



MEETING OF RURAL SERVICES PARTNERSHIP

VULNERABILITY PANEL

Tuesday 3rd December 2019 from 11am – 12noon

Soroptomists Club, 63 Bayswater Road, London, W2 3PH

AGENDA

Chaired by Rev Richard Kirlew, Chair of Rural Services Partnership

1. Apologies for Absence
2. Minutes of Previous Meeting
9th April 2019 (See Attachment 1)
Response to action/comments raised
3. Rural Vulnerability Statement – the next steps
Appendices of good practice (See Attachment 2)
4. A Rural England Vulnerability /Research Panel
David Inman, Director of RSP Ltd to report
5. General Discussion
6. Any Other Business

Meeting Notes for the Rural Vulnerability Panel

Tuesday 9th April 2019

Venue – 63, Bayswater Road, London.

Present:

Jane Mordue (Chair) (Citizens Advice), Nik Harwood (Chief Executive, Young Somerset), Digby Chackfield (Rural Enterprise East, East and Otley College), Harriot English (Head of Engagement, Plunkett Foundation), Revd Elizabeth Clark MA, (National Rural Officer for the Methodist and United Reformed Churches, Germinate The Arthur Rank Centre), Amanda Fearn (Development Director, The National Youth Agency), Revd Richard Kirlaw (The Sherborne Deanery Rural Chaplaincy), Laura Cochran (Parkinson's UK), John Birtwistle (First Group), Emma Bould (Alzheimers UK), Mr Leeding (Oxfordshire Association of Parish & Town Councils)

RSN Officers Graham Biggs (GB) (Chief Executive RSN & RSP), David Inman (DI) (Corporate Director RSN & RSP) Jon Turner (JT) (Policy Director RSN)

Apologies for Absence:

Rod Hammerton (Shropshire Fire & Rescue), Nigel Wilcock (Institute of Economic Development (IED)), Martin Roehorn (Director of Finance, Hereford & Worcester Fire), Darren Henley (Chief Executive, Arts Council England), Matthew Isom (Chief Executive, Dispensing Doctors' Association Ltd, Marcus Clinton (Reaseheath College)

1. General Introduction

The Chairman, Rev Richard Kirlaw, asked Graham Biggs (GB), CEO of RSN, to outline the relationship between the Rural Services Network (RSN) and the Rural Services Partnership (RSP).

The RSN includes both Sparse and Rural Assembly local authorities, there are currently some 140 members. The Sparse local authorities are members on whose behalf RSN lobby in Government in respect of local government funding both directly and through the Rural Fair Share Group (a cross-party group of rural MPs, who campaign for national resources within central government to be directed to support both local government funding and the funding of other essential public services in rural England). The Rural Assembly local authority members do not benefit from our financial lobbying services. They -benefit from the RSN's rural policy and representational work.

The Rural Services Partnership Ltd (RSP) is the non-local authority network which was formed in about 2003. The interface its members have with the local authority members is at the bi-annual Rural Assembly meetings which take place in London and the two sub-groups – Rural Economy and Health & Social Care and at the Annual Rural Conference and the 7 Regional Seminars/Meetings.

The Group responded.

A member asked whether we are currently working with LEPs as they have access to funding sources. GB explained as they are governmental organisations and distribute public funding, LEPs, therefore, would have a direct conflict of interest if they were to join any rural (or urban) groups.

However, it was suggested that it might be a good idea to work with them where possible when they undertake research.

Other members were supportive of the work of the RSN and recognised its value in terms of supporting community groups, businesses, and the public sector.

2. The Foreseen Role and Purpose of the RSP Vulnerability Group (Appendix A)

GB introduced the paper and outlined the reason for the Panel, which was to provide RSP member organisations a forum to discuss the challenges that they experience in the delivery of services in rural England.

DI emphasised that vulnerability was not unique to rural areas, but the issues and impacts that rural residents and communities experience in rural England are very different to those in urban areas. For example, people in rural areas live longer as a percentage of the overall population, however, with an ageing profile and declining investment in social care and wellbeing the future implications for older people is potentially more severe than those experienced by older people in urban areas. DI explained that there was a need for organisations to work collaboratively to address vulnerability issues. DI asked for members to work in partnership with the RSP, through examples of best practice and information and research exchange, to address rural vulnerability.

The group responded

A member was keen to consider how we could look at data collection in a more comprehensive way. She explained that data sets sourced from local authorities were not always comparable and limited data was available.

A member suggested that the RSP draft document needed to be more focused. Perhaps there was a need to agree some themes in order that the Panel's work could be focused and prioritised.

