The Rural Review of Public Services

A report by the Rural Services Network

THE VOICE OF
RURAL SERVICES

RSN

THE RURAL REVIEW OF PUBLIC SERVICES 2010

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March 2010

The Rural Services Network

The Rural Services Network is a group of over 250 service providers and local authorities working to establish best practice across the spectrum of rural service provision. The network has representation across the range of rural services, including local authorities, public bodies, businesses, charities and voluntary groups.

It is devoted to safeguarding and improving services in rural communities across England. It is the only national network specifically focusing on this vital aspect of rural life.

The network has three main purposes:

- **Representing** the case for a better deal for rural service provision
- **Exchanging** useful and relevant information
- **Developing and sharing** best practice

The Rural Services Network exists to ensure services delivered to the **communities of predominantly rural England** are as strong and as effective as possible.

There are two operating arms of the network: the Sparse Partnership for authorities delivering rural services (SPARSE-Rural) and the Rural Services Partnership (a not for profit company).

Foreword

We are please to present to you this first report on Rural Public Services.

This report comes hot on the heels of our "Rural Services Manifesto" launched in the first week of January 2010 and in many ways complements its content.

We intend to prepare such reports in the year between the publication of the Commission for Rural Communities' (CRC) excellent 'State of the Countryside' reports. Thus in the future we will also be able to draw on the data, analysis and trends identified in that report, in addition to the methodology used in the compilation of this report

However, we are publishing this first report in the same year as the CRC's report as we think it is important to have a review of the rural services' present condition – and recent trends – ahead of both the 2010 General Election and the substantial public expenditure cuts which will follow, irrespective of which party is in Government.

The report itself presents the issues relating to the changing population of rural areas and the implications of that change on service demands relating to the priority services which this report has reviewed. It is not a financial analysis of services, but there are financial implications. In this foreword we wish to draw attention to the contextual implications of the public expenditure cuts to which we have referred.

As we say in our Rural Services Manifesto:

"Across the plethora of public service provision the funding formulae have not recognised properly (in some cases not at all) the costs of providing services across rural areas.

We have tirelessly campaigned for funding formulae which distribute resources in a fairer way and which recognise the costs relating to population dispersal and settlement patterns (which our own research has indicated is, for some services, as much as 90% higher than the more built up parts within rural areas).

There is now a real fear among those living in rural areas that the fiscal situation in which Britain finds itself will only exacerbate an already untenable status quo. We cannot stress strongly enough that any across-the-board budget cuts, which seek to take a set percentage from national budgets, will be severely detrimental for rural communities given their low starting point compared to more urban areas.

For instance, a 10% budget cut for all local councils across the board would be hard for those servicing more urban areas; but in sparsely populated areas this effect would be amplified ten-fold and services already strained by unbalanced funding formulae could be irreparably damaged and with discretionary (but nevertheless essential) services being withdrawn altogether". Of course, rural communities and places should face their fair share of whatever the future holds – it would be

unrealistic to expect anything else – but the low starting point of rural areas compared to urban should be factored in to decisions as to what constitutes a "fair share".

Of course, the response to reduced budgets may not (in all probability will not) be just to cut services. It is more likely to be a mixture of responses including service cuts, tax rises, increasing fees and charges and many others (see the CRC's discussion paper of January 2010 – 'The potential impacts on rural communities of future public sector austerity').

On average people who work in rural areas earn over £7,000 a year less than those working in urban areas. So increases in taxes and increases in fees and charges will represent a bigger percentage of locally earned incomes. Rural residents also have to pay more in transport costs to access services. We are in danger of being in "multiple whammy land" in our rural areas. These impacts must be reflected upon by those making decisions on public expenditure reductions.

As this report shows, there are real concerns that in those areas where rural public transport has improved in recent years those improvements may not be sustained as public sector budgets are squeezed harder. Similarly, rural schools remain under financial pressure; the recession has hit affordable housing completions hard; facilities for young people are, in the main, discretionary services which usually are first in line for cut backs; and there are fears of cuts in services for older people, despite the increase in the population of those age groups. We share the concerns of the Local Government Association that the current Personal Care at Home Bill will create further burdens for local authorities; given the demographics of rural areas this is of particular concern. We believe the Government has underestimated the number of people who will qualify for free care. This is a new burden and should be fully funded from central government funds or by lifting other burdens on Councils.

There are also concerns about the impact of public sector job losses on the rural economy. In many rural areas public sector jobs underpin the local economy and a decline in the public sector could have severe knock on consequences on the fragile private sector recovery.

As you will have gathered we are concerned about what the next review of these priority services will present, following the inevitable budget cuts.

We welcome feedback on this report via our website (www.rsonline.org.uk) and hope you find the report interesting and informative.

Councillor Roger Begy OBE   Graham Biggs MBE
Chairman   Chief Executive
Rural Services Network   Rural Services Network

Contents list

Summary of findings and recommendations

This report examines recently published analyses about public service provision in rural areas and considers it alongside survey evidence gathered from Rural Services Network members (local service providers and community representatives).   It focuses down onto five topics – public transport, primary schools, affordable housing, facilities for young people and support services for older people. These were identified as priorities by Rural Services Network members. Indeed, public transport was their top priority, emphasising the primacy placed on access as an issue for rural communities.

A rural analysis of the Place Survey shows that rural people are particularly dissatisfied with public transport, as well as being relatively dissatisfied with the provision of cultural or leisure facilities. However, they are more satisfied than their urban counterparts with the way they are treated by service providers and with certain other services, including litter collection and waste or recycling facilities.

A fifth of England's population lives in a rural area. That population has been increasing, not least as a result of established migration trends from urban to rural areas. The rural population is also older (on average) than the urban population and the forecast growth in numbers of older people is strongest in rural areas. These features have significant implications for service providers and the future of service provision.

Public transport: key concerns about rural public transport are its frequency, convenience and fare levels, plus access to service information. Our survey indicates that, in many ways, rural public transport provision has improved during the last five years. Services run more often, information is easier to access and fare levels have dropped for some (most obviously those who benefit from the statutory concessionary fares scheme).

Nonetheless, the widespread view is that public transport is far from meeting the needs of rural communities and this impact's most on vulnerable groups. Whilst some local authorities have clearly given a high priority to improving rural public transport, there are real concerns that this cannot be sustained if, as expected, public sector budgets are squeezed harder.

Primary schools: a feature of the more than 5,000 rural primary schools is that their quality is generally good and they score well on national test results. They remain the most accessible public service for rural communities, in terms of their geographic spread. However, as school rolls have fallen there have been local reviews and some closures. The continuing threat of closures is a very real concern for many, not least given the importance of primary schools to their communities.

For small rural schools expanding to provide a range of specialist services, such as wrap-around childcare, appears to be challenging and a lack of public transport outside normal school hours adds further complexity.   Collaboration between rural primary schools to share resources and activities is fairly common, especially where this involves a joint head-teacher.

<u>Affordable housing for local people</u>: high rural house prices have created severe affordability problems, especially in the smallest settlements. The recession has impacted significantly on the housing market, though has not generally made housing more affordable because of the tightening mortgage market. This has also made it difficult for Registered Social Landlords to (part) sell mixed tenure schemes. The provision of new affordable homes generated by Section 106 agreements has slowed as the number of housing starts has decreased (and has virtually stopped in some places).

Feedback from our survey indicates variable rural trends in the numbers who are homeless or in temporary accommodation around the country. Nevertheless, statistics show that rural areas have (on average) been hit particularly badly by rising repossessions and unintentional homelessness.

<u>Facilities for young people</u>: this diverse range of facilities, activities and opportunities are all affected by the viability of local rural provision and by, often poor, public transport networks. Access to training and employment opportunities is a key issue, in terms of young people staying in the local area, and is seen as hard for many of them. Careers advice is generally good whilst they remain at school or college, but can be difficult to access afterwards. Advice services on lifestyle issues are seen by most as better provided outside of small communities, given confidentiality considerations.

 Young people (nationally) say the thing that would most improve their lives is having somewhere safe to meet friends and they rank sports centres, clubs and activities high as the things that would most improve their local area. In our survey the majority view was that access to sports facilities and activities was quite hard for rural young people.

<u>Older people</u>: the rural elderly are somewhat healthier than their urban counterparts and most are fortunate to benefit from local support networks. However, thirty per cent of the over 65 age group living in rural areas have some social care need. The actual number in need is projected to grow very rapidly, by 70% over the next twenty years, as the rural population ages – a much faster rate than in urban areas.

Service providers say that home care, self-directed support, support for carers and (especially) day care centres are more difficult to provide in rural areas. Factors which underlie this include urban-centred provision, the paucity of transport and difficulties in recruiting staff. Whilst local authority budgets had not altered greatly in recent years – increasing with demand in some places – there is a fear that they now face cuts.

<u>Demographic change</u>: powerful population trends are having an impact on rural service provision and will continue to do so. Migration into rural areas pushes up house prices making them less affordable for local people. The ageing of the rural population can be expected to lead to further falls in school rolls and will not help the viability of facilities for young people. On the other hand it will significantly increase demand for support services for older people and mean that more people are eligible for concessionary travel.

Key themes from this research are:

- Demand and need: demographic and other changes are altering demand and the need for different service types in rural areas. Policy makers must plan for these changes;
- Accessibility: whilst the quality and range of services on offer are important for rural people, policy makers should not overlook the fact that simply having access remains a core issue for many, including those in vulnerable groups;
- Fairness: it is recognised that service provision is inherently more complex in sparsely populated areas, but where people cannot access key public services it raises basic questions of equity;
- Costs: survey and other evidence in this report support's the view that the (unit) cost of service provision is generally higher in rural areas. Allocation formulae for public services should take this properly into account. This takes on a particular relevance now that public sector budgets are expected to be significantly reduced;
- Expectations: policy reforms have attempted to offer users more choice in the public services they use. This is very difficult to provide for in rural areas; there is a tension between this ambition and keeping services local;
- Sustainability: retaining services and ensuring all population groups can access them is integral to the sustainability of rural communities, enabling those from different age groups and with different incomes to live together. This should be seen as central to policy making decisions.

In its *Rural Services Manifesto 2010 and Beyond*[1] the Rural Services Network says it is concerned that, "rural people [are] paying more, getting less and having to pay more from their net disposable income to access services". They go on to say that, "this is an issue of short term equality and long term sustainability of rural communities ...".

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[1] Rural Services Network, 2009

Introduction – the Rural Review of Public Services project

This is the first time the Rural Services Network (RSN) has produced a *Rural Review of Public Services* report and, as such, it marks both a milestone for the network and a foundation for its future.

The report draws upon two things – recent research and analysis about public service provision in rural England and the collective knowledge of RSN members, most of whom work at the sharp end of local delivery.   Its intention is to explore the current position and latest trends, whether positive or negative, for rural communities and those who seek to serve them. The findings have a potentially wide audience, at national, regional and local levels. The hope is that they will inform and assist those who make and shape policies, enabling them to take account of the perspectives from those who deliver services and who represent communities.

It should be stressed that the focus is on **public** services, albeit widely defined. This includes services delivered by public bodies and authorities, as well as services which are commissioned, contracted or subsidised by them (such as local bus services). More generally, it should not be read into this focus that the role of healthy private and third sectors in rural areas is being downplayed.

Even this focus embraces a wide range of services, so – following consultation with RSN members – this first report shines a spotlight on five service areas. These are public transport, primary schools, affordable housing, facilities for young people and support services for older people.

The research methodology included the following stages:
- Reviewing relevant published research and data sources, in order to identify key rural messages and recent trends;
- Conducting a broad survey of RSN members, to gather views about priority public service areas;
- Conducting more detailed surveys for the five service areas, targeted at RSN members with direct experience of them. This comprised five tailored surveys for different groups of service providers, plus one composite survey for parish and town councils;
- Gathering some local examples to illustrate a few of the trends identified; and
- Assembling and writing up this material to create a *Rural Review of Public Services* report.

In broad terms, then, the approach has combined two types of information. The first is recent existing research and data sources about rural public service provision (with some secondary analysis of datasets, such as the 2008 Place Survey). The second is the views and local intelligence of RSN members, in order to get behind the figures, test their reality and illustrate some with local examples.

Our member surveys went to a broad mix of interested parties, comprising: local service organisations, such as principle local authorities (counties, unitaries and districts), Fire & Rescue Authorities, Primary Care Trusts, Police Forces/Authorities and Registered Social Landlords; providers, such as bus and rail companies, colleges and individual primary schools; community

representatives, including parish and town councils; and various voluntary sector and interest groups.

It should be noted that different research adopts different definitions of 'rural', whilst various data sources are available at various spatial scales. Our preference, where it is available, has been to use the official rural definition[2], which consists of settlements with a population of fewer than 10,000. Some datasets further disaggregate this rural definition into small towns, villages and hamlets/ isolated dwellings in either sparse or non-sparse areas.

Failing that, we have tried to use the Defra rural classification[3] of local authority areas – unitaries and districts – which too can be disaggregated further into three sub-categories (R80 where more than 80% of the population lives in a rural area, R50 where between 50% and 80% live in a rural area, and SR where at least 26% and more than 37,000 people live in a rural area or market town).

However, some published research uses other rural definitions and some data is unavailable even at the district level. The text states where other definitions or approximations have had to be employed.

The next chapter of this report briefly outlines the changing population of rural England, since – as this project has found – that is a crucial part of the context. A further chapter looks at the views of rural people, their representatives and rural service providers about service provision and priorities. The following five chapters focus down onto five different public service areas (as listed above). Finally, there is a conclusions chapter. Annexes contain full results of the Place Survey analysis and the broad survey of RSN members.

The research was led by consultant Brian Wilson[4], who also drafted this report. Brian is the RSN's Research Director. Other members of the RSN team played key roles, including Graham Biggs who oversaw the project, Richard Inman who managed the surveys and Dan Bates who provided additional advice on data. Justin Martin, the Commission for Rural Communities' Head of Analysis & Research, must be thanked for his helpful advice and for making data available. It goes without saying that none of this would have been possible without the considerable input of the RSN membership. The response rate for most of the surveys was high; an astonishing 1,146 parish and town councillors and clerks responded to the survey targeted at their sector.

