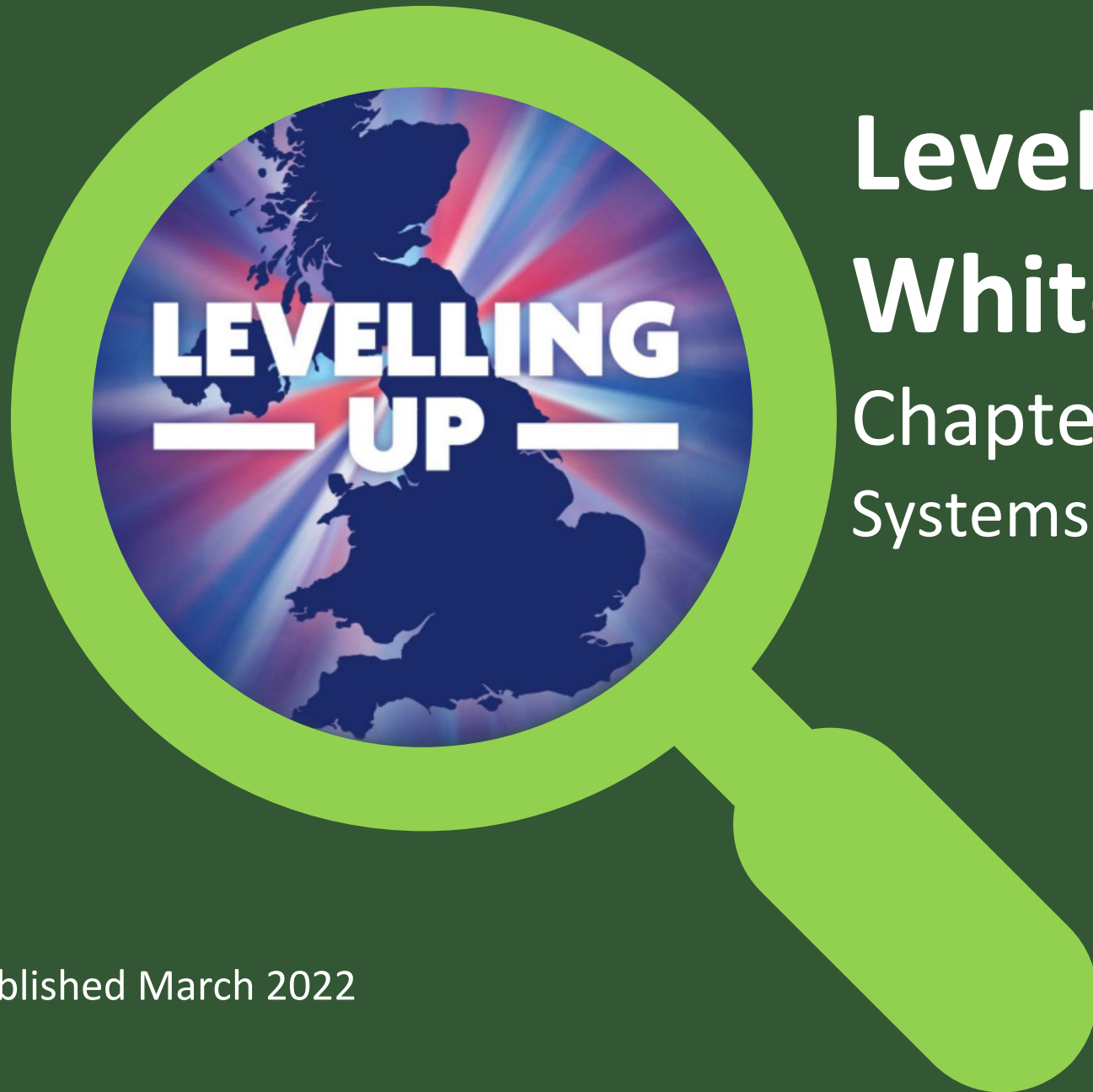


RURAL LENS REVIEW



Levelling Up White Paper Chapter 2 Systems Reform

Published March 2022



At a glance



Rural Services Network's thoughts on **Chapter 2 of the Levelling Up White Paper.**

