

HEREFORDSHIRE THINKS RURAL

FINAL REPORT

**ALISON MCLEAN CONSULTING
JULY 2005**

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all those Herefordshire staff members who have contributed to this work. All have been helpful, generous and enthusiastic in giving of their time and expertise to the work. In particular my thanks go to the members of the project team whose contributions to the progress of the project and to the content of this report (as well as their good humour) have been invaluable.

Alison McLean
July 2005

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Herefordshire is above all a rural county. Its spatial geography, composition and distribution of population, the characteristics of the economy, as well as the historical and cultural context of the County are all elements that come together to produce a quintessentially 'rural' flavour to any description of either the people or places of Herefordshire.

Herefordshire Council has commissioned a project to help it develop a new approach to identifying and meeting the needs of its rural areas and their communities. The intention is to build on the Council's own best practice and that from elsewhere to achieve a more systematic and effective consideration of the rural context when designing and delivering Council services.

The terms of reference of the project identify three objectives:

- **To articulate the key characteristics of rural Herefordshire and identify specific rural needs.**
- **To establish a baseline of Herefordshire Council's current understanding of and response to specific rural issues and needs.**
- **To develop a co-ordinated and strategic approach that ensures that Council policy and delivery meets the specific needs of rural people and places in Herefordshire.**

Alison McLean (independent consultant), working with a small internal project team, led the project. The consultant gathered information from a wide variety of sources and conducted a series of interviews with a selection of Herefordshire Council staff. The analysis of this information has been used to formulate the three parts of the final report of the Herefordshire Thinks Rural project.

Part 1	Key Characteristics of rural Herefordshire
Part 2	Findings in relation to Herefordshire Council's current understanding of and response to specific rural issues and needs.
Part 3	Conclusions, Recommendations and Action Plan

Part 1 of the report draws together the key characteristics that give Herefordshire its rural feel. It is designed to summarise what we know about the rural nature of the County and to suggest how this knowledge can be extended. It will be published separately as an information document for Herefordshire Council members, staff and partners.

PART TWO - SUMMARY OF FINDINGS OF HEREFORDSHIRE COUNCIL'S CURRENT UNDERSTANDING OF AND RESPONSE TO SPECIFIC RURAL ISSUES AND NEEDS

1. Understanding and identifying rural issues and needs

- Herefordshire Council staff have a high level of understanding of the issues faced by rural communities.
- The statistical evidence base for the County is in good shape and is well used, although there is more limited information about variations within the County.
- There is some evidence of 'rural proofing' already embedded in the Council's planning and decision making processes. On the whole however, the service plans present a mixed picture when it comes to the analysis of need and particularly how this varies between rural and urban areas.
- Although there are some excellent examples of analysis of service delivery in comparison with other local authorities, the evidence of service delivery being mapped within the County is patchy.
- LPSA and Best Value targets are generally county-wide and reporting is not broken down on a geographical basis.
- Some consultations are analysed geographically, but this is not standard practice.

2. Responding to rural issues and needs - evidence of good practice

- The study found many examples of good practice in meeting the needs of the most scattered rural communities in the County.
- These examples include innovative, partnership-based initiatives, the use of mobile facilities and multi-purpose outlets, using IT and flexible working arrangements to improve the accessibility of services, and policy development work at regional and national level to strengthen the 'rural voice' in the formation of government policy.

3. Responding to rural issues and needs - barriers and gaps

- There is also a sophisticated understanding of the barriers to delivering services to the most rural areas and the gaps that result from these. These were particularly well articulated during the semi-structured interviews.
- Interviewees were clear about the impact of national and regional drivers, although they were less confident that they could do anything about these. Also, although there are examples of the Council challenging regional and national frameworks, there is not a coherent influencing policy or any process for identifying priorities or focus for influencing activity.
- Lack of resources and staff capacity were identified as the most important constraints to meeting the specific needs of rural communities. Although the overall costs of delivering services are clear, there is little evidence of the analysis of differential costs between rural and urban areas within the County.
- Attitudes of various elements of the community are seen as sometimes standing in the way of improving the quality of life in rural areas, as well as the capacity of communities to help themselves.

- Territorial attitudes within Council departments can sometimes be a block to innovative joint working and delivery. Also the pressures of a large and multi-faceted workload for many council staff can act as barriers to meeting rural needs, which can be more time consuming and yet less productive in terms of meeting County wide targets.

PART THREE - CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Herefordshire Council is well placed to be a leader in developing an effective approach to 'rural proofing' its services and so improving its understanding and response to rural needs and issues at a local level. Much is already in place, but there is more that could be done to make sure the Council has a systematic and effective approach to meeting the needs of rural communities.

Success will depend on how far "thinking rural" is embedded into the culture of the organisation. The following recommendations are a pre-requisite for ensuring that the Action Plan delivers real improvements for rural communities.

- Thinking Rural has to be 'internalised' into the thinking of staff and culture of the organisation.
- Thinking Rural has to be rewarding and to make a difference (as well as sometimes being a requirement).
- Thinking Rural has to be led at a senior management level and to be championed by members.
- Thinking Rural must be outward looking as well as inward looking. Part of the job is to challenge others to Think Rural.
- Thinking Rural means considering the interdependence between urban and rural areas.

Key Recommendations - A Framework for Action

Thinking Rural is a journey not a destination. The key recommendations arise from the findings of the study and are designed to build on the strengths of the organisation, and to take the current practice of 'rural proofing' one step further. There are five key recommendations, each of which has a number of suggested activity areas.

1. Improve the information and evidence base

- Gather and map quantitative geographical evidence to assess differential needs within County.
- Gather and map qualitative geographical evidence to assess differential needs and aspirations within the County.
- Build a geographical dimension into data collection about delivery and impact of services across the County.

2. Embed an explicit rural dimension into strategic planning, service planning, scrutiny and review

- Embed a rural dimension into corporate, directorate and service planning and wider strategic planning.
- Include rural challenge in cabinet and other decision making processes
- Build a rural dimension into the performance management framework.
- Embed a rural dimension into scrutiny and review.
- Plan responses to future rural challenges and opportunities

3. Build on and roll out best practice in terms of delivery to rural areas

- Two for the price of one - seize opportunities for collaboration and co-location
- Use all forms of delivery (including ICT) to improve access to services
- Identify and copy best practice

4. Build the capacity of staff and members to 'Think Rural'

- Nominate rural ambassadors - both members and staff
- Include specific rural elements in training and development programmes for staff and members
- Encourage innovation, creativity and collaboration in meeting the needs of rural communities
- Organise a series of events to learn about, celebrate and disseminate Herefordshire Thinks Rural

5. Influence others to 'Think Rural'

- Challenge national (and regional) government when policies and/or targets are not 'rural friendly'
- Develop an influencing strategy focussed on strengthening the rural voice at regional level

- Roll out Herefordshire Thinks Rural to Herefordshire Partnership

A detailed Action Plan has been developed to address each of these key areas of activity. It describes some quick wins and actions that can be tackled in the medium and longer term.

Recommendations for Future Work

A number of areas for future work arose from the findings of the study

1. **Roll out Herefordshire Thinks Rural to the wider partnership.** Ideas for initial partnership based activity are included in the Action Plan.
2. **Develop a partnership-based strategy for countryside and land management activity.** This would develop a single vision for the countryside in terms of the natural environment and land management and develop a framework for responding to the potentially huge changes that will result from the CAP reforms.
3. **Initiate 'futures' thinking with partners to respond to future demographic changes.** The changes that will happen over the next period, both in terms of a rapidly ageing population (including the out-migration of young people) and increasing population of migrant workers from (Eastern) Europe and elsewhere, present both opportunities and challenges. A co-ordinated approach with partners in responding to these demographic changes would help both the Council and its partners to grasp the opportunities presented by this new demography and to minimise its negative impact.

INTRODUCTION

Herefordshire is, by all definitions, a rural county. It follows naturally that people working in those organisations that serve the rural area take account of this rural context and adapt both policy and practice to meet the needs of rural communities. One could say that people working in a rural area 'rural proof' intuitively - Herefordshire Council is no exception to this.

Nevertheless there are a number of drivers that indicate that now is a good time for the Council to examine its approach to the needs of the rural areas and to make explicit how it will act to meet the needs of rural people and places in the future.

Firstly, the government's new Rural Strategy (Defra 2004) resulting from the Modernising Rural Delivery review aims to find the best mechanisms for devolving delivery even closer to rural communities. The Rural Strategy emphasises the crucial role of local authorities as community leaders responsible for ensuring local rural needs and priorities are identified and met.

Secondly, rural proofing is expected to be a standard aspect of local authority work in the future and specific references to the needs of rural communities appear in the new Key Lines of Enquiry for the Corporate Assessment (Audit Commission - CPA 2005 draft).

Thirdly, contrary to traditional perceptions, change is ever present in the countryside. However, the current changes in relation to the European funding (including the Common Agricultural Policy) and national and regional rural policy (particularly in relation to social and economic regeneration) are of such as scale and pace that the potential impact on rural areas is considerable and demands specific attention.

Fourthly the pressures for efficiency savings in the context of local government will continue. New and innovative approaches for delivering local services in rural areas need to be identified if these savings are to be achieved. The Council needs to be aware of and implementing best practice.

PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT

The purpose of this project is to help Herefordshire Council develop a new approach to identifying and meeting the needs of its rural areas and their communities. The intention is to build on best practice and to achieve a more systematic and effective consideration of the rural context when designing and delivering Council services.

Central government has made rural proofing part of its policy making process. This means that as policies and programmes are developed and implemented, Whitehall departments must:

- think about whether there will be any significant differential impacts on rural areas;
- if there are such impacts to assess what these might be;

- consider what adjustments /compensations might be made to fit rural circumstances.

Rural White Paper 2002

The Countryside Agency has also worked with central and regional government to embed rural proofing and to develop checklists to help policy makers identify rural issues. There has also been some work with unitary and district councils, which provides useful first steps when considering embedding 'rural proofing' at a local level.

The intention of the project is to build on this best practice but to take it one step further and to put in place a process that embeds 'thinking rural' into every step of the Council's decision making and review process. The terms of reference of the project identify three objectives:

- **To articulate the key characteristics of rural Herefordshire and identify specific rural needs.**
- **To establish a baseline of Herefordshire Council's current understanding of and response to specific rural issues and needs.**
- **To develop a co-ordinated and strategic approach that ensures that Council policy and delivery meets the specific needs of rural people and places in Herefordshire.**

The intention is also that this new approach to rural proofing could be rolled out to other key partner organisations or adapted as appropriate.

METHODOLOGY

The objectives of the project were addressed in the following way:

1. A desk study to identify from existing data sets the key characteristics of rural Herefordshire.
2. A study into the Herefordshire Council's current understanding and response to rural issues and needs, using information from an analysis of a selection of corporate and service plans and a series of semi-structured interviews (see Annex 1 for list of plans and interviewees).
3. The development of a series of recommendations and detailed Action Plan developed from the findings of the study and from desk research into best practice.

