

RURAL LENS REVIEW



Levelling Up White Paper

Chapter 3

The Policy Programme

Chapter 4

Next Steps

Published March 2022



At a glance



Rural Services Network's thoughts on **chapters 3 and 4 of the Levelling Up White Paper.**

- Most proposals for targeted interventions appear to be major town or city focused with rural areas, people, communities and businesses overlooked. A key question across all of the Policy Programmes is whether they will reach rural areas and designed (and funded) to reflect rural issues and circumstances?
- A lot of 'retro-fitting' policies and programmes already decided on spending decisions already made and labelling them as Levelling Up.
- The 'Improving Public Services' outcome sought will never be equitably achievable in rural areas unless and until all the funding formulae for the allocation of national funds to local authorities (and other public service organisations) are fair and reflect the addition costs of service delivery in rural areas.
- The 'proposed legislation - to put in statute some of the key pillars of levelling up' - must include an obligation to publish an annual report on delivery against the levelling up missions. The legislation must include for specific section(s) in that annual report to include delivery in rural areas against SMART targets.
- A specific rural sub-group of the Levelling Up Advisory Council should be established from the outset and would instil more confidence that rural issues were being considered.
- No real details on which bodies are going to be charged with delivery. Local Government seems to have a major role - but no explanation of additional funding to meet change on the scale envisaged (let alone addressing the current funding gap).
- In terms of reviving high streets government must address the fact that rural towns and high streets serve exactly the same function as urban towns to the residents and businesses in the town and their rural hinterlands. The metrics for Towns Fund etc are biased against rural areas.

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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.

RSN INTRODUCTION TO THIS RURAL LENS REVIEW

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](#)
- Rural Lens Review of Levelling Up White Paper - CHAPTER 3: THE POLICY PROGRAMME AND NEXT STEPS (this document).

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).

CHAPTER 3 THE POLICY PROGRAMME

In reviewing this Chapter 3 we look at the content of the White Paper and where we consider there is a point of significance in the rural context (in respect of what is not said as much as what is!) we include RSN comments under each such point. We have included a summary of the 'Case for Action' and the 'Policy Programme' for each of the missions. Whilst there is nothing explicitly about rural issues, they do set out what actions the Government is proposing and it is important to reflect on rural issues arising from them.

The 'missions' are absent of any targets other than general intentions towards such things as 'significant change' and 'closer performance'

Chapter 3 is split into the following Sections:

- 3.1** Introduction
- 3.2** Boost Productivity, Pay, Jobs, and Living Standards by Growing the Private Sector (with 3 'aims' by 2030)
- 3.3** Spread Opportunities and Improve Public Services (with 3 'aims' by 2030)
- 3.4** Restore a Sense of Community, Local Pride and Belonging (with 3 'aims' by 2030)
- 3.5** Empower Local Leaders and Communities (with 1 'aim' by 2030)

The introduction to Chapter 3 explains that Chapter 2 sets out 12 specific missions and the overall policy regime for the UK Government to deliver against those objectives. Chapter 3 goes on to set out the next steps in the policy programme – with specific interventions designed to begin to deliver these missions and overarching objectives. It details how new policies will build on initiatives and programmes launched since 2019 and, most recently, at the 2021 Spending Review (SR21). There is a of 'retro-fitting' of policies and programmes already decided onto spending decisions already made and labelling them 'Levelling Up'

It further states that "The policies outlined in this chapter are only part of the answer to levelling up. To meet the ambition of the missions there is a need to go further and faster in a number of areas – from strengthening manufacturing to fighting crime, reforming local taxation to providing communities with new tools to revive high streets. The policies in this chapter are further, significant, stepping stones on what must be a sustained journey of change".

The Introduction to Chapter 3 refers to both reforming local taxation and providing communities with new tools to revive high streets.

RSN COMMENTS – THE POLICY PROGRAMME

- The talk of ‘a sustained journey of change’ is undoubtable right and the measurable initiatives set out in the White Paper have an achievement date of 2030. This is two General Elections away and perhaps three Spending Reviews, therefore what is necessary are some interim targets for delivery within the lifetime of this Parliament or the current Spending Review
- Integral to reforming local taxation is ensuring that rural areas receive a Fair Share of national funds to support local services and that funding formulae fully reflect rural service delivery costs.
- In terms of reviving high streets government must address the fact that rural towns and high streets serve exactly the same function as urban towns to the residents and businesses in the town and their rural hinterlands. The metrics for Towns Fund etc are biased against rural areas as set out in the relevant RSN Rural Lens Reviews detailed below.
- The RSN has produced [Rural Lens Reviews](#) in respect of [Build Back Better High Streets](#); [Government Place Based Funds](#); [A Plan for Jobs](#) and [Build Back Better – Plan for Growth](#). The key messages from these reviews must be taken on board in developing further policy responses to the issues.

Boost Productivity, Pay, Jobs, and Living Standards by Growing the Private Sector

The Government is setting four core missions on this spanning living standards, research and development (R & D), transport infrastructure and digital connectivity

The associated mission is:

By 2030, pay, employment and productivity will have risen in every area of the UK, with each containing a globally competitive city, and the gap between the top performing and other areas closing.

