



## Commission for Rural Communities : Business Plan 2011-12

### 1. Overview

1.1 The Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) was established to promote awareness of rural needs amongst decision-makers across and beyond Government. In June 2010 the Secretary of State announced that the CRC was to be abolished, subject to legislation and the consultation exercise required by the Public Bodies Bill. DEFRA's internal rural policy capacity was to be expanded to create a Rural Communities Policy Unit (RCPU). The first stage of the transition was completed by end of March 2011, and the CRC will operate a streamlined operation for 2011-12. The CRC's statutory functions of 'Advice, Advocacy and Watchdog' will be carried out this year by the Chairman, Dr Stuart Burgess, and Commissioners supported by a flexible small team, acting as a critical friend to DEFRA and especially the RCPU. The delivery budget for the streamlined CRC this year will be £450,000, and there will be four staff.

1.2 The Commission's activities constitute a programme of work, which will develop as the year progresses. This paper sets out the work programme as of April 2011. The CRC is required to report financial and non-financial performance to DEFRA on a quarterly basis, and any updates to the business plan will be raised then.

1.3 The business plan contains:

- A narrative describing the CRC's proposed activities during 2011-12
- Appendix 1, a table setting out the proposed activities each month, with details of which Commissioners and Officers will be involved in each workstream
- Appendix 2, a more detailed specification for the proposed project 'Young people in rural areas – review of opportunities for training and employment' This paper was approved by the Commission at its meeting on 4 May 2011.
- Appendix 3, a schedule of the Commission's budget for 2011-12

### 2. Proposed CRC activities in 2011-12

2.1 This section of the business plan sets out the rationale for each key area of activity. A more detailed breakdown of specific activities is at Appendix 1.

2.2 In previous years the Commission undertook a raft of policy-related research that was designed to inform Government and others developing and implementing policy affecting rural communities. This year, the Chair and Commissioners have agreed to retain their focus on those suffering social disadvantage and areas experiencing economic underperformance, and have identified two key projects:

*i) Young people in rural areas – review of opportunities for training and employment*

Last year's final report from the Rural Advocate, Dr Stuart Burgess, highlighted concerns about the rate of retention of young people in rural areas, and discussed the reasons why

retention might be lower than desirable for rural economies to be sustainable in the future. This project will explore further the employment and training opportunities available to young people, and will consider the extent to which changing Government policy can address their needs. A fuller specification for this project is at Appendix 2.

*Timing:* the Young People project will be complete by end of December 2011.

*How will we know the project is making a difference?*

- Our recommendations have a discernable impact on the policy of relevant Government Departments
- Relevant stakeholders commit to taking forward specific actions related to employment and training opportunities for young people in rural communities.
- Good practice methods for addressing issues related to young people's access to employment and training in rural areas are successfully shared between policy makers and/or practitioners in different geographical areas.

## **ii) Isolation**

Minister Benyon has expressed a wish for the CRC to consider the implications of isolation for rural communities, and at present the expectation is that this project will consider the availability of public services to rural communities, any social implications arising from varying levels of availability, and the effects of changing Government policy relating to public services for rural communities. CRC colleagues are developing a more detailed specification for this project for approval by the Commission at their June meeting, and with the RCPU.

*Timing:* the Isolation project will be complete by end of December 2011.

*How will we know the project is making a difference?* The CRC will seek to identify areas where Government policy is making a positive difference to rural communities. Where the CRC identifies ways in which it believes policy could be amended to make a more positive difference, it will suggest those to the Government Department concerned, working through the RCPU or through Commissioner membership of relevant committees or other bodies.

In addition the above two key projects, the Chairman identified two further priorities for 2011-12: rural economies, and the Big Society. In those areas, the following activities are planned:

## **iii) Rural Economies**

The RCPU has a team of analysts undertaking on-going analysis of the changing state of rural economies. CRC staff will engage frequently with those analysts and ensure that their findings are made known to Commissioners, including at CRC Board meetings. This will provide Commissioners with the opportunity to comment on the changing state of rural economies, and to consider whether the two key projects identified above need to take any changes in economic conditions into account.

*Timing:* on-going during the year, as new economic data emerges.

*How will we know we are making a difference?* The CRC will be looking for ways in which its interpretation of emerging economic data can impact on the two key projects this year, and on wider areas of Government activity.

## **iv) Big Society**

Previous CRC analysis has highlighted occasions where rural communities have been well placed to develop approaches to dealing with the issues they face, with Government support. Whilst pursuing the two key projects, and in other aspects of Commissioners' work, the CRC

will aim to identify examples of the Big Society working on the ground in rural communities, showing the pitfalls, the solutions and the good practice; and to provide a route to Government, other decision-making bodies, and to other rural communities.

