

Head of Policy & Public Affairs

Recruitment Pack

February 2025



Welcome to ACRE



Thank you for your interest in the role of Head of Policy and Public Affairs at Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE). It's a time of great opportunities and challenges for rural communities, and I hope you will wish to join our team so we can make a positive and lasting difference together.

Rural areas are often perceived as being idyllic places to live and work but in reality the picture is much more complex. They are experiencing a period of enormous economic, social and environmental change. The election of a new Government has also resulted in a huge range of new policy proposals that could impact on rural areas in many different ways.

Ten million people live in rural areas but these communities are often poorly understood. They have inequitable access to essential infrastructure, services and employment and public policy often does not take the features of rural areas into account. Did you know, for example, that houses in rural areas are less affordable for the bottom 25% of earners than in urban areas? Or that the rural fuel poverty gap is double that in urban areas?

If we could change this, we would be able to unleash the full potential of rural communities. In fact, a recent report estimated that with the right policies, rural economies could achieve increased productivity and growth and create an additional £9 billion to £19 billion per year in tax revenue.¹

ACRE is the only national charity speaking up for rural communities as a whole. We don't represent a specific group or sector and this gives us a unique position in public policy debate. We champion thriving, sustainable, inclusive rural communities that have the services they need and the resources to secure equitable outcomes for everyone.

I joined ACRE last spring and have been hugely impressed by the team's expertise and culture of mutual support. Our impact is far greater than our small size suggests, not least because of the expertise of our national network of 38 member organisations. They work with rural communities in every county in England, and we are able to draw on their experience of what's going on locally to inform our advocacy activities at national level.

We're ambitious for the future and want to make sure we can have the greatest impact at a time of rapid change. With this in mind, we are working on our new five year strategy. We will launch it this summer but we already know we wish to build a more confident voice and develop new and wider partnerships. The role of Head of Policy and Public Affairs has been created to help achieve this and to drive lasting change. I hope you will be inspired to join us and look forward to reading your application.

With best wishes,

Corinne Pluchino

Chief Executive

¹ *Reigniting Rural Futures* (May 2024) Pragmatix Advisory - A Report for The Rural Coalition

Head of Policy and Public Affairs: Introduction

**Would you like to make a positive impact for rural communities across England?
Would you like to help tackle rural deprivation and ensure rural areas have fairer
access to essential services? Would you like to help rural communities reach their
full potential?**

About Us

Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) champions thriving, sustainable and inclusive rural communities that have the services they need and the resources to secure equitable outcomes for everyone. We are the only national charity speaking up for everyone in rural areas, and work closely with our 38 member organisations who support local communities across England. Together we campaign for change, enable local action, and improve support for people most in need. We work with government and other national partners to explore the issues affecting rural communities and identify solutions so that no one is disadvantaged by where they live.

About the Role

We are seeking a Head of Policy and Public Affairs to join our ambitious team. This is a new post that will play a key role in delivering our forthcoming strategy and the next phase of our development. You will lead our engagement with policy makers and stakeholders, and work with our members to campaign on the issues that will have the greatest impact on rural communities. Reporting to the Chief Executive, you will also manage the Senior Communications Officer, and advise and support the wider team and our member bodies. You will have the chance to shape our new strategy and wider organisational development and priorities.

About You

You will have a track record of developing and executing public affairs strategies that deliver tangible results, bringing organisations together to work in partnership, and creating eye catching, integrated campaigns that raise awareness of low profile issues and drive change. A confident networker, you will be used to working with politicians, advisers and officials at senior level. A strategic thinker, you will also enjoy getting the job done, and be used to dealing with multiple projects at one time as well as spotting new opportunities. You will have direct experience of living in a rural community or have a strong empathy with our cause.

This role is a great opportunity for an experienced policy and public affairs professional to make a real impact for communities that are often unheard and poorly understood. You will be joining a small, focused and energetic organisation while being part of a unique national network. If you share our vision and ambition please get in touch.

Working at ACRE

The ACRE team is largely home based. Most of the team meet once a week in our office in Woodstock, Oxfordshire, and we all get together for a full day's meeting once a month. We offer flexible working, a contributory pension scheme (7.5% employer contribution), life cover (2x salary) and a generous annual leave allowance of up to 30 days a year. We are keen to support professional development and give team members the chance to broaden their skills and experiences.

We are an equal opportunities employer and are committed to achieving the highest standards of diversity, equity and inclusion. We welcome applications from people of all backgrounds, beliefs, traditions and ways of life. Please note you will be asked to provide evidence of your eligibility to work in the UK prior to interview selection.

To apply:

Please submit your CV and a covering letter of two pages maximum, summarising your interest in the role and your experience relative to the person specification, to Sue Kirkman at s.kirkman@acre.org.uk

- **Closing date for applications: 9am on Thursday 13 March.**
- **First round interviews: Online on Monday 24 and Thursday 27 March.**
- **Second round interviews: In person at ACRE in Woodstock on Friday 4 April.**

Please confirm in your application that you are able to attend these dates.

If you would like an informal discussion to learn more about the role, please email Sue Kirkman on s.kirkman@acre.org.uk to arrange a call with Corinne Pluchino on 3 or 5 March. Thank you.

