organisation’s own policies or decision-making processes. If there is a weakness, it may have been in converting “influence” to real “action”. In terms of the “process of influence”, there may therefore be lessons to learn. Again, these findings suggest some success in relation to the functions of “advocate” and “adviser”, but possibly less in terms of “watchdog”.

5.16 Finally, it is important to consider whether the influence of CRC has led to lasting change. Through our e-survey, stakeholders were asked whether the “rural dimension” is now “fully embedded and reflected in mainstream decision-making”. Respondents were – in the main – cautious in their responses. Overall, the view was that the “rural dimension” has been embraced – at least to some extent – within local government. In relation to central government, however, 27 (of 42 respondents) indicated that this had not occurred. Central government, it appears, is particularly challenging in these terms – despite the work of CRC on rural proofing.
6. Impacts and additionality

**Key Points:**

- Stakeholders considered that CRC’s detachment from the delivery process made any judgements on its impacts (in relation to rural communities) inappropriate; instead it was considered more important to reflect on the extent of “influence” (as an intermediate point in the route to impact).

- Views were very mixed on additionality – those close to CRC assessed the additionality of its work in strongly positive terms whereas external observers tended to be much more cautious (and in practice, many also felt unable to comment).

- Those close to CRC explained additionality principally in terms of CRC’s unique role which – in this context – they defined principally in relation to the quality of its evidence base and its consistent and coherent rural voice.

6.1 There is, then, some evidence of both outcomes and influence associated with CRC’s work. In terms of an *ex post* evaluation, questions also have to be asked around impacts and additionality; and value for money. These issues are the focus for this chapter and the next.

**Impacts on rural areas**

6.2 From our stakeholder consultations, there were three main observations in relation to the impacts of CRC:

- There was actually some debate as to whether having an impact on outcomes in rural communities/areas was really part of CRC’s remit, particularly as it had no delivery function.

- Consultees observed that the main role of CRC was to gather evidence from rural communities, then to use this to influence policy in the belief that this in turn would impact on rural outcomes. In their view, there was actually therefore a big “gap” between CRC’s activities and impacts observed on the ground – as the diagram below indicates.

- From this premise, consultees inferred that:
  
  - CRC might have had an influence in some specific areas (where it had had more success in influencing policy) such as broadband, cancer care, school and post office provision, and access to finance, although they found this difficult to evidence.

  - because of difficulties in influencing policy-makers, wider impacts were likely to be limited.
6.3 Consistent with this line of argument, our e-survey suggested that stakeholders were more likely to link CRC’s work to changes on the ground in those areas in which it had had a very explicit focus, particularly during its early years. Hence 12 stakeholders considered that CRC’s work had contributed “to a large extent” to improving social inclusion in rural areas. Assessments of its impact in relation to later foci were weaker; two identified a similar scale of contribution in terms of the competitiveness of rural businesses, and two did likewise in terms of the diversity of rural communities.

The additionality of CRC

6.4 If impact in relation to rural conditions is – in practice – impossibly difficult to identify, what of the additionality of CRC’s role? In other words, without the work of the organisation, to what extent would the policy-related outcomes – described in some detail in earlier chapters – have been achieved anyway?

6.5 In this context, there was radically inconsistent evidence from across the different strands of our work. In general terms – and whether through consultations, the e-survey or the case studies – those closest to CRC were far more likely to comment on the additional nature of CRC’s effects. Those close to CRC suggested that without its work, the outcomes noted above would not have been achieved at all (in most cases), or would have happened more slowly or at a smaller scale. The basis for this argument was that no other
organisation was undertaking similar advocate, advisory and watchdog functions at a national level. Defra did not have the capacity or expertise in-house – or, as one central government department, the remit – to play this pan- (and supra-) government role. Without CRC, there would have been a broader array of agencies raising rural issues across the country, with different agendas, resulting in more diluted (and mixed) messages. The key aspects of CRC's work that really appeared to have made the difference were (a) the robust and trusted evidence base, which was grounded in in “real world” experience and tackled cross-cutting issues, and (b) the Advocate providing a consistent and coherent rural voice.

