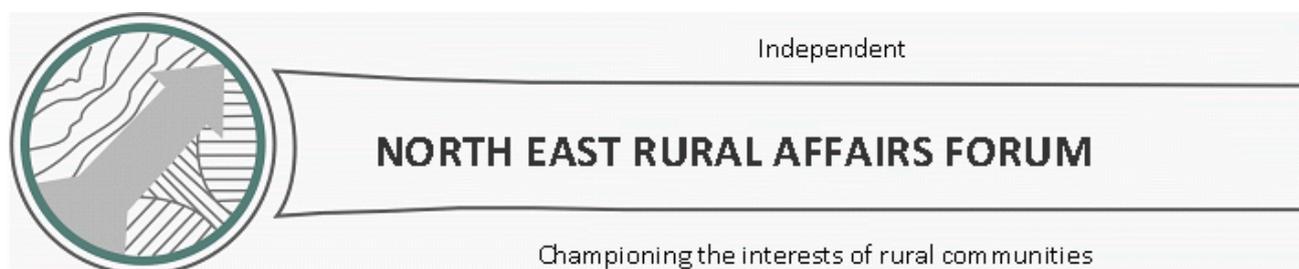


A REVIEW OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE NORTH EAST RURAL AFFAIRS FORUM 2007-2009



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Executive Summary

NERAF is widely perceived by key regional stakeholders to be carrying out a useful function for the rural sector in the North East through its advocacy of rural issues, and in its activity in supporting the 'rural-proofing' of strategy and delivery in the region. NERAF's current delivery levels – regionally and nationally – are underpinned by the very high activity rate of the Chair and several other Forum members.

A fundamental strength of the Forum is its makeup of individual citizens. This provides it with a legitimacy and autonomy from public sector bodies which is viewed as invaluable at a strategic and policy level. This was a constant and very robust theme in the response from most regional stakeholders.

The generally strong picture regionally does, however, incorporate some significant weaknesses which revolve around several key themes:

- An over-reliance on one or two key members which potentially reduces the input of other members and could render the Forum less effective when a change of Chair occurs
- Lack of resource of Forum members generally, related to their volunteer status
- A generally expressed view that the Standing Conferences lacked breadth of attendance, and do not provide sufficient links between the communities that NERAF represents, and the strategy/delivery bodies in the region

Some other elements of relevance which have been raised – which are not necessarily weaknesses considering the current Aims and Objectives – include:

- A lack of awareness of NERAF and its activities beyond a 'core' group
- Potential political change next May which may influence regional organisational structure

We therefore make the following recommendations for NERAF:

1. Continue to exploit current relationships and develop new ones; ensure that the strength of NERAF in networking and relationships is improved across Forum membership
2. Continue to promote the Forum as a strong and independent voice for the rural sector, and to stress the importance of NERAF to the rural sector among public sector strategic and delivery bodies
3. Build up capacity of a potential successor to the current chair in order that NERAF maintains a strong presence nationally
4. Determine what sort of capacity and development is required of NERAF members in order that they can use their representative prerogative to the maximum possible level; and then undertake this development as a matter of urgency in order to decrease reliance by the Forum on one or two key individuals
5. Clarify the expected involvement of NERAF and policy officers in consultation, and communicate this activity more effectively
6. Use existing rural networks more effectively to disseminate information; consider a redevelopment of the 'public face' of NERAF (the website)
7. Investigate the possibility of remuneration for the Chair in order to enable the position to benefit from some 'paid' hours of activity
8. Increase networking/lobbying activity to individuals or organisations who might hold the biggest rural remits in a changed political landscape after May 2010
9. Improve the relevance of the Standing Conferences to the rural constituency
10. Revisit the possible output of NERAF given constrained resources (both time and financial), and consider prioritising activity accordingly

