



Rural Payments
Agency

Rural Payments Agency (RPA)

5 Year Strategy

February 2021

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Our Purpose: Helping agricultural and rural communities to create a better place to live

We will successfully deliver Agricultural Transition, meeting both customer expectations and policy needs

We will reinforce our reputation for delivering environmental outcomes through a quality service

We will be an exemplar of the Civil Service's Operational Delivery Profession working in practice



Chief Executive's foreword

I am immensely proud to be introducing our 5 year strategy. Our driving force is for the RPA to deliver against the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) strategic objective to 'lead the world in food, farming and fisheries with a sustainable and resilient model of food production and robust protection and promotion of animal welfare'.

Our core objectives in delivering this strategy are:

1. we will successfully deliver agricultural transition, meeting both customer expectations and policy needs
2. we will reinforce our reputation for delivering environmental outcomes through a quality service
3. we will be an exemplar of the Civil Service's Operational Delivery Profession working in practice



Over the next 5 years our relationship with customers will change significantly as we move to a partnership-based approach where we will work together to achieve our shared aims.

Our emphasis on environmental outcomes will be evident in our interactions with customers, stakeholders and the general public. As guardians of the public purse we will ensure funds are used responsibly and in the public's interest.

We will continue to work closely with Defra and our colleagues across the Defra Group including Natural England, Animal and Plant Health Agency, Forestry Commission and Environment Agency. Our shared interests and ambitions mean we can achieve great things working together for the public good.

In recent years I am really pleased that we have delivered improvements and simplifications for customers and enhanced our performance. It is most important that we continue to do this in order to secure a smooth agricultural transition. At the same time we will continue to do better in delivering on our current responsibilities.

RPA has many excellent assets to support the implementation of this strategy. These include expertise in project and programme delivery, an award-winning land management system and our ability to deliver outcomes at both landscape and farm level. Our most important asset is our people who I am thrilled to lead. Their passion for enhancing rural areas coupled with their skills, determination and ambition is crucial to our success.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Caldwell'.

Paul Caldwell
Chief Executive

Our role

We are an organisation committed to world class farming and land management for the environment, food, and rural resilience. We are a voice for farmers and land managers, we encourage sustainable and profitable farming, and are a delivery agency for the 25 Year Environment Plan. We help agricultural and rural communities to create a better place to live, we achieve this through:

- delivering economic growth
- delivering environmental sustainability
- supporting agriculture
- enabling innovation
- facilitating community activities

Every service we currently offer will change as we seize the opportunity to develop a new approach for farming and land management having left the European Union. We will support farmers and land managers through agricultural transition, seeking to place British farming at the forefront of environmental good practice, supporting net zero and enhancing our beautiful natural environment.

Supporting our customers through these changes is critical. We care about agricultural and rural communities and the environment. We understand our customers and we are best placed to support them. We are integral to Defra's work on the Agricultural Transition Plan which will be key to farmers:

- running sustainable businesses that don't need to rely on public subsidy.
- managing their whole business in a way that delivers profitable food production and the recovery of nature, fusing the best modern technology available today with the rediscovery of the traditional art of good farm husbandry.
- being able to access public money to help them deliver environmental and animal welfare outcomes on the land they manage, and help their businesses become more productive and sustainable.
- meeting clear, relevant and outcome-focused legal standards that champion UK food internationally, prevent environmental harm, protect biosecurity, and protect animal welfare.

We are a regional organisation with a presence in 27 counties and many of our people live and work in the communities they serve, giving us a unique perspective of our customers' needs. We are a resilient and valuable organisation which can be flexible to meet the needs of both our customers and the policy makers.

As we approach the biggest shift in agricultural support in over 70 years, we are already investing heavily to simplify existing schemes which we will continue to deliver until their conclusion. As part of the Defra Group we advise and support our Secretary of State, our Ministers, and Defra Group colleagues to design and implement policy ensuring the lessons learnt from previous schemes are applied to shape the new offers. We also fully support and engage with our Permanent Secretary in her Accounting Officer responsibilities.

Our customers are at our heart and we will always listen to what they have to say as their views enable our operational delivery success. We will develop and grow our regional presence to ensure the interests of farmers and rural communities are understood and we stand ready to help our customers through agricultural transition. Our people are great assets and we support their personal development to meet the needs of our customers.