*Timing:* on-going during the year, as CRC colleagues identify positive examples of Big Society initiatives

*How will we know we are making a difference?* We will be looking to ensure that good practice in Big Society initiatives is transferable from one community to another.

### **3. End of year report**

3.1 At the end of 2011-12, the Commission will write up a report summarising its activities, findings and recommendations during the year. The report will draw on previous CRC activities and aims to serve as a lasting legacy of understanding, relating to social and economic disadvantage facing rural communities.

*Timing:* To be complete by end of 2011-12

### **4. The role of Commissioners**

4.1 To help fulfil its advisory role, the CRC decided at its March 2011 meeting to establish six policy-orientated Reference Groups, each composed of Commissioners with expertise in the areas of policy in question. The roles of the reference groups will be:

- To provide advice to Government
- To be spokespersons for relevant rural issues
- To take forward small ad hoc projects with specific deliverables, as resources allow.

4.2 The reference groups will cover the following subjects:

- Housing and sustainable planning
- The future for the Uplands
- Rural economies and LEPs
- Access to services
- Big Society
- Young people

4.3 In addition, Commissioners will be looking to continue to ensure that their own experience of good practice can be made known to the CRC more widely. This should provide another route to ensuring that Government and other bodies are aware of successful and transferable initiatives in rural communities.

### **5. The Chairman**

5.1 Dr Stuart Burgess has brought energy, drive and passion to the post and the issues facing rural communities. As Chairman, he will:

- Lead the Commissioners, chair meetings and encourage participation and engagement in the rural agenda, making the most of every Commissioner's interests, skills and networks
- Work closely with the Chief Executive to ensure best use of limited resources
- Ensure that the Governance of the organisation is maintained
- Report to the Minister quarterly

- Promulgate the messages and work of the CRC as widely as possible

## **6. Budget**

6.1 The continuing CRC's delivery budget for 2011-12 is £450,000. This figure covers costs of the Chairman, the Commissioners, and the on-going team of staff. It does not cover any costs relating to winding-down the CRC from 2010-11, or back-office costs, and remaining costs relating to that period will be covered separately from DEFRA's resources. Appendix 3 sets out proposals for how the budget will be spent, by budget line, in 2011-12. The headline costs are:

- Young People project (c.£61,000)
- Isolation project (c. £61,000)
- Advice, Advocacy and Watchdog functions (c. £246,000)
- Other policy support (c.£37,000)
- Operating costs (c.£35,000)
- Reserve (c.£10,000)

### Appendices

Appendix 1: proposed activities by month and participant

Appendix 2: specification for the proposed project 'Young people in rural areas – review of opportunities for training and employment'

Appendix 3: Commission budget for 2011-12







## Appendix Two : Young people in rural areas – review of opportunities for training and employment

### Project specification

#### 1. Purpose of paper

- At the Commission meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2011, Commissioners identified as a priority the need to review the position of young people in rural areas, including those not in education, employment or training (NEETs), and specifically the opportunities open to them for employment and training.
- The purpose of this paper is to set an outline specification for this project.

#### 2. Recommendation

That Commissioners approve the project specification, with comments.

#### 3. Background

##### National

- Youth unemployment has been a high profile concern for national and local government for over a decade and despite policy drives and initiatives to tackle the problem, the number of young people (16-24) not in education, employment and training (NEET) has continued to rise.
- During the recession, young people were hit harder than any other group. Latest figures from the Department for Education's Research and Statistics Gateway show that at the end of 2010 there were 938,000 16-24 years olds either not in employment, education or training in England.
- Previous government policy tended to focus on those in the 16-18 age group, tackling the problem early and reducing the NEETs moving into the post-18 age-group. This policy was also part of the rationale behind raising the compulsory participation age in education from 16 to 18 by 2015.

##### Rural

- The trend towards outward migration of young people in rural areas is an on-going concern, as highlighted in last year's *Rural Advocate* report. Lack of choice, insecure work and low pay in rural areas, has meant that many young people are forced to move further afield to more urban areas to find better employment and training opportunities.
- Latest figures show of those in rural areas, 40 per cent of 16-24 year olds were either unemployed – 107,129, or economically inactive – 267,007 (*Labour Force Survey, 2009*).
- Young people make an important contribution to sustaining rural communities and the future of these communities is at risk if young people do not have sufficient access to employment and training opportunities, both in terms of getting them into work and also the sufficient services and support required to keep them in work, whether that work is within rural communities or further afield.
- It is not just a lack of employment and training opportunities that is making it difficult for young people to find jobs and remain in employment in rural areas. Even when in employment, the lack of affordable housing in rural areas is a particular issue for young people, many of whom are on low wages or in

temporary work and find it impossible to meet housing costs. This along with other factors such as poor access to broadband, growing debt and access to other services like health and transport, are major issues for young people in rural areas.