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[2] CRC, 2007 (1)
[3] Defra, 2009
[4] Brian Wilson is an independent consultant providing policy research, evaluation and advice. He can be contacted on brian@brianwilsonassociates.co.uk

The changing population of rural areas

Using the official rural definition and population estimates for 2008, some 9.8 million people live in rural England[5]. This is just short of one in five (19.1%) of the country's population.

Disaggregating the figures further, around half the rural population lives in rural towns, with between 3,000 and 10,000 residents, whilst the other half lives in smaller places, comprising villages, hamlets and isolated dwellings.

Population shares

9%

10%

81%

- Urban areas
- Rural towns
- Smaller rural settlements
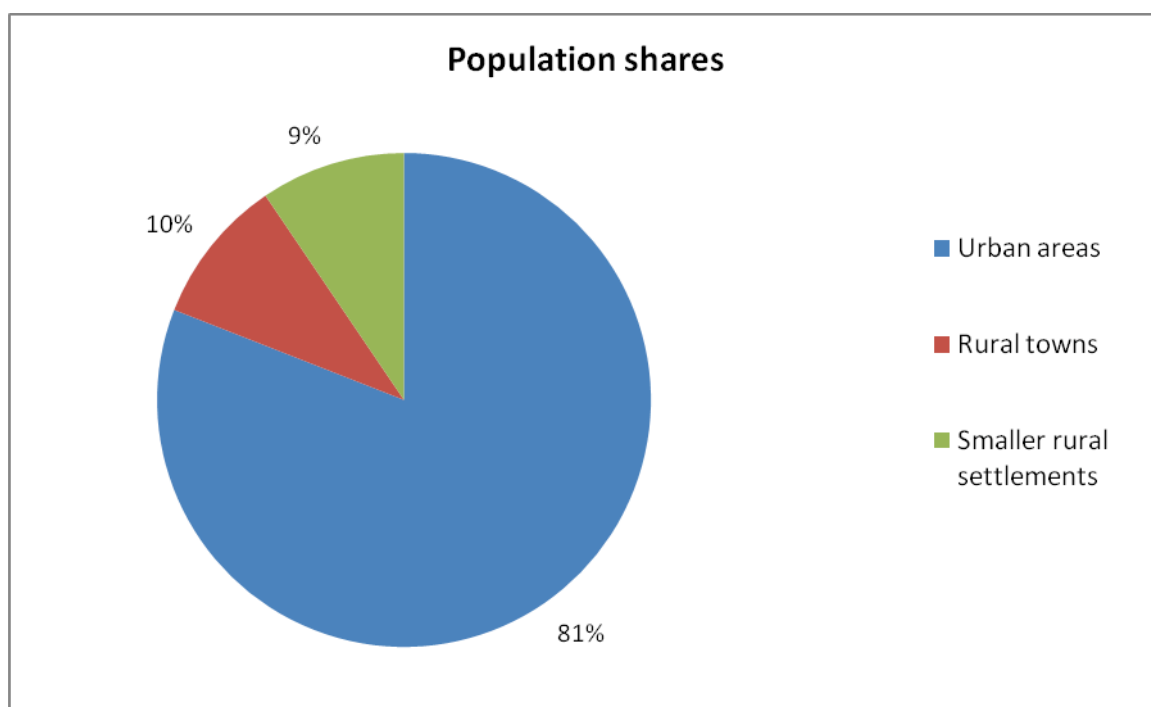
The population of rural areas has been increasing and at a faster rate than that of urban areas. Overall, it is the smaller rural settlements which have been growing fastest. However, population change has been uneven between different parts of rural England. Areas of rapid growth (more than 4.4% from 2001 to 2005) included much of Lincolnshire, north-east Cornwall, much of the East Riding of Yorkshire and the coast of Suffolk[6]. Most rural areas show growth, but there are pockets where the population has decreased e.g. on the north coast of Norfolk.

Migration from urban to rural areas is an important driver of rural population change. All three categories of rural local authority area are beneficiaries of (net) inward migration. The largest gain has been among the most rural category (R80). These flows are long-established and have been fairly consistent throughout the years, though the annual inflow was at a slightly lower level during 2004-08 than during 2001-04.

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[5] Office for National Statistics, 2010
[6] CRC, 2008 (1)

Net inward migration of people to rural local authority areas
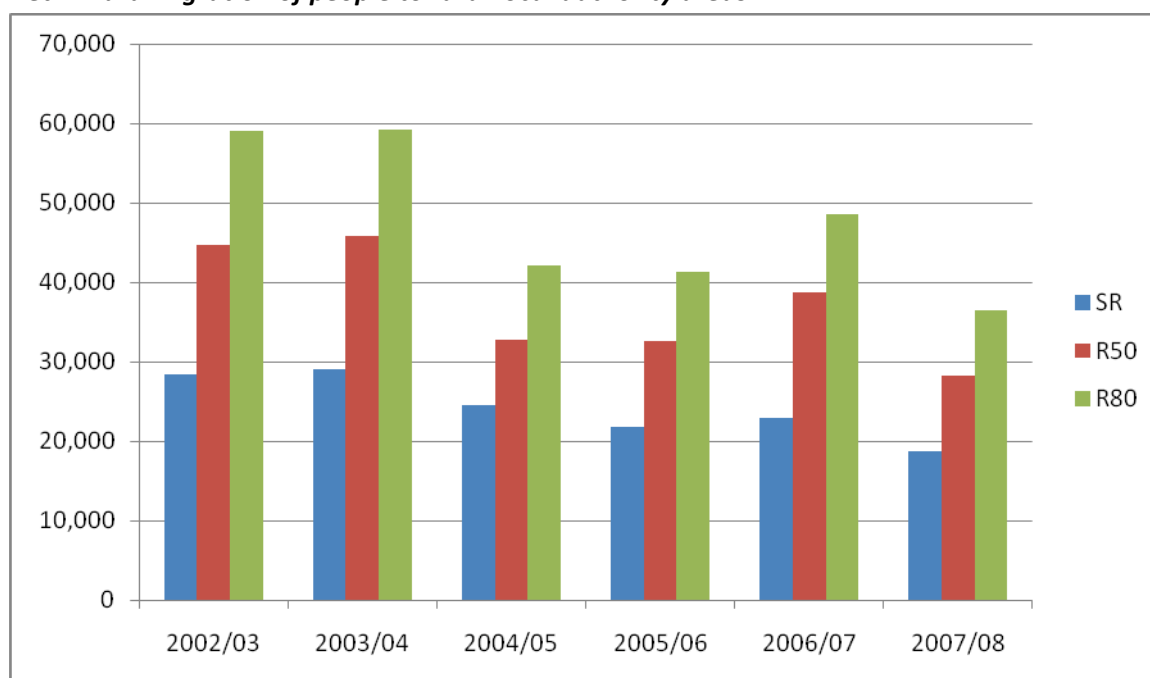
Migration within England is, of course, not all in one direction. There is a net outflow from rural areas of younger people, particularly at ages where they are most likely to leave for study or work. There is then a net inflow to rural areas among those aged 35 and upwards.

It is unsurprising, therefore, that the rural population is older than the urban population. In 2006 the average age[7] of a rural resident was 44.4, compared with an average age for an urban resident of 38.5. In other words, a typical rural person was roughly 6 years older. The rural population profile shows a dearth of people aged 20 to 35, but becomes top-heavy by around age 60.

Moreover, to this profile should be added the fact that people are living longer. A recent Cabinet Office report[8] noted that the population of rural areas is projected to age at a considerably faster rate than in the rest of the country. So:
- Between 2009 and 2029 the population aged 65 and over will rise by 62% in rural areas (and 46% in urban areas);
- Between 2009 and 2029 the population aged 85 and over will rise by 114% in rural areas (and 86% in urban areas).

There are also some significant rural-urban differences in the structure of households. Figures in the following table are based on a rural definition used by the General Household Survey. Rural areas have an above average share of couples without children (including pensioners), but a below average share of one person households and single parent households.

[7] CRC, 2008 (1)
[8] Social Exclusion Task Force, 2009

Proportion of households by type (per cent)

Household type	Rural areas	Mixed areas	Urban areas
One person only	13	16	17
Couples without children	32	27	24
Couples with children	46	47	44
Single parents with children	9	10	15
	100	100	100

A recent phenomenon has been significant international migration to many rural areas, much of it associated with the expansion of the EU eastwards in 2004 and again in 2007. In 2006/07 some 116,000 migrants registered for National Insurance[9] in rural local authority areas. Indeed, proportionally, the most rapid increase has occurred in rural areas – a 231% increase since 2002/03 in rural authorities, compared with an 86% increase in urban authorities. This inflow has slowed again during the recession and as the pound has weakened.

Key features of rural England, then, are that it is home to a fifth of the country's population, that its population is increasing with migration from urban areas, that its population is ageing rapidly and that it has a high proportion of couple households without children. All these features have implications for service providers and the future of service provision.

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[9] National Insurance registrations are a proxy, but an undercount, of actual migration numbers. Migrants not wishing to work or claim benefits do not need to register. Other migrants may simply fail to register.

Views and perceptions of rural services

What do rural communities think about the public services they receive? What do those who represent them consider to be the service priorities? What outcomes are local service providers focussing their efforts upon? Various surveys, including one conducted of RSN members, provide some valuable insights to these questions.

The views of rural people

The Place Survey was conducted in every local authority area (district and unitary) during Autumn 2008, asking a minimum of 1,100 residents for their views about the local area and the public services they receive locally. Analysis has been undertaken to compare the findings from individual rural local authorities with the national (England-wide) findings. Full results from this analysis are at annex A.

In the table below a green box indicates that in most rural areas residents are more satisfied than the national average (slightly more = light green and much more = dark green). Conversely, a red box indicates that in most rural areas residents are less satisfied than the national average (slightly less = light red and much less = dark red). Amber means that in rural areas resident satisfaction is similar to the national average.

Residents' satisfaction with services; rural analysis of the 2008 Place Survey

Services	R80 areas	R50 areas	SR areas	All rural
Litter collection from public land	dark green	dark green	light green	dark green
Household waste collection	light green	amber	light red	amber
Doorstep recycling	amber	amber	amber	amber
Municipal tip/recycling centre	dark green	light green	amber	light green
Local transport information	dark red	dark red	dark red	dark red
Local bus services	dark red	dark red	dark red	dark red
Sport and leisure facilities	light red	amber	amber	amber
Libraries	amber	amber	amber	amber
Museums and galleries	dark red	light red	amber	light red
Theatres and concert halls	dark red	light red	amber	light red
Parks and open spaces	amber	amber	amber	amber
Support for older people	dark green	light green	amber	light green
Tackle crime/anti-soc. behaviour	dark green	amber	amber	amber
How well the council runs things	amber	amber	amber	amber
How treated by service providers	dark green	dark green	dark green	dark green

Key findings from this analysis are that, relative to the national picture:

- Rural residents are particularly dissatisfied with public transport services;
- They are also fairly dissatisfied with many leisure and cultural facilities;
- They are fairly satisfied with support services for older people;
- They are very satisfied with litter collection from public land and quite satisfied with municipal tips/recycling centres; and
- They are particularly satisfied with the way they are treated by service providers.

Another recent survey[10] asked people living in rural areas with high levels of disadvantage about local services. The main disadvantage they cited was poor public transport and they identified four concerns: low service frequency; the inconvenient times that services ran; the cost of fares; and a lack of service information. Unsurprisingly, it was a particular concern for young people, older people and those without their own means of transport, who saw it as key to accessing many other services.

Other findings from this rural survey were that:
- Health services were generally seen favourably, though access to hospitals for both patients and visitors is a concern;
- Housing was a central concern, both its affordability and (in many of these areas) the condition of the housing stock;
- The natural environment was appreciated, but an absence of leisure facilities was a problem and sports grounds (where they existed) could be poorly maintained;
- Access to employment services, especially Jobcentre Plus, was seen as difficult and an important issue for younger people;
- Rural areas were considered safer than urban areas, but fear of crime and anti-social behaviour were issues, heightened by a lack of visible policing;
- Local schools were thought to be of high quality, through poor public transport limited access to pre- and after-school activities;
- Lack of facilities and activities for children and young people, more generally, was a significant concern.

The views of rural representatives

The broad survey of RSN members conducted for this report went out to a range of community level organisations. The largest group were the parish and town councils, though it reached many others too. They were asked what level of importance they attached to a list of 20 service areas. Full results can be seen at annex B. For the community level organisations the top ten priorities were the service areas listed below.

Top ten rural service priorities for community level organisations

Rank	Service area
1	Public transport
2	Support for older people
3	Policing

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[10] OPM, 2009

4	GP surgeries
5	Hospitals
6	Post offices and facilities for young people (6th equal)
7	(see above)
8	Primary schools
9	Affordable housing
10	NHS dentist

The primacy of public transport provision stands out once again, with policing, healthcare and support services for older people also ranked highly.

Looking at the inverse, the community level groups felt that (relatively) the 3 least important of the listed services were those for homelessness/temporary accommodation, Jobcentre Plus, and leisure and cultural services.

The views of rural service providers

The broad survey of RSN members conducted for this report also went out to a range of service providers. The main respondents were local authorities, and community and voluntary sector providers. It again asked them what level of importance they attached to the list of 20 service areas. The full results are shown at annex B. For this group the top ten priorities were the service areas listed below.

Top ten rural service priorities for service providers

Rank	*Service area*
1	Public transport
2	Affordable housing
3	Support for older people
4	Facilities for young people
5	Primary schools
6	Post offices
7	GP surgeries
8	Hospitals
9	Policing
10	Broadband

The service providers place public transport at the top of their priorities list, with affordable housing, facilities for young people and primary schools appearing high, alongside support services for older people.

Looking at the inverse for this group, the service providers felt that (relatively) the 3 least important of the listed services were those for homelessness/temporary accommodation, leisure and cultural services, and Jobcentre Plus.

Further insight into the views of service providers comes from the priorities they have selected for their 2008-11 Local Area Agreements (LAAs) – the documents in which local authorities and their

service delivery partners set out the thirty-five or fewer outcomes (improvement targets) they will focus upon for their locality.

