



# Rural Services Network Campaigning and rural policy

**Kerry Booth, Chief Executive  
Rural Services Network**

**24 June 2024**



The background of the slide features several stacks of gold coins. The stacks are arranged in a row, with the tallest stack on the left and the shortest on the right. The coins are highly reflective, showing bright highlights and deep shadows. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light color.

**The Rural Services Network is fighting for a fair deal for rural communities, in all public sector funding**



**We want a fairer  
distribution of  
national resources  
to rural areas and  
for more nuanced  
national policies  
that reflect rural  
circumstances.**

**RURAL SERVICES NETWORK**

**WINNING THE RURAL VOTE**  
 A ROADMAP TO RURAL SUCCESS

**40% of constituencies are rural**  
**Their vote can swing the election**

**RURAL PLANNING**

**RURAL ECONOMIES**

**RURAL TRANSPORT**

**RURAL CONNECTIVITY**

**RURAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

**FAIR FUNDING**

**RURAL NET ZERO**

**RURAL HEALTH & CARE**

The infographic features a central map of the United Kingdom with 40% of its constituencies highlighted in green. Surrounding the map are several circular icons, each containing a photograph and a label for a rural issue: 'RURAL PLANNING' (elderly woman), 'RURAL ECONOMIES' (bus on road), 'RURAL TRANSPORT' (hand holding smartphone), 'RURAL CONNECTIVITY' (school children), 'RURAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING' (stone building), 'FAIR FUNDING' (countryside), 'RURAL NET ZERO' (wind turbines), and 'RURAL HEALTH & CARE' (man in apron). The Rural Services Network logo is at the top center.

RURAL FAIR  
FUNDING



RURAL  
CONNECTIVITY



RURAL  
AFFORDABLE  
HOUSING



RURAL  
ECONOMIES



# WINNING THE RURAL OTE

A ROADMAP TO  
RURAL SUCCESS

RURAL  
PLANNING



RURAL NET  
ZERO



RURAL  
ACCESS TO  
HEALTH AND  
CARE



RURAL  
TRANSPORT





36%

**Urban areas will receive 36%  
more in Government Funded  
Spending Power per head than  
Rural in 2024-2025**

Urban local authorities will receive some 36% (£141.71) MORE in Government Funded Spending Power per head compared to rural authorities in 2024 /2025



**20%**

**Rural Residents will pay on average 20% more per head in Council Tax**

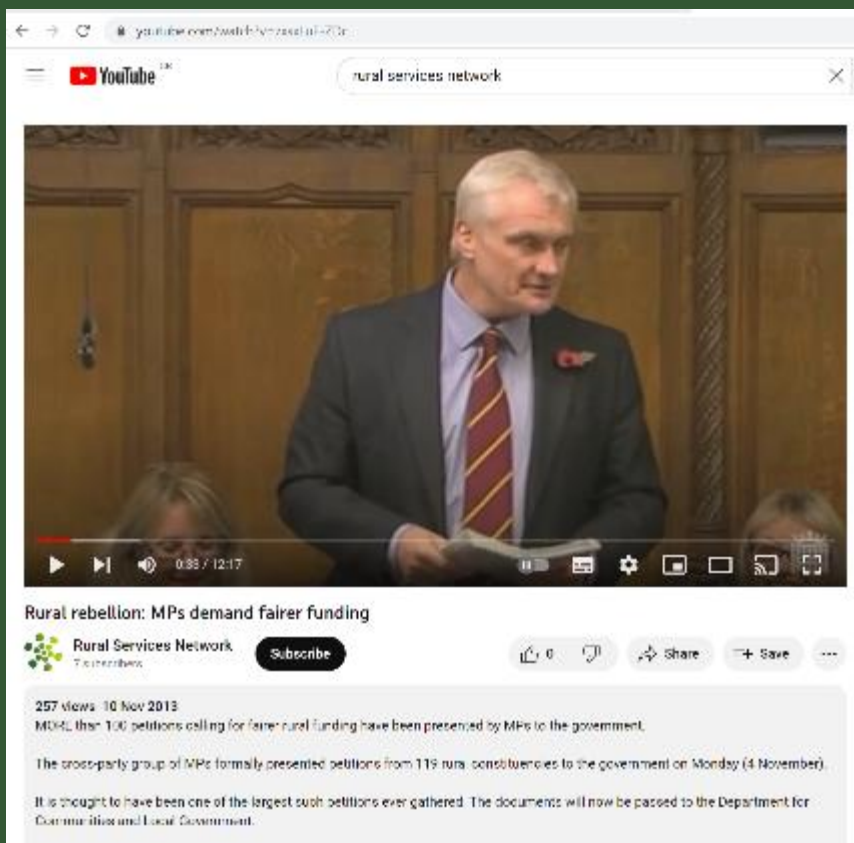
Rural residents will pay, on average, 20% (£112.33) MORE per head in Council Tax than their urban counterparts due to receiving less government grant in 2024/2025



Urban authorities in 2023/2024 budgeted to spend almost **double** that of rural authorities on discretionary services







The Rural Services Network has been campaigning for fair funding for local authorities for a number of years, supporting MPs with information and statistics to understand the approach of Government to rural areas.