We have a bright future where sustainability and innovation will be at the centre of what we do to help our agricultural and rural communities create a better place to live.

Our actions

Our strategy is designed to support the achievement of the goals of the 25 Year Environment Plan. We will support Defra to translate policy ambitions into tangible results whilst recognising there are competing priorities.

The 25 Year Environment Plan provides a framework within which we will enable farmers, land managers, and the rural businesses and communities that are so vital to our rural economy, to play their part in achieving the goals.

Our work will encourage more sustainable use of land, improved biodiversity and the realisation of environmental outcomes through the following.

Our delivery approach

- We will influence and develop schemes and services for agricultural and rural communities
- We are expert in government grant standards and managing public money. We ensure maximum value for money is achieved in terms of outputs, outcomes and economic results. We do this while also guarding against fraud and protecting the public purse
- We will have simple, well run schemes that achieve measurable outcomes to positively influence future policy making

Sector specific actions

- Our current work, including making payments to farmers and the broader rural community under Basic Payment Scheme, Countryside Stewardship, Environmental Stewardship and Rural Development, is of great importance. We will continue to improve our performance for customers until this work reaches its conclusion
- Through the Environmental Land Management national pilot, we will maximise the environmental gains achievable from the funding available. Working closely with customers and stakeholders we will deliver against the targets in the 25 Year Environment Plan
- We will continue to support livestock information to promote and support world class traceability to ensure the health of our food production sector, safeguarding exports and public health
- We will continue to support the flow of trade through the provision of licences and quotas
- We will launch and manage a rural grants service that supports our customers to improve their productivity through innovation
- We will respond to emergencies as required, using our skills to design, develop and implement sector intervention schemes quickly and effectively

Development of further schemes and initiatives

- We will be a centre of excellence for delivering government policies, known for our creativity in designing funding mechanisms and embracing digital solutions
- We will use our extensive experience and expertise in the development and delivery of complex schemes to trial ideas, developing and nurturing them to maturity. By providing a safe environment we will be able to develop higher-risk ideas
- We will be known for overcoming complexity and ambiguity using simple but effective solutions and our work will be underpinned by a culture of innovation and co-design with our customers

Regulation and enforcement

- We will work together with customers on enforcement, supporting and encouraging improvement in the approach to regulation, putting in place a clear framework that is understood and respected
- Our enforcement activities will always align with our purpose and be respectful of our role as a responsible funder

Data

- We will be a source for reliable data related to the Agri-Food supply chain to support businesses to make informed decisions
- We will use our award-winning land data systems to support the development of policy and customer ambitions

All of this work will help us play a vital role in enabling Defra to work towards achieving the strategic objective to 'lead the world in food, farming and fisheries with a sustainable and resilient model of food production and robust protection and promotion of animal welfare.'



Our customers and stakeholders

Our relationship with customers continues to evolve to become a partnership with shared goals and an emphasis on co-design. Our reputation for excellent customer service will continue to grow as we respond to feedback and changing customer needs. We are determined that our customers will feel positive when they talk about us and will trust us to deliver.

Throughout agricultural transition we will support our customers to ensure they have the information and advice that they need to make the most of the new opportunities whilst continuing to meet their obligations from previous schemes.

We will:

- act as a single point of contact for customers to get all the information and guidance they need to navigate the changes
- work with customers to encourage them to take responsibility for their future, increasing their resilience, self-reliance, and ability to respond to market needs
- be trusted to listen to customer views and feed this back to policy makers whilst also improving our own services
- use our knowledge to act as a signposting service for all countryside matters and will ensure the customer is directed to the leading organisation for their issue.

Where we differ, we will act professionally and responsibly in attitude, approach and behaviour.

Our understanding of the unique issues and opportunities in agricultural businesses and communities allows us to represent farmers interests in discussions with Defra. This will help ensure consequences of decision making across all farming sectors are fully understood.

We will continue to engage with stakeholders on both current and future business showing willingness to listen and adapt. We will continue to build this relationship on trust and respect.

We will work alongside our stakeholders, so they continue to be positive about us, our reputation and our influence. We want to build our reputation with them as a centre of excellence for continuous improvement and call upon our knowledge, skills and expertise.

