Review of Rural Evidence

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

September 2011
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Executive Summary

1. In December 2009, SQW was commissioned by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) to “review Defra’s role and function in the collection, dissemination and presentation of rural evidence and research”. The requirement was essentially for a “stock take”, focusing on the rural evidence that had been generated by Defra; assessing its “fitness for purpose”; and then developing recommendations for Defra’s future role in relation to it.

2. The study was originally scheduled to finish in summer, 2010. However the change in government in May 2010 had major implications for this piece of work. The study was initially paused. It was then refocused to consider, specifically, the potential role of Defra’s new Rural Communities Policy Unit (RCPU) with regard to rural evidence. Hence there was a major change in direction.

3. This report considers both phases of work. It acknowledges that there was a major disjunction between the two phases but it also recognises that important lessons from the last decade of Defra’s rural evidence activities need to be taken into account in planning for the future.

4. Throughout, this piece of work has relied on extensive consultation. In the early phases, we spoke to stakeholders, Other Government Departments and a range of policy teams within Defra. Later stages of the study focused primarily on consultations with stakeholders. The different findings and recommendations need to be seen in this context.

Perspectives on rural evidence, 2000-2010

5. In 2000, then-MAFF published a Rural White Paper1. However for some months, the foot and mouth disease (FMD) crisis of 2001 brought rural affairs to the top of the political agenda. Subsequently Lord Haskins reviewed the way in which the government’s rural policies were delivered. Defra accepted many of Lord Haskins’ recommendations and the Department’s response formed the basis of Rural Strategy 2004 (RS04)2. This committed Defra to setting broad outcomes and targets and then holding delivery agencies to account (hence the Department’s approach became increasingly “hands off”). The Strategy also announced that the Countryside Agency should be “refocused”; and in 2006, the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) was set up with three statutory functions (rural advocate (acting as a voice for rural people, businesses and communities), rural watchdog (monitoring and reporting on the delivery of policies in rural areas) and expert adviser (giving evidence-based objective advice to government)).

6. Against this backdrop, the period 2000-2010 can, broadly, be divided into two “epochs” in terms of rural policy and evidence, separated by the publication of RS04. In terms of

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1 Our countryside, our future: A fair deal for rural England Defra, 2000 Cm 4909
2 Rural Strategy 2004 Defra, 2004
approaches to rural evidence – and as identified by our consultees – there were strengths and weaknesses associated with both.


7. During the early years, the links between evidence and policy were – in principle – reasonably straightforward. High level commitments from the Rural White Paper were translated into delivery programmes, many of which were implemented by the then-Countryside Agency. However there were, at the time, significant gaps in evidence relating even to basic social and economic facts as they applied to rural areas. One fundamental problem was the lack of any agreed “rural definition”. In the early part of the decade, Defra sought to address this shortcoming and the outcome was published as an Annex to Rural Strategy 2004. More generally, during the early part of the decade, Defra – through its Rural Policy Division – invested heavily in the development of a robust rural evidence base.

8. Stakeholders’ assessments of this period of intensive activity on the evidence-gathering front were quite mixed. Amongst those who were able to comment, it was recognised that the quality of evidence gathered over this period was impressive. However our consultees raised two fundamental concerns with regard to it. These related to its accessibility and to Defra’s use of the evidence. Overall, the conclusion was drawn that the investment made by the Department in generating high quality rural evidence may not always have been used to maximum effect.

**Review and assessment of the later years (c. 2005-2010)**

9. During the second half of the decade, three changes were fundamentally important. First, there was a transition to mainstreamed rural delivery (and in this context, Defra’s own targets were defined increasingly in terms of the outcomes from mainstreaming in rural areas). Second, the emphasis on devolved delivery grew significantly. Third, and at about the same time, the Commission for Rural Communities was formed.

10. Over this period, Defra’s own role and resources in relation to rural evidence declined significantly. Given this context, stakeholders’ observation that Defra was poor at communicating – both in defining evidence priorities and disseminating research findings – was, perhaps, unfair. Conversely stakeholders were positive in relation to the evidence-based work of the CRC over this period. CRC’s evidence was seen as influential and its relaxed operating style was welcomed. Stakeholders considered the independence of CRC from government to have been instrumental in this regard.

**Lessons from 2000-10**

11. Taken in the round – and despite major policy changes – a number of conclusions can be drawn regarding approaches to rural evidence over the period 2000-2010. These include: the importance of engaging stakeholders (especially policy-makers) in shaping the research agenda; the need for independent, “balanced” and “objective” evidence that can be used to influence – and, where necessary, challenge – policy; the imperative of “sweating” evidence to provide some interpretation of the implications for policy-makers; the great importance of dissemination (and planning for it from the outset); the value of a “personal approach” in
developing and disseminating evidence; and the growing imperative for evidence and insight at a fine-grained spatial scale.

**Perspectives on rural evidence from 2010**

**Changing the foundations**

12. Mid-way through the study – in May 2010 – the coalition government came into power. The change of administration signalled key shifts in the premises for rural evidence:

- it heralded *major changes in the institutional architecture* (particularly with the demise of Regional Development Agencies and the Commission for Rural Communities)
- it called into question the *underlying rationale for generating rural evidence* (as concepts linked to localism and devolved government become more important, and “top down” strategies and targets are revoked)
- it signalled the *introduction of very significant spending cuts*.

13. For all three reasons, Defra’s approach to rural evidence had to be re-considered. Hence at its mid-point, the focus of our study also had to be redefined.

**Rebuilding the foundations**

14. On the presumption that the coalition government’s agenda is taken forward, the relationship between evidence and policy is likely to look quite different over the next period. Its core is likely to be defined by a convergence between a *localism agenda* driven by rural communities and a growing commitment to *devolved and personalised service delivery*, while *cost cutting* will be implicit throughout. This will mean that there are likely to be four main imperatives in relation to rural evidence. Logically, there will be a need for:

- very fine-grained and accessible baseline evidence
- evidence that can inform community-based action at a local scale
- evidence linked to highly targeted “projects” which are linked into cost-effective but devolved and personalised service delivery
- more holistic evidence on structural rural issues, linking reflectively to wider considerations on (a) peripherality and (b) environmental assets.

15. In the future, evidence is likely to be produced by a wide range of different organisations. Given the commitment to both localism and devolved/personalised service delivery, *rural communities (and the partnerships/organisations within them)* must increasingly be seen as a core part of the wider rural evidence “community”. In this context, a second key role should exist for the various *networks of rural communities (and their partnerships/organisations)*. Third, the organisations involved in the *delivery of services in rural areas (including, where relevant, the sponsor government departments)* ought to have a critical role to play. Finally,
we would argue that there should be a role for the *professional research community* – whether charities/research foundations (like Joseph Rowntree Trust, Plunkett Foundation, Arthur Rank Centre, etc.), academics from universities, or commercial research companies.

16. Looking ahead, different parts of the emerging evidence community are likely to play different roles with regard to evidence needs. Figure 1 maps the likely key relationships.

![Figure 1: Mapping evidence needs onto the emerging evidence community](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evidence need</th>
<th>Emerging Evidence Community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local communities (organisations and partnerships)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locally-specific information on baseline conditions</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information/insight on “how to do things” within rural communities</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insights into complex service delivery challenges</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holistic evidence on structural rural issues</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: SQW*

**Specific suggestions and proposals linked to the evidence role of RCPU**

17. Based on the premises set out above, the final phase of this assignment concentrated on the evidence role(s) that Defra’s new Rural Communities Policy Unit (RCPU) might potentially play.

18. In this context, we consulted with external stakeholders. Two overarching roles were identified for the new Unit:

- stakeholders considered that RCPU is very well placed to provide some kind of **coordinating resource**, promoting its own evidence but also that generated by and through other stakeholders within the wider rural evidence community

- stakeholders considered that because it is within government and better equipped than its predecessor within the Department, RCPU is now well placed to **influence the rest of government** (including the rest of Defra) to take rural issues seriously.

19. Reflecting on stakeholder comments – but also taking to account the findings from earlier parts of the study – we concluded that in order to meet its own objectives, RCPU needs to **shape** an agenda for rural evidence; and then **produce** that evidence; and finally, **disseminate and “sweat”** that evidence, such that it reaches its intended audience (inside and outside of government) and exercises influence. In addition, RCPU must work closely with other...
organisations throughout: specifically, it must engage with rural communities; draw in and on other organisations and stakeholders; and influence government.

20. In practice, these two sets of process-based imperatives are thoroughly intertwined. Essentially this is because producers of evidence are very often also users; and/or the act of using evidence is very often also a mechanism for dissemination. Hence RCPU plus three (or four) sets of constituents essentially need to work across an integrated rural evidence “supply chain”.

21. Against this backdrop, RCPU’s modus operandi might be structured as follows:

• in shaping the agenda for rural evidence, RCPU needs both to steer and facilitate, and it ought to try and draw a wide range of partners and stakeholders into the process: there will need to be a clear and informed debate as to what the priorities are and why, and then RCPU will need to make decisions and communicate them clearly

• RCPU essentially has three routes to securing the information it considers to be important – producing it internally, commissioning it, or working collaboratively with stakeholders to shape their evidence-generating activities; in our view, all three have a role to play

• RCPU needs to be really quite creative in disseminating rural evidence, building on the good practice generated by CRC in particular. Hence it ought to be producing documents which are accessible. It ought also to be using its website effectively – not simply as a repository for lengthy reports but as an interactive tool with “snippets” of information and effective signposting. Throughout, it will need to acknowledge that users of rural evidence will increasingly be non-technical; fragmented; and generators, as well as users of it.

22. Cutting across the three distinct “stages” in the evidence supply chain, we would – finally – encourage RCPU to invest in two processes that are concerned fundamentally with the quality of the evidence it produces and its robustness/independence. These proposals are informed directly by the feedback we received from RCPU’s stakeholders. They include:

• forming some kind of peer review group with the specific purpose of ensuring the quality of the rural evidence that is produced.

• setting up a wider stakeholder challenge group that meets periodically. Its purpose would be both to inform the development of research agendas ex ante and to review and probe the findings ex post.
1: Introduction and overview

The purpose of this study

1.1 In December 2009, SQW was commissioned by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) to “review Defra’s role and function in the collection, dissemination and presentation of rural evidence and research”. The requirement was essentially for a “stock take”, focusing on the rural evidence that had been generated by Defra; assessing its “fitness for purpose”; and then developing recommendations for Defra’s future role in relation to it. From the outset, it was recognised that although Defra had responsibility for rural affairs in England, its role with regard to rural evidence could not be defined in isolation; instead, it needed to be considered in relation to the activities of a wide range of other partners and stakeholders drawn from the public sector, higher education, the voluntary and community sector, and so on. Originally, the intention had been that the study should be completed by summer 2010.

The study’s chronology – and how the study’s premises changed

1.2 Within this overall context, in early 2010, SQW completed a programme of consultations with stakeholders – from within government, partner organisations, the community sector and academia – to examine these issues. We then considered in some detail the “fitness for purpose” of rural evidence in relation to three key policy agendas, all of which appeared to be increasingly important in rural areas against a backdrop of recession: worklessness and employability; housing and affordable housing; and access to broadband. This process again relied on consultation (including with Other Government Departments), but also on a review of strategies and plans and an assessment of the use of evidence to effect better outcomes for communities in rural areas.