There are **five elements** that will support the delivery of this mission on living standards:

1. Small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) finance
2. Institutional investment
3. Mobile investment and trade policy
4. Adoption and diffusion
5. Manufacturing

For each of the above five elements the White Paper sets out the Case for Action, and details of the intended policy programme.

SME Finance

Case for Action: SMEs are the backbone of the economy. In South West England, SME's account for 70% of jobs in the private sector. Many promising SME's fail, or do not grow because they cannot access finance.

Policy Programme: Extend reach of The British Business Bank (BBB) established in 2014. SR21 announced £1.6bn of government investment in the next generation of BBB Regional Investment Funds. SR21 also announced an additional £150M commitment to the Regional Business Angels Programme supporting "high potential businesses with early-stage equity finance and reducing geographic imbalances. Government Departments will "work with the Levelling-up Advisory Council to further explore options for unlocking capital for SME's".

RSN COMMENTS – SME FINANCE

- It is important that the British Business Bank does not focus on the more visible medium sized businesses but makes real efforts to reach the small, and indeed micro, businesses that are predominant in rural areas.
- SMEs are defined as up to 250 employees: small business up to 50 employees and micro 10 or fewer employees.
- Many rural businesses needing support are small or micro.
- Not counted are the self-employed or other forms of non-registered businesses of which there are very many across rural areas.

Unlocking Institutional Investment; Unlocking globally mobile investment and harnessing the UK's independent trade policy; Adoption and diffusion

There are no specific rural issues to raise on these points at this time.

Manufacturing

Case for Action: In older industrial towns, manufacturing accounts for almost twice the proportion of jobs as in larger population centres, and three times as much as in London. Outside London, wages in manufacturing are also higher, with a wage premium of over £11 per hour for the UK as a whole – higher in some places, such the North East and North West of England. Between 1979 and 2019, output per job in the UK grew nearly twice as fast in manufacturing as it did in the economy as a whole.

Policy Programme: Reference to 'Upcoming Food Strategy', the Made Smarter Programme (the UK's industrial digitalisation initiative, aiming to boost UK manufacturing productivity and growth and to reduce CO2 emissions. It supports the development, diffusion and adoption of transformative technologies such as additive manufacturing, robotics and autonomous systems, and the industrial Internet of Things).

Referring to Levelling Up and the Net Zero Strategy the following are referred to Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage; Hydrogen; Automotive, Offshore wind; Nuclear; Green public transport; Decarbonising buildings

RSN COMMENTS - MANUFACTURING

- It is worth noting that 6% of registered businesses in rural areas are manufacturing business. This compares to just 4% in urban areas.
- Many businesses across rural areas form an essential part of the supply chain to manufacturing businesses situated in urban areas. The needs and opportunities for these supply chain businesses must not be overlooked
- The opportunities (and challenges) to rural areas from the Net Zero transition need to be supported. The RSN has produced [Rural Lens Reviews](#) of the [Net Zero Strategy](#); [10 Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution](#); [Heat and Buildings Strategy](#) and the [Sustainable Warmth Strategy](#). The key messages from these reviews must be taken on board in developing further policy responses to the issues.

R&D and Innovation

The associated mission is:

By 2030, domestic public investment in R&D outside the Greater South East will increase by at least 40%, and over the Spending Review period by at least one third. This additional government funding will seek to leverage at least twice as much private sector investment over the long term to stimulate innovation and productivity growth.

Case for Action: R&D is key to accumulating capital, generating business innovation and improving productivity. But gross R&D (GERD) spending is currently unevenly distributed across the UK, with 54% taking place in London, the South East and East of England. This share has increased by approximately 1 percentage point per year since 2017. The UK Government is determined to increase research and innovation capacity across the UK, with evidence showing that targeting areas where investment is currently lower may deliver higher returns, with larger boosts to both GVA outside the Greater South East and national GDP.

Policy Programme: Implement the plans in the R&D Roadmap and Innovation Strategy. Defra will spend £175M on net Zero related R&D in Defra sectors in the next 3 years. Mentions the Farming Innovation Programme.

There are no specific rural issues to flag up at this point

Transport Connectivity

The associated mission is:

By 2030, local public transport connectivity across the country will be significantly closer to the standards of London, with improved services, simpler fares and integrated ticketing.

Case for Action: Transport can boost productivity by connecting people to jobs and businesses to each other. It also supports wider quality of life, positive health outcomes and local pride by helping to regenerate high streets and town centres, supporting people to increase their physical activity, socialise and access shops and services. smaller cities, towns and villages also need good public transport and high-quality local roads to ensure everyday journeys are safe and quick.

Policy Programme: The policy programme is focused on (a) local transport; (b) empowering local leaders; and (c) connectivity between economic centres. Since 2020, the UK Government has published the National Bus Strategy and Cycling and Walking Plan, backed by over £5bn of funding for buses and active - travel over this Parliament. £3bn has been allocated for transforming buses.

In places where it will make the most impact, the UK Government will enable increased frequencies and reduced fares, with high-frequency services in densely-populated areas and new forms of demand-responsive transport to places, such as business parks and rural villages, that are not well served by linear bus routes.

In addition, Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) will take on greater powers and responsibilities, so that they can plan their transport systems more effectively. 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, so that they can put Local Transport Plans in place before the end of this Parliament, as well as offering multi-year integrated settlements covering core local transport funding streams for local highways maintenance and smaller upgrades.

