



**Meeting of THE RURAL ASSEMBLY Sub SIG
(incorporating SPARSE Rural Members, Rural Assembly Members and
the Rural Services Partnership Meeting)
Venue:- City of Westminster Archives Centre, 10 St Ann's Street, London
SW1P 2DE**

**Date: Monday 10th April 2017
Time: 11.30 a.m. to 2.30 p.m.**

1. **Apologies for absence**
2. **Minutes** of the last Rural Assembly meeting – 21st November 2016
(Attachment 1)
3. **Minutes** of the last Executive meeting – 13th March 2017
(Attachment 2)
4. **The State of Rural Services Report (SORS) 2016**
This is a key report which will be prepared by the Rural England CIC every two years. It is intended that it will seek to track rural services and how they have developed or contracted over the preceding years. This form of report was previously issued by the Commission for Rural Communities, again every two years.

The need for reports of this nature was one of the key reasons behind the RSN taking the initiative to establish the Rural England Community Interest Company. Obviously with the Austerity measures, the Report at this time has become particularly important.

The Report was formally launched in Parliament on the 17th January 2017 with over 50 bodies being represented.

The task of the Rural Assembly meetings, as a representative body, will be to formally pick from the Report areas from this research report on which they wish to make formal representation to Government. (Attachment 3 sets out the RSN's Key Priorities and a bullet point summary of the SORS Report showing where its findings and the Key Priorities dovetail)

Providing a voice for rural communities and service providers

5. Brexit

To consider the current situation (see also Minute 7 from the Minutes of the Executive meeting of the 13th March 2017) (Attachment 4 – Briefing Note considered by the Executive Meeting)

6. Rural Vulnerability

To consider how the RSN should tackle this increasing problem.
(Attachment 5 - Report from the Corporate Director)

7. A Rural Panel and the Rural Sounding Boards

(Attachment 6 - Report from the Corporate Director)

8. RSN Communication Survey

To receive the Lexington PLC “Toolkit” approved by the Executive (Attachment 7)

9. Total involvement of all rural areas in England in the work of the Network.

(See also Minute 9 of the Executive meeting of the 13th March 2017)

The LGA Rural Commission used to cover rural matters. The fact that both it and the previously Government funded Commission for Rural Communities no longer operate leaves specific coverage of rural governance and service matters entirely dependent on the RSN. Support from across all LGA authorities with clear rural areas is essential if we are to speak for and be recognised by the entirety of rural areas across England. This discussion will be about how we might hope to achieve that essential goal

10. Budget Report

(Attachment 8 to follow)

11. Sounding Board Report

Consideration of topic for next meeting

12. Rural Weighting Allowance for GPs

Cllr Owen Bierley, West Lindsey Borough Council

12. Rural Services Network Events

- a) The Rural Conference
To discuss the plans for 2017
- b) Rural Health Conference 2017
- c) Rural Housing Conference 2017 – Assistant Director to report.

Providing a voice for rural communities and service providers



13. Report on the RSP Service Groups

- (a) Housing
- (b) Health
- (c) Crime
- (d) Fire
- (e) Transport

14. Any Other Business

Providing a voice for rural communities and service providers

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Notes of RSN AGM Meeting

21 November 2016

Title: RSN AGM

Date: 21 November 2016

Venue: City of Westminster Archives Centre, London

AGM membership of the Rural Services Network

1. Apologies for absence

Members noted apologies. Graham thanked attendees and welcomed speakers.

2. Minutes

The minutes from the previous AGM meetings were noted and approved.

3. Appointment of Chair for the forthcoming year

Members agreed that the Chairman should continue for the forthcoming year.

4. Vice Chair for ensuing year

Members noted the list of current vice-Chairs, and agreed that those currently in the roles should continue.

5. Election of First vice-Chair

Members agreed that Cllr Robert Heseltine should continue in his current role.

6. Rural Assembly Sub SIG

Members agreed that the Sub SIG chairmanship should remain as it is currently with the Chairman leading both Sparse Rural and the Rural Assembly.

7. Future Directions

Members noted the report of the RSN executive which gave an overview of challenges over the next 5 years, looking at issues around representing rural areas and sustaining the organisation. Members discussed current contributions, a new cycle of meetings and new future services.

The group discussed possible outcomes further to Brexit and agreed that rural areas would need to be joined up in their thinking if they were to have a strong voice to Government. The range of work required of the RSN would not reach its full potential without an increase in the subscription and all rural areas being involved in the Group. In future, the Group would levy a charge – as an investment in rural areas - instead of asking for a subscription. The revised charge was agreed to be implemented in April 2017 rather than 2018 as stated in the report.