Any 'rural' analysis comes with a health warning, since LAAs operate at the upper tier local authority level of counties and unitaries. This table shows[11] the most popular service-related improvement targets within the 46 most rural LAA areas. A full list is given at annex C.

Improvement target (NI)	Number (out of 46)
Some educational attainment indicators are mandatory	46
Affordable homes delivered	37
Participation in sport and recreation	33
Carers receiving a needs assessment	31
Access to services by public transport or walking	27
Young people's participation in positive activities	26
Social care clients getting self-directed support	25
Perception that local crime is dealt with	17
Adults helped by social services to live independently	17

What does this tell us?

As a rule perception surveys show rural people to be more satisfied than urban people. There are many reasons why this might be so, including rural people having lower expectations about what can be provided in their location. The Place Survey results, above, show there is some truth to this rule of thumb, but the position is actually more complex. Rural residents distinguish services which are particularly problematic for them, most obviously the provision of an adequate public transport system.

This focus on public transport is confirmed by the priorities of both community level organisations and rural service providers. There is widespread recognition of its importance as a means of accessing a range of services and opportunities. Furthermore, it is prioritised in 27 of the most rural LAA documents.

Compared to their urban counterparts, rural people are relatively satisfied with the support services for older people in their area. However, both community level organisations and rural service providers assign a high priority to them, while support for independent living and for carers feature in many of the more rural LAAs.

[11] Brian Wilson Associates and Rural Innovation, 2008

Whilst this should not be overstated, the RSN survey indicates some difference in the priority rankings between community level organisations and rural service providers. The former have healthcare and (especially) policing higher on their list, whilst the latter put more emphasis on facilities for young people, primary schools and (especially) affordable housing. It is not surprising, therefore, that increasing the supply of affordable housing and young people's participation in positive activities both feature in many of the more rural LAAs.

Public transport

As noted above, residents in rural authorities are very dissatisfied with public transport provision and RSN members attach more importance to public transport than any other services.   It is a means to access the range of services, employment and other opportunities, especially for vulnerable groups who are without their own (private) transport. This has become even more important as some services have centralised and many local outlets closed.

The findings in this chapter need to be seen in context. Rural communities make longer journeys than urban communities in conducting their lives; the National Travel Survey[12] shows there to be a clear relationship between distance travelled and settlement size. Most of the difference in the height of the bars (chart below) is accounted for by travel which is made by car/private transport.

Miles travelled per person per year by private and other transport modes (in 2006)
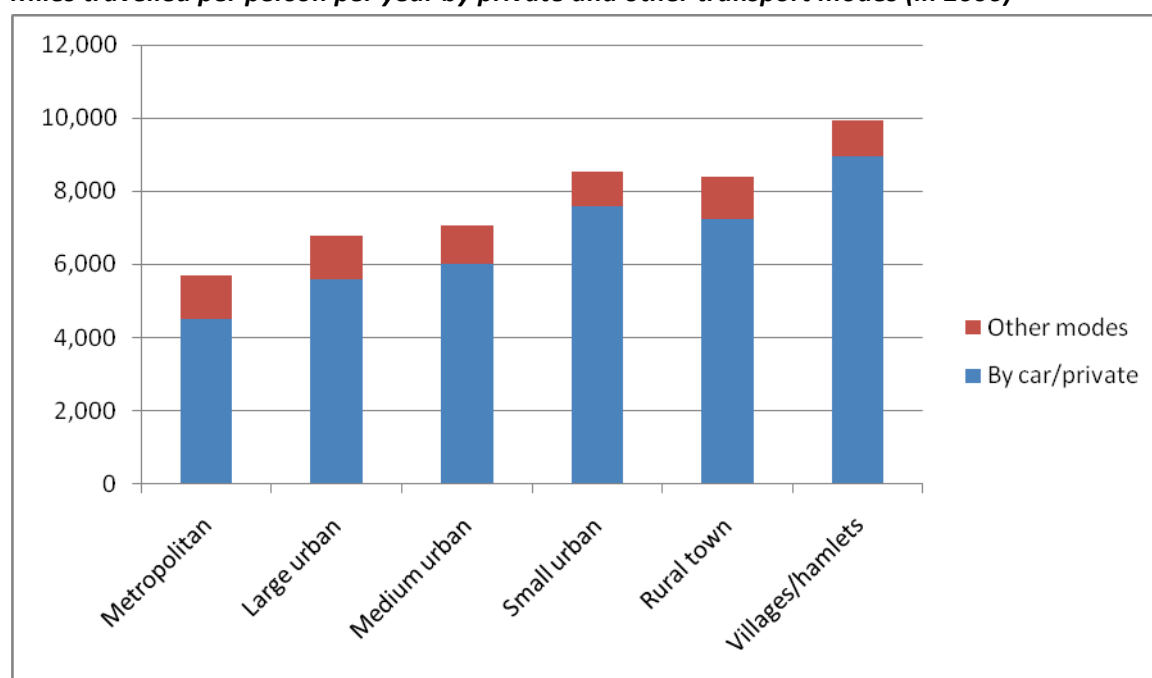
Car ownership has expanded and is high in rural areas. The fastest growth in car traffic (1996 to 2006) took place mainly in shire areas, notably County Durham, Gloucestershire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, North Yorkshire, Somerset and West Berkshire. By 2005/06 some 87% of households in villages and hamlets (less than 3,000 people) owned a car and 54% owned two or more cars[13]. This compares with national figures or 70% and 32% respectively. A paucity of alternative transport options means that in villages and hamlets 72% of the poorest households – the lowest fifth of incomes – own a car and 23% own two or more cars. Car ownership should not, then, be taken as a proxy for wealth; for those on low incomes it may be an additional expense (and local wage levels are low in many rural areas).

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[12] Department for Transport, 2008
[13] CRC, 2008 (1)

According to focus group research[14], conducted in some relatively deprived rural areas, the main concerns about public transport were its frequency, convenience and fare levels, plus access to information about services. Our survey of RSN members included some transport authorities and providers. While not a statistically robust sample, it contained useful responses on these issues.

Frequency

Most of the responses indicated that, locally, service frequency had improved for rural communities during the last five years. Others thought that service frequency was broadly the same.

A variety of reasons were put forward to explain this, including:
- Extra demand generated by the introduction of a national statutory concessionary fares scheme for the elderly;
- The introduction of demand-responsive services, replacing fixed timetable services;
- Increased local authority funding to subsidise bus services;
- Competition in the shape of new, smaller bus service providers; and
- More demand as a result of the better marketing of services.

This finding matches statistics from the National Transport Survey, which show the proportion of households in rural villages and hamlets within 13 minutes walk of an hourly (or better) bus service to have increased from around 40% in the mid-1990s to around 50% by 2007. For rural towns the figures are around 70% and 85% respectively.

Convenience

The survey also asked whether services for rural communities were more or less convenient now that they were five years ago – for example, running at times which would enable people to get to/from their place of work. Responses, again, were mostly that convenience had improved; with others stating that the local situation was unchanged.

Examples were cited of services running over wider time periods, either at the two ends of the day or the introduction of a Sunday service. Another response noted additional services to coincide with the beginning and close of the working day. However, another respondent felt they were fighting a losing battle, since local service outlets and places of employment were locating in more dispersed areas, based on an assumption of car access and making it harder to lay on public transport.

In Norfolk, the Coasthopper service runs the 55 miles along the county's northern coastal road from King's Lynn to Cromer. This is timed to connect with train services at each end and with other bus services en route. There has also been a major investment in the bus fleet and greater effort with marketing. Passenger numbers had already been growing at 15% a year, but in 2009 have risen by 58%. This rate of growth has been as marked for fare paying passengers as for those entitled to concessionary fares. The service won the countryside category at the 2009 UK Bus Awards.

[14] OPM, 2009

Fare levels

Views about whether fare levels had risen or fallen over the last five years (after taking account of inflation) were very mixed, no doubt partly reflecting local circumstances, but also because of the complex picture for different groups of transport users.

Two groups who have been clear gainers are OAPs and the disabled, with the introduction of concessionary (free) travel, at least outside of peak travel times. Other things cited were the introduction of discount tickets, new entrant bus companies bringing lower fares and fares simply rising at below-inflation rates.

> *"A number of discount tickets have been introduced ... including family tickets ... tickets for 16 to 19 year olds and [discounts] for two adults travelling together."*

This situation was compared, though, with the rising cost of bus operation, with increasing fuel prices and a reduction in the (former) fuel-duty rebate.

Service information

There was a much clearer message about service information and whether this had improved or not during the last five years for rural communities. Almost universally, the view was that it had improved.

A key reason given was service information that is now widely available on websites, including printer-friendly timetables. However, printed leaflets and timetables are also having a wider circulation. Sometimes this is in local libraries, shops and post offices; sometimes it is on buses themselves. One local authority delivers the latest bus timetable to every household on a twice yearly basis.

Meeting needs

Both service providers and community representatives were asked how far public transport, therefore, met the needs of local rural people. Most of the providers felt that services only "partially met" those needs. This was echoed by the community representatives (see pie chart below).

Extent to which public transport meets local needs; views of community representatives
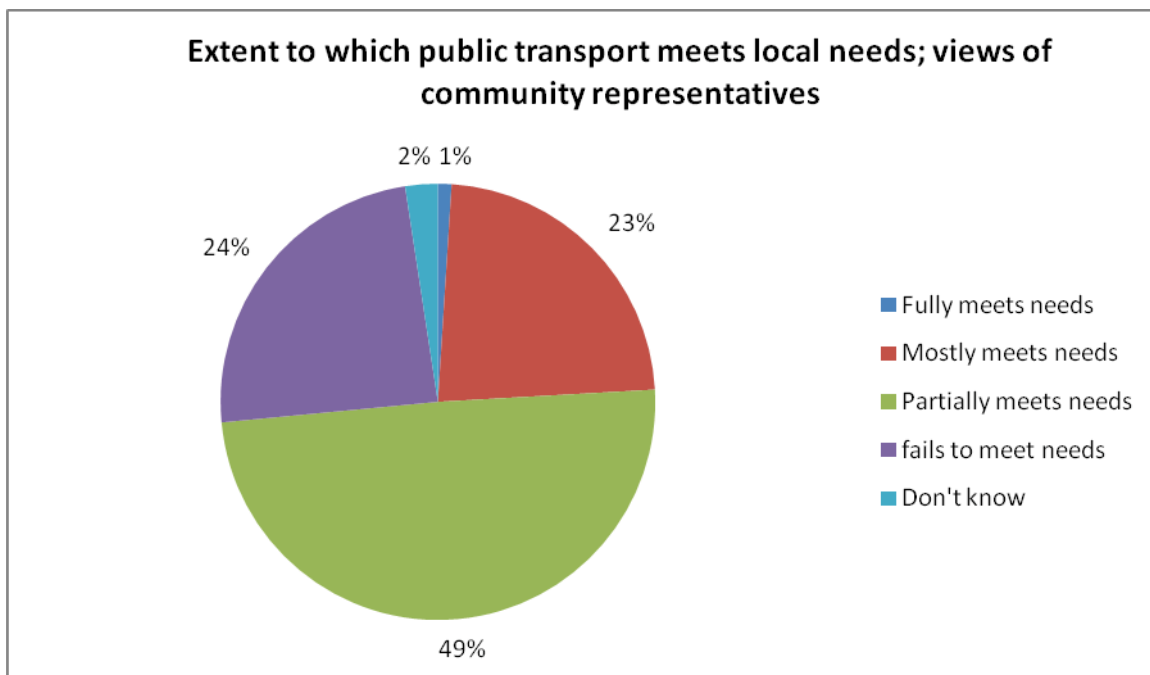
The community representatives, though, were more pessimistic than service providers about whether public transport locally had improved. The largest proportion of them (44%) thought the situation was unchanged, but almost a third felt it had worsened and only 18% that it had improved. Nor can we ignore the significant dissatisfaction with public transport that has been expressed by residents in rural local authority areas (see page 11). As research confirms, those public transport needs are especially relevant for the rural poor, the young, the elderly and those without a car.

Demand-responsive transport

Our survey asked about the effectiveness of demand-responsive transport to meet rural needs. Whilst it was seen as useful, respondents were careful to point out that it should not be seen as a panacea. Demand-responsive services can be expensive, requiring a sizeable passenger subsidy. It was felt that they should be treated as part of the solution, operating where the population is particularly dispersed (or more widely to assist those with limited mobility). It could feed in to conventional bus routes and should not compete with them. With generally smaller vehicles it has the advantage of being able to go down narrow country roads.

CallConnect[15], in rural Lincolnshire, is a mini bus service which can be pre-booked by phone or online. From 7 in the morning to 7 in the evening it will collect people from or take them to designated pick-up points in each village or town. Those with disabilities or in more isolated locations may be taken to their home address. Each mini bus will take its passengers to any point within its local operating area. Those who wish to make longer journeys can be taken to join a regular inter-urban bus service (Interconnect) or to a railway station. More than 10% of CallConnect users are daily commuters. Real-time monitoring of the whereabouts of the mini buses means they can be used efficiently.

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[15] Lincolnshire County Council, 2010

Expenditure and budgets

Our providers said that local transport budgets had either increased or remained unchanged in their areas. This had happened as a result of councils recognising the centrality of the issue for rural communities and cross-party support from local councillors. But there was a high expectation that this position would now go into reverse as local authority budgets came under review and intense pressure.

> *"[We] are now undertaking a fundamental review of future policy due to expectations that budgets will be coming under even greater pressure in future years."*

A related issue was the budget impact as a result of the introduction of the statutory concessionary fares scheme for the elderly. Local authorities said this had had some impact and transport operators said they were inadequately reimbursed. In principle, they were not supposed to be better or worse off as a result of the scheme.

The statutory scheme provides for free travel after 9.30am. In some rural areas, where the only bus of the day runs before this threshold, local authorities have used discretionary powers to extend free travel within the morning rush hour. However, they are not recompensed for doing so and the cost must be born locally.

Future demands

The rapidly ageing rural population is seen as something that should be taken into account, especially since this will impact on the cost of the concessionary fares scheme. It could either lead to services becoming overstretched or to extra services having to be laid on (with additional subsidy). Another survey respondent noted the effect of more affluent incomers buying into the area. Almost inevitably they are car users and the result is a reducing passenger base.