The UK Government will support all LTAs by publishing new guidance on Local Transport Plans, so that all LTAs can deliver updated plans by the end of this Parliament, with clear project pipelines and comprehensive strategies to improve local transport for people and reduce carbon emissions.

RSN COMMENTS - TRANSPORT

- Where Bus Services are non-existent or infrequent, action will have significant impact. Government needs to ensure that a fair proportion of the £5bn (only £1.2bn of this has been allocated for priority measures, networks and fares) of funding for buses and active travel in the National Bus Strategy reaches rural areas.
- The Bus Recovery Fund has proved crucial for some areas and its deferment as opposed to withdrawal is welcome. Without the Fund some areas would have to cut services.
- The recognition that transport supports wider quality of life and positive health outcomes is very welcome. The RSN has been making that point for a long time.
- The additional costs of providing services across rural areas must be fully reflected in allocations
- Where the White Paper refers to “places where it will make the most impact” it is essential that impact is not just measured by passenger numbers. Population numbers are lower in rural areas but the impact of introducing or providing reliable, timely bus services could be greater.
- The RSN has produced a [Rural Lens Review](#) in respect of the [National Bus Strategy](#). The key messages from this review must be taken on board in developing further policy responses to the issues.

- In March 2021 the Government issued a Consultation Paper on “Future of transport: rural strategy - call for evidence”. Click [here](#) to view the RSN consultation response. We call on the Government to urgently set out proposals
- Linking the devolution of greater powers only to devolution deals with a directly elected mayor is divisive. It is also contradictory in that elsewhere in the White Paper it is stated that the Government is now taking a more flexible approach to Devolution Deals, so a Mayor is not a prerequisite.
- A requirement to update Local Transport Plans without the resources to implement risks losing public confidence.
- See our Rural Transport asks here: <https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/revitalising-rural/rural-transport.pdf>

Digital Connectivity

The associated mission is:

By 2030, the UK will have nationwide gigabit-capable broadband and 4G coverage, with 5G coverage for the majority of the population.

Case for Action: The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the importance of digital infrastructure right across society, from ensuring business continuity to reducing isolation. Improved digital connectivity has the potential to drive growth and productivity across the UK and widen job opportunities through remote working. However, there are significant spatial disparities in the quality of broadband and mobile networks, with rural areas likely to experience worse digital connectivity than urban areas. Infrastructure is only part of the picture: economic benefits will only materialise if businesses and workers have the skills to take advantage of improved infrastructure.

Policy Programme: In 2020, the UK Government published the National Infrastructure Strategy, committing to providing £5bn (only £1.25 bn allocated in the spending review) in public funding to roll out gigabit broadband to at least 85% of the country by 2025, and subsequently to as close to 100% as possible, working with the private sector. Public investment will target premises that are hardest to reach and which would otherwise not be provided for by the private sector, ensuring no areas are left behind.

The UK Government has also agreed a £1bn deal with mobile operators to deliver the Shared Rural Network programme. This will see operators collectively increase 4G coverage to 95% by 2025.

In 2022, the UK Government will publish the Wireless Infrastructure Strategy. This will review how far the private sector will go to deliver wireless infrastructure – including 5G – across the country and determine whether there are any market failures in places that need to be addressed, and how the UK Government could tackle these.

RSN COMMENTS – DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY

- There is a long history of broken promises in relation to access to high quality broadband for rural areas. The current administration's manifesto for the 2019 General Election contained a similar promise with an achievement date of 2025. £5b remains promised to achieve this, whilst only £1.2b of this has been committed in the public accounts.
- There is a real need for Government to speed up delivery of its Project Gigabit in rural areas. The roll out in commercial urban areas is happening fast and rural areas are once again being left behind.
- On the positive side, this 'mission' cannot be achieved without it being addressed in rural areas, albeit by 2030 instead of 2025. This is just about the only place in the White Paper with substantive reference to rural areas.
- In May 2021 the Government issued a Call for Evidence in respect of Delivering Better Connectivity to the 'Very Hard to Reach'. We call on the Government to urgently come forward with proposals to deliver to these hard to reach residential and business premises.
- See our Rural Digital Connectivity asks here: <https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/revitalising-rural/rural-connectivity.pdf>

Spread Opportunity and Improve Public Services

There are three core missions here spanning education, skills and health:

Education

The associated mission with this is:

By 2030, the number of primary school children achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and maths will have significantly increased. In England, this will mean 90% of children will achieve the expected standard, and the percentage of children meeting the expected standard in the worst performing areas will have increased by over a third.

Case for Action: Children's development, attainment and later-life chances vary significantly across the UK.

Policy Programme: It is critical that UK Government investment in schools is distributed fairly between all areas of England, and all schools, to level up opportunity. The introduction of a schools national funding formula in 2018-19 was a significant step in removing the postcode lottery of the previous funding system. A majority of English local authorities have now moved towards the national funding formula. DfE recently consulted on completing its reforms to the national funding formula and will publish its next steps in due course.

DfE will launch a consultation on moving schools in these areas with successive “Requires Improvement” Ofsted judgements into strong multi-academy trusts, so that they can better access the support they need to improve.

In addition, the UK Government will create a new UK National Academy. It will support pupils from all backgrounds and areas to succeed at the very highest levels.