- The shortcomings referred to are deficiencies in government strategy setting, financing and procedural requirements. It is good to see the honesty of the analysis of the shortcomings of past strategy and policy approaches. However also relevant is the government's 'one-size-fits-all' approach to policy and procedural requirements. Policies/processes laid down are often not appropriate to rural areas as they are tailored around urban areas. That must change through proper
- There must be a requirement to have data to support policy interventions and monitoring of delivery at a level of geographical granularity to be able to see issues in a rural context and have locally determined responses to meet local needs.
- The bigger the geographical area for which a body has responsibilities the greater the number of very different types of communities within them. It is accepted that sometimes policies do need to reflect urban-rural dependencies. A more appropriate approach is to consider where it is necessary to cover larger (mixed rural and urban) geographies. Combining rural areas with urban areas has, historically, meant rural losing out as it is almost always easier (and less costly) to achieve performance targets in densely populated areas than more sparsely populated rural areas. Whatever approach is adopted extra care must be taken to avoid rural areas losing out.

- There is no attempt in the White Paper to define such phrases as ‘local’, ‘place’, or ‘area’. How can there be a “Greater focus on local places’ without further definition?
- To refer to the proposed devolution framework as a flexible approach (in recognition that a directly elected mayor model may not suit all areas) is not credible. We agree a flexible approach is needed but the degree of devolution set out for Level 1 (and to a lesser extent Level 2) is quite small and offers little incentive. If the Government believes in local empowerment, it should not penalise those areas which opt for an approach without a Directly Elected Mayor. Creating a combined population of at least 500,000 will mean either enormous geographical areas or rural areas being combined with predominantly urban areas. Neither of which make sense for any concept of local. This minimum 500,000 population relates to “any tier of devolution” The 500,000 population criteria may well prove to be the undoing of potential devolution deals in many rural areas of England.
- In two-tier areas the involvement of District Council should be a pre-requisite (unless a District opts out) not just something to be encouraged although we recognise that the deal would be agreed with the upper tier authority. Districts are the Local Planning Authority and the Strategic Housing Authority. In addition, they are being given responsibilities for the UK Shared Prosperity Funds.
- The RSN will continue its work on Fair Funding and will support the Rural Fair Share Group in its activities in that regard.
- The starting point for rural authorities can be seen through analysis of the Final Local Government Finance Settlement for 2022-23
 - Rural areas in 22/23 will still receive some 37% (£105) per head in Settlement Funding Assessment grant LESS than their urban counterparts
 - Rural residents will pay, on average, 21% (£104) per head MORE in Council Tax than their urban counterparts due to receiving less government grant
 - Rural residents will get 14% per head LESS in social care support overall
- Rural residents pay more, receive fewer services and, on average, earn less than those in urban areas and that is inequitable.

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WE NEED A STRATEGY THAT RECOGNISES THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL BENEFITS OF DELIVERING LEVELLING UP IN RURAL AREAS: WITHOUT SUCH RECOGNITION RURAL ENGLAND WILL BE OVERLOOKED, BY-PASSED AND PUSHED DOWN FURTHER, RATHER THAN LEVELLED UP. SUCH A STRATEGY NEEDS TO BE DELIVERED ACROSS DEPARTMENTS AND FOCUSED ON GENUINELY LEVELLING UP AND REVITALISING RURAL AREAS/ECONOMIES.

INTRODUCTION

The Government published the long-awaited [Levelling Up White Paper](#). Although issued by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) it is a whole of Government document. Published alongside the White Paper and integral to it the Government (again through DLUHC) published [Pre-Launch Guidance in respect of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund](#).