A member said that one of the major challenges was the lack of knowledge about the transport sector within the local authority sector in particular. There was a need to explain both nationally and locally the impact that local authority funding decisions had on the transport network.

A member suggested that the Panel needed a strap line and the work of the Panel needed to be based on real fact and avoid any fiction. There was a need for positive solutions.

A member suggested that the Panel should consider not only the current challenges, but what the situation might be in 10-15 years' time, as many of the health and care and service issues discussed will become far more acute in the years to come.

A member said that young people would question what rural vulnerability was. Perhaps other terms should be considered when engaging young people.

All organisations present were supportive of the RSP Vulnerability Panel. Members were asked to consider what themes they would like as priorities for future Panel meetings.

Action: members to forward suggestions by the mid-May to Jon Turner.

Members were also encouraged by GB to review the RSN website which outlined the purpose of the 'Call for a Rural Strategy', and if they had not done so already to sign up and support the campaign. Please refer to the following link for details

<https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/time-for-a-rural-strategy>

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/time-for-a-rural-strategy>

3. Members Invited to Participate in the Panel

JT outlined why certain organisations had been approached. JT explained that the RSP can only work with member organisations that pay a membership subscription, as this was necessary to sustain the RSN which was dependent upon membership support.

Members were requested to review the circulated list and suggest other organisations that they might consider would be interested in joining the RSP and participating in the Panel

Other sectors to be considered in terms of representation were digital and health sectors.

4 RSN Vulnerability and Disadvantage Statement 2019

The document was introduced by DI. It was approved by the meeting, however, as a working document members were encouraged to forward comments, or additional themes, they consider could be included, plus any facts and stats they would like to include with a supporting reference source. Comments should be sent to JT.

5 The Parliamentary Vulnerability Group

GB outlined the purpose of the Group which has a membership of circa 40 active MPs. GB explained that this group was not an All-Party Parliamentary Group. The Vulnerability Group unlike the APPG can through its members lobby government as long as those parliamentarians have robust evidence to support their approach to government. GB suggested that members of the Panel would be able to engage with the Group and the work of the Panel could assist in forming future agendas and provide information and best practice for future Vulnerability Days.

6. General discussion about rural vulnerability

The Chairman concluded that this meeting had covered this and no further discussion was undertaken.

7. A.O.B

The Panel would meet twice a year in the Spring and in November. The proposed date for the November meeting would be the 19th November, venue to be confirmed.

Rural Vulnerability and Disadvantage Statement. (Updated November 2019)

Context

Despite being the most urban country within the UK, almost 90% of England's land area is categorised as rural¹. Rural areas are home to 9.5 million people (2017) or 17% of the population². More people live in small rural towns, villages, hamlets and isolated dwellings than live in Greater London.

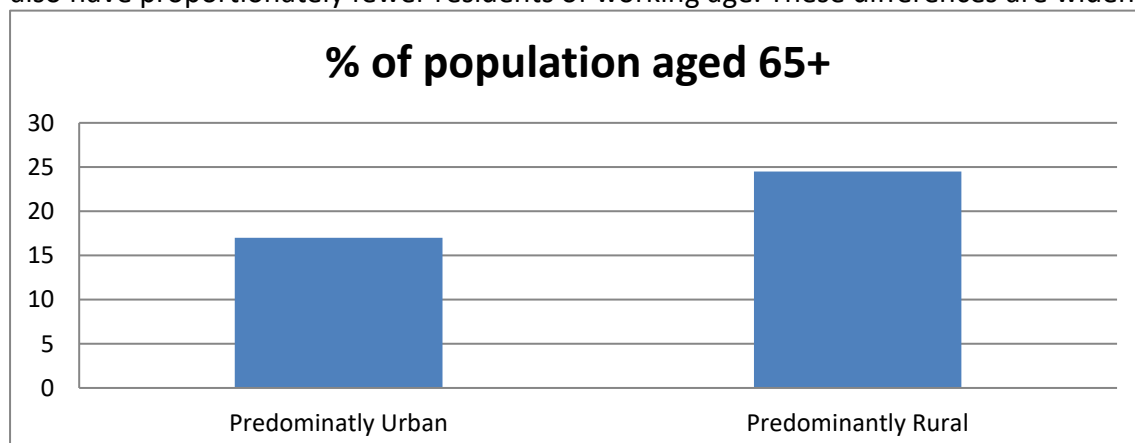
England's rural communities are extremely diverse economically, environmentally and socially. They include, amongst others, remote and upland communities; coastal settlements; commuter villages and former mining communities. There is no doubt about the beauty and tranquillity of many rural areas but, as the former Commission for Rural Communities said "You can't eat the view". For those who are disadvantaged or vulnerable life in rural areas can be very difficult.

