

Rural Proofing Checklist

Rural proofing is a way of checking how proposed policies could impact on rural communities.

It will help you to systematically

- Consider whether policy is likely to have a different impact in rural areas, because of particular rural circumstances or needs
- Make proper assessment of those impacts, if they are likely to be significant
- Adjust the policy, where appropriate, with solutions to meet rural needs and circumstances

Steps to take

1. Ensure you are clear about the objectives of the proposed policy development, its intended impacts or outcomes (including which areas, groups or organisations should benefit) and the proposed means of delivery
2. Run through each question in the checklist, identifying where the proposed policy is likely to have a different impact in rural areas
3. Where there is uncertainty or a potentially different (worse) impact, this should be investigated further (and included in the overall assessment of the costs and benefits of the policy)
4. Where the impact in rural areas will be significantly different, explore policy options to produce the desired outcomes in rural areas or avoid/mitigate any undesirable impacts. This exercise may also highlight opportunities to maximise positive impacts in rural areas
5. Feed the results of your appraisal, including solutions, into the decision-making process

The rural proofing checklist

The following checklist has been adapted from "Rural Proofing – policy makers' checklist" designed by The Countryside Agency for use with central Government targets. Consider all the questions below to help establish whether the initiative is likely to encounter the challenges presented by rural circumstances. Some potential solutions are indicated to help you consider appropriate adjustments.

1. Will the policy affect the availability of public and private services? Might it encourage closure or centralisation and will this have a disproportionate effect in rural areas where services are already limited?

Rural solutions: improve transport/accessibility to compensate for the centralisation of services; research alternative funding streams for threatened rural services; provide additional funding to rural outlets to maintain service standards

2. Is the policy to be delivered through existing service outlets, such as schools, banks and GP surgeries?

How will you ensure rural residents can access services in areas where outlets are few and far between?

Rural solutions: use mobile and outreach services; use ICT to avoid the need to visit outlets; share premises or staff with other service providers to maintain or create a rural outlet ('joint provision')

3. Will the cost of delivery be higher in rural areas where clients are more widely dispersed or economies of scale are harder to achieve?

Will longer travel times or distances to clients add to the cost of service provision?

Will services need to be run out of smaller outlets, so losing economies of scale?

Rural solutions: allow for higher unit delivery costs in funding formulae (e.g. a 'sparsity' factor) or when specifying cost efficiency criteria; encourage joint provision to reduce costs

4. Will the policy affect travel needs or the ease and cost of travel?

Will the impact be different in sparsely populated or rural areas, where typically journey times are longer, public transport is poor, there are higher levels of car dependency and travel options are limited or expensive, especially for low income groups?

Rural solutions: reduce the need to travel by using mobile services, local delivery or telephone/internet; ease travel by co-ordinating or improving transport links (e.g. additional services, demand responsive transport, community transport/community car schemes, taxi vouchers); alleviate the costs of travel by subsidising services or individuals (There may be no public transport service between many locations)

5. Does the policy rely on communicating information to clients?

How will clients access information in rural areas, where there are fewer (formal) places to obtain advice and information?

Rural solutions: be flexible and use the networks that do exist e.g. post offices, village halls; link up with other information providers; use local radio and newspapers; provide mobile advisers; use information technology (Some groups, such as older people, use ICT less)

6. Is the policy to be delivered by the private sector or through a public-private partnership?

Will the smaller and scattered population in rural areas provide a sufficient market to attract the private sector? Will there be similar opportunities for choice and competition? Does the private sector in rural areas have the capacity to deliver?

Rural solutions: consider the use of universal service obligations; set rural delivery

targets; draw up contracts which prevent cherry picking of the most profitable (urban) markets; encourage commercial providers with incentives

7. Does the policy rely on infrastructure (eg. broadband ICT, main roads, utilities) for delivery?

How will the policy work in rural areas, where the existing infrastructure is typically weaker or non-existent (e.g. roads, cable TV and upgrading of infrastructure may be difficult or expensive)?

Rural solutions: encourage or co-ordinate demand to make supply viable; use the public sector's collective demand to stimulate supply; provide alternative means of accessing the service

8. Will the policy impact on rural businesses, including the self-employed?

Will it have a different effect on smaller businesses (which employ a greater proportion of the workforce in rural areas) or those sectors which are typically more significant in rural areas - farming and construction? Will the higher proportion of self-employed people in rural areas be affected by the policy (including women running part-time businesses)?

Rural solutions: ensure the needs of small businesses are specifically addressed; take support, advice and training out to businesses

9. Will the policy have a particular impact on land-based industries and, therefore, on rural economies and environments?

How will the policy affect the agricultural sector and the extraction and water industries, which have a particular importance in many rural areas? Will there be a knock-on effect on the environment? Conversely, if the policy affects the environment, what are the implications for businesses based on natural resources such as tourism, leisure, renewable energy and food production?

Rural solutions: identify 'win-win' solutions which deliver economic and environmental benefits (e.g. promoting local supply chains, especially between food producers and consumers); consider incentives for environmentally friendly practices; allow for and encourage a diverse range of rural enterprises

10. Is the policy to be targeted at the disadvantaged?

How will it target rural disadvantage, which is not usually concentrated in neighbourhoods? Do the indicators to be used for identifying need measure deprivation issues that are particular rural features (eg. access to services, access to job opportunities, low earnings and housing affordability)?

Rural solutions: use small-area statistics to identify pockets of deprivation; adjust the indicators or their weighting to accommodate both urban and rural aspects of deprivation; designate larger areas for targeting, to pick up scattered disadvantage; target population groups rather than areas

11. Will the policy rely on local institutions for delivery?

Will the policy be as effective in rural areas, where private, public and voluntary sector organisations tend to be smaller and have less capacity to build partnerships? If funds or services are to be allocated via a bidding process, will small organisations be able to compete fairly?

Rural solutions: provide specific support for capacity building; allow longer timescales for bidding; simplify the bidding process; allow an increased level of public or voluntary sector input to compensate for the possibility of limited private sector input

12. Does the policy depend on new buildings or development sites? Where will these be located in rural areas, given that there are few brownfield sites and fewer locations where housing or other development will be acceptable?

Rural solutions: check the proposal with rural planning authorities; create flexibility for development to be located where it is most appropriate and needed (eg. in market towns or villages); ensure high quality development that will contribute to local character and distinctiveness

13. Is the policy likely to impact on the quality and character of the natural and built rural landscape?

In particular, might it affect landscape or biodiversity sites which are protected by statute (e.g. Sites of Special Scientific Interest, National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty)? Outside designated areas, will it conform to the conservation objectives of local planning authorities?

Rural solutions: apply environmental appraisal; consult the relevant Government agencies, the Landscape Character Assessment guidance of the Countryside Agency and local planning authorities or management plans for particular designated areas. Whether it affects protected landscapes or the wider countryside, identify how the policy could create opportunities for the conservation and enhancement of countryside character

14. Will the policy impact on people wishing to reach and use the countryside as a place for recreation and enjoyment?

Will it affect the ability of visitors to visit the countryside or the attractiveness and opportunities for enjoyment offered? Will it affect the tourism and leisure industries, which are particularly important in many rural areas?

Rural solutions: consider the possibilities for creating extra opportunities to enjoy the countryside e.g. better information about what is available, or new footpaths, bridleways or cycle path links; ensure policies take account of local access issues and do not limit access; protect and where possible improve the accessibility of the countryside (especially by foot, bicycle or public transport) and particularly access for urban populations to their surrounding countryside.