Skills and Training

The associated mission with this is:

By 2030, the number of people successfully completing high-quality skills training will have significantly increased in every area of the UK. In England, this will lead to 200,000 more people successfully completing high-quality skills training annually, driven by 80,000 more people completing courses in the lowest skilled areas.

Case for Action: The UK Government’s goal is to support a high-wage, high-skill economy by building skills and human capital, particularly in places where they are weakest. This includes supporting people to realise their career aspirations without having to leave their communities, and to ensure that local employers have access to the skills they need to grow and thrive.

Policy Programme: putting local employers at the heart of provision; strengthening locally accessible institutions, notably the national network of further education colleges; ensuring that all individuals have lifetime access to training. DfE is piloting new employer-led Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) in 2021-22 and supporting providers with Strategic Development Funding to help shape technical skills provision to better meet local labour market needs. The UK Government will now roll out these employer led LSIPs across England, together with supporting funding, looking to prioritise areas with the most pressing skills needs.

Alongside this, as announced in Skills for Jobs, the UK Government also intends to reform funding and accountability for further education.

The UK Government will continue to encourage work-based training through apprenticeships in England, increasing funding to £2.7bn by 2024-25. This includes an enhanced recruitment service for SMEs, which are more likely to employ younger apprentices and those living in disadvantaged areas.

RSN COMMENTS – SKILLS AND TRAINING

- The RSN will review the proposals on ‘completing the reforms to the schools national funding formula when published.
- Is there a danger that for small rural schools (which on the whole perform well) that this ‘mission’ takes the performance of those schools for granted and resources are moved elsewhere? This and falling school rolls in some areas - due to growing age imbalance – could bring about further closures of small rural schools.
- The RSN has produced [Rural Lens Reviews](#) in respect of the [Skills for Jobs White Paper](#) and the Government’s [Plan for Jobs](#). The key messages from these reviews must be taken on board in developing further policy responses to the issues.
- Previous work has shown that issues with further education provision for many rural residents include: physical access to (or distance from) colleges; limited choice in terms of accessing colleges and courses; and the costs associated with travel to colleges. These must be urgently addressed. An intermediate objective on skills around close to 100% of all rural 16-year-olds having reasonable access to a defined choice of post 16 education at a high-quality standard could make a substantial difference.
- The Government’s stated goal is to support a high-wage, high-skill economy by building skills and human capital, particularly in places where they are weakest. This includes supporting people to realise their career aspirations without having to leave their communities, and to ensure that local employers have access to the skills they need to grow and thrive. There can be no doubt that rural areas fall within the areas needing support. Bespoke actions to reflect the rural context are necessary. Many young rural people have to leave their community to find good employment or careers.
- The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education must be alive to the skill needs of particular rural-based businesses, including SMEs, the self-employed and those in the land-based sector.
- Feedback from RSN members has highlighted that the Kickstart Scheme has been very beneficial. The Kickstart Scheme however, is due to finish in March 2022. Re-instatement of the Scheme would be very much welcomed.
- See our Rural Skills and Training asks here: <https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/revitalising-rural/rural-fe-training-skills.pdf>

Health

The associated mission is:

By 2030, the gap in Healthy Life Expectancy (HLE) between local areas where it is highest and lowest will have narrowed, and by 2035 HLE will rise by five years.

Case for Action: Better health improves productivity and well-being. People living in the most deprived communities in England have up to 18 years less of their lives in good general health than the least deprived. This is driven by a variety of factors, including smoking rates, alcohol intake and poor diet. It is also heavily affected by differences in factors such as the quality of housing and access to healthier food. Other local factors, such as demographics, also matter – for example, in rural or coastal areas where populations are older. Access to and quality of health services are also important drivers of health outcomes and can vary by area.

Policy Programme: The policy programme is focused on: improving public health; supporting people to change their food and diet; and tackling diagnostic backlogs. The UK Government will also maintain the Public Health Grant in real terms over the SR21 period, enabling local authorities to invest in prevention and frontline services like child health visits.

DHSC will work with the whole of government to consider health disparities at each stage at which they arise, from the wider determinants of health to the behavioural factors that influence health, to the health services that people access and receive.

The UK Government will set out a strategy to tackle the core drivers of inequalities in health outcomes in a new White Paper on Health Disparities in England in 2022. This will set out a bold ambition for reducing the gap in health outcomes, with a strong focus on prevention and disparities by ethnicity, socio-economic background and geography.

RSN COMMENTS - HEALTH

- The allocations for Public Health services for 2022/2023 show that predominantly urban local authorities receive 57% more per head compared to rural local authorities. That's an allocation of £69.87 per head for urban and only £44.50 per person for rural residents. This is despite the fact that it costs more to deliver services across rural areas.
- The 'Improving Public Services' outcome sought will never be equitably achievable in rural areas unless and until all the funding formulae for the allocation of national funds to local authorities (and other public service organisations) are fair and reflect the addition costs of service delivery in rural areas.
- The geographical level at which Healthy Life Expectantly is measured is crucially important. Just as rural poverty and disadvantage exists in pockets and is hidden so is life expectancy. Data must be collected at the lowest possible level and policies and process developed in a rural context.
- This metric will undoubtedly favour urban areas. Improving healthy life expectancy of those who fair badly, wherever they live, is a more appropriate, people focused rather than geographic focused approach.