6.6 **External observers, however, were far more cautious in their judgements.** To some extent, these differences must reflect historic loyalties and an unavoidably partisan view. But that is not the whole story. For the most part, the second group really did not have the knowledge – years after the event – on which the base a confident judgement. CRC's work was relevant and usually, there was at least some awareness of it, but concluding that a particular policy or initiative would not have achieved its final form without the benefit of CRC's inputs and influences was a step too far. Some were sceptical; most simply did not know.

6.7 The binary nature of this overall narrative was evident across three of the four case studies. In the domain of broadband, for example, CRC highlighted key issues and concerns, and provided a useful contribution, but – from the external vantage point – there was a sense that some combination of Defra, BIS and DCMS was “getting there anyway”; just how important CRC's work actually was in relation to the final provisions of the Digital Economy Bill is impossible to isolate. Similarly, in terms of rural housing (including affordable rural housing), CRC's work was one strand among many, and there were other processes underway, not least the work of the Affordable Rural Housing Commission. In terms of rural economy, the link to specific policy outcomes was weaker – although some suggested that the report paved the way for the (much later) rural growth review led by Defra. What might not have been achieved without CRC's rural economies work was the improvement in data which was subsequently achieved by ONS.

6.8 Arguably, the outcomes linked to the Uplands Inquiry were – on balance – more appropriately judged to be “additional”. Here – unlike the other three case studies – CRC went out on a limb in initiating its research, and the evidence suggests that it caused some friction with Defra in doing so. With regard to this Inquiry, its “independence” was clearer – not just in the conclusions it drew but in recognising the challenges facing uplands communities in the first place; at the time, it was not obvious that any other organisation – either inside or outside of government – would have alighted on the issues, at a national scale, in the absence of CRC. Its substantive links to rural communities were also far more evident, and in a formative – rather than simply consultative – sense. Through the Uplands Inquiry it did appear to cause some behaviours to change (e.g. in relation to the management plan systems used within National Parks), and it is not apparent that these would have occurred without CRC's prompting.
7. Perspectives on value for money

Key Points:

- Conventional measures of value for money are very challenging in relation to the work of CRC; qualitatively, consultees were positive in relation to assessments of economy and efficiency but there were more questions in relation to effectiveness.

- A comparison with other – broadly similar – organisations suggested that relative to its scale, CRC was prolific in the production of outputs but it may have achieved a lower level of visibility.

- Broadly, the observations on value for money resonated with an assessment suggesting that CRC’s advisory and advocacy functions were more effective than those concerned with its watchdog role.

7.1 Conventional value for money metrics – of economy, efficiency and effectiveness – are very difficult to use in relation to CRC. There are no obvious output or outcome metrics in relation to its three statutory functions as expert adviser, advocate and watchdog, and whilst we know that – over 6.5 years – it spent a total of £37.4m, this was not allocated to particular activities or directed towards very specific or codified outputs and outcomes on a consistent basis.

7.2 Nevertheless, during the first phase of our work, we asked consultees for their own reflections in relation to value for money. The feedback we received can be summarised as follows:

- On measures of economy (i.e. was CRC delivered at the minimum cost to the public purse), consultees considered that performance improved over time. In its first year of operation, CRC’s annual budget was over £9m; this declined to about £6m in 2010/11; and it then shrunk substantially (to around £500,000 in 2011/12 and 2012/13) once plans for its abolition had been announced. At the time CRC was formed, the major concern was that it was a very much smaller operation than its predecessor, the Countryside Agency, and the loss of its regional structure was a particular concern to many. However without CA’s delivery responsibilities, and with a different set of tools for dissemination and influence, new “norms” were gradually established. In the view of consultees, it became a “leaner machine” over time.

