



SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Environment and Rural Affairs Department
Fisheries and Rural Development Group

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Our ref: 2RPC 2/29

25 January 2005

Dear Councillor Macaskill

CLOSING THE OPPORTUNITY GAP (COG)– THE RURAL TARGET

As you may know, we have been in discussion recently with Jon Harris of CoSLA about Ministers' rural services target under the Closing the Opportunity Gap programme. Jon suggested I drop you a line to make sure you are in the picture. We are looking forward to working with Community Planning Partnerships to deliver real improvements in the services enjoyed by people in rural Scotland.

The rural target (on which we have been working with an Advisory Group, three of whom represent Local Authority, CPP and Local Rural Partnership (LRP) interests) is expressed as follows: - *By 2008, improve service delivery in rural areas so that agreed improvements in accessibility and quality are achieved for key services in remote and rural communities.* Further information on the work of Closing the Opportunity Gap and the rural target can be found at www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Social-Inclusion/17415/target.

Our priority in recent weeks has been to identify the geographic areas to be targeted in our efforts to improve service delivery. The approach taken to the selection of these areas is outlined in the attached **Annex A**. You will see that this involves taking account of both overall deprivation and difficulties in accessing services. On this basis, the following area within your CPP boundaries is likely – subject to final Ministerial approval - to be included:

S01000800 – 'East Loch Fybe, Holy Loch'

There are two glosses I should add. First, whilst these are the data zones within which we shall be looking to see measurable improvements, there will be scope for agreement with all affected CPPs as to the exact areas over which action will be taken. Second, the advisory group acknowledged that the approach adopted may appear to give rise to some anomalies on the ground especially in respect of small islands. In response to any such issues being flagged up by yourself or your counterparts, they will consider over the summer whether to add up to 5 additional RSPAs.

We expect Ministers to announce the RSPAs at the end of the week. Taking this target forward will involve a number of key steps, including establishing in each RSPA the local views as to the key services on which we should all focus and agreeing the improvements we should be seeking. We aim to complete that part of the process by early November. We see CPPs as having a vital role to play in both the setting of the individual targets and their delivery. We propose convening a meeting of representatives of affected CPPs shortly, to share further information as to what is involved and the resources and support which are likely to be available and to discuss ideas for taking the programme forward.

I would be grateful if you could nominate a representative from your Partnership to act as a contact for this work. Further I would appreciate some indication from the representative as to their availability in the last week of February to get together to discuss ideas as stated.

On a general note, we are currently seeking an experienced rural practitioner on a 2-year secondment basis to help us with the delivery of the rural target. Further information on this exercise can be provided by Ross Lindsay, at the contact details provided below.

I look forward to working with yourself and your colleagues on this issue. If you have any immediate enquiries please contact Ross Lindsay at ross.lindsay@scotland.gsi.gov.uk, (Phone: 0131 244 4157) who will be happy to help.

Yours sincerely



Frank Strang
Head of Land Use and Rural Policy

ANNEX A

ANNEX: SELECTION OF RURAL SERVICES PRIORITY AREAS

Background

1. The rural target concerns improving service delivery in remote and disadvantaged areas within rural Scotland. This annex summarises the approach adopted to select the rural services priority areas (RSPAs).
2. A transparent approach to selecting RSPAs was required and this necessitated using an evidence based approach.
3. The RSPAs were identified by geographic area rather than, for example, disadvantaged groups within populations. This meant that it was possible to focus on specific localities, allowing service deliverers to take an integrated approach to bringing about improvements in service delivery.

Statistics on disadvantage

4. The most widely used tool to identify disadvantaged areas in Scotland is the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004 (SIMD). SIMD is being used to design and measure targets in the Closing the Opportunity Gap work programme. Therefore, for consistency, the rural target should use SIMD to select RSPAs. The SIMD has the advantage that it is the only available statistic on relative disadvantage at small area level and is therefore the only available statistic that can allow an evidence based approach to be adopted.
5. There have been concerns about the appropriateness of SIMD for rural Scotland. For example, when SIMD is aggregated at local authority level, it is not able to identify pockets of relative disadvantage within rural areas. It is not necessary, however, to use the SIMD at local authority level. An alternative to using SIMD at local authority level is to analyse the SIMD by the small areas that comprise the overall index. These areas are known as 'data zones'.
6. The SIMD is built up from 6,505 data zones covering the whole of Scotland – each data zone is designed to include a population of around 750 people. Of the 6,505 data zones, 1,326 are rural and these rural data zones can be analysed separately. Separate analysis of rural data zones was the approach adopted here to identify the RSPAs.

Steps taken to select rural services priority areas

7. The 1,326 rural data zones were extracted from the full SIMD dataset.
8. It was not possible to include all the rural data zones as RSPAs. Moreover the Closing the Opportunity Gap exercise is focussing on tackling disadvantage. In order to make the process manageable, a maximum number of data zones was set at 20 areas, recognising that any more than 20 would not be a manageable number.
9. A decision had to be taken as to whether the RSPAs should be defined on the basis of the overall SIMD score or solely on the basis of the geographic

access to services domain within the SIMD, or both. A limitation of using the overall SIMD score is that disadvantage arising from lower access to services is not given as much weight as other factors. A limitation of focusing solely on the geographic access to services domain is that it would ignore the fact that all forms of disadvantage can be exacerbated by limited access to services. In order to overcome the limitations of both these approaches, a combined approach was used and data zones that are lowest on the overall index *and* lowest on the geographic access to services domain were selected. Each measure was given equal weight so, for example, if a data zone was in the lowest 10% on the overall index and in the lowest 10% on the geographic access to services domain then it was selected as one of the RSPAs.

10. A final decision had to be taken regarding whether stratification by geographic area should be adopted. No stratification would mean that most of the RSPAs would be in the Highlands and Islands, yet rural areas within lowland Scotland are also affected by limited access to services. Securing a slightly broader geographic spread should also allow lessons to be learnt which are likely to be applicable more widely throughout rural Scotland. Given this, the analysis was stratified into two broad geographic areas: those covering the Highland and Islands Enterprise (HIE) area and those covering the Scottish Enterprise (SE) area. Of 1,326 rural data zones, 987 are in the SE area and 339 are in the HIE area. Data zones were stratified into HIE and SE areas and 10 RSPAs selected from each.

Summary of Approach

11. In summary, the approach taken to select the RSPAs was:

The aim was to identify priority areas which suffered in terms of both overall disadvantage and service provision. The rural data zones within the SIMD were analysed, giving equal weight to overall disadvantage and low service accessibility. The 10 data zones with the greatest combined disadvantage were then chosen for the HIE area and the SE area. These twenty areas are the Rural Services Priority Areas.

ERAD

Analytical Services Division

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