Looked at another way, though, one view is that the rural population is growing and bus provision must accommodate this if the result is not to be worse traffic congestion. A similar argument could be made in terms of rural communities' contribution to CO_2 reduction and addressing climate change.

Summary

Rural residents travel further than their urban counterparts and more do so by car. Key concerns about rural public transport are its frequency, convenience and fare levels, plus access to service information.

Our survey would seem to indicate that in many ways rural public transport provision has improved during the last five years. Services run more often, fare levels have dropped for some (especially with the introduction of concessionary fares for the elderly) and information is easier to find.

Nonetheless, the widespread view is that public transport is far from meeting the needs of rural communities and this is likely to impact on various vulnerable groups.

The recent RSN *Rural Services Manifesto 2010 and Beyond*[16] suggested that "where a local rail service provides better access to service centres than rural buses the statutory concessionary fares scheme should be applied and community transport schemes, where separate fares are charged, should be brought within the national scheme".

Whilst some local authorities have clearly given a high priority to improving rural public transport, there are real concerns that this cannot be sustained as public sector budgets come under greater pressure in the coming period. However, this could be at odds with wider public policy concerns about the environment (CO_2 reduction), not to mention equity (focusing on the most vulnerable).

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[16] Rural Services Network, 2009

Primary schools

The village school is often seen as a cornerstone of rural life and its closure (or the threat of closure) is almost guaranteed to spark community protest. In our survey of RSN members about public services, they attached considerable importance to local primary schools.

The government funding formula for schools provides a Dedicated Schools Grant. A contextual point is the relatively low allocation (per pupil) for education authorities in the more rural areas; in 2009/10 Herefordshire receives £3,830 per head, while Birmingham receives £4,605 per head and many inner London boroughs receive over £6,000 per head.

Quality

The quality of rural primary schools is generally considered to be good. Indeed, research conducted in some relatively deprived rural areas[17] found that residents in five of the six areas studied felt their local schools were of high quality. An analysis of Key Stage 2 test results[18], taken by children aged 11, would appear to offer some backing for this view. Pupils from small settlements on average achieve better results in English, in maths and in science.

Key Stage 2 test results in 2004/05 – per cent of pupils achieving level 4 or above

Subject	Village and hamlet	Small (rural) town	Urban areas
English	85	82	78
Maths	81	78	74
Science	91	90	86

Note: these figures are based on pupils' place of residence and exclude the minority of areas defined as 'sparse'.

However, the survey in relatively deprived areas noted that positive views about quality were qualified by some concerns over the range of provision that was on offer in small rural schools.

Accessibility

The Rural Services Series[19] indicates that primary schools are the most accessible of all the public services measured by that dataset, in terms of their spread and location amongst rural communities. It shows that in 2009:
- There were 5,249 primary schools in rural England, which is 30% of all primary schools;
- Over 3,000 of these were in small rural settlements (villages and hamlets), with the remainder located in small towns; and
- More than 87% of rural households were living within 2 kilometres of a primary school.

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[17] OPM, 2009
[18] CRC, 2007 (2)
[19] CRC, 2009 (1)

On this measure, more serious issues of access only really showed up[20] for those living in hamlets and isolated dwellings within sparse areas of England. This appears to be consistent with evidence from a recent inquiry[21] into the future of upland communities, which cited lack of local schools as a concern for people in these types of areas.

RSN members based in local education authorities and primary schools were asked what share of the children living in rural parts of their area they considered faced problems in physically accessing (travelling to) a primary school.   The most common answer was that a sizeable minority faced problems, though quite a few answered that none or almost none faced problems.

Answers to the question: "What share of children in the rural parts of your area do you consider face problems accessing (travelling to) a primary school?"
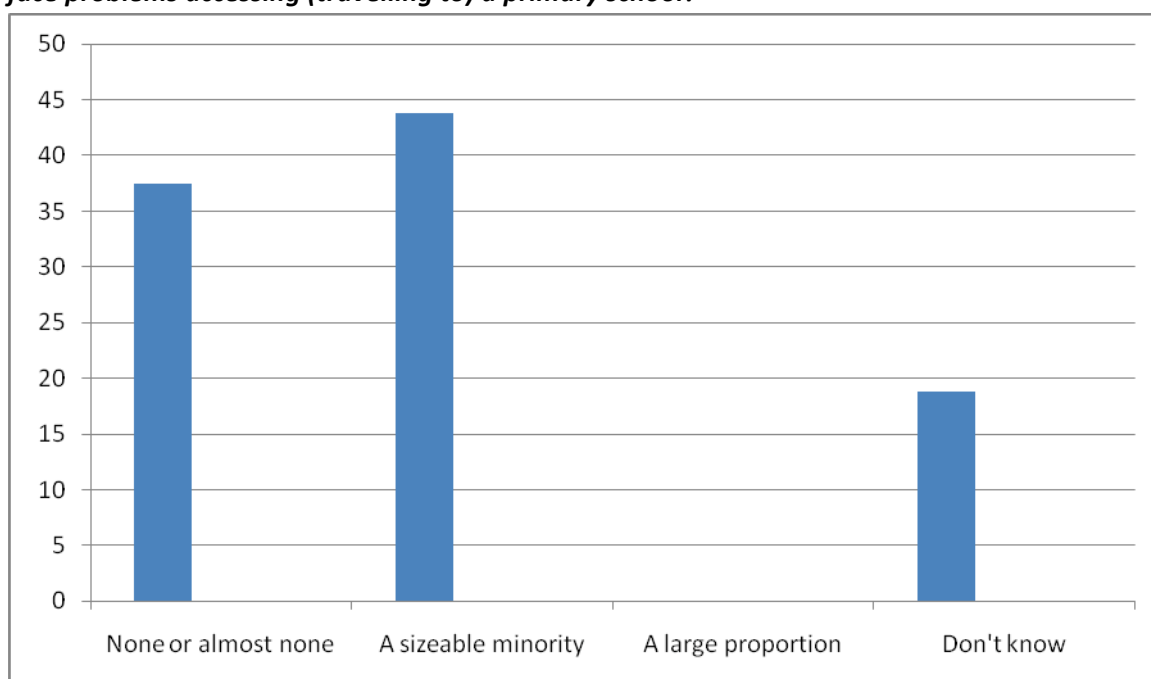
Respondents who thought there were problems for a sizeable minority mentioned two basic issues. Most notable was a lack of public transport, which would enable pupils to travel at convenient times. Travel to school frequently relied on parents having a car and being able to juggle the school run round other commitments. They noted that dedicated school transport runs at set times around the core teaching day, so is not an option for children joining in activities outside normal school hours. A previous call-for-evidence from RSN members on education funding[22] found that shire Local Education Authorities struggle to pay for additional transport because of reductions to their transport budgets.

 The other issue cited was the danger that rural pupils may face if they walk or cycle to school. It was noted that rural roads are often narrow and dangerous for cyclists and many lack a pavement for pedestrians.

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[20] CRC, 2008 (2)
[21] Steps Ahead Research Ltd, 2009
[22] Rural Services Network, 2009 (1)

Looked at over a number of years, the Rural Services Series dataset[23] shows there has been a gradual decrease in the number of rural primary schools. The proportion of households living within 2 kilometres in 2009 was down 0.9% on the same figure for 2000. Most of this reduction has taken place within the smaller and more remote rural settlements.

Given the spread of primary schools in smaller rural settlements, a related issue – seemingly under-researched – is the wider leadership role played within rural communities by head-teachers, who must often be the senior public service holders within their localities.

Closures

RSN members were asked about recent and future closures of rural primary schools. Over two-thirds of responding service providers said there had been closures in their local education authority area during the last five years. They also had a clear expectation of further closures, with the same proportion agreeing there is a serious likelihood of this during the next few years. None of the respondents felt confident that there would be no rural primary school closures in their area.

Rural primary school closures in LEA area - per cent of education providers agreeing
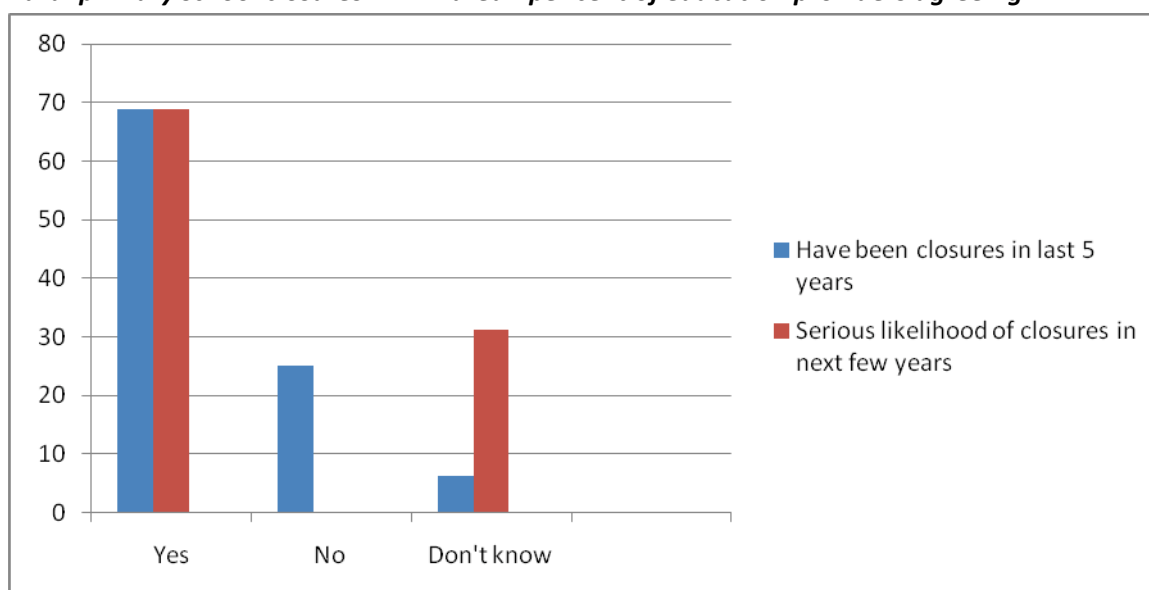
 A RSN survey of parish and town councils (Councillors and Clerks) asked a similar question, though this time just about primary schools within their immediate parish/town council area. At this very local scale only a small number had actually experienced a closure during the last five years and most (two-thirds) felt that their local school was not under threat. Nonetheless, almost a fifth of these parish/town council areas do not (now) have a primary school within their boundary and one in thirteen respondents felt that their local school was under serious threat.

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[23] CRC, 2008 (2)

Rural primary school closures in parish/town council area – per cent of councillors/clerks agreeing
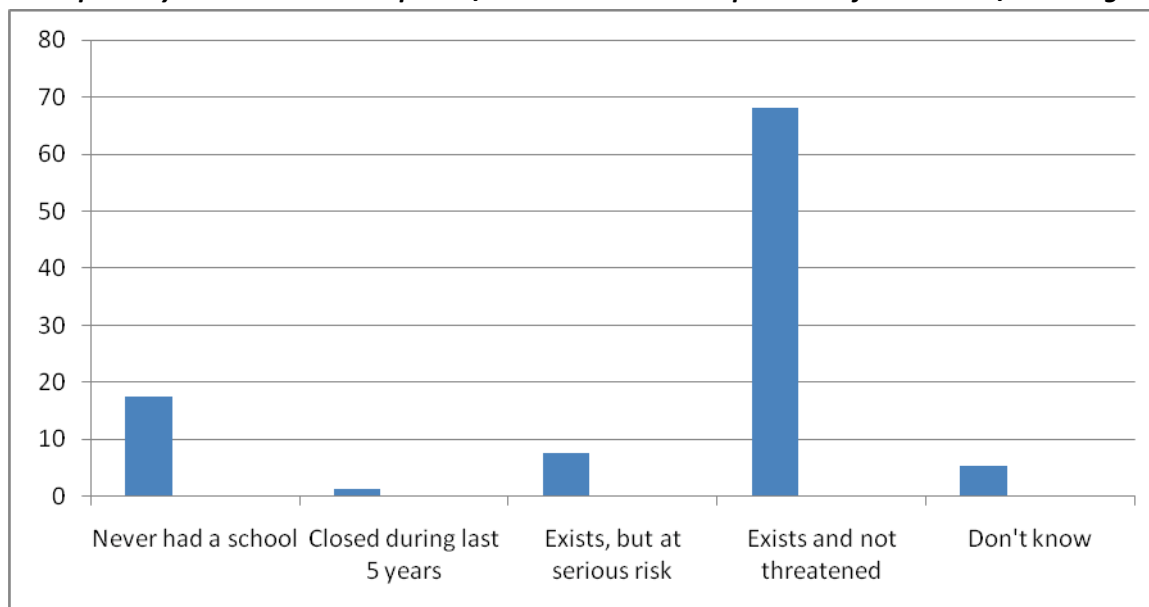
Respondents cited a variety of underlying causes for school closures and threats of closure, but much the most frequent was the decreasing number of young children on the roll, which is resulting in surplus school places. Since many rural primary schools are small – most of the 2,600 primary schools with 100 or fewer pupils are in rural locations[24] - they may quickly reach a threshold at which their viability comes into question.

Other causes of school closures that were cited included tightening local education budgets, re-organisation and rationalisation of school sites e.g. where middle schools are removed, and the inability to replace a departing head-teacher. In Shropshire, which faces a projected fall in pupil numbers, it was a shortfall in the education budget which led to proposals – since revised – to close 22 (out of 140) primary schools and to the setting up of an independent commission of inquiry[25].

Each year in Northumberland, roughly 700 fewer pupils are joining school reception classes than are moving on from primary education. School funding is linked to pupil numbers, so a reduction of 700 means £2.6 million less in the local education authority's annual budget.

Those surveyed were asked to think ahead about the changing demographics of their areas. Most expected the school roll to continue reducing, with the result that there would be further closures or pressure on schools to federate. The cost of rural housing and lack of affordable homes for young families were noted as issues. That said, a minority cited fluctuations in the school age population and increasing numbers currently in their areas.