At a national level, NERAF is well-respected amongst its peers. The effectiveness of the RAFs as a whole in lobbying Government is limited, as their influence is fundamentally linked to the willingness of the relevant Minister to attend meetings and listen to the RAFs; the high churn rate of Ministers with this portfolio militates against strong, continuous links which could lead to highly productive relationships. There is no scope for NERAF to affect this situation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
1. INTRODUCTION	3
2. METHODOLOGY	3
3. RESULTS	4
A. STRENGTHS	4
I. FULFILLING AN IMPORTANT FUNCTION	4
II. PROVIDING INDEPENDENT AND INFORMED INPUT	5
III. A STRONG RAF NATIONALLY	5
B. WEAKNESSES	5
I. LACK OF RESOURCE	5
II. LACK OF AWARENESS	5
C. OPPORTUNITIES	6
I. POLITICAL UNCERTAINTY	6
II. INCREASED PROFILE REGIONALLY	6
III. EVOLUTION OF STRUCTURE	6
IV. POTENTIAL TO BRIDGE GAPS IN DELIVERY	6
D. THREATS	7
I. POLITICAL UNCERTAINTY	7
II. EXPECTATION EXCEEDING DELIVERY CAPACITY	7
E. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES	7
I. LOBBY FOR RURAL INTERESTS	8
II. PROVIDE A SET OF KEY QUESTIONS	8
III. FACILITATE A STANDING CONFERENCE	8
IV. SCRUTINISE SERVICE DELIVERY	9
V. ALERT THE RURAL MINISTER TO REGIONAL RURAL ISSUES	9
VI. COMMENT ON STRATEGY AND POLICY	9
VII. WORK WITH PUBLIC SECTOR STAKEHOLDERS	9
VIII. ADDITIONAL POINTS	9
F. OUTPUTS	10
4. BIBLIOGRAPHY	10
5. ANNEXE	11
A. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES	11
B. REGIONAL STAKEHOLDERS	11
C. THE QUESTIONNAIRE	12
D. CONTACT DETAILS	13

1. Introduction

Rural Affairs Forums were created in eight regions in England as a result of the Rural White Paper¹. They were envisioned as a mechanism whereby end users of Government services could provide feedback on the efficacy of public-sector service delivery in rural areas.

The Forums are strictly independent of Government, although they are serviced through the Government Offices for the Regions.

The North East Rural Affairs Forum (NERAF) is a group of individuals from across the region who are sponsored by DEFRA to try to ensure that policy, strategy and delivery takes appropriate account of the needs of the rural sector.

In the case of the North East, GONE provided the secretariat functions until November 2009. At that time, the contract for delivery of secretariat services was awarded to Rural Development Initiatives (RDI) through their regional office based in Morpeth.

The last annual report on NERAF activities was published in 2007; a review of activities since is therefore timely. RDI has undertaken this work on behalf of NERAF.

One of the main aims of this review is to consider in what ways NERAF should continue to operate, or evolve its activities, in order to maintain and improve its relevance to the sector in light of past achievements and some potentially turbulent political events in the near future.

2. Methodology

The methodology aims to tease out the main delivery-related issues of NERAF which are categorised under the headings of 'Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats'. We then undertake to examine each component of the Aims and Objectives² (Aims and Objectives) in order to determine whether NERAF has been successful in carrying out its activities.

The main inputs to the review are the qualitative assessments of the NERAF membership (both past and present) and the feedback of regional stakeholders. The 'deliverable outputs' of NERAF have been collated by the Chair and are presented at the end of the Results.

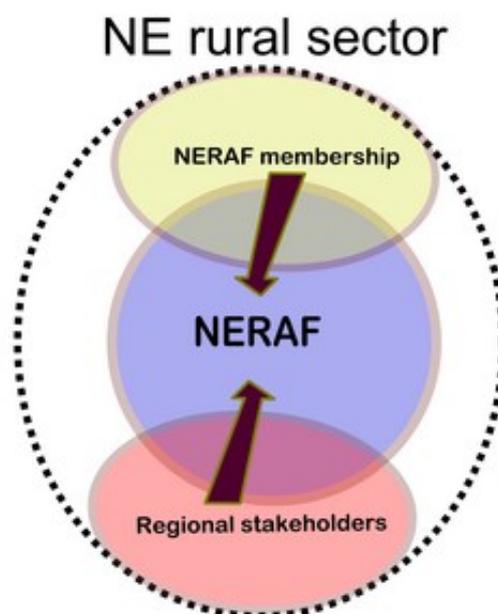


Figure 1: Feedback on NERAF activities

¹ "Department for Environment - Defra, UK - Wildlife and countryside - Rural White.pdf," <http://www.defra.gov.uk/rural/documents/policy/ruralwp/rural.pdf>.

² "Independent North East Rural Affairs Forum," http://www.ne-ruralaffairsforum.org.uk/main/section_aboutneraf.htm?section_id=178.