An internal project team with a membership drawn from across the Council has overseen the project and has worked with the independent consultant to arrive at the recommendations and the details of the Action Plan (see Annex 2 for membership of the Herefordshire Thinks Rural Project Team).

STRUCTURE OF THIS REPORT

The structure of this report is arranged to deal with each of the key objectives of the project.

Part One - is written in the form of a text for a short publication that identifies the key characteristics of rural Herefordshire and gives examples of how the new urban-rural definitions developed by Defra can be used to understand the differences between more urban and rural parts of the County. The idea is that this text will be published separately as an information document for members, staff and partners.

Part Two - details the findings of the study into Herefordshire Council's current understanding of and response to specific rural issues and needs.

Part Three - presents the conclusions and recommendations arising from the studies and has annexed to it a detailed Action Plan for implementation.

PART ONE

TEXT FOR SHORT PUBLICATION

THE EVIDENCE BASE - KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF RURAL HEREFORDSHIRE

INTRODUCTION

Herefordshire is above all a rural county. Its spatial geography, composition and distribution of population, the characteristics of the economy, as well as the historical and cultural context of the County are all elements that come together to produce a quintessentially 'rural' flavour to any description of either the people or places of Herefordshire.

This short publication draws together the key characteristics that give Herefordshire that rural feel. It is designed to summarise what we know about the rural nature of the County and to suggest how this knowledge can be extended. The more we understand about the nature of rural areas, about who lives in the countryside, about how people make their living or access services, about the difficulties and delights of rural life, the better we can design and deliver services that will make a difference to rural communities. Having strong and robust evidence about what it is like to live and work in rural areas can also help in making the case to government and others for additional resources and for government policy and guidance that takes account of the realities of rural life.

Most of the information in this publication has been drawn from existing documents. There is a list of the key sources of more detailed information at the end together with a list of useful contacts for more detailed statistical information.

HOW RURAL IS HEREFORDSHIRE?

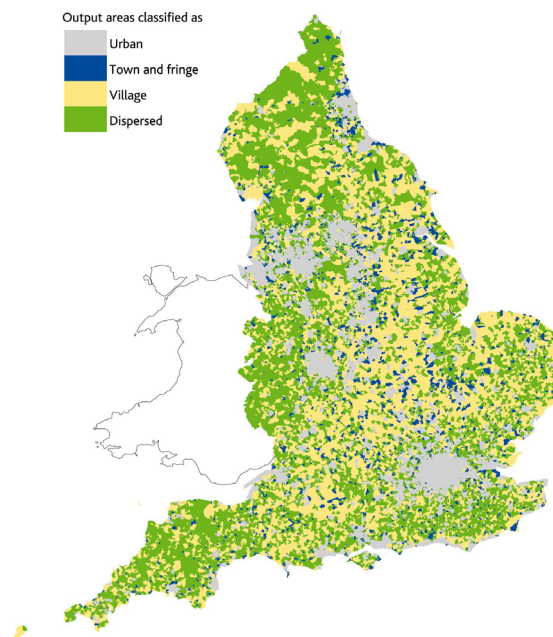
The government's Rural Strategy (2004) launched a new set of rural-urban definitions. The attached maps show these new classifications across England at output area level¹. As can be seen, the new classification has two elements:

1. Settlement Size - these are divided into one urban and three rural groups; town and fringe, village and dispersed. Map A shows clearly that Herefordshire has predominantly village and dispersed areas, with relatively few urban and town areas.
2. Sparsity - describes the context in which settlements are located. Map B shows the western edge of Herefordshire as part of just a few areas in England that are classified as 'sparse' and part of the only area that is classified as 'sparse' in the West Midlands².

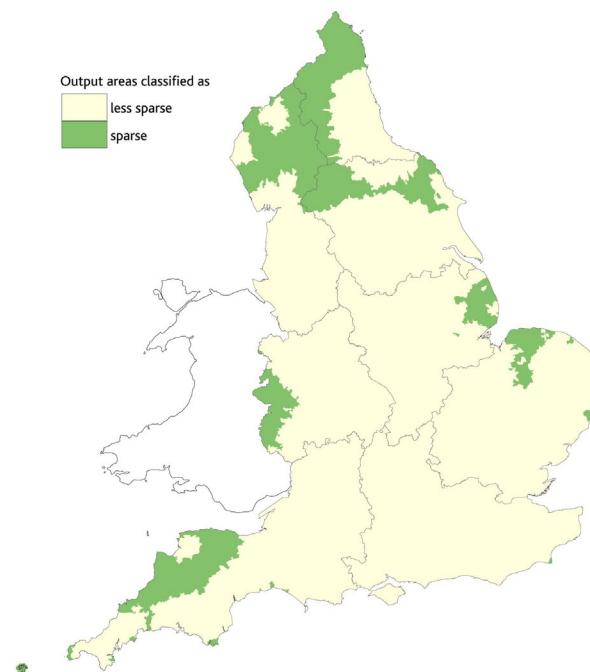
¹ The 2001 Census introduced output areas as the smallest statistical geographic area for which Census information is available. Each output area has approximately 125 households.

² A more detailed explanation of these definitions is available on the DEFRA web-site, in the Rural Strategy (2004) and in Herefordshire Council's Quarterly Economic Report August 2004

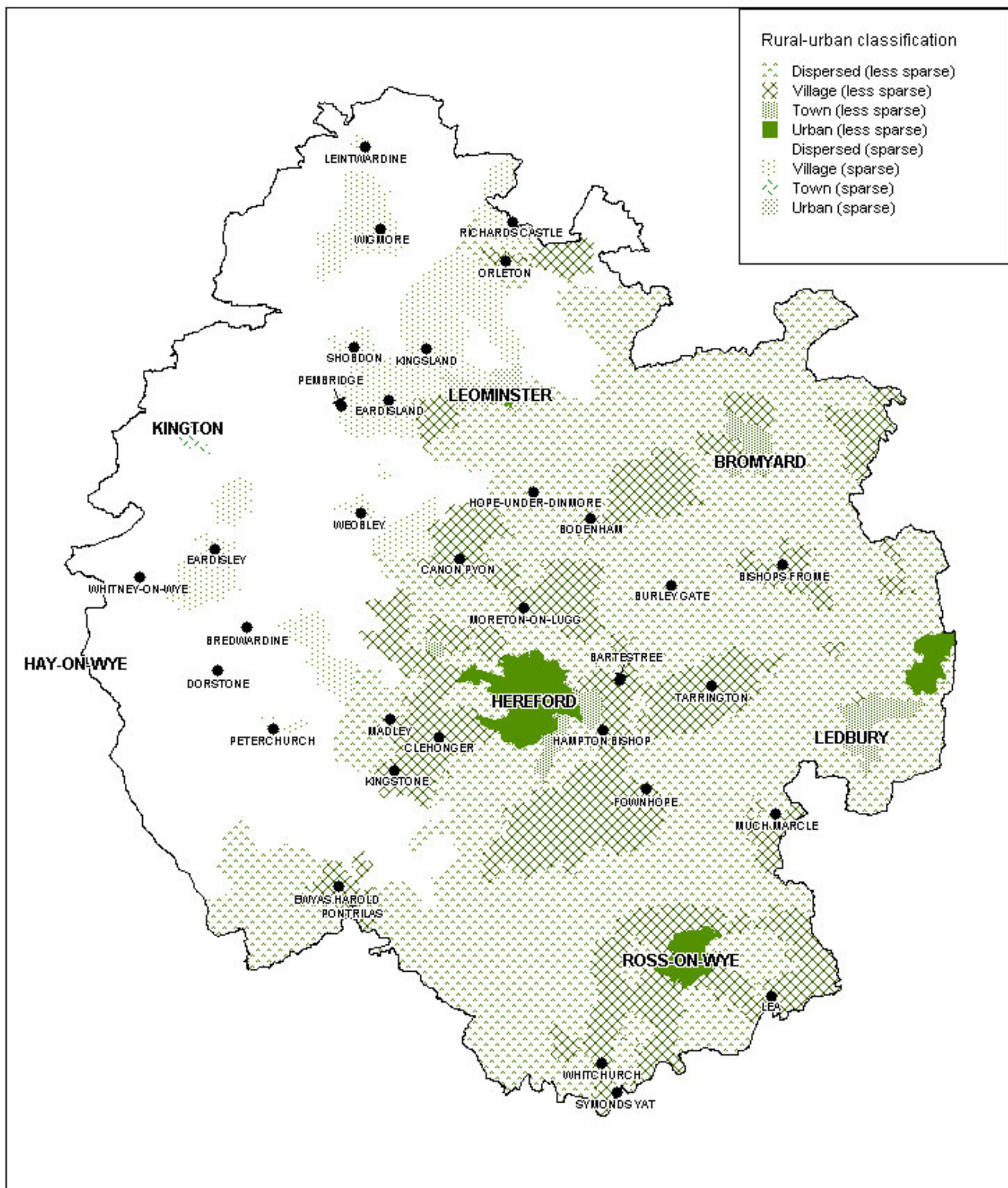
MAP A



MAP B



MAP C (below) shows the new urban-rural classifications in Herefordshire in more detail.



Rural-urban classification of Census Output Areas 2004

Scale: 1:325,000

Herefordshire Council
P.O.Box 4
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So even by national comparisons Herefordshire is one of England's most rural counties with similar characteristics to other peripheral areas in that it is sparsely populated and less well connected to services in larger towns and cities. Also it has been classified by Defra as one of England's economically 'lagging' rural areas; that is to say, it is in the worst 25% of rural districts in terms of productivity³.

The following facts about Herefordshire's people, economy and environment give a flavour of the rural characteristics of the County as a whole and give examples of how the new definitions can be used to examine the differences within the County in more detail.

HEREFORDSHIRE - THE PEOPLE

- ***A sparsely populated county***

Herefordshire is one of the most sparsely populated areas in England and Wales, with only 0.8 persons per hectare. At a County level only Northumberland and Cumbria have lower population densities.

- ***A population that is scattered***

Just under half of the population of 176,000 live outside Hereford City and the market towns. This means Herefordshire has a very scattered population compared to other rural areas, which often have large tracts of uninhabited land and higher percentages of their population living in towns or larger villages.

- ***A rapidly ageing population***

Herefordshire has a large and increasing number of people over 65 years compared to the country as a whole. The percentage of the population over 75 years is forecast to grow at such a rapid rate that it will account for nearly 11% of Herefordshire's population by 2011.

- ***Young people moving out of the County***

At the same time Herefordshire is 'losing' younger people as they move out of the County to find higher education and better jobs. Over the last five years about half of all migrants were 15-24 year olds leaving the county. Only 15% of local authority areas nationally lose a higher proportion.