# Fair Funding Campaign Timeline

July 2012 –

Government issues technical consultation which includes exemplifications (based on the 2012/13 formulae) showing the impact of proposed changes to sparsity weighting in the formulae. The exemplifications show a significant redistribution in favour of rural areas

Dec 2012 –

The technical changes to sparsity were supported by the majority of respondents to the July 2012 consultation and were consequently implemented in the provisional settlement for 2013/14. However, the damping mechanism (and other changes) wiped out the majority of the gains to rural authorities leaving them with only about a quarter of the additional funding arising from the technical changes. The formula was the frozen from further change.



# Fair Funding Campaign Timeline

Summer 2014 –

DCLG/Defra undertook a joint study on the additional cost of rural services. This study looked at 30 authorities including rural and urban across a number of local government services.

Dec 2014 –

As part of the provisional settlement, the Government publishes the results of the study into the additional cost of rural services. They concluded:

“Several drivers for additional rural costs were identified in the research including the small size of rural authorities, scattered and remote populations, lack of private sector providers and poor broadband and mobile coverage in rural areas.”



£ Millions

Chart to show the progression of rural services delivery Grant Allocations



Almost £800 Million for the most sparsely populated rural councils in last 10 years

# Rural Affordable Housing



Wages earned in rural areas are lower than in urban areas, and the cost of living in rural areas is higher.

House prices are less affordable in Predominantly Rural areas than in Predominantly Urban areas (excluding London).

Houses in rural areas are less affordable to purchase for those in the bottom 25% of earners compared to urban.

Annual average sale price of houses (Q1 of 2023):

Rural	£424,000
Urban (excl London)	£299,900

Over  
£100,000  
more  
expensive!

# Holiday homes are 'hollowing out' coastal areas, says MP

Labour MP Luke Pollard says Covid-19 has 'turbo-charged' housing crisis in rural and coastal towns



Whitby residents have voted overwhelmingly for curbs on second homes. Photograph: Edwin Rensberg/Getty Images

Coastal communities are being "hollowed out irretrievably" by a surge in holiday homes, an MP has warned, as new figures showed more than 17,000 properties in England have been "flipped" into short-term lets since Covid-19.

# New research: a huge rise in holiday lets is strangling rural communities



Welsh / Unsplash

News story

## Right to buy extension to make home ownership possible for millions more people

The Prime Minister has announced 2.5 million tenants renting their homes from housing associations will be given the right to buy them outright.

From: [Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street](#), [The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP](#), [The Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP](#), and [The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP](#)  
Published 9 June 2022



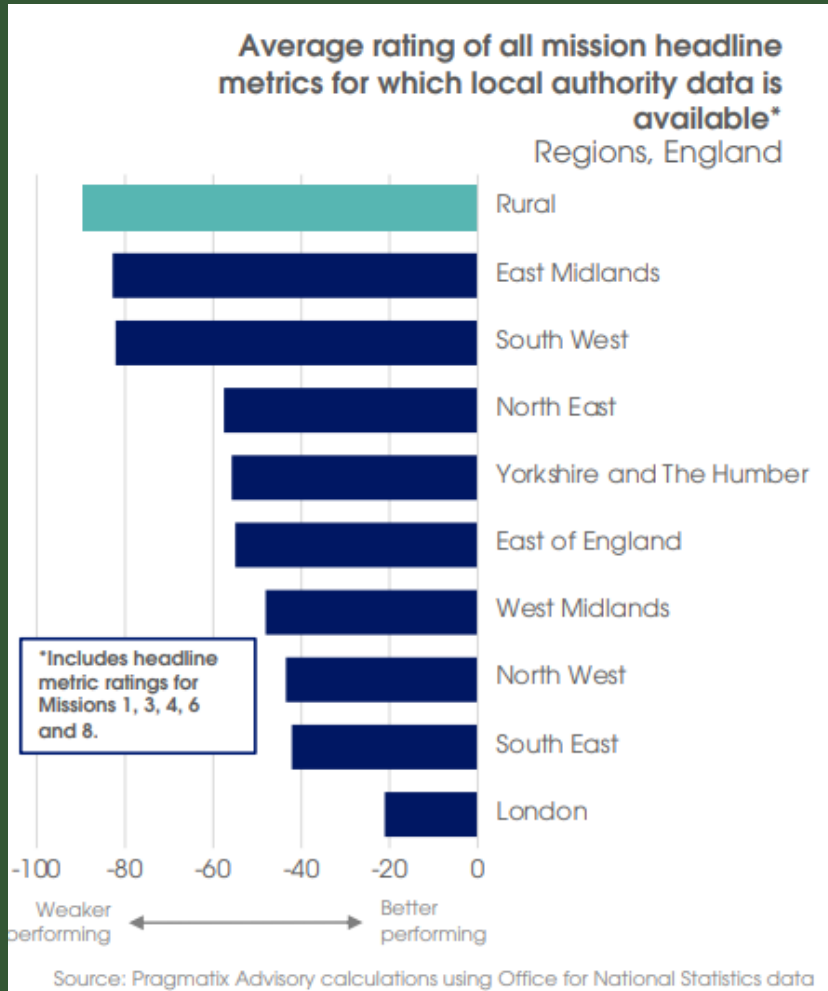
Campaigning for a fair deal for rural communities