We took as our starting point the first annual report³ of NERAF activities. Some of the key issues which were to be addressed from this report included:

- Increasing the non-Northumberland makeup of the Forum
- 'Core' issues such as housing and public transport
- Red tape for rural businesses; generic support issues for micro-businesses
- Improving access for rural businesses to supply chain value, particularly through public sector procurement
- Retention of graduates in the region (and particularly in rural areas)
- Encouraging greater use of bio-fuels (taken to mean biomass more widely)

The extent to which these issues have been addressed is indicated in more detail in each of the Aims and Objectives; broadly speaking there has been success across several of these key issues. Some of this is not directly attributable to NERAF – for example, the clearly increased regional use of biofuels – but is worth stating nonetheless.

'Rural-proofing' issues into the mainstream can be said to have taken major strides in the last few years, and there is strong evidence that NERAF has played a significant part in this development.

In order to assess the success of NERAF in carrying out its functions, each Aim and Objective was broken down into separate components; these have been indicated in section 5.a. An online questionnaire⁴ tackling each component of the Aims and Objectives was generated and circulated to a number of regional stakeholders, as well as to members of the Forum. The regional stakeholders who were contacted are listed in Section 5.b.

The performance of NERAF has therefore been judged on the success in meeting its Aims and Objectives. Going beyond this, we have indicated where we believe there is scope for improvement of the performance of NERAF, which should help in any debate over the relevance of the existing Aims and Objectives.

3. Results

Not all identified stakeholders responded. Of those who did, some felt that they did not have a deep enough understanding of NERAF to be able to comment.

	Contacted	Responses	Feedback provided
Current and ex-members of NERAF	21	8	6
Regional stakeholders	22	15	12
Total	43	23	18

Feedback consisted of filling in the questionnaire, emailing a response, or a personal interview.

The most useful way to present the performance of NERAF over the last two years is to combine the comments into generic 'strengths' and 'weaknesses' as derived from an analysis of the responses; and to augment where possible with specific responses to the questionnaire on each Aim and Objective.

a. Strengths

i. Fulfilling an important function

There was widespread agreement that NERAF fulfilled the important function of representing to delivery bodies (particularly the public sector) the concerns and issues of the rural sector. Given that this is the overarching aim of the Forum, the most important objective of the Forum appears to be fulfilled satisfactorily.

However, the strength of having independent members of the public represented on the Forum was simultaneously highlighted as a weakness; such individuals are inevitably constrained in how much time and

³ "Annual Report 2006-2007; North East Rural Affairs Forum" (Government Office of the North East).

⁴ "Review of North East Rural Affairs Forum, 2007-2009,"

http://spreadsheets.google.com/viewform?hl=en_GB&formkey=dFFvcINBbTdQM3Fwa0JGNHRJZ2taTEE6MA.

resources they can devote to the Forum and some individuals – such as those running their own business – are arguably under more severe time pressure.

ii. Providing independent and informed input

The independence and relevance of NERAF input was a common theme for many respondents. For some regional stakeholders this was considered critical to obtaining legitimate feedback and input into strategy development.

This was considered important in a sector which can easily become dominated by public sector policy or delivery bodies. The ‘critical friend’ element of NERAF’s functions was appreciated, and it was felt that this independence sometimes allows things to be said or considered which might otherwise have been felt too controversial.

The strength of opinion on this matter leads us to conclude that the makeup of the Forum provides an excellent service to both delivery/strategy bodies, and to the rural constituency. Although improvements to the Forum are certainly possible – not least relating to capacity-building and development – the rationale underpinning the Forum makeup is sound and robustly supported by the evidence.

iii. A strong RAF nationally

NERAF is considered to be punching ‘above its weight’ nationally, providing strong influence for the other RAFs and in meetings with the Rural Advocate and Minister. It was described by one respondent as ‘the best RAF in the country’. It is also considered to have good links with the CRC, and the new Director responsible for the region has made a strong start in demonstrating her enthusiasm for the role and for the region.

Recommendations

Recommendations to help build on strengths:

- Continue to exploit current relationships and develop new ones; ensure that the strength of NERAF in networking and relationships is improved across Forum membership
- Continue to promote the Forum as a strong and independent voice for the rural sector
- Build up capacity of a potential successor to the current chair in order that NERAF maintains a strong presence nationally

b. Weaknesses

i. Lack of resource

This was highlighted a number of times as a potentially critical weakness, and is a straightforward consequence of using volunteers to populate the forum. The lack of resource could become particularly acute with a change of leadership within the Forum; it is clear that the existing Chair has devoted considerable time and energy to carrying out their role. Subsequent Chairs may not be able to do so, and the Forum should consider how best to undertake a ‘succession strategy’.