- In terms of efficiency (i.e. were outputs produced for minimal cost), feedback from the consultations suggested that, in qualitative terms, CRC performed reasonably well (although again, it is difficult to judge whether it constituted real “value for money”). The comment was frequently made by consultees that CRC “punched above its weight” (relative to its size and resources) in terms of the prominence of its evidence-based work and strength of its rural voice. Staff were considered to be productive and on a day-to-day level, time was spent well. Moreover, the status of the CRC (as an independent advisory body) meant it was also able in some instances to call upon external expertise at marginal cost (e.g. leading academics inputted into the Uplands Inquiry). However, perhaps resources could have been targeted more effectively on
a narrower set of topics and more resource could have been invested on embedding the messages that were generated.

- **On effectiveness** (i.e. did CRC meet its objectives), the feedback was more mixed: as noted above, stakeholders suggested that it was broadly successful in terms of its advisory and advocacy roles, but struggled to deliver the watchdog function effectively. Its influence on policy-making processes at an institutional level was limited, and this had implications for its impact on rural outcomes on the ground.

### A comparative perspective

#### 7.3 Particularly during our first phase of work, the refrain from consultees that CRC was a small organisation which "punched above its weight" was a common one. Whether this assessment was essentially a comparative statement of its work vis-à-vis the earlier achievements of the Countryside Agency – or whether it was a reasonable one in relation to relevant comparators – demanded some level of investigation. It was in this context that we sought to reflect on the achievements of CRC alongside those of four – broadly comparable – organisations: Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE), Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE), Centre for Cities, and the Sustainable Development Commission (SDC).

#### 7.4 Of course, questions can be asked about the validity of the comparisons. Of the four organisations, the one that was functionally most similar to CRC was SDC: it had been set up by government with statutory functions; its resources and staffing levels were broadly similar to those of CRC; and ultimately, it went through the same abolition process at about the same time. The other three were essentially charitable bodies which – to a greater or lesser extent – saw themselves as some combination of advocates, advisers and watchdogs in their particular fields, albeit without a formal mandate provided by government.

#### 7.5 In many respects, comparisons are both invidious and inappropriate, and we have very little robust data on which we can draw. Our findings do therefore need to be treated with considerable caution. Nevertheless, focusing on the main period of CRC’s activity (from 2006-2010) and focusing on published information and key media, we found that:

- CRC and SDC had more salaried staff than the three charities; at the extremes, CRC had an average of about 70 employees whereas both Centre for Cities and ACRE employed 15-20 staff

- The number of discrete CRC publications on its own (now archived) website was much greater than among the comparator organisations for which we were able to source data (SDC and Centre for Cities)

- Overall, the most “visible” organisation within the mainstream media was CPRE: it featured far more frequently than any other on the BBC website and across both the Guardian and Telegraph newspapers

- CRC (as an organisation) achieved a very similar number of citations in both the Guardian and Telegraph newspapers; conversely, Centre for Cities achieved far more than CRC in the Guardian but far fewer in the Telegraph
• The number of search returns on the BBC website was similar for *State of the Countryside* and *Cities Outlook*, the “flagship publications” for CRC and Centre for Cities respectively.

• CRC received 194 Hansard citations between 2006 and 2013, a similar number to CPRE (214) but far fewer than SDC (459).

7.6 Although there is a need, clearly, for real caution in interpretation, these findings appear to suggest that although CRC was prolific in producing outputs, it remained far less “visible” than campaigning organisations like CPRE. Its flagship publication was similar in reach to that of Centre for Cities – but Centre for Cities achieved this with fewer resources. In terms of featuring in parliamentary discussions – which is obviously an indicator (albeit an imperfect one) in terms of “policy influence” – CRC appeared to be markedly less prominent than SDC and similar in profile to CPRE.

7.7 Taken at face value, these findings would appear to suggest – in value for money terms – a relatively strong performance on measures of “efficiency”, but a weaker one in terms of “effectiveness”. Although the data and metrics could certainly be challenged, it is notable that this assessment chimes precisely with the view expressed consistently by stakeholders, namely that:

• CRC’s *advisory and advocacy functions were the most effective*: bringing rural issues to the fore, and presenting them in a coordinated and rounded manner (which no other organisation had previously done (or has done since))

• the *overall performance of CRC was less successful in relation to the watchdog function*. 