- ***Not an ethnically diverse population***

Herefordshire has a very low proportion of residents from black and other minority ethnic backgrounds. The largest minority ethnic group is probably gypsies and travellers. Also seasonal agricultural workers from Europe and elsewhere come into the County under the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme for between five and six month stays. *(Need to check if SAW scheme still applies to accession states).*

- ***Poor and deteriorating access to services for rural residents***

Most of Herefordshire's rural population (outside Hereford City and the market towns) does not live within a reasonable distance of key services compared to England as a

³ Defra measures productivity in terms of earned income by those of working age adjusted for the proportion of people of working age participating in the labour force. The measure is based on people who live in the area.

whole. Rural residents live much further from banks and building societies, GP surgeries, libraries and supermarkets. The evidence suggests that the situation has deteriorated and fewer people are finding it easy to access services.

- ***Rural communities are not deprived (measured by IMD)***

Except in terms of Access to Services, rural Herefordshire is relatively less deprived when measured by the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). None of the 7 Super Output Areas in the County that are within the 25% most deprived in England are in the rural areas of the County.

- ***A lack of affordable housing***

If you compare house prices to the amount of earned income coming into households, Herefordshire has one of the worst 'affordability ratios' in the region. It is higher (worse) than the ratio for the South East region as a whole (although there are some areas within the South East with higher ratios).

- ***A healthy population***

The life expectancy and mortality for Herefordshire suggest that Herefordshire people are generally healthier than the national average. The figures for limiting long term illness are similar to the averages for England and Wales.

- ***Low levels of crime***

Herefordshire has less crime than England and Wales as a whole and crime rates have reduced steadily even though crime rates nationally have increased.

Using the new urban-rural definitions to examine differences across the County

% in various age groups (Analysis so far shows very little difference in % of older people in rural/urban areas)

% of lone pensioners, long term limited illness analysis

HEREFORDSHIRE - THE ECONOMY

- ***Agriculture is important to the local economy - but so are other sectors***

The main sectors of employment in Herefordshire are wholesale, retail and repair trade, manufacturing and health and social care. Agriculture and tourism remain important sources of employment in the County.

- ***Low levels of employment in knowledge industries***

Herefordshire has a much lower proportion of people employed in technology and knowledge based industries compared to the West Midlands region and nationally - and the numbers employed in these sectors is decreasing.

- ***Many small, surviving businesses, but generating relatively low levels of economic wealth***

Herefordshire has a large number of small businesses and businesses that start up in the County have a better chance of survival than in other parts of the country. But

Herefordshire generates relatively low levels of economic wealth compared to the region and to the UK as a whole.

- ***Low levels of unemployment, especially in rural areas***

The unemployment rate in Herefordshire remains very low overall and is particularly low in the more rural parts of the County.

- ***Longer hours for less pay***

People who work in Herefordshire earn less than those in other areas and full time workers work longer hours. Average earnings are much lower than regional and national figures. There are also more people working in part-time jobs.

- ***Farm incomes are low***

Just over a fifth of farms specialise in lowland cattle and sheep, which has by far the lowest income compared to other farm types. Also 60% of farm holdings in Herefordshire are less than 20 hectares in size.

- ***Economic inactivity is more of an issue in more remote parts of the County***

Economic inactivity among the 16-74 age group is more concentrated in the northern and western parts of the County. This may be as a result of less access to employment, learning and training or childcare.

- ***Poor communications and infrastructure***

Economic vitality is hampered by poor road and rail infrastructure and lack of access to broadband, particularly in the most remote parts of the County.

- ***A mixed picture when it comes to learning and skills***

Herefordshire students perform strongly at GCSE level and particularly well in terms of post 16 qualifications. That said, there are less people in Herefordshire in higher level occupations than nationally, and the share of the County's workforce with degree level qualifications is lower than nationally.

Using the new urban-rural definitions to examine differences across the County

% self employed - variations across the County

% with no qualifications and % with Level 4 qualifications

HEREFORDSHIRE - THE ENVIRONMENT

- ***The special quality of Herefordshire's countryside is protected by designation, but it is not always in the best condition.***

% of land with designation of SSI or AONB.

But Herefordshire is lagging behind other areas in the condition of its SSSIs

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The rivers are in very good condition</i> Compared to other areas, more of Herefordshire's river length is judged to be in good or very good condition. • <i>More landowners have Countryside Stewardship agreements</i> Herefordshire has a quarter of all the Countryside Stewardship agreements in the West Midlands. 3% of the land in Herefordshire is covered by these agreements. • <i>Herefordshire has a special build and historic environment</i> There are nearly 6000 entries on the listed buildings register in Herefordshire. There are 262 Scheduled Ancient Monuments, 63 conservation areas and 19 registered parks and gardens. • <i>More household waste is recycled</i> Herefordshire recycles more household waste than in the past and this compares well with regional and national figures. • <i>There is more traffic on the roads, particularly rural roads</i> Herefordshire aims to restrict the growth of traffic on the roads to 1% per year, but this has been exceeded for the last two years on the rural roads in the County. • <i>Herefordshire roads are getting safer</i> The number of people killed or seriously injured on Herefordshire roads has continued to decrease in the last 2 years and is falling faster than the average for the UK. • <i>There is less opportunity for rural residents to travel by bus</i> The rural bus service is shrinking both in terms of the extent of the service and the frequency of buses. This places increased demands on the Community Transport schemes, whose capacity is constrained by the number of volunteers they are able to recruit.
Using the new urban-rural definitions to examine differences across the County
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>% of employment in agriculture, fishing and forestry</i>

CONTACTS AND SOURCES OF INFORMATION

More details about the information contained in this publication can be found in the following key documents

- The State of Herefordshire Report - Monitoring report 4 2003-2004
- Herefordshire Economic Assessment 2005-2007
- Audit of Crime, Disorder and Drugs within Herefordshire 2004

For more information and advice about how to gather and use evidence about rural Herefordshire the first point of contact should be:

Madeleine Spinks, Herefordshire Partnership Research Officer

Herefordshire Council Research Team
PO Box 4
Plough Lane
Hereford
HR4 0XH

Tel:01432 261944

E-mail researchteam@herefordshire.gov.uk

PART TWO - STUDY FINDINGS

HEREFORDSHIRE COUNCIL'S CURRENT UNDERSTANDING OF AND RESPONSE TO SPECIFIC RURAL ISSUES AND NEEDS.

INTRODUCTION

This second part of the report presents and analyses the findings from the desk study and the semi-structured interviews. In particular it reports on Herefordshire Council's current level of understanding and response to rural needs, identifying both good practice and gaps. This is the part of the report that assesses how much Herefordshire Council 'thinks rural' now.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Understanding and identifying rural issues and needs

- Herefordshire Council staff have a high level of understanding of the issues faced by rural communities.
- The statistical evidence base for the County is in good shape and is well used, although there is more limited information about variations within the County.
- There is some evidence of 'rural proofing' already embedded in the Council's planning and decision making processes. On the whole however, the service plans present a mixed picture when it comes to the analysis of need and particularly how this varies between rural and urban areas.
- Although there are some excellent examples of analysis of service delivery in comparison with other local authorities, the evidence of service delivery being mapped within the County is patchy.
- LPSA and Best Value targets are generally county-wide and reporting is not broken down on a geographical basis.
- Some consultations are analysed geographically, but this is not standard practice.

Responding to rural issues and needs - evidence of good practice

- The study found many examples of good practice in meeting the needs of the most scattered rural communities in the County.
- These examples include innovative, partnership-based initiatives, the use of mobile facilities and multi-purpose outlets, using IT and flexible working arrangements to improve the accessibility of services, and policy development work at regional and national level to strengthen the 'rural voice' in the formation of government policy.

Responding to rural issues and needs - barriers and gaps

- There is also a sophisticated understanding of the barriers to delivering services to the most rural areas and the gaps that result from these. These were particularly well articulated during the semi-structured interviews.
- Interviewees were clear about the impact of national and regional drivers, although they were less confident that they could do anything about these. Also, although there are examples of the Council challenging regional and national frameworks, there is not a coherent influencing policy or any process for identifying priorities or focus for influencing activity.
- Lack of resources and staff capacity were identified as the most important constraints to meeting the specific needs of rural communities. Although the overall costs of delivering services are clear, there is little evidence of the analysis of differential costs between rural and urban areas within the County.
- Attitudes of various elements of the community are seen as sometimes standing in the way of improving the quality of life in rural areas, as well as the capacity of communities to help themselves.
- Territorial attitudes within Council departments can sometimes be a block to innovative joint working and delivery. Also the pressures of a large and multi-faceted workload for many council staff can act as barriers to meeting rural needs, which can be more time consuming and yet less productive in terms of meeting County wide targets.

UNDERSTANDING AND IDENTIFYING RURAL ISSUES AND NEEDS

1. Staff analysis of rural issues and needs

Both the examination of the service plans and the discussions with staff reveal a high level of awareness of the issues faced by rural communities, the sorts of responses that are most likely to meet rural needs and the barriers to implementing these. This understanding is built upon many years experience of working (and often living) in a rural area, as well as a strong commitment to delivering quality services to everyone, irrespective of location.

"We want to remove all barriers - physical, cultural, financial and perceptual - so that everyone in Herefordshire finds it easy to use the Library service"

Library Strategy for Herefordshire 2005-2009

Interviewees were able to articulate both general issues facing the rural communities of Herefordshire and those that have a particular significance for their service area. The issues that were highlighted chime closely with the issues that emerge from the data analysis in Part One of this report. The list below summarises the key issues raised most often in the semi-structured interviews.

- Accessibility of services, including transport infrastructure and cost, and depletion of village based services.

- A rapidly ageing population and the corresponding out-migration of younger people, and the significant impact this will have on the delivery of services as well as social and economic vitality.
- Sparsity of population and issues of 'critical mass'.
- Low wages and economic uncertainty.
- Large numbers of SME's and micro businesses and a high proportion of self-employed people (not necessarily indicating economic vitality).
- Lack of affordable housing.
- Rapid changes in the agricultural economy including the impact of CAP reforms and increasing number of migrant workers.
- Social exclusion caused by poverty and rural isolation.
- The costs of delivering services to the most scattered communities.

The interviewees also displayed a good understanding of the interdependence between city, market towns and rural areas especially when it comes to designing the delivery of services to more outlying rural areas. The roles of the market towns are seen as crucial in this respect - "how many people never travel to one of the six centres?"

In most instances interviewees felt that they have a good understanding of the issues facing rural communities although they could not always identify a specific evidence base, nor necessarily were they always confident that needs were being met. They also had a strong sense of the positive aspects of living in a rural area, including strong and active communities, good schools, access to fresh local food and an outstanding natural environment.