1.3 In May 2010, the coalition government came into power. The change of government was profoundly important with regard to the premises of rural evidence – and, by implication, for this study – for three inter-related reasons:

- First, it heralded major changes in the institutional architecture. For example, the emergency Budget of June 2010 announced that “Regional Development Agencies will be abolished”; Defra’s intention to axe the Commission for Rural Communities became clear in June 2010⁴; while the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) set out plans to revoke Regional Strategies in July 2010 (even though the legal basis for the change would have to wait until the Localism Bill received Royal Assent (which is likely to occur in autumn, 2011)). For much of the past decade, these institutions – and the processes linked to them (e.g. regional spatial strategies, regional economic strategies) – have played increasingly central roles in relation to the generation and dissemination of rural evidence; their abolition changed

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fundamentally the underlying assumptions around which future role(s) for Defra might have been defined

- **Second – and even more fundamentally – it called into question the underlying rationale for generating rural evidence.** Concepts of localism and “small government” were central to the coalition government’s policy agenda and in this context, the premises of “evidence” were challenged to the core. At root, if every place could choose to be different, why should resource be devoted by a central government department to generating evidence that might have very little traction or relevance locally? Further, whereas previously, evidence had often been generated in order to expedite the delivery of centrally defined targets – not least those relating to housing – the removal of the targets raised profound questions as to the residual value and purpose of evidence

- **Third, it signalled the introduction of very significant spending cuts.** Underpinning the emergency Budget of June 2010 and the Comprehensive Spending Review of autumn 2010 was the need to effect major reductions in public expenditure. In this context, there would be no safe harbour for the process of “evidence gathering” in general; for example, the proposal currently is that after 200 years, the 2011 Census should be the last\(^5\). In this overall context, it is clear that assumptions surrounding the resources available for gathering rural evidence in the round will be significantly smaller than those that have informed Defra’s previous plans.

1.4 At all three levels, then, the question of rural evidence – and Defra’s approach to it – was fundamentally challenged by the change of government. For this study, these changes also presented major quandaries. Much of our own work was conducted pre-election and by summer 2010, it was apparent that the parameters within which this had taken place were largely no longer relevant. However exactly what “the future” would look like was still very far from clear. Hence the concluding stages of the project were paused and – as a pragmatic step – a good proportion of the remaining resource was devoted to exploring and codifying RDAs’ plans for the transfer of their rural evidence bases.

1.5 In the latter part of spring 2011 – and with plans for the new Rural Communities Policy Unit (RCPU) within Defra shaping up – we revisited again the objectives on which the study had originally been founded: to “review Defra’s role and function in the collection, dissemination and presentation of rural evidence and research”. We conducted a further round of consultations with external stakeholders (although it is important to note that this did not, at this juncture, include either the various policy teams within Defra or Other Government Departments (OGDs)). This phase of consultation focused strongly on the sources of evidence that were being lost; the implications for the organisations concerned (and their stakeholders); and the role(s) that RCPU itself might play in the future. It concluded with a workshop held with officers from RCPU in early summer 2011.

1.6 This project has therefore been a “journey” – and quite a lengthy and fragmented one. It has spanned a change in government and – in the process – a fundamental reassessment of the purposes of the evidence generated (more or less directly) through Defra. What has not

\[^5\] See http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10584385
changed, however, has been the acknowledgement that rural communities face a distinctive set of socio-economic challenges and opportunities, and that these often vary according, *inter alia*, to levels and forms of peripherality and accessibility. Seeking to evidence rural circumstances – and develop appropriate policy responses – therefore remains important.

**Structure of this report**

**1.7** This report is structured to reflect the different phases of work that have been delivered through this assignment. Some of these are now, essentially, of historical interest only, but Defra’s contention has been that they ought to be captured and – where possible – the lessons ought to be learned (taking into account the specific scope of different phases of our work). Other elements inevitably represent early and initial thinking, and they may quickly be superseded as RCPU becomes more established and as new arrangements under the coalition government “settle down”.

**1.8** The report is structured into two main parts, each of which is sub-divided into a number of component chapters:

- **Part A** essentially looks backwards, focusing on the period from 2000-2010 and examining changing approaches to rural evidence over this time. It is divided into three chapters:
  
  ➢ Chapter 2 summarises the broad approaches taken to rural policy and evidence over the last decade
  
  ➢ reflecting on the views of stakeholders in May 2010, Chapter 3 assesses the extent to which the available evidence was judged to be “fit for purpose”
  
  ➢ Chapter 4 examines the contributions played by Defra and CRC over this period and it summarises stakeholder views on their strengths and weaknesses, and the lessons to be learned

- **Part B** is concerned with looking forwards and, based on the work we were able to complete, it outlines emerging priorities with regard to rural evidence:
  
  ➢ Chapter 5 examines key policy and institutional changes that have occurred since the change of government and which are likely to define the parameters for rural evidence over the medium term
  
  ➢ based on our final, admittedly partial, round of consultations, Chapter 6 reflects on future evidence needs and the organisations/actors which seem best placed to provide it
  
  ➢ finally, looking forward, Chapter 7 considers the potential role of Defra’s new Rural Communities Policy Unit with regard to rural evidence.

**1.9** There is one Annex which lists the stakeholders that have been consulted at various phases of the study.
Acknowledgements

1.10 We would like to acknowledge the inputs provided by all those stakeholders and partners who have been consulted at different points in this study (see Annex A): they were generous in devoting time to this project and thoughtful and challenging in terms of the inputs they provided.

1.11 In addition, we would like to thank our own immediate clients within Defra. The early part of the study was overseen by Ian Baker (Head of Rural Economy and Research from Defra’s Rural Policy Unit); the middle part was managed by Rosemary Sayer (Rural Economies Team, Rural Policy Unit); and the latter stages have been led by Justin Martin (Rural Evidence Team, Rural Communities Policy Unit).
PART A: Looking back – Perspectives on rural evidence, 2000-2010
2: Evolving approaches to rural policy, and its link to rural evidence, 2000-2010

2.1 Approaches to rural evidence changed substantially over the period 2000-2010, in part as a result of oscillations in the political prominence of the “rural agenda” more broadly. In this Chapter, we:

- chart the evolution of rural policy over the decade 2000-2010
- consider – in schematic terms – the relationship between policy and evidence, and we reflect on how this evolved over the decade.

The development of rural policy in England, 2000-2010

2.2 In 2000, then-MAFF published a Rural White Paper\(^6\). This set out a vision for a countryside that is living, working, protected, and vibrant. This vision was underpinned by an aim – to sustain and enhance the distinctive environment, economy and social fabric of the English countryside for the benefit of all – and ten priorities were identified in response; importantly, these included both thematic priorities (such as the provision of affordable homes and the delivery of local transport solutions) and spatial/place-based considerations (e.g. support vital village services and rejuvenate market towns). Although now over a decade old – and dated in many respects – the Rural White Paper arguably still provides the most unambiguous statement of priorities for rural areas, and as a White Paper, it certainly provides the most legitimate.

2.3 The foot and mouth disease (FMD) crisis of 2001 brought rural affairs to the top of the political agenda. In response, on 8\(^{th}\) November 2002, the then-Minister of State for Rural Affairs, Alun Michael, announced the appointment of Lord Haskins to review the way in which the government’s rural policies were delivered. Lord Haskins was invited to make recommendations on how to simplify responsibilities for rural delivery; maximise value for money; and provide better, more streamlined services and ways in which Defra could deliver its rural priorities and Public Service Agreement (PSA) target cost effectively. Lord Haskins’ report was published in November 2003. It advocated a separation of rural policy making and its delivery; a rationalisation of delivery bodies; and the devolution of delivery. It emphasised the importance of mainstreaming throughout\(^7\).

2.4 Defra accepted many of Lord Haskins’ recommendations. The department’s response formed the basis of Rural Strategy 2004 which was launched on 21\(^{st}\) July 2004\(^8\). This set out three

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\(^6\) Our countryside, our future: A fair deal for rural England  Defra, 2000 Cm 4909

\(^7\) Rural Delivery Review: A report on the delivery of rural policies in England  Christopher Haskins, October 2003

\(^8\) Rural Strategy 2004  Defra, 2004
key priorities. Substantively, it made provision for a number of delivery reforms which built upon the principles set out in Lord Haskins’ review. In relation to funding streams controlled by Defra, the Strategy committed to setting broad outcomes and targets and then holding delivery agencies to account (hence the Department’s approach was to become increasingly “hands off”).

2.5 The Strategy also announced that the Countryside Agency would be “refocused”. The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act which was passed in 2006 eventually provided the legal basis for the formation of the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) (thereby fulfilling the commitment set out in Rural Strategy, 2004 to form a “New Countryside Agency”). CRC was set up with three statutory functions: rural advocate (acting as a voice for rural people, businesses and communities), rural watchdog (monitoring and reporting on the delivery of policies in rural areas) and expert adviser (giving evidence-based objective advice to government).

2.6 In parallel with these shifting emphases, the targets towards which Defra was working also changed. Defra PSA4 was agreed as part of the 2002 Spending Review. The target was to “reduce the gap in productivity between the least well performing quartile of rural areas and the English median by 2008, demonstrating progress by 2006 and improve the accessibility of services for people in rural areas”. However PSA4 was scrapped as part of the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review. Defra was subsequently given lead responsibility for two of the new PSAs – one relating to the natural environment and a second focused on climate change. It also acquired a series of Departmental Strategic Objectives (DSOs). DSO8 was concerned with “Strong rural communities” and it included two intermediate outcomes: “economic growth is supported in rural areas with the lowest levels of performance”; and “the evidenced needs of rural people and communities are addressed through mainstream public policy and delivery”. However whereas PSAs applied across government, DSOs were contained within individual departments. On the face of it, the transition from direct delivery to mainstreaming as the primary delivery route sat oddly with a simultaneous move from a pan-government PSA target to a “within department” DSO.

Implications for the evolving relationship between policy and evidence

The nature and process of evidence from about 2000-2005

2.7 At the time of the Rural White Paper, the relationship between policy and evidence was broadly as depicted in Figure 2-1. The links between evidence and policy were – in principle – reasonably straightforward. High level commitments from the Rural White Paper were translated straightforwardly into delivery programmes, many of which were implemented by the then-Countryside Agency: Market Towns Initiative, Vital Villages, Rural Transport Partnerships, etc. These programmes were monitored and, periodically, evaluated. Baseline evidence was also gathered through the “State of the Countryside” which was first published...

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9 These are: social and economic regeneration—supporting enterprise across rural England, but targeting greater resources at areas of greatest need; social justice for all—tackling social exclusion wherever it occurs and providing fair access to services and opportunities for all rural people; and enhancing the value of the countryside—protecting the natural environment for this and future generations.
by the Countryside Agency in 1999 and it was updated annually throughout this period. However – as the Rural White paper itself observed – there were, at the time, significant gaps in evidence relating even to basic social and economic facts as they related to rural areas.

2.8 One fundamental problem was the lack of any agreed “rural definition”. In the early part of the decade, Defra sought to address this shortcoming and the outcome was published as an Annex to Rural Strategy 2004. The rural definition was developed by the Rural Evidence Research Centre (RERC) which was hosted by Birkbeck College. It was initially set up (and funded) by Defra with three main objectives:

- to develop and conduct, in conjunction with Defra, an innovative research agenda programme to support Defra’s objectives on English Rural Affairs
- to provide a networking and dissemination activity for research on Rural Affairs by, for example, running workshops and seminars
- to provide a “fast response” resource for conducting small and specific research projects specified by Defra.

2.9 In theory at least, as the evidence base was developed, its relationship to the policy cycle should have been strengthened and – principally through the Countryside Agency – a mechanism existed for formulating some kind of response. In many respects, this period of evidence gathering was a “high point” for rural affairs within Defra – certainly in terms of the level of resource devoted to it.
The nature and process of evidence from about 2005-2010

2.10 The progression from the Rural White Paper to Rural Strategy 2004 and its implementation provoked an initially subtle – but with hindsight important – shift in the relationship between rural policy and evidence. Three changes were fundamentally important.