- The recognition in the White Paper that the older demographic in rural areas is an important factor is welcomed. Policies, programmes and funding must address this. The metric for this 'mission' is poor from a rural perspective. The focus should be on directly addressing the social determinants of ill-health
- Arising from the [Report of the APPG for Rural Health and Care and the National Centre for Rural Health and Care](#) a conclusion is "There is clear evidence that change is required. We must provide tailored, person-centred, community-based approaches to health and care services in rural communities. Without clear changes in policy direction, the situation will move from urgent to critical.
- "The current 'one size fits all' model is ineffective and inefficient. If we are truly serious about 'levelling up', we must ensure that rural residents have the same access to timely, quality services as their urban counterparts. The solutions are there, they just need to be recognised and properly funded."
- The strategy to tackle the core drivers of inequalities in health outcomes to be published in a new White Paper on Health Disparities in England in 2022 must demonstratively be rural-proofed.
- See our rural health asks here: <https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/revitalising-rural/access-to-health-and-care.pdf>

Restore a Sense of Community, Local Pride and Belonging

The associated mission is:

By 2030, pride in place, such as people's satisfaction with their town centre and engagement in local culture and community, will have risen in every area of the UK, with the gap between top performing and other areas closing.

There are three elements that will support the delivery of this mission: regeneration; communities; and culture, heritage and sport.

Regeneration

Case for Action: In recent years, the foundations of the traditional high street have been weakened by changing consumer habits and institutional investment in property has fallen in many parts of the UK.

Policy Programme: The High Streets Task Force is helping communities regenerate their high streets to reflect evolving local needs. It is already supporting 84 local authorities with access to expert support in areas such as place making, planning and design. The UK Government is now announcing the next 68 local authorities to receive this expert support from the Task Force, including Southend-on-Sea, Somerset West and Taunton, Rossendale and Dudley. These have been allocated using the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), together with a measure of retail exposure

In addition, the UK Government will bring forward further measures to make high streets and town centres the thriving hearts of communities again. We will incentivise landlords to fill vacant units by giving local authorities the power to require landlords to rent out vacant properties to prospective tenants

In respect of Communities the Policy Programme is focused on supporting young people; empowering communities; and investing in communities.

Supporting Young People

The UK Government will invest £560m of funding over the next three years to deliver a new National Youth Guarantee that reflects young people's priorities, with a focus on levelling up. This will ensure that, by 2025, every young person in England will have access to regular out of school activities, adventures away from home and opportunities to volunteer, supported by: investing £368m in areas of England with high levels of child income deprivation and a lack of youth provision, reaching deprived major urban areas and other pockets of deprivation; investing £288m of capital to deliver up to 300 new and refurbished youth facilities, ranging from small modular buildings to flagship youth zone projects, which will be supported by revenue funding to give young people access to support from youth workers, creating over 45,000 extra youth activities per year.

Empowering Communities

Communities also need strong community infrastructure and social capital, but this is lacking in many places and tends to be particularly weak in the most deprived places. This is why the UK Government will set out a new Strategy for Community Spaces and Relationships. The strategy will be underpinned by the following guiding principles: community power – making it easier for local people and community groups to come together to set local priorities and shape their neighbourhoods; understanding “what works” – building the evidence base to better understand how to support communities and put them in the driving seat to level up; listening to communities – engaging with communities, local government and civil society to identify priorities, the assets that matter to local

places, and the policies and actions needed to strengthen community infrastructure; and every community matters – reaching out to engage with the most disconnected communities, and ensuring funding reaches those most in need.

The UK Government will begin work with partners in local government and civil society on a programme to put in place a bold new approach to community empowerment. This includes launching a review of neighbourhood governance in England, looking at how to make it easier for local people and community groups to come together, set local priorities and shape the future of their neighbourhoods. The review will also look at the role and functions of parish councils in England and how to make them quicker and easier to establish.

One model the UK Government will test is Community Covenants. These would be agreements between councils, public bodies and the communities they serve, seeking to harness the energy, know-how and assets of local communities. They would also set out how local social capital and infrastructure can be built and sustained to encourage confident and active communities. A Covenant approach would see local authorities and communities work together to take a holistic look at the health of local civic and community life, set out a driving ambition for their area, and share power and resources to achieve this.

On Assets the White Paper says the UK Government will enhance the offer in the Community Ownership Fund, learning lessons from the first bidding round to maximise the impact of the fund across the UK. As part of the strategy for community spaces and relationships, the UK Government will consider how the existing Community Asset Transfer and Asset of Community Value Schemes can be enhanced and consult on options to go further to support community ownership.

On Planning the White Paper says councils and communities will create new local design codes to shape streets as residents wish; widen the accessibility of neighbourhood planning, encouraging more accessible hybrid models for planning committees in England; and look to pilot greater empowerment of communities to shape regeneration and development plans. The ability to have a meaningful say on individual planning applications will be retained and improved through new digital technologies.

On Social Economy the White Paper says the UK Government will consider how best to encourage social organisations and entrepreneurship to flourish in left-behind places across the UK, building on and augmenting existing support, generating evidence on what social enterprises need to do to thrive in disadvantaged places, and encouraging the next generation of social entrepreneurs.