The question of capacity and resource of all Forum members is a sizeable issue, and merits serious consideration. The efficacy of the Forum would be strengthened by the development and capacity-building of its members which would increase the range and impact of its reach. It would also support the Forum as a whole in a time of succession of Chairs, and support the Chair who would be able to delegate actions more widely amongst the members. The form of such development or capacity-building is not immediately obvious as each member brings with them different experience and skills, and we therefore recommend that the Forum considers this issue itself to help determine the support required.

The fact that the Forum is made up of volunteers necessarily limits its capacity to respond effectively to the sheer volume of consultations on strategy and policy emanating from various bodies. The Aims and Objectives caveat this lack of resource by stating that ‘we comment on *selected* rural strategy and policy’; this is deliberately vague and therefore offers the remit for commenting on any number of consultations. However, it is clear that some stakeholders were unclear about the remit of the Forum in this respect, and clarification on the expected involvement would potentially be a useful improvement.

It is likely that the removal of the secretariat function from GONE will enable more policy work to be carried out by the relevant officers, which should increase the output in this sector.

ii. Lack of awareness

Overall NERAF suffers from a lack of awareness amongst key stakeholders about its activities; anecdotally

this seems to have worsened over the period 2007-2009. However, as raising awareness of NERAF is not part of its aims and objectives this should not be raised as a criticism of past activities; more an opportunity for improving the efficacy of the Forum in the future.

Recommendations

Recommendations to help tackle weaknesses:

- Determine what sort of capacity and development is required of NERAF members in order that they can use their representative prerogative to the maximum possible level; and then undertake this development as a matter of urgency in order to decrease reliance by the Forum on one or two key individuals
- Clarify the expected involvement of the forum and policy officers in consultation, and communicate this activity more effectively
- Use existing rural networks more effectively to disseminate information (including the network of parish councils); consider a redevelopment of the 'public face' of NERAF (the website)
- Investigate the possibility of remuneration for the Chair in order to enable the position to benefit from some 'paid' hours of activity

c. Opportunities

i. Political uncertainty

Whilst this could also be seen as a threat, respondents felt overall that any potential restructuring of priority and organisational structure regionally could provide the opportunity for NERAF to continue influencing key decisions, as long as this opportunity is grasped immediately.

A likely outcome of the forthcoming General Election is that regionalism diminishes and localism is strengthened; in practice this might mean a reduction of the powers and influence of One NorthEast and potentially a strengthening in devolved responsibility to Local Authorities and GONE.

Whilst this is in no way certain – and until election manifestos are published we are left to second-guess what may happen from comments from politicians – NERAF would probably benefit from an urgent consideration of how it is best to operate under a new set of regional or local priorities; and if possible, to start building up relationships with people and organisations who may be in positions of influence with regard to rural sector strategy and delivery.

ii. Increased profile regionally

The patchy awareness of NERAF across some regional stakeholders suggests that there is a strong opportunity for improving communication of NERAF's activities and importance to the rural sector across the region. An increased level of awareness would help bolster NERAF's stake in a shakeup of regional organisational structure.

iii. Evolution of structure

One respondent suggested a move to a 'select committee'-type role, picking a topic and inviting relevant public/private sector individuals or organisations to give evidence and/or respond to questions. This might change the 'feel' of NERAF from a Critical Friend to a scrutiny panel, and the change of remit or form of NERAF was felt unwise in a time of potential significant policy change by other respondents. Nevertheless, it is possible that this might even out the time resource which needs to be applied to membership of the Forum in order to exert influence at a regional level.

iv. Potential to bridge gaps in delivery

One respondent suggested that in cross-regional issues – such as service delivery in the 'Bermuda triangle' of coverage between the three RDAs – NERAF could consider working with the relevant RAFs in seeing whether funding could be brought in via The Northern Way or other cross-border mechanisms. However, any such activity would require significant time resource allocation which may not be practicable in current circumstances.

Recommendations

Recommendations to help capitalise on opportunities:

- Increase networking/lobbying activity to individuals or organisations who might hold the biggest rural remits in a changed political landscape after May 2010
- Consider whether an evolution of function could fulfil NERAF remit without reliance on individual resources

d. Threats

i. Political uncertainty

Although viewed as mostly an opportunity, the fact that change is extremely likely could be threatening to a body which does not vigorously promote its relevance to existing and new organisational and delivery landscapes.

