

**Yorkshire & Humber RAF**  
**Securing Proportionate Outcomes for Rural People and Places from the Government's Locality Framework**

1. The Yorkshire & Humber Rural Affairs Forum (RAF) is keen to play its part in rural proofing policy making and service delivery planning affecting rural communities in the region.
2. The RAF recognises that the Government's position on rural issues has shifted significantly over the last 12 months. 'Rurality' per se can no longer be considered as a driver of public policy. The future of rurally specific programmes seems likely to be limited, the Regional Development Programme for England (RDPE) apart. Government's current approach, clearly enacted by the Comprehensive Spending Review, is to mainstream rural issues across all service departments.
3. Of the 30 PSAs introduced by the Comprehensive Spending Review, none relate specifically to rural England. Defra takes the lead on PSA 27 (Dangerous Climate Change) and PSA 29 (Healthy Natural Environment). The agenda within these two PSAs is clear, and covers much of the work of Natural England and the Environment Agency.
4. Defra also has an interest in a number of other PSAs, notably relating to Economic Performance in the Regions (7), Housing (20) and Cohesive, Empowered and Active Communities (21). It is far from clear however how that influence will be applied, and what it will mean in terms of outcomes for rural people, places and businesses. Defra's focus for the next three years is clearly set out in its Departmental Strategic Objectives; these lead with Climate Change (in an international and national context) and natural environmental protection; they also include Governmental responsibility for Sustainable Development. There is no mention of 'rural economies' although references to 'sustainable food and farming' and 'strong rural communities' are retained.
5. This mainstreaming of rural issues means that Government's new 'Locality Framework' will significantly influence the way that public policy and services are applied, and the impact that these have on quality of life in rural areas.
6. This 'Locality Framework' will be delivered through Local Strategic Partnerships, Local Area Agreements and the new Comprehensive Area Assessment.
7. All statutory organisations with responsibilities for delivering against Public Service Agreements (PSAs) are now subject to a 'Duty to Cooperate'<sup>1</sup> within a Local Strategic Partnership. The Local Strategic Partnership is responsible for setting out a vision for its area, and setting a framework to achieve that

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<sup>1</sup> Local Government & Public Involvement in Health Act, 2007

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vision via planning policy (Local Development Framework) and service delivery. This is done within its Sustainable Community Strategy.

8. Each local authority district has an LSP. LSPs for Higher tier and unitary authority areas are responsible for developing, implementing and monitoring a Local Area Agreement.
9. LAAs are the primary agreements between central and local government (and partners) on local delivery of both national and local priorities. They have the ambition of guiding the totality of local public expenditure towards the aims of both central and local government.
10. Each 'LAA owning' LSP will need to develop its LAA in partnership with its communities and partners - including in second tier areas, district level LSPs. It will also need to negotiate its LAA with Government (represented via Government Offices in the Regions) to ensure that there is an appropriate balance between local and national priorities, and that the targets and monitoring frameworks put in place are robust, realistic and appropriate.
11. Each LAA has to set priorities, and address its actions against a number of national indicators. In addition it can define its own local targets and indicators.
12. Performance against these indicators will be measured by Government during the Comprehensive Area Assessment. The LSPs performance against its LAA can, and should, also be monitored by local communities, and in two tier areas, by district level LSPs.
13. The Comprehensive Area Assessment will be introduced in 2009 and seeks to assess the impact of public service delivery at a local authority level (higher tier / unitary). It is focused on the quality of outcome delivered by public service activity and places material weighting against the views and experience of local communities, and evidence of their involvement in the policy development / service planning process.
14. LAAs do not control all service deliver, far from it, but they do contain 35 Improvement Targets, which all partners will be signed up to try and achieve. They also define a set of common priorities for the area, and focus the minds of a range of service providers to work together to address them. These priorities can be both thematic (i.e. alcohol abuse) and geographic (alcohol abuse in Hull).
15. It follows therefore that if you are interested in influencing service delivery in rural areas, engagement with LAA owning LSPs will be important.