On the positive side, rural communities do often exhibit a certain strength and resilience with local authorities and the voluntary/ community sector providing much important support for those disadvantages or vulnerable. However, this is no excuse for central government's and other organisations' policies ignoring the existing and growing problems of rural residents.

How is vulnerability and disadvantage different in rural areas?

Even small rural communities typically have a wide ranging socio-economic mix of residents, with wealthy and poor households often immediate neighbours. This mix means that averaged statistics, such as average earnings, tend to disguise the real extent and severity of hidden disadvantage. Certainly the romantic image of the 'rural idyll' is far from reality for many residents.

Another major difference between urban and rural areas is demographic. Rural areas tend to have proportionately far more people in the older age groups (24.5% are over 65 in predominantly rural areas compared to 17% in predominantly urban areas)². Rural areas also have proportionately fewer residents of working age. These differences are widening.



What are the 'rural' problems?

As identified in RSN's 'Rural Strategy' there are many issues contributing to rural vulnerability and disadvantage including difficulties in accessing facilities and services, higher cost of living, low local wages, lack of opportunity, and little political priority. These issues are interconnected in complex ways.

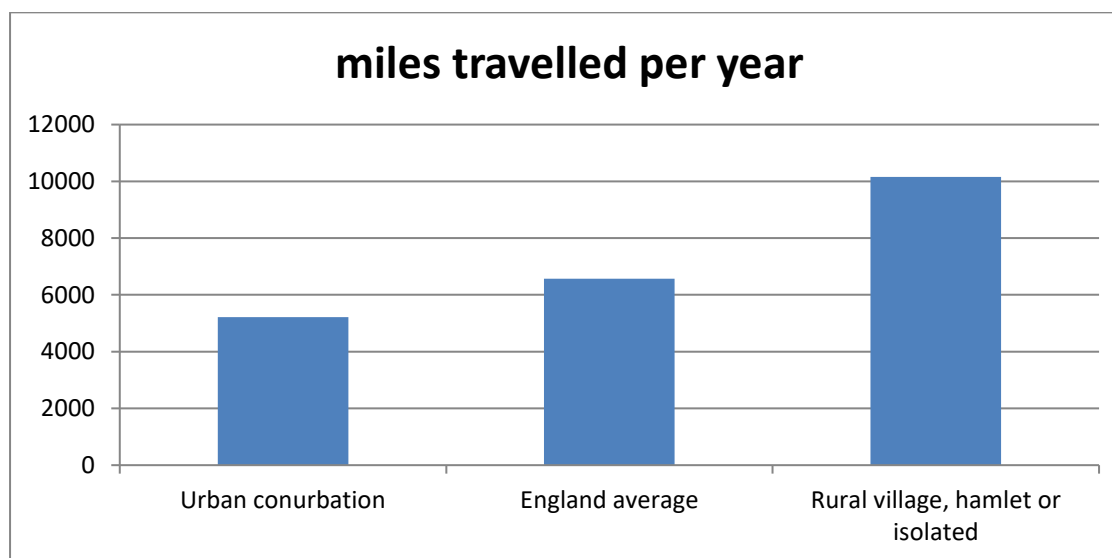
Access to services and facilities.

The challenges of rural accessibility have long been recognised but in recent years the difficulties in accessing facilities and services have become yet more acute.

'Walk- to' rural facilities such as pubs, Post Offices and shops are continuing to decline. Other facilities and services (e.g. supermarkets; hospitals; GP surgeries; job centres; youth clubs; and council offices) are centralising in urban, often out -of -centre, locations which are hard for rural residents to get to, except by private car. For example, almost 30% of rural residents live more than 30 minutes' drive time from a major hospital. If travelling by public transport 40% live more than an hour away.

50 per cent of the rural population are living in areas that have the poorest accessibility to services (lowest 10 per cent decile) based on minimum travel times, compared with 2 per cent of the urban population.²

Unsurprisingly rural residents have to travel further. In 2015/16 people living in rural villages, hamlets and isolated dwellings travelled 10,159 miles on average, 95% further than in urban conurbations and 55% further than the average for England as a whole.²



At the same time rural public transport is continuing to contract. "Ten years ago such buses, which often connect to poorer or isolated areas and communities, represented a third of all bus services. Now, funding for bus services in England has fallen by over £162 million (43 per cent) in real terms in comparison to 2009/10"³. In England some 243 services were reduced or withdrawn in 2018/19 alone.³

Many small rural communities have no bus service whatsoever and for others it is absolutely minimal. Such rural buses as still remain often run on radial routes to the nearest town/ city centre but other destinations are much more difficult or totally impossible to reach. Even where some limited public transport is available it very rarely runs at convenient times for accessing employment/training or attending fixed -time appointments such as doctor's appointments. Accordingly, if you are unable to drive you are dependent upon others to access employment, post- 16 education/training; shops; medical facilities; and a host of other essential activities.