Additionally members decided as follows:-

(a) **Public Sector Finances**

To seek to cover (through Sparse Rural) all public sector financial matters – comparing rural and urban settlements. Detailed work on seeking to improve settlement could, however, only be done on the Local Government settlement. If representation on other settlements were to be attempted, additional resource to fund that work would have to be achieved.

(b) **Parliamentary Activity**

As well as continuing The Rural Fair Share Group, the RSN would seek to establish a campaigning group in relation to other rural issues such as vulnerability. They might also seek to establish an APPG on Brexit activity. The possibility of seeking to establish a rural group in The Lords would also be investigated.

(c) **Comparison Work**

This would be a new service. Attempts would be made to highlight the treatment of urban and rural areas.

(d) **Rural Vulnerability**

One in four people in rural areas was over the age of 65. Within the coming decade this would increase to one in three. The number of people over the age of 80 was also increasing very sharply and by 2039 one in eight people in rural areas would be of that age. The meeting discussed the social problems that would arise and the need to establish protective networks. The meeting decided it would seek to undertake significant work in this area (Rural Assembly meetings).

(e) **Brexit**

Members noted recommendations to develop a position statement to fulfil full economic and social expectations for all rural areas, particularly after Brexit. They confirmed the need to engage with CCN and DCN and agreed the importance to have elected representation from rural areas working on the same page and to avoid fragmentation in taking forward issues of importance to rural areas. It was suggested a group be created to gather all info and statistics on the amount of issues faced by those living in rural areas.

(f) **A Biennial Rural Meeting**

It was felt that too often rural areas failed to achieve a collective rural view. The concept of trying to achieve a cross representational meeting once every two years was agreed. Detailed discussion with the University of Gloucestershire and with other rural organisations was agreed.

Members noted and agreed to all further recommendations within the report. The Chair thanked them for their valuable contributions to the discussed and to David Inman for all his input and hard work.

8. Next meeting

Members noted the date of the next meeting of the AGM - 20 November 2017.

9. Rural Services Network Statement about the Modern Slavery Act

Members agreed the report as a policy situation in relation to the Group (including the RSP).

10. Minutes of the last Executive Meeting

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed.

11. Membership

The annual report on membership was noted.

12. Budget

Members noted the budget report as it stood. The figures for 17/18 needed amending to include a communication strategy, Brexit work and the new charges just agreed. This would be revisited at future meetings.

13. RSN Submission to the Chancellor re the Autumn Statement

Members noted the position of the Group as detailed by Graham Biggs. Local Authorities had also to comment directly as the position would vary from Authority to Authority. The LGA's First magazine will have an article on implications on rural areas by RSN.

14. State of the Rural Services Report

Brian Wilson had sent apologies. The launch was delayed until January 2018 and the group noted a summary of current findings from Rural England. Members agreed that the findings were useful and looked forward to receiving more information at coming meetings.

15. Update on the Health Scrutiny Project

Members noted the presentation from Kerry Booth and discussed key issues, including transport, access to health specialists, recruitment and other limitations in rural areas. The Chair thanked the speaker for her work and noted that LG First Magazine had shown interest in an article about this subject for the Spring edition. Members discussed their own experiences.

16. Rural Conference 2016

Members received a presentation about this year's conference and discussed the outcomes. It was agreed that it had been a very successful event and it had been a great platform for networking and sharing information.

17. Rural Conference 2017

This would again take place in Cheltenham on the 5th and 6th September. Members were encouraged to attend and agreed the benefits. They noted difficulties in getting Ministerial attendance due to the time of year – however, they would attempt to get a Minister to attend a future Rural Assembly meeting.

18. Meeting dates for 2017

Members noted the list of meeting dates for the forthcoming year.

19. Any other business

Graham Biggs notified members that the Rural Health Conference would be held on 28 February in London.

Members noted outcomes of recent consultations and agreed the need to ensure that common messages are consistent between DCN, CCN and LGA.

There was no other business and the meeting was closed.

Note: All presentations are available on the RSN website.