At over 330 pages long plus a Technical Annex on the proposed 'Missions and Metrics' The White Paper is a very long document and covers a significant number of issues. **Accordingly, the RSN has decided to carry out its Rural Lens Review across a series of separate documents.** They are:

- **Rural Lens Review of Levelling Up White Paper - [CRITIQUE BY THE RSN OF OVERARCHING RURAL ISSUES AND ACTIONS PROPOSED BY THE RSN](#)**
- **Rural Lens Review - [UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND PRE-LAUNCH GUIDANCE](#)**
- **[Rural Lens Review of Levelling Up White Paper - CHAPTER 1: THE UK's GEOGRAPHICAL DISPARITIES: DRIVERS AND POTENTIAL POLICY APPROACHES](#)**
- **Rural Lens Review of Levelling Up White Paper - CHAPTER 2: SYSTEMS REFORM** (this document).
- **[Rural Lens Review of Levelling Up White Paper - CHAPTER 3: THE POLICY PROGRAMME AND NEXT STEPS](#)**

These are far-reaching policy proposals with, at this stage, only medium-term 'missions' to 2030. **The RSN, on behalf of its members, will be keeping the issues raised under close review.**

As a starting point we must say that **there is no sign that the White Paper has been Rural Proofed** (see more in the Overarching Rural Issues and Actions Proposed by the RSN document).

AN OVERVIEW OF CHAPTER TWO AND RSN COMMENT

In this Rural Lens Review of Chapter 2 of the Levelling Up White Paper the RSN has decided that, at least in the main, we will concentrate on the specific proposals set out and our view of rural issues arising. We are not commenting on the general verbiage surrounding the proposal except where necessary to explain the proposal or the rural context. However, it is worth setting out some of the main drivers of the proposals.

MAIN DRIVERS

This chapter recommends wholesale changes to the information, incentives and institutions which underpin spatial decision-making in the UK.

This transformation in the system of government, and in the governance of spatial policy, is supported by **five pillars**:

1. a mission-oriented approach to setting policy
2. a reorientation of central government decision-making
3. greater empowerment of local government decision-making
4. a revolution in data and transparency at the subnational level
5. enhanced transparency and accountability of this new regime

The White Paper identifies **five shortcomings** in past policy initiatives:

1. longevity and policy sufficiency
2. policy and delivery co-ordination
3. local empowerment
4. evidence, monitoring and evaluation
5. transparency and accountability

A New Policy Regime

The White Paper proposes a” fundamental rewiring in the system of decision-making, locally and nationally, across the UK. Learning the lessons of past experience, the following five pillars should underpin this policy regime.

The White Paper articulates that as a policy tool, missions are distinct from delivery targets. “Missions are intended to precipitate systems change through cooperation across the public, private and voluntary sectors, rather than acting as a mechanism for holding the government to account”

Reshaping central government decision making

The White Paper states that “in the past, central government decision-making has weighed spatial considerations insufficiently in the design and delivery of policy initiatives. Indeed, this has been a significant contributor to the UK’s widening spatial disparities. Correcting that calls for a radical reorientation of decision-making by central government along **four dimensions**.

1. Improved transparency about place-based spending
2. Hardwiring special considerations into decision - making and evaluation
3. Improved coordination of central government policies at the local level
4. Greater focus on local places

Of fundamental importance is the White Paper’s acknowledgement that *“A significant proportion of sub-nationally directed public spending is determined by formulae, such as the National Funding Formula used to allocate money across schools in England. The UK Government has already taken action to review some of the key formulae – for example, recent changes to the schools funding formula which now seeks to reduce disparities in school spending across England. The UK Government will further review its formula-based spending, to ensure it is targeted where most needed.”*