Community transport and taxi alternatives, whilst helpful, are not without their drawbacks, not least their unsuitability for spontaneous or urgent trips. Older people cannot use their bus passes on community buses and even the expensive option of taxis is not necessarily always available. Whether by private car or other means, the additional cost for rural households of essential travel is very significant. For example, it is not unusual for 16-18 year olds to pay in excess of £600 p.a. just to access education.

The problems of poor rural accessibility and increased travel costs also impact on those trying to provide services to customers and clients including, notably, health and social care professionals; council services; and the voluntary sector.

Rural areas generally also suffer from inferior digital services compared to urban areas. In 2018 11% of rural premises could not get a 10 Mbps fixed line connection and 24% could not get a 30 Mbps (superfast broadband) connection. The equivalent urban figures are 1% and 3% respectively. Accessing the internet is also a very significant added financial burden in areas where no free wi-fi provision is available.⁴

With mobile provision, in 2018 a basic phone call could not be made inside 33% of rural premises on all four networks. A 4G connection could not be accessed on all four networks inside 58% of rural premises. The equivalent urban figures are 3% and 17% respectively. Two particular issues experienced with mobile provision are weak signal strength within many rural premises and the extent of network coverage in open countryside.⁴

Low wages and higher costs of living

The earned average wage in rural areas compared to the urban average is almost 9% lower⁵.

Rural residents also face higher costs:

- Housing costs. In 2017, the average lower quartile house price was 8.6 times the average lower quartile earnings in predominantly rural areas. This compares with 7.4 in predominantly urban areas (excluding London).²
- Fuel poverty. In 2017 there was little rural-urban variation in the percentages of households in fuel poverty. Significantly however the average fuel poverty gap for fuel poor households in rural villages, hamlets and isolated dwellings (£571) was some 78% higher than the National average (£321).⁶
- Travel. In 2018 average weekly transport costs for households in rural hamlets and isolated dwellings was £139.20 (£60.60 higher than for urban areas) which accounted for 15% of their weekly disposable income.⁷

- Higher costs of service delivery. A diverse range of services cost more in rural areas. For example recent research showed that rural Councils paid 13% more for domiciliary social care.⁸ There are many other examples e.g. the higher grocery costs in village shops and commercial delivery firms charging supplements for remoter areas.

“People in rural areas typically need to spend 10–20 per cent more on everyday requirements than those in urban areas. The more remote the area, the greater these additional costs.” (Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2010)⁹

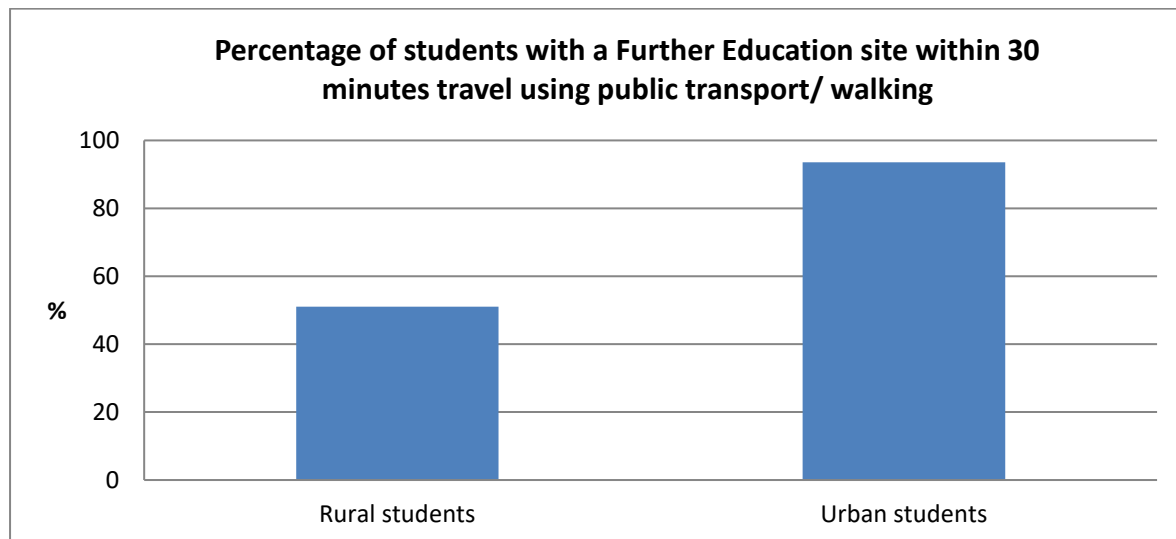
Lack of opportunity

The challenges facing rural residents can have severe consequences for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged and can adversely affect social mobility.