Attendees

Cecilia Motley	Chair, RSN	
Graham Biggs	Chief Executive, RSN	
David Inman	Corporate Director, RSN	
Kerry Booth	Assistant Chief Executive, RSN	
Cllr Philip Sanders	West Devon BC	
Cllr Owen Bierley	West Lindsey DC	
Cllr Janet Duncton	West Sussex CC	
Cllr Cameron Clark	Sevenoaks DC	
Paul Masters	Cornwall Council	
Ian Knowles	West Lindsey DC	
Cllr Ian Threlfall	Richmondshire DC	
Cllr David Ireton	Craven DC	
Cllr Rupert Reichhold	East Northamptonshire Council	
Cllr Gwilyn Butler	Shropshire Council	
Cllr Michael Hicks	South Hams DC	
Leigh Higgins	Melton BC	
Cllr Glynn Gilfoyle	Nottinghamshire Council	
Cllr Robert Heseltine	East Northamptonshire Council	
Keriesha Williams	UK Youth	
Milly Price	UK Youth	
Cllr Gordon Nicolson	Eden DC	
Cllr Peter Stevens		
Cllr Lindsey Cawson		
Dan Reynolds	RSN	
Martin Reohorn	Hereford & Worcester FA	
Malcolm Leeding	Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils	
W J Clarke	GBC	
Cllr Neil Butters	Bath & NE Somerset	
Fatima de Abreu	Local Government Association	

Apologies

John Birtwistle	First Group plc
Jim Graham	Warwickshire County Council
Cllr Anthony Alford	West Dorset District Council
Cllr Richard Sherras	Ribble Valley Borough Council
Cllr David Godfrey	Shepway District Council
Cllr Stephen Lydon	Stroud District Council
Cllr Louise Gittins	Cheshire West and Chester Council
Cllr Adam Paynter	Cornwall Council
Jenny Poole	Cotswold District Council
Dave Heywood	South Staffordshire Council
Sue Joyce	Purbeck District Council
Cllr Samantha Dixon	Cheshire West and Chester Council
Cllr Sue Sanderson	Cumbria County Council
Jill Penn	Broadland District Council
Cllr Elizabeth Sneath	South Holland District Council
Cllr Wendy Bowkett	East Lindsey District Council
Cllr Lewis Strange	Lincolnshire County Council
Cllr Malcolm Pate	Shropshire Council
Cllr Paul Diviani	East Devon District Council
Stewart Horne	Business Information Point
Cllr Andre Gonzalez de Savage	Northamptonshire County Council
Peter Shipp	EYMS Group Ltd
Cllr Roy Miller	Barnsley MBC
Cllr Kath Hemmings	Solihull MBC
Cllr Peter Martin	Surrey County Council
David Henley	Principal, Easton & Otley College
Suzanne Clear	Senior Advisor, NFU
Cllr Gary Sumner	Swindon Borough Council
Ian Richardson	Shropshire & Rural Housing Association
Ian Richardson	Shropshire Council
Cllr Kevin Barker	Wakefield Council
Cllr Martin Gannon	Gateshead Council
Cllr Wendy Bowkett	East Lindsey District Council
Cllr Malcolm Pate	Shropshire Council
Christopher Graffius	British Association for Shooting & Conservation
Cllr Mrs Geraldine Carter	Calderdale MBC
David Ashworth	Norfolk Fire & Rescue Group
Cllr Pam Posnett	Melton Borough Council
Ann Turner	Myerscough College
Katherine Steel	Babergh & Mid Suffolk District Councils
Cllr Tom Fitzpatrick	North Norfolk District Council
Lisa Creaye-Griffin	Surrey County Council
David Greenwood	Surrey County Council

Cllr Jane March	Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
Richard Quallington	ACRE
Cllr Heather Bainbridge	Mid Devon District Council
Cllr R Phillips	Herefordshire Council
Cllr Ian Dobson	Maldon District Council
Cllr Jeremy Savage	South Norfolk District Council
Catherine Tytherleigh	Berkshire College of Agriculture

**MINUTES OF THE SPARSE RURAL AND RURAL SERVICES NETWORK EXECUTIVE,
MONDAY 13th MARCH 2017 HELD AT CITY OF WESTMINSTER ARCHIVES CENTRE,
10 ST ANN'S STREET, LONDON**

Present: - Cllr Cecilia Motley (Chairman), Cllr Janet Duncton, Cllr Peter Thornton, Cllr Peter Stevens, Cllr Gordon Nicolson OBE, Revd Richard Kirlew

Officers: - Graham Biggs MBE (Chief Executive), David Inman (Director), Andy Dean (Assistant Director)

Apologies:- Cllr Robert Heseltine (First Vice Chairman), Cllr Derrick Haley, Cllr Philip Sanders, Cllr Adam Paynter, Cllr Lewis C Strange, Cllr Sue Sanderson, John Birtwistle (First Group), Kayleigh Wainwright (UK Youth), Kerry Booth RSN

1. Notes of Previous Executive Meeting

Agreed as a correct record with Cllr Peter Thornton added to the Minutes.