# Rural Affordable Housing – our asks

We want to see Government:

- **Deliver a rural housing** strategy stating how new housing will be delivered to meet rural communities needs. Introduce and fund an ambitious annual target for genuinely affordable quality rural homes and deliver this through a dedicated rural affordable housing funding programme to reflect local needs and policies.
- **Protect** rural tenants by ensuring that local authorities can register and manage the short and long term rental market to meet local need, thus avoiding the oversupply of holiday lets.
- **Ensure** a national homelessness strategy includes investing in solutions in rural areas.
- **Create** a programme of at least 5 years of support for a national network of Rural Housing Enablers covering each rural housing authority.
- **Rural proof** all planning policy changes which may be introduced – to ensure that they help and support the provision of affordable housing in rural areas
- **Exclude** rural from the right to buy extensions.

# Does rural need levelling up?



Were England's rural communities a distinct region, their need for Levelling Up would be **greater** than that of any other part of the country





**There are over  
half a million  
rural  
businesses in  
England...  
...that is 23% of  
all registered  
businesses**



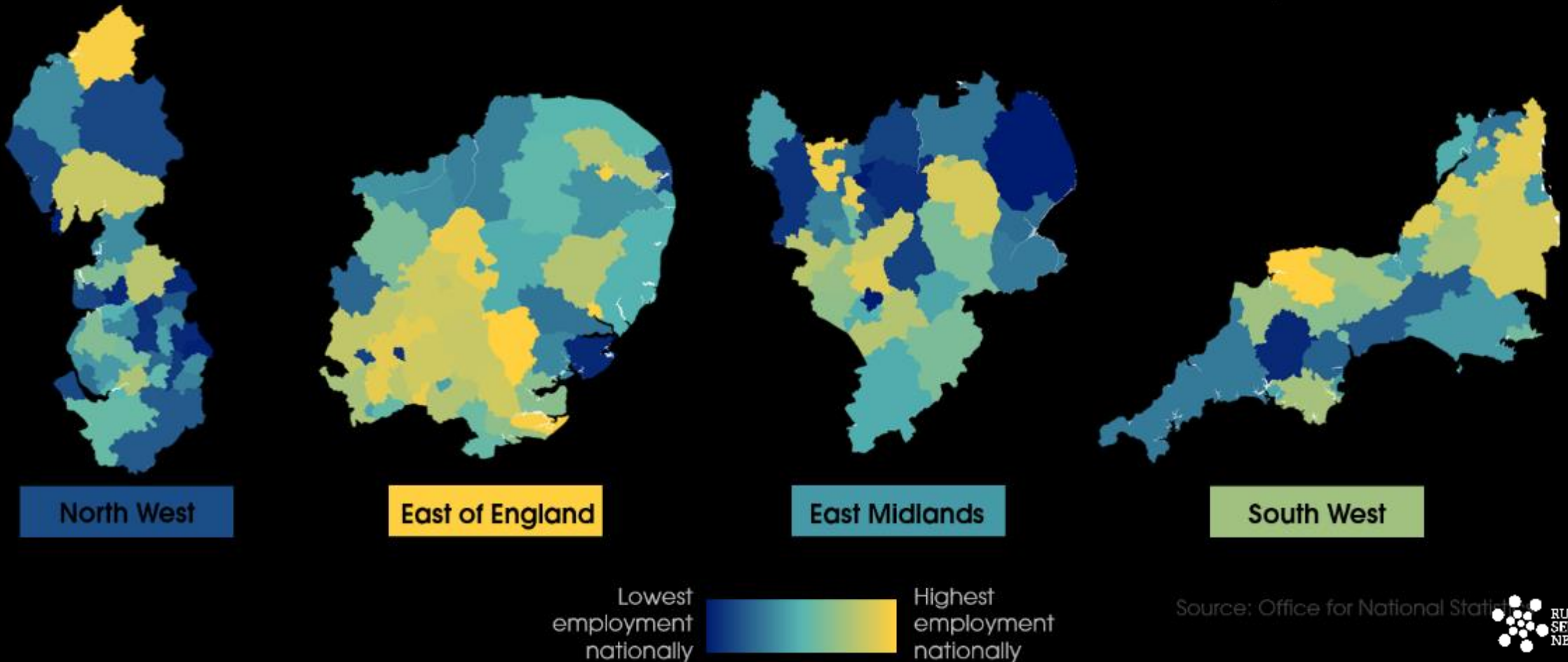
Find out more [here](#)