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[24] Todman P et al, 2009
[25] Independent Policy Commission, 2009

Range of services

Most education providers who responded to our survey felt that being in a rural location made it difficult to offer certain types of specialist provision. In some cases the issue was providing for small numbers of children or fluctuating numbers of children, making it expensive and harder to sustain. Once again, the lack of transport was mentioned as a constraint. Other issues mentioned were a lack of facilities for wrap-around childcare, difficulties finding staff with the right expertise and the magnified effect of a child with special educational needs in a small school.

However, a minority felt positive about the ability of their schools to offer specialist provision.

> *"I think rural primary schools are very adaptable and work hard to meet the needs of their pupils and families."*
>
> *"We have a foundation stage/nursery class which allows early entry and additional afternoon care. Our numbers are at the critical point to allow funding for the staff to operate this extra provision. Our out of school club is also close to breaking even on the numbers attending."*

A village school on the southern side of Suffolk has been unable to establish pre-school facilities. Numbers of 5 to 11 years olds attending the school fluctuate from year to year (from about 20 pupils up to 35 pupils). There is a mother and toddler group which meets once a week at the school, but the low pupil numbers mean that funding to develop full nursery facilities has not been forthcoming. This is something of a catch-22 for the school; children go to pre-school elsewhere and, because they settle in and make friends there, parents are reluctant to move them back to the village school at age 5. There is thus an impact on the school roll. However, the school remains at the centre of village life and there is a real determination to retain it.

Working together

A recent report[26] identified various forms of formal collaboration between small rural primary schools, including sharing staff (such as a business manager), sharing a head-teacher (executive headship) and sharing governance (forming a federation or trust). Many types of informal collaboration were also identified. These collaborations brought many benefits, such as more time for leadership, more specialist support, filling recruitment gaps, a wider range of services and cost savings. However, the scope for co-location of extended services was found to be limited in rural areas.

The great majority of respondents to the RSN survey could cite collaboration examples in their local education authority area. Much the most frequent was a shared (executive) head-teacher. Other examples were:

- Shared teaching staff where vacancies cannot be filled;
- Shared teaching staff so more children can benefit from particular expertise;
- Joint extra-curricular activities and joint school projects;

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[26] Todman P et al, 2009

- The sharing of school buildings, equipment and materials.

Others noted more informal arrangements between rural schools and "soft federations".

Summary

Key features of rural primary school provision are that their quality is generally good and they remain the most accessible public service for rural communities. However, school reviews and the threat of closures is a genuine concern for many.

The RSN's policy position is opposition to the closure of rural schools, except on educational grounds. There appears to be no real research into the economic, social and environmental impacts of rural school closures – a gap in the evidence base.

In most rural areas providing a range of specialist provision, such as wrap-around childcare, is found to be challenging and a lack of public transport outside normal school hours adds further complexity. Examples of collaborating rural primary schools are fairly common, especially where this involves sharing a head-teacher.

For rural primary schools the rapidly ageing rural population seems likely to remain a driver of change and other factors, such as high rural house prices, may add to falling schools rolls in many areas.

Affordable housing for local people

Rural house prices and the lack of affordable rural housing to meet the needs of local people are well documented issues, which have been the subject of various policy inquiries – most recently that led by Matthew Taylor MP. It is, therefore, not surprising that RSN members say this is a high priority topic. A recent survey[27] also found that 62% of rural residents believe there is a shortage of affordable housing in their area.

Rural house prices

House prices are considerably higher in rural than in urban areas. According to Land Registry data, the average sale price[28] in a rural area in 2007 was £257,600. This compares with £212,800 in urban areas – almost £45,000 less.

As can be seen from the chart below, prices are at their highest in the smallest settlements, with the hamlets and isolated dwellings category the most expensive. Less sparse areas are also consistently more expensive than sparse areas.

Average house prices from sales during 2007 (£ sterling)
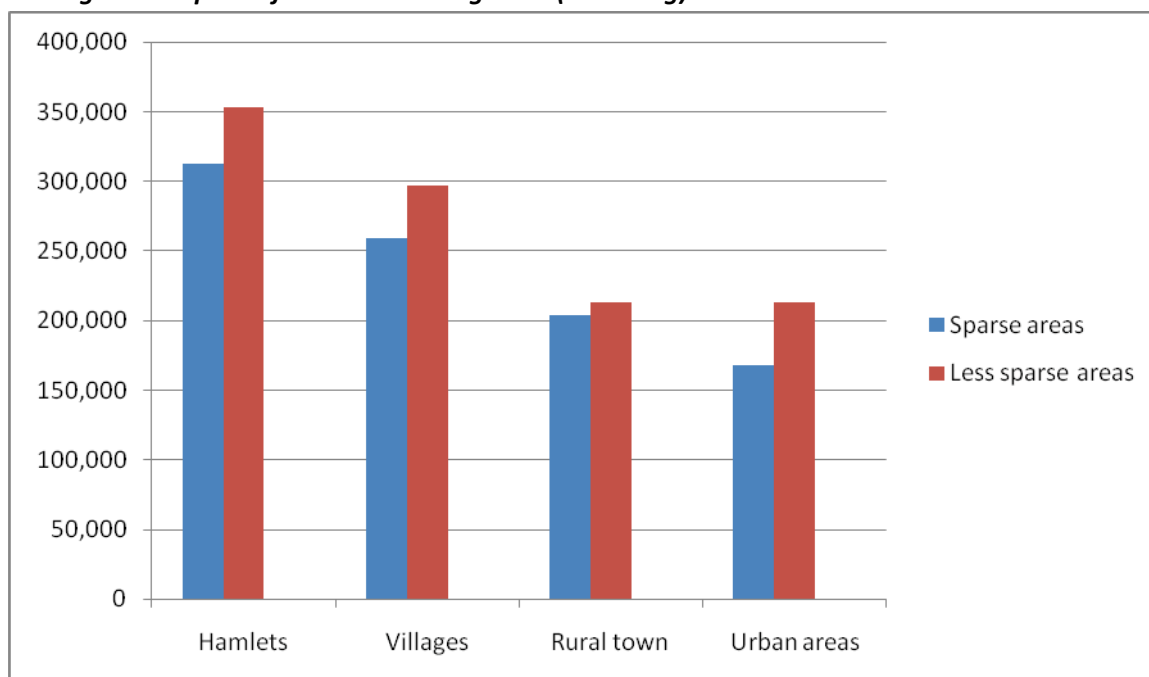
From 2000 to 2007 house prices in England rose by an annual average of 14.8%. Rural areas, as a whole, recorded a marginally greater annual rise of 15.0%. However, an annual rise of 21.5% was recorded for house prices in villages in less sparse areas.

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[27] National Housing Federation, 2009
[28] CRC, 2008 (1)

The recession has had an impact. In January 2009 the average price of a rural house was 12.5% lower than it had been a year before[29]. The average price of an urban house fell slightly faster, at 14.5%, over the same period. It should be noted that these average house price falls mask some notable variations across different parts of the country.

Housing affordability

House price affordability is measured by calculating the ratio of house prices to household income. In 2007 the Commission for Rural Communities calculated this ratio both for average house prices and average household incomes, and for lower quartile house prices and lower quartile household incomes. The latter provides a useful indicator of the ease with which people can enter the housing market.

Housing is less affordable in rural than in urban areas. It is also less affordable on the lower quartile than on the average ratio measure. At the extreme, a typical lower quartile household in a sparse village or hamlet would need to spend 9.7 times its income to purchase a property in the bottom quartile price bracket.

Note: less sparse area ratios are shown in red and sparse area ratios in green.

Average affordability ratio	Settlement size	Lower quartile affordability ratio
7.5　8.2	Villages, hamlets and isolated dwellings	9.0　9.7
6.2　7.4	Rural towns	7.7　9.2
5.8　6.5	Urban areas	7.5　8.2

Recent price falls in the property market have had almost no effect on affordability. The average affordability ratio had fallen by just 0.1 in rural areas in the year to December 2008.

This may explain why our membership surveys found a very mixed picture, when asking whether local housing had become more or less affordable over the last year. More than half the parish and town council responses said there was no difference, with others split fairly evenly between thinking it was more or less affordable. Housing authorities and Registered Social Landlords (RSN housing members) were split between those who felt it had become less affordable and those who considered the picture unchanged. Many acknowledged that house prices had fallen, yet noted that new mortgages are harder to come by and higher deposits are being sought by lenders.

This is seen as having particularly affected the intermediate market. Whilst there are potential buyers for shared ownership schemes, Registered Social Landlords are struggling to find buyers who can obtain a mortgage (or, at least, one that does not have tough conditions or high interest rates). Some responses report unsold properties and others report properties being switched into the (wholly) rented sector. Where the Homes & Communities Agency (HCA) is still seeking a proportion of shared tenure properties, new schemes are said sometimes to be being delayed or scaled back.

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[29] CRC, 2009 (2)

A recent affordable housing development within the Dartmoor National Park (Devon) area was completed with four rented and three shared ownership homes. Willing buyers were found, who met the local shared ownership criteria, but none of them could obtain a mortgage. All of these homes are now been rented out.

An affordable housing development at Thorpe-le-Soken in Essex originally contained eight rented and four shared ownership homes. Given the unavailability of mortgages two more of the shared ownership properties have been switched to rental properties. It has proved difficult to (part) sell the remaining two, given the state of the local housing and jobs markets.
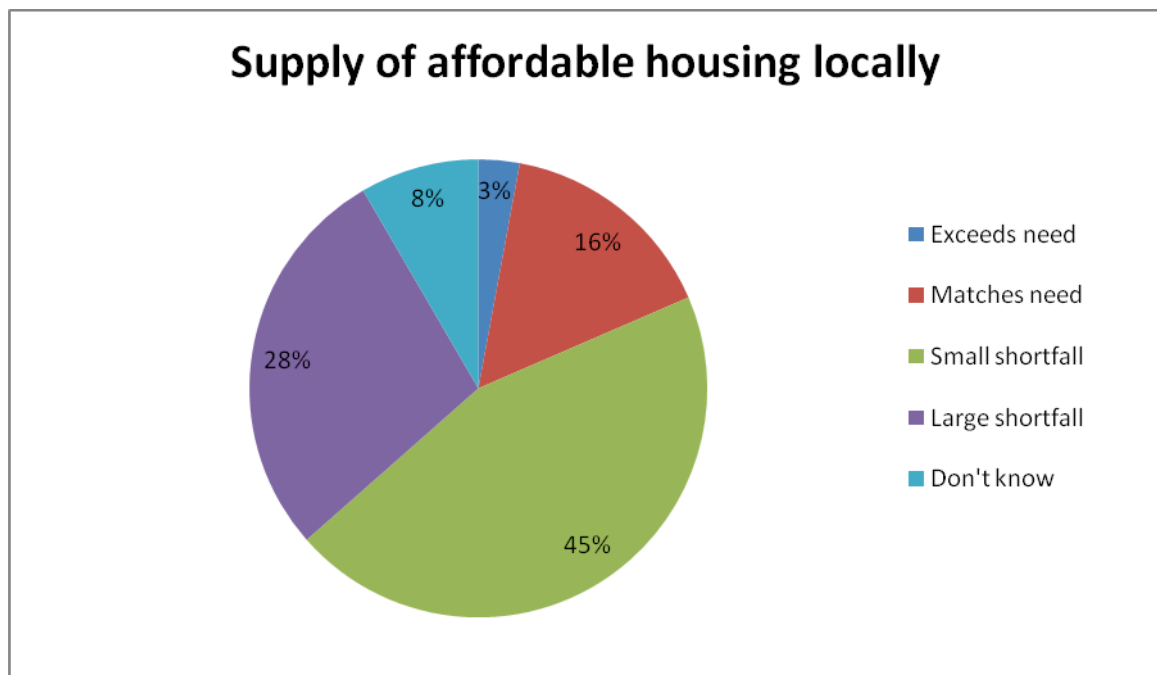
Housing supply: starts and completions

The pattern of housing tenure is markedly different in rural and urban areas. Rural areas have noticeably higher levels of owner occupied housing and much lower levels of social housing.

Proportion of households by their housing tenure (2001 Census)

Tenure	Rural areas	Urban areas
Social housing	12	21
Private rented	7	9
Owner occupied	77	67
Other	4	3

In the RSN survey of parish and town councils a clear majority (almost three-quarters) said the supply of affordable housing did not meet demand in their local area. Responses could be said to indicate that this need is not for large-scale development; more often there is a small shortfall to be met. Less than 18% of respondents felt that local supply met (or exceeded) demand.

Supply of affordable housing locally

- Exceeds need — 3%
- Matches need — 16%
- Small shortfall — 45%
- Large shortfall — 28%
- Don't know — 8%

In our survey of RSN housing members half of respondents said that the number of affordable housing starts in their local authority area (or their organisation's area) is down compared with a year ago. Most of the remainder said it was unchanged. This seems unfortunate, given that rural schemes can take a long time to bring to the development stage.

The picture for affordable housing completions is much more mixed, probably because many schemes were already underway when the recession hit. Responses were almost equally divided among those who say the number is up, is unchanged and is down on the year before.

The most common explanation offered for these trends was that affordable homes secured through Section 106 agreements on planning permissions for (otherwise) market developments have almost ground to a halt. This finding mirrors another recent piece of survey work.

> *"Private sector developments are not proceeding due to the depressed housing market. This reduces affordable housing provision where there is a Section 106 agreement."*
> *"We are getting increased completions on Section 106 sites which gained planning permission at the height of the market. Such completions will tail off quite soon."*

However, the picture is not all gloom.

> *"We have a programme ... in market towns and rural villages with planning and funding, so are relatively optimistic ...."*

Almost without exception respondents to our survey saw the availability and level of HCA grant funding for affordable housing schemes as a significant rural constraint. Its 2008-11 investment programme is said to be almost fully committed and grant levels are said to have fallen. Respondents mention, as issues, the HCA's plot (grant) limit, its value for money criteria, the high upfront costs associated with small schemes, high scheme standards that are being demanded (including for energy efficiency) and increasing infrastructure costs e.g. for drainage and sewerage. Energy efficiency standards are harder to achieve in rural locations which are off the mains gas network. The RSN has called, in its manifesto, for the HCA to recognise additional costs in its grants and to apply the Code for Sustainable Homes more flexibly.