It is likely that the General Election will result in a hung parliament or an overall majority for the Conservative Party. The most likely result of this will be an increase in localism, a decrease in regionalism, and a sizeable reduction in public spending. Although the direct consequences are difficult to predict, it could be that there will be a reduction in influence of ONE, and an increase in responsibility and influence of GONE and ANEC. There could also be conflicting priorities between national and local Governments.

ii. Expectation exceeding delivery capacity

The flip side of improving communication and networking for an organisation which consists of volunteers is that expectations will rise to levels which exceed delivery capacity. Indeed, this has already been flagged as a weakness, and without some consideration of resources allocated to NERAF could become a critical issue.

Recommendations

Recommendations to militate against threats:

- Continue to stress the importance of NERAF to the rural sector among public sector strategic and delivery bodies
- Revisit the possible output of NERAF given constrained resources (both time and financial), and consider prioritising activity accordingly

e. Aims and objectives

The Aims and Objectives were used to assess the success of NERAF in carrying out its mandated tasks. Each Aims and Objectives was considered by one or more question in the questionnaire which can be found online⁵ or in Section 5.c. A summary of the questionnaire responses follows in the table below, with further details provided in the next section.

Question	Summary
How aware are you of the activities of NERAF, and of its activities in lobbying for rural issues regionally?	Highly aware
How important is the involvement of individual citizens in the makeup and delivery of NERAF?	Reasonably important
To what extent can the activities of NERAF be said to be contributing to the 'rural proofing' of service delivery regionally?	Moderate contribution
What policies or strategies has NERAF influenced to the benefit of the rural sector?	See detailed response
Are you aware of the Standing Conferences of NERAF?	Yes
Have you attended any Standing Conferences of NERAF?	Generally yes
If attended, how successful would you say they have been in providing a platform for engagement and feedback from rural stakeholders to relevant delivery bodies?	Response not very positive; turnout felt to be low with 'the usual suspects' in attendance
How effective has the anecdotal/informal feedback from NERAF members been to relevant delivery bodies?	Moderately effective (scored), very effective (interviews)
Do you feel that public sector policy and/or delivery bodies value NERAF input?	Varied response; moderate
Can you provide examples of issues which might have been missed by delivery bodies but which have been raised by NERAF?	See detailed response
How has feedback from NERAF been useful in supporting service delivery through raising awareness on current significant issues for rural communities?	Strong response supporting NERAF usefulness
How effective is the work done by NERAF on scrutinising delivery of services to rural communities?	Very mixed response, varying from 'not very' to 'highly' effective
In what ways has NERAF engaged with public bodies and affected rural service delivery?	Broadly seen as through the main strategic and delivery

⁵ David Clubb, "Online questionnaire for the 2007-2009 NERAF review," http://spreadsheets.google.com/viewform?hl=en_GB&formkey=dFFvcINBbTdQM3Fwa0JGNHRJZ2taTEE6MA.

	bodies
Have the Rural Minister and regional partners been effectively informed about regional rural issues?	Yes
Does rural policy and strategy receive sufficient scrutiny and comment from NERAF?	Yes
To what extent has NERAF been involved with policy/strategy comment or scrutiny?	To a reasonably strong extent (see detailed response)
How effectively does NERAF represent the region's rural interests to the principal policy and delivery agencies in the region?	Reasonably effective
Please provide further details of representation to any public sector organisations	See detailed response
Are the aims and objectives of NERAF correctly aligned with its capacity and remit?	Yes
In what way would you amend the aims and objectives to improve the relevance and effectiveness of NERAF?	See detailed response
Are there any additional ways in which NERAF supports the rural sector which have not already been covered but which add value?	Networking, and the informal community-relevant feedback was mentioned
Do you have any other comments about NERAF?	Incorporated into 'strengths and weaknesses'

i. Lobby for rural interests

We lobby for rural interests by asking public sector bodies to carry out rural proofing using rural citizens

Most respondents were aware of NERAF and its role in lobbying for rural regional issues. There was a spread of opinion on the importance of using individual citizens, between 'somewhat' and 'very' important. One respondent thought that having individual citizens was not important in the makeup and delivery of NERAF. The lack of resource (time) available to private citizens was highlighted as an issue here by one respondent.

ii. Provide a set of key questions

We provide a set of key questions for a rural proofing process, and we provide citizens to carry out or assist in this process

The overall view was that NERAF provides a moderate or strong contribution to rural proofing service delivery, with some slight confusion about what that meant in practice. Several respondents were very strongly supportive of the work of NERAF in this respect, and stated that the fact that rural proofing was now considered 'mainstream' was partly the result of strong NERAF representation.