**Productivity  
and GVA in  
rural areas is  
lower than  
urban**

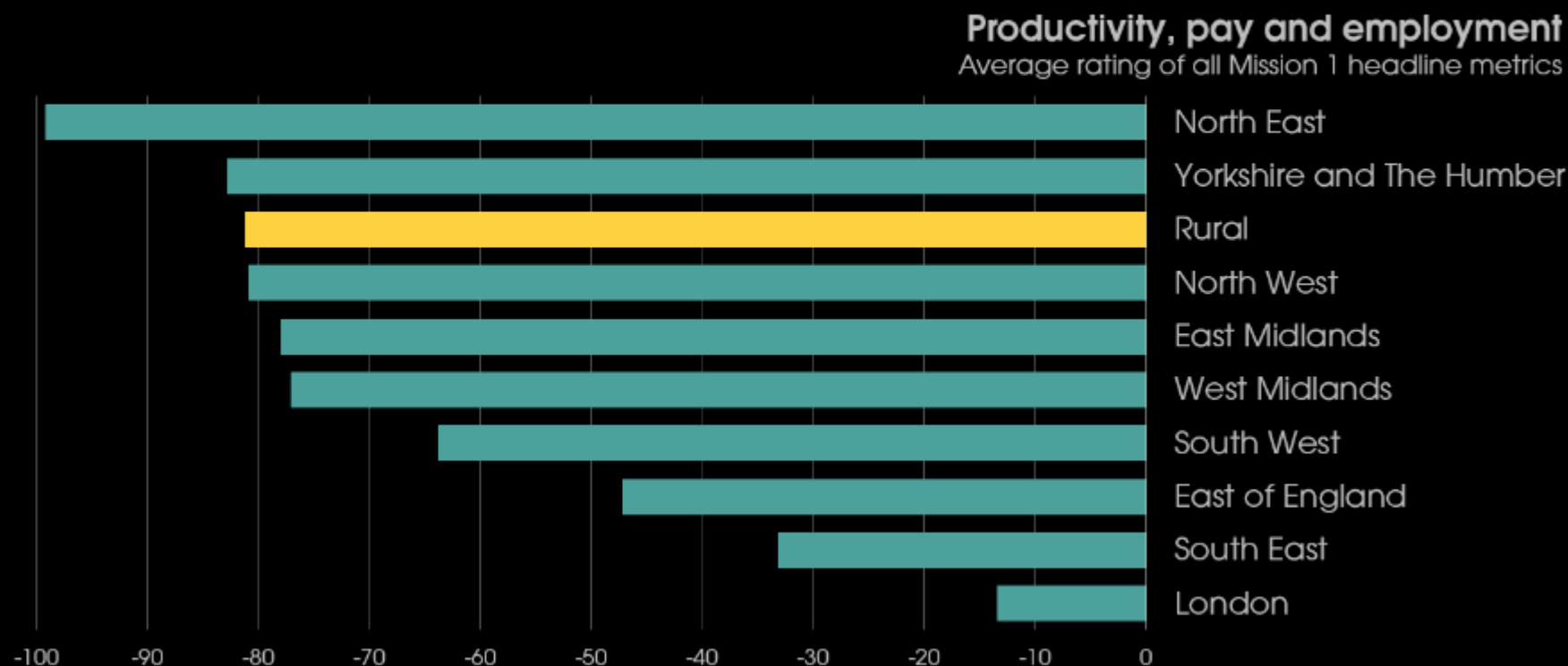
**Rural voters  
earn £1,600  
less a year**