2. The statistical evidence base

The statistical evidence base for the County as a whole is in good shape. The State of Herefordshire report, the Economic Assessment, Landscape Character Assessment and many of the partnership-based strategic documents analyse the state of the County particularly in relation to its near neighbours, the region and the nation. In addition the Herefordshire Council research unit together with the Social Inclusion Ambition Group of the Herefordshire Partnership have published a short leaflet entitled "Social Exclusion in Rural Herefordshire", which includes useful data and evidence that indicates the type and level of social exclusion in rural Herefordshire. There is however, far less information about the differences within the county although some analysis of the Index of Multiple Deprivation, of census data (e.g. age groups) and employment data has been completed.

Data on the variation of needs within the County is sometimes difficult to access especially when the evidence base is only available at County level. Also, different definitions are used to describe 'rural' within the County. Mostly it is taken to mean 'everything outside Hereford City and the market towns'. In relation to transport policy however, it means everything outside Hereford City. Despite these problems of definition it is possible to use the data that is available at ward and now at output/super output area level to develop a more sensitive and spatially aware analysis of information. The next step in terms of understanding specific rural issues would be to use this information to drill down below county level and in this way analyse the variation across the County.

The Council has made considerable investment into various types of consultation, and customer surveys. Also progress has been made on co-ordinating and quality checking consultations across the County. There are examples of responses being analysed by postcode and of using rural contacts (parish councils and particularly the parish planning process) to assess the needs and aspirations of the most rural communities. Analysis of responses to draw out differences between various parts of the County however is not done on a consistent basis. It would be relatively easy and inexpensive to do this as long as the information in relation to the location of people participating in the consultation was collected along with the responses. In the case of the User Satisfaction Survey (2004) for example, since respondents postcodes are known, further analysis could be made of the differences of perceptions of residents in rural and urban areas.

The LPSA targets are countywide (apart from one focused on anti-social behaviour in Hereford City) along with most Best Value Performance Indicators. There is the possibility for some of these to inadvertently disadvantage rural areas by concentrating effort in centres of population in order to achieve specified targets. Information in relation to these targets is not currently broken down geographically as a matter of course (although individual departments may hold this information). It would probably be relatively easy in most cases to analyse the differences across the county (e.g. satisfaction with Home Care Services). The development of specifically rural performance indicators could be a longer term goal.

3. Consideration of rural needs in Herefordshire Council planning and decision making processes

At the highest strategic level the recognition of the importance of the interdependence of town and countryside as well as the specific needs of different communities is clearly flagged. The Herefordshire Plan identifies 'geographic communities' as a 'golden thread', or cross-cutting theme running through all the ambitions of the Plan. Herefordshire Council's corporate plan identifies the sparsity of the population as a 'key characteristic' of the County and highlights the impact of this on the delivery of Council services, particularly in terms of the extra costs of delivery. Also the Corporate plan includes 'geographic location' in its diversity and equality priority and this is translated into the questions raised in the diversity impact assessment documentation. In many of the impact assessments that have been carried out to date access to services (in terms of location) has been flagged up as an issue. The inclusion of 'geographic location' in the Council's approach to embedding issues of diversity into its decision making process is a good start to embedding a "thinking rural" approach. The evidence that this has been a driver for identifying or responding to specific rural needs is as yet unclear.

There are some examples of Council services using a systematic and comprehensive approach to the analysis of needs across the county and from there the development of specific responses depending on both the type of need revealed and the logistics of implementation. The programme of housing needs surveys, for example, is designed to collect data on housing need across the County and to develop a strategic response that takes account of the variations between City, market town and rural locations.

Children's Services not only know the home address and school of every child, they have also mapped all early years provision and used this information to devise alternative provision (networks of childminders) in areas where low numbers make nursery provision unsustainable. The recently completed Economic Development Strategy also makes clear distinctions between the characteristics of various parts of the County, identifying the Rural Heartland as a specific spatial type in terms of economic development. This analysis then enables the strategic approach to 'focus distinctive policy measures on the difficulties and opportunities faced by remoter rural areas'.

Also, where services are of a statutory nature and focussed on the needs of individuals, both the interviews and the service plans reflect a general assumption that the same quality and level of service is available to those individuals irrespective of where they live. This is most notably true for Children Services, particularly in respect of education, services for looked after children and child protection. Evidence of this approach is also seen in Adult Services through the processes of agreeing individual care plans supporting people to live independently, and in services which have County-wide targets for responding to individual requests (e.g. Revenues and Benefits service).

In general however, the service plans present a mixed picture when it comes to the analysis of and response to rural issues. In many instances the service plans do not include an assessment of need nor specifically whether these vary across the County, although these may exist in other strategic documents. Most surprisingly perhaps service plans do not always make it clear that they are delivering a service in a rural area. In some instances the plans reflect back government priorities, but are not explicit about how the rural context shapes the nature of the delivery. Although in other instances the rural nature of the county is a clear driver for shaping the plans for the service (the Library Service for example).

There are some excellent examples of analysis of service delivery in comparison to other local authorities, for example the comparison of library services with other authorities with a similar low population density and the work done in benchmarking waste management. There is also evidence of geographical analysis of service delivery for universal services such as education. The study found only patchy evidence however, that information about service delivery or its impact is mapped across the County, although a number of interviewees said that it would not be too difficult to collect this information. Information about the take up of housing and Council Tax benefits for example, is not currently mapped. In general Geographic Information Systems (GIS) offers a huge opportunity, as yet largely untapped, to track spatial variations across the County and to improve the understanding of both the needs of rural communities and the level and impact of service provision. In addition the requirement from the Department of Transport to work with partners on "Accessibility Planning" includes guidance to produce detailed mapping of services across the County (in the first instance, retail, health services and centres of employment).

The issue of the 'rural premium' is highlighted in the Corporate Plan, and comparable costs for individual services for the County as a whole are collected. Also there are very clear messages from Council staff that the costs of delivering services in rural

areas are a major constraint on the Council's ability to respond to the needs of rural communities (see 'Barriers and Gaps' below). However the study suggests that very little specific information about the differential costs of delivering individual Council services in different parts of the County is currently collected.

Although members almost certainly consider rural issues during the decision-making and review processes, there does not appear to be any triggers in the procedures or protocols to encourage this. For example, the Cabinet report template does not ask if the decision will have a differential impact across the County (although neither does it include a diversity check nor a sustainable development check). Also while almost all reviews will have some impact on the rural areas of the County, and many will have a particular resonance for rural areas (e.g. the recent review into polytunnels), the Council processes for scrutiny and review do not specifically require a check on impacts in rural areas.

RESPONDING TO RURAL NEEDS - EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

1. Use of satellite offices, multi-use centres, Info shops to improved accessibility

The study found many examples of Herefordshire Council using a variety of locations for delivering services to more outlying areas. Schools, libraries, village halls, churches, shops and pubs are all used as locations for delivering services to more scattered communities. The use of the market towns as service centres or as part of a 'hub and spoke' model of delivery is also crucial in this respect. Herefordshire's geography is helpful here. The market towns are well spaced around the County and within striking distance of the City, which lies at its heart. Only the Golden Valley area was highlighted in the interviews as an area that did not have an obvious market town to act as a service centre.

The development of the Info shops in the market towns is a key Council strategy for delivering services across a scattered community. The customer-focussed, partnership-based approach to delivering a variety of services from one location has clear benefits both for the Council (and its partners) in terms of costs of delivery and for the customers in terms of ease of access. The quality of the service is also likely to be better when offices are staffed by people who live locally and who know the area and its community well, as is the case with the Info shops. There is however potential to deliver a wider variety of services from the info-shops, whether Council services or those delivered by other agencies.

CASE STUDY

CO-LOCATION OF SERVICES

The Bromyard Centre was opened in January 2004 as a one-stop community facility serving the north eastern sector of Herefordshire. The vision for the centre was to co-locate a wide range of services and is a product of the Herefordshire Council's

strategy to provide a quality range of services in its market towns. The services currently delivered from the Bromyard Centre include :

- *The Herefordshire Library Service.*
- *The Info in Herefordshire council information service.*
- *Halo Leisure (a leisure trust delivering leisure services on behalf of the council).*
- *The Hereford Youth Service.*
- *The Herefordshire Tourist Information service.*

Other partners that deliver services in the Centre include CAB, Help the Aged and the Credit Union.

This one stop shop approach benefits the customers because they can access a variety of services more easily and makes efficiency savings through the co-location of services.

2. Use of IT to improve accessibility

The integration of the Info shops with the web-based information system of the Council also enhances the ability of the Council to respond consistently to customer queries and requests, from wherever in the County they originate. Customers are able to pay bills, search the library catalogue and order books, fill out a benefit claim form, apply for a grant, ask a question, make a complaint, respond to a consultation - all online. There are also some examples of education and training being delivered by video-link ('A' level classes in rural VI forms linked to Hereford VI Form College). As access to broadband spreads across the county, the possibility of using these systems of a way of overcoming the constraints of geographic distance increases. There are however, some important caveats. To begin with, access to broadband in the most remote parts of the county remains uncertain. In addition, all the research shows that it is older people who find it more difficult to use IT to access services, and there are more older people living in the rural areas than the towns. The evidence also suggests that those most in need are the ones least likely to benefit from increased access to the Internet because of low income and low skills. This is likely to be just as true in rural areas as in urban.

Insert case study of use of IT to increase access to services - Case study awaited from Julie Holmes

3. Mobile provision - moving the service to the people and the people to the service

The use of mobile services, especially mobile libraries, has long been a traditional approach for improving access to services in rural areas. There are some interesting other examples of this approach being used in the County, including the Museum on the Move, the Youth bus and the Sure Start mobile unit. There are also some examples of people being transported to services, for example the transport of young people to youth clubs, children to playgroups and elderly people to day centres, where this is more suitable and sustainable. Mobile units can be expensive to maintain especially when they are delivering a single service. There is good evidence that

innovative approaches to combining the delivery of a number of services have been developed, for example combining the Council's benefit advice with pensions advice on the pensions service mobile unit.

CASE STUDY

TWO FOR THE PRICE OF ONE - AND ON THE MOVE

Herefordshire Council and the local Pensions Service have been working in partnership to ensure that people in rural areas have access to their services.

The Pensions Service has a mobile unit nicknamed 'Muriel' that is funded by the Department for Works and Pensions and visits the rural areas across the County on a set timetable each week. The unit's locations are publicised in Herefordshire Council Info Shops and Herefordshire Matters magazine. Pension service staff on the unit will help claimants fill out forms and answer queries for both pension and for Housing and Council Tax benefits.

4. Gaining collaborative advantage - combining services internally and externally

The use of collaborative working between Council departments and with other agencies is a distinctive feature of Herefordshire Council's approach to delivery in rural areas. Herefordshire has a well deserved reputation for strong partnership working and it is clear that the driver for this has in many cases been the necessity to look for ways of reducing the cost and increasing the effectiveness of delivering services to a scattered population. The delivery of services in the most scattered communities let alone efficiencies of scale are often only possible by collaborating with other providers.