RSN COMMENTS – MAIN DRIVERS

- The shortcomings referred to are deficiencies in government strategy setting, financing and procedural requirements. It is good to see the honesty of the analysis of the shortcomings of past strategy and policy approaches.
- However also relevant is the government's 'one-size-fits-all' approach to policy and procedural requirements. Policies/processes laid down are often not appropriate to rural areas as they are tailored around urban areas. That must change through proper open and accountable pre-decision rural proofing.
- The five pillars underpinning the policy regime do seem appropriate.
- There must be a requirement to have data to support policy interventions and monitoring of delivery at a level of geographical granularity to be able to see issues in a rural context and have locally determined responses to meet local needs.
- There is no attempt in the White Paper to define such phrases as 'local', 'place', or 'area'. How can there be a "Greater focus on local places' without further definition?
- The bigger the geographical area for which a body has responsibilities the greater the number of very different types of communities within them. It is accepted that sometimes policies do need to reflect urban-rural dependencies. A more appropriate approach is to consider where it is necessary to cover larger (mixed rural and urban) geographies. Combining rural areas with urban areas has, historically, meant rural losing out as it is almost always easier (and less costly) to achieve performance targets in densely populated areas than more sparsely populated rural areas. Whatever approach is adopted extra care must be taken to avoid rural areas losing out.

THE PROPOSALS

Establishing a Levelling-up Cabinet Committee and establishing Levelling Up Directors

With the following objectives:

- Building local capacity and capability, especially where it is thin.
- Improving the evidence base for local decision-makers, working with the ONS, and evaluating what works using data, statistics and analysis.
- Catalysing local change and championing local ideas within government.
- Bringing strategic coherence, coordination and flexibility to government interventions in places.
- Forming a key bridge between local actors and central government.
- Acting as champions for their places.

Levelling Up Directors will act as a single point of contact for local leaders and a first port of call for new and innovative local policy proposals. They will be based in the areas they have responsibility for. Directors will bring together government policy and delivery, aligning decisions and funding to support local and national strategic objectives.

RSN COMMENTS – THE PROPOSALS

- Is this a return to something akin to the former ‘Government Offices of the Region’?
- Will there be Regional Leads, based in the Regions, for each of the Government departments involved in Levelling Up delivery?
- Levelling Up Directors must work closely with local government and other actors and not just be a point of central government delivery.
- When addressing the issue of ‘improving the evidence base’ there must be a requirement to have data to support policy interventions and monitoring and evaluation of delivery at a level of geographical granularity to be able to see issues in a rural context.

Public Sector Procurement of Goods and Services

Legislation to reinforce the message that public procurement should take account of these wider benefits and place a duty on all contracting authorities to have regard to national and local priorities, including creating new jobs and skills, encouraging supply chain innovation and supporting strong, integrated communities. The new measures will make it easier for small businesses and social enterprises across the country to bid for and win public contracts.

Streamline the Funding Landscape

This year based on the following **three principles**:

1. Reducing the unnecessary proliferation of individual funding pots with varied delivery approaches.
2. Streamlining bidding and supporting greater alignment between revenue and capital sources.
3. Ensuring places have robust ongoing monitoring and evaluation plans for the impact and delivery of investments and spending.

RSN COMMENTS – PROCUREMENT AND FUNDING LANDSCAPE

- The proposals to streamline the funding landscape are very welcome.
- Where ‘bidding’ is retained the reduced capacity of rural Councils must be taken into account as must be the recognition that delivery costs are higher in a rural context and as a consequence the number of outputs/outcomes achieved for a given amount of money will be fewer in rural when compared to urban.
- Timescales for developing and delivering bids or programmes must be realistic.
- Simplified expectations of bidders may be needed to give local business or VSC’s the opportunity to fully engage.
- The basic funding formulae to support public services must ensure that a fair share is received by rural areas year-on-year which reflects rural delivery costs.
- See our Rural Fair Funding asks here: <https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/revitalising-rural/rural-fair-funding.pdf>

Establish an “Islands Forum”

That “will provide a regular means of engagement with island communities across the UK. This will support the unique challenges faced by these communities, which are often cross-cutting – for instance, issues with connectivity and infrastructure, fuel poverty and demographic trends”.

RSN COMMENTS – ISLANDS FORUM

- We support this.
- Rural areas also face the same unique challenges “which are often cross-cutting – for instance, issues with connectivity and infrastructure, fuel poverty and demographic trends”. Across government departments Rural England Forum – going beyond Defra’s Rural Impact Forum - can also be justified.