Mainstreaming rural delivery

2.11 First, the delivery landscape was transformed and the relationship between evidence and policy became much more complicated. This transformation was formally codified through the specification of DSO8. Because of the reliance on rural proofing and mainstream delivery, DSO8 was concerned, fundamentally, with the outcomes from mainstreaming in rural areas. However, as set out in Figure 2-2, the relationship to rural conditions was – at best – partial. In making this observation, it is worth referring back to the provisions of the (still extant) Rural White Paper as summarised above. This identified a number of rural priorities – some thematic and some spatial/place-based. Whilst thematic priorities (e.g. affordable rural housing) were consistent with the specification of DSO8, the spatial/place-based ones (e.g. rejuvenate market towns) arguably were not.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OGDs’ visions and strategies</th>
<th>OGDs’ rationales and objectives</th>
<th>OGDs’ mainstream delivery channels</th>
<th>OGDs’ outcomes and impacts (including in rural areas)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rationale and objectives for intervention</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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Source: SQW, 2010

Devolving rural delivery

2.12 Second, over this period, the emphasis on devolved delivery grew significantly. The regional development agencies (RDAs) assumed a prominent role and – in relation to rural funding streams – gained responsibility both for the socio-economic elements of the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE – pillar two of the Common Agricultural Policy) and the functions exercised hitherto by the Countryside Agency.
2.13 The transition to devolved delivery proved really rather challenging in terms of a central government department’s approach to evidence. In parallel therefore, over this period, the regional development agencies and regional assemblies started to play a much more prominent role in the generation of rural evidence and – in part – this was funded by Defra. The role of RDAs in generating rural evidence is summarised in Figure 2-3 below.

Figure 2-3: The role of RDAs as generators of rural evidence, prior to their abolition (based on consultations with RDA staff in January/February, 2011)

The Regional Development Agencies Act 1998, set out five main purposes for Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and it also stated that these purposes should apply as much in rural parts of the region as non-rural ones:

- to further economic development and regeneration;
- to promote business efficiency, investment and competitiveness;
- to promote employment;
- to enhance development and application of skills relevant to employment;
- to contribute to sustainable development in the UK where it is relevant to its area to do so.

RDAs initially inherited the work of the Rural Development Commission and – in the early years and in the light of that legacy – many operated through spatially-defined rural development areas.

Following the 2001 Food and Mouth Disease crisis, many RDAs launched recovery programmes and these had a huge bearing on the character of rural interventions for the next 2-3 years.

The publication of the Haskins’ Report and Defra’s Rural Strategy 2004 provided a further key milestone and one that – in general – was synonymous with a transition away from rural targeting (and treating rural areas as “different”) to an approach that was characterised far more in terms of “mainstreaming”. A further fillip was provided by the transfer of socio-economic functions from the then-Countryside Agency in 2006.

Subsequently the rural agenda slipped down RDAs’ priority list. There were two main reasons: first, the rural economy performed strongly and second, “rural” concerns were overtaken by broader responses to issues of “environment and sustainability” and recovery from the recession.

RDAs’ approach to rural evidence was shaped by these developments. However, the evidence legacy is substantial, if varied. It includes:

- the production of evidence on a range of thematic areas, such as rural economies/productivity/economic potential/foresighting, sustainable rural communities, access to services, sustainable land management, renewable energy, recreation, sectors (such as horticulture, farming, tourism, food and drink), worklessness, poverty (e.g. in-work poverty), skills, migrant workers, and broadband
- monitoring data/analysis of baseline conditions
- exploratory research, for example to better understand how rural places function, and how the flows and interactions between rural and urban areas work in practice
- evaluation evidence of rural interventions and generic interventions that were delivered in rural areas.

Source: Summary of SQW consultation with RDA staff responsible for the collation and transfer of rural evidence and intelligence to BIS

Emergence of the Commission for Rural Communities

2.14 Third, and at about the same time, the Commission for Rural Communities was formed with the three roles described above: rural advocate, watchdog and expert adviser. From the outset, it clearly had a role with regard to rural evidence but, as compared to the Countryside Agency, there were some crucial differences: the CRC had a national remit with no regional structure; it had no programme delivery capacity at all; and the CRC was set up with a clear responsibility as “rural advocate”.

2.15 The implications of all three changes were important in terms of rural evidence and they were not lost on our consultees (when we first spoke to them in early 2010). We return to them later.
Progress and prospects

2.16 By 2010, the landscape of rural policy, delivery and evidence looked fundamentally different from a decade earlier. But so too – arguably – did rural England: for example, in part because of broadband availability, the links between rural and urban areas were far stronger (although variably so) and some of the associated pressures (linked for example to the affordability of housing) were more acute; and variations across rural areas in terms of access to services were more apparent. Whereas the Rural White Paper provided an holistic statement in response to rural imperatives in 2000, the nearest equivalent a decade later was a report drafted by the OECD. This reviewed rural policy in England and it set out a number of recommendations. Although these do not have the status of a White Paper, they are instructive. They are summarised in Figure 2-4 below.

Figure 2-4: Summary of key messages from the OECD Rural Policy Review for England, 2011

The OECD report found that whilst England’s rural areas performed well on average, pockets of poverty, access to public services, ageing populations and shortages of affordable housing were still major challenges for rural areas. The OECD rural policy review made the following headline observations in relation to policy:

- **Improving mainstreaming**: the review commented that mainstreaming is “an attractive policy approach” but has “proved challenging to implement”. The need for good rural evidence is considered critical in strengthening the mainstreaming process and to “better capture the rural story”. The review stated that “effective rural mainstreaming” requires (1) building sound rural evidence (2) making it available to all ministries, and (3) rural proofing during the policy design, development and implementation phases”.

- **Maximising urban-rural linkages**, given the high degree of integration between urban areas and the vast majority of rural England. The OECD argued that as a result, broad policy mechanisms can be introduced in many domains, rather than specific urban and rural approaches.

- **More affordable rural housing**: Greater rural housing market flexibility is key to this. The review noted that the focus has been to place limits on development, but the rise in older retirees and second home owners has caused housing prices in rural areas to increase. This prices many of those living and working in rural areas out of the housing market (especially because wages in rural areas are lower than in urban areas). Also, in some places there is a shortage of social housing.

- **Improving service delivery**: the review noted that whilst services are more expensive to deliver in rural areas, there is no recognition of this in mainstreaming, and this problem is only likely to worsen as demands for services increase due to an older rural population.

- **Strengthening the rural economy**: the role of small and medium size firms is highlighted as particularly important for rural economies. However, the review raised concerns around the prevalence of small firms in rural areas and the tendency for rural entrepreneurs to be less interested in business expansion – and the implications this has for the creation of much-needed private-sector jobs.

Key recommendations, as set out by the OECD, can be summarised as follows:

- The need for “market-based solutions to rural development problems” and the avoidance of regulations
- The need to include a “distinct rural component to the ‘city region’ strategy or incorporate policies for those rural areas that fall outside of the city region approach”
- The need to “reinforce mainstreaming with other measures in the short term, better integrate the mandates of mainstreaming and rural proofing, and clarify the responsibilities for each”
- **Remote rural areas** are likely to be missed out in mainstreaming, and therefore require specific policy approaches to ensure quality of life is equitable in these places
- Housing policy, planning policy and economic development strategies should be **better joined up at the local level**, and consider the role of rural areas in achieving overall economic competitiveness goals
- The need to improve the **diversity of employment choices** in rural areas (by increasing employment and attracting new enterprises), especially given that public services (health, education and public administration) account for the largest share of employment in rural areas
- Policy should look at “new ways to enhance the competitiveness of the rural economy and reduce the number of government-imposed restrictions on individual choice”.

3: Assessing the “fitness for purpose” of rural evidence by 2010

3.1 As demonstrated in Chapter 2, the first decade of the 21st Century saw at least two clear epochs in relation to rural policy, rural delivery and the evidence requirements related to both. At the end of it, the question we are left with is whether – and to what extent – rural evidence has been “fit for purpose”. This in turn must be premised on an assessment of “what we need evidence for”. Consistent with the findings of the OECD report, these questions appear to be especially important against a backdrop of mainstreaming and devolving delivery; in this context, ensuring that evidence informs and influences the work of others at various points in the policy process is paramount.

What is rural evidence needed for?

3.2 The question of “what rural evidence is needed for” can be considered from two perspectives:

- **substantively**, in terms of those characteristics of sustainable rural communities that need to be measured and researched e.g. housing, access to services, health, settlement vitality, etc.

- **functionally**, reflecting the uses to which rural evidence may subsequently be put, and recognising that this ranges from monitoring conditions in rural areas to precipitating and formulating a changed policy response.

3.3 Based on consultations completed (and literature reviewed) during the early part of this study, Figure 3-1 summarises key substantive and functional requirements of rural evidence. At the time – as the graphic demonstrates – policy-makers identified a need for three main types of rural evidence:

- **“Wide and shallow” evidence which is required for monitoring purposes.** Examples cited in this context include: evidence on levels and patterns of unemployment, housing, business starts, access to services, and education and skills; and also evidence on the processes of economic and social well-being (such as evidence relating to businesses in rural areas with growth potential)

- **“Narrow and deep” evidence which is required for policy development and involves in-depth evidence on specific topics.** Examples of this type of evidence that were identified by our consultees included the need to understand flows between places; the roles/functions of different places; the economic and environmental contribution of rural areas (now and in the future); and non-traditional rural concerns such as the nature and process of child poverty

- **“Intermediate” evidence which is required where there is a reasonable body of knowledge, but there is also anxiety that the performance of, and implications for,
rural areas could change very quickly. Examples cited in this context included digital inclusion, fuel poverty and sustainable transport.

3.4 Our consultees concluded that in some areas, the rural evidence base was relatively well-established: “wide and shallow” monitoring data linking, for example, to population migration was a case in point. However they also flagged some imperatives that seemed to be emerging at the time. They identified a need for “narrow and deep” evidence relating, *inter alia*, to the economic role and function of rural areas and interdependencies between urban and rural areas. Although our consultations were completed well before the OECD report was published, very similar themes were in fact identified.

3.5 What was also apparent from our review was that different types of evidence were needed at different points in the policy intervention cycle: “wide and shallow” data are essential in monitoring underlying conditions but “narrow and deep” evidence and analysis is important in understanding causal relationships to inform the development of effective policies; and a third category of “intermediate evidence” is required where a quick, decisive and informed response is needed to “known” issues where conditions can change rapidly.

3.6 By implication, then, the role of rural evidence varied at different points in the policy intervention cycle. Using the structure set out in Figure 2-2 – and based again on insights gleaned from consultations that were completed in early 2010 – Figure 3-2 summarises the main “purposes” of rural evidence. As the graphic shows, three “purposes” seemed to be particularly important:

- monitoring rural conditions
• investigating and understanding delivery processes
• influencing delivery priorities *ex ante*.

**Figure 3-2: The purposes of rural evidence and the relationships between evidence and policy**

Source: SQW, 2010

**An assessment of three key policy agendas**

3.7 Within the context of Figure 3-2, the obvious question that followed was the extent to which rural evidence was indeed “fit for purpose”. In order to explore this issue, we examined three policy agendas: the provision of broadband; the provision of housing and affordable housing; and tackling worklessness and employability. At the time – and indeed now – all three policy agendas were (and are) crucial to rural areas: broadband and housing were at the top of the rural agenda (and subsequently they have been identified as ministerial priorities by the coalition government) and tackling worklessness and employability has been important in the context of recession. However, none of these policy domains were (or are) “owned” formally by Defra.

3.8 Our research was conducted immediately before the change of government in May 2010 (and the timing is important). It relied on a desk-based review of policy documents and the evidence base to which they referred; and consultations with both stakeholders and Other Government Departments. Key findings from this phase of work are summarised in the pages that follow.
Figure 3-3: Stakeholder views, as of April/May 2010, on the provision of rural evidence to influence mainstream agendas linked to the provision of broadband

**Context**

The Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) is the lead department in terms of ICT infrastructure and its priorities are set out in the *Digital Britain Report (2008)* (which was published jointly with DCMS). This topic is not particularly new for rural areas, but is re-emerging as a key problem for rural areas in terms of Next Generation Broadband (and risks of a second digital divide).