On Procurement the White Paper says as part of the UK Government's plans to reform the way the public sector procures services it will improve transparency, provide greater flexibility and put greater emphasis on social value, as discussed further in Chapter 2. New reforms will include awarding contracts on the basis of Most Advantageous Tender, encouraging a greater consideration of social value across the c.£300bn of public procurement contracts.

In addition, the White Paper says that UK Government will:

- Provide community investment as part of the £2.6bn UKSPF, including new investment opportunities in community-led activity.
- Explore further collaboration between lottery funders for arts, heritage, sport and community projects within the UK to ensure that £1.7bn in National Lottery funding every year reaches the people and places that need it most;
- Explore how the existing Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) can be used to support neighbourhood and community activity where Parish Councils do not exist across England and continue the neighbourhood portion of CIL as it introduces a new Infrastructure Levy; and consider ways to further develop the role of government in leveraging private investment into community and neighbourhood infrastructure, community activity and wealth building, which will include building on and extending the evidence base for de-risking interventions, as well as exploring new opportunities for working with the financial sector to test and scale innovative approaches.

RSN COMMENTS – SENSE OF COMMUNITY AND LOCAL PRIDE

- The 'Improving Public Services' outcome sought will never be equitably achievable in rural areas unless and until all the funding formulae for the allocation of national funds to local authorities (and other public service organisations) are fair and reflect the addition costs of service delivery in rural areas.
- The proposal to support Young People must reach rural areas. Access to out of school activities is hampered by the lack of public transport.
- "Every young person" sounds great but will not be delivered if all that is done is funding into projects in "areas of England with high levels of child income deprivation" and "deprived major urban areas". Out of school facilities also need to be accessible in rural areas with scattered populations.

- Studies by [Pragmatix Advisory for the RSN](#) have demonstrated that “The way in which government allocates spending spatially is placing rural communities at a disadvantage, and failing to unlock the opportunities they can offer to the nation. Rural areas face the triple whammy of higher costs, lower funding and greater need. Lack of economies of scale mean delivery of services in rural areas will likely cost more than in urban locations. But despite this, public sector spending per head is higher in regions with greater urban populations. Metrics used to prioritise fund allocations often fail to reflect the reality for sparsely populated areas and remote communities”.
- Pragmatix also advised that “If government economic and structural development funds were prioritised and allocated on the basis of local real incomes, there would be a clearer line of sight from the levelling up objective through to action on the ground. And more rural locations, which have had their needs obscured in the past and been disadvantaged by recent funding rounds, would benefit from a fairer distribution of national funds”.
- Until the issues addressed in the Pragmatix reports are addressed there will be no meaningful levelling up in rural areas.
- Many rural communities are ‘disconnected’ – not least by digital connectivity and the lack of public transport provision.
- The [RSN's response](#) to the Planning White Paper raised very many concerns about the proposals from a rural perspective. Those concerns must be fully addressed as detailed proposals are developed.
- The White Paper declares Government’s intention to “begin work with partners in local government and civil society on a programme to put in place a bold new approach to community empowerment. This includes launching a review of neighbourhood governance in England, looking at how to make it easier for local people and community groups to come together, set local priorities and shape the future of their neighbourhoods. The review will also look at the role and functions of parish councils in England and how to make them quicker and easier to establish. This is a matter of considerable interest across rural areas. The establishment of new Parish Councils is largely an urban agenda.

Culture, Heritage and Sport

Case for Action: While talent and creativity is spread equally across the UK, the opportunity to enjoy culture and sport is not. Those in less affluent regions are less likely to have visited a heritage site, or to have engaged with the arts, compared to those from more affluent regions.

Policy Programme: Tackling disparities in access to culture and delivering a truly national cultural offer should be a defining feature of levelling up. The UK Government will make changes to transform the landscape for arts, culture and heritage by significantly increasing cultural investment outside London. committing to 100% of the additional funding for Arts Council England agreed at SR21 going to support culture and creativity outside London. In the spring, DCMS will set out further plans to deliver this over the next three years and beyond.

RSN COMMENTS – CULTURE, HERITAGE & SPORT

- Support to the rural cultural sector is hugely important. Again, access to culture, heritage and sport by rural residents is hampered by poor public transport. There is a need to reach small rural cultural venues, touring schemes and arts initiatives.
- The RSN supports the need for a clear, multi-year programme or strategy to support the rural cultural sector. This needs to be fully funded with funding ring-fenced to rural areas.

Home Ownership and Housing Quality in England

The associated mission is:

By 2030, renters will have a secure path to ownership with the number of first-time buyers increasing in all areas; and the government's ambition is for the number of non-decent rented homes to have fallen by 50%, with the biggest improvements in the lowest performing areas.

Case for Action: Nowhere is the need for making opportunity more equal more urgent than in housing. Housing has a critical role in delivering the outcomes that levelling up aims to achieve across the UK. Housing is a necessity to support economic growth. Without enough housing, productivity growth will be constrained as the engine of the economy – labour mobility – is slowed and the benefits realised from the location of people, business and finance in the same area is undermined. Beyond productivity, housing is key to restoring a sense of community, local pride and belonging. Home ownership provides people with a tangible stake in society, a place to forge community bonds and a stable place to raise a family. The importance of housing goes beyond its availability. Having a decent home is fundamental to our well-being and housing quality must be addressed in order to create thriving neighbourhoods and communities.