A NEW DEVOLUTION FRAMEWORK FOR ENGLAND

“The UK Government is setting out a new devolution framework for England. This framework is designed to create a clear and consistent set of devolution pathways for places, enabling them to widen and deepen their devolved powers subject to meeting certain pre-conditions. The preferred model of devolution is one with a directly-elected leader covering a well- defined economic geography with a clear and direct mandate, strong accountability and the convening power to make change happen. However, because this may not suit all areas, the framework sets out a flexible, tiered approach, allowing areas to deepen devolution at their own pace”.

There are **four principles** underpinning the government’s devolution framework. These are summarised below:

1. Effective Leadership
2. Sensible Geography
3. Flexibility
4. Appropriate Accountability

The Government is establishing a new independent body in England focused on data, transparency and robust evidence.

Before new devolution deals are agreed, a new accountability framework will be finalised that will apply to all devolved institutions in England. This will ensure that there are clear roles and metrics for assessment and measures to support local areas, alongside strong local scrutiny mechanisms. This is to ensure that local people have confidence that devolution is leading to improvements in their area.

The new framework will focus on:

- Setting out key roles and responsibilities for devolved institutions in England, central government and other stakeholders so they are clear to residents.
- Ensuring there are appropriate forums for local media, local councillors and local residents to review the performance of authorities with devolved functions – for example, Mayor’s Question Times, regular appearances before local scrutiny and audit committees.
- Allowing the public to make a clear judgement on the performance of Mayors against key outcomes to allow comparisons between areas with devolution.

The proposed levels (see later for more detail) are as follows:

Level 3 – A single institution or County Council with a directly elected mayor (DEM), across a FEA or whole county area

Level 2 – A single institution or County Council without a DEM, across a FEA or whole county area

Level 1 – Local authorities working together across a FEA or whole county area e.g. through a joint committee

RSN COMMENTS – NEW DEVOLUTION FRAMEWORK

- To call this a flexible approach (in recognition that a directly elected mayor model may not suit all areas) is not credible. We agree a flexible approach is needed but the degree of devolution set out for Level 1 (and to a lesser extent Level 2) is quite small and offers little incentive. If the Government believes in local empowerment, it should not penalise those areas which opt for an approach without a Directly Elected Mayor.
- In Chapter 3 in the Policy Programme for Transport it is stated that “For areas in England that agree the highest- level devolution deals with directly elected leaders, the UK Government will make more targeted resource support available sooner...”. No flexibility there for areas where a directly elected mayor model is considered not suitable. Much more stick than carrot!!

District Authority Involvement

The involvement of district authorities will be encouraged, but deals will only be agreed with county and unitary local authorities. No authority will have a veto over the progress of neighbours who are prepared to move quickly and adopt strong governance models. To ensure decisions are taken over a strategic geography, for any tier of devolution, the council or group of councils seeking devolution must have a combined population of at least 500,000.

While the UK Government does not rule out devolution deals which do not cover a FEA, priority will be given to devolution deals covering either a FEA or a whole county geography, for instance a county council and its associated unitary authorities in the county area. Where neighbouring local authorities in the same FEA or county geography wish to join a deal which is being negotiated, the negotiating area is expected to seriously consider this option to secure devolution. case-by-case basis, and an opportunity to adopt innovative local proposals to address specific challenges and opportunities – for example, the improvement of health and social care outcomes.

RSN COMMENTS – DISTRICT AUTHORITIES AND DEVOLUTION

- In two-tier areas the involvement of District Council should be a pre-requisite (unless a District opts out) not just something to be encouraged although we recognise that the deal would be agreed with the upper tier authority. Districts are the Local Planning Authority and the Strategic Housing Authority. In addition, they are being given responsibilities for the UK Shared Prosperity Funds.
- Creating a combined population of at least 500,000 will mean either enormous geographical areas or rural areas being combined with predominantly urban areas. Neither of which make sense for any concept of local. This minimum 500,000 population relates to “any tier of devolution”
- The 500,000 population criteria may well prove to be the undoing of potential devolution deals in many rural areas of England
- There is no definition in the White Paper of a Functioning Economic Area (FEA) – indeed there is no single, universal approach anywhere to defining FEAs. The former Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) defined FEAs as, “the area over which the local economy and its key markets operate”. A set of indicators which are often applied to define the boundaries of an FEA are related to such matters as:
 - Travel-to-work flows
 - Housing Market Areas
 - Travel-to-learn flows
 - Sectoral clusters
 - Transport networks