Through consultation with relevant stakeholders, the requirements, availability and fitness-for-purpose of evidence was tested against each stage of the policy cycle in order to draw general lessons for Defra’s role in evidence and research.

**Findings**

- Key pieces of evidence have been CRC’s “Mind the Gap” report and Defra’s Next Generation Access (NGA) Guidance. Within this, evidence has been produced for rural areas, but not typically at a sub-national level.
- Overall, the available evidence has resulted in leverage and influence. Consultees suggested that:
  - appropriate evidence has been produced at appropriate times in the policy development process
  - using Other Government Departments’ (OGDs’) evidence to do rural cuts is the strongest way to influence
  - there has been consistency of message from Defra and this has influenced OGDs
  - there has been plenty of research on problems, which has been fit for policy-makers’ purposes, but there is demand now for greater work on solutions, building the economic case for investment & clarify on recommendations
- Organisationally, consultees commented on
  - the lack of clear delineation of responsibility for broadband evidence between Defra and CRC
  - the lack of formal mechanisms to influence other research or disseminate evidence
  - the need to improve inter-departmental co-ordination in research commissioning to improve leverage in future

Source: Summary of SQW consultation with stakeholders, April/May 2010

Figure 3-4: Stakeholder views, as of April/May 2010, on the provision of rural evidence to influence mainstream agendas linked to the provision of housing and affordable housing

**Context**

The Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) is the lead department and there is a raft of different policy statements. However the CLG-sponsored *Matthew Taylor Review on Rural Economy and Affordable Housing (2008)* provides a clear summary of the key issues as they relate to rural areas.

Through consultation with relevant stakeholders, the requirements, availability and fitness-for-purpose of evidence was tested against each stage of the policy cycle in order to draw general lessons for Defra’s role in evidence and research.

**Findings**

- There is a significant evidence base linked to this agenda, the main components of which include:
  - submissions associated with the Taylor Review’s Call for Evidence
  - key studies such as: the provision of new affordable housing in larger rural settlements – Ecotec (for the Housing Corporation); the on-going Rural Affordable Housing Project (funded by Defra, being completed by Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), and focusing on the delivery of affordable housing in smaller rural settlements); Buchanan’s study on rural community sustainability
  - evidence linked to the work of the Affordable Rural Housing Commission
  - regional data, notably Strategic Housing Market Assessments (SHMAs – although major consistency issues despite CLG intervention); and data gathered through Annual Monitoring Reports
  - a wide range of local data – although these are variable in quality and coverage
  - monitoring data including: data gathered by HCA linked to their spending programme (although available at a fine-grained spatial scale) and information collected from local authorities by CLG – especially Housing Strategy Statistical Appendix (HSSA) data
- In terms of the use of the available evidence, consultees commented that
  - there are different layers of communities of interest
  - the link between evidence generation and policy delivery tends to be: *either* internalised (generators are users) or highly mediated and indirect (reports on reports on data…)
  - the available monitoring data are not flawless – but they are useful
the "big picture" themes are being addressed and the mechanism provided by the Regional Housing Advisory Group (RHAG) appears to be helping
overall, the alignment of targets helps significantly – e.g. HCA and affordable rural housing
any threat to the future of the regional tier will create a huge gulf between national and local
at a local level, there is a need for more impartial evidence that can really influence both the politics and the mechanics of delivery

Source: Summary of SQW consultation with stakeholders, April/May 2010

Figure 3-5: Stakeholder views, as of April/May 2010, on the provision of rural evidence to influence mainstream agendas linked to tackling worklessness and improving employability

Context
With regard to worklessness and employability, the key government department is the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and its priorities have been recently summarised within two publications: Britain’s Recovery: Achieving Full Employment (December 2009) and Building bridges to work: new approaches to tackling long-term worklessness (March 2010).

Through consultation with relevant stakeholders, the requirements, availability and fitness-for-purpose of evidence was tested against each stage of the policy cycle in order to draw general lessons for Defra’s role in evidence and research.

Findings
• With regard to the current situation, consultees commented that
  a range of evidence is available – both "wide/shallow" (e.g. DSO8 indicators, State of the Countryside Reports) and "deep/narrow" (e.g. research into the economic potential of rural areas; working in 21st Century England; Defra’s research on the impact of recession on rural economies)
  within the available evidence, some “interpretation” is provided and the evidence base does present emerging solutions
  however there is limited future facing work, or sub-national evidence
• The evidence has had a limited impact/influence on national policy to date, for three main reasons:
  there is limited recognition of Defra’s interest in this policy area within mainstream worklessness agenda
    increasingly, interventions linked to worklessness are delivered at a sub-regional level, and therefore Defra needs to influence policy-makers at this spatial level
    it is increasingly hard to justify bespoke rural activity (because of high delivery costs and poor rates of return) – Defra needs to make the economic/business case for investment in rural areas
    worklessness is of increasing importance on national agendas – important for Defra/CRC to get a handle on the issues and opportunities quickly, and to be on the front-foot with evidence
  there is a lack of shared understanding of evidence agendas with relevant ODGs, and a lack of systematic dialogue
  there is a lack of clarity on the respective evidence roles of Defra & CRC – implications for how evidence is perceived/understood externally
• Looking ahead, there is a need for a clear, consistent and customer-focused message on issues/opportunities and policy implications from Defra/CRC. Overall, policy-makers’ need for in-depth research is greater than their need for monitoring data
• Overall, whilst worklessness is not a new issue per se, there remains very limited evidence and understanding of the issues faced in rural areas, particularly by other government departments (OGDs).

Source: Summary of SQW consultation with stakeholders

3.10 From these three short summaries, two conclusions are important. First, the three mainstream policy agendas differed substantially from each other: housing and affordable housing had probably the best developed evidence base while – insofar as it related specifically to rural communities – the agenda relating to employability and worklessness arguably had the worst. Writ large, the implication at the end of the decade was that the rural evidence base was variable in terms of its robustness and appropriateness. Second, whilst it was apparent that Defra and CRC had clearly been active in generating evidence and insight across all three domains, it was also clear that so too had a huge number of other agencies and organisations.
The development of the rural evidence base – and the strengths and weaknesses of it – relied therefore on an array of different sources.

**Implications**

3.11 Looking across the three policy areas – and reflecting on the different purposes of rural evidence which had previously been identified – our analysis suggested that as of May 2010, arrangements for the production and dissemination of rural evidence broadly seemed to “work” where:

- clear structures existed for information sharing and dissemination: in this context, the work of the Rural Housing Advisory Group was, for example, considered to be valuable
- there were consistent and well-established relationships between key policy officers
- there was a clear, consistent and evidentially compelling “rural message” which was communicated consistently to OGDs
- there was some alignment of targets (e.g. HCA have targets relating to the delivery of affordable housing in small rural settlements).

3.12 Conversely, influencing mainstream delivery agendas appeared far more difficult where:

- there was a lack of awareness of the evidence amongst external users – i.e. the problem was less the evidence than the use of it
- there was a limited understanding of how OGDs operate and undertake research, and therefore how to influence mainstream research activities/policy
- there was constant staff/institutional “churn”
- there was little or no alignment of targets, or even misalignment

3.13 Hence at the end of this period, the situation was actually really quite mixed. Rural evidence – whatever its source – appeared to be shaping some mainstream agendas far more effectively than others.
4: Stakeholders’ reflections on the evidence roles played by Defra and (latterly) CRC, 2000-2010

4.1 The decision to axe the Commission for Rural Communities and to create a strengthened Rural Communities Policy Unit within Defra was taken very shortly after the coalition government came into power – and just as our analysis (which informed Chapter 3) was being completed. In this context – and as a basis for starting to look forward – it is important to distil some of the insights we gleaned about the effectiveness of approaches to rural evidence adopted by both Defra and CRC (although recognising that this study was never intended as a formal evaluation of either).

Defra’s approach to rural evidence

4.2 As Chapter 2 made clear, the last decade really needs to be considered in terms of two epochs of rural policy, delivery and evidence which were separated by the publication and implementation of Defra’s Rural Strategy 2004 (RS04).

Stakeholders’ views on Defra’s approach in the early years: 2000-2005

4.3 During the early part of the decade, Defra – through its Rural Policy Division – invested heavily in the development of a robust rural evidence base. Drawing on consultations conducted by SQW in early 2010, stakeholders’ assessments of this period of intensive activity on the evidence-gathering front were really quite mixed.

4.4 Amongst those who were able to comment, it was recognised that the quality of evidence gathered over this period was impressive. For example, the new “rural definition” developed by RERC was a major step forward. It was widely adopted at local and regional levels (although it was less widely used within central government) and therefore it allowed for comparative analyses. Moreover, defined around settlement morphology and population sparsity, it was capable of being used to analyse uncorrelated data and provide some level of insight in relation to key service delivery issues. Subsequently RERC examined issues relating to rural networks and rural-urban interdependencies, and it therefore provided robust insights into “how rural places work” and how this was changing. Separately, Defra established a Rural Evidence Hub and this provided structured web-based access to a wealth of relevant secondary data.

4.5 Over this period, then, the evidence base did develop significantly. However our consultees raised two fundamental concerns with regard to it.

4.6 First, while the quality of the evidence was not questioned, there were major concerns about its accessibility – both literally and in application. Few of our consultees had any real knowledge of RERC. Those that knew of it generally considered it to be academic and remote. It was seen as detached from the immediate concerns of users – particularly those...
operating at regional and local scales, and seeking information and evidence to help them. The Rural Evidence Hub was also unknown to many. Those that had come across it were concerned that it was not “user friendly”: it required passwords and userID even to access the site, and this was considered to be a real deterrent.

4.7 The second major concern related to Defra itself. The view expressed consistently was that during this period, Defra had not been a good “user” of evidence. Specifically, with regard to RERC, some of our consultees considered Defra to have been a poor client: it had commissioned a significant research programme without any real sense of how the findings might be used and it had lacked the capacity to absorb the evidence generated. Hence whilst it had commissioned research, it had not “sweated” many of the findings in a way that had seriously influenced policy; in fact, its “corporate memory” of its own evidence base appeared to be quite limited. The conclusion was drawn that the investment made by the Department in generating evidence may not always have been used to maximum effect.

**Stakeholders’ views on Defra’s approach from about 2005-2010**

4.8 With the implementation of RS04, Defra’s own direct role in relation to rural evidence was significantly scaled back and funding for RERC came to an end. The work of the Rural Evidence Hub continued, although this was aligned increasingly with the monitoring requirements of DS08. Defra also commissioned occasional studies – but far fewer than previously. Defra’s Rural Policy Division was thinned down and increasingly, the Department relied far more strongly on the devolved delivery of policy and generation of evidence. RDAs, in particular, played an increasingly prominent role at a sub-national scale: over this period, Defra was a significant financial contributor to the RDAs’ Single Programme.

4.9 Hence over the second part of the decade, Defra’s own role and resources in relation to rural evidence declined significantly. Stakeholders’ comments largely reflected this changing context (and often appeared to be made without understanding it fully). Our consultations suggested that:

- there was some concern about a lack of communication with stakeholders in developing research agendas, and therefore Defra may not have been wholly successful in “filling gaps” in the evidence base
- in general, stakeholders had limited awareness of Defra’s recent research outputs: they simply did not know what the Department had been doing; this was explained largely in terms of ineffective dissemination, communication and publication of evidence
- Defra’s tendency to focus on data that are readily available, rather than evidence that stakeholders, policy-makers and communities need, was a further observation made by stakeholders; as a result, some of the evidence produced had not been wholly relevant
• many stakeholders appeared to have been frustrated by Defra’s website which they considered to be difficult to navigate, and with some concern that evidence could be “out of date”.

4.10 Given the scale of resources available to RPD over the second half of the decade, these comments are not wholly fair. However they were the concerns raised by stakeholders.