"On our own we can deliver hardly anything" Interviewee

Some examples of this collaboration are well planned, on a large scale and well documented; the collaboration between schools in the Golden Valley for example. Others are less comprehensive in scale, but nonetheless well established and of an ongoing nature, for example the co-location of other advice services (CAB, Age Concern, Job Centre+ etc.) in the Info shops and the work with Parish Councils on identifying exception sites for affordable housing in rural areas. There are also some interesting examples of a more pragmatic approach being taken. For example the home care workers and district nurses swapping jobs, depending who was due to visit; home care workers will administer eye drops following an operation to save the district nurse a separate visit.

There are many examples of collaboration with the voluntary sector; community car schemes and the Rural Sure Start scheme as well as all manner of personal services delivered under service level agreements by the voluntary sector organisations

involved in the Community Care Alliance, to name but a few. Of course volunteer based services are not targeted solely on rural communities, but are arguably even more essential in areas of low population density where public services are constrained by the costs of delivery.

CASE STUDY

COLLABORATION ACROSS SECTORS

Herefordshire's Out and About Rural Transport Scheme assists people with mental and physical disabilities to access support, educational facilities and other local services. The project is delivered by Herefordshire MIND, receives funding from Advantage West Midlands and Herefordshire Primary Care Trust and was developed with the support of Herefordshire Rural Transport Partnership and Herefordshire Council.

The project makes a real difference to the lives of its clients. It provides a Transport Information and Brokerage Service and a support worker helps clients to develop their own personalised travel plan helping them to build the confidence to travel independently. A specialist transport service also currently has 180 regular users and provides over 600 passenger journeys throughout the County each month.

5. Staffing, flexible working arrangements

Interviewees were enthusiastic about flexible working arrangements where these were available. In a rural county such as Herefordshire the ability to work at home was seen as particularly beneficial. It provides benefits for the individual in terms of reducing the pressures of commuting to work every day, to the services, in terms of increasing productivity and to the environment, in terms of reducing car use. In some services (for example home care) a greater number of part time workers are used to gain greater coverage of the service and to reduce travelling times between appointments. Flexible employment also allows for more flexible opening times for Council offices. The new centre in Bromyard for example (see case study above), is now open well outside usual office opening hours.

6 Influencing others - cross boundary working, attracting additional resources to meet the needs of rural areas.

Herefordshire Council has a good track record in attracting funding. Inspections and peer reviews have indicated that it 'punches above its weight' when it comes to attracting external resources. Much of the context of the case made for this additional funding has been centred around the rural nature of the county and the particular difficulties this causes in terms of social and economic development as well as in terms of the costs of delivering public services. Herefordshire has been the subject of a series of 'rural' designations. It has been a Rural Priority Area and an Objective 5b area and is now part of the West Midlands Objective 2 area and AWM's Rural Regeneration Zone and it has a LEADER+ programme, all of which have brought

funding targeted specifically on rural issues. In addition the Council has bid successfully from central government funding for investment into transport improvements (for example the rural low-floor bus project and the re-building of the bridge at Bridge Sollers).

The study showed evidence of Council staff being actively involved in both regional and national policy debates. They are contributing to forums, consultations and events, trying to raise the profile and understanding of rural issues and joining forces with other rural 'champions' where there is a clear advantage to do so. The Strategic Housing Service, for example, is seeking a shared approach with Shropshire in order to influence the next iteration of the Regional Housing Strategy with the specific aim of ensuring that the strategy considers rural housing needs.

RESPONDING TO RURAL NEEDS - BARRIERS AND GAPS

Both the interviews and the examination of the service plans were used to explore the barriers to responding to the needs of rural areas and to identify gaps. The following themes emerged from this analysis.

1. National and Regional drivers

National or regional policy frameworks are perceived as not always 'rural friendly', particularly where the Index of Deprivation is used to either design or fund particular government programmes.

"National guidance in relation to planning for housing is poor on rural areas"? - Interviewee

"Government constraints bear disproportionately on rural areas" Corporate Plan

"Children's Centres are essentially an urban model" Interviewee, in relation to original government guidance.

"Government gives us capital, but really we need revenue to improve transport in rural areas" - Interviewee

As well as the more obviously urban focused targets of 'within pram pushing distance' (in relation to Sure Start facilities) and 'within 2 miles of a static library' (subsequently amended to include mobile library stops), interviewees quoted many examples of an urban bias when it comes to the details of government policy and guidance. The new 14-19 curriculum for example is constructed around the needs of the individual student, using different providers to meet these individual needs, especially in relation to non-vocational learning. The possibilities of doing this in a rural area are clearly limited, both by the distances between providers and the choice of provision.

Where need is defined by statutory requirement, this does not always fit well with the local rural context. The national standard for home care 'Fair Access to Care' does not

consider shopping or lighting fires as 'critical or essential services' for someone in receipt of home care. In rural areas an open fire is often the only form of heating and access to shops is clearly more problematic for housebound and older people.

Also government regulations can have a disproportionate impact in rural areas. Herefordshire has a large number of SMEs and micro-businesses, which lack the capacity to deal with regulation or respond to bureaucratic demands.

In addition 'silo' national and regional financial systems can discourage collaborative provision. In adult learning for example, it is difficult for training providers to join forces when the trainees must 'belong' to a single organisation to attract funding from the Learning and Skills Council. Also in some cases (e.g. Housing Capital Funding) there is increasing competition with urban areas for limited cash.

Finally government targets and indicators are often set and measured at a County level, including LPSA targets. This may encourage effort to be concentrated on centres of population where reaching the target will be that much easier (e.g. % of private dwellings made fit or % improvement in energy efficiency; % of young people participating/contacted by Community Youth Services; % of household waste recycled).

Although interviewees were well able to articulate the national and regional drivers that constrained their ability to respond to the needs of rural communities, they were not always clear about the routes through which they could raise these issues. When they did highlight these difficulties with the relevant government departments they were often not clear whether they had any impact on regional or national government thinking or indeed any chance of making an impact. The difficulties of making the 'rural voice' heard together with the day-to-day demands of delivering a service could mean that opportunities for highlighting the difficulties of operating in a rural context are being lost.

2. Lack of resources. Higher costs combined with a low population base.

The combination of higher costs related to the sparsity of population and less resources associated with having a small population base is the single most important barrier to responding to rural needs identified by the interviewees.

This "double whammy" has an impact on almost every Council Service. Libraries have an income based on the number of people in the County, yet the price of books is the same however many people are served. Small rural sixth forms struggle to offer a wide choice of 'A' level subjects, where the finance for teaching staff is based on the number of students. Transport budgets for almost every service are high. This applies not just to the more obviously large costs of maintaining the extensive road system and bussing (and sometimes taxiing) children to and from school and college every day (although a logistics programme has been introduced to co-ordinate special transport to minimise costs). The costs of all manner of home visits, site visits, training sessions and meetings are perceived to be high both in terms of travel costs and staff time taken to travel to venues, whether inside the county or to regional centres, although figures for this are not collected.

A 'sparsity' allowance is factored into mainstream funding to Local Authorities, although they have long argued that this does not meet the added costs of delivering services to a scattered population. Also sometimes government funding is targeted particularly at rural circumstances (e.g. the rural bus subsidy). On the other hand there are some external funding regimes that do not include a 'rural premium'. In these cases too increased costs and the lack of a 'critical mass' can threaten the sustainability of provision. Nurseries, adult education, training sessions for foster carers, advice to SMEs (particularly farmers), investment in public rights of way, were all quoted by interviewees as vulnerable or inadequate to meet rural needs.

"We don't deliver to rural areas as much as to other communities because we can't afford to. We have limited resources, we can use them more effectively in urban areas" - Interviewee in relation to delivery of adult and community learning.

"It is not just the sparsity of the population, it is the fact that the population is so scattered. The current bus network is very limited in the rural areas because of the low demand that results from this settlement pattern." - Interviewee

This lack of critical mass can also hamper the ability of services to respond to changing needs. Where numbers are small, small changes can have a disproportionate effect on the quality of services. If pupil numbers fall below a certain number then the school will be subject to review; but also if one member of staff changes, or if there are two families who move into the village with children who do not speak English, or if the only male teacher moves on - these changes can have a profound effect on the quality of the education that is available to the children.

Resources other than finances are also often more constrained in rural areas. There is a lack of development land available for housing. Also there is a perception that less staff resources results in heavier workloads for many Council staff both at managerial level and at the front line.

There are also difficulties of consulting meaningfully with the most isolated rural communities who are literally in the 'hard to reach' group when it comes to assessing both needs and aspirations. At the same time delivering services to both travellers and migrant workers is restricted both by costs and by the logistical difficulties of meeting the needs of transient populations.

2. Tension between a specialising and a multi-functional approach.

One of the more surprising themes that arose during the interviews was the tension between a general (national) trend to have specialist provision and the need in a rural context to be able to deliver a number of services simultaneously, and therefore the value of multi-skilled, more generalist staff. Adult services need specialists in dementia, reablement and palliative care, but when it comes to delivering home care to older people in remote rural areas, what is called for is a generalist that can meet a variety of needs at one visit.

"The specialisms within Environmental Health and Trading Standards tend to reflect urban issues. They put a constraint on thinking holistically" - Interviewee

Having less of everything means that each one has to offer more, whether it is a trading standards officer, a teacher, a home care worker, a library, an information centre or an 'extended' school. Multi-skilled staff and multi-purpose centres are seen as an essential element to working in a rural area, but not only does this create its own complexity in terms of training and implementation, also it does not always sit comfortably with external pressures to specialise nor with the hierarchical structures of a Local Authority setting.

3. Attitudes - both external and internal

Tensions within rural communities are seen, at times, to hinder improvements to the quality of life in rural areas.

"People tend to think that rural communities are happy, but tensions and disputes can be persistent and pernicious" - Interviewee

Tensions between 'in-comers' and the indigenous population, between village hall committees and youth clubs, between developers and the parish councils were all quoted as barriers to addressing the needs of rural areas. In particular, where development land is in short supply landowners will hold out for the greater gains from planning permission for housing for the open market, rather than release land for schools or affordable housing. In more general terms there was a perception among some interviewees that the cohesiveness of village life has changed, that people are less connected to the place where they live and that therefore geographic communities are less able to meet their own needs, although the evidence of extensive involvement in Parish Planning activity in the County belies this impression.

There are also internal, organisational tensions that can hinder the Council's ability to address rural needs. Despite the many examples of good practice in relation to collaborative working, territorial attitudes within Council departments are seen sometimes be a block to innovative joint working and delivery. There is a perception that managers can be reluctant to 'let go' of services especially if they think that it might affect staffing levels in their department.

A number of interviewees felt that there is still more that could be done by investing in and encouraging innovative, collaborative approaches both between Council departments and with partners.