2. Notes of Last Main Meeting Monday 30th January 2017

Agreed mainly as a correct record. Amendment of mistake in Minute 10, delete Executive and insert Rural Assembly.

3. Budget

Position as detailed by Graham Biggs. The Report was accepted – it was regarded as a relatively healthy budget situation. Graham detailed the Service Level Agreement position concerning the NRCN Service Level Agreement where some uncertainty existed.

Membership under the two RSN's headings now stood at a total of 147.

4. Communication Strategy

The Lexington Report was accepted by the Executive.

In future there would be three types of Press Release:

- (1) **Strategic/Campaigns** – prepared in conjunction with Lexington. There may be one or two of these each year - targeted particularly at the nationals. There was provision in the budget of £6000a year for this.
- (2) **Periodic** – eight a year full releases in conjunction with Johann Tasker contract on a topic of particular relevance.
- (3) **Reactive Pieces** – one, brief comment piece stating the RSN position, through Johann Tasker at least every fortnight to make the network's presence felt more frequently.
- (4) **Specific Local Government Press Releases** – targeted at the Municipal Journal and the LGA First Magazine. Again, Johann Tasker would be employed.

In each case (other than Reactive) Councils' Media Officers would be given the release on a 'not for publication before' basis circa 24 hours before release so they aware of the issue in case they are contacted and also asked to use in their own local context. Each of the Press Releases would in future, as recommended by Lexington, include at the bottom the relevant piece outlining the key strategic message behind the RSN's position.

Additionally each Press Release would include the list of Authorities in membership by "Region" and the email address of the Authorities' media contact would be included...

The position would need discussion with Johann to make sure a consistent situation was achieved.

The Executive looked at what Lexington was offering. It was decided to buy the list of media contacts, which it was understood were established in relevant sections. It was also decided to buy the updating services for this list but only updating once a year.

The 'Audit of Events' and the 'Calendar of Facts' would not be purchased but we would try to replicate something internally through Kerry.

The 4 suggested key messages were agreed.

It was decided that Johann needed to fulfil a far more proactive multi- media role in terms of the Rural Conference and this would be discussed with him.

The whole Communication Strategy to be reviewed in 12 months' time to assess effectiveness

5. LG Finance Settlement

Graham Biggs detailed the situation which revolved around the four year settlement.

The Rural MPs had had a lengthy discussion with the Secretary of State who had agreed that the current position was inequitable to rural Local Authorities. He had assured the MPs that the situation would be rectified during the transformation to a Business Rate driven system, aspects of which he had agreed were now being brought forward to the 2019/2020 settlement. He had pointed out that in the LG consultation in relation to the 4 year settlement, 97% of Authorities in replying to the accepting the settlement and submitting their 4 year strategies showing how they could cope with the position..

Given this position, the Rural MPs advised:

- (a) That they concentrate on monitoring the needs assessment work and on the promised 19/20 changes.
- (b) The Local Authorities themselves petition Government and their MPs in a common letter prepared in the summer and lodged in the autumn of 2017.

(The MPs indicated that the absence of Local Authority lobbying of them over the 17/18 settlement had led them to not challenging the final settlement more robustly).

6. Update on 'Vulnerability' discussion with Water and Energy deliverers/providers.

A series of exploratory meetings had been held on this one to see whether it was possible to form a group of Rural England supporters from the Power and Water industries who would work with RSN and Rural England on the questions arising from Vulnerability/Safeguarding and the Priority Services Register.

It was proving challenging to try to establish a common position as the work areas had evolved in different ways. However the discussions were continuing and a further meeting was due on Thursday 16th March.

7. Update on Brexit discussions held on 20th February with CCN and DCN

The general position was detailed by Graham Biggs. Executive members emphasised the need to establish the global figure of how much Rural Areas received from Europe currently so that a true plumb line could be established. Officers commented on this and although different figures might be achieved from differing viewpoints – the importance of this particular exercise was accepted.

Cllr Nicolson reported that Eden was trying to establish such a figure in respect of its District. He agreed he would keep RSN informed both in respect of the amount and the various components which had been applied to establish it. Obviously, if such methodology could be achieved all Authorities in RSN could be encouraged to undertake a similar exercise.

8. Agendas for forthcoming meetings:

(a) Rural Social Care, Health and Vulnerability Committee

This committee was designed to involve particularly Unitary and County Councils in some ways, although District/Borough Councils in RSN Membership could be members of this Committee, therefore it was a replacement for the Unitary Group initiative. Due to the County/Unitary Council elections, it was felt prospective members might be unable to give the first meeting's initiative the attention it deserved. It had been decided therefore to not proceed on the 10th of April but to introduce the Committee at the AGM meeting in November.