Although the former Housing Corporation managed to grow its output in small settlements, under its rural programme, it was notable that the HCA missed its 2008/09 target[30] for these areas. In that year it completed 2,415 units, against a target of 2,800 units.

Severe housing need

During the 18 month period to September 2008 the number of repossessions increased by 39% in rural areas[31]. This compares with a 21% increase in urban areas. There were 3,292 repossessed homes in rural areas in the July to September 2008 quarter.

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[30] CRC, 2009 (3)
[31] CRC, 2009 (2)

Figures from the Department for Communities & Local Government show the number of those unintentionally homeless rising by 5% in rural areas in the year to December 2008 (and by 4% in urban areas).

A mixed pattern emerged from RSN housing members about the trend in numbers accepted by local authorities as homeless. In almost equal measure they said the local list had increased, stayed the same and decreased over the last year. On the other hand, they said that local authority waiting lists for housing had mainly increased during the last year. In contrast, when asked about numbers of households placed in temporary accommodation, they were split between those noting a local decrease and those noting no change in their area.

Going forward

RSN housing members said that the Local Development Frameworks for their areas were explicit about encouraging the supply of rural affordable housing. In most cases (but not all) they also felt that the Regional Spatial Strategy was supportive in this regard.

> *"There is a focus on improving the supply of affordable housing in rural areas."*
> *"The strategy has an objective on affordable housing and recognises the impact of commuting on house prices."*
> *"It is fairly [helpful], but I would like to see more determination at the local level."*

They were also asked about the likely impact(s) of future population change on local housing. Respondents recognised various pressures and challenges. Some mentioned the ageing population and saw older age groups displacing (out-purchasing) younger age groups for housing. Continuing in-migration, commuting and demand for second homes were also mentioned. Another noted the trend to extend and convert housing, pushing up its value in the process. Finally, there was concern over the growing gap between owner occupiers of housing and those left behind on low incomes.

It was felt that such trends could affect a wide array of groups, including young people, first time (potential) buyers, low income groups and rural workers, ordinary families and some older people. Indeed, it might be said that the impacts are on the sustainability of rural communities as a whole.

A recent analysis[32] of the 2006-based household projections, produced by the Department for Communities & Local Government, found that the rate of growth is projected to be fastest in the most rural areas. Between 2011 and 2031 an additional 2,167,000 households are projected for rural districts, which is an increase of almost 26%.

Projected household growth from 2011 to 2031

	Households 2011	*Households 2031*	*% change 2011-31*
Rural 80 council areas	2,735,000	3,497,000	27.9%
Rural 50 council areas	2,689,000	3,367,000	25.2%
Significantly rural council areas	2,984,000	3,711,000	24.4%
Urban council areas	14,338,000	17,236,000	20.2%

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[32] CRC, 2010

Summary

High rural house prices have created severe affordability problems, especially in the smallest settlements. The recession has impacted significantly on the housing market, though has not generally made housing more affordable because of the tightening mortgage market. This has also made it difficult to (part) sell mixed tenure schemes. The provision of new affordable housing generated by Section 106 agreements is slowing as housing starts decrease (and has virtually stopped in some places).

The RSN is keen to see developments which were planned as mixed tenure, but which have become fully rented as a result of the recession, being encouraged to return to mixed tenure as soon as circumstances allow, in order to retain a local housing ladder.

The National Housing Federation[33] has noted that figures in the Autumn 2009 Pre-Budget Report imply a spending cut to the housing budget of just under 18%. Using forecasts from the Institute for Fiscal Studies it warned that, if implemented for a decade (2010-20), only 444,000 of the target of 1 million affordable homes would be built (nationwide), leaving a shortfall of 556,000. Given their relatively high development costs, rural areas could bear the brunt of such cuts.

The provision of affordable homes to meet the needs of local people is central to the sustainability of rural communities. Elsewhere in this report its link with primary school provision is noted. Such links could be made with a range of public services; employment by health care providers, the police and local authorities, as well as retained volunteers for the fire and rescue service, all rely to some extent upon people being able to afford to live in rural areas.

Feedback from RSN members indicates variable rural trends in numbers who are homeless or in temporary accommodation around the country. Nevertheless, rural areas have (on average) been hit particularly by rising repossessions and unintentional homelessness.

While the recession is a temporary feature, the popularity of rural living and a rapidly ageing rural population seem likely to continue the challenges which face those who are concerned with meeting the need for affordable housing for local people in rural areas.

Two specific issues the RSN flagged in its manifesto were: the need for better financial support for Rural Housing Enablers, to help identify needs and bring forward development sites; and the need to make utility providers more accountable so they do not cause unnecessary delays to rural schemes.

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[33] National Housing Federation, 2010

Facilities for young people

Our survey of RSN members found that facilities for young people were another priority topic. Rural areas are net exporters of young adults, as many leave for higher education, employment, more affordable housing and other opportunities. In the Place Survey residents from rural local authority areas had average or slightly below average satisfaction levels with services which may be important to this age group (i.e. leisure and recreation facilities) and well below average satisfaction levels on public transport, which again may be important for this group. However, this dataset does not measure the views of young people themselves. A full rural analysis of the Tell Us Survey, overseen by Ofsted, would help to fill this gap in the evidence base.

Sixth form and FE colleges, training and employment

A publication by the Department for Children, Schools & Families[34] lists a number of challenges for providers who are delivering its package of reforms to the 14 to 19 age group in rural areas. These are: low population density; lack of transport infrastructure; long distances between homes, schools and colleges; lower proportion of larger employers; and lack of employers in some sectors. On one aspect of that delivery, the new diplomas, rural schools were falling behind in 2008 though, based on plans underway, were expected to catch up by 2009.

Proportion of schools delivering diplomas

	2008	2009 (expected)
Urban areas	28%	71%
Rural areas	17%	69%
Sparse rural areas	13%	74%

A set of (county by county) diploma delivery maps on the Department's website show in detail the spatial pattern of schools with a sixth form, post-16 colleges and training providers. They illustrate the extent to which provision is urban located and where there are particular geographic gaps.

Our survey of service providers asked how easy it was for young people living in their rural areas to access different facilities. The predominant view was that quite a few young people could not access a sixth form or FE college, though in some areas it was only a small minority who faced problems. The picture was worse for access to training providers or paid employment, with the predominant view (again) being that quite a few young people could not access them, but some areas reported a large percentage facing problems. In almost all cases the reason given for access problems was the paucity of public transport. It was noted that some colleges do lay on transport for students. The other issue raised was a limited jobs market and the fact that local employers were generally running very small businesses.

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[34] Department for Children, Schools & Families, 2008

In its rural manifesto the RSN refers to the unfunded cost of travel to and from further education as a deterrent for some young people, as well as the time commitment involved where there are long journeys to their education institution. It notes that this situation is aggravated when facilities are centralised.

Education, training and employment opportunities were seen as the most important factors for young people in rural communities, when they were deciding whether to stay in the local area or move away.

Sports and leisure facilities, and organised activities

Nationally, the third Tell Us Survey[35] found that better activities and better sports clubs and centres ranked high among the things which young people said would make their area a better place to live.

In rural areas our survey found that access to this range of facilities and activities was seen as difficult for many young people. Sports and leisure facilities and youth clubs were considered the most accessible, though even here most responses were that "quite a few cannot". Sports clubs and arts activities were the next most accessible activities. The least accessible were thought to be coaching opportunities, which a large proportion of young people could not easily reach.

The two underlying reasons given for this situation were:
* A lack of facilities within small (village) settlements; and
* The paucity of public transport to reach facilities elsewhere, especially in the evening. This restricts access to facilities in nearby urban centres.

Respondents said that low usage of sports facilities in rural areas makes them expensive to maintain. They said that organised activities were often not cost-effective because there were only small numbers of young people living in rural communities and, hence, attendance could be low. Local authorities often try to ensure provision in market towns, on access to services grounds, though this may be at a premium cost.

> *"There is a once a week youth club in the village. Otherwise it's whether parents are prepared to drive to [the town]."*
> Though the situation is sometimes better: *"The village has a youth centre. [It also] has well organised soccer teams and the city has the rest ... there is a bus service to [the city]."*

We also asked the community representatives in parish and town councils for their views. They broadly echoed the response from providers, with the most common view being that it was "quite hard" for young people in their community to reach leisure/sports facilities and organised activities (see chart below).

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[35] Ofsted, 2008 – though this survey spans ages 8 to 16, so includes some younger children and excludes young adults

Views of community representatives: ease with which young people in your community can access these facilities or activities? (percentages)
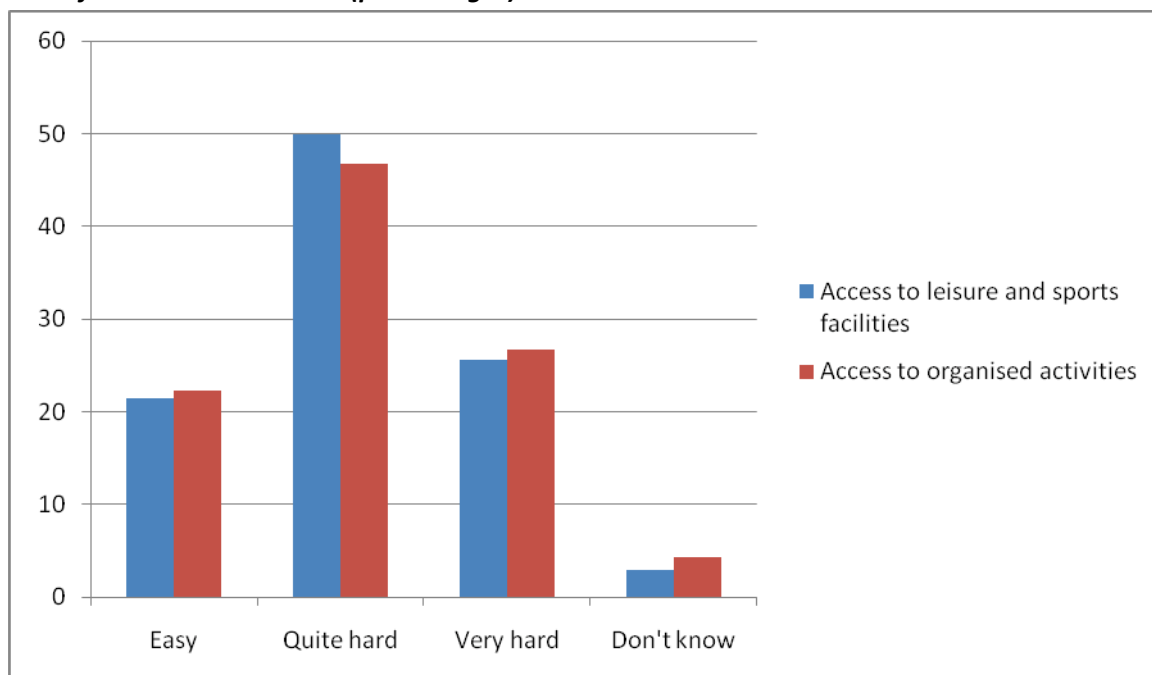
Focus group research[36] in six disadvantaged rural areas also flagged the lack of accessible facilities and activities for young people as a key concern for residents. A key aspiration for these communities was to improve infrastructure such as sports facilities. They also felt that, where initiatives for young people existed they tended to be short term and to rely heavily on volunteers.

It is notable that "young people's participation in positive activities" has been one of the most frequently selected priorities (improvement targets) within shire Local Area Agreements (2008-11). It features in 26 of the 46 more rural LAAs.

The Wiltshire Tomorrow's Voice survey[37] in Autumn 2007 was answered by more than 1,600 young people aged 11 to 18. It found that 22% of young people thought the best thing about the county was it being 'a rural area with lots of countryside'. However, by far the main thing young people wanted to see changed was having 'more things to do'. The other two main items on the wish list (for change) were 'crime, safety and anti-social behaviour' and 'public and other transport'. Asked about sports activities, young people were most keen to join in with football and swimming out of school hours. The number one issue they would like the local police to deal with is vandalism, including damage to bus shelters, graffiti, broken windows and broken bottles in parks.

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[36] OPM, 2009
[37] Wiltshire County Council, 2008

Advice and guidance services

Our survey asked whether there were any significant rural challenges in terms of young people's access to advice and guidance services about healthy lifestyle matters e.g. drugs and alcohol, sexual health, healthy living. The main issue cited was that of confidentiality in a small community and a feeling that young people may prefer to access services in a neighbouring town to preserve their anonymity. That said, it can be difficult, anyway, to run such services in small communities; small numbers of young people meant that they were unlikely to be viable.

> *"There is nothing within the village offering this sort of advice and the closeness of the community would make confidentiality an issue."*

A further question concerned access to careers advice and information. The key finding, here, was that it is easy whilst young people are at school or college (where it is laid on), but can become difficult once they have left. It was also noted that gaining information online is more difficult where a broadband internet connection is problematic. That said, there were examples cited of outreach provision at local facilities or using home visits, as well as making more use of phone calls and e-mails to keep in touch with young people.

Safety and being part of the community

One dimension to the government's Every Child Matters policy initiative is that young people should feel a part of safe and welcoming communities. As research like the focus groups has found, a lack of things to do and places to go for young people can be interpreted (rightly or wrongly) by adults in rural communities as anti-social behaviour.

In order, our survey felt that the following were important factors in contributing to safe and welcoming rural communities for all age groups:
- Safe places for young people to meet;
- Organised activities for young people;
- Inter-generational events or activities; and
- General community events.

This aligns with a finding from the national Tell Us Survey; the thing young people most often said would make their lives better was, "more places where I can go to spend time with my friends".

Policies and the changing context

The service providers responding to our survey held mixed views about the degree to which the policy outcomes set out in Every Child Matters were being met, in terms of access for rural young people to facilities, activities and opportunities. However, on balance responses erred towards the positive – more so for 'staying safe'; less so for 'economic well-being'.

As noted before, transport is a critical dimension. Public transport is seen (in our survey) as the main means by which young people access the more formal services and opportunities, including sixth forms and FE colleges, training providers, paid employment and advice services. On the other hand,

the main means for accessing sport, leisure and cultural facilities, and social activities, is by having a lift in a family member's or friend's car.