Commission for Rural Communities’ approach to rural evidence

4.11 CRC was formed in 2006 and its functions were as described in Chapter 2: rural advocate (acting as a voice for rural people, businesses and communities), watchdog (monitoring and reporting on the delivery of policies in rural areas) and expert adviser (giving evidence-based objective advice to government). From the outset, it clearly had a key role in relation to “evidence”.

4.12 Its main outputs have included, *inter alia*:

• **State of the Countryside:** This is – in essence – a statistical analysis of conditions in rural England. It is a “high level” and very accessible document and it provides some level of insight into rural circumstances. CRC inherited State of the Countryside (from the Countryside Agency). Annual updates were produced until 2008. Subsequently, it was decided to publish full updates every 2-3 years with partial updates drafted more regularly as new data became available. In 2010, a new edition was released which contained rather more analysis and narrative than previously. Hence State of the Countryside has evolved as demands and resources have changed.

• **Publications linked to a series of “inquiries”**: These have provided a focus for the Commission’s in-depth work and the Rural Advocate has had a key role in relation to them. Particularly influential investigations have included the early Rural Housing Inquiry (which was submitted as evidence to the Affordable Rural Housing Commission (which reported in 2006)) and the Inquiry into the Future for England’s Upland Communities (which reported in June 2010).

4.13 From our consultees – particularly those to whom we spoke in spring 2011 – feedback in response to the evidence-based work of the CRC was generally quite positive. It was seen as very influential, particularly in terms of raising general awareness of rural issues. In part this was explained by the persistence and consistency of the messaging, and by the good and highly effective use of key media (and the contrast here with perceptions of Defra is noteworthy). In addition, CRC’s operating style was seen as relaxed, friendly and approachable which meant that stakeholders could influence the CRC’s emerging thinking. However probably the key factor – identified by most of our consultees – was the independence of CRC from government: specifically, the comment was made that CRC was able to use evidence to challenge policy and, ultimately, to improve outcomes in rural areas.

4.14 However there were also some concerns and in large part, these were the corollary:

• **first, there was a worry that much of the evidence generated by CRC was available only at a national scale:** Increasingly stakeholders were seeking data and intelligence
that might be capable of sub-national disaggregation and yet much of the information was only available England-wide. In this context, the comment was made that State of the Countryside was really not very helpful at a local scale

- second, there was a concern that the distinction between “lobbying” and “evidence” was a fine one and that sometimes there was line that had been crossed: At root there was a potential tension in the CRC’s terms of reference given its need to be both independent expert and rural advocate. Although, for the most part, this tension was managed, it did raise questions and there was a suggestion that on occasions, the suspicion of lobbying could undermine the credibility of impartial and robust evidence.

Implications

4.15 In many respects, the roles of Defra and CRC with regard to rural evidence were fundamentally different from each other and comments from Stakeholders were wholly consistent with this. Whereas Defra RPD was seen as remote, CRC was perceived to be accessible and friendly. Whereas the evidence generated directly by Defra was always robust, it could – sometimes – be perceived as inaccessible. Conversely, there was a danger that CRC’s outputs were – fundamentally – aimed at lobbying and while their dissemination was impeccable, there was – in the minds of some – a nagging question with regard to impartiality. In sum, over the decade to 2010 (and particularly the second half of it), there was a mix of strengths and weaknesses, many of which were the inevitable consequence of the Terms of Reference of the organisations from which they derived.

4.16 However there are, we think, a number of important lessons that can be gleaned from this period. These should not be lost in looking forward. It will be apparent that some of these are derived from Defra RPD and some from CRC:

- first, our investigation highlighted the importance of engaging stakeholders (especially policy-makers) in shaping the research agenda, not only to ensure research does not duplicate existing work, but also to ensure that Defra fully understands its audience and their evidence needs

- second, there appeared to be a need for independent, “balanced” and “objective” evidence that could be used to influence – and, where necessary, challenge – policy

- third, we found that rural evidence that is “sweated” to provide some interpretation of the implications for policy-makers and potential solutions (not simply critiques) tends to be regarded as the most useful – but this “sweating” process itself needs to be resourced

- fourth, our consultations suggested that evidence needs to be disseminated effectively in order to influence the target audience, and this means that it should make use of interesting, innovative, accessible and “consumable” mechanisms and media
• fifth, we observed that stakeholders generally value a “personal approach”, combined with a culture of openness and approachability, but again this has cost implications, for it needs to be properly resourced

• sixth, we found that clarity and persistence in communicating key messages are both important

• finally, we observed that increasingly, there is a need for evidence and insight at a fine-grained spatial scale as stakeholders are interested less in rural conditions across England than in their own particular locality; however, the need for local insight presents a major challenge to those generating evidence, particularly against a backdrop of financial restraint.
PART B: Looking forward – Priorities for rural evidence from 2011
5: The coalition government’s emerging agenda

5.1 Shortly after the coalition government came into power, its Programme for Government was published. The document was over 30 pages long but within it, there was only one overtly rural commitment, to “investigate measures to help with fuel costs in rural areas, starting with pilot schemes”. Subsequently, Defra ministers identified a number of other rural priorities – including broadband, housing and transport\(^\text{10}\). Two of these priorities – linked to fuel costs in remote rural areas and the provision of a community broadband programme – found their way into Defra’s recently published Business Plan, 2011-2015\(^\text{11}\).

5.2 However implicitly, the Programme for Government signalled some far more profound policy changes of relevance to rural communities. Reference has already been made to the most immediate of these – the abolition of the Commission for Rural Communities and the regional development agencies, and the plan to revoke regional strategies. But as a basis for looking ahead, these institutional changes – and the rural policy priorities identified by Defra ministers – need to be understood within their broader context. This is described in general terms in the paragraphs that follow. At various points, we consider and illustrate its application in the context of health policy, recognising that this is an important policy domain for rural communities and one in which the challenges and dilemmas are writ large.

Key themes

**Localism and the “big society”**

5.3 For rural communities, one key theme emerging from the new government has been that of localism linked to notions of the “big society” (and the small state). In some respects at least, the commitment to localism actually signalled broad continuity with the direction of travel established towards the end of the last administration. For example, the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act received Royal Assent in autumn 2009 and its provisions included, inter alia:

- a new duty on councils to promote local democracy and ensure all sections of their community understand how the council and other public bodies work, who makes the decisions and how they can get involved

- a requirement for councils to respond to local petitions on the issues that are of most importance to their local communities.

5.4 However the new Localism Bill – which is currently working through parliament – revokes some elements of the 2009 Act (notably the commitment to single regional strategies). It takes others a good deal further. It is structured around new freedoms and flexibilities for local government; new rights and powers for communities and individuals; reform to make the planning system more democratic and more effective; and reform to ensure that decisions

\(^{10}\) See Rural Communities Evidence Plan, 2011/12, Defra, 2011

about housing are taken locally. Its detailed provisions are numerous. They include the introduction of neighbourhood planning and both a community “right to build” (which will mean that following a local referendum, communities literally have the “right to build” without first having to apply for planning permission) and reforms to the Community Infrastructure Levy (such that local neighbourhoods/communities should gain more directly from development processes). More broadly, communities will have the right to buy assets of community value (e.g. pubs and meeting halls).

5.5 For rural communities, the Localism Bill is potentially very important. Fundamentally, it paves the way for a radical localisation of decision-making and delivery. Rural communities are often well defined, coherent and articulate and hence in general, they ought to be well placed to drive this agenda forward. Moreover, in many areas, there is already a strong foundation on which to build: both parish plans and market town healthchecks should, in principle, provide a basis from which the different provisions might be put to work, once the Bill receives Royal Assent (which is likely to be autumn, 2011).

Service delivery reforms

5.6 In parallel, the coalition government is intending to instigate major service delivery reforms. The *leitmotif* is again one of radical devolution.

5.7 For example, shortly after the general election, the coalition government’s health white paper, “Equity and Excellence: Liberating the NHS” was published. Later in 2010, the government published its *Health and Social Care Bill*. However, the Bill’s progress through parliament was difficult and the process was eventually “paused” in spring 2011 in order to allow a “listening” exercise to take place. This resulted in some major changes to the Bill’s provisions\(^\text{12}\). Nevertheless the intention is to introduce Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG, broadened from GP Consortia); this means that once Primary Care Trusts are abolished in 2013, groups of local GPs, healthcare professionals and other stakeholders will procure healthcare services appropriate to the needs of their local area.

5.8 It is worth reflecting – briefly – on the implications for rural communities. In principle at least, the transition to CCGs should mean that there is scope to procure a different range of healthcare services and one that is more attuned to the particular character of rural communities. This could mean, for example, that rather than assuming patients are able to travel some distance to an acute hospital, provision is instead made for community-based solutions. This might effectively improve access to services, particularly for those without private transport. For many elderly people living in rural areas this could be very beneficial.

Reduced public sector spend

5.9 In the preface to the *Programme for Government*, the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister stated that “the most urgent task facing this coalition is to tackle our record debts”. A third key theme permeating the agenda of the coalition government has therefore been one of public sector spending restraint and – in many respects – this theme has been overarching. The emergency Budget of June 2010 identified £6bn of in-year spending cuts while the

\(^{12}\) *Government changes in response to the NHS Future Forum*, Department of Health, CM8113, June 2011
Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR), published in autumn 2010, was concerned fundamentally with longer term spending restraint.

5.10 The provisions of CSR2010 are proving extremely demanding across all parts of government. To return to health as an example, within CSR2010, the Department of Health was one of the few departments to see a rise in real terms over the Review period. However the increment was small – less than 1% over four years – and given the cost of drugs, population ageing and inflation, it is challenging. More generally, the funding issue needs to be understood in the historical context of UK state spending on health which has increased steadily – in cash, real terms and as a share of GDP – since the 1960s. According to OECD data, in 1960, UK state health spending accounted for just over 3% of GDP; by 2008, the figure was in excess of 7% (and the GDP “cake” was considerably larger). Hence the CSR announcement heralded a departure from the experience of steadily rising budgets – under all governments – over the preceding 50 years. In this context, rather than providing more cash, Andrew Lansley, Secretary of State for Health, told the NHS to save £20bn from existing budgets in lieu of the full increment that might have been expected.13

Implications for rural areas – and rural evidence

5.11 This cocktail of localism, service delivery reform and spending cuts potentially has major implications for rural communities. At one level there are huge opportunities. Increasingly, rural communities will have the tools and powers to determine their own future – to build houses if that is the priority locally, to take key local assets and amenities into community ownership, and so on. In addition, there will be far more scope than previously to influence mainstream service delivery and to ensure that the specific character of rural communities is taken on board fully. And it is not difficult to see how both strands might be brought together: in principle at least, community-based healthcare could, for example, be delivered in settings which are owned by the local community.

5.12 However there are also some threats. At root, these reflect the challenges of radical localism in the context of severe budgetary restraint. There is a huge body of evidence which suggests that service delivery in rural areas is expensive on a per capita basis. It is expensive because – by definition – delivery-related economies of scale are difficult to effect and travel costs (in time and fuel) are high. In the current climate, all organisations delivering publicly-funded services are being required to find cost savings.

5.13 In this context, it is insightful to return again to the healthcare reforms. Recently, the Department of Health published a consultation document, Developing Clinical Commissioning Groups: Towards Authorisation. This set out the process through which CCGs are to be authorised and the key criteria against which they will be assessed. The criteria include clinical and governance-related issues, but there is also a need for “clear and credible plans which continue to deliver the QIPP (quality, innovation, productivity and prevention) challenge within financial resources”. The implication is that devolved delivery will also have to be cost effective delivery.

13 See http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-11686396
5.14 The new political agenda therefore brings with it both opportunities and threats for rural communities. In sum, rural communities ought to have the scope for far more self-determination than hitherto – avoiding “being done unto” as Greg Clarke put it in a preface to one of the documents linked to the Localism Bill. At the same time, the imperative for cost cutting and efficiency savings will be overwhelming. In combination, localism and devolved delivery and substantial spending cuts presents some substantial risks for rural communities. In this context, the importance of good rural evidence is, in principle, obvious.
6: Future rural evidence needs

Are the premises of rural evidence changing?