- Across large rural areas the above indicators will show that within any County there will be several different FES's. That position will be exacerbated by having to achieve 500,000 population levels and made worse for rural areas if combined with urban areas
- We repeat our earlier comment, that the bigger the geographical area for which a body has responsibilities the greater the number of very different types of communities within them. Combining rural areas with urban areas has, historically, meant rural losing out as it is almost always easier (and less costly) to achieve performance targets in densely populated areas than more sparsely populated rural areas

Devolution Powers

The table below “provides an indication of the types of powers and functions that will be considered for each devolution deal”. These are not minimum offers. Some powers may only be available to certain authorities or geographies. There will also be scope to negotiate further powers, on a case by case basis.

L1 - Level 1 Local authorities working together across a FEA or whole county area e.g. through a joint committee

L2 - Level 2 A single institution or County Council without a DEM, across a FEA or whole county area

L3 - Level 3 A single institution or County Council with a directly elected mayor (DEM), across a FEA or whole county area

Function	Detail	L1	L2	L3
Strategic role in delivering services	Host for Government functions best delivered at a strategic level involving more than one local authority e.g. Local Nature Recovery Strategies	✓	✓	✓
	Opportunity to pool services at a strategic level	✓	✓	✓
	Opportunity to adopt innovative local proposals to deliver action on climate change and the UK's Net Zero targets	✓	✓	✓
Supporting local businesses	LEP functions including hosting strategic business voice		✓	✓

Function	Detail	L1	L2	L3
Local control of sustainable transport	Control of appropriate local transport functions e.g. local transport plans*		✓	✓
	Defined key route network*			✓
	Priority for new rail partnerships with Great British Railways – influencing local rail offer, e.g. services and stations			✓
	Ability to introduce bus franchising		✓	✓
	Consolidation of existing core local transport funding for local road maintenance and smaller upgrades into a multi-year integrated settlement			✓
Investment spending	UKSPF planning and delivery at a strategic level		✓	✓
	Long-term investment fund, with an agreed annual allocation			✓
Giving adults the skills for the labour market	Devolution of Adult Education functions and the core Adult Education Budget		✓	✓
	Providing input into Local Skills Improvement Plans		✓	✓
	Role in designing and delivering future contracted employment programmes			✓
Local control of infrastructure decisions	Ability to establish Mayoral Development Corporations (with consent of host local planning authority)			✓
	Devolution of locally-led brownfield funding			✓
	Strategic partnerships with Homes England across the Affordable Housing Programme and brownfield funding			✓
	Homes England compulsory purchase powers (held concurrently)		✓	✓
Keeping the public safe and healthy	Mayoral control of Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) functions where boundaries align [^]			✓
	Clear defined role in local resilience*		✓	✓
	Where desired offer MCAs a duty for improving the public's health (concurrently with local authorities)			✓
Financing local initiatives for residents and business	Ability to introduce mayoral precepting on council tax*			✓
	Ability to introduce supplement on business rates (increases subject to ballot)			✓

* refers to functions which are only applicable to combined authorities ^ refers to functions which are currently only applicable to mayoral combined authorities

The Government also states that in addition to the core elements in the table, there may be scope to consider public sector boundaries on a case by case basis, when requested, to support devolution. Proposals to pool local authority functions, where it can improve services and increase efficiency, will also be supported.

RSN COMMENTS – DEVOLUTION POWERS

- It may not be worth the managerial and administrative effort to seek Level 1 status unless significant new money is generated. But, even then, the 500,000 population requirement may dull any enthusiasm.