Looking ahead at demographic change, an important factor was likely to be the declining number of young people resident in rural areas and, at the other end of the scale, the increasing policy focus on older people issues. However, the general picture varies at local level and one larger rural town reported a growing youth population.

Summary

This topic covers a complex set of facilities, activities and opportunities. However, all of them are affected – to varying degrees – by the viability of local provision in rural areas and thin public transport networks. Access to training and employment opportunities is a key issue, in terms of young people staying in the area, and is seen as hard for many young people. Careers advice is generally good whilst they are still at school or college, but can be difficult to access afterwards. Other advice services on lifestyle issues, meanwhile, are generally seen as better provided outside of small communities, because of confidentiality considerations. Young people (nationally) say they want somewhere safe to meet friends; it is the thing that would most improve their lives. They also rank sports centres, clubs and activities highly in terms of things that would improve their local area, and our survey found them to be difficult to access for many young people rural.

As the trend is for (net) migration of young people away from rural areas and as the population is ageing, the viability of provision, at least in conventional ways, seems unlikely to improve. But clearly some rural communities and providers do manage to buck the trend.

Support services for older people

In our surveys both rural community representatives and local service providers said that support services for older people were a high priority. Services such as home support and day care centres help some of the most vulnerable people within rural communities – those who must rely on others. According to the 2008 Place Survey most residents in rural local authority areas do not think older people get the support services that they need. However, this view is held by even more residents in urban local authority areas. Further evidence of the importance attached to the issue is the fact that it is dealt with by three of the eight targets most often chosen[38] for shire Local Area Agreements (2008-11) – see page 17.

Demand

Around 550,000 people aged 65 and over in rural areas (or 30% of that population group) have some level of social care need[39].

Overall, older people living in rural areas are healthier than those living in urban areas. Nonetheless, in 2004/05 almost exactly a third of the rural population aged over 50 had a limiting long-term illness. This is around 5% below the urban figure, a gap which narrows to 2% if only those in poverty are measured.

Proportion of the rural population with restricted independence (2005)

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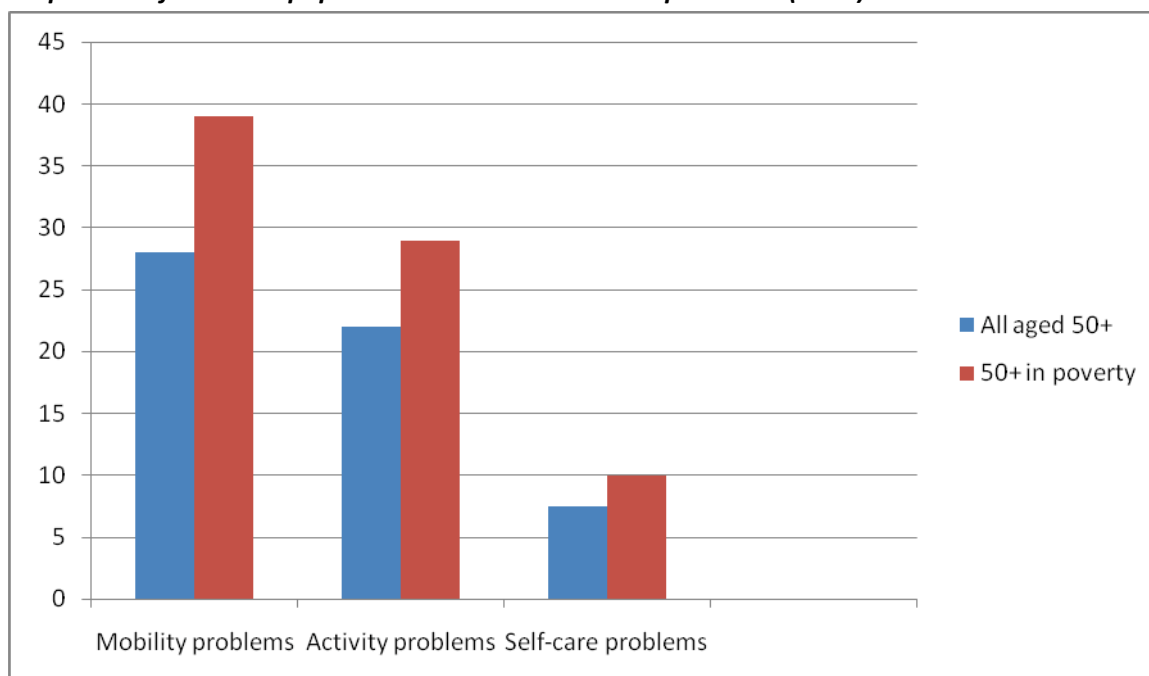
[38] The "three of the eight" statistic excludes the mandatory education targets.
[39] Cabinet Office, 2009 – many of the statistics quoted in this chapter are from this report.

The great majority of older people in rural areas (87%) benefit from high levels of support from partners, family and friends. However, even in 2001 well over half a million pensioners in rural areas lived alone, indicating a considerable need for support.

As reported earlier, a relatively high proportion of the rural population is elderly and the ageing of the population is projected to happen at a much faster rate in rural than in urban areas. The rural number for very elderly people (aged 85 or over) is expected to more than double over the next 20 years. Areas projected to see the highest rates of increase in their older population (aged 65+) include Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, North Yorkshire and Suffolk. Unsurprisingly, our survey of local authorities managing adult social services rated this trend as "very important" for them.

According to a Cabinet Office report, "social care needs among older people are projected to increase more rapidly in rural areas". The number needing social care in rural areas is expected to rise by 70% in the next 20 years, to reach 930,000 (requiring an additional £2.7 billion per year). This compares with a 50% growth in urban areas.

Home support

Respondents to our survey felt that supporting older people to live independently at home was more difficult in their rural than in urban areas. In part this was simply a matter of support services being thinner on the ground. However, they also cited difficulties in recruiting staff, with one result being fewer specialists.
> *Home support agencies can struggle to recruit staff in rural areas".*

Workforce shortages was noted as a rural issue, too, by the Cabinet Office report, which quoted examples of a shortage of younger people to join the workforce and provide support, and of a lack of intermediate care staff. Some areas are seeking to address these issues by broadening the skills base of professionals and creating more integrated or multi-disciplinary teams with generic skills.

A large proportion of older people in rural areas are owner occupiers and one respondent noted a steady increase in demand for handy-person schemes, home cleaning services, transport services and the like. This applied, too, to work to adapt homes so those with restricted mobility or disabilities can continue living there.

Providing support to those who are caring for elderly relatives was also generally seen, by our survey, as challenging in rural locations.

In Cheshire it has proved difficult to recruit domiciliary care staff in rural areas. Staff are typically from towns and could find themselves with 10 to 15 mile journeys to reach elderly people in outlying locations. The council buys in much of this service through contracts with independent care providers. Recognising there is a 'rural premium', its contracts offer providers an additional £1 for each visit made to a rural address. Despite this, the issue has persisted and the independent care providers are often reluctant to pick up work from rural areas. The result is that the council's in-house home care service has to plug the gap, which pushes up the unit cost of its own provision.

Self-directed support

It was equally seen as more difficult to offer self-directed support to older people in rural areas. Some of the reasons for this were the same as those given about home support – services were thinner on the ground and recruitment was problematic. It was also noted that older people can be more physically isolated and less likely to want to take-up the offer.

The RSN commented on this in its recent manifesto saying, "the current direction for adult care is for the use of direct payments to the end user to choose their providers in care. This may work well in urban areas where there is a choice of providers. This is not the case in sparsely populated rural areas where the 'choice agenda' is just a theory because, in practice, realistic choice does not exist." It suggested that additional funding to attract providers could be found from the reduced demand on health and home care budgets.

Day care facilities

Day care facilities were felt by survey respondents to be more difficult to provide in their rural areas and written responses indicate that the picture on the ground is very patchy. There is a limited supply of services and comments note that provision is often focussed on urban areas, with small rural settlements not being able to justify centres. A related comment was that specialist provision, such as that required for those with dementia, is lacking in rural areas. Quite a few responses note the existence of local luncheon clubs and the like, which partially fill gaps left by the public sector.

> "Access to day care centres is limited ... there is one luncheon club in town and one a couple of miles away. Visits to these can be arranged subject to waiting lists."
> "The nearest day care centre is about eight miles away."
> "Access to a day care centre relies solely upon voluntary drivers."

Many of the comments were about the lack of transport provision which would enable older people to get to and from day care centres. Where centres have their own transport this is not such an issue, but elsewhere public services may not run at the right times or at all.

Another set of comments noted that provision is (or was) there, but it struggles to achieve adequate funding, so access may be limited to those with the most severe needs.

As the chart below illustrates, the view of rural community representatives is that generally it is hard for older people to access a day care centre (where they wish to do so).

Views of parish and town councils: how easy is it for people in your community to access support from these services? (percentages)

45
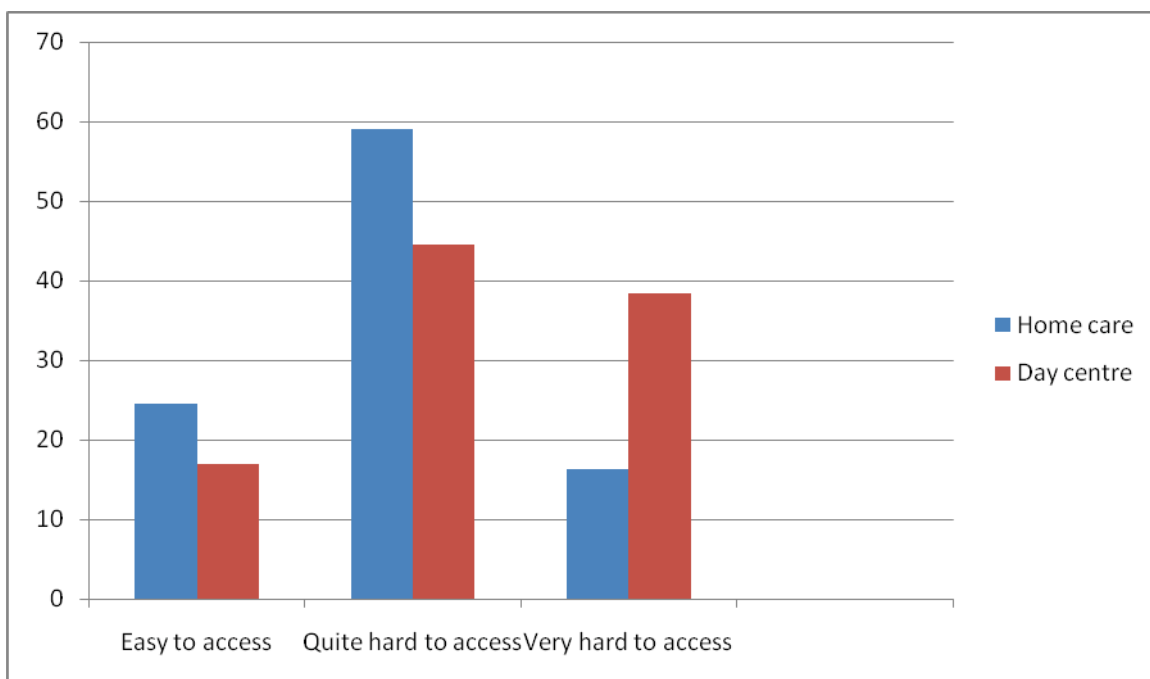
Note: as a significant number of respondents answered 'don't know' to these questions, they have been removed and the percentages refer only to those who did express an opinion.

Special housing needs

Specialist housing, in the form of sheltered or supported housing, is required for those who are struggling to live alone or with help from family and friends. Our survey indicated that in the local authority areas responding there was a shortfall and supply was not meeting demand. Inward migration of older people to rural areas was felt to be outpacing supply. One detailed response said that very little new sheltered housing was being built, while some existing schemes were being decommissioned rather than refurbished. This was due to a lack of available grant funding and poor public perceptions of sheltered housing. The Supporting People policy initiative had also altered the model of provision, with less emphasis on sheltered housing.

Nonetheless, in our survey responses local authority housing strategies were explicitly addressing the needs of the elderly living in rural areas for sheltered and supported housing.

Costs and budgets

If responses to our survey are typical of more rural upper tier authorities, budgets for support services for the elderly have not altered greatly over the last five years – they had either "increased a bit" or "decreased a bit". Those who had seen an increase pointed towards a growing number of older people in their area and rising demand for services as the reason. A decrease was explained by the need to make efficiency savings.

Looking to next financial year (2010/11), there was no consensus, but responses erred towards an expectation of cuts. This may be no surprise, given messages about the state of public finances, but it nonetheless sits uneasily with the projections for support needs and the likely cost of meeting them (see above).

The higher (unit) cost of providing domiciliary care in sparse or rural areas was also flagged within the comments received. In a similar vein, the Cabinet Office report noted that the policy drive to deliver more services closer to people's homes could add to rural delivery costs.

Summary

The rural elderly are somewhat healthier than their urban counterparts and most benefit from local support networks. However, thirty per cent of the over 65 age group living in rural areas currently has some social care need. The actual number in need is projected to grow rapidly (by 70%) over the next twenty years, as the rural population ages. This is considerably faster than the rate of growth in urban areas.

Home care, self-directed support, carers support and (especially) day care centres are felt to be more difficult to provide in rural areas. Factors which underlie this include urban-centred provision, the paucity of transport and difficulties in recruiting staff. Whilst local authority budgets had not altered greatly in recent years – growing with demand in some places – there is a fear they will now experience cuts.

It is to be hoped that the Joint Strategic Needs Assessments, which local and health authorities are now expected to undertake, will identify rural needs better and, of course, will help to ensure that delivery addresses those needs.

Conclusions and recommendations

Rural England's population is subject to considerable forces of change. The overall size of its population is growing due, in particular, to (net) in-migration from those aged 35 and over. Residents in rural communities are, on average, older than their urban counterparts and projections for the future ageing of the population are very marked in rural areas. These trends can be expected to have significant impacts on the need for and use of public services.

The Government's local performance framework and National Indicator set puts emphasis on measuring and monitoring the views of local residents. In the 2008 Place Survey residents of rural local authorities held relatively positive views about many local public services and their treatment by providers, but they were particularly dissatisfied with public transport and fairly dissatisfied with leisure and cultural services.

