
RURAL FRAMEWORK

**A PROGRESS
REPORT**

By The Rural Focus Group

comments

CONTENTS

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Rural Framework

Rural Focus Group

SECTION 2: REVIEW OF RURAL FRAMEWORK THEMES

Partnership

Community Involvement

Diversity

Quality

Local Value Added

Effective Service Delivery

Networks and Communications

Europe

Sustainability

SECTION 3: CONCLUSIONS

ANNEX 1: MEMBERSHIP ORGANISATIONS OF THE RURAL FOCUS GROUP

ANNEX 2: RURAL FRAMEWORK SERIES PUBLICATIONS

comments

SECTION 1

Introduction

1. This is a progress report on action under the themes set out in the "Rural Framework" document published by The Scottish Office in 1992. It has been prepared by the Rural Focus Group, which was also established in 1992, to bring together representatives of the main Government Departments, agencies and non-Governmental organisations concerned with rural Scotland. The report provides an independent perspective on some of the major developments in relation to the "Rural Framework" themes in rural Scotland over the last three years, and has been prepared as part of the consultations carried out by the Government in connection with the Scottish White Paper on Rural Policy.

Rural Framework

2. "Rural Framework" was published by the Government in 1992 with the overall aim of providing a foundation on which organisations could work together more effectively for the benefit of rural areas. Government recognised that substantial resources were already deployed by itself and other bodies in rural Scotland and that the value of these could be increased by greater co-ordination and partnership working. The specific aims of the "Rural Framework" document were:

- to develop a common language which rural communities and those working in their support can use to build their own ideas for development.
- to bring together the effort in support of rural communities in a continuing and coherent manner.

3. "Rural Framework" put forward eight themes which were seen as fundamental to the improvement of life in rural communities. These were:-

Community Involvement: the strength of the rural community lies in its people; it is vital that they be involved in decisions about their future.

Diversity: once a common feature of rural communities, needs to be re-established and pursued.

Quality: rural communities deserve high quality services and need to produce high quality products.

Local Added Value: value added locally to the resources supplied by rural Scotland will retain profits locally and benefit its communities.

Effective Service Delivery: by working together local authorities, public agencies, the private and voluntary sectors will best deliver their services in ways which most benefit their customers.

Network and Communications: rural Scotland can use its remoteness to advantage through the development of networks and communications.

Europe: rural Scotland has a place in Europe which it can use to its own and others' benefit.

Sustainability: by pursuing our actions today in a sustainable manner, we will protect ourselves and safeguard our descendants.

Partnership: all those themes were set within the over-riding principle that policies and the delivery of policies will be most effective when the various Governmental and non-Governmental bodies involved in rural Scotland work together towards common objectives.

Rural Focus Group

4. To give greater practical effect to those ideas the Rural Focus Group was established by Sir Hector Monro MP, Minister for Agriculture and the Environment, in September 1992. This brought together, under Scottish Office chairmanship, representatives of Government Departments, agencies, Local Government, private and voluntary sector bodies concerned with rural Scotland. A list of the member organisations of Rural Focus Group is at Annex 1.

5. The broad remit given to Rural Focus Group at the time of its formation was: "to provide a forum for the examination of issues affecting rural areas and to promote collaboration among central Government, its agencies, local government and the private and voluntary sector for the improvement of the quality of life in rural areas". In particular, the Group was asked to take forward the ideas contained in "Rural Framework".

6. Rural Focus Group has met regularly since 1992. Its main activities have been:-

6.1 analysis of key issues affecting the future of rural Scotland, involving a programme of speakers from within and outside the Group. This included sponsorship of a major conference on "Incentives to Rural Enterprise" held in Inverness in May 1994 on the theme of the opportunities for much of rural Scotland under Objectives 1 and 5b of the EC Structural Funds. This activity has led to significantly improved collaboration between the organisations represented on the Rural Focus Group.

6.2 the encouragement of awareness and information sharing on research being undertaken by member organisations and the encouragement of joint research projects. Specific examples of the latter include a research project on rural child care in the Highlands and Islands funded by The Scottish Office and HIE, on rural transport options funded by The Scottish Office and COSLA and a research report on "Housing and Economic Development in Remote Rural Areas of the Highlands and Islands" jointly funded by Scottish Homes and HIE. In addition The Scottish Office Central Research Unit was commissioned to produce one report "Literature Review of Rural Issues" in 1994 which provides a comprehensive picture of the key issues affecting rural Scotland and identifies gaps in the information base which could be filled by further research.

6.3 promotion of improved information about the range of financial and other assistance available in rural Scotland. Rural Focus Group has overseen a project which aims to produce an information booklet, similar to one produced by Tayside Regional Council, for other parts of rural Scotland. Rural Forum was commissioned to prepare a national template for this initiative and is working with local authorities with a view to the preparation of local editions for publication when the new councils take control in April 1996. If the new rural authorities proceed with publication it is hoped that booklets will become available during 1996.

6.4 identification and encouragement of innovatory approaches to rural development. An example of this is the evaluation of the potential of a new model for rural development, pioneered by the Wise Group in Ross and Cromarty based on local training, job creation and environmental improvement.

7. Rural Focus Group has kept under review the themes outlined in "Rural Framework". Its report on progress and areas where further opportunities lie, in Section 2, forms the main part of this paper. A number of further reports have been published in the "Rural Framework" series and they are listed at Annex 2.

comments

SECTION 2

Review of Rural Framework Themes

8. Here we review progress since 1992 on the themes proposed in "Rural Framework" and comment on the opportunity for further progress in the future. The aim is to illustrate how the themes have been put into practice over the last 3 years, highlighting successes and drawing attention to areas where there is a need for particular attention in future. It is not possible in a short review to give a comprehensive picture of all relevant developments, and there are inevitably omissions. We do not claim that all or even most of the progress is due to the Rural Focus Group, although some specific developments are. It is important that overall rural policy should provide the framework within which local partnerships and strategies can develop. This policy should take account of the diversity of rural areas and the need for local solutions.

Partnership

9. Although partnership was not identified as one of the original 8 themes of "Rural Framework", it was recognised as an over-riding principle, essential if real progress was to be made across rural Scotland against the themes set out by "Rural Framework".

10. "Rural Framework" recognised that the partnership approach is particularly appropriate in the rural context because the issues to be addressed are inter-related and require an integrated response. Effective solutions to the problems facing rural communities require a wide perspective, recognising the increasing number of participants with a legitimate and often essential role to play, and addressing the full range of issues including economic development, land and resources management, health and social welfare, housing, transport, consumer and business services, leisure and recreation. This shift away from a sectoral approach towards a more integrated, comprehensive method of tackling rural problems is also identified in the "Literature Review of Rural Issues" produced by The Scottish Office, and is an illustration of the changing policy context in which partnerships are seen as an appropriate policy tool. The concept of effective partnership is also increasingly seen as central to the process of formulating and implementing successful programmes for obtaining Government and European Union funding.

11. The establishment of the Rural Focus Group was itself a major step forward in developing partnership at the national level. The membership of the Group and the commitment of the partners to the work undertaken reflects an understanding of the importance for policy to be co-ordinated in an effective manner. There is increasing recognition of the need to provide linkages between national and local levels and to facilitate and support the "bottom up" approach to rural development. Examples of local partnerships based on the need for a joint approach towards the future planning of different types of areas include : -

A Rural Strategy for Tayside: Tayside Regional Council invited Rural Forum to chair a working group to prepare a rural strategy and action plan for Tayside Region. The working group included representatives from all the key public bodies working in the area including the District Councils, Scottish Homes, Scottish Enterprise Tayside, SNH, Tayside Health Board, the Forestry Commission and the SAC. The strategy, which was launched in July 1995 following extensive consultation, adopts a thematic approach, focusing on issues such as a sustainable rural economy and rural disadvantage.