It was decided that in terms of reporting lines the Committee would report to the Rural Assembly.

(b) The Rural Assembly on the 10th of April would commence at 11.30 a.m. Items would include SORS, Vulnerability, Brexit, Panels and Sounding Boards.

(c) The Sparse Rural meeting on the 10th of July would be in conference style, involving representative Councillors but also Finance Officers and Finance Portfolio Holders.

9. Total involvement of all rural areas in England in the work of the Rural Services Network.

The work of the Commission for Rural Communities and the Countryside Agency obviously had involved and been relevant to all rural areas no matter in which Local Authorities they were situate.

Somehow, as there was no longer any Commission for Rural Communities or Countryside Agency (or indeed LGA Rural Commission) there was a need to involve as many Local Authorities as possible in supporting the important work of the RSN. The difficulty was that unlike the Commission and the Countryside Agency, involvement had to equate to a financial input of some size by the Authority. This was the task in hand.

It was agreed the exercise would involve all Authorities who had over 20 rural output areas or more than 3,000 rural residents. (Tables were presented to members together with an indication of the amount being sought for Network support in accordance with the established charging structures).

It was felt that an approach signed by all Local Authority members of the Executive, giving their email address and phone number would be best - making it as informal as it could be.

Members looked at the proposed documentation and were generally happy with it. However, they felt that boxes showing RSN achievements to date and further targets that could be achieved if the financial support scheme set out could be established.

The work involved would be attempted over 12 months in ten defined tranches of approach. Documentation, it was agreed, would be varied to meet local circumstances.

Those being approached would be given two options:

- (a) Joining now to support the initiative immediately.
- (b) Taking advantage of free involvement for 12 months after which invoicing of the appropriate amount would take place, unless at a defined previous stage Authorities had indicated that they did not wish to remain involved.

10. Business rates retention

The paper prepared by Pixel Financial Management concerning the latest technical consultation paper on 100% business rate retention was discussed. It was agreed that Pixel would be requested to prepare a short formal response.

The Chief Executive presented information from two PowerPoint presentations given at a recent joint meeting on business rate retention between DCN, CCN and RSN. Copies of these two presentations are attached.

It was noted that the additional resources directed to adult social care, announced in the Chancellor's recent budget, would equate to an additional £18.20 per head in rural areas and £20.06 in urban areas in the first year rising to £67.88 and £70.42 respectively in 2019/20. Due to the complexity of this issue, it was agreed that letters would be written to MPs rather than issuing a press release on this matter.

11. Schools funding (F40 Group Briefing Note to MPs)

It was agreed that a RSN response would be drafted based on the key points raised in the Briefing Note.

12. Rural Health Conference

It was noted that the conference had gone well with a variety of interesting presentations. It had made a small financial loss

13. Annual Rural Conference

It was agreed that the critical themes of health and the economy should be incorporated into the conference and that a wider audience should be encouraged beyond RSN members. Members were requested to submit thoughts on the central theme and potential presentations to enable a draft programme to be developed.

14. Industrial Strategy White Paper Briefing Note

The report was noted and endorsed.

REPORT TO THE RSN RURAL ASSEMBLY MEETING
10TH APRIL, 2017

THE STATE OF THE RURAL SERVICES REPORT 2016 AND THE RSN's KEY PRIORITY AREAS

1.0 RSN's Top priorities

The RSN's current priorities as set out in the Rural Manifesto 2015 are as follows:

1. The planning system
2. Affordable housing
3. Local Government funding
4. Public transport
5. Access to key health facilities and services
6. Older people's services
7. Fuel poverty
8. Viable village services
9. Broadband and connectivity
10. Rural economy

Through the recently approved Communications Strategy these have been further narrowed to **four key priority areas**:

- **Barriers to access (especially broadband and transport)**
- **Future of rural areas**
- **Local Government Funding**
- **Health and Welfare**

The Communications Strategy appears elsewhere on this Agenda and contains details of the main issues under each of the four key priority areas and the Key Message which applies to each.

2.0 The following sets out a bullet point summary of key findings from the State of the Rural Services Report 2016 and indicates, where appropriate, which of the RSN's key priority areas they relate to.

[NB: RURAL ENGLAND SENT A COPY OF THE REPORT TO ALL OF THE GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS/MINISTERS WHO'S SERVICES WERE COVERED IN THE REPORT'S FINDINGS]

Rural population

- 9.2 million People live in rural England. This is 17% of the country's population.