Other Comments in the White Paper regarding functions under devolved arrangements

Homes England

The UK Government will ask Homes England to play a wider role in supporting mayors and local government to drive their ambitions for new affordable housing and regeneration in their area

RSN COMMENTS – HOMES ENGLAND

- Homes England must set out its intentions – including for rural areas – as soon as possible.
- In rural areas the over-riding need is for social housing at rents which are affordable based on local wages/salaries.
- See our Rural Affordable Homes asks here: <https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/revitalising-rural/availability-rural-housing.pdf>

Public Safety

Combined authority mayors also have a key leadership role in public safety and improving public health. That is why the UK Government will look to have all combined authority mayors lead on public safety, taking on the PCC role.

RSN COMMENTS – PUBLIC SAFETY

- The fear here is that rural public health and public safety needs get overlooked unless there are specified rural ‘targets’ introduced against which performance can be measured and evaluated.

Fire

Strengthening fire governance will be an important element of the fire reform White Paper “Reforming Our Fire Service”, in which options to transfer governance to an executive leader, such as a mayor, will be consulted on. The devolution framework will be updated following this consultation if appropriate. The UK Government will consider the role that directly elected mayors of local authorities with a county deal could have when it comes to police and fire governance.

RSN COMMENTS - FIRE

- The RSN will work closely with its Rural Fire and Rescue Group in responding to the proposed consultation.

Health Devolution

Opportunities will be explored for Mayoral Combined Authorities to take on a duty to improve the health of their residents, concurrent with the existing duty of their constituent upper-tier councils. This duty will complement the health improvement role of local authorities and their Directors of Public Health, making it easier for Mayoral Combined Authorities to participate alongside local authorities in initiatives that can improve health and proactively consider health as part of key strategies and investment decisions. The forthcoming Integration White Paper will set out plans for health and social care integration in early 2022, ensuring responsibility for this is devolved to the right level.

RSN COMMENTS – HEALTH DEVOLUTION

- The RSN will review the proposals in the proposed Integration White Paper when published. If, as suggested here, the proposal is for Mayoral Combined Authorities to have concurrent duties of constituent upper tier councils they may not be an issue.
- See our Rural Health asks here: <https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/revitalising-rural/access-to-health-and-care.pdf>

Local Government Reorganisation

While there is a case for wholesale institutional reform, this could distract from the implementation of improved local government services and outcomes and delay the agreement and implementation of devolution deals. The UK Government will not impose top-down restructuring of local government. Reorganisation will remain a locally-led avenue available where there is broad local support, but will not be a requirement for a devolution deal. The UK Government intends to follow an incremental approach, using existing legislation to work with areas which are seeking to establish reformed local governance structures.

RSN COMMENTS – LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

- No imposition of a top-down re-structuring of local government is welcomed.
- It remains vitally important that in rural areas District, County and Unitary authorities receive a fair share of national government funding to support local government services. The determination of that fair share must fully reflect the additional costs of service delivery across rural areas and that is much more than just the costs of travel/travel time.

Supporting Local Leaders and the Local Government Sector

First, the UK Government will empower local leaders with the resources they need to level up their communities. This means a commitment to ensuring that funding allocations for councils are based on an up-to-date assessment of their needs and resources. The data used to assess this has not been updated in a number of years, with some dating back as far as 2000. Over the coming months, the UK Government will work closely with the sector and other stakeholders to update this and to look at the challenges and opportunities facing the local government sector before consulting on any potential changes. As part of this, the UK Government will look at options to support local authorities through transitional protection. One-of grant funding provided in the Local Government Finance Settlement in 2022-23 will be excluded from potential transitional protections.

RSN COMMENTS – SUPPORTING LOCAL LEADERS

- The RSN will continue its work on Fair Funding and will support the Rural Fair Share Group in its activities in that regard
- The starting point for rural authorities can be seen through analysis of the Final Local Government Finance Settlement for 2022-23
 - Rural areas in 22/23 will still receive some 37% (£105) per head in Settlement Funding Assessment grant LESS than their urban counterparts
 - Rural residents will pay, on average, 21% (£104) per head MORE in Council Tax than their urban counterparts due to receiving less government grant
 - Rural residents will get 14% per head LESS in social care support overall
- Rural residents pay more, receive fewer services and, on average, earn less than those in urban areas and that is inequitable.