The Central Scotland Woodlands Initiative: this initiative, launched by the Secretary of State in 1989 now brings together a partnership of 18 public bodies, led by Central Scotland Countryside Trust, with the aim of developing and implementing the Central Scotland Forest, a strategy for which was launched in April 1995. The aim is to regenerate an area of 160,000 hectares, doubling woodland cover and creating a range of associated improvements in Central Scotland over a 20 year period. It is supported by ten Local Authorities; Scottish Enterprise (and the four relevant Local Enterprise Companies); Forestry Commission (Forestry Authority and Forest Enterprise); and Scottish Natural Heritage as well as other organisations.

The Cairngorms Partnership, established in 1994, following the report by the Cairngorms Working Party, brings together a wide range of public and private bodies and individuals in the local area to develop and implement a management strategy for this area of outstanding natural heritage interest. The Partnership has been formally constituted as a private company chaired by Mr David Laird at the invitation of the Secretary of State, with the core funding provided through SNH.

Tweed Forum which was set up in 1990 brings together twenty nine statutory and non-statutory bodies with an interest in the Tweed to exchange information and improve co-ordination. The Forum has published a Factpack for educational use, a Users guide which includes a contact list and a series of Topic papers giving information on a number of key issues.

SNH Firths Initiative under which a local forum for individual Scottish Firths been set up with a view to achieving a joint approach to managing each of the estuaries concerned. Three groups have so far been established for the Forth (November 1993), the Solway (June 1994) and the Moray Firth (1992).

Borders Forum for Sustainable Development, established in April 1995, building upon the Ettrick and Lauderdale Sustainability Study which brings together a wide range of community, economic, and environmental interests with the aim of identifying future development options for the Borders.

12. Other examples of partnership include the Rural Stirling Partnership, which comprises 7 local partners: Central Regional Council; the Forest Authority/Forest Enterprise; Forth Valley Enterprise; the local Tourist Board; SNH; Stirling District Council; and the Rural Stirling Housing Association. This wide-ranging partnership, founded in 1992, aims to promote economic activity whilst maintaining the quality of rural Stirling's outstanding environment. Approximately 2.5 million has been invested since the partnership was established in the rural economy and the impact of this spend has been more effective because of collaborative work of partners. The partnership also aims to forge greater links between private and public sectors and local business involvement has played a vital part in ensuring grass roots involvement. A number of projects have been set up including the Trossachs Tourism Trail; village enhancements in Aberfoyle, Callander and Balquhider; and new visitor attractions such as Dunlaverig Farmlife Centre and Breadalbane Folklore Centre.

13. The Angus Glens Initiative has focused on an area affected by declining population. It was funded by Scottish Enterprise Tayside, Angus District and Tayside Region who appointed a development officer, or animateur, for the area. Projects initiated included drystone dyking training, a sheep health scheme, the Glens Tourism Group, and promotion of teleworking and a telecottage. Local partnership arrangements exist between SNH, Scottish Homes and other funding bodies and the initiative is regarded as part of a long term process of engaging the community and agreeing priorities.

14. The South Roxburghshire Initiative involves Scottish Borders Enterprise, Roxburgh District Council, Borders Regional Council and Scottish Homes in a number of environmental, business and property projects with the active involvement of the local community through, for example, a community workshop held in January 1995.

15. A final example of partnership - at national level in this case - is the Scottish Tourism Co-ordinating Group, which has an important role because of the economic value of tourism in rural areas and is undertaking strategic initiatives designed to improve Scotland's tourism product. The group also acts as a forum for discussion of tourism-related issues and where appropriate has commissioned action. The group is chaired by the Minister responsible for Tourism and comprises representatives from 11 organisations: The Scottish Office, Scottish Tourist Board, COSLA, SNH, Scottish Enterprise, Historic Scotland, HIE, British Tourist Authority, Scottish Arts Council, Scottish Museums Council and Scottish Sports Council.

16. We believe there is scope for further development of the partnership approach at national and local level. The Rural Focus Group could have an important role in furthering the integration of policy for rural areas: by discussing how far particular sectoral policies for organisations represented on the group contribute to the overall aims of rural policy; by promoting research and discussion of key issues; by disseminating information on good practice to the increasing number of local partnerships and by increasing collaboration between its members.

comments

Community Involvement

17. The full involvement of local people in the systems and decisions that affect their daily lives is potentially one of the key driving forces of rural development. Local people have invaluable knowledge and expertise about how things actually work in their local area.

18. In reviewing progress against this theme and setting out opportunities for action, we have been mindful that:-

- the scope of "community" covers a broader set of groups than just those people who live in a particular area. Communities also include parents of school children, groups of businesses, users of services and groups of people with a common interest or concern; and
- involvement must mean more than consultation if it is to be meaningful. Consultation is an important way to give people a say about issues that affect them, but involvement also implies a role in shaping projects and programmes from the very start and consequently some "ownership" of the results.

19. There has been considerable progress since "Rural Framework" was published in relation to community involvement and wider participation in rural development. In terms of national structures, the establishment of the Association of Scottish Community Councils (ASCC) and the various associated federations has been a significant step forward. The ASCC was established in June 1993 following recognition that local government reorganisation offered a unique opportunity for community councils to achieve their latent potential through collective action. The ASCC has undertaken research which shows that the councils are active within their communities in tackling a wide range of problems and the full findings of this research will be published later this year.

20. The Rural Forum Rural Housing Service is committed to working in and with rural communities to help them analyse and resolve local housing problems. The Personal Housing Plan approach, based on home interviews with households to look at the full range of housing options available locally, was developed by the Service last year, supported by Scottish Homes and Skye and Lochalsh District Council. It was piloted in Skye and has since been extended. The technique is of benefit to the households concerned, the community and local housing providers. This year the service has been working with housing action groups on Mull, helping them and all the key housing interests to work towards agreed solutions to the serious housing problems there.

21. Local authorities have a key part in promoting community involvement and local community-based initiatives. An example is the role played by Western Isles Council (along with Western Isles Enterprise) in developing The Uist 2000 project, a community initiative established to prepare a development programme for the Uists: the Islands of North Uist, Benbecula, South Uist, Berneray and Eriskay. Western Isles Council and Western Isles Enterprise act as enabling bodies, assisting in arranging public meetings and workshops which have examined such topics as land and the environment, marine enterprise, tourism and leisure, culture and heritage, transport, natural resources and building and construction.

22. "Planning for Real" is a concept based on the desirability of involving local opinion while avoiding domination of the planning process by particular sectoral interests. Its aim is to enable communities to gain access to local authority expertise without being overwhelmed by it. A recent exercise, for example, has taken place in the Douglas Valley of Lanarkshire, supported by a range of public bodies including the local authorities. The direct involvement of local people in the planning and development process can help tap into local knowledge and meet local need.

23. Community based voluntary organisations are increasingly involved in the delivery programmes resulting from Care in the Community legislation. A good example of a bottom-up response to these changes is the Highland Community Care Forum which has been established to co-ordinate the work of voluntary organisations based in local rural communities. It is particularly important that low income groups, who might otherwise be excluded from consultation and participation processes, are involved. The Brechin Area Initiative and Network (BAIN) is aimed specifically at more disadvantaged families and localities in this part of Angus. The project is supported by Tayside Regional Council and the Scottish Episcopal Church and seeks to help people identify key concerns and address them effectively.