8. Conclusions and lessons

Key Points:

- CRC made progress in relation to all three of its statutory functions, but especially those linked to advisor and advocate
- However there is a real question as to whether these functions ought to be resourced through the public purse or whether they ought to be being fulfilled by voluntary/charity sector bodies acting both individually and collectively
- In addition, the evaluation found some fundamental tensions at the core of the organisation – specifically, whether an organisation that is accountable to one government department can also be “independent”; and whether/how it can act as a watchdog when it has no real traction
- Ten lessons were identified from the work of CRC relating mainly to accountabilities; and the process of effecting influence in the context of statutory functions that may jar with each other. These should be taken into account if consideration is ever to be given to “something like” CRC being re-established

8.1 CRC was vested with three statutory functions – as advocate, adviser and watchdog. A review of successive Corporate Plans and Business Plans suggested that through these functions it sought to achieve three main outcomes across a wide range of policy domains:

- to ensure that the voice of rural communities was heard in mainstream decision-making
- to raise awareness of – and commitment to – rural issues amongst stakeholders
- to influence mainstream decision-making, policy, delivery, targets and funding to ensure that the “rural dimension” was embedded in decision-making at appropriate levels.

8.2 Although relying on a highly fragmented evidence base (which undoubtedly has decayed over time), this ex-post evaluation has found that CRC made progress in relation to all three, and particularly the first two outcomes. It is not however possible to comment on the extent to which these outcomes have led to enduring impacts across rural communities in England; CRC was one factor among many across a hugely complex set of delivery processes, and there is no meaningful counterfactual.

8.3 Whilst “independent”, CRC was ultimately accountable to – and strongly influenced by – government. Therefore, as an organisation, there was a basic tension – and some consultees put it more strongly – at its core. In the main, however, CRC appeared to navigate this effectively, certainly in relation to the first two outcomes listed above: verbatim comments gathered through our stakeholder e-survey for example reflected on CRC largely in terms of the organisation’s “trustworthiness” and the “quality of its evidence”. The watchdog function was much more challenging and here, “independence” was double-edged, limiting its traction with both Defra and OGDs. Ultimately, CRC had no real clout akin, say,
to Ofsted inspectors visiting schools, or the National Audit Office reviewing public expenditure; all it could do was to generate and use evidence relating to rural communities to “inform” and subsequently “influence”.

8.4 Whether its achievements were worth £37m of tax-payers’ money is – clearly – a judgement call. CRC did raise awareness of rural issues, and it took steps to ensure that the voice of rural communities was heard, but – particularly in an era of austerity – some would question whether a role of this nature should be funded entirely through the public purse. To a significant extent, these functions ought to be being fulfilled through voluntary/charity sector bodies, both individually and collectively; and in this context, the role of groupings like the Rural Coalition – which was actually initiated by CRC in 2008 – should be important.

8.5 Where voluntary arrangements of this type may struggle is in relation to the watchdog function. Yet – as this study has shown – CRC also made limited headway in this domain. Particularly in relation to central government, there was (and is) a need to influence both ministers and civil servants to “make things happen”. Even within individual departments, these two constituencies were very different. In summary terms, one appeared willing to act on the basis of headlines and quick wins, while the second sought incontrovertible evidence of value for money; from the vantage point of England’s rural communities, neither of these appetites was easily satisfied. Over the 6.5 years of CRC’s existence, the challenges facing rural communities were – in the main – incremental and long term, and there were a few immediate “crises”. Influencing mainstream policy – and policy-makers – in this context was intrinsically challenging, and CRC itself struggled to find a sustainable solution. The work of the rural champions perhaps came closest and this is one aspect of CRC’s rural proofing work that should not simply be “lost”.

8.6 Ultimately, the decision as to whether “something like” CRC should exist is a political one; currently – for the first time in well over half a century – it does not. If government chose to go down this route again, it ought to reflect on the lessons and insight from the activities of CRC over 6.5 years. Based on the evidence considered in the course of this ex-post evaluation, ten overarching lessons are summarised in the table below.