6.1 Against the backdrop provided by Chapter 5, it is important to consider the premises of future rural evidence needs.

6.2 In Figure 2-2 (page 9), we sought to distil the relationship between policy and evidence that emerged through RS04 and arguably defined priorities for, and approaches to, rural evidence from about 2005. The core of this graphic – and indeed of RS04 – was the commitment to mainstreaming. As explained in paragraph 2.3, this was espoused by Lord Haskins in the wake of the foot and mouth disease crisis and against a backdrop of a profusion of delivery bodies and funding streams; progress in relation to it was measured ultimately through DS08.

6.3 In terms of the relationship between policy and evidence, the question that follows is whether – under the coalition government – we are literally seeing a continuation of the last five years; or whether we are moving “back to the future” to something pre-Haskins in ethos; or whether the transition is towards something that is different again.

6.4 On the presumption that the coalition government’s agenda is taken forward, our view is that the relationship between evidence and policy will look quite different over the next period. Its core is likely to be defined by a convergence between a localism agenda driven by rural communities and a growing commitment to devolved and personalised service delivery (see Figure 6-1), while cost cutting will be absolutely implicit throughout.

Figure 6-1: The relationship between rural policy and evidence, from 2011?

Source: SQW, 2011
What this might ultimately achieve for rural communities in general is currently quite unclear. Defra remains the department with responsibility for rural affairs; RCPU has been established to advise ministers; and a Ministerial Statement on rural affairs has been promised. However within its recently published *Business Plan, 2011-2015*, Defra appears to be working to six input indicators and eight impact indicators, none of which has any immediate or specific relationship to rural communities (see Table 6-1). Hence there is no obvious successor in the high level targetry to either DSO8, or before that, to PSA4. In the past, these targets were very influential in shaping the evidence agenda.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Input indicators</th>
<th>Impact indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Cost per Single Payment Scheme (SPS) claim</td>
<td>• Agricultural soils nitrogen balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Unit cost of delivery of higher level stewardship</td>
<td>• Farmland birds index</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>schemes</td>
<td>• Productivity of the UK agricultural industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Total government funding to the Environment</td>
<td>• Uptake of higher level stewardship schemes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency for management of environmental quality of</td>
<td>• Net improvement in surface water bodies in England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>surface water bodies</td>
<td>• Household recycling rates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cost of local authority waste management per</td>
<td>• Cattle herds that are Officially TB Free (OTF)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>household</td>
<td>• Number of households where the risk of damage from flooding and coastal erosion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cost to government of bovine TB control in animals</td>
<td>has been markedly reduced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Total Government capital investment in flood and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coastal erosion risk management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The loss of a set of high level targets of direct relevance to the rural communities agenda is double-edged. Previously, the indicators (and targets) effectively framed elements of the evidence agenda and ensured that associated rural issues were afforded some level of prominence and visibility. However for Defra, there were clearly challenges in being held responsible for a set of targets against which it had very limited delivery powers. These challenges reflected the intrinsic difficulties of measuring cross-cutting outcomes and effecting clear accountabilities in relation to them. On the positive side, the new regime is more flexible and it could provide the basis for a more nuanced and policy-led response, with a stronger focus on the activities of Other Government Departments (which are delivering services in rural areas). The downside risk, however, is that the rural agenda simply becomes much less visible within Defra and across government.

We suggest that emerging parameters for rural evidence will need to be seen in this context; our attempt to distil them is provided in Figure 6-1 above.

What is the nature of future rural evidence needs?

From Figure 6-1, it is possible to distil four main propositions in relation to the nature and form of future evidence needs. These propositions do not reflect the thematic content of the evidence (i.e. whether the issue is fuel prices or broadband access or whatever); within each proposition, it is likely that a wide (and evolving) range of themes will, in practice, need to be considered and addressed.
Proposition 1: There will be a need for very fine-grained and accessible baseline evidence

6.9 Particularly given the provisions of the Localism Bill, there will need to be an evidence base that is available at a fine-grained spatial scale. This will need to be accessible and robust. It will need to equip local communities in seeking to understand “their place” in a manner that is evidentially sound and informative, but also in a way that helps to inform and shape action.

6.10 From our consultations, we know that State of the Countryside has been valued by many stakeholders. However a limitation that has been expressed consistently concerns the level of insight it provides into local conditions. In evidence terms, this critique is very challenging and it is one that is likely to be aired equally in relation to the new Statistical Digest of Rural England which has been published recently by Defra. One national assessment (perhaps with regional analyses) is quite a different proposition from (literally) thousands of local-scale analyses.

6.11 For local communities, there is a wide range of evidence sources on which to draw, although all of these have their drawbacks and very few are explicitly “rural”. For example:

- One of the most wide ranging sources is the Office for National Statistics’ Neighbourhood Statistics (NeSS) facility which provides access to a very wide range of data for wards and lower layer super output areas (although these are very imperfect “spatial vessels” in relation to rural communities). In the main, these data derive either from the Census (and hence are currently very out of date) or from administrative datasets (e.g. benefits claimants, which are not always wholly useful in a rural setting (as rates of take-up can be low)), and are sometimes presented in a composite form (e.g. Indices of Deprivation). Although NeSS includes the rural and urban classifications, these are not very prominent: some work is required in building up the basis for any kind of comparative rural assessment.

- A huge amount of information is available in relation to particular policy areas. For example, the Department of Health has been prolific in generating information, much of which is now freely available. Many of these data are socio-economic in focus and rural communities might find them informative. For example, the Association of Public Health Observatories provides a wide range of data which can be downloaded from its website. The finest level of spatial granularity is that of the middle layer super output area: this is bigger than an individual rural community, but it may be more insightful than local authority district-level information. In addition, some data are available in relation to General Practice areas; this evidence base appears to have been assembled to inform the formation of Clinical Commissioning Groups but it may be of more general value. Again though, there is no explicit comment on rurality.

- Finally, we are aware that individual local authorities have developed bespoke information sources of relevance to “their places”. In Devon, for example, 29 town

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14 Defra’s Rural Evidence Hub is still also available although it has not been updated since 2005
15 See http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/
17 See http://www.apho.org.uk/pracprof/
profiles have been drafted\(^\text{18}\). Rural communities located close to the towns may find this resource helpful.

6.12 For individual rural communities, there are therefore resources on which to draw. However all of these require some knowledge of statistical data and aside from Defra’s own sources, few of these have been really tailored to rural communities. There is therefore a job to be done in helping communities to navigate these (and other) sources and to “make sense” of them. Some resources are available in this context. One example is ACRE’s website, *Evidencing Rural Need*\(^\text{19}\). In the future, resources of this nature will need to evolve and awareness of them will need to be increased; there could be a specific role for Defra RCPU in this context.

*Proposition 2: There will be a need for evidence that can inform community-based action at a local scale*

6.13 Based on changing government policy, there will – we think – be a need for evidence that might inform community-based action at a local scale. The evidence requirement here is action-focused and the concern is “how to make things happen”. Hence the requirement is for practical insights and in all probability, the principal source of evidence ought to be networks of practitioners.

*Proposition 3: There will be a need for evidence linked to highly targeted “projects” which are linked into cost-effective but devolved and personalised service delivery*

6.14 A third area in which evidence will be needed will relate to changing approaches to service delivery. Across government, the emphasis is on devolving delivery, choice and “personalisation” across most public services, particularly health, social care and education. With a simultaneous commitment to cost cutting, this agenda is challenging; add to it the delivery challenges of sparsity and/or remoteness and the issues are compounded. Looking ahead, there needs to be some kind of evidence base in this context, otherwise people accessing services in rural areas are in danger of receiving much poorer quality solutions as the cost pressures bite.

*Proposition 4: There will be a need for more holistic evidence on structural rural issues, linking reflectively to wider considerations on (a) peripherality and (b) environmental assets*

6.15 Finally, we would argue that there is a requirement for an evidence base that captures “the rural condition” in an holistic, dynamic and spatial sense. In our view, this cannot simply be an amalgamation of thematic indicators: resources like *State of the Countryside* and *Defra’s Statistical Digest of Rural England* have a necessary and important role to play in this context, but they are not sufficient. There is a need, in addition, for something that provides insights into how rural England is operating functionally and relatively. Although much maligned by the coalition government, regional (spatial and economic) strategies – and the evidence gathering processes that sat behind them – did arguably play an important role in

\(^{18}\) See http://www.devon.gov.uk/index/councildemocracy/neighbourhoods-villages/devontownprofiles.htm

\(^{19}\) See http://www.rural-evidence.org.uk/home/
this regard: without them, there is a danger that structural changes and processes will be largely “invisible” in evidence terms.

6.16 Although essentially a commentary on the last decade, the OECD report (summarised in Figure 2-4, page 8) does provide some important clues with regard to headline issues in this context. Generalising somewhat, we think there ought to be some focus on gathering evidence and insight that can inform (robustly) four overarching issues. These are outlined briefly in the paragraphs below.

(i) The changing nature of urban-rural linkages at a variety of spatial scales:

6.17 In place of regional development agencies, Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) have been formed over the last year. Some 37 LEPs have now been approved and together, these cover 97% of England’s population. However compared to RDAs, LEPs have very few resources (or powers) and what they will actually “do” is not yet clear. When the concept of LEPs was first mooted, the intention was that they should take some kind of overview of economic development, housing, transport and planning issues in their local areas. Further, they should be defined around functional economic areas. Although there have been many spatial compromises subsequently, most LEP territories are sizeable and encompass both rural and urban areas; some are genuine city-regions. Within this context, it will be important that the evolving strategic role(s) of rural areas is properly understood and that appropriate provision is made for them locally, recognising though the intrinsic interconnectivity between “urban” and rural”.

(ii) The full implications of peripherality for sustainable rural communities:

6.18 Certainly compared to elsewhere in Europe, much of rural England might be described as “peri-urban” given the nature and intensity of links with major urban areas: many people living in rural areas work in large cities (either commuting daily or taking advantage of broadband infrastructures to enable an urban workplace/employer but a rural home). However there are some parts of rural England which are, on any measure, peripheral: West Cumbria and North Devon are two examples. For these peripheral rural areas, socio-economic prospects are fundamentally different from elsewhere – and this difference is not picked up through the rural definition. Looking ahead, it will be important to understand how – and why – the performance and prospects of peripheral rural areas is changing.

(iii) The nature of rural socio-economic spaces with a particular focus on demography and sustainability

6.19 The rural population is rapidly ageing and older people tend to be major consumers of public services (particularly healthcare). Linked to this, there is a concern that rural communities are – in a strict economic sense – increasingly “non-productive”. Moreover, where there is economic activity, it appears to be linked to leisure, recreation and tourism. These sectors are not “bad” and they are growing, but arguably rural communities really need a diverse economic base so as to generate some well-paid jobs locally and to be economically sustainable. This amalgam of inter-related social and economic changes needs to be properly understood and the implications worked through: the consequences are very significant, not least in relation to the delivery of personalised and devolved local services.
Finally, we think that it will be important to continue to invest in an evidence base which links rural communities to the full range of eco-system services (and in this context, links between RCPU and other policy teams in Defra will be important). Rural communities have a crucial “function” in this context, but that function is unlikely to be sustained unless communities are themselves both sustainable and viable. Again, this bundle of issues is complicated, but it is, genuinely, important.

Concluding

6.21 The four issues we have identified above are overarching. None of them will be addressed through highly localised approaches – and indeed, at local scales, the causes of many of the issues may be virtually “invisible”. Moreover, all four are complicated and headline data on rural conditions are unlikely to provide any real insight into causes or solutions.