RESPONDING TO RURAL NEEDS - FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

1. A more strategic approach to the Countryside and Land Management

By and large the strategic documents around which the vision for the future of the County is based, including the Herefordshire Plan and its various sub-strategies provide a strong and clear decision making framework for the Council. However, there was one area that was highlighted as in need of a more coherent approach, which has a particular relevance for this study. Different Council departments have responsibilities for landscape, commons, open spaces and parks, small-holdings, conservation and bio-diversity, footpaths and access to the countryside. There does not appear to be clarity about how these work together towards a single vision for the countryside within the Council or with partners. The scope of this study did not include a remit to look at this area of activity in any depth and further work would be needed to assess the accuracy of this perception.

The Council is currently reviewing its approach to this area of work and developing proposals to iron out the overlaps within the Council around 'countryside' services. However, it would be well worth taking a broader view and developing a joint strategy with partners, including representatives of landowners and local and regional environmental and countryside bodies. The establishment of Natural England as a new integrated agency responsible of land management, countryside access and the natural environment provides the ideal context to look more broadly at this area of activity.

2. Future Opportunities and Challenges

Although the study did not look particularly at future challenges and opportunities a number of issues that will impact on rural areas were raised during the interviews that may be worthy of further work. Relatively small changes can have disproportional impacts on rural communities (for example the sale of council houses in a village or the loss of a single large employer in a market town) and there are some aspects of life in rural areas that are changing very rapidly. A pro-active approach to preparing for these changes can help harness the benefits of change and reduce the negative effects and it is here that public bodies need to focus their attention

2.1 *The reform of the Common Agricultural Policy* - is likely to have a profound impact not only on the economic viability of many farms, but on the social fabric of rural communities and on the environment in the countryside. Further major changes can be expected over the next ten-year period. Some of these changes may be for the good, but the effects of rapid change need to be managed if the environmental quality and the prosperity of the countryside are to be maintained and improved. Many organisations at national, regional and local level will be concerned with managing this change. The Council will need to consider what role it should play.

2.2 *Demographic changes, a rapidly increasing older population* -

The rate of increase in the numbers of people over 65 years, and particularly people over 80 yrs. is likely to be very rapid in Herefordshire and this will have particular

impacts in smaller and more scattered communities. There will be important implications for the delivery of adult and community services, although there will also be opportunities in terms of increased volunteering. Also older people (over 65 yrs.) are likely to be an increasingly essential element of the workforce and it will be important to ensure that they have up to date skills.

The corresponding decrease in the numbers of younger people as they continue to leave the County in pursuit of higher education and better paid jobs will also impact on Council services as well as on the social and economic vitality of the County.

2.3 Increasing numbers of migrant workers -

There are increasing numbers of migrant workers, especially from (Eastern) Europe, who are coming to the County to meet the labour and skills gaps in the local economy. Many come on a temporary basis to undertake seasonal work in agriculture, while others are moving permanently. Again this trend is likely to bring both benefits and difficulties. This flow of labour is essential for the local economy and the opportunities of increasing diversity in terms of economic and cultural vibrancy can be grasped. On the other hand demands on some public services are likely to increase or require a different response (e.g. translation of material, access to Internet services, access to public transport).

PART THREE - CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

IMPROVING HEREFORDSHIRE COUNCIL'S UNDERSTANDING AND RESPONSE TO RURAL NEEDS AND ISSUES.

INTRODUCTION

Herefordshire Council is well placed to be a leader in developing an effective approach to 'rural proofing' its services and so improving its understanding and response to rural needs and issues. Council staff have a high level of awareness of the issues faced by rural communities, the sorts of responses that are most likely to meet rural needs and the barriers to implementing these. There is not however a systematic approach to embedding 'thinking rural' into the planning, implementation and review cycle, nor into organisational and individual development plans. This is unsurprising, as there are relatively few Local Authorities that have started to develop anything more than the checklist approach originally developed by the Countryside Agency.

There has been some interesting work done by the Countryside Agency, the LGA and the University of Birmingham among others on developing more sophisticated approaches to rural proofing at a local level. However this is a relatively new sport and the rules of the game are still being puzzled over. The recommendations below arise from both the findings of the study and the desk research into best practice elsewhere.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE GENERAL APPROACH

As with any improvement programme success will depend not only on having the capacity and systems in place but also on how far "thinking rural" is embedded into the culture of the organisation. The following recommendations are a pre-requisite for ensuring that the more detailed action plan achieves the improvements it is designed to deliver.

- Thinking Rural has to be 'internalised' into the thinking of staff and culture of the organisation.
- Thinking Rural has to be rewarding and to make a difference (as well as sometimes being a requirement).
- Thinking Rural has to be led at a senior management level and to be championed by members.
- Thinking Rural must be outward looking as well as inward looking. Part of the job is to challenge others to Think Rural.
- Thinking Rural means considering the interdependence between urban and rural areas.

"All rural proofing activity is not an end in itself, it should ultimately lead to improvement in the quality of life of those living in rural areas"

"Rural Proofing for Unitary Local Authorities in England". K.Spencer and S. Rogers,

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Thinking Rural is a journey not a destination. With this in mind the Action Plan (attached at Annex 3) has been designed to signpost the first steps along this road. The Action Plan describes some quick wins and actions that can be tackled in the medium and longer term. It is designed to be achievable within the capacity restraints of the organisation and to build on the strengths of what is already in place. At the same time it will challenge the Council in terms of how it allocates resources across the County. It also flags up some activity that can be rolled out to partners as the first stage of widening the Herefordshire Thinks Rural approach into the Herefordshire Partnership (the Local Strategic Partnership for Herefordshire). It has been constructed around a clear set of recommendations that have arisen out of the study findings.

Key Recommendations - the framework for action

1. **Improve the information and evidence base**
2. **Embed an explicit rural dimension into strategic planning, service planning, scrutiny and review**
3. **Build on and roll out best practice in terms of delivery to rural areas**
4. **Build the capacity of staff and members to 'Think Rural'**
5. **Influence others to 'Think Rural'**

A brief rationale for each of these is given below.

1. **Improve the information and evidence base**

The study found that the information and evidence base for the County as a whole was in good shape, but there was far less information about the differences between different parts of the County. Also data that is collected about service delivery and as part of the various consultation processes undertaken by the Council are sometimes, but often not, analysed for differences between urban and rural areas. An improved evidence base will help both with planning and delivering services to rural areas and with making the case to regional and national government for appropriate policy frameworks and resources. Three key activity areas have been identified under this heading. This activity will need to be supported by appropriate research capacity.

- ***Gather and map quantitative geographical evidence to assess differential needs within County.***

- *Gather and map qualitative geographical evidence to assess differential needs and aspirations within the County.*
- *Build a geographical dimension into data collection about delivery and impact of services across the County.*

2. Embed an explicit rural dimension into strategic planning, service planning, scrutiny and review

One of the clear findings of the work done by the University of Birmingham was the importance of embedding rural proofing activity into the planning, decision making and review processes that were already in place. Herefordshire Council does include rural thinking into the strategic planning and the design of services, but not in a systematic way. The result is that consideration of specific rural needs can be hit and miss. This part of the Action Plan suggests activity that will penetrate each part of the existing planning cycle.

- *Embed a rural dimension into corporate, directorate and service planning and wider strategic planning.*
- *Include rural challenge in cabinet and other decision making processes*
- *Build a rural dimension into the performance management framework.*
- *Embed a rural dimension into scrutiny and review.*
- *Plan responses to future rural challenges and opportunities*

3. Build on and roll out best practice in terms of delivery to rural areas

There are many examples from within the Council and from elsewhere of good practice in terms of responding to rural needs, but opportunities for learning from these and rolling out the experience to other parts of the Council and other partners are often missed. This part of the Action Plan includes activity that will improve the quality of services for rural communities without placing impossible demands on Council resources (both financial and staff resources). Using pilots and exemplars will help staff learn about what works and gain some quick wins for rural communities.

- *Two for the price of one - seize opportunities for collaboration and co-location*
- *Use all forms of delivery (including ICT) to improve access to services*
- *Identify and copy best practice*

4. Build the capacity of staff and members to 'Think Rural'

Embedding Thinking Rural into the culture of the organisation is a key to success. The activity included in this part of the Action Plan supports the other activity areas in building the capacity of both staff and members to understand and respond to the needs of rural communities. The trick to success will be to focus on activity that will inspire innovation without increasing burdensome bureaucracy.

- *Nominate rural ambassadors - both members and staff*
- *Include specific rural elements in training and development programmes for staff and members*
- *Encourage innovation, creativity and collaboration in meeting the needs of rural communities*
- *Organise a series of events to learn about, celebrate and disseminate Herefordshire Thinks Rural*

5. Influence others to 'Think Rural'

Local Authority activity can only go so far in meeting the needs of rural communities. The Council is constrained both by its statutory powers and by its access to resources. Improving the quality of life for rural communities depends on the actions of a wide variety of organisations at local, regional and national level. This part of the Action Plan identifies activity that can influence others to Think Rural at all three levels.

- *Challenge national (and regional) government when policies and/or targets are not 'rural friendly'*
- *Develop an influencing strategy focussed on strengthening the rural voice at regional level*
- *Roll out Herefordshire Thinks Rural to Herefordshire Partnership*

MANAGEMENT AND REVIEW OF ACTION PLAN

The management, implementation and review of the action plan were discussed with the project team. The following actions were agreed as the next steps to ensure that the momentum for Herefordshire Thinks Rural is not lost at the end of the study period and that the recommendations are taken forward.

- Chief Executive Management Team/Cabinet appoint corporate and member leads.
- Herefordshire Thinks Rural to appear as a standing agenda item for Heads of Service Group.
- Corporate lead to identify staff to support the work and provide the 'engine room' for implementing the Action Plan.

- Cabinet agrees actions to ensure strong member involvement including scrutiny.
- Cabinet requests progress reports on Action Plan implementation (frequency to be decided).
- Rural proofing is addressed in the review of the Herefordshire Plan
- A State of Rural Herefordshire report is published as sub-set of the State of Herefordshire report.

In addition it is recommended that an evaluation and review process be built into the more detailed Action Plan that will need to be developed as part of the management of the process.

KEY RISKS AND BARRIERS

Both the study and the work of the project team identified a series of risks and obstacles to the success of rural proofing Council activity. These are described briefly below together with initial suggestions for contingencies. The risk register including identification of risk owners will need to be developed as part of the management of the Action Plan. By far the greatest risk is that of nothing or very little happening because of either lack of management 'buy in' or lack of resources and staff capacity.