# Differences within are greater than between regions

Employment rate for 16- to 64-year-olds  
2021, per cent, national scale



# But there's also a serious economic gap to close



Source: Pragmatix Advisory calculations using Office for National Statistics data

# Challenges for the rural economy

Challenges for the Workforce	Challenges for the employers / businesses
Lack of affordable housing options	Lack of broadband / mobile signal for businesses to increase productivity/markets
Lack of Public Transport to access skills/training/education/employment	Suitably qualified workforce
Lack of Broadband / mobile connectivity to access skills/training/education	Lack of Infrastructure
Seasonal nature of tourist industry	Less ability to work within economies of scale

# Rural Economies– our asks

We want to see Government:

- **Deliver** a support programme for SMEs and community entrepreneurs in rural areas especially startups and those seeking to grow.
- **Protect** rural communities by ensuring that the metrics used to devise strategies or programmes for growth (including skills) are not based on one size fits or thinking but reflect the disadvantage in rural economies within regions.
- **Ensure** policy and strategies rural proofed in a way that is meaningful and demonstrable and also includes outcome monitoring.
- **Address** the recommendations of the APPG for rural business and the rural powerhouse 2022 report.
- **Develop** diversification programmes to tackle the structural weaknesses of some rural economies which are over reliant on certain sectors such as the visitor economy. Provide opportunities for the growth of the green economy and supporting infrastructure namely the National Grid and digital and mobile connectivity.
- **Create** a system where decision making and resource is a devolved to local areas as far as possible, creating the flexibility for tailored solutions to prioritise and meet local needs and opportunities

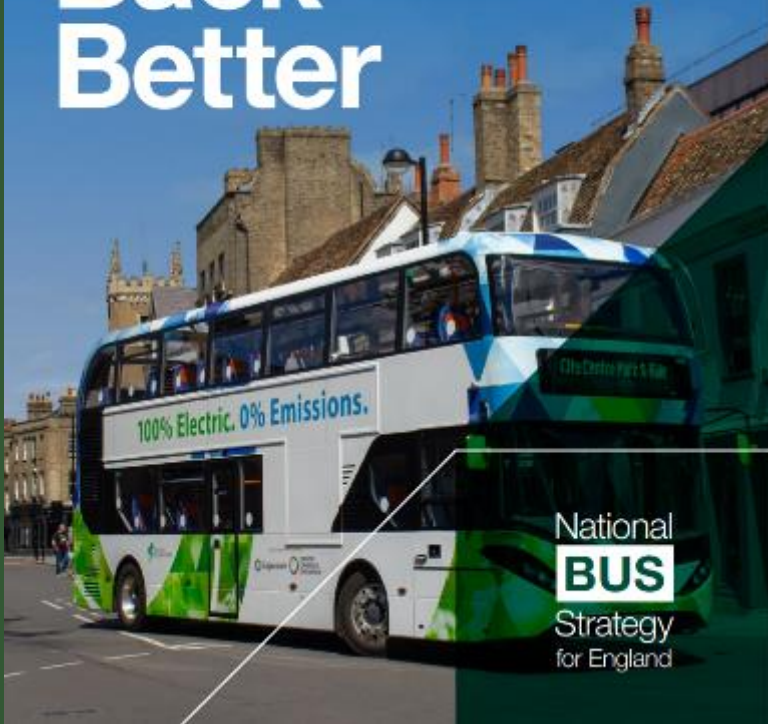
# **PUBLIC TRANSPORT**

## Discretionary Spend Comparison

**In 2023/24** planned expenditure on **PUBLIC TRANSPORT** per resident is **OVER 3.5 X MORE IN** predominantly **URBAN AREAS**



# Bus Back Better



National  
**BUS**  
Strategy  
for England

## T: 04.2022 RURAL ANGER ON BUS FUNDING

ACCESS TO NEWSIPS NEWS GLOBAL TRANSPORT NEWS FINANCING REGULATION LEGAL & COMPLIANCE POLICY & REGULATIONS ON  
RURAL BLOG



On the 5th April the Government announced its long-awaited funding allocations for Bus Service Improvement Plans.

The RSN's Chief Executive, Graham Biggs, comments here:

*"Well now we have it – or rather for most rural areas now you don't!"*

The headline to the Government's announcement is misleading in referring to a £7 billion package to level up transport outside London. Only £1.08Bn has been allocated to Bus Service Improvement Plans. £5.7bn is in respect of 'City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement' announced by the Chancellor in the Autumn Statement.