24. Arising from an approach to the Rural Focus Group, COSLA and Scottish Homes are working with the Corrom Trust to identify ways in which community involvement in rural areas can be further developed. Areas are being identified where partnerships between communities and a wide range of agencies could be established.

25. Many other examples of community involvement could be mentioned, reflecting different issues in different areas. In order to learn from the diversity of community involvement in rural policy, The Scottish Office has commissioned

research from the Arkleton Trust to examine the rationale for community involvement as a mechanism for developing and implementing rural policy and practice and assess the effectiveness of mechanisms used to achieve involvement and participation. While substantial progress has been made in increasing the involvement of communities, this has not been uniform in terms of geographical coverage or sectors of activity. It is expected that the Arkleton research will contribute to identifying options for further progress.

comments

Diversity

26. "Rural Framework" recognised that diversity was a strength rather than a weakness for rural businesses. Operating from as broad an economic base as possible facilitates flexibility in difficult times and responsiveness to change. The transition from traditional patterns of activity to new opportunities presents challenges, particularly in sectors such as agriculture. While specialisation can be valuable, support is needed to encourage people to branch out into new activities where they have less expertise and experience. Local authorities and local enterprise companies have a pivotal role in managing the process of change.

27. Diversity is most closely associated with economic diversity and there has been progress in this area. Business based on information technology is also increasing in number on rural areas, with the support of agencies such as HIE and the Scottish Enterprise network. In the Highlands and Islands jobs in data processing have been created by Hoskyns in Forres and British Telecom in Thurso. Other projects demonstrate how a rural area can respond to the closure of an industry that previously was a major employer. The Cowal Initiative, which was a partnership response to the closure of the Holy Loch Defence Base, channelled resources from HIE, The Scottish Office and Europe into improvements to the economic diversity of the area, creating 900 jobs. The Cumnock and Doon Valley Initiative sought to enable recovery from the closure of the mining industry by making factory space available and other assistance to businesses and succeeded in creating 100 new jobs.

28. Natural diversity is mentioned in "Rural Framework" as an example of how variation is a strength. Steps have been taken to protect and increase the diversity of Scotland's habitats, wildlife and landscapes in the past three years, notably through the publication of the Biodiversity Action Plan by the Government in 1994 and the work currently in progress to implement it. The planting of native woodland has also increased natural diversity as has the move towards forests that have multiple purposes - commercial, recreational and conservation. This type of diversity ensures that Scotland continues to have an attractive and interesting countryside which provides a support for primary production and other industries with a strong rural link such as tourism. A recent study by HIE and SNH identified 1300 full time jobs in the Highlands which are directly associated with environmental activity.

29. Considerable effort has been focused on encouraging agricultural diversification, for example through the Farm Woodland Premium Scheme and the promotion of farm tourism. Programmes have been developed under Objective 5b of the EC Structural Funds to promote the diversification of agriculture. The Rural Enterprise Programme operated in the Highlands and Islands over the period 1991-94 when the area was designated under Object 5b. Forecasts provided by applicants to the Rural Enterprise Programme suggest that around 350 full-time equivalent jobs in the Highlands and Islands will be created or safeguarded by the Programme, which encouraged business diversification into sectors facilitating the maintenance of a close link with the land. Around 750 rural development projects have been assisted under the Programme. The Highlands and Islands now have Objective 1 status, and the Highlands and Islands Agricultural Programme will bring over £23 million by way of new assistance to farmers and crofters in the area up until 1999. Agricultural diversification programmes are planned for the Objective 5b areas in Borders, Dumfries and Galloway, Rural Stirling and Upland Tayside, and North and West Grampian.

30. Support in the form of training and advice has been provided by SAC through its courses in Leisure Management and Tourism and Recreation Management and the development of a rural business database for Scottish Farm Businesses. Carefully planned and managed restructuring of landuse and diversification of economic activity in the agricultural landscape of Central Scotland is yielding interesting results. The Lowland Crofting Initiative demonstrates how whole farms can be transformed into a number of smaller businesses, which retains some agricultural use while allowing economic diversification and revitalisation, landscape improvements, woodland creation, increased nature conservation interest and public access provision. This project is part of the Central Scotland Forest and has involved a partnership of the West Lothian District Council; New Lives; New Landscapes; SNH; the Forestry Commission; SAC and the Central Scotland Countryside Trust. At the West Harwood site for example, 90,000 trees have been planted, 6 new houses are under construction, with several owners planning to work from home, and the former farm steading now houses a quality furniture manufacturer. The scheme has involved public expenditure of around £50,000 and has realised private sector activity exceeding £500,000. The Crofting Township Development Scheme is part of the Objective 1-based Highlands and Islands Agricultural Programme. Funded by The Scottish Office the scheme is administered by the Crofters Commission. It has a budget of 0.98 million ecu over its lifetime. In addition there is the Crofter Forestry Scheme based on legislation introduced by Government which encourages crofting communities to invest in and develop forestry.

31. Summing up, we are impressed by the efforts to increase diversity which have been made at national level, for example through the Rural Enterprise Programme and the Objective 1 and 5b programmes. There has been progress in

terms of the numbers of new rural businesses that have been established. Local initiatives have also been put in place and this might be a more widespread type of response to the decline of a major industry in a rural area, or indeed in advance of such a decline occurring. Care must also be taken that undue dependence on one industry is not replaced by dependence on another. Rural businesses should be encouraged to be flexible in the long term and this is where continued support in the form of training and advice is essential.

comments

Quality

32. The statements made in "Rural Framework" about the intrinsically high quality of Scottish products and superb natural resources and scenery of Scotland are as true now as they were then. Quality is also still as important to rural Scotland's economic success and prosperity as three years ago. In reviewing this theme, we have looked for progress in sustaining and improving quality in these areas and also at some other aspects of quality - performance, training and standards.

33. The Farm Assured Scheme for Livestock was relaunched in 1995 with greater input from the industry in an attempt to increase involvement in this quality scheme. There have been important developments in quality food certification, for example the establishment of a new Scottish food quality certification company. This will provide a focus for the development of existing food quality schemes in Scotland and their extension to new sectors. For example, the Scottish Quality Cereals scheme offers a premium for grain which adheres to certain quality standards. The Scottish Pig Industry Initiative, Scottish Quality Farmed Trout and Scottish Venison Marketing Initiative all aim to increase exports of Scottish quality fish and meat. Other developments include the Cheese Company in Lockerbie which has developed a new premium-branded Churnton Cheese, Castle Maclellan Foods Ltd producing a range of speciality premium patés in Kirkcudbright, and Rannoch Smokery in Kinloch Rannoch producing smoked venison. Local quality competitions, such as the Talisker Quality Awards on Skye, are another way in which the high standard of rural produce and service can be highlighted. Scottish producers are increasingly having to compete to European standards and the establishment of the Quality Forum encourages Scottish producers to demonstrate quality in a wider international market. The Scottish Enterprise Network's "Meet the Buyer" programme, which won a Scottish Food Initiative of the Year Award, brought together food business with major purchasers, boosting sales. In addition the New Products Development Scheme has proved very successful, with 18 companies and 73 new products being developed. The Scottish Quality Farm Assurance Initiative, which was mentioned in "Rural Framework", continues and a code of good practice developed with the assistance of The Scottish Office and SAC, will be launched by the National Farmers' Union of Scotland in 1995.