### Table 8-1: Overall lessons arising from the work of the Commission for Rural Communities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: “Independence” from government is important – but it is also double edged</td>
<td>“Independence” is – arguably – crucial in relation to evidence, for it confers a level of credibility and robustness that makes it very powerful, and far more likely to be used. However “independent” organisations will struggle as “watchdogs” within government, particularly if they are also ultimately accountable to government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: The roles of adviser and advocate/watchdog may not always be compatible</td>
<td>The impartiality of evidence and expertise may be called into question if it is also used as the basis for advocacy. There needs to be some level of separation between these functions to mitigate the risk of “evidence statements” being seen as lobbying documents with limited currency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Much credibility can be gained through one, consistently high quality, flagship publication</td>
<td>Although not “invented” by CRC, “State of the Countryside” was – arguably – its most important “product”. It was widely used and it conferred on the organisation a high level of credibility and legitimacy as a real authority in relation to the nature of the rural condition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: Exercising real influence with government ministers depends crucially on networks/relationships and the ability to respond quickly</td>
<td>There are several examples – usually through the work of the Rural Advocate and/or other Commissioners – of CRC engaging effectively with ministers, including with the Prime Minister. This engagement was premised on relationships, however, and in most cases it also demanded very quick responses. At times, this imperative placed real pressures on CRC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson</td>
<td>Explanation</td>
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<tr>
<td>5: There is a balance to be struck between “responsiveness” and seeking to set the agenda in relation to rural issues</td>
<td>CRC was – at times – accused of being too reactive and insufficiently strategic (i.e. deciding what its priorities should be and seeing them through). There is an important balance to be struck in this context – and its complex relationship with government was again a factor. However in some respects, it appeared to achieve most at those points when it took the initiative and essentially set the agenda. The Uplands Inquiry is an important example.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6: The language of economics is very important in seeking to influence senior civil servants within the policymaking process</td>
<td>At times, CRC struggled to engage with senior civil servants and one of the explanations was its limited capacity in relation to “hard” economics – particularly robust value for money assessments. Any successor to CRC ought to invest in some expertise in this domain, if it is seeking to influence those with key responsibilities for implementing policy. Equally, it needs staff with wider expertise in policy development; this needs to be recognised as a distinct set of skills and – particularly in the early years – CRC may have lacked the appropriate balance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7: The relationship between the role of Rural Advocate and the role of CRC Chair needed greater clarity</td>
<td>The Rural Advocate and the Chair of CRC were the same person, but the two roles had different reporting lines – the first to the Prime Minister and the second to Defra. This led to some tensions. While these might, at times, have been creative ones, they were a complication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8: It may not be appropriate for an organisation charged with rural proofing across government to report to Defra</td>
<td>There was a case for CRC sitting completely outside of Defra, particularly given its imperative to work across all government departments in relation to its most challenging function, that of rural watchdog. Had it been vested in the Cabinet Office, the cross-cutting role might have been easier to implement. However it would be perverse for an organisation charged with generating impartial rural evidence to be separated completely from government’s rural department. This suggests, again, that the three statutory functions might have been delivered more effectively had they been split up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9: Effective rural evidence and advocacy is not wholly premised on an organisation’s own capacity in relation to rural delivery – although it is important that some staff have rural delivery experience</td>
<td>When CRC was first formed, there was real concern that it would struggle to be effective in the absence of a programme delivery function (which had characterised its predecessor, the Countryside Agency). This study has found very little evidence that this was in fact the case. CRC’s advice might have been taken more seriously if there had been the “carrot” of some kind of funding programme – and there was some evidence of this – but there was little feedback to suggest that the quality of CRC’s advice was compromised. That said, CRC benefitted from staff that had knowledge of delivery “on the ground” (many of whom had transferred across from CA). This legacy experience was an important asset for CRC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10: Particularly with the internet and social media, an elaborate sub-national staffing structure is not a pre-requisite for influence at a local level although local networks are still important</td>
<td>CRC did not have an elaborate regional office structure, unlike its predecessor, the Countryside Agency. When it was first formed, there was great anxiety that it could not function without a significant local presence. This evaluation has found no real evidence that it lost anything – in part because it could draw on the legacy of a network of relationships through staff transferred from CA and in part because it could reach far and wide through the internet and the use of social media. There is some evidence (from our e-survey) to suggest that the impact of CRC might actually have been greater at local than national levels, despite the absence of a local staff resource.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SQW – based on findings from the evaluation
Annex A: Methodology