I cannot recall the last time that so many rural councils voiced their anger at specific service funding allocations. Words like "complete waste of time, energy and resources" and "rural clearly doesn't exist in the mind of Government" were commonplace. The suggestion that those not receiving funding did not show sufficient ambition rubbed salt into an open wound. Ambition must surely reflect where the service is now and be realistic in what can be achieved in given timescales – otherwise it is ambition doomed to fail.



HM Government

## Unleashing rural opportunity



## Future of Rural Transport Rural Strategy...on it's way?

# Rural Transport- our asks

We want to see Government:

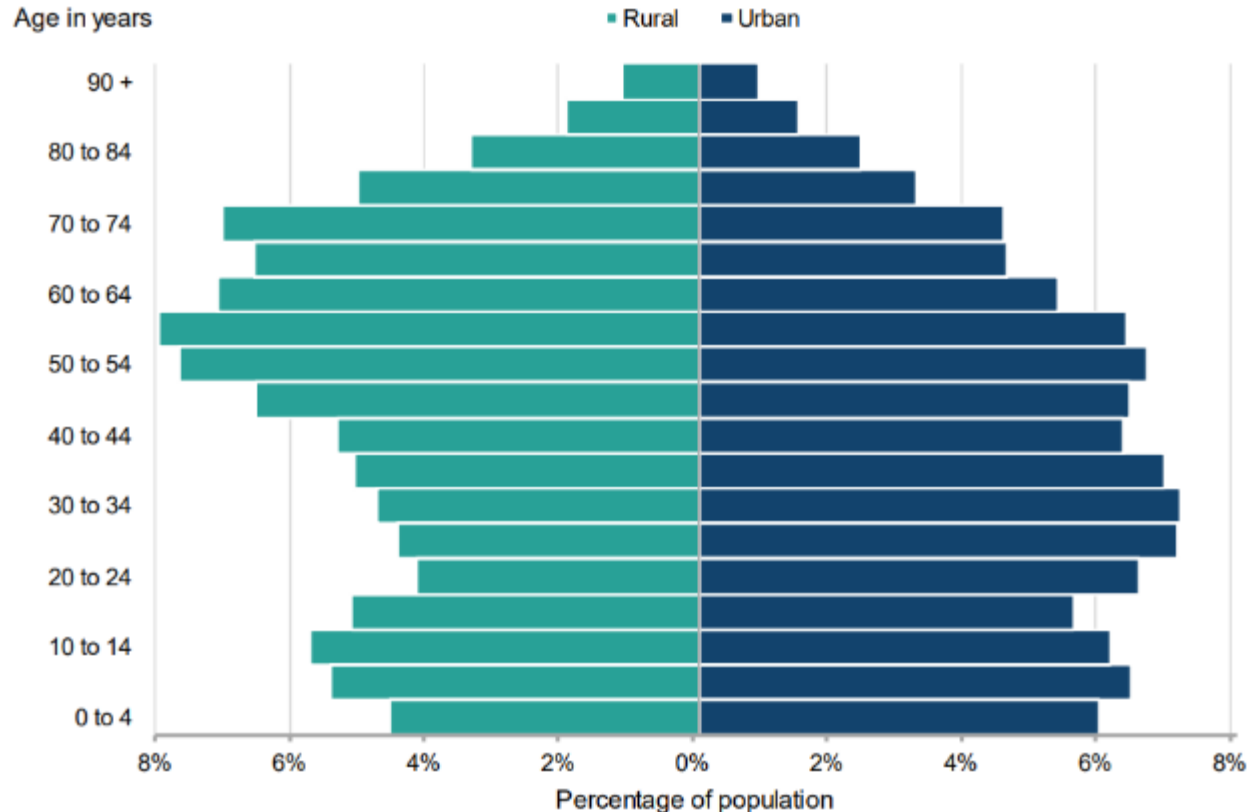
- **Develop** an evidence-based Future of Transport Rural Bus Policy that acknowledges that buses are essential infrastructure and places a duty on (and allocates funding to) local authorities to provide socially necessary rural buses
- **Protect** community transport by creating a larger funding part which is sustained over a longer.
- **Ensure** funding for the rural fuel duty relief scheme and the rural mobility fund (without a bidding process) to deliver equality of access.
- **Address** the gaps in the national bus strategy by producing a Rural Bus Strategy, objectives for rural provision, with funded actions to better serve rural communities and their economic needs on a sustainable basis.
- **Develop** and strengthen the power of local authorities to deliver these services by ensuring predominantly rural local authorities regained can sustain their ability to offer necessary revenue support.
- **Create** greener future by undertaking a comprehensive review of the electric grid and where appropriate hydrogen supply to address the risk at the high cost of introducing electrical hydrogen buses and their fuelling facilities could prove problematic in rural areas.