34. The need to improve the quality of rural housing has been recognised in the Scottish Office Planning Advice Note on "Design of Housing in the Countryside" and Rural Forum workshops on the subject. The Scottish House Condition Survey, conducted by Scottish Homes, provided a picture of the quality of housing stock throughout Scotland for the first time. This revealed that the quality of parts of the housing stock in rural areas remains a matter of concern and to address this Scottish Homes is implementing a rural policy and supports a network of rurally based housing associations, other developers and individuals to produce an increased supply and improve quality of housing in rural areas. Innovative schemes specifically aimed at rural areas such as Rural Home Ownership Grants and the Rural Empty Housing Initiative have been introduced and, though small scale, have had significant local impact. Through this and other initiatives, Scottish Homes has supported the building or improvement of over 6,000 homes in the countryside since 1992. The Crofters Building Grants and Loans scheme operated by The Scottish Office has provided £14.4 million over the last three years in grants and loans which have improved the quality of crofter housing.

35. Scotland's landscapes and countryside are of outstanding quality and much has been done to ensure that this is conserved. Consideration of landscape issues in forestry development has been greatly strengthened by the Forestry Commission guidelines, mentioned in "Rural Framework", and the adoption of Indicative Forestry Strategies by planning authorities. SNH has also undertaken a major programme of landscape character assessment, under which it is planned to cover all of Scotland by 1997. These assessments, carried out in partnership with local authorities, will provide information on how landscape character would be affected by proposed developments and allow more sensitive planning and siting. "Rural Framework" also mentioned the need for integration between the historic and natural features of our countryside in order to make the best of the good quality that both have to offer. The publication in 1995 of the Concordat between SNH and Historic Scotland is important in this connection. The Central Scotland Forest Strategy, building on significant input from the local authorities, FC, Historic Scotland and SNH, contains a full assessment of landscape character for the area to enable consideration of the widest possible range of issues and attributes in assessing development which will enhance the overall quality of the area.

36. Quality of performance and service is another important area of achievement for rural Scotland. A major industry is tourism and the STB "Welcome Hosts" scheme helps to ensure that the highest standards apply. STB have also raised standards throughout the industry through its Grading and Classification programme for different types of accommodation, which is now being expanded into visitor attractions.

37. Training is also a vital issue, both to ensure that people living in rural areas are equipped to undertake skilled well-paid jobs, with the related benefit in terms of retaining young people in the local area, and to provide rural enterprise with a workforce that can achieve a high quality of performance. We welcome continuing programmes to provide training that

will enable both these requirements to be met. The Tourism Training in Scotland initiative, jointly run by STB, Scottish Enterprise and HIE, has been set up to raise the quality of tourism training in Scotland. The substantial increase in enrolments in further and higher education in rural sector subjects, including new initiatives in countryside conservation, recreation management and rural tourism developed by SAC, suggests that larger numbers of young people in Scotland will be equipped to take on high quality rural employment in the future. There have also been specific retraining initiatives such as those for ranger training jointly promoted by SAC and SNH.

38. Co-ordination of quality standards is also important. As the numbers of different schemes in operation grow, there is a danger of confusing consumers if too many standards without clear relationships are in use. Clear standards can help the marketing of rural Scotland's goods and services, for example high environmental and animal welfare standards, are likely to be of increasing importance to consumers. All the evidence suggests that the high quality of Scotland's produce and resources noted in "Rural Framework" has been maintained. Standards are high and look set to become higher. While concern has sometimes been expressed that regulations can place onerous burdens on small rural businesses and need to be applied sensitively, it is equally important that consumers can rely on the produce or services they buy to meet certain basic standards.

comments

Local Added Value

39. Adding value to the products of rural areas is an important way to support the economic growth of rural areas, through creating direct and indirect employment and helping to prevent the leakage of benefits to urban centres. Rural areas have direct access to some of the highest quality resources that Scotland possesses: its scenery, natural resources and cultural assets. Adding value to these resources so that rural communities get the maximum benefit from them should be a central aim of policy.

40. Value can be added to the resources available to rural areas by local processing, so that the product leaves the area in a more finished state. This has always been the case with some products, as "Rural Framework" described, such as Scotch Whisky, Harris Tweed and woollen textiles. The Local Enterprise Companies and local authorities aim to increase the range of goods processed locally through schemes which provide workspace, and give assistance with finance, marketing and training. Specialist food-industry training and business and technology advice is also provided by SAC and will be further developed through its Food Technology Transfer Centre. The food and drink sector has been the focus of new activity, for example Strathaird Salmon with fish farms on Skye and processing plants in Inverness and Grantown on Spey; the Orkney Food Initiative which uses the regional identity of food products for marketing purposes; and a number of premium ice cream producer such as Mackies in Rothienorman and the Cream O'Galloway Dairy Co Ltd which operates from a farm base in Castle Douglas. Scottish Farm Venison Ltd has been set up with Scottish Enterprise and the Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society support, to bring together venison producers in Scotland through joint marketing initiatives. New markets for organic products and bottled spring water are also being used to add value to a local resource, for example Strathmore Mineral Water is now the top selling brand in the UK, outselling Perrier.

41. EC schemes have been introduced to assist in the processing and marketing of both agricultural and fishery products. New schemes were opened in July 1994 to provide capital grants from 1994 to 1999 to improve the structures for marketing products. Their basic objective is to benefit the primary producer (farmer, grower or fisherman) by processing more of their products or adding value to produce through improved quality, further processing, developing new products, making use of waste produce or securing better market outlets. Complementing these schemes is the Marketing Development Scheme, also introduced in 1994. This seeks to improve the efficiency of the UK food marketing chain by helping farmers, growers and processors improve their marketing and commercial expertise. The grant can help fund feasibility studies into collaborative efforts between producers and processors to produce what the customers want. This might include product development, designing packaging, using local names, or producing for export. Grants are also available to employ a marketing manager to ensure a consistent product grown to prescribed specifications is available all year round, thus maintaining a reliable supply for processing. One of the components of the Objective 1 Highlands and Islands Agricultural Programme is a scheme to assist with the marketing of rural goods and services. Assistance of £400,000 per annum will be available up until 1999 to assist farmers and crofters in the Highlands and Islands area.

42. The forestry industry is another important rural employment sector and one where there is clear potential for growth. The establishment of the Forestry Contracting Association as a scheme across Scotland, supported by the Forestry Commission, HIE and Scottish Enterprise is addressing this issue and is now being introduced in England, based on Scottish success. An example of timber processing using local material is Norbord which has developed a major plant near Inverness, employing 160 people, and produced an innovative construction board using large quantities of locally grown conifer. The management of native woodlands can also be combined with opportunities for wood processing. The Highland Birchwoods project, Argyll Broadleaves and a number of similar initiatives are identifying such development potential through the use of native timber for craft industry, specialist timber products and even innovative new forms of production such as mushroom growing. The creation of new woodlands in Central Scotland is also being undertaken with a view to long-term sustainable management and the need for a local and commercially viable product market. Multi-purpose woodlands, including farm woodlands, are a priority, even if the crop may only be harvested in thirty years or more.