Our people and the way we work

Our values

We continuously strive to be an outstanding place to work, developing the areas that are most important to our people to ensure our customers are the beneficiaries. Our values are:

Visible, Engaging, Respectful, Inclusive, Trusted, Accountable and Supportive.

VERITAS helps us to deliver our purpose, feel pride in our agency, confidence in supporting our customers and enables us to work together towards our vision and shaping our future. It is designed to help us set out direction, engage people and deliver results.

Everything we do should enable everyone to grow through regular, supportive and appropriate learning and development. This will use the skills and strengths of our people.

Through embedding VERITAS in the way we make decisions, act and evaluate results, we raise our awareness of how we are working towards our vision and delivering against our purpose.

Equality, diversity and inclusion

RPA is part of the Defra Group Equality, Diversity and Inclusion approach which is structured around four themes.

Respect We respect each other

Include We promote inclusive behaviours and use our data to drive workplace improvements

Support We will ensure everyone is supported in the workplace to achieve their full potential

Engage We will engage with others

We continue to ensure all our processes and practices enable everyone to have the opportunity to be the best they can be while maintaining their wellbeing.

Our people are active members of networks both within RPA, the Defra Group and wider Civil Service which promote inclusivity and celebrate the diversity of our workforce.

As an organisation that has equality and fairness at its core, we are leading the way with our approach to social mobility. Where we come from in life should not determine what we can achieve, how we can expect to be treated or how we ought to treat others. Social mobility is about creating a society that is fluid. To thrive as an organisation, RPA must reflect the society we serve, attracting people to work for us based on merit and potential.

We will continue to grow a diverse workforce of individuals from an array of different socio-economic backgrounds. Attracting a broad range of perspectives will enable us to solve problems in different ways to meet the demands of the modern and rapidly changing world.

Our commitment to net zero

In 2019 the Government passed laws to commit to bringing all greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050.

Net zero means any emissions would be balanced by schemes to offset an equivalent amount of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere, such as planting trees or using technology like carbon capture and storage.

RPA is leading by example and setting ambitious targets to meet the government commitment of carbon neutrality as soon as possible and certainly no later than 2050.

Internal to RPA

We have launched an internal campaign to reduce our carbon emissions and improve our sustainability.

Our efforts are led and monitored by our people, supported by the Executive Team harnessing the passion that our people have for the environment. Our Net zero action plan includes:

- embedding net zero in our criteria for all our decisions
- promoting sustainable travel methods for example, cycling and walking
- stopping all domestic flights for business on mainland GB, except in case of emergency
- working with our colleagues who supply our Corporate Services to encourage and support them as they also take action to tackle net zero
- influencing the Defra Sustainability Strategy
- reviewing our supplier contracts to ensure they are supportive of our net zero aims
- increasing recycling in offices

External to RPA

We will use our reputation and influence to support the sectors we serve to reach net zero emissions by 2050. We will achieve this by working alongside policy makers to design schemes with net zero ambitions at their heart.

Conclusion

The 5 years covered by this strategy are critical for agricultural and rural communities to navigate Agricultural Transition and embrace the opportunities that lie ahead, creating a better place to live.

Our customers and their communities are at the heart of our actions as we strive to keep being the best, providing excellent delivery and outcomes that are in the public interest.

Our people are our major strength and their passion and dedication to work with customers, stakeholders and policy makers will help us achieve our aims and contribute to the realisation of the 25 Year Environment Plan goals.

We have a vision for prosperous agricultural and rural communities who we can work in partnership with to achieve environmental outcomes and support the rural economy.

We look forward to working with you to achieve these aims.

We will successfully deliver Agricultural Transition, meeting both customer expectations and policy needs

We will reinforce our reputation for delivering environmental outcomes through a quality service

We will be an exemplar of the Civil Service's Operational Delivery Profession working in practice



Further information

Useful links

[25 Year Environment Plan](#)

[Defra Strategy](#)

[Civil Service Operational Delivery Profession](#)

[Civil Service Project Delivery Profession](#)

Photo credits

Page 3: North Hill, Minehead by Nicola Benson

Page 7: Blue dragonfly in Armathwaite, Cockermouth by Matthew Hodgson

Page 11: Country lane overlooking Ireby, Cumbria by Jen Little

Contact details

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