<i>Risk</i>	<i>Impact</i>	<i>Probability</i>	<i>Contingency</i>
Action Plan not seen as priority - not a legal requirement	H	H	Cabinet and CXMT nominate leads and request progress reports.
No capacity or resources to deliver the Action Plan	H	M	Focus on quick wins that are not resource intensive. Review Action Plan after 9 months and reshape in line with existing capacity.
Lack of 'buy in' from all levels of management	H	M	Appoint Think Rural Ambassadors with a role to enthuse and inspire Avoid burdensome bureaucratic processes
Failure to learn from best practice	M	M	Use existing networks to exchange ideas with other Councils. Use exemplars and pilots to test out and disseminate ideas.
Identification of differential in service delivery that cannot be met - reputational risk.	M	L	Log the unmet need. Be clear about realistic levels of service. Feed back early to stakeholders explaining the constraints and explore other options
In focussing on rural issues the needs of urban centres receive less attention.	M	L	Build into Action Plan exemplars of rural urban interdependencies. Include this challenge as part of scrutiny and review.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE WORK

The following recommendations for future work are based on issues that emerged from the findings of the study that do not necessarily relate directly to rural proofing the Council's own activities but to a wider consideration of the rural context.

1. ***Roll out Herefordshire Thinks Rural to the wider partnership.*** Each element of the action plan could be adapted to work on a partnership basis. Ideas for initial partnership based activity are included in the Action Plan.
2. ***Develop a partnership-based strategy for countryside and land management activity.*** This would develop a single vision for the countryside in terms of the natural environment and land management and develop a framework for responding to the potentially huge changes that will result from the CAP reforms. The strategy should be developed in conjunction with all the key stakeholders in the County and operate as a sub-set of the Community Strategy (the Herefordshire Plan). Implications for existing strategies as well links to emerging strategies at regional and local level would need to be considered. These would include the Biodiversity Action Plan, AONB management plans, the Local Development Framework among others. It would also be important to establish strong links with the Natural England and this may provide the opportunity to work with them on developing their strategic links with Local Strategic Partnerships. The recent creation of 'rural hub' in Herefordshire could also help move this work forward.
3. ***Initiate 'futures' thinking with partners to respond to future demographic changes.*** The changes that will happen over the next period, both in terms of a rapidly ageing population (including the out-migration of young people) and increasing population of migrant workers from (Eastern) Europe and elsewhere, present both opportunities and challenges. A co-ordinated approach with partners in responding to these demographic changes would help both the Council and its partners to grasp the opportunities presented by this new demography and to minimise its negative impact.

CONCLUSION

The recommendations and the details of the Action Plan are designed to put Herefordshire Council at the forefront of best practice in terms of 'rural proofing' at a local level. The suggested actions and mechanisms are built upon the planning and decision-making processes already in place and will kick start an improvement process that does not rely solely on bureaucratic procedures (although these will have their place). Also, although the recommendations take account of the current practice of the Council, they are built around a framework that could have a much wider

application. A similar framework could be used to embed other cross cutting themes (for example, sustainable development) into the Council's planning processes, and so add value to the overall improvement programme for the Council.

The rural nature of Herefordshire has shaped its past and will no doubt shape its future. For this reason "Thinking Rural" must be an essential ingredient of successful Council policy making and practice.

DESK STUDY

LIST OF STRATEGIES AND SERVICE PLANS

Herefordshire Council Corporate Plan 2005-2008
Herefordshire Council Performance Management Framework
April 2005
Herefordshire Children's Services Plan 2005-2008
Herefordshire Local Transport Plan. Annual Progress Report July 2004
Parks and Countryside Service Plan 2005-6
Adult Services Division Service Plan 2005-6
Herefordshire's Education Development Plan 2002-2007
Strategic Housing Services Service Plan 2005-2006
Environment Directorate Service Plan 2005-2006
Cultural Service Plan 2005-2006
Herefordshire Council Community Youth Service Business Plan 2005-2006
Revenue and Benefits Services Service Plan 2005-2006
Library Strategy for Herefordshire 2005-2009

OTHER BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Herefordshire Economic Development Strategy 2005-2025
Herefordshire Economic Assessment 2005 -2007
Guidance on conducting equality impact assessments (Herefordshire Council)
State of Herefordshire Report
Selection of Quarterly Economic Reports
Audit of Crime, Disorder and Drugs within Herefordshire 2004
CPA 2005 - Key lines of enquiry - Audit Commission
Herefordshire Housing Strategy (draft) 2005-2008
Herefordshire Council Small Schools Policy

BEST PRACTICE PUBLICATIONS and CONTACTS WITH OTHER COUNCILS

Moira Mortimer, Beacon Co-ordinator, Lancashire County Council
Moira.mortimer@env.lancscc.gov.uk
01772 531653

Paul Martin, Cumbria County Council
01539 772180

"Thinking rural - your essential guide", product of Rural Matters, Action for Cumbria, Cumbria County Council

Steve Kendall, Director, Steve Kendall Associates

Undertook work on rural proofing at a local level for Countryside Agency with 5 District Councils in the East Midlands - publication forthcoming.

Rural Proofing by Local Authorities: a feasibility study. Countryside Agency research notes - June 2003

Thinking Rural within Local Public Service Agreements. Report of key messages raised at seminar held 16th November 2004. IDeA Knowledge web-site.

Think Rural -a survey of rural proofing in Local Authorities. LGA and Countryside Agency - March 2004

Local Strategic Partnership and Community Strategy Rural Checklist. Countryside Agency - May 2002

Rural Proofing - policy makers' checklist. Countryside Agency - revised 2002

Spencer K., Rogers S., (2005) *Rural Proofing for Unitary Local Authorities in England*, University of Birmingham (A report commissioned by the Countryside Agency in collaboration with the unitary local authorities of Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire)

Entwistle T, Enticott G (2005) *Researching the Rural Dimensions of Local Public Service Agreements.* Countryside Agency

Northumberland Rural Strategy and Action Plan - Northumberland Strategic Partnership November 2003

Devon Rural Strategy - Devon Strategic Partnership July 2003

LIST OF INTERVIEWEES - for semi-structured interviews

Madeleine Spinks	Principal Research Officer
Sheila Morgan	Interim Home Care Team Manager
Antony Featherstone	Parks, Countryside, & Leisure Development Manager
Susie Binns	Principal Benefits Manager
Andy Tector	Head of Environmental Health & Trading Standards
Dave Nicholson	Forward Planning Manager
Peter Ding	Senior Learning Officer
Jon Dudley	Childrens Services Manager (Resources)
Jeremy Alder	Library Policy & Development Manager
Linda Beddis	Area Customer Services Manager South
Adrienne Davies	GIS Team Leader
George Salmon	Head of Policy & Resources
Richard Ball	Transportation Manager

Other Herefordshire Council Staff consulted

Martin Heuter-Russell

Trish Marsh

Glyn West
Vinia Abesamis
Philippa Lydford
Yulia Tarboth

John Eades
Paul Haley

HEREFORDSHIRE THINKS RURAL

ANNEX 2

MEMBERSHIP OF PROJECT TEAM

Stephanie Canham	Head of Social Care (Adults)
Sue Griffiths,	Head of Performance Management
Julie Holmes	Policy and Community Directorate Head of Service
Geoff Hughes	Policy and Community Directorate Head of Service
Jane Jones	Director of Corporate and Customer Services (formerly Director of Policy and Community)
Henry Lewis	Head of Social Care (Children))
Steve Martin	Corporate Policy and Research Manager
George Salmon	Head of Policy and Resources (Education)
Ted St. George	Head of School Effectiveness
Andrew Tanner	Assistant County Treasurer
Andy Tector	Head of Environmental Health & Trading Standards
Alison McLean	Independent Consultant

ANNEX 3

HEREFORDSHIRE THINKS RURAL ACTION PLAN

HEREFORDSHIRE THINKS RURAL ACTION PLAN

IMPROVING THE EVIDENCE AND INFORMATION BASE			
Key Activity Area	Quick Wins Achieved by March 06	Medium Term Achieved by March 07	Long Term Achieved by September 2007
<i>Gather and map quantitative geographical evidence to assess differential needs within County.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use new urban/rural definitions to analyse differences within County and produce clear maps to analyse differences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compare trends in Herefordshire with regional and national data (new State of Countryside report and WM regional observatory) Map infrastructure issues. <i>Exemplar: access to mains water.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include more geographic breakdown in State of Herefordshire report. Establish quality of life indicators suitable for rural communities.
<i>Gather and map qualitative geographical evidence to assess differential needs and aspirations within the County</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build rural proofing into consultation quality check <i>Exemplar: Check % rural response to consultation for review of Herefordshire Plan; pilot examination of young people's responses for difference across County.</i> Use Parish Plans to gauge rural communities aspirations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collect 'stories' of living and working in rural area - both positive and negative. to illustrate particular policy issues. Collect information about why people move in and out of rural areas. Make sure Citizen's Panel reflects rural population 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyse all consultations for differences between urban and rural areas (including existing data e.g. from User Satisfaction Survey). Collect information about rural communities aspirations and expectations at village fetes, village events etc.
<i>Build a geographical dimension into data collection about delivery accessibility, impact and outcomes of services across the County.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Exemplar: Prepare needs analysis for Children and Young People's Plan taking into account current levels of delivery across County.</i> <i>Exemplar: Use data on differential needs to inform and develop extended schools programme.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand use of GIS to map delivery and impact of Council services. Map quality of service provision Use Accessibility Planning (DfT) to map access to services and respond to 'black spots' Collect data on differential costs of delivery to rural/urban areas - pilot for one service. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and pilot simple GIS guide for service managers to map service delivery.
<i>Opportunities for rolling out to wider partnership</i> Continue to build on Herefordshire Information and Research Network to share evidence base and to undertake joint consultations Use Accessibility Assessment to gather evidence of variation of access to services			

EMBEDDING A RURAL DIMENSION INTO STRATEGIC PLANNING, SERVICE PLANNING, SCRUTINY AND REVIEW			
Key Activity Area	Quick Wins Achieved by March 06	Medium Term Achieved by March 07	Long Term Achieved by September 2007
<i>Embed a rural dimension into corporate, directorate and service planning and wider strategic planning.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and include simple rural proofing checklist in service planning guidance, (including risk register). • Rural proof review of the Herefordshire Plan. • Make explicit how LAA will benefit rural areas (interdependency model) • <i>Exemplar: Rural proof new strategy for Adult and Community learning. to ensure rural needs addressed</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build on 'geographic location' in diversity impact assessments to draw out rural needs and responses. • Include statement of commitment to rural communities in corporate plan under Leadership and Vision. • <i>Exemplar: Develop Local Development Framework with strong links to new Herefordshire Plan.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural proof high level corporate plan indicators
<i>Include rural challenge in cabinet and other decision-making processes.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include rural implications in cabinet papers and briefings. • Encourage lead cabinet member to question rural implications of decisions. • Ensure contracts for service delivery meet the needs of rural communities - <i>Exemplar Rural proof new Home Care Contract</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed rural considerations in Prince 2 and other project management mechanisms. 	
<i>Build a rural dimension into the performance management framework.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Flag' BVPIs that are insensitive or detrimental to rural needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop separate targets to pick up geographical differences, including LPSA targets. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop PIs specific to rural areas
<i>Embed a rural dimension into scrutiny and review.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use internal and external 'rural champions' as part of scrutiny process • Use IDeA checklist (IDeA 2004) in relation to Best Value and rural proofing. 		
<i>Plan response to future rural challenges and opportunities</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiate 'futures' thinking in relation to ageing population, CAP reform impacts, increase in migrant workers 	

Opportunities for rolling out to wider partnership

Include results of Parish Plans in development of strategic and service plans - roll out inclusion in statutory planning guidance.