43. There may be opportunities for increased value added activities through import substitution, as demonstrated for example in the local bakery in Fort William and dairy in Shetland; by producing soft ripened cheeses (such as Brie) or mature hard cheeses in Scotland rather than other EU countries. Processing imported goods is another way that local businesses can grow: Arran Provisions, Ortak Silverware in Kirkwall and Highland Stoneware in Lochinver are all examples of companies which operate in this way. Businesses can add value by exploiting the tourism potential of their activities. Whisky distilleries, and food processing industries such as Baxters of Speyside have invested successfully in visitor centres.

44. The popularity of Scotland's countryside for tourism and outdoor activities means that there are increasing

employment opportunities in maintaining and creating footpaths and other facilities. A good example of increasing tourism based on the environment is "Wild Argyll", a marketing campaign involving a wide range of environmentally related businesses. The cultural heritage also provides work, for example the Aros Centre is a major cultural attraction in Skye involving a partnership between the private sector, Skye and Lochalsh Enterprise, SNH and the Forestry Commission. There has also been notable activity recently in film making and broadcasting including projects using the Gaelic language.

45. Training and skill development add value to the human resources of rural areas. In remote and sparsely populated areas the delivery of training is more difficult and expensive because of the lack of providers and economies of scale. There has been development in rural training structures through the establishment of ATB-Landbase as an Industrial Training Organisation with a wide rural remit. However, many of the problems of local training delivery remain to be addressed. A number of distance learning initiatives have been taken by the Further and Higher Education institutions and these add to the provision available through the Open University network. However, only with an expansion of electronic communication links and with a full use of information technology to make the connections between local students and distant tutors will the problems of training access be satisfactorily addressed.

46. There are opportunities for local business development, particularly in the food processing sector, but advice is needed to facilitate the establishment of small businesses and to provide the support necessary to help them develop small scale production systems that fully meet modern standards of hygiene and product safety. In the forestry sector, there may be further scope for increased wood processing close to where the timber is grown, and for greater involvement of local labour. There are a number of research projects and initiatives looking at increasing the level of economic, social and community benefits which local people can obtain from forests. These include the Forests and People in Rural Areas initiative, the Scottish Rural Development Forestry Programme, and research being undertaken by the Forestry Commission. Within the HIE area there are training schemes in operation in the Moray, Badenoch and Strathspey LEC. A scheme relating to chainsaw techniques and other forestry skills has trained 430 people so far, while a new entrant scheme encouraging newcomers to the industry has already reached its target of 12 persons.

comments

Effective Service Delivery

47. "Rural Framework" identified the need for public bodies to structure themselves in such a way that they work closely with local communities, and to bring different services together at local level to provide more coherent and co-ordinated delivery. We endorse these principles and would extend the theme to encompass the very important element of information to rural communities as a vital way to ensure that people are aware and can make sense of what is on offer.

48. The move reported in "Rural Framework" of national agencies operating through a devolved system of local offices has continued. For example SNH has established 4 Regional Offices, each with its own Board and a network of 13 Area Offices. Its "Natural Standards" initiative based on the Citizen's Charter aims to ensure effective responses to enquiries and requests for advice. Similarly, SAC has maintained a regional structure of 24 Regional Advisory Offices, 8 Veterinary Centres and 3 Centres of Study. It has also published "Commitment to Service" a Charter Statement of Service Standards. Scottish Homes restructured its Development Funding network in 1992 and now has 7 District Offices and 14 locally based Development Funding Units. A country-wide network of telephone enquiry points has been established from which members of the public can contact The Scottish Office free of charge. In many rural areas the enquiry points are situated in the local offices of the Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department which serve all parts of rural Scotland. The Department has also published Charter Standard statements for farmers and crofters.

49. Local authorities, as part of local government reorganisation, will have to submit decentralisation plans which show how they will devolve decision-making to local areas. Local authorities have been active in considering how to organise service delivery in rural areas and a variety of different schemes exist. In Annandale and Eskdale for example the council has established one scheme to pool leisure and recreation equipment for loan to rural communities and another to provide free transport to and from rural areas to allow young people to participate in leisure programmes operated throughout the District. A similar scheme operates in East Lothian. In Fife Region, local service offices have been established in certain rural communities to promote community involvement in service delivery. Several post offices in more remote communities provide information about regional council services. Highland Regional Council established a Community Development Projects Initiative to assist community-based projects such as rural swimming pools, rural post offices and heritage centres. With the benefit of European funding, the Council has also developed a system for public information and service provision to rural areas, based on public multi-media computer terminals which enables public services which are routinely available in urban centres to be made available cost effectively to the most rural areas. Several local authorities run small business and rural shop assistance schemes.

50. The Scottish Sports Council commissioned a research study in 1992 with the aim of identifying a set of design principles applicable to small rural sports halls. The outcome of the study was a recommendation for a 3 badminton court hall with ancillary accommodation, designed with flexibility and multi-use in mind. The SHIRTS (Sports Halls in Rural Towns in Scotland) project aims to address the common problem of a small town (less than 10,000 people) which requires a sports centre but finds it difficult to meet the capital or revenue costs. The first SHIRTS hall opened in Turriff in November 1994. The Sports Council's Demonstration Programme assisted in the capital funding of the hall, in addition to a 3 badminton court hall, fitness room and a social area, an outdoor floodlit multi games area has been built adjoining the hall to maximise the use of the centre. This outdoor area enables pitched based sports to be played outside, thus freeing the hall for other sports and activities. The hall has been designed so as to enable non-sports use such as amateur dramatics. The Scottish Sports Council have also undertaken research into determining the requirements of small communities throughout Scotland for combined sports and community facilities.

51. There is also evidence of co-operative working between agencies at a local level through joint research and a large number of partnership projects. All the Rural Focus Group member organisations contribute to joint work of this kind. Examples of local joint working which aim to deliver a service more effectively include the Orkney Opportunities Centre which delivers training and education advice through a partnership of the LEC, the local authority and the careers service. This is now being replicated in the Lochaber Opportunities Centre in Forth William. Initiatives such as the Angus Glens Initiative, and the Rural Stirling Partnership are multi-partner initiatives aimed at involving communities in integrated rural development. The Douglas Valley Partnership is a community based regeneration programme supported by Lanarkshire Development Agency, actively engaging the community in the design and development of proposals, and enabling properly targeted action. The mechanisms and structures developed through this partnership are intended to enable a broad integrated approach to economic development with community involvement at each stage of the decision making process. Local authorities and Scottish Homes have worked together to set up Local Housing Agencies in the Western Isles and south Roxburgh. These agencies provide local co-ordinated service delivery in their areas. A number of rural local authorities are working with housing associations and Scottish Homes to establish a single waiting list for access to housing. Tayside Regional Council have established a Rural Area Service Team in Highland Perthshire to

improve service delivery at the local level. It includes representatives from the regional and district councils and the local NHS trust.

52. We view the delivery of information to rural areas as an important element of providing good services and an opportunity for collaboration. The growth of new forms of information delivery is worthy of note. Examples include the Scottish Homes support to voluntary agencies providing housing information and advice in rural areas, such as the Buchan Advice Bus and the LEC One Stop Shops. Citizen's Advice Scotland have received funding from Scottish Power and British Telecom to provide a national telephone helpline facility which will be available at local call rates and are also developing information and advice services in rural communities by using Information Technology to link bureaux which will enable information sharing. The HIE Network "Business Information Source" in Inverness provides a single publicised point of contact for business in the Highlands and Islands. It brings together Highlands and Islands Enterprise Library, Highland Regional Council's Euroinfo Centre, a mainstream business information service and the Scottish Agricultural College computerised land management and mapping services. The Rural Focus Group has paid particular attention to the question of information provision and commissioned research on this subject from Peter Gibson Associates and SAC. The Rural Focus Group will publish a summary of these reports.