Overarching findings

- **Public and private sector** service provision is reducing in rural areas due to austerity and competitive pressures. Community action has increased and plays a growing role.
- Two services currently at particular **risk of cutbacks** are local buses and bank branches. The loss of bus services affects access to other services.
- **Take-up of online service** provision grows and has real scope. But there are issues, such as those not online and if it replaces physical service outlets.
- The rural population is **ageing**, which will place extra demand on services like GP surgeries and adult social care. However, some pensioners could be volunteers and many may use local (rural) services.

Local buses and community transport: BARRIERS TO ACCESS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT FUNDING

- 49% households in smaller rural settlements (villages) have **access to** a regular bus service. 51% do not.
- In 2015/16 (alone) there were 124 **bus services withdrawn** and 248 reduced / altered. The largest cuts were to subsidised services in shire areas.
- Many (a third) of **community transport** schemes are rural, but they tend to be smaller and more dependent on fares revenue than urban schemes.

Welfare services: HEALTH & WELFARE

- **Jobcentres** are overwhelmingly located in urban centres. 60% of rural households live more than 5 miles from a Jobcentre.
- The number of rural pensioners claiming **Pension Credit** (to top-up the State Pension) is lower than would be expected, raising questions about take-up.
- In sparsely populated areas an issue is the distance many live from those who give **independent advice** on benefits, debt, etc. e.g. Age UK, Citizens Advice.

Access to cash: **FUTURE OF RURAL AREAS**

- **Bank branch closures** have increased. Some 124 of closures in 2014 were a last branch in their neighbourhood, many in rural or coastal places.
- The **Post Office network** still has significant reach, with more than half of its outlets in rural locations. The size of the rural network is fairly stable. For many rural people the PO is the nearest place to access their bank account.
- 11% of **ATM (cash) machines** are in rural locations. Provision in rural towns is quite good, though accessing an ATM is an issue for many villages.

Further education: **FUTURE OF RURAL AREAS**

- Only half of rural users can get to a **FE College** by public transport or walking in a 'reasonable travel time' (as defined by the Department for Transport).
- 39% of rural users can get to a **school sixth form** by public transport or walking in a 'reasonable travel time' (and that transport may be infrequent).
- **Apprenticeship** opportunities are fewer in rural areas due to the paucity of public transport and lack of larger employers.

Retail sector: **FUTURE OF RURAL AREAS**

- The average rural household is a 9 minute car drive from their **nearest food shop**. The average urban household can walk to a food shop quicker.
- **Online shopping** has expanded rapidly. However, rural consumers may be held back by poor broadband and most delivery innovation is in cities.

- **Community-run shops** have grown steadily in number and most are rural. There are 277 in rural England with more than 100 others being planned.

Mental health services: **HEALTH AND WELFARE**

- Mental ill-health is **less prevalent** in rural than in urban areas, though sufferers in rural communities may be less likely to present.
- **Suicide rates** are relatively high in rural areas and farmers have the highest rate among any occupation (because of their tendency not to seek help).
- **Mental health services** are more restricted in rural NHS Trust areas. Relative to their populations, rural areas have fewer doctors, nurses, social workers and therapists, with fewer home visits and in-patient facilities.

Older people's services: **HEALTH AND WELFARE**

- Rural areas have a high **proportion of older people** and their populations will age fast. Almost a quarter of rural older people are themselves carers.
- Average journey times from home to a **GP surgery** are longer in rural than in urban areas. Evidence indicates rural GPs having to make more home visits.
- **Care providers** face rural challenges e.g. staff recruitment, urban-based day care centres and contractors unwilling to serve outlying clients. There are growing numbers of volunteer schemes (Good Neighbour, Village Agent).

Public health services: **HEALTH & WELFARE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT FUNDING**

- Rural areas score badly on certain **Public Health Outcome** indicators, mainly those related to service provision (e.g. health checks, screening access) or those on traditional rural concerns (e.g. isolation, road casualties).
- But they **also score badly** on school readiness indicators, while northern rural areas score badly on active lifestyles, diabetes and early mortality.
- **Funding** for public health is much lower for rural than urban local authorities. Some rural areas get under £30 per resident. The England average is £51.

Community assets: **FUTURE OF RURAL AREAS**

- There are almost 10,000 **village halls** and other rural community buildings, managed by volunteers and hosting a wide range of activities and services.