Some of the strategies/policies which were felt to have been influenced by NERAF were:

- RDPE (integration of axes)
- Futures work
- Affordable housing review
- Broadband delivery
- Regional spatial strategy
- Regional economic strategy
- Local authority and National Park LDFs
- Sub-regional sustainable community strategies
- Regional and sub-regional climate change strategies

iii. Facilitate a standing conference

We facilitate a rural stakeholder standing conference to provide a platform for rural organisations and communities to engage with public bodies

This seems to be one of the weaker areas of NERAF delivery. Several respondents stated that the last standing conference was disappointing and that the breadth and number of attendees was poor.

We monitor the well-being of rural communities using a 'canary in the coalmine' sampling approach

The responses to this tended to suggest that the approach was moderately effective, although the interviewees had a more positive take and generally suggested that this informal approach was very useful.

Several issues were suggested as having benefited from NERAF attention which might not otherwise have had such a rural focus. These included:

- Broadband access
- Delivery of NHS services in Northumberland
- Effect of Durham County Council's travel voucher on potential 6th form pupils in rural areas
- Additional support for hill farmers post-Foot and Mouth

iv. Scrutinise service delivery

We work with public bodies to scrutinise the delivery of services to rural communities

Again, there was some variation in response, although broadly speaking the feedback was positive in terms of the scrutiny provided.

v. Alert the rural minister to regional rural issues

We alert the Rural Minister and regional partners to rural issues in the region

This was considered an extremely important part of the role of NERAF. Several respondents were sceptical about the weight attached by the Rural Minister to the feedback from RAF Chairs. This scepticism has grounds in reality given the high 'churn rate' of Ministers with this portfolio, which fundamentally reduces the potential influence which can be wielded by RAF Chairs (and potentially the Rural Advocate).

vi. Comment on strategy and policy

We comment on selected rural policy and strategy

This aspect of the Aims and Objectives is undermined by the lack of resource which can be applied to it. There are a plethora of initiatives, strategies and policies which are produced on a European level, as well as nationally, regionally and locally. However, this was not flagged as a major issue, due to the success in the broader aim of 'rural-proofing' policy work more generally.

vii. Work with public sector stakeholders

We work with One NorthEast, Government Office North East and Association of North East Councils in particular to secure support for the actions above

There was reasonable agreement that the public sector organisations mentioned, plus additional ones (Forestry Commission, Commission for Rural Communities, Primary Care Trusts, AONBs) were involved, although some respondents were unaware of any of this work which might indicate an over-reliance on a minority of NERAF members which restricts knowledge of activity to those individual networks.

viii. Additional points

Improvements of Aims and Objectives

Comments in this section included:

- Lack of clarity currently on whether views expressed by individual members were those of NERAF as a whole or the individual concerned
- Forthcoming political change may well impact on the Aims and Objectives and necessitate evolution of the body

Geographic coverage

This was felt to be reasonable given the number of Forum members. The current breakdown is as follows:

County	Number
Northumberland	10
Durham	6
Redcar & Cleveland	1
Hartlepool	1

f. Outputs

The following is a list of outputs of NERAF in 2008 and 2009, as provided by David Stewart (Chair of NERAF) and correlated to the relevant Aims and Objectives (or termed as 'generic').