53. This is an area where there is considerable scope for further progress to be made. It is encouraging that decentralisation of service delivery and decision-making has developed to the extent that most national agencies in Scotland have offices either in or easily accessible to rural areas which can deliver services that are sensitive to local needs. There are also many partnerships at local level in terms of joint funding, collaborative research and the giving of advice on various matters. This now needs to be taken forward to address the delivery of joint services, where there are far fewer examples to report. The potential for joint sharing of premises, staff and information networks has yet to be fully realised and we believe that this is an area where more work to consider the possibilities and encourage experimental arrangements would be of great value. The provision of information services show an encouraging trend towards greater quality and accessibility. Experiments with new information technology should be evaluated and where appropriate replicated elsewhere.

comments

Networks and Communications

54. "Rural Framework" drew attention to Scotland's peripheral location in Europe and some of Scotland's rural areas are among the most remote in Europe. This need not be a disadvantage: one of the attractions of Scotland's rural areas for many people is their distance from large settlements and it is in part what gives much of Scotland its unique character. Advances in communication and information technology mean that distances are no longer as critical for many businesses, although rural areas will always require a good transportation system which can meet economic needs and also support access to services.

55. There have been substantial improvements to roads such as the A96, A830 and A/M74. The Scottish Office is currently consulting on revising road design standards ("Fitting Roads") and developing a consistent rural road hierarchy. Financial support was given by The Scottish Office in 1995 towards the establishment, by the Community Transport Association, of a Scottish advice and information service. The Rural Transport Innovation Grant, administered by The Scottish Office, has also provided funding for several successful transport schemes which have provided new or experimental transport services in rural areas. Some of the schemes funded include a service from Strathmore to hospitals in Dundee and Angus, a community minibus service in Thornhill and a post-bus service for the island for Lismore. Community transport has also been promoted by Rural Forum through the production of a video on the experience of the Ettrick & Yarrow Community Council who have operated a community bus scheme in the area for more than 10 years. The Rural Focus Group has also commissioned research to explore the range of innovative transport options which could be adopted. One of the outputs from this work will be a guide for rural communities to assess their own transport needs.

56. The telecommunications system has continued to improve and develop, with 80% of businesses and 70% of people in the Highlands and Islands having access to a digital system. The Highlands and Islands Telecoms Initiative has created over 500 jobs while in other areas (for example Braemar) telecentres and teleworking are becoming commonplace. Other examples of successful teleworking enterprises are Database Direct in Dunoon, dealing in direct marketing services; Televisual Data in Dunoon, providing electronic information services to the newspaper industry; and Writers News in Nairn, a specialist journal.

57. Rural Forum is developing a partnership with the Scottish Association of Small Scale Broadcasters to encourage community radio as a means to improve communication within local areas. This builds on the experience of Heartland FM, the smallest community radio station in the UK, which operates from Pitlochry. The station is run by volunteers and is supported by local business. The Association of Community Enterprise in the Highlands and Islands (ACE-HI), with the support of Highlands & Islands Enterprise and Moray Firth Radio, have been promoting the development of new radio stations serving communities in various parts of the Highlands and Islands. ACE-HI's role has been particularly important in providing training for what are essentially volunteer-run community radio stations. The Scottish Enterprise network, in partnership with HIE, has funded the establishment of an electronic trading network using the existing network of machinery rings across rural Scotland. A number of livestock auction companies have taken advantage of improved technology to develop electronic auction systems for livestock. These systems operate nation-wide and mean that livestock do not have to be transported to a central mart for sale. Prospective buyers make their bids through a computer terminal and, in some instances, they can call up video film of the livestock being sold. The establishment of TAYNET by Scottish Enterprise Tayside enables businesses throughout Tayside to have easy access to the Internet and the Information Superhighway. The Aberfeldy Telecentre, supported by Forth Valley Enterprise, is a good example where technology has been made available to the local community, resulting in the creation of several new businesses.

58. Networks of people can also bring benefits to rural Scotland. Rural Forum, for example, is itself a network of people and organisations which brings together many of the diverse interests of rural Scotland. Rural Forum has grown and expanded since "Rural Framework" was written and now works with a wide range of rural communities throughout Scotland. Over the same period Scottish Homes has established a specific Department focusing on the provision of housing information and advice called HomePoint. There are now 340 contact points for this network and a wide range of grants have been provided in rural areas to support improved housing information and advice.

59. Transport will always be a difficult issue for rural communities, particularly in the Scottish context where remoteness presents special challenges for transport networks. While economic trends in the field of electronic communications are working to reduce the disadvantages stemming from remoteness, the same cannot be said in relation to many forms of public transport which are faced with increased costs and often a falling passenger demand. There are concerns about the large and increasing dependence of many rural communities on private car ownership particularly the problems this presents for low income households. It is clear that a high quality road network is increasingly important to the social and economic needs of rural Scotland, and the evidence is that this has continued to improve during the 3 year period under

review. But problems remain and it is important that public transport is maintained wherever this is possible at reasonable cost.

comments

Europe

60. There can be no doubt that Europe has become a steadily increasing influence in many aspects of rural life. Three years ago many of the relationships between Europe and rural Scotland that are important now were already in place, but the scale of this involvement has increased enormously since "Rural Framework" was written. Access to funding has grown substantially, but so have information networks, the sharing of good practice through exchanges and joint research initiatives. More individuals and organisations are becoming familiar with the institutions of the European Community and of other member states, and this is giving rural Scotland a range of experience which is much wider than was the case three years ago. For example, local authorities in Scotland have a strong involvement at the European level in terms of exchange of information, networking and links with Community institutions.

61. As already mentioned, the Highlands and Islands have secured Objective 1 status and a funding package of £240m agreed for the period up to 1999. There are two Objective 2 Areas in the West and East of Scotland, which together will receive £315m, and four Objective 5b areas in the Borders, Dumfries and Galloway, Rural Stirling and Upland Tayside, and North and West Grampian eligible to receive a total of £110m. Almost 600 projects have already been given funding under the programmes for these areas and a sample of these indicates the wide diversity of action that the programmes will support, for example construction of a new woollen mill at Brora, a village development programme in Argyll, harbour improvements at Ullapool, the establishment of 5 community radio groups and a children's facility in Nairn.

62. Special programmes known as Community Initiatives are also funded, using up to 9% of the Structural Funds. There are 2 which are specially significant in rural Scotland: LEADER and PESCA. The initial LEADER programme ran from 1992 to 1994, since then it has been reviewed and a successor, LEADER II, developed. This initiative will bring over £15.5 million of Structural Funds to Scotland and will be delivered through two separate programmes, one for the Highlands and Islands and one for rural lowland Scotland. These programmes will be co-ordinated by the Enterprise Networks who have set up Local Action Groups in the Objective 1 and 5b areas. These groups will focus directly on rural development and in particular encourage new innovative measures to develop locally generated potential. Co-ordinated by the relevant Local Enterprise Company, these local partnerships are responsible for preparing business plans, setting out proposals for the use of LEADER resources, deciding on local priorities, articulating local needs and taking local responsibility for delivery of the programme. LEADER groups are encouraged to exchange information, good practice and experience both locally and Community-wide in the expectation that lessons learned elsewhere can be constructively applied closer to home. PESCA is a new Community Initiative which will address the social and economic consequences of the structural difficulties affecting the fishing industry. It will contribute to economic diversification by the development of other activities and job creation whilst also being able to strengthen existing industry activities. EC funding of some £14m for the period up to the end of 1999 has been approved for Scotland, aimed principally at projects in fishery-dependent areas with Objective 1, 2 or 5b status.