The UK Government is investing £800m this year alone to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping – including providing 14,500 more bed spaces and 2,700 support staff across England – while also reforming the system to tackle the causes of homelessness so that fewer people are pushed into a life on the streets.

Policy Programme: The policy programme is focused on: making homeownership a reality; improving housing quality; and reforming the planning system.

The UK Government also wants to encourage empty homes back into use and empower local leaders to invest back into their communities. The UK Government will therefore introduce new powers for councils to apply a premium of up to 100% to homes left empty for a year, rather than two years. The UK Government will ensure councils retain all additional revenues to empower their local leaders to deliver on their priorities and deal directly with the impacts of empty homes

Addressing poor energy efficiency by targeting retrofit funding at the worst- performing homes and those least able to pay. The £2.2bn funding through the Home Upgrade Grant, Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund and Boiler Upgrade Scheme, will help to improve energy efficiency, reduce carbon emissions and lower energy bills. The Future Homes Standard and Future Buildings Standards will also ensure new homes and buildings reach much higher energy efficiency standards.

For older people trapped in non-decent or unsuitable accommodation, the UK Government will work to increase the choices available to them. A new Task Force will be launched shortly to look at ways better choice, quality and security of housing for older people can be provided.

Local plans will be made simpler and shorter, and improved data that underpins plans will ensure that they are transparent, understandable and take into account the environment that will be developed. All of this will result in a system that is easier to engage with and works more efficiently, with communities having more of a say and more councils agreeing local plans.

The current planning system enables some developers to benefit disproportionately and unfairly from the land they develop. This is why the UK Government is developing models for a new infrastructure levy which will enable local authorities to capture value from development more efficiently, securing the affordable housing and infrastructure communities need.

The UK Government will also explore further options to limit the competition first-time buyers face. This means looking at all of the options available to government to limit the factors which are pricing out local people, seeking to learn from international comparators.

RSN COMMENTS – HOME OWNERSHIP AND HOUSNG QUALITY

- The [RSN's response](#) to the Planning White Paper raised very many concerns about the proposals from a rural perspective. Those concerns must be fully addressed as detailed proposals are developed.
- Government's decision to explore further options to limit the competition first-time buyers face. This means looking at all of the options available to government to limit the factors which are pricing out local people, seeking to learn from international comparators is welcomed as long as it genuinely considers housing affordability. This must include exploring the issues arising from second homes and tourist lets in many rural and coastal areas.
- In rural areas it is, and has been for decades, the lack of housing -to rent or buy- at prices which are affordable based on incomes earned in the local area which is at the heart of the on-going housing crisis.
- For older people trapped in non-decent or unsuitable accommodation, in rural areas the choices are too often hampered by lack of availability of suitable accommodation where they live and where they have support networks. The new Task Force referred to must consider these issues.
- See our Rural Affordable Homes asks here: <https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/revitalising-rural/availability-rural-housing.pdf>

Safer Neighbourhoods

The associated mission is:

By 2030, homicide, serious violence and neighbourhood crime will have fallen, focused on the worst-affected areas.

RSN COMMENTS – SAFER NEIGHBOURHOODS

- There are no specific issues detailed which are unique to rural areas which we feel need drawing attention to at this point.
- There is no reference rural crime and community safety – indeed the word rural does not appear at all in this section of the White Paper.
- The Police Funding Formula needs urgent review and must ensure that the nature of crime and disorder in rural areas (and the costs of rural policing to meet those issues) is fully reflected.

Empowering Local Leaders and Communities

The associated mission is:

By 2030, every part of England that wants one will have a devolution deal with powers at or approaching the highest level of devolution and a simplified, long-term funding settlement.

These matters are dealt with in more detail in Chapter 2 of the White Paper which is the subject of a separate RSN Rural Lens Review, [click here to view](#).

CHAPTER 4: NEXT STEPS

The UK Government will put in place a comprehensive process of engagement and informal consultation to inform levelling up delivery and future policy-making, and avoid the siloed, short-term and small-scale approaches that have hindered attempts to tackle spatial disparities in the past. Some of the key elements of this process include:

- A structured process of visits, at ministerial level, across the whole of the UK in the months following publication of this White Paper, to discuss how levelling up can be successfully achieved in that area and to gather feedback.
- An ongoing, long-term commitment for further ministerial visits across the whole of the UK, to update on progress on the policy programme and missions.
- Setting up local panels, drawn from a wide range of stakeholders, to serve as a sounding board on levelling up delivery and implementation, working closely with the new Levelling Up Directors once established.
- Annual reports summarising the key messages from these local panels, which will feed into the UK Government's Cabinet Committee on Levelling Up.
- An online space where local ideas, proposals and initiatives around levelling up can be heard and co-ordinated, to spread knowledge and understanding of what has worked locally and to foster innovation and experimentation.

Setting and delivering missions and metrics: Meeting ambitious and aspirational missions will require innovation and change across the public, private and civil society sectors. The UK Government will work with the ONS, devolved and local government, and other external experts and stakeholders, to road test the missions, and design and agree suitable metrics and data to track performance against them. For the UK Government, it will be a cross-departmental endeavour with significant responsibilities for ministers to work together across their policy portfolios and Levelling Up Directors to work across all tiers of government. The UK Government will engage with partners, stakeholders and experts to further inform the missions, and will periodically publish updates as appropriate, ensuring that the missions and their delivery are rooted in what places need. This will also include close collaboration with devolved administrations, particularly where missions intersect with devolved policy areas like health and education.