Output	Aims and Objectives
Providing thought-provoking issues from the NERAF 'canary in the coal mine' exercises	4, 6, 8
Contributing 'canary' issues to rural minister and to regional rural officials to apply to policy	2, 6, 7
Championing rural proofing to regional public sector including GONE	2, 8
Supporting Y&H RAF in negotiations on the future of Blaydon dairy and its suppliers	Generic
Contributing a practitioners perspective to DEFRA on foot and mouth and blue tongue	Generic
Adding experiences to regional and national monitoring of the impact of the recession	4
Securing a place for a rural expert at the regional housing board	1, 2
Ensuring that one of the two environment places is rural on the interim regional development board	1, 2
Arguing for interests of rural communities at the stakeholder advisory group of the integrated regional strategy	2, 4, 7, 8
Arguing for excellent coverage of rural issues in the regional spatial strategy	2, 4, 7
Securing commitment to rural proofing of the Integrated Regional Framework	2, 4, 7
Batting for rural at the development of the Regional Funding Advice	1, 8
Bringing together regional rural stakeholder organisations with CEO/RDs of GONE, ANEC and One NorthEast to discuss the integrated regional strategy	1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8
Supporting the unitary Authorities' of Durham and Northumberland in developing services to rural communities	2, 5, 8
Working with rural small businesses and Business Link on managing the impact of regulation	Generic
Advising regional bodies on rural issues and implications of policy including the Homes and Community Agency, Regional Development Agency, Business Link, Government Office North East, Association of North East Councils	4, 5, 7
Working with NHS north east to establish the Rural Health Commission	Generic
Supporting the Commission for Rural Communities on their inquiries including uplands, democratic decision taking, major life events, health care & dentistry	7
Leading the regional rural affairs forum chairs group & representing that group on the RDPE Programme Monitoring Committee	6

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3. "Annual Report 2006-2007; North East Rural Affairs Forum" (Government Office of the North East).
4. "Review of North East Rural Affairs Forum, 2007-2009," http://spreadsheets.google.com/viewform?hl=en_GB&formkey=dFFvcINBbTdQM3Fwa0JGNHRJZ2taTEE6MA.
5. David Clubb, "Online questionnaire for the 2007-2009 NERAF review," http://spreadsheets.google.com/viewform?hl=en_GB&formkey=dFFvcINBbTdQM3Fwa0JGNHRJZ2taTEE6MA.

5. Annexe

a. Aims and Objectives

Aim	Aspect	Indicative components	Measurement method
1	Lobbying for rural interests	Awareness of stakeholders of the NERAF and its lobbying work, and its connection to community	Communication with Forum members and other regional stakeholders
2	Rural proofing processes	Success of NERAF scrutiny and/or comment on influencing regional activity and strategy	Communication with regional stakeholders, GONE and Forum members
3	Standing conference to help engagement	Success of the standing conference in allowing engagement	Communication with Forum members and other regional stakeholders, especially standing conference attendees
4	Monitoring of rural community well-being	Awareness of rural issues highlighted to relevant regional bodies	Communication with Forum members and other regional stakeholders
5	Scrutiny of service delivery	Evidence of discussions in the Forum on service delivery	Communication with GONE (and partner organisation) staff members and Forum members
6	Alert rural Minister and partners to regional issues	Evidence of influence on Minister and/or partners	Communication with Minister's office and regional partners
7	Comment on selected rural policy and strategy	Level of input into selected strategy/policy	Communication with GONE and Forum members
8	Work with ONE, GONE and ANEC	Level of partnership operation between stakeholders	Impression of partnership approach will arise from discussions related to above points

b. Regional stakeholders

The table below lists all stakeholders who were contacted and asked to provide information about NERAF to support the review. Note that not all contacted were able to respond.

Name	Organisation	Job title	Proposed method of engagement
Allen, Lesley	NERAF	Member	Online form
Armstrong, Barbara	NERAF	Member	Online form
Bateman, Glyn	Natural England	Regional advocacy & partnership manager	Personal interview
Beaumont, Pat	NERAF	Member	Online form
Betton, Richard	NERAF	Member	Online form
Braithwaite, Anthony	NERAF	Member	Online form
Brown, Ian	ONE	Director	Online form
Burns, Monica	NHF	Regional director	Personal interview
Callaghan, Brendan	FC	Regional director	Online form
Carr, Bill	HCA	Regional champion	Personal interview
Carroll, Terry	NRN	Coordinator	Online form
Chesters, Fiona	NERAF	Member	Online form
Collingwood-Cameron, Angus	CLA	Regional director	Online form
Darlington, Jim	ONE	Chief planner	Personal interview
Dent, Ruth	NERAF	Member	Online form
Dunn, Norman	NERAF	Previous member	Online form
Ellison, Richard	NFU	Regional director	Online form
Ford, Rachel	Business and Enterprise NE	Business intelligence manager	Personal interview
Foster, Norma	NERAF	Member	Online form and ongoing discussion
Gates, Tony	NNPA	Chief executive officer	Online form
Greenlay, Yvonne	GONE	Business support	Personal interview