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16. Engagement with district level LSPs is also very important. Their Sustainable Community Strategies set the context for planning. Planning is a key driver of activity in rural areas. They also significantly influence the corporate plan of the local authority, and should influence, or at least align with, performance plans and local delivery plans of other key partners such as the PCT and Police.
17. LSPs can be engaged with through their boards / executives, and through their thematic partnerships. Each LSP will have a full time officer to support it, and often, especially district level LSPs, an independent Chair.
18. LAA owning LSPs are more formal organisations, and tend to be led (and dominated) by the local authority. They should include local authority members and a range of organisations including the private and third sectors.
19. LSPs should be ready and willing to engage with interested parties representing communities or relevant stakeholder organisations. It will improve their CAA score; they also have a statutory duty to do so. The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 imposed a 'Duty to Involve' local people and communities in service planning and policy making on those organisations with a 'Duty to Cooperate' with LSPs.
20. LAAs are all about improving social, economic and environmental conditions at the local level. Yet LAAs are based on county, unitary and metropolitan local authority boundaries. These are administrative boundaries that do not necessarily reflect people's daily lives, based on their neighbourhoods and localities and daily travel patterns. So, within these authority areas there are many different places. Those negotiating and delivering LAAs need to beware any assumptions of homogeneity. They need to consider carefully the different needs of neighbourhoods and other communities within their area. They need to ensure that targets reflect differing geographical needs within the LAA area, where necessary.
21. CRC has developed a range of questions that people can ask of LSPs (and their partners) in a bid to ensure that their plans will deliver proportionately across the whole of their territories, and not 'short change' rural communities. These questions are attached as an annex.

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22. In its session on Friday 1<sup>st</sup> February, the RAF Steering Group considered this new 'Locality Framework', what it meant for the RAF, and how it should engage with it. Its conclusions were as follows:

- a. It is important that as many RAF members as possible understand the new locality framework and what it means for rural communities.
- b. It will be helpful if RAF members can engage with their LSP, ideally through involvement in the thematic partnerships in the first instance. In due course it would be extremely valuable for the RAF if members can play a part on the Executive / Board of LSPs across the region.
- c. It is important to engage with local authority members involved with LSPs and LAAs. It would be helpful if RAF members who have relationships with elected councillors help them to understand the need for LSPs and LAAs to delivery proportionate outcomes across their areas, and to work for all communities.
- d. It is important for the officers of the RAF to build relationships with Chairs of LSPs. The Chair should write to each LSP Chair seeking engagement and offering to support monitoring the impact of the LAA and Sustainable Community Strategy and 'neighbourhood level' in the rural areas through its network of membership
- e. It will be useful if members can feed into the RAF officers their experiences of service withdrawal, differentials in service levels between communities etc. Real examples are very powerful aids to support the RAF in its rural proofing mission.

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Annex A - LAAs - CRC Rural Proofing questions for local and regional rural stakeholders to ask

To what extent is your LSP *capable* of addressing rural issues, either through the research and support available to it and/or through its membership? Research by the (then) Countryside Agency, indicated that LSPs faced some particular challenges in ensuring a representative voice for rural voluntary and community sector bodies, for the parish and town council sector and for the rural private sector.

In two tier areas *part* of the local improvement agenda must be to integrate district level Sustainable Community Strategies and LSPs into the county level LAA. District level LSPs will also be an important delivery and monitoring mechanism for the LAA.. Is this happening in your LAA?

Across rural England there will continue to be a need to ensure that very local community level plans, such as parish plans and market town plans, are used to inform and influence LAAs. Is this happening in your LAA? The action groups and partnerships, and the parish and town councils that implement such community level plans, may also be a useful vehicle for delivering and/or monitoring aspects of the LAA.

To what extent are your local authorities consulting with, and being responsive to, the expressed views of rural people and groups (when they consult on their Sustainable Community Strategy targets and in preparing material for discussion of new LAAs with Government Offices)?

Is there a case for the preamble to signed LAA agreements to make reference to the consideration and reflection of cross cutting themes, including Rural, within the LAA (as appropriate) and as reflecting the content of Sustainable Community Strategies?

CLG's 'Developing the future arrangements for LAAs' report (February 2007) refers to the ability to establish neighbourhood level targets that can be used in the development of new LAA targets (paragraph 18). How will these work to ensure that proposed improvements for both urban and rural neighbourhoods are identified, delivered, reviewed and measured?

Researchers<sup>2</sup> have reflected on the experience of LPSAs and concluded that despite rural issues being high profile during the period 2000/2003, "in the low profile and arcane world of LPSAs agenda setting was heavily influenced by the technical criteria negotiated between central and local government officials". If this

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<sup>2</sup> 'Who or what sets the agenda: the case of rural issues in England's local public service agreements', Tom Entwistle and Gareth Enticott, Policy Studies 2007

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criticism has validity, how will the LAA negotiators avoid this danger this time around? How will you help to ensure that they avoid it?

How are you intending to use the urban rural definition to support the LAA process and the measurement of its delivery achievements?

Will local authority scrutiny processes help improve the effectiveness of LAAs? How will such scrutiny work? Will there be any specific guidance to help scrutiny work well? Can cross cutting issues such as Rural be integrated into such guidance?