The other European funding programme which is significant for rural areas in Scotland is the LIFE programme. LIFE is the funding instrument of the European Commission for the environment and is about to begin its second phase. Competition for this funding is fierce but Scotland has been successful in securing funding for four projects since 1992. These are the Scottish Raised Bog Conservation Project; Promoting Sustainable Development in the Highlands; Restoration of Caledonian Forests; and Conservation of Active Blanket Bog, a joint project between Scotland and Northern Ireland. In addition, Scotland is involved with the Republic of Ireland and France in a fifth project entitled Action for Corncrakes. Although these projects focus mainly on nature conservation they have also brought wider benefits to rural areas, in particular the Highlands Sustainable Development project aims to promote small rural enterprises. Under Phase II, the nature element of LIFE is set to continue to focus on Natura 2000: the network of sites designated to protect species, habitats and birds under the Habitats and Birds Directives. We look forward to further successful applications from Scotland to LIFE Phase II. The Common Fisheries Policy (the "CFP"), in all its facets, continues to have a major influence on the fishing scene. European Community structural aid for the period 1994-1999 is now available under the new Financial Instrument of Fisheries Guidance (the "FIFG"). A particular feature of the latter is the prominence of decommissioning aid as the UK's fleet adjusts in size to meet Multi Annual Guidance Programme targets.

63. Funding is not the only benefit that Europe offers rural Scotland. The sharing of information and good practice has done a great deal to expand our horizons and make us aware of new opportunities. Scottish Homes has helped to establish the European Network for Housing Research Commissioners which shares and exchanges information and enables collaboration on housing research. SAC has also been active in setting up joint research programmes with institutions in other parts of Europe and has arranged a range of student exchange schemes and joint courses with rural institutions in other member states. Rural Forum is active in 3 European information and policy networks: The Trans European Rural Network; VIRGIL, the European Rural Network which takes a particular interest in policy integration and community

empowerment and the European Network for Economic Development, for which it is the UK link. Support for Eastern Europe also continues, for example through SAC work with training and consultancy schemes and Rural Forum's information exchanges with local rural development organisations in Slovenia, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Lithuania. As part of the LEADER II programme the European Commission has established a European Rural Observatory. The purpose of the observatory is to act as a networking mechanism for the exchange of good practice in rural development not only within the LEADER project areas but also in other rural areas in the European Union. The Arkleton Trust is involved at the European level and plans are being formulated to establish a direct link in Scotland and other parts of the UK.

64. In considering Scotland's success in obtaining funding support from the EC it is important to remember that these funding programmes are time limited. The local partnerships will be mindful of that fact and will be selecting projects which will secure lasting and sustainable benefits for the rural communities in which they are based. Rural Scotland is also gaining much through the sharing of information and experience and this should continue to be encouraged. The increased importance of European level policy-making has both benefits and difficulties for rural areas. The benefits lie in the funding and information opportunities set out above, and also in the greater access to European markets for rural businesses. The imposition of greater control in terms of meeting environmental and health regulations, while welcome in terms of setting unequivocal standards for all goods, can sometimes place a disproportionately heavy burden on small businesses. An example of how European standards can be applied sensibly to rural areas comes from Article 6 of the Stage 1 Petrol Vapour Recovery Directive. This allows Member States to apply a derogation from the requirement for provision of a vapour tight connection line for small service stations in areas where vapour emissions are unlikely to contribute significantly to environmental or health problems. In response to a consultation exercise in February 1995, the Government decided to apply this in the UK and consulted recently on the extent of the derogation area. With the exception of the Central Belt and the area around the City of Aberdeen, most of Scotland will be covered.

comments

Sustainability

65. Sustainable development requires that when decisions are taken they have regard to longer term issues and strike an appropriate balance between a broad range of factors, economic, environmental, social and cultural. In doing this, a central place must be found for the views and experience of people living in rural communities who are often most closely involved in husbanding natural resources, maintaining social and cultural values and who should ultimately benefit from economic growth.

66. We believe that this is an area where progress has been made, particularly at the level of policy commitments and the development of national strategy. The UK Government published the UK Sustainable Development Strategy in 1994. This sets out the current situation for the full range of relevant economic activities, challenges that must be addressed and the way forward. The Scottish Advisory Group on Sustainable Development was set up by the Secretary of State for Scotland, following publication of the UK Strategy, and will contribute further to thinking on how sustainability can be achieved in Scotland. In response to the various measures proposed to take forward sustainable development, The Scottish Office commissioned a survey to determine public knowledge of and attitudes to sustainable development, and to explore public reactions to the dilemmas posed by it. Commitments to sustainable development are now finding their way into legislation, corporate plans and strategies. The Natural Heritage (Scotland) Act 1991, which established SNH, requires SNH to "have regard to the desirability of securing that anything done, whether by SNH or any other person in relation to the natural heritage of Scotland, is undertaken in a manner which is sustainable". The legislation for the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) includes provision that the "Secretary of State for Scotland shall from time to time give guidance to SEPA. ...This must include guidance with respect to the contribution which ... the Secretary of State considers it appropriate for SEPA to make ...towards attaining the objective of achieving sustainable development". SNH and the bodies that will go to make up SEPA are preparing a Memorandum of Understanding which will set out how they plan to co-operate on this and other aspects of their duties. The Scottish Enterprise strategy contains a statement that "sustainability will...occupy an important place in our approach to economic development and environmental improvement and we will continue to work with others to expand and improve our knowledge of its implications for our actions".

67. At a more operational level there has also been encouraging progress. Local authorities have taken on board sustainability and have active policies to, among other things, minimise the use of finite resources. Highland Regional Council and Strathclyde Regional Council, among others, have a purchasing policy to reduce consumption of products such as tropical hardwoods from non-sustainable sources. Reducing, re-using and recycling waste is another policy initiative actively pursued by local authorities.

68. Improving agricultural and forestry practice towards the environment makes an important contribution to the sustainable use of resources. In agriculture there has been a strong promotion of the benefits of environmentally sustainable systems of farming for example through the Sustainable Farming Systems Initiative, a joint programme between SAC and the University of Edinburgh. Advice to farmers and crofters has been made available through the SAC Advisory Services and supported by publications such as the Scottish Farm Waste Liaison Group's publication on "Prevention of Environmental Pollution from Agricultural Activity" and "Design and Construction Guidelines for Farm Waste Storage". There is a need for continued promotion of good practice through farm-scale demonstrations and applied research. Various relevant programmes of work are in place at SAC's farms near Elgin, Aberdeen, Crianlarich, Edinburgh, Ayr and Dumfries, providing a wide regional accessibility to information. Additional information will be derived through SNH's TIBRE project. The agri-environment programme, a package of measures to support farmers and crofters in taking action which benefits the natural heritage, has recently been expanded to cover 4 main elements: the Habitats Scheme, the Heather Moorland Scheme, the Organic Aid scheme and the Environmentally Sensitive Areas Scheme. The latter now covers 1.4 million hectares in Scotland or 19% of the land area.