Introduction

A.1 We agreed with Defra to adopt a “mixed methods” evaluation approach that balanced width and depth and enabled us to triangulate findings. This included data analysis and documentation review; in-depth consultations with Defra, CRC representatives and stakeholders; a wider e-survey; in-depth case studies; and a comparator analysis. The overall approach to the evaluation of the Commission for Rural Communities is set out in the graphic below. In the paragraphs that follow, we describe elements of our methodology in more detail.

Figure A-1: Overall approach to the ex post evaluation of the Commission for Rural Communities

Phase I: Desk review and initial stakeholder consultations

A.2 A core part of Phase I was a desk-based review of CRC Corporate Plans and Annual Reports in order to build a profile of CRC’s principal activities and objectives during the 6.5 years of its existence.

A.3 On the basis of this evidence review, we developed a high level logic chain which is presented at Figure 3-3. This attempted to distil the inputs and resources that "fuelled" the organisation; the activities and outputs that it produced; and the outcomes and impacts that these ought to achieve. Judging the extent to which it was successful in achieving these was, in essence, the purpose of the ex post evaluation. The contents of the logic chain fundamentally shaped the primary research that was undertaken in both phases of the study.

A.4 The second main element within Phase I comprised over 25 bilateral consultations with former CRC staff/commissioners and wider stakeholders. The list of consultees was agreed with the client group. It had to include individuals with sufficient knowledge to be able to comment on the effectiveness of CRC’s activities, but it also sought to strike a balance between (essentially) internal and external perspectives. The consultations were conducted using a mix of face-to-face and telephone methods. The findings were considered through an internal meeting among members of the project team.
A.5 The desk-based review and the findings from the early round of consultations formed the basis for an interim report. This was discussed with our Steering Group and it helped to inform the research design for the second phase of work.

Phase II: e-survey, case studies and comparator analysis

A.6 Within Phase II, there were three main strands of enquiry, the details of which are set out below.

e-survey

A.7 The e-survey set out to gather evidence on the role of CRC, levels/patterns of stakeholder engagement, and insights into the performance, efficiency and effectiveness of CRC in order to draw out lessons around and “what works” (or not) and why. The survey focused on the influences, impacts and added value of CRC, on both the stakeholders themselves and their views on benefits for the rural communities in which they operate.

A.8 The questionnaire was piloted prior to circulating the e-survey and feedback was taken into account where appropriate.

A.9 The list of stakeholders was compiled from data sets from a variety of sources provided by Defra:

- the State of the Countryside 2008 mailing list (a more recent mailing list was not available)
- respondents to CRC abolition consultation process
- Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and Local Action Group (LAG) contact details
- Rural Affairs Forum leads, and individuals from OGDs and external organisations who were identified as potential Phase I consultees but were not contacted at that stage in the study.

A.10 SQW cleaned the datasets to remove organisations that are no longer in existence (such as Regional Development Agencies and Government Offices) and to fill in missing email addresses where possible. We also removed a small number of high profile individuals where we felt it was not appropriate to ask them to complete the survey (e.g. all MPs). This gave a cleaned mailing list of 359 individuals.

A.11 The questionnaire was then issued by SQW to the 359 stakeholders through KeySurvey (via email)\(^\text{14}\).

A.12 Using the cleaned mailing list, 225 emails were sent successfully (i.e. without being bounced back), which in turn yielded a 21% response rate (48 responses). From the 48 submitted responses we excluded six from the analysis as their responses were very partial. We therefore derived complete – or virtually complete – responses from a total of 42 stakeholders.

