

East of England Rural Forum Terms of Reference

1. Background

- 1.1 The East of England Rural Affairs Forum (EERAF) was originally set up in 2002. It carried out the role of 'rural sounding board' as set out in the 2000 Rural White Paper.
- 1.2 In 2004, a new Rural Strategy was published, which contained a description of a range of new functions that Regional Rural Forums are expected to fulfil. In response, GO-East led a review of the EERAF, in partnership with other regional organisations and members of the EERAF. The **East of England Rural Forum** (the Rural Forum) is the result of that review.
- 1.3 The Rural Forum is an important part of the evolving Regional Rural Delivery Framework. The Framework sets out priorities for rural communities, proposed delivery arrangements and mechanisms for decision making and representation of rural issues.

2. Purpose

- 2.1 The purpose of the Rural Forum is to provide a voice for rural stakeholders at a strategic level, capable of influencing the rural agenda in the East of England. In addition, it is to provide a channel of communication between rural stakeholders, the Regional Assembly, government and other organisations. The Rural Forum will not be responsible for delivery of individual services.
- 2.2 Specific responsibilities include:
 - (a) **Rural proofing** – the Rural Forum should respond to key national and regional strategies to make sure that they take account of the rural stakeholder perspective.
 - (b) **Priorities** – comment on government proposals for rural policy and contribute to the development and review of regional delivery priorities as set out in the Regional Rural Delivery Framework
 - (c) **Monitoring, scrutinising and reviewing** - the Rural Forum will monitor and review rural delivery, identify gaps in service provision and areas where performance could be improved.
 - (d) **Rural voice** - the Rural Forum will act as the rural voice of the region, particularly through developing stronger contacts with a wide range of constituencies and sub-regional partnerships and through the member's regular consultations with their constituencies enabling it to take full advantage of regular contacts with Government Ministers to convey issues of concern.
 - (e) **Regional Assembly** – although the Rural Forum will be an independent body, it will provide a link between rural stakeholders and the East of England Regional Assembly, Government Office for the East of England and The East of England Development Agency.
 - (f) **Sub-regional links** – County Rural Forums will be expected to contribute to the rural agenda through representation on the Regional Forum.

3. Membership

- 3.1 The membership of the Rural Forum is limited to no more than 35. This is to achieve a balance between comprehensive representation and effective decision making. The Membership is intended to reflect regional thematic and geographic balances across the three pillars of sustainable development (environment, economy and community). The roles and responsibilities of Rural Forum members are set out in the Members' job description.
- 3.2 Although membership is limited, each member of the Forum has a responsibility to communicate effectively with the constituency they represent. They should provide feedback from the Forum and consult constituents on issues that are to be discussed to ensure that they are able to accurately represent the views of the rural community.
- 3.3 Members of the Forum will be selected by nominating bodies, but will be required to represent a wide constituency, rather than only representing the views of the nominating organisation. Members must also be able to think and operate at both a local level and at a regional, strategic level.
- 3.4 The following is a list of the constituencies that the Rural Forum members will represent, together with the nominating bodies.

Constituency	Nominating body	No.
Elected local authority members (ideally covering a broad range of types of authority)	East of England Regional Assembly, through County Local Government Associations	6 (1 per county)
Sub-Regional Rural Forums	County Rural Forums or, where these do not exist, Sub-regional Economic Partnerships or Local Strategic Partnership(s)	6 (1 per county)
Rural, voluntary and community sector	Rural Community Councils	6 (1 per county)
Town and parish councils	Regional Association of Town and Parish Councils (BENSCH)	3
Black and minority ethnic interests	Minority and Ethnic Network in the Eastern Region (MENTER)	1
Faith Groups	East of England Faiths Council	1
Land based industries	National Farmer's Union, Country Landowners and Business Association, Forestry and Timber Association	2
Businesses located in rural areas	East of England Business Group	2
Tourism and leisure	East of England Tourist Board	1
Skills and Education	Regional Skills and Competitiveness Partnership	1
Environment	East of England Environment Forum (1 to represent natural environment, 1 to represent land management/conservation)	2
Sustainable Development	Sustainable Development Round Table	1
Culture	Living East	1
Health	NHS Confederation	1

- 3.5 The nominating bodies may nominate anyone who they think is able to effectively represent that constituency; they are not limited to those within a nominating organisation(s). Where possible, a **non-executive** representative should be nominated, rather than an officer employed by the organisation.

The nominating bodies are expected to take account of their own cultural, disability and ethnic diversity policies when considering suitable candidates.