Devolution framework in England: The UK Government will continue to work with local government in England to shape devolution deals, roll out further MCAs and create new County Deals. A framework has been set out in Chapter 2 to simplify the devolution process. The UK Government will engage with local actors as the framework evolves through the negotiation and implementation of new devolution deals.

New body focusing on local government data: The UK Government will work with local leaders, citizens and sector experts to establish a body to focus on local data, transparency and outcomes. Strengthening local data will be the cornerstone for this body, to empower citizens with a greater knowledge of their place and support local authorities to learn from one another and be more user focused.

Taking a partnership approach: The UK Government is exploring a new approach to place through Levelling Up Directors. They will provide a key point of contact for local areas, acting as a bridge between local leaders and central government. The UK Government will work with local partners to tailor and develop the model to ensure that it is rooted in what places need.

Fund simplification: The UK Government will engage with local government and key stakeholders on the simplification of the local growth funding landscape with respect to the publication of further plans later this year.

There will be a specific role for expert advisory committees, run as sub-groups of the Levelling Up Advisory Council. These will serve as a confidential forum for engagement between experts on the major cross-cutting themes of this White Paper. Themes covered by these expert sub-committees are likely to include:

- Regional adoption and diffusion infrastructure – improving the uptake of productivity-enhancing technologies and management practises by businesses.
- Role of private sector capital in levelling up and strategies for encouraging more institutional investment.
- Local communities and social infrastructure – the role of neighbourhood policies and strategies for building community capacity in left behind areas.

Future Legislation

The UK Government will bring forward legislation to put in statute some of the key pillars of levelling up to ensure this new framework is built on strong foundations. The UK Government will explore provisions around: introducing an obligation for the UK Government to publish an annual report on delivery against the levelling up missions; and strengthening devolution legislation in England in order to expand devolution to more places, deepen current devolution deals and enable the devolution process to be simpler and more transparent.

The UK Government will also implement reforms to the planning system as outlined in Chapter 3. Many of these improvements will pay dividends across the whole country, but particular reforms will support regeneration in less prosperous places. The UK Government will explore provisions around compulsory purchase powers and support for reusing brownfield land.

More details on these reforms will be published in due course.

RSN COMMENTS – NEXT STEPS

- We encourage RSN members to seek Ministerial visits to put across directly to Minister the rural issues associated with levelling up.
- We encourage RSN members to set up the proposed local panels – specially to flag up rural issues and opportunities. The RSN will be happy to receive reports and to assemble a national rural picture from them.
- The most urgent next step should be to review the metrics to a much lower geographical level to ensure that rural needs and opportunities are not overlooked. We will watch closely the work of the proposed new body focusing on local government data. As said before the granularity of national data will also be of significant importance.
- A specific rural sub-group of the Levelling Up Advisory Council would be appropriate and would instil more confidence that rural issues were being considered.
- Delivery targets (including for rural areas) to be achieved at various points between now and 2030 must be set and progress monitored and published.
- The ‘proposed legislation - to put in statute some of the key pillars of levelling up’ - must include an obligation to publish an annual report on delivery against the levelling up missions. The legislation must include for specific section(s) in that annual report to include delivery in rural areas against SMART targets.

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.

ANNEX: THE LEVELLING UP MISSIONS AND FOCUS AREAS

Focus Area	Mission
<i>Boost productivity, pay, jobs and living standards by growing the private sector, especially in those places where they are lagging</i>	
Living Standards	By 2030, pay, employment and productivity will have risen in every area of the UK, with each containing a globally competitive city, and the gap between the top performing and other areas closing.
Research and Development	By 2030, domestic public investment in R&D outside the Greater South East will increase by at least 40%, and over the Spending Review period by at least one third. This additional government funding will seek to leverage at least twice as much private sector investment over the long term to stimulate innovation and productivity growth.
Transport	By 2030, local public transport connectivity across the country will be significantly closer to the standards of London, with improved services, simpler fares and integrated ticketing.
Digital Connectivity	By 2030, the UK will have nationwide gigabit-capable broadband and 4G coverage, with 5G coverage for the majority of the population.
<i>Spread opportunities and improve public services, especially in those places where they are weakest</i>	
Education	By 2030, the number of primary school children achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and maths will have significantly increased. In England, this will mean 90% of children will achieve the expected standard, and the percentage of children meeting the expected standard in the worst performing areas will have increased by over a third.
Skills	By 2030, the number of people successfully completing high-quality skills training will have significantly increased in every area of the UK. In England, this will lead to 200,000 more people successfully completing high-quality skills training annually, driven by 80,000 more people completing courses in the lowest skilled areas.
Health	By 2030, the gap in Healthy Life Expectancy (HLE) between local areas where it is highest and lowest will have narrowed, and by 2035 HLE will rise by five years.
Well-being	By 2030, well-being will have improved in every area of the UK, with the gap between top performing and other areas closing.
<i>Empower local leaders and communities, especially in those places lacking local agency</i>	
Local Leadership	By 2030, every part of England that wants one will have a devolution deal with powers at or approaching the highest level of devolution and a simplified, long-term funding settlement.