- Concerns also exist that the above issues may be compounded by the current programme of savings being made at all levels of government, and any impact that they may have on the ability of young people in rural areas to access employment and training, in particular in view of the premium attached to delivering related programmes in rural areas.

#### 4. Project definition

- The overall objective of this project is to create a picture of the employment and training related issues being faced by young people aged between 16 and 24 in rural areas, including but not exclusively those who are NEET, to understand where experiences differ from those in urban areas, and to make recommendations for policy by central Government, and at more local levels.
- We will know we are making a difference when:
  - Our recommendations have a discernable impact on the policy of relevant Government Departments
  - Relevant stakeholders commit to taking forward specific actions related to employment and training opportunities for young people in rural communities.
  - Good practice methods for addressing issues related to young people's access to employment and training in rural areas are successfully shared between policy makers and/or practitioners in different geographical areas.

#### 5. Key lines of inquiry

Early analysis of the issues outlined in section 3 has given rise to the following questions:

- How are the policies of central and sub-national Government addressing these issues?
- What are the implications and impacts of these policies for young people living in rural communities, compared to those living in urban areas? (NB we will need to separate out rural/urban effects from the effects caused by other policy or contextual changes)
- What examples of good practice can be identified, which seek to address these issues, and which might be transferable to other areas, in particular within the context of the Big Society agenda?

#### 6. Project methodology and timescales

We will address these questions by:

- i. Reviewing literature previously assimilated by the CRC on employment and training related issues facing young people in rural areas. **(May/June 2011)**
- ii. Researching new government policies and programmes, and reviewing the extent to which they have been rural proofed. **(May/June 2011)**
- iii. Generating up to date data relating to issues affecting employment and training for young people in rural communities, and making rural / urban comparisons. **(May/June 2011)**
- iv. Meeting with key stakeholders including Connexions Direct; Young People's Learning Agency; National Apprenticeship Service; Skills Funding Agency; Job Centre Plus; HE/FE providers, as well as representatives from relevant government departments, to identify and discuss key issues since 2010 General Election. **(June/July 2011)**
- v. Convening a round table meeting with key stakeholders to reflect on outcomes from the above and agree further actions. **(August/September 2011)**
- vi. Identify and carry out a number of Chairman and Commissioner led visits focussed on various elements of employment and training for young people in rural areas, including: Volunteering and Big Society; Transport; Further Education; Apprenticeships; and LEPs and the rural economy. **(July-November 2011)**
- vii. Producing a report on the above and using the findings in imaginative ways to make presentations and

recommendations to Government and local stakeholders. **(December 2011 for the report)**

## 7. Resources

The project team will consist of the following:

Project Board – Full Commission (to be an agenda item at Commission meetings)

Project Team : Young People Reference Group members – Stuart Burgess, Rachel Purchase, Sheena Asthana, Mark Shucksmith, Howard Petch, plus Jon Carling and Adam Lavis

Project Manager – Adam Lavis

Budget Holder – Jon Carling

It is intended that a project budget will be allocated following clarification of the CRC's overall budget, and how this is to be managed. The budget will be made up of the following:

- T&S – visits
- T&S – stakeholder meetings
- Commissioner time where necessary, beyond the agreed 1.5 days per month

As the project is being delivered internally, there will be no additional costs associated with research and write up.

**Commission for Rural Communities, Delivery  
Budget 2011-12**

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	<b>Total</b>
Isolation project	5391	5391	5391	5391	5391	5391	5391	5391	5391	4315	4315	4315	<b>61,464</b>
Young People project	5391	5391	5391	5391	5391	5391	5391	5391	5391	4315	4315	4315	<b>61,464</b>
Advice, Advocacy and Watchdog functions	20630	20630	20630	20630	19604	20630	20630	20630	20630	20630	20630	20630	<b>246,189</b>
Other Policy support	3105	3105	3105	3105	3105	3105	3105	3105	3105	3105	3105	3105	<b>37,254</b>
Operating Costs	2004	2462	2462	2462	7746	2204	1746	1746	2204	2187	1729	6415	35,367
Reserve													<b>10,260</b>
Total costs 2011-12													<b>451,998</b>

DEFRA has agreed that additional Grant in Aid funding will be made available to cover costs relating to back office functions and the retained team