\(^{14}\) The survey was issued on 28 March 2014 and stakeholders were given a deadline of 11 April 2014 for responses. This was subsequently extended to 17 April 2014
Case studies

A.13 The purpose of the case studies was to test in more detail the effectiveness and impacts of CRC’s activities. A long list of case study candidates was developed in the light of the findings from Phase I. This spanned different types of CRC activities, including: examples of good practice and activities that have worked less well; different thematic areas and functions; and activities that occurred at different points in CRC’s lifetime. In the end, Defra chose four of these case studies. The original rationale for their inclusion is set out below.

Table A-1: Case studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possible case study topic</th>
<th>Typologies covered</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Broadband research     | Statutory function of adviser and wider output (thematic report) | • c. 2009, therefore before abolition process began, through to 2011  
• Anecdotal evidence of tangible outcomes (e.g. Defra’s Rural Community Broadband Fund)  
• Initiated in response to a challenge set by Defra – i.e. reactive (to some extent) |
| 2. Housing Inquiry / affordable rural housing | Statutory function of adviser and wider output (inquiry) | • c. 2006/7 – during the early years of the CRC  
• Initiated in response to Government’s Affordable Rural Housing Commission – i.e. reactive.  
• Anecdotal evidence of influence from consultations – would be interesting to explore further (and extent to which CRC was credited) |
| 3. Uplands Inquiry        | Statutory function of adviser and wider output (inquiry) | • c. 2010/11– during the mid/later years of the CRC  
• A number of examples of impact provided by consultees, including a direct impact on policy  
• Initiated largely by the CRC – more proactive, driving the agenda |
| 4. Realising the potential of rural economies / impact of the recession | Statutory function of adviser, advocate and watchdog, wider output (thematic research) | • Increasingly focused on economic contribution towards later years of the CRC  
• Mixed views on success in consultations, although some tangible examples of influence |

Source: SQW

A.14 Each case study involved:

• preparation, e.g. to identify and track suitable consultees, and background reading

• in-depth consultations with those involved in delivering the activities and a sample of stakeholders/beneficiaries to track from the activity through to changes in policy/delivery on the ground

• analysis and reporting.

Comparator analysis

A.15 It was agreed at the interim stage that – rather than further case studies – we should instead complete a benchmarking exercise to inform an assessment of the value for money of CRC against four comparable UK-based, organisations: Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE), the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE), the Centre for Cities, and the Sustainable Development Commission (SDC).
A.16 For each comparator – and for CRC itself – we reviewed operations over the period 2006 to 2013 on a structured basis. Metrics were chosen to explore the volume and reach of the organisations’ tangible outputs. These were defined as official published reports and media pieces produced for (or about) the organisation, and any measurable influence on the policy-making process. To collate sufficient evidence to complete each pro forma, a full review of the organisation’s website was carried out, all available business reports were analysed, and a selection of online media sources as well as the UK Government Hansard were reviewed.

Information was patchy across the time period and therefore, in order to make the most of the data available, averages were calculated for the time period available for each organisation.

**Triangulation**

A.17 At the end of Phase II – and armed with the different strands of evidence – we sought to triangulate the findings. This evidence base then underpinned our *ex post* evaluation of the statutory functions carried out by CRC.

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15 These may include research reports, policy position papers, thematic reviews, informational pieces and guidance.
16 In the case of the Commission for Rural Communities and the Sustainable Development Commission we reviewed archived websites.
17 Including Business Plans, Annual Performance Reports and Audited Financial Reports.
18 Using the search engine on TheyWorkForYou.com.
Annex B: List of consultees