Hall, Jennifer	NERAF	Member	Online form
Hall, Richard	NEEF (NE)	Chair (regional policy senior specialist)	Online form
Heywood, John	GONE	Head of rural, environment, climate change and energy	Personal interview
Hughes, Philip	NERAF	Member	Online form
Knox, Hilary	ANEC	Assistant regional director	Online form
Lavery, Patrick	NERAF	Member	Online form
Lee, Gerald	NERAF	Member	Online form
Littlefair, John	NERAF	Member	Online form
Lloyd, Nicola	CRC	Executive Director	Online form and telephone interview
Lyford, Julia	NERAF	Member	Online form
Mcknight, David	NERAF	Member	Online form
Morrison-Bell, Julian	NERAF	Member	Online form
Robinson-Gay, Jason	NERAF	Previous member	Online form
Roll, Gillian	ONE	Research manager	Personal interview
Rowe, Bill	NERAF	Previous member	Online form
Rowe, Francis	ONE	Rural policy manager	Personal interview
Scott, Claire	GONE	Business support	Online form
Shucksmith, Mark	Newcastle University	Professor of planning and Director of research	Personal interview
Stewart, David	NERAF	Chair	Online form and ongoing discussion
Warburton, Tom	ONE	Head of regional strategy	Personal interview Gone to HCA
Williamson, Tony	DEFRA	Head of rural mainstreaming policy	Online form
Winter, Dagmar	NERAF	Vice-Chair	Personal interview

c. The questionnaire

This questionnaire is available to fill out online at [this link](#), which is the preferred method. Should you be unable to access the online form, please feel free to email your response to david.clubb@ruraldevelopment.org.uk.

Each numbered question indicates which Aim/Objective of NERAF is being addressed.

1. **How aware are you of the activities of NERAF, and of its activity in lobbying for rural issues regionally?**
How important is the involvement of individual in the makeup and delivery of NERAF?
2. **To what extent can the activities of NERAF be said to be contributing to the 'rural proofing' of service delivery regionally?**
What policies or strategies has NERAF influenced to the benefit of the rural sector?
3. **How successful has the Standing Conference been in providing a platform to allow rural stakeholders to engage with public bodies?**
Are you aware of the Standing Conferences?
Have you attended any of the Standing Conferences?
If you have attended, how successful were they in providing a platform for engagement and feedback from rural stakeholders to relevant delivery bodies?
4. **How effective has the anecdotal/informal feedback from NERAF members been to relevant delivery bodies?**
Do you feel that public sector policy and/or delivery bodies value NERAF input?
Can you provide examples of issues which have been missed by the public sector which have been raised by NERAF?
How has the feedback from NERAF been useful in supporting service delivery through raising awareness on current significant issues for rural communities?
5. **How effectively is the work that NERAF does on scrutinising delivery of services to rural communities?**
In what ways has NERAF engaged with public bodies and affected rural service delivery?
6. **Have the rural Minister and regional partners been effectively informed about regional rural**

issues?

7. **Does rural policy and strategy receive sufficient scrutiny and comment from NERAF?**
(NERAF members only) To what extent have you been involved with policy and/or strategy comment or scrutiny?
(Non-NERAF members) Has NERAF been actively involved in policy/strategy in your sector of interest?
8. **How effectively does NERAF represent the region's rural interests to the principal policy and delivery agencies in the region?**
Please provide further details of representation to any public sector organisations such as ONE, GONE, Natural England, Environment Agency, ASNEC, CRC etc)
9. **Are the aims and objectives of NERAF correctly aligned with its capacity and remit?**
10. **In what way would you amend the aims and objectives to improve the relevance and effectiveness of NERAF?**
11. **Are there any other ways in which NERAF supports the rural sector which have not already been covered but which add value?**
12. **Do you have any other comments on the NERAF?**
13. **Are you happy for your comments to be made publicly available (for example, quotes in the report, on the website etc)?**

d. Contact details

The NERAF website is available at www.ne-ruralaffairsforum.org.uk.

Position	Contact	Email	Telephone
Chair	David Stewart	david@davidstewart30.orangehome.co.uk	
Vice-chair	Dagmar Winter	dagmar.winter@btinternet.com	
Secretariat (admin)	Pam Baker	pam.baker@ruraldevelopment.org.uk	01670 513292
Secretariat (liaison)	Jennifer Hewitson	jennifer.hewitson@ruraldevelopment.org.uk	01670 513292