- **Community-run shops** have grown steadily in number and most are rural. There are 277 in rural England with more than 100 others being planned.
- There are now 170 **Community Land Trusts**, a number which has doubled in just two years. Most of these operate in rural areas.

Gaps in evidence

- **Access to services** data is thin or dated. Department for Transport data only covers 8 services and the wider CRC dataset is now 6 years old.
- There is little robust evidence about the **take-up of online** services by rural users, despite the obvious opportunities that this presents.
- The rural evidence base on **community assets** is weak (except for village halls and community-run shops), despite the policy focus on this topic.

3.0 Matters for the Rural Assembly to Consider.

The task of the Rural Assembly meetings, as a representative body, will be to formally pick from the Report areas from this research report on which they wish to make formal representation to Government.

The case for a united rural voice in the context of Brexit

Extract from "[Frequently Asked Questions](#)" (Dept for Exiting the EU, 22/11/16)

The Referendum

Will there be a second referendum or an alternative to leaving the EU?

No. The country voted to leave the European Union and it is the duty of the Government and Parliament to make sure we do just that.

How will you take into account the views of those who did not vote to leave the EU?

Our priority is to build a national consensus around our exit from the EU. We have already started a wide-ranging programme of engagement, listening to organisations, institutions and companies in as many sectors as possible to establish their priorities and understand their concerns, and also to hear what they think the opportunities are.

Exiting the European Union

What is Article 50 and why do we need to trigger it?

The rules for exiting the EU are set out in Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union. This is the only lawful route for withdrawal from the EU under the Treaties.

When will Article 50 be triggered?

The Prime Minister has made clear the Government's intention to trigger Article 50 no later than the end of March 2017. It is in everyone's interest that we take time to establish a UK approach and clear objectives for negotiations.

What is the Government doing ahead of triggering article 50?

The Department for Exiting the European Union is responsible for overseeing negotiations to leave the EU and establishing the future relationship between the UK and EU. The Department now has just over 300 staff in London and a further 120 people working in the [UK Representation in Brussels](#). We are currently undertaking 2 broad areas of work:

- We are listening to as many organisations, companies and institutions as possible – from the large PLCs to small business, from the devolved administrations through to councils, local government and the major metropolitan bodies – to build a national consensus around our negotiating position. We are doing this through [meetings](#), visits and a series of sector roundtables, led by the Secretary of State. You can read more about the work of each roundtable, as well as future roundtables and Ministerial visits [here](#).
- We are carrying out a programme of sectoral and regulatory analysis, which will identify the key factors for British businesses and the labour force that will affect our negotiations with the EU. This will help inform our negotiating position and build a detailed understanding of how withdrawing from the EU will affect our domestic policies, to seize the opportunities and ensure a smooth process of exit.

Background

In the referendum on 23 June 2016, a majority of the UK electorate voted to leave the EU. UK withdrawal from the EU – usually described as ‘Brexit’ – has been the subject of a great deal of comment in books, journal articles, press reports and other media. Great uncertainty exists around future policy, funding arrangements, trade and other critical areas.

From the extract quoted in the box above, it is clear that scope exists to create a dialogue with government in an attempt to influence the potential outcomes for rural areas, their businesses and communities.

Other interest groups with powerful lobbying and representational resources are actively engaged with government and it is critical that rural areas are not left out.

To quote Professor Tony Travers (LSE) speaking at the Rural Services Network’s Rural Conference last September “But I do think the general point you make is the risk of the rural voice, well let’s put it this way, unless the rural voice is strong, it won’t be heard. And the lobby has to be one that will have to work more powerfully now than ever before because trade associations working for let’s say the car industry, will be, and rightly, working very hard. But the rural lobby is a different thing and has generally existed for different purposes. What it hasn’t traditionally been about, and I stand corrected in a room of people who know more about this than me, thinking about the terms of Britain’s relationship with the rest of the world in terms of rural economies. It has been about issues to do with the countryside or small schools or rural bus services, but not about what economy and what package of deals made by the UK Government would be the best one for the rural economy and that will have to be altered quickly, because as I say, the car industry, cities, Scotland, Wales will definitely. Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are all going to have a place at the table in the negotiations, but other interests won’t

Current funding

Currently, rural areas in the UK benefit from more than **£3 billion per year** in EU funds in support of agriculture and rural development, as part of the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy. It is widely accepted that £1 spent in the rural economy circulates circa 3 times – thus the value of current EU funds into the rural economy is around £9 billion a year and that is what stands to be lost depending upon the decisions made by the UK Government.