69. Forestry practice was already changing rapidly at the time "Rural Framework" was published, and improvements are continuing. The siting and design of new woodlands has been assisted by the preparation of Indicative Forestry Strategies by local authorities which was mentioned earlier and the introduction of environmental assessment for afforestation projects likely to have significant environmental effects. The Forestry Commission has revised and extended its guidelines on forest design and management and forestry schemes must comply with the standards set out in these guidelines as a condition of Government grant aid. Forestry grants are now better targeted and encourage a variety of woodland planting. In the past few years several thousand hectares of new native pine woodlands have been created. The Farm Woodland Premium Scheme is encouraging smaller scale woodland planting by farmers and the Crofter Forestry Scheme has opened up opportunities for crofting communities to develop woodland resources. Local authority Community Woodland plans now cover some 85% of the Scottish population. Following the Forestry Review the Government made further

improvements to the Woodland Grant Scheme including a Livestock Exclusion Annual Premium aimed at stemming the deterioration of native woodland and a Locational Supplement to encourage new woodland in the area of the Central Scotland Forest.

70. Engaging local communities in developing a model of sustainable development for their local area is another way to put the concepts into practice. The Ettrick and Lauderdale Sustainability study aimed to develop a system that would make the interactions between different activities clearer and enable local people to decide how they might influence the outcome. The report of the study has now been published and the results made more generally available and developed through the Borders Sustainability Forum and possibly later through a national seminar. Local authorities have the responsibility of developing a Local Agenda 21 for their area, in partnership with local people. These will also set out how progress towards sustainable development for the area will be made and measured. The Tweed Horizons Centre for Sustainable Technology is an initiative promoted by Scottish Borders Enterprise. It provides a business centre for demonstrating practical sustainable development, encourages sustainable technology in the Borders and raises awareness of sustainability both locally and nationally.

71. A Tourism and Environment Task Force has been set up under the Tourism and Environment Initiative to shape policies that will encourage environmentally-friendly tourism. The Task Force has been instrumental in the implementation of Tourist Management Programmes, in St Andrews for example. Its objectives relate to enhancing visitor experience and economic benefits, as well as improving and protecting the quality of life for residents. The Highlands project funded by EU LIFE programme sponsors a number of Green tourism projects which will be used to demonstrate good practice. The Task Force has produced the publications "A Sustainable Partnership", "Going Green", "Tourism and the Scottish Environment", and a video "Tourism and the Environment".

72. There is a great deal happening in Scotland to promote the idea and practice of sustainability although in some cases changes will be slow and difficult to measure in the short term. There are also further developments in hand: proposals for costed action programmes to take forward the Biodiversity Action Plan will be published later this year. SNH launched its Species Recovery Programme earlier this year and action under the Habitats and Species Directive will establish a European network of protected sites. Further improvements will result from the development and application of SAC research on more sustainable agricultural systems, including techniques such as integrated pest management, minimum tillage systems, and strategic grassland management systems. Likewise, the development of alternative energy strategies for rural businesses and improved transport policies and communications systems in rural areas have a significant role to play and Scottish Homes has developed a number of action research projects on energy efficiency and its impact on housing design.

comments

SECTION 3

Conclusions

73. It is not the function of this report to review overall trends in rural Scotland over the past 3 years. To do so would involve a clear statement of the overall aims of rural policy, followed by an analysis of changes in specific indicators related to the aims - for example population trends, employment and unemployment, environmental indicators, and the incidence of rural disadvantage. The aims of this report are more modest: to examine how far the themes set out in "Rural Framework" have been put into action over the last three years.

74. Even this task faces a fundamental problem in that the "Rural Framework" themes are described in qualitative terms only. Their purpose was to develop a new language rather than to set out an operational blueprint. A rigorous assessment of progress and identification of good practice is in the strictest sense not possible unless clearer criteria and targets are set against which performance can be measured. The "Rural Framework" themes are therefore only a beginning, and we suggest the next step should be a more systematic attempt to define the criteria by which good practice can be identified. A start on this has already been made in the case of some themes, for example the research which The Scottish Office has commissioned on community involvement.

75. It is nevertheless possible in a less rigorous way to take stock of progress over the last 3 years, based on the examples set out in Section 2 in relation to each of the "Rural Framework" themes. Overall, we believe encouraging progress has been made. For example, there is widespread support from public and private bodies in rural Scotland for the concept of partnership and the desirability of working towards a more integrated rural policy. The setting up of the Rural Focus Group was itself an important step in furthering partnership at national level. The activities of Rural Focus Group, through discussion of key issues, research, promotion of improved information, improved collaboration, and the identification and encouragement of innovatory approaches to rural development, have helped to ensure that each of the member bodies represented on Rural Focus Group see their work within a wider context. We believe the Rural Focus Group provides a good basis on which to build. There are also many examples of local partnerships set up by various bodies for different purposes over the last three years. We believe there is scope for more local partnerships, and a need for the experience and successes of existing partnerships to be disseminated on a more systematic basis.

76. Turning to the individual themes of "Rural Framework", more obvious progress has been made on some themes than on others. For example, there is increased recognition of the importance of community involvement in rural development, not only in the sense of being consulted by public sector bodies before decisions are taken but more fundamentally in terms of the benefits of empowering communities to promote their own ideas for community-led development. Developments such as the Scottish Homes Personal Housing Plans initiative have demonstrated some of the potential from this approach.

77. The other themes where important developments have certainly occurred are more effective service delivery, particularly in relation to decentralisation and the provision of better information to customers; Europe, where the designation of much of rural Scotland under Objective 1 and 5b has been a catalyst for the preparation of local plans by partnership teams to draw down the substantial European Funds now available; and sustainability, where our understanding of the scope of this concept has improved and some useful steps taken towards its practical implementation. The pursuit of quality in rural Scotland has also been a major objective over the past 3 years and some success has been achieved, exemplified by developments in the tourism and food and drink industries. In the case of the remaining themes (diversity, local value added, and networks and communications), arguably less has been achieved but it needs to be recognised that progress has been made more difficult by the existence of strong economic forces operating towards specialisation and centralisation of economic activity. Despite these adverse trends, the examples given in Section 2 illustrate the major opportunities which exist for rural Scotland, for example in the field of electronic communications.

78. In conclusion, we believe the Rural Focus Group could play an important part in developing the principles of "Rural Framework", taking account of the conclusions of the Government's Rural White Paper. In our view, what is now needed is a more systematic programme of research, monitoring and evaluation which will identify examples of good practice in relation to "Rural Framework" themes and disseminate this information to all those involved in the continued development of rural Scotland.

comments

ANNEX 1

Member Organisations of The Rural Focus Group

The Scottish Office (Chair)

Forestry Commission

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH)

Scottish Homes

Scottish Tourist Board (STB)

Scottish Enterprise

Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE)

Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA)

The Scottish Agricultural College (SAC)

Central Scotland Countryside Trust

Rural Forum

comments

ANNEX 2

Rural Framework Series Publications

Rural Framework (1992)

Scottish Rural Life: A Socio-economic profile of Rural Scotland (1992)

Pounds, Policies and Prospects: Rural Scotland and the European Community (1993)

Conservation, Access and Recreation: Code of Practice for Water & Sewerage Authorities and River Purification Authorities (1993)

Cairngorms Partnership: A statement of intent by the Secretary of State for Scotland following the advice of the Cairngorms Working Party (1993)

Loch Lomond & the Trossachs: The response by the Secretary of State for Scotland to the report of the Loch Lomond & the Trossachs Working Party (1995)

For information on these publications please contact:

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comments