# Access to Rural Health and Care Services

**Figure B-1: Percentage of population within age bands of 5-year intervals from 0 to 90+, by Rural-Urban Classification in England based on LSOA level data, 2020**

The legend is presented in the same order and orientation as the stacks in the bars



Rural areas have an ageing population which places additional demands on services

Isolation and lack of public transport - leading to mental health concerns; distance from services; the nature and quality of the housing stock.

**Urban Councils receive 57.5% more per head to spend on public health**

**Rural voters can wait 3 times longer for an ambulance**

# National Reports on rural health

- The EFRA Committee produced a detailed report on Rural Mental Health in May 2023.<sup>9</sup> It concluded “**Rural communities’ needs are not fully reflected in mental health policy and services and NHS planning**” and “NHS mental health services are often not fairly accessible for rural communities with services largely centered in towns and cities creating barriers to access, compounded by the limitations and weaknesses of rural public transport and digital connectivity”.
- In its evidence to the EFRA Committee the Nuffield Trust provided useful context on the NHS being “defined and perceived as a national service”, when “in reality”, some parts of England such as rural areas “**face disproportionate problems in delivering care to the standards people expect**”. This makes it difficult for them to recruit staff, “with smaller more distributed populations, fewer younger people and a greater competition for the locum or agency staff relied on to deal with shortfalls”
- Professor Sir Chris Whitty, The Chief Medical Officer for England has commented “The health challenges of rural areas are distinct from those of urban areas, and **they've received much less attention than they should have.**”

# Rural Health and care – our asks

We want to see Government:

- **Deliver** a rural workforce strategy to a training and recruitment across all health and care services including dentistry.
- **Protect** rural communities by accepting the recommendations of the May 2023 EFRA committee report into rural mental health.
- **Ensure** strategy is rural proofed especially proposals designed to tackle the core drivers of disparities in health outcomes including quality of housing, and access to good quality jobs and training this must also take into account the whole range of extra costs of delivering services in rural areas and ensure that they are accurately reflected in funding formula.
- **Address** the lack of understanding of the distinctive health and care needs of rural areas to deliver services that are suited to the specific needs of rural places full stop



# Rural Net Zero

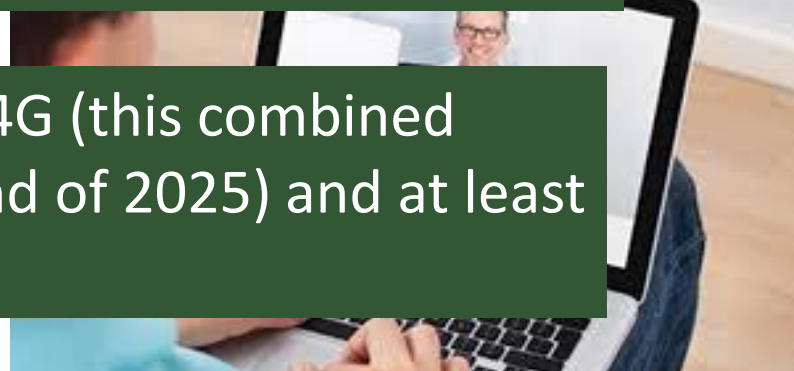
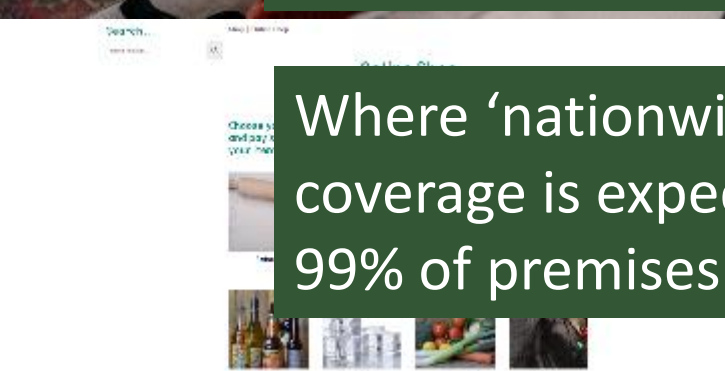
# Rural Net Zero – our asks

We want to see Government:

- **Deliver** a Fabric First Energy strategy which addresses rural needs. This means ensuring rural is ready to embrace the move to a technology neutral approach to net zero so that individuals can choose the most appropriate solutions.
- **Protect** rural communities and businesses by not increasing duty or taxes on vehicle fuel cost.
- **Ensure** that all economic growth programmes include explicit objectives to support low carbon and net zero growth.
- **Address** the gaps in the network of public charging points across rural Britain as many rural areas are tourist hotspots, increasing this network will boost the economy in rural areas.
- **Develop** rural communities which are self-sufficient by decentralising energy networks in rural areas.
- **Create** a net zero rural Britain by working with the energy industry to ensure that the electricity distribution network is resilient reliable and fit for purpose across all rural Britain before additional demands are put on it



Mission 4: By 2030, the UK will have nationwide\* gigabit-capable broadband and 4G coverage, with 5G coverage for the majority of the population.



Where 'nationwide' means 95% of the UK landmass for 4G (this combined coverage is expected to be achieved for the UK by the end of 2025) and at least 99% of premises for gigabit-capable broadband.

# What is happening to improve rural connectivity?

## Shared Rural Network

The Shared Rural Network (SRN) is transforming mobile coverage, countrywide. The project was developed by the UK's four mobile network operators (MNOs) with support from Government. The programme will make 4G mobile broadband available to 95% of the UK. The operators expect this will extend mobile coverage to an additional 280,000 premises and for people in cars on an additional 16,000km of the UK's roads, boosting productivity and investment in rural areas.

The project consists of MNOs investing to extend their coverage by upgrading their existing networks, working together on shared infrastructure and building new sites, with new government-funded masts being built to target areas with no mobile coverage from any operator. Through its work, the SRN will increase the parts of the UK that get a mobile service from all operators from 66% to 84%, improving consumer choice.

Each of the MNOs' individual networks will cover 90% of the UK, enabling rural businesses and communities to thrive.

## Project Gigabit

The Government has promised £5 billion to subsidise the roll-out of gigabit-broadband to the 'hardest to reach' premises in the country that will not be reached by private investment (20% of the UK). This is around 5 million premises mostly in rural areas.

The funding programme is called 'Project Gigabit' and follows programmes that aimed to increase demand for gigabit-broadband and provided vouchers to help connect rural premises.

The Chancellor allocated £1.2 billion of the £5 billion Project Gigabit funding in the 2020 Spending Review, for the years 2020-2025.

The remaining £3.8 billion is reserved for future years.

# Rural Connectivity – our asks

We want to see Government:

- **Deliver** improved rural connectivity through the effective delivery of Project Gigabit and creating a clear road map and government funding for connecting very hard to reach premises as soon as possible.
- **Protect** rural residents from digital exclusion by delivering the Shared Rural Network.
- **Ensure** high quality coverage and delivery of TV and radio, supporting the viewing requirements of rural customers.
- **Address** the growing digital divide through a fully funded digital inclusion programme so no one is left behind due to their lack of online skills or their inability to pay for basic equipment and connection charges.
- **Create** a digitally savvy innovative rural workforce by providing accessible training appropriately funded for rural communities.



# Rural Planning

- Respond to Government Consultations on key issues affecting rural areas
- Liaise with your planning departments on a rural response to these consultations
- Often about ensuring that the implications for rural areas which may be different to that of urban, are considered by Government.



# Rural Planning – our asks

We want to see Government:

- **Deliver** an effective approach to Neighbourhood Plans into which rural communities have spent a huge amount of time and effort.
- **Protect** rural voices in community engagement around planning. Whilst digital might always be the preferred choice, poor connectivity in rural areas means many voices are being lost.
- **Ensure** vacant and underused buildings in rural town centres find productive use as housing in appropriate locations and where little prospect exists of continuing retail use.
- **Address** the issues cause by combining Section 106 and CIL into a single Infrastructure Levy. There is a danger that the legal basis for enforcing a local connection with a development through S106 will be lost if the rules are softened.
- **Develop** Rural Proofed planning policy which gives autonomy to Local Authorities and the communities they serve and ensure that the needs of rural communities are not overlooked in future changes to national planning policy guidance.
- **Create** thriving rural areas by building the right homes, in the right places offering a range of tenures for all stages of life from the working young to retirees.

# Rural Services APPG

Priorities last year were:

- Rural Fair Funding
- Rural Net Zero – off gas grid
- Rural Transport
- Rural Health & Care

**We will continue to work  
on your behalf, fighting for  
a fair deal for rural  
communities, in all public  
sector funding**