B.1 The following individuals have been consulted during the course of this study – some during the Phase I stakeholder consultations and others in the context of Phase II case studies. We would like to acknowledge the time they made available to contribute to this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role / Organisation</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Will Aston</td>
<td>ex-CRC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phil Bicknell</td>
<td>NFU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeremy Blackburn</td>
<td>ex-CRC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caron Britton</td>
<td>Defra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allan Buckwell</td>
<td>Institute for European Environmental Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stuart Burgess</td>
<td>ex-CRC Chairman; and ex-Rural Advocate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick Chase</td>
<td>ACRE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trevor Cherrett</td>
<td>ex-CRC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret Clarke</td>
<td>ex-CRC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Coleman</td>
<td>Defra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Couchman</td>
<td>Plunkett Foundation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Helen Dimmock</td>
<td>DWP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt Dodds</td>
<td>HCA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jeremy Eppel</td>
<td>Defra</td>
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<tr>
<td>David Evans</td>
<td>BIS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craig Felts</td>
<td>Midlands Rural Housing Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew Field</td>
<td>DCMS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca Frost</td>
<td>ex-CRC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lorna Gibbons</td>
<td>Previously LEP Network Manager, now Dorset LEP Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris Goulden</td>
<td>Joseph Rowntree Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin Griggs</td>
<td>National Association of Local Councils (NALC)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Laura Jacobs</td>
<td>ex-CRC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alistair Johnson</td>
<td>Defra and ex-CRC secondee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris Kolek</td>
<td>ex-CRC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jo Lavis</td>
<td>ex-CRC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Leafe</td>
<td>Lake District National Parks Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicola Lloyd</td>
<td>Defra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phillipa Lloyd</td>
<td>BIS</td>
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<tr>
<td>David Mack-Smith</td>
<td>SQW lead on broadband</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alison Maclean</td>
<td>ex-Commissioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Role / Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>David Marlow</td>
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<tr>
<td>Justin Martin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stephen Martin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sarah McAdam</td>
<td>ex-CRC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Robin Mortimer</td>
<td>Director for Wildlife, Landscape and Rural, Defra</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gill Payne</td>
<td>ex-CRC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liz Peel</td>
<td>ex-CRC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Howard Petch</td>
<td>ex-CRC Commissioner</td>
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<td>Sue Prince</td>
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<td>Kirstine Riding</td>
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<td>Sam Sharpe</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professor Mark Shucksmith</td>
<td>Commissioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lord Taylor</td>
<td>House of Lords</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel Thornton</td>
<td>GAVI Alliance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Keith Thorpe</td>
<td>DCLG</td>
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<tr>
<td>Roger Turner</td>
<td>ex-CRC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tony Williamson</td>
<td>Defra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor Michael Winter</td>
<td>Commissioner</td>
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## Annex C: List of acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACRE</td>
<td>Action with Communities in Rural England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARHC</td>
<td>Affordable Rural Housing Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIS</td>
<td>Department for Business, Innovation and Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>Countryside Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPRE</td>
<td>Campaign to Protect Rural England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRC</td>
<td>Commission for Rural Communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DCMS</td>
<td>Department for Culture, Media and Sport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DCSF</td>
<td>Department for Children, Schools and Families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DECC</td>
<td>Department of Energy and Climate Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defra</td>
<td>Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIT</td>
<td>Department for Transport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIUS</td>
<td>Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DWP</td>
<td>Department for Work and Pensions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FMD</td>
<td>Foot and Mouth Disease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HCA</td>
<td>Homes and Communities Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HMA</td>
<td>Housing Market Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MRD</td>
<td>Modernising Rural Delivery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NALC</td>
<td>National Association of Local Councils</td>
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<tr>
<td>NERC</td>
<td>Natural Environment and Rural Communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OGD</td>
<td>Other Government Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ONS</td>
<td>Office for National Statistics</td>
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<td>PPS3</td>
<td>Planning Policy Statement 3</td>
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<td>Regional Development Agency</td>
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<td>RDC</td>
<td>Rural Development Commission</td>
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<td>RGF</td>
<td>Regional Growth Fund</td>
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<td>PR</td>
<td>Public Relations</td>
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<td>Rural Strategy 2004</td>
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<td>RWP</td>
<td>Rural White Paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDC</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TUPE</td>
<td>Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment)</td>
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