Our survey of RSN members – service providers and community representatives – reinforced this view, putting public transport as a clear rural priority. Support services for older people were seen as another core issue. Community representatives also put health care and policing near the top of their list, whilst service providers put affordable housing, primary schools and facilities for young people near the top of theirs.

In many rural areas, at least, public transport would appear to have improved during the last few years, with more frequent and convenient services, and better information available about those services. For some the cost of fares has dropped, most obviously the elderly who benefitted from the introduction of statutory concessionary (free) fares. However, it is recognised that these services still fall short of meeting the needs of many rural people, especially the most vulnerable groups. There is now an expectation that transport services will come under considerable pressure as public sector budgets are squeezed.

Primary schools remain the most widely distributed public service among the rural population. Their quality is also above average. Many are now collaborating in formal and informal ways, in order to achieve efficiencies and provide a wider range of services (both during the school day and at each end of the school day). But adding more specialist services – as they are expected to do – can be hard for small rural schools, with their limited resources and scope to lay on transport outside basic school hours. With falling school rolls, many RSN members have seen primary school closures in their local area and the threat of future closures is seen as very real.

The lack of affordable housing has been a long-standing concern for rural communities and policy makers. House prices are high in rural areas and a low share of the housing stock is in the social rented sector. The recession might have been expected to bring some benefit, as house prices fell or stalled, but it appears not to have done so, partly because many (potential) buyers cannot access mortgages and partly because the supply of affordable homes that are delivered within new market developments (through section 106 agreements) has slowed.

Facilities, activities and opportunities for young people can be thin on the ground in rural areas. Among this age group, access to things such as training and employment often relies upon public transport being available. Equally important to young people's quality of life are access to sports clubs and activities, and simply having somewhere safe to meet with friends. All these can be difficult to provide locally (being unviable) or to make accessible (requiring transport). Policy makers face the challenge of providing accessible services for this age group as they become a smaller part of the overall rural population.

The rural elderly are relatively healthy and have relatively good support networks, yet 30% of the 65+ age group still have some social care need. The number with this need is projected to rise rapidly in rural areas as the population ages – a 70% increase over the next twenty years. Managing this increase will not be easy in rural areas, where the provision of support services, such as home care, self-directed support and day care centres, is seen as complex given factors such as a poor transport networks and the difficulty in recruiting staff. Moreover, it may be that public sector budgets will soon be squeezed hard as demand for services is rising.

A number of themes can be drawn out from these findings, including:

Demand and need – both overall demand for local services and the needs of specific groups are altering, not least as a result of significant demographic change impacting on rural areas. Falling school rolls in many areas have resulted in complex questions about the viability of small primary schools. In-migration, generally of more affluent people, has inflated house prices making less of it affordable. The need for adult social care support is set to grow rapidly. While population trends do shift – birth rates have started rising again – the overall trends for rural areas show little sign of abating. Indeed, the ageing of the population is projected to become more marked. It is imperative that policy makers plan for this change.

Accessibility – the policy focus on services has tended to be on issues such as its quality and the range of provision. Of course, these issues matter a lot to rural as well as urban communities. Nonetheless, this report indicates that simply being able to access or reach services remains a basic concern for many rural people, especially the most vulnerable – can they get to an after-school club, a day centre or a sports centre? Meeting policy outcomes for rural people depends equally on them being able to access services. It is unsurprising that public transport comes out as the highest concern for rural communities, their representatives and local service providers.

Fairness – no-one expects people living in sparsely populated areas to be as proximate to public services as those living in towns and cities. However, basic questions of equity arise where rural people are unable to access key services, such as support for the elderly to remain living in their own home. There is a risk that as budgets are reduced, to tackle the public sector deficit, many of the same services – where their provision is discretionary – will be among those most affected. Full account needs to be taken of accessibility, especially for the most vulnerable, when hard decisions about budgets come to be taken.

Costs – there is a significant body of research[40] about the cost of service provision to scattered and rural communities, much of it showing additional time and travel costs where services are taken to people's homes, and fewer economies of scale where they are provided through small outlets. It is a point that has come out, too, within this report. Small sites for affordable housing are less financially attractive. It is harder to add new services (e.g. childcare, special needs) to small primary schools, where unit costs are high. Demand-responsive transport can play a key part in rural public transport networks, but is not a cheap option. Resource allocation formula for public services should include an element for sparsity of a size which matches the evidence about these costs.

Expectations – it is often noted that the public have growing expectations of public services. Many policy reforms have been designed to meet those expectations. Schools are looked to, to provide a wider range of services. Older people should self-direct the care they require. This can be particularly difficult for smaller service providers to achieve or where demand for services is geographically scattered. There is an inherent tension between meeting widening expectations and keeping provision local. Some will say that basic services can be offered in small rural communities, but more specialist or newer services should follow a more centralist model. It is not always that simple. For example, rural primary schools not offering childcare or pre-school may find that pupils go elsewhere and stay elsewhere when they start full school.

Sustainability – for local communities the provision of services is about more than buildings, vehicles and staff. Having basic services and the activity that goes with them within the community is about the vitality of the place. Ensuring access to public services is, therefore, an integral and important part of the argument about the sustainability of rural communities. It means that different age groups and households on different incomes can continue to live there comfortably. Seemingly strategic or technical policy decisions are actually about the fabric of rural places. This report was never intended to be about policy solutions, but clearly the challenge for policy makers at all levels and for rural communities themselves is how to adapt in ways which will retain and enhance their sustainability.

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[40] For example, MSA Ferndale, 2004

A rural analysis of the 2008 Place Survey

In the tables and text below figures for residents' satisfaction within individual local authority areas (districts and unitaries) are compared with national figures (for the whole of England).

Figures over 50% mean that satisfaction in most rural authorities is above the national average, while figures below 50% mean that satisfaction in most rural areas is below the national average.

R80 local authorities have more than 80% of their population living in rural settlements, R50 areas have between 50% and 80% living in rural areas, and SR areas have more than 37,000 people (at least 26% of their population) living in rural areas.

Satisfaction with refuse and recycling services – rural areas scoring better than England average									
LA group	No. LAs in the group	Litter collection on public land		Household refuse collection		Doorstep recycling		Municipal tip and recycling centre	
		No.	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
R80	54	48	89	36	67	31	57	43	80
R50	48	37	77	27	56	26	54	32	67
SR	53	36	68	20	38	25	47	31	58
All rural	155	121	78	83	54	82	53	106	68

Litter and refuse: rural satisfaction ratings are relatively very high. In most rural areas the proportion of residents who are very or fairly satisfied with local services to control litter and refuse in public places is above the national (England) average. This is especially true in R80 areas.

Refuse collection: rural satisfaction ratings are relatively quite high. In most R80 and R50 areas the proportion of residents who are very or fairly satisfied with their household refuse collection is above the national average. However, the opposite is true in most SR areas.

Doorstep recycling: rural satisfaction ratings are close to the norm. In a small majority of R80 and R50 areas the proportion of residents who are very or fairly satisfied with their doorstep recycling services is above the national average. However, this is not the case for SR areas.

Municipal tips/recycling centres: rural satisfaction ratings are relatively very high. In most rural areas the proportion of residents who are very or fairly satisfied with their municipal tip and recycling centre is above the national average. This is especially true in R80 areas.

Satisfaction with local transport – rural areas scoring better than England average					
LA group	No. LAs in the group	Local transport information		Local bus services	
		No.	%	No	%
R80	54	7	13	3	6
R50	48	8	17	4	8
SR	53	9	17	8	15
All rural	155	24	15	15	10

Local transport information: rural satisfaction ratings are relatively very low. In almost all rural areas the proportion of residents who are very or fairly satisfied with local transport information is below the national average. This is especially true for R80 areas.

Local bus services: rural satisfaction ratings are relatively extremely low. In all but 15 (10%) of rural areas the proportion of residents who are satisfied with local bus services is below the national average – and the national satisfaction rate is itself low (at 48%). This is especially true for R80 and R50 areas.

Satisfaction with leisure and cultural facilities – rural areas scoring better than England average												
LA group	No. LAs in the group	Sport and leisure		Libraries		Museums and galleries		Theatres and concert halls		Parks and open spaces	
		No.	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
R80	54	19	35	24	44	15	28	11	20	24	44
R50	48	25	52	28	58	16	33	15	31	24	50
SR	53	25	47	31	58	22	42	23	43	31	58
All rural	155	69	45	83	54	53	34	49	32	79	51

Sport and leisure facilities: rural satisfaction ratings are relatively a little low. In SR and R50 areas the proportion of residents who are satisfied with local sports and leisure facilities is close to the national average. In most R80 areas satisfaction is below the national average.

Libraries: rural satisfaction ratings are close to the norm. In a small majority of SR and R50 areas the proportion of residents who are satisfied with their local library service is above the national average. In a small majority of R80 areas that proportion is below the national average.

Museums and galleries: rural satisfaction ratings are relatively low. In most rural areas the proportion of residents who are very or fairly satisfied with local museums and galleries is below the national average. This is especially true for R80 areas.

Theatres and concert halls: rural satisfaction ratings are relatively low. In most rural areas the proportion of residents who are very or fairly satisfied with local theatres and concert halls is below the national average. This is especially true for R80 areas.

Parks and public open spaces: rural satisfaction ratings are close to the norm. In a small majority of SR areas the proportion of residents who are satisfied with local parks and open spaces is above the national average. R50 areas are at the national average and in a small majority of R80 areas that proportion is below the national average.

Other service satisfaction ratings – rural areas scoring better than England average									
LA group	No. LAs in the group	How council runs things (overall)[41]		Treatment by service providers		Support for older people		Dealing with crime and ASB	
		No.	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
R80	54	28	52	51	94	39	72	38	70
R50	48 (45)	26	58	44	92	33	69	27	56
SR	53 (51)	22	43	39	74	28	53	24	45
All rural	155 (150)	76	51	134	86	100	65	89	57

 Overall satisfaction with how the council runs things: rural satisfaction ratings are close to the norm. In most R50 areas the proportion of residents who are satisfied overall with the way their council runs things is above the national average. R80 areas are roughly at the national average and in a small majority of SR areas that proportion is below the national average.

Treatment by local service providers: rural satisfaction ratings are relatively very high. In a large majority of rural area the proportion of residents who feel they have been treated with respect and consideration by local public services is above the national average. This is especially true for R80 and R50 areas.

Older people's support services: rural satisfaction ratings are relatively high. In most R80 and R50 areas the proportion of residents who think older people get the help and support they need to live at home as long as they want to is above the national average. SR areas are close to the national average.

Dealing with crime and ASB: rural satisfaction ratings are relatively fairly high. In most R80 areas the proportion of residents who consider the police and other public services are dealing successfully with crime and anti-social behaviour is above the national average. R50 and SR areas are both close to the national average.

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[41] A few R50 and SR councils were not measured on this statistic e.g. some new unitaries, so the number of councils is in this instance is the figure given in brackets.

Results of the Rural Services Network members' survey

The tables below show services listed in the order in which they appeared in the service priorities question. This order was chosen to try and avoid bias in the responses.

The question asked of RSN members was: "... could you let us know what importance you attach to the following services?"
Extremely important scored 4, very important scored 3, less important scored 2 and not at all important scored 1. The figures below are the average of the scores in the survey responses , rounded to one decimal point for ease of reading. More precise figures were used to create rankings (top ten) in the views chapter of this report.

Service area	Average score (from 1 = unimportant, up to 4 = very important)	
	Sparse and RSP	Community sector
Jobcentre Plus	2.6	2.6
Primary schools	3.2	3.2
Secondary schools	2.8	2.9
GP surgeries	3.2	3.4
NHS dentists	2.9	3.0
Hospitals	3.1	3.3
Post offices	3.2	3.2
Social housing	3.0	2.9
Homelessness/temporary accommodation	2.5	2.3
Housing fuel poverty	3.0	2.8
Refuse and litter collection	2.9	3.0
Recycling services	2.8	2.8
Public transport	3.5	3.5
Leisure and cultural services	2.5	2.6
Facilities for children and young people	3.2	3.2
Support for older people	3.4	3.4
Other social care services	2.8	2.7
Policing	3.0	3.4
Affordable housing	3.4	3.1
Broadband	3.0	2.8

National Indicators (improvement targets) selected by the most rural 2008-11 Local Area Agreements

This list shows how many of the 46 most rural LAA areas selected these indicators as a local priority.

NB. Many educational attainment indicators are mandatory i.e.	46
Affordable homes delivered	37
Participation in sport and recreation	33
Carers receiving a needs assessment	31
Access to services by public transport or walking	27
Young people's participation in positive activities	26
Social care clients getting self-directed support	25
Perception that local crime is dealt with	17
Adults helped by social services to live independently	17
Older people helped by social services to live independently	16
Municipal waste that is land-filled	16
Street and environment cleanliness	16
Waste re-used, recycled or composted	15
Tackling fuel poverty	15
Substance misuse by young people	13
Perceptions of anti-social behaviour in the area	12
Services for disabled children	10
Households living in temporary accommodation	10
Non-principal roads needing maintenance	9
Children's mode of travel to school	8
Timeliness of placements of looked after children	7
Principal roads needing maintenance	6
Older people receiving support to live independently	6
Use of libraries	5
Number of local bus passenger journeys	5
Satisfaction the police deal with anti-social behaviour	4
17 year olds participating in education or training	4
Timeliness of social care assessments	4
Timeliness of children's initial social care assessments	4
Bus services running on time	3
Childcare provision for low income families	3
Schools subject to special measures	2
Council homes below the decency standard	2
Access to employment by public transport	2
Timeliness of social care packages	2
Timeliness of child protection plans	2

Visits to museums and galleries	1
Victim support services offered	1
Timeliness of child social care referrals	1
Council house tenants satisfaction with landlord	0
Per cent of schools with an extended service	0
Delivery of children's centres	0
Children's satisfaction with park and play areas	0
Early access to maternity services	0
Experience of social care users	0
Perception of drug using	0
Timeliness of child protection reviews	0
Reduction in low achieving schools	0
Fair treatment by local services	0

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