LEPs

The UK Government is encouraging the integration of LEPs and their business boards into MCAs, the GLA and County Deals, where these exist. Where a devolution deal does not yet exist, LEPs will continue to play their vital role in supporting local businesses and the local economy.

RSN COMMENTS - LEPs

- The RSN continues to press for LEPs to have to produce specific investment and delivery plans for their rural areas and to report annually on monitoring and evaluation of those plans.

The Role of Data, Monitoring and Evaluation

High-quality, timely and robust spatial data are a foundational pillar of the new policy regime for levelling up. Granular data are essential for understanding the UK's complex economic geography and tailoring policy to local needs. They enable monitoring of policy impact in places, and facilitate external scrutiny and accountability of those policies, including to the general public.

At present, sub-national data in the UK is insufficiently granular and timely to support user requirements. Indeed, data gaps are not new, and may have contributed to weaknesses in the design and delivery of levelling up policies.

To tackle data gaps and harness the potential of new data, visualisation and experimentation techniques in support of levelling up, the UK Government is putting in place a transformative data and analysis strategy at the sub-national level. This strategy has **four elements**:

1. Producing and disseminating more timely, granular and harmonised subnational statistics through the Government Statistical Service's Subnational Data Strategy (this will produce more timely, granular and harmonised subnational statistics).
2. Making granular data publicly available through a number of tools, including a new ONS interactive subnational data explorer.
3. Harnessing data visualisation techniques and building capacity within the ONS to help decision-makers better understand and compare outcomes.
4. Increasing incentives to evaluate, monitor and experiment in levelling up policies and programmes.

Highly granular data helps in understanding current economic geographies but, by itself, is not sufficient when undertaking spatial planning for the future. Doing so requires a spatial modelling capacity. There has been great progress in developing spatial models over recent years, as more granular data has become available. For example, spatial models have been used to simulate new transport infrastructure and patterns of commercial and residential land use. At present, most local government functions do not have in-house spatial modelling capability. The UK Government is therefore investing in spatial modelling techniques to help local government in their planning.

HM Treasury published an updated list of priority outcomes and metrics, which will form the basis of updated Outcome Delivery Plans covering 2022-25. The plans will be published in spring 2022. The updated list includes metrics that are crucial for measuring and monitoring levelling up, including on a subnational basis.

RSN COMMENTS – DATA MONITORING AND EVALUATION

- This is all to be welcomed as long as the level of granularity enables rural issues and opportunities to be seen and acted upon.
- The RSN will review the updated list of priority outcomes when published

Annual Report on Levelling Up

The UK Government will introduce a statutory obligation to report annually on progress towards meeting the Levelling Up missions.

The report will draw on the metrics set out in this White Paper and provide rigorous analysis and monitoring of progress in reducing regional disparities. It will also provide progress updates on policy related to addressing spatial differences in living standards and social outcomes across the UK. This annual report will be published and be subject to external and Parliamentary scrutiny.

The UK Government is creating a Levelling Up Advisory Council. The Council will be charged with providing independent expert advice on matters relating to the design and delivery of levelling up.

RSN COMMENTS – ANNUAL REPORT

- There must be rural voices – and not just those focussed on land-based sectors – at the Levelling Up Advisory Council.
- In the Executive Summary of the White Paper (but not in any of the Chapters – was it a last- minute thought to correct oversight?) it is stated “Building on this White Paper, we will publish the second report on rural proofing in England this spring. This report will set out how government departments are working to support levelling up in rural areas, through targeted approaches. working to support levelling up in rural areas, through targeted approaches where needed, and how we are strengthening the rural economy, developing rural infrastructure, delivering rural services and managing the natural environment. Of course, the rural proofing annual report is a retrospective look at what has happened. It is not of itself any sort of strategy or vision for rural areas. That said the phrase “where needed” implies that the government will make clear where there is a need.
- Progress towards Levelling Up across rural England should also be included in the main Levelling Up Annual Report and not limited to the Rural Proofing Annual Report).

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