- 3.6 Members should be persons of integrity and standing within their constituency of interest and should understand, reflect and represent the diversity of that constituency and of the Region.
- 3.7 To maintain continuity and effective working and decision making, it will not normally be appropriate for members to send substitutes to the regular Rural Forum meetings. In exceptional circumstances, substitutes will be allowed but the agreement of the Chair and Secretariat must be obtained in advance of the meeting. The Member will be expected to ensure the substitute is fully briefed and has the authority to comment and make decisions on behalf of the constituency.
- 3.8 Nominations for members of the Rural Forum should be made to the secretariat (GO-East). Members will be appointed on an annual basis, with members serving no more than three consecutive years.
- 3.9 EEDA and the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) will be invited to nominate a member of their boards to attend meetings of the Rural Forum as observers. A representative of the EEDET (East of England Directors of Environment and Transport) group will also attend as an observer. Officers from the organisations represented on the Rural Network Core Group will also attend as observers and advisers to the Rural Forum.
- 3.10 Other observers may attend the Rural Forum meetings providing the permission of the Secretariat and Chair has been obtained and there is sufficient space in the venue.

4. Meetings

- 4.1 Normally, meetings of the Forum will be held four times per year. The following options are proposed for locations:
 - Meetings held in a variety of locations throughout the region.
 - Meetings held at a single location in the region
 - Two meetings at a single location and two in a variety of locations.The Rural Forum will advise the Secretariat which option it prefers.
- 4.2 When discussing issues, the task of the Rural Forum will be to represent all views expressed but with ideally a consensus achieved. However, the ability to represent all views and perspectives is of greater importance than consensus. Members will not be expected to take part in votes to establish the Rural Forum's position on issues.
- 4.3 At least once each year (normally in conjunction with one of the regular quarterly meetings, the Rural Forum will host a conference on a relevant topic. The conference will be open to a wide range of rural stakeholders and will provide the opportunity for them to hear about and influence the Rural Forum's activity and discuss current rural issues.

5. Secretariat and Communication

- 5.1 The Rural Team at GO-East will coordinate secretariat support for the Rural Forum. This will include making arrangements for meetings, briefing the Chair, preparation of the agenda, reports and minutes for the meeting. Also, the secretariat will provide a contact point for people who are interested in finding out about the Forum.
- 5.2 Papers for meetings will normally be circulated to members by e-mail unless a member indicates a preference for paper copies.
- 5.3 Information about the Rural Forum, including agendas, minutes and an annual report will be published on the Forum's Website.

6. Chair

- 6.1 To assist with the rapid establishment of the Rural Forum, for the first year the Chair and two Vice-Chairs will be appointed by the Government Office for the East of England, The East of England Development Agency and the East of England Regional Assembly in consultation with the other members of the Rural Network Core Group. This appointment will be for a period of up to one year only, after which the normal election procedure will be implemented.

7. Election Procedure.

- 7.1 At the annual general meeting, the members of the Rural Forum, by a simple majority, will elect the Chair and two Vice Chairs.
- 7.2 Nominations with a proposer and seconder must be made to the Secretariat at least two weeks prior to the annual meeting so that confirmation of willingness to stand by nominee can be obtained in advance.
- 7.3 The Chair and Vice-Chairs will be elected annually and should not normally serve for longer than three consecutive years. The first election of Chair and Vice-Chairs of the Rural Forum will take place in June 2006.

8. Vice-Chairs

- 8.1 Ideally, the Vice-Chairs should complement the background and experience of the Chair. It is expected that one of the Vice-Chairs will be an elected local authority member, if the Chair is not from this constituency.

9. Monitor and Review

- 9.1 The Rural Forum will operate in an ever-changing policy and delivery environment. The Rural Forum will therefore on an annual basis:
 - Reviews its purpose and that it is fit to address that purpose, including whether it continues to represent the appropriate range of constituencies.
 - Prepare an annual report on activity to date, including an outline of what issues it expects to address in the coming year and a forward programme of meeting dates. Meeting dates will normally be agreed at least a year in advance.

- Review the Rural Forum's own Terms of Reference.
- Review membership performance when issues such as attendance and engagement with constituencies will be considered.

10. Attendance at Quarterly Meetings with Government Ministers.

10.1 The England Rural Affairs Forum has been replaced by quarterly meetings between Defra Ministers and the Chairs of the Regional Rural Affairs Forums as part of the implementation of the Rural Strategy 2004.

10.2 Each RRAF has the opportunity to send three representatives to these meetings. It is expected that the Chair of the Rural Forum will attend. It is for the Rural Forum to agree how the remaining representatives are selected. Options include:

- The two Vice-Chairs.
- Two Forum members on a regular basis.
- Two Forum members on a rotational basis.
- Two Forum members chosen depending on the theme of the meeting.