Educational choice and attainment. English and Maths GCSE results, using the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI), show that for pupils in rural areas the attainment levels were lower for all decile bands compared with pupils in urban areas. (2016/17).²

As at 31 October 2016, 18 per cent of secondary schools in rural areas had received ‘Outstanding’ as the most recent inspection outcome, compared with 24 per cent of secondary schools in urban areas.²

Only 51% of rural students have access to a Further Education site within 30 minutes travel time using Public Transport/Walking compared to 93.6% in urban areas.²



Rural areas typically offer far fewer employment and training opportunities which particularly disadvantages people who are unable to drive. In predominantly urban areas the proportion of the working age population with NVQ Level 4 or an equivalent qualification was 44.7 per cent compared with 35.4 per cent in predominantly rural areas (2015).²

The political dimension

In Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland (and in most of Europe similarly) rural areas receive special financial attention by their Governments. In England however, that is rarely the case and indeed rural areas receive far less government financial support for their services per head of population than do their urban counterparts. This unfairness is not helped by the lack of genuine rural proofing and the inadequate provision of meaningful statistics about the realities of rural living.

Far from being confined to Central Government, this lack of rural focus (or even the most cursory consideration of rural issues) is evident in plans and actions of many service providers in both the public and private sectors. Arguably this is because disadvantaged and vulnerable people in rural areas are geographically scattered and include such a diverse mix of demographic characteristics that they are not a cohesive lobbying group and are accordingly easy to ignore.

What is the RSN doing?

As the only organisation currently examining aspects of rural vulnerability and disadvantage on a regular basis we have developed a number of initiatives: -

- The Rural Services Network holds meetings involving rural local authorities to consider the situation (alongside Rural Health and Social Care) on two occasions a year.
- The group involving non-local authority rural organisations, The Rural Services Partnership, has formed a sub- group to consider rural vulnerability issues- The RSP Rural Vulnerability Panel.
- We work with the Rural England Community Interest Company to operate a Rural Vulnerability Day in Parliament early each year and the RSN also acts as the Secretariat for a Parliamentary Group Meeting of MPs and Peers.
- We promote the sharing of information and best practice.
- We support the work of the National Rural Crime Network and the National Centre of Rural Health and Care. In the latter case we jointly provide the Rural Health and Care Alliance services to its members.
- We support the work of the Rural Housing Alliance.

Ideas for tackling Rural Vulnerability and Disadvantage

Rural Vulnerability is a collective term that applies to an array of rural circumstances and situations which is perhaps best considered in the specific contexts of particular identified problems and issues.

Given the reduction and centralisation of public services, the ageing demographics of rural areas, and the challenges facing young people, the likelihood is that an increasing proportion of the rural population will become disadvantaged and/or vulnerable in the future.

The Utility Service Regulators Ofgem, Ofwat, and Ofcom are asking power, water and telecommunications companies to do work and set up systems to give consideration to both identify and assist their vulnerable customers and the phrase is also employed by the

Financial Conduct Authority. The power and water industries employ a Priority Services Register situation to allow people to inform or register their difficulties so that companies are aware of their situation.

Whilst recognising the need for confidentiality of the individual in many cases it is essential for private sector companies, local authorities and the voluntary sector to collaboratively address the challenges facing rural communities. We also think that people 'on the ground' such as Parish/Town Councils, voluntary groups and possibly Church Councils could have a more defined wider role.

In summary:-

1. It is our view that the number of people living in rural areas and who are particularly vulnerable/ disadvantaged is increasing markedly year-on-year and that immediate action is required.

2. We have an established track record of working to improve the public financing of rural areas and support for the rural economy. (We operate through a small charge system with rural local authorities and we are dependent on these arrangements to highlight these issues and to put measures in place to try to tackle them)

3. RSN has the experience, track-record, and the team to work with existing and new partners to address vulnerability and disadvantage. By supporting our existing work and working with our members we can provide a collective rural voice and dedicated resources to tackle rural vulnerability and disadvantage.

References

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8. Cost to Councils of externally provided domiciliary social care. Rural England CIC Research Paper. <https://ruralengland.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Launch-Report-Issues-Facing-Providers-Social-Care-in-Rural-England.pdf>
9. A minimum income standard for rural households, JRF 2010 <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/minimum-income-standard-rural-households>