Who are the main future providers of evidence?

6.22 Within the framework provided by Figure 6-1 and in response to the four propositions set out above, a wide range of organisations and processes are providing – or are capable of providing – evidence. Broadly though, we think that these may be divided into four groups, as illustrated and explained below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research community (charities/trusts, commercial researchers, academics)</th>
<th>Networks of rural communities (partnerships/organisations)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural communities (partnerships/organisations)</td>
<td>Organisations engaged in the delivery of services in rural areas (incl. OGDs)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given the commitment to both localism and devolved/personalised service delivery, rural communities (and the partnerships/organisations within them) must be seen as a core part of the wider rural evidence “community”. In particular, the information and insights gleaned by one rural community ought to be of real value to others – if ways can be found of codifying and communicating them. This could be regarded as an example of “crowdsourcing” or...
distributed problem solving. Facilitated by web-based communications, it relies on an open call for solutions in which the distinction between “professionals” and “amateurs” is significantly eroded.

6.24 In this context, we suspect a second key role exists for the various networks of rural communities (and their partnerships/organisations). This could include, for example, the Association of Market Towns (AMT) and Action for Communities in Rural England (ACRE). It could also include networks which have been formed among organisations whose constituency is not exclusively rural – local government networks, interest groups within membership organisations like the Royal Town Planning Institute, and so on. In addition, there may be an important role for networks which have emerged around key programmes (e.g. the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) Network). Previously, formal networks have – typically – been difficult to sustain without public sector support and many have struggled. However the emergence of social networking as an acceptable way of communicating and exchanging information is having an impact. In the future, networked interest groups may increasingly emerge through media such as LinkedIn. Whatever the form, the role of networks in relation to evidence is arguably two-fold: generating evidence and insight, and providing an effective mechanism for disseminating it.

6.25 Third, we consider that the organisations involved in the delivery of services in rural areas (including, where relevant, the sponsor government departments) have a critical role to play – whether or not they realise it fully. Administrative data linked to many of these services (e.g. benefits claimants data) are a useful source of evidence in their own right. In addition, those engaged in service delivery in rural areas are observing rural life first hand; if they are doing so in different areas, they are building up a comparative evidence base. The evidence “potential” linked to these processes is significant – particularly if it can be accessed by other parts of the evidence community. In the future, more needs to be made of it.

6.26 Finally, we would argue that there is an important role for the professional research community – whether charities/research foundations (like Joseph Rowntree Trust, Plunkett Foundation, Arthur Rank Centre, etc.), academics from universities, or commercial research companies. This ought to be focused more on structural rural issues. In volume, it will probably be relatively modest while in execution it needs to be linked to – rather than divorced from – other elements of the evidence community. It is though potentially important.

Links between future evidence needs and different parts of the emerging evidence community

6.27 Quite clearly, different parts of the emerging evidence community will play different roles with regard to evidence needs. Far and away the best source of evidence and intelligence on “how to do things” is communities that have already done them – although a separate input might be required in codifying and disseminating insights (which is where networks are so powerful). Conversely, evidence on structural issues and elements of service delivery is more likely to rely on professional researchers. Typically these evidence needs link to policy across government and/or issues of large scale resource allocation, and in this context,
technical rigour tends to go hand-in-hand with impact. In Figure 6-3, we seek to map the key relationships between evidence needs and the emerging evidence community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evidence need</th>
<th>Emerging Evidence Community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Locally-specific information on baseline conditions</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information/insight on “how to do things” within rural communities</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insights into complex service delivery challenges</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holistic evidence on structural rural issues</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SQW

Conclusion

6.28 If the basic premise underpinning Figure 6-1 is accepted, then the arguments set out in this chapter are at least logical. However they are also both challenging and fundamentally different from those that have provided the foundation for rural evidence over the last decade. They signal a “hands off” approach to rural evidence and – other than in structural circumstances – they make relatively little provision for formal comparative analysis: the scope for government to intervene quickly if “things go wrong” will be reduced. In response, the coalition government would almost certainly suggest that “things” are far less likely “to go wrong” if local communities make their own decisions; this is – after all – the essence of the wider localism venture and implicit within the “big society” and “small government”. It is against this backdrop that RCPU needs to define its own role within the reconfigured evidence community.
7: Potential roles for RCPU moving forward

7.1 At one level, a headline message that might be summed up in terms a “hands off” approach to rural evidence is not especially helpful in seeking to define the evidence role of Defra's new Rural Communities Policy Unit; but at another level, this principle is both useful and important. In this final chapter, we:

- outline the formal remit of RCPU as prescribed by ministers
- provide some feedback from stakeholders on the roles that RCPU could potentially play and the manner in which rural evidence might “work”
- set out some outline proposals for RCPU, drawing both on stakeholder feedback but also all other parts of this report (including the strengths and weaknesses of approaches to evidence over the period 2000-2010).

The remit of RCPU

7.2 In a written ministerial statement, it was announced that the new RCPU would “operate as a centre of rural expertise, supporting and co-ordinating activity within and beyond Defra”. The ministerial statement continued:

_The RCPU will maintain and build upon the strong evidence base developed by both Defra and the CRC. This evidence will inform both the unit’s priorities and its policy-influencing function and will also be made available to the public via the Defra website. Much of the activity which helps rural communities to thrive takes place at a remove from central government, often undertaken directly by people within the communities themselves. It is our intention that the RCPU’s evidence will promote the government’s drive to decentralisation by supporting bodies operating sub-nationally better to understand and take proper account of rural needs and opportunities._

20 House of Commons Hansard Written Ministerial Statement, 1st April 2011, Column 41WS

7.3 Implicit within this statement are all four of the “evidence needs” identified in Chapter 6: locally-specific information on baseline conditions, information/insight on “how to do things” within rural communities; insights into complex service delivery challenges; and holistic evidence on structural rural issues.

7.4 Separately, two immediate objectives were defined for RCPU. Again, these resonate strongly with the observations and arguments set out in Chapter 6:

- to identify issues of critical importance to rural communities and then to support, inform and influence the development and implementation of relevant government policy so as to achieve fair, practical and affordable outcomes for rural residents, businesses and communities;
• to develop **open and collaborative approaches** to gathering information, evidence and potential solutions, working closely with the wide range of organisations which support and represent rural communities.

7.5 Clearly then, **relationships** will need to be central to the work of the new unit – both in terms of how information is gathered, and how it is used. These relationships will need to exist across three constituencies: within government (including elsewhere in Defra); with an array of stakeholders and partners, some of whom may have conflicting objectives; and with rural communities themselves.

### The views of stakeholders and partners

7.6 During the final phase of this assignment, we consulted with one of these three constituencies in order to garner views on the role(s) that RCPU might play and how, in practice, this could work\(^2\).

7.7 For most of our consultees, the demise of CRC and the regional tier (regional development agencies, regional assemblies, etc.) was seen as really quite problematic in relation to the provision and dissemination of rural evidence. Specific concerns boiled down to eight themes which are summarised in Table 7-1. For RCPU, some of the “concerns” are far more straightforward to respond to than others. However all of our consultees were keen to look forward rather than back – not least because the forward look was often associated with genuine opportunities for their own organisations. In discussion with stakeholders we identified a menu of possible solutions, some more feasible than others. These are also set out – in summary – in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Loss of…</th>
<th>…could result in the loss of</th>
<th>Immediate implications for RCPU</th>
<th>Possible solutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CRC</td>
<td>…evidence which is robust and of a high quality</td>
<td>Whether generated internally or in collaboration with others, RCPU will need to pay attention to the robustness, quality and integrity of evidence it sponsors</td>
<td>• Should a peer review group be formed in order to retain a focus on all aspects of quality?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRC</td>
<td>…evidence and insight which is independent from government</td>
<td>This issue is really tricky for RCPU and there was genuine concern as to whether it plausibly can provide an independent conduit for rural voices and operate within central government simultaneously</td>
<td>• Direct lines of accountability are necessarily to ministers and the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Select Committee will also have an important role. However, should there also be a stakeholder challenge group (perhaps with representation from the different constituencies identified in Figure 6-2) which meets regularly with RCPU to input into its work plan, review outputs, etc.?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRC</td>
<td>…evidence which is well presented and effectively disseminated</td>
<td>Presentation and dissemination needs to be “designed in” from the outset: within Defra, there have been mistakes in the past</td>
<td>• RCPU needs to act creatively and quickly, learning from CRC. Its website is key and needs to be well designed – perhaps with an interface that is linked to but separate from Defra? • Early thought should be given to harnessing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{2}\)In forming its own final view, RCPU will need to engage with all three of these constituencies – i.e. OGDs and rural communities as well as institutional stakeholders
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Loss of...</th>
<th>Immediate implications for RCPU</th>
<th>Possible solutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CRC</td>
<td>...an organisation which is friendly and approachable</td>
<td>Again, this is challenging; RCPU is a small group of people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region at tier</td>
<td>...benchmarks and reference points which (effectively) flag up local issues and prompt action</td>
<td>These emerged de facto as a result of regional strategies. Strong peer-to-peer networks could provide a similar function and these might be encouraged by RCPU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region at tier</td>
<td>...longitudinal data which is helpful in charting change over time</td>
<td>RCPU’s evidence gathering activities ought to be structured with longitudinal issues in mind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region at tier</td>
<td>...an effective interface between national and local</td>
<td>Again, in terms of building up relationships, the regional tier played an important role and with very limited resources, it will be hard to replace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region at tier</td>
<td>...a mechanism for “doing something” with the “spaces” between urban areas</td>
<td>RCPU does not have an immediate mandate to “intervene”. It can animate peer groups and will have to rely on peer pressure at a range of scales</td>
</tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: SQW consultations, March-May 2011

7.8 In addition, stakeholders identified two overarching opportunities for RCPU, neither of which was particularly well addressed in the past.

7.9 First, RCPU arguably does not need to worry unduly about its own organisational profile (unlike, arguably, CRC): it is, simply, part of government and if its own “brand awareness” is poor, that is not necessarily a problem. Hence stakeholders considered that RCPU was very well placed to provide some kind of co-ordinating resource, promoting its own evidence but also that generated by and through other stakeholders within the wider rural evidence community. Could it potentially provide a “portal” through which links might be provided to a wide range of evidence from different sources?
7.10 Second, because it is within government and better equipped than its predecessor within the Department, RCPU is now well placed to influence the rest of government (including the rest of Defra) to take rural issues seriously. One of RCPU’s functions is to promote understanding of rural issues across government, and many stakeholders noted that there was considerable scope to ensure that departments with direct responsibility for good (or bad) outcomes in rural areas, such as the Department of Communities and Local Government (with its planning responsibilities), the Department of Health, the Department for Education and the Department of Work and Pensions, reflected the needs of rural communities more consistently in their policies. Even in an era of devolved and personalised service delivery, sponsor departments need to take rural circumstances seriously and stakeholders considered that RCPU could help achieve this.

Outline proposals for RCPU in relation to rural evidence

7.11 In order to meet its own objectives (as set out in paragraph 7.4), there are two implicit process-based imperatives for RCPU:

- first, RCPU needs to shape an agenda for rural evidence; and then produce that evidence; and finally, disseminate and “sweat” that evidence, such that it reaches its intended audience (inside and outside of government) and exercises influence
- second, RCPU must work closely with other organisations throughout: specifically, it must engage with rural communities; draw in and on other organisations and stakeholders; and influence government.

7.12 In practice, these two sets of process-based imperatives are thoroughly intertwined. Essentially this is because producers of evidence are very often also users (and key evidence needs were summarised in Figure 6-3); and/or the act of using evidence is very often also a mechanism for dissemination. Hence we have, essentially, RCPU plus three (or four) sets of constituents working across an integrated rural evidence “supply chain”. Figure 7-1 attempts to capture the key relationships in the supply of evidence; in terms of demand (or need) for evidence, it needs to be considered alongside Figure 6-3.
Based on Figure 7-1, RCPU’s *modus operandi* might be structured in relation to the evidence “supply chain”. Key considerations with respect to each “stage” are summarised in the paragraphs that follow.