Registered Charity No 1061568 VAT No 477763003
Company Limited by Guarantee 3336101

Head of Policy and Public Affairs:

Job Description

Type of role: Full time, permanent (37.5 hours per week - flexible arrangements will be considered). Given the nature of the role the postholder may be required to attend some events outside normal working hours.

Location: Home / hybrid working. Our office is in Woodstock, Oxfordshire. We are happy to discuss working arrangements with candidates. Most team members meet in the office once a week and the whole team meets together once a month. Given the nature of the role the postholder is expected to live within easy travelling distance of London to attend meetings and events there.

Reporting to: Chief Executive

Supervisory responsibilities: Senior Communications Officer

Salary: £48-50K per annum plus benefits

Main purpose of the role: Responsible for leading ACRE's policy and public affairs activity, developing and expanding our relationships with key policy makers and stakeholders, and briefing the ACRE Network on key policy and political developments of relevance to them and their beneficiaries. The role will also oversee the delivery of communications activity to help deliver ACRE's organisational strategy and manage the Senior Communications Officer. The role will work closely with the Chief Executive, as well as colleagues in the team and stakeholders across the rural affairs sector, and deputise for her when appropriate.

Responsibilities

- 1.To develop and deliver ACRE's policy and public affairs strategy in support of our wider organisational strategy and to report regularly to the Chief Executive and Trustee Board on the outputs and outcomes achieved.
- 2.To monitor and analyse key policy and political developments and brief the Chief Executive and ACRE Network Chief Executives on the implications and possible responses.

-
- 3.To lead on the development of ACRE’s public policy positions and responses, working in partnership with the ACRE Network and other stakeholders where appropriate.
 - 4.To represent ACRE in discussions with Government, Parliament and other stakeholders to ensure our voice is heard and to support the delivery of our strategy.
 - 5.To build strong and wide ranging working relationships with stakeholders and identify areas for partnership and collaboration to help achieve our objectives.
 - 6.To brief and support the Chief Executive and other team members as required when engaging with political and other stakeholder audiences.
 - 7.To line manage, coach and support the Senior Communications Officer and oversee his/ her professional development.
 - 8.To oversee the development of an external communications strategy designed to raise our profile and support our policy and public affairs objectives, to include campaigns, media relations, digital communications and events and to report regularly against agreed evaluation metrics.
 - 9.To work with the Chief Executive to oversee the delivery of an integrated communications and engagement plan for the ACRE Network, including written, online and in person briefings, meetings and events.
 - 10.To provide policy and public affairs advice for colleagues in the team for specific projects and events as required.
 - 11.To provide secretariat support and advice for the Rural Coalition, a collaboration of twelve national organisations working in rural affairs.
 - 12.To appoint external suppliers and consultants as required and to manage budgets as agreed with the Chief Executive.
 - 13.To deputise for the Chief Executive and undertake other tasks as required by the line manager in keeping with the nature of this post.

Joining the ACRE Team

ACRE champions vibrant, sustainable, and inclusive rural communities by finding innovative solutions to their unique challenges. We’re a small charity with a big impact. We work closely with government, national partners and our network of 38 county-wide members across England to ensure that no-one in rural areas is disadvantaged by where they live.

Person Specification

Experience – essential

1. Extensive experience of developing and delivering policy and public affairs strategies, either in house or in a consultancy role, and a track record of achieving tangible outcomes.
2. Extensive experience of developing policy positions in collaboration, and responding to public consultations and calls for evidence underpinned by robust evidence and case studies.
3. A track record of using robust evidence and clear arguments to inform public policy development and public debate.
4. Extensive experience of representing an organisation externally and engaging with senior politicians, officials and stakeholders and building networks.
5. Confident in working and influencing at a senior level and managing multiple stakeholders simultaneously.
6. A track record of convening different organisations to find common ground and working in collaboration to deliver public affairs and other objectives.
7. Experienced in analysing political and policy developments and their impact on organisations and issues, ideally (though not exclusively) with specific expertise in one or more of the following: housing and development, energy and the transition to net zero, transport, utilities and communications.
8. Experienced in developing and delivering integrated campaigns that bring together external communications and public affairs to achieve specific policy and other objectives.
9. Experience of commissioning research and appointing and managing external agencies to drive public affairs and communications objectives.
10. Knowledge of policy making process, parliamentary procedure and the legislative process.
11. Experience of line management and coaching and helping individuals to develop professionally.
12. Experience of engaging with the media as a spokesperson.

Experience – desirable

- 1.Experience of working specifically in rural affairs.
- 2.Experience of working in the not for profit sector.
- 3.Experience of working in a membership organisation
- 4.Experience of working in a small organisation.
- 5.Knowledge of local government
- 6.Experience of working with volunteers.

Personal qualities

- 1.A passion for supporting rural communities and particularly the most disadvantaged.
- 2.An energetic self starter who is proactive and self motivated.
- 3.Excellent interpersonal skills and a proficient networker.
- 4.A team player who is collaborative, inclusive and approachable.
- 5.An inspiring manager with a genuine interest in coaching and developing team members.
- 6.Well organised and flexible with the ability to manage multiple projects simultaneously.
- 7.Excellent written and presentation skills with gravitas and a confident public speaker.
- 8.Willingness to develop expertise in new areas
- 9.Politically astute and an ability to identify and respond to opportunities at pace.