Include rural dimension in future Local Public Service Agreements

Develop partnership based Vision for the Countryside, linked to revised Herefordshire Plan and negotiate with Natural England to be exemplar for integration with LSP

BUILDING ON BEST PRACTICE IN RESPONDING TO THE NEEDS OF RURAL AREAS			
Key Activity Area	Quick Wins Achieved by March 06	Medium Term Achieved by March 07	Long Term Achieved by September 2007
<i>Two for the price of one - seize opportunities for collaboration and co-location</i>	<i>Exemplars:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use new Kington Info Shop to delivery services of other agencies • Challenge 2 new mobile libraries to delivery other services. • Encourage collaboration between schools to delivery extended schools programme, building on the experience of existing clusters of schools 	<i>Exemplar:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use Churches for wider community use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop strategic programme of investment into multi-use centres, including Info shops and 21st century village halls and apply to AWM for co-ordinated package of capital funding.
<i>Use all forms of delivery (including ICT) to improve access to services</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address shortfalls in access to broadband in most remote rural areas. <i>Exemplar: Library Service/Community Access points. Use volunteers and Community Transport to move people and books, co-locate with shops and schools, use any access to IT for ordering and renewals.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider needs of those excluded from IT use because of literacy or access to computers. <i>Exemplar: Support rural employers (e.g. with labour market issues)</i>	
<i>Identify and copy best practice</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange networking meeting with other rural councils working on rural proofing (Lancashire, Suffolk, Cumbria, Northumberland, S. Glos, N. Somerset etc) • Take to benchmarking club and IDeA • Embed rural dimension into implementing govt. programmes <i>Exemplars:</i> <i>Design Children's Centres to meet rural needs</i> <i>14-19 Curriculum - rural access to non vocational learning</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target the hardest to reach groups <i>Exemplar: support for schools with increased numbers of children with English as a second language</i> <i>Exemplar: info-shops equipped to act as first point of contact for migrant workers</i>	
<i>Opportunities for rolling out to wider partnership</i> <i>Continue to collaborate on co-location and joint delivery of services. Encourage partner organisations to embed rural proofing in service plans</i>			

BUILDING THE CAPACITY OF STAFF AND MEMBERS TO "THINK RURAL"			
Key Activity Area	Quick Wins Achieved by March 06	Medium Term Achieved by March 07	Long Term Achieved by September 2007
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Nominate rural ambassadors - both members and staff</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Find Staff Ambassadors - preferably from all levels in the organisation . Find Member Ambassadors - at least one to be part of scrutiny and review and one on cabinet <p><i>Need to make this attractive and fun! - space and time needed to be innovative and visionary.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop programme for ambassadors that will be rewarding for them (visiting other best practice) and inspiring for others. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Include specific rural elements in training and development programmes for staff and members</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include specific rural dimension in induction training for staff and members Strengthen advice about 'geographic location' element in diversity impact assessment training. Communicate evidence base to staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include rural dimension in Leadership Development and Management Development programmes Commission video case studies 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Encourage innovation, creativity and collaboration in meeting the needs of rural communities</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'Flag' strategies and plans that have been rural proofed. Collect best practice case studies, examine for critical success factors and disseminate. Hold council meetings (management and member) in rural locations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Challenge service managers to find new ways of joint delivery Introduce flexible working arrangements where this will increase ability to deliver to scattered community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage staff to 'give up' control of staff and services when this will facilitate better service.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Organise a series of events to learn about, celebrate and disseminate Herefordshire Thinks Rural</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer to be a pilot area for GOWM monitoring rural proofing at a local level. Organise and run Think Rural Think Tank Conference including MPs, MEPs etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programme to be agreed by Herefordshire Thinks Rural Ambassadors 	

Opportunities for rolling out to wider partnership

Include challenge to 'think rural' in Herefordshire Driver to embed rural proofing in Herefordshire Partnership activity.

Disseminate partner organisations' best practice in relation to rural delivery.

INFLUENCING OTHERS TO "THINK RURAL"			
Key Activity Area	Quick Wins Achieved by March 06	Medium Term Achieved by March 07	Long Term Achieved by September 2007
<i>Challenge national (and regional) government when policies and/or targets are not 'rural friendly'</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish good links with GOWM and Commission for Rural Communities to log difficulties. Focus on a few key issues for influencing campaign. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage managers and staff to register difficulties with government departments. Establish easy to use system of logging impact of government policy and/or targets on rural delivery. Join forces with other Local Authorities to make the case. Use the evidence base to built the case 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actions to involve the public in Herefordshire Thinks Rural
<i>Develop an influencing strategy focussed on strengthening the rural voice at regional level</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Get the region out of Birmingham" Exemplar: Offer to host regional meetings in Herefordshire. Find opportunity for WM Regional Assembly to meet in/visit Herefordshire Make presentations to WM Rural Affairs Forum, AWM, WM Regional Assembly about Herefordshire Thinks Rural 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyse strengths and weaknesses of rural voice in the region - e.g. European agenda, Regional Spatial Strategy, Economic Development, Transport Strategy, Housing Strategy. Work with rural champions working in regional bodies. Develop focussed influencing plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement focused influencing strategy
<i>Roll out Herefordshire Thinks Rural to Herefordshire Partnership</i>	<i>Actions included in each part of Action Plan</i>	<i>Actions included in each part of Action Plan</i>	<i>Actions included in each part of Action Plan</i>
<p><i>Opportunities for rolling out to wider partnership</i></p> <p><i>Build on current strategic alliances to 'speak with one voice' on rural issues at a regional level wherever possible - including Herefordshire Partnership, Rural Regeneration Zone Board, Rural Housing Network, Regional Rural Affairs Forum.</i></p>			

MANAGE AND REVIEW THE THINKING RURAL ACTION PLAN	
Recommendations	Next Steps
<i>Agree lead and support staff</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chief Executive Management Team/Cabinet appoint corporate and member leads. • Corporate lead to identify staff to support the work and provide the 'engine room' for implementing the Action Plan.
<i>Build actions into service and individual work programmes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Herefordshire Thinks Rural to appear as a standing agenda item for Heads of Service Group. • Cabinet agrees actions to ensure strong member involvement including scrutiny.
<i>Agree evaluation and review process</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cabinet requests progress reports on Action Plan implementation (frequency to be decided). • Agree evaluation and review process as part of more detailed Action Plan
<i>Conduct review and amend action plan</i>	<i>To be agreed</i>

RURAL PROOFING CHECKLIST AND FRAMEWORK FOR ITS USE

Taken from Spencer K., Rogers S., (2005) Rural Proofing for Unitary Local Authorities in England, University of Birmingham

(Adapted from the Countryside Agency Rural Proofing Checklist for use by local authorities, from Caffyn, Dahlstrom, Rogers and Spencer, Rural proofing for local authorities, Local Governance, vol. 28, no. 4, 2002 pp. 273-286).

Note

Applying this checklist approach should not be done in isolation, it may be an added aid in relation to the more policy planning integrated approach put forward in the main body of this report.

Framework stages for checklist

- Step 1** An evaluation of how significant the impacts of new or current policies may be on key rural issues.
- Step 2** An analysis of options for action.
- Step 3** An analysis of partners who need to participate, be involved or consulted.
- Step 4** A statement of proposed actions.

Step 1. The Checklist

Each issue questions should be assessed against two criteria:

- a) does it have a significant or not significant impact on rural communities.
- b) does it have a positive or negative impact on rural communities.

Rural issues are identified below, others may be added by local authorities. Some of the example questions may be self-evident, and others may be added as appropriate.

- 1) Protecting/enhancing local facilities and shops
How does the policy affect rural facilities such as village shops, post offices, pubs, garages, other retail outlets, village halls, banks, churches and community enterprises? Can policies be amended to protect or enhance such facilities?
- 2) Maintaining/improving access to services
Does the policy impact on access to and maintenance of services for the rural population, particularly for less mobile groups such as the elderly?
- 3) Improving transport links and options

- Will the policy affect transport links and options for commuting, accessing services and recreation? Are different modes and uses of transport considered?
- 4) Tackling poverty and promoting social inclusion
Does the policy affect any disadvantaged groups e.g. elderly, people with disabilities, homeless people, unemployed, women or ethnic minorities? Does it have an impact on sources of information and advice, social services, health, community development and capacity building?
 - 5) Providing activities/facilities for young people
Will the policy impact on young people and how?
 - 6) Improving employment opportunities
Will the policy impact on employment opportunities and how?
 - 7) Strengthening/diversifying the rural economy
Does the policy affect the rural economy? Will it affect market towns, business support, agriculture, manufacturing, tourism, retail, credit sources, community enterprises, farmers markets, training, ICT or start-up premises?
 - 8) Provide affordable, quality rural housing
Will the policy affect the affordability and quality of housing across all types of tenure? Does the policy relate to prices, registered social landlords, developers, planning policies, migration, second homes, the elderly or special needs? Does it enhance sustainable communities?
 - 9) Protecting/enhancing the local environment
How does the policy affect the protection and/or enhancing of the local natural and built environment? How sustainable is this?
 - 10) Developing education and training opportunities/facilities
Does the policy impact upon education and training? How does it affect schools, colleges, ICT, access via local facilities or through transport or distance learning?
 - 11) Promoting the use of and access to ICT
Will the policy have an impact on the use of and access to ICT?
 - 12) Encouraging recreation and tourism
Does the policy affect recreation and tourism? Will it have an impact on rights of way, access to the countryside, recreational activities, local heritage, culture, villages and market towns?

Step 2. Options analysis

The local authority should consider options for action arising from its checklist findings. Where an impact is negative and significant it may require remedial action. Where positive impacts are identified there may be scope for further capitalising on these. Affordability will be an issue, as will be possible working with other partners, seeking new funding or lobbying for action.

Step 3. Partner analysis

Where the options analysis indicates needs for consultation, liaison or joint working, the next step is to identify which partners/stakeholders to engage in the actions required or negotiated. Such groups could be other local authorities, government at regional levels, business groups, the voluntary and community sectors, local

communities and business. It would also be important here to identify whether the issue(s) is significant enough to be raised as part of the local strategic partnership process, or other partnership processes, in order to further encourage joined-up working.

Step 4. Proposed actions

Proposed actions could be a short summary of:

- actions to take
- who is responsible for each action
- a timetable for implementation of actions

Finally, it is important to take the rural proofing concept beyond policy formation, it should emphasise differential rural implications of a service plan on different communities, age groups and so on. Different approaches to service delivery may be appropriate and this may entail cost variations.