### Shaping the agenda for rural evidence

7.14 In our view, RCPU ought to devote some attention to the process of *shaping the evidence agenda*. RCPU needs both to steer and facilitate this, and it ought to try and draw a wide range of partners and stakeholders into the process. There will need to be a clear and informed debate as to what the priorities are and why, and then RCPU will need to make decisions and communicate them clearly.

7.15 Obviously, RCPU has no control over the research agendas of other organisations. However by reaching some kind of consensus on priorities, it ought to be possible to maximise the impact of limited research budgets. If consensus cannot be achieved, then different partners at least ought to be clear on their respective priorities, so as to avoid overlap.

### Producing rural evidence

7.16 In terms of *producing rural evidence*, RCPU essentially has three routes to securing the information it considers to be important: producing it internally, commissioning it, or working collaboratively with stakeholders to shape their evidence-generating activities. For RCPU, we would suggest that in general:

- the third route (working with stakeholders to influence their evidence-gathering) ought to be the preferred one – it is the corollary of a devolved and partnership-based approach; it will tend to go hand-in-hand with effective dissemination; and it ought to result in its own limited resources stretching further
the principal providers of rural evidence ought to be the communities themselves, recognising the need for both locally-specific information and advice and insight on “how to do things” (see Figure 6-3).

7.17 However some rural evidence will need to be commissioned externally – particularly that which is concerned with investigating structural rural issues (see Figure 6-3). Inevitably, the process and prospect of commissioning will affect the relationship between RCPU and its stakeholders: no longer are these organisations simply “partners” but they become contractors whose own future income stream depends (in part) on Defra. It will also affect relationships between stakeholders as they are, effectively, competing for business and hence the propensity genuinely to collaborate and share information may well be compromised. Once financial resources are involved, these challenges are unavoidable. But we suspect they can be managed – through open and transparent procurement processes, and by requirements to engage with others and to share key outputs being written into the terms of reference for particular commissions.

7.18 Finally, in terms of producing rural evidence, we would suggest that RCPU does need to do some internally. A major reason for this is that it needs its own knowledge base, not simply to rely on that of others. Moreover it needs to be an “intelligent client” and it needs to be capable of using properly the evidence that is generated from different sources. In practice, this is difficult if it is simply managing processes and if it has little or no technical capacity internally. As we saw in paragraph 4.7 (page 19), Defra has not always struck the right balance: whilst it has commissioned good evidence, it has – in the past – been less effective in terms of actually using it. In short, RCPU itself needs to be knowledgeable and informed, not least so that it can advise ministers: knowledge should not only be vested in other parts of the evidence community – it needs to capture some itself.

**Disseminating rural evidence**

7.19 It is imperative that the evidence that is generated is disseminated and used. In this context, we would encourage RCPU to be really quite creative, building on the good practice generated by CRC in particular. Hence it ought to be producing documents which are accessible. It ought also to be using its website effectively – not simply as a repository for lengthy reports but as an interactive tool with “snippets” of information and effective signposting. Throughout, it will be important to acknowledge that users of rural evidence will increasingly be

- *non-technical* – and hence evidence will need to be presented clearly and simply, in a manner that is capable of easy assimilation
- *fragmented* insofar as they will “dip into” the information that is available
- *generators* of evidence, as well as users of it.

7.20 Looking forward, it will be important that RCPU also takes a positive approach to the use of social networking media: the likes of LinkedIn, Facebook, etc. We suspect this will become an increasingly powerful tool for sharing – and to some extent creating – rural evidence. The use of social networking media is free, highly dispersed and (assuming broadband provision)
widely accessible; for all three reasons, it is well attuned to the localism agenda. What RCPU cannot do, however, is “control” it, in a top-down sense. Nor can it guarantee the quality of the evidence – or the wisdom of the advice – that it will generate. We suspect though that RCPU needs to “go with the flow”, contributing to discussions where possible, and it needs to be an active and informed participant in the process.

**Providing some checks and balances: quality and robustness/independence**

7.21 Cutting across the three distinct “stages” in the evidence supply chain, we would – finally – encourage RCPU to invest in two processes that are concerned fundamentally with the quality of the evidence it produces and its robustness/independence. These proposals are informed directly by the feedback we received from RCPU’s stakeholders (see Table 7-1).

7.22 First, as intimated in Table 7-1, we would encourage RCPU to consider forming some kind of peer review group with the specific purpose of ensuring the quality of the rural evidence that is produced. Ultimately, RCPU will succeed or fail in the objectives prescribed for it by ministers on the basis of quality: it needs to be a respected member of the evidence community and in this regard, quality is paramount.

7.23 Second – and closely related – we would encourage RCPU to set up a wider stakeholder challenge group that meets periodically. Its purpose would be both to inform the development of research agendas *ex ante* and to review and probe the findings *ex post*. This group would serve two main functions: securing the “buy in” of the wider evidence community and – to some extent – mediating the relationship between RCPU and government/ministers. RCPU cannot be wholly independent of government as it is structurally within government. However no organisation is wholly without affiliation – whether to shareholders or to trustees or to the interests of fee-paying members. Different interests clearly need to be understood and also, to some extent, managed. Participating as a stakeholder – in dialogue with others – is important as a workable solution.
Annex A: List of consultees

A.1 In the course of this piece of work, we have spoken to a large number of people – within Defra and within partner and stakeholder bodies and organisations. We would like to acknowledge the different contributions that have been made.

Phase 1

7.24 The first phase of this study was completed between January and February 2010. At that stage, the purpose of the consultations was essentially to consider “what rural evidence is for” and to comment on the range and depth of (then-)existing provision. Our Phase I consultees are listed in the Table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Robin Mortimer</td>
<td>Director Climate Adaptation, Landscape and Rural (CALR)</td>
<td>Defra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ron Scrutton</td>
<td>Head of Rural Policy</td>
<td>Defra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Costigan</td>
<td>Head of research CALR</td>
<td>Defra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ian Davidson</td>
<td>Evidence Investment Strategy Lead</td>
<td>Defra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike Anderson</td>
<td>Director General – Science and Evidence Group</td>
<td>Defra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pippa Gibson</td>
<td>Head of rural statistics unit</td>
<td>Defra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ian Baker</td>
<td>Head of Rural Economy and Research</td>
<td>Defra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicola Lloyd</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>CRC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damian Walne</td>
<td>Economic Adviser, Spatial Planning Analysis Unit</td>
<td>CLG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew Cunningham-Hughes</td>
<td>Economist</td>
<td>BIS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philip Lowe</td>
<td>Director of Rural Economy and Land Use Programme</td>
<td>RELU, Newcastle CRE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigel Curry</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>CCRI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Shepherd</td>
<td>Chair of Human Geography</td>
<td>Birkbeck College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glenn Athey</td>
<td>Director of Insight East</td>
<td>EMDA/East Midlands Observatory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry Overman</td>
<td>Reader in New Economic Geography</td>
<td>LSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick Chase</td>
<td>Head of Policy and Research</td>
<td>ACRE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yvette Dearden</td>
<td>RDA Rural lead</td>
<td>EEDA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Higham</td>
<td>Regional Director of Economy, Environment and Regional Issues</td>
<td>GONW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elaine Howard</td>
<td>Head of Natural Environment &amp; Rural</td>
<td>GONW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela Coulton</td>
<td>Head of Environment</td>
<td>GONW</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SQW

Phase 2

A.2 Phase 2 of the project was concerned with testing the “fitness for purpose” of the then-existing rural evidence base in relation to three key policy domains, all of which were important for rural areas, but none of which was formally “owned” by Defra: broadband,
worklessness and employability, and housing and affordable housing. The associated consultations were conducted in March and April, 2010. Our Phase 2 consultees are listed below.

Table A-2: Phase 2 Consultees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consultee</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Justin Martin</td>
<td>Analyst</td>
<td>CRC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria Pymm</td>
<td>Rural Proofing Champions project lead</td>
<td>CRC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ian Baker</td>
<td>Head of Rural Economy and Research</td>
<td>Defra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe Clease</td>
<td>Areas Analysis Team leader</td>
<td>DWP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul Mooney</td>
<td>Policy lead on employment related issues</td>
<td>DWP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Matejic</td>
<td>Households Below Average Income Team</td>
<td>DWP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anita Gambie</td>
<td>Senior Policy Advisor</td>
<td>CRC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jon Merrick</td>
<td>Head of Employment</td>
<td>NWDA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corinne Matthews</td>
<td>Economic Regeneration Officer</td>
<td>West Somerset Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Ingham</td>
<td>Head of economic development</td>
<td>Cumbria CC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen Hall</td>
<td>Statistician</td>
<td>Defra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helen Kelly</td>
<td>Affordable Housing Officer</td>
<td>CLG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew Dodd</td>
<td>Rural Policy Manager</td>
<td>HCA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laurna Compton</td>
<td>Senior Policy Officer (Housing)</td>
<td>East of England Local Government Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caron Britton</td>
<td>Rural Policy Manager (Broadband)</td>
<td>Defra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt Hill</td>
<td>Policy Officer</td>
<td>CRC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam Sharps</td>
<td>Project Manager for the Digital Britain Report</td>
<td>BIS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominic Ridley</td>
<td>Head of Digital Inclusion</td>
<td>BIS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ewen McKinnon</td>
<td>Programme Manager, Digital Inclusion Team</td>
<td>CLG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawrence Ramsey</td>
<td>Digital policy lead</td>
<td>EEDA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate Reeve</td>
<td>Head of Market Research</td>
<td>Ofcom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andy Carter</td>
<td>BDUK - Broadband Policy Lead</td>
<td>BIS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SQW

Phase 3

A.3 The third phase of this assignment was significantly delayed following the change of government. With Defra’s agreement, its purpose/focus was also fundamentally changed. Following the announcement of their pending abolition, we agreed to speak to rural leads in each of the Regional Development Agencies to establish the nature and extent of the evidence base that had been gathered and to clarify any plans for its transfer to successor bodies. We spoke to the RDA rural leads between January and March 2011. Our findings from this exercise were written up as a separate report.

Table A-3: Phase 3 Consultees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mike Barton</td>
<td>Transition Team 5, Transfer of Functions, Assets and Liabilities</td>
<td>AWM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire Robinson</td>
<td>Policy Manager, Rural Team</td>
<td>AWM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Simmons</td>
<td>Senior Executive - Rural and Business Support</td>
<td>EEDA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesley Anderson</td>
<td>Executive - Sustainable Development</td>
<td>EEDA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A.4 Phase 4 of this project was concerned essentially with assessing the consequences of institutional changes for the provision of rural evidence; understanding the changed roles of organisations with regard to rural evidence and their likely future requirements; and reflecting on the strengths and weaknesses of past approaches adopted by both Defra and CRC, and the lessons that might be drawn. Our consultations were conducted between March and May 2011 with the individuals listed below.

Table A-4: Phase 4 Consultees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consultee(s)</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nick Chase</td>
<td>Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Couchman</td>
<td>Plunkett Foundation (PF)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris Goulden</td>
<td>Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. Dr. Gordon Gatward</td>
<td>Arthur Rank Centre (ARC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris Borg</td>
<td>National Association of Local Councils (NALC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim Allen</td>
<td>Local Government Association (LGA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alison Eardley and Gordon Morris</td>
<td>Action for Market Towns (AMT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neil Sindon</td>
<td>Campaign to Protect Rural England (CRPE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christopher Price</td>
<td>Country Land and Business Association (CLA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trevor Cherrett</td>
<td>Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt Thompson</td>
<td>Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graham Biggs</td>
<td>Rural Service Network (RSN)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicola Thompson</td>
<td>Northern Rural Network (NRN)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SQW