Five-sixths of the £3 billion a year is spent on so-called Pillar 1 ‘basic’ support to all farms according to the area of land they manage, in order to provide income support and some basic environmental and safety conditions on land management. One-sixth of that sum is spent on Pillar 2 aid through the Rural Development Programmes for each UK principality. For England this is broadly broken down as follows:

Rural Development Programme (England) 2013-20	
Scheme	£m
Countryside Stewardship	860
Environmental Stewardship	1959
English Woodland Grant Scheme	95
Growth Programme	177
Countryside Productivity	141
LEADER	139
Farming Recovery Fund	9
Technical Assistance	127
Total	3,507

As this table shows, a very large proportion of spending within the Rural Development Programme (in addition to the Basic Payment Scheme for farmers) is spent on environmental management schemes for farmers and a much smaller share of funds for farm and forestry investments and the diversification of the rural economy, as well as building local capacity and providing rural services often through the LEADER approach.

With regard to other EU funds, in particular European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and European Social Fund (ESF) £6.5 billion is allocated across the English Local Enterprise Partnerships for the period from 2014-20. This figure is not broken down in any analysis in terms of rural areas.

Some certainty in the short term has been provided by the Chancellor following his announcements in [August](#) and [October](#). This has guaranteed EU funds for projects to the point at which the UK departs the EU. The Chancellor confirmed that “the government will guarantee EU funding for structural and investment fund projects, including agri-environment schemes, signed after the Autumn Statement and which continue after we have left the EU. He was clear, while the UK is still a member of the EU, British businesses, farmers and other organisations must be entitled to apply for EU funds.”

Funding for projects will be honoured by the government, if they meet the following conditions:

- they are good value for money
- they are in line with domestic strategic priorities

Respective government departments are now seeking to confirm how they meet these two requirements in relation to the EU funding programmes they manage.

As stated earlier, in considering future funding arrangements it will be important to determine the local multiplier effect of EU agricultural expenditure and the consequent impact on the wider community. The impending ex-post evaluation report into the 2007-13

Rural Development Programme for England (due to be formally submitted to the European Commission by the end of December 2016) should prove informative in this respect.

Expressed views of others

These include the following:

- In respect of agriculture it is likely that there will be a move by government to reduce the amount of support that's going into CAP pillar 1: the basic farm payment which all farms receive currently on a per-hectare basis. This payment accounts for more than 5/6 of CAP support to farms in the UK, and it particularly underpins incomes in the beef, sheep and cereal sectors whilst in others it is less significant. It has been the stated aim of the UK Treasury for the last 30 or more years to say, 'Pillar 1 doesn't have a rationale, we would do without it if we could'. This is one of the largest parts of the so-called 'savings' that the Leave campaign promised could be made, if the UK left the EU.
- In a previous policy statement on CAP reform (2005), Defra and the UK Treasury said their aim would be to cut Pillar 1 in a carefully phased process, allowing time for farms to adjust to reduced support.
- Following the Autumn Statement it appears that the government remains keen to pursue devolution in England. This may have an impact on future resource allocation. There is a risk that the Local Government Association seeks to merge CAP funds into wider funds for local availability as part of a wider devolution argument.
- The CLA, along with Scottish Land & Estates, has published a series of [briefings](#) outlining new opportunities for the rural economy in post-Brexit Britain. These focus on direct support, trade, regulation, labour and devolution.
- The [NFU](#) are engaged in direct discussion with the government. NFU President Meurig Raymond said: "The government must not ignore the economic importance of the farming sector. It's the bedrock of the UK's largest manufacturing industry - food and drink - which is worth £108 billion and employs 3.9million people."

Key Rural Statistics

- Some 9.3 million people (17% of the England total) live in rural areas and some 581,000 (1.1%) of those are (in 2014) in sparse settings.
- In 2015 Gross Value Added (GVA) in Predominantly Rural areas was worth £237 billion (16.5% of the English total) employing 3.8 million people in England
- 'Distribution; transport; accommodation and food' and 'Public administration; education; health' each contributed roughly one fifth of GVA in both Predominantly Rural and Predominantly Urban areas (excluding London). Around 2% of the GVA from Predominantly Rural areas came from 'Agriculture, forestry and fishing'

- In 2015 the productivity of Predominantly Rural areas was around 89% of that for England as a whole (provisional estimate).
- A booklet of general Rural Statistics produced by Rural England Community Interest Company is appended to this note.

Information updates

The Commons Library and Lords Library has produced impartial analysis of the UK's referendum for remaining in or leaving the European Union. This is updated on a rolling basis and can be found via this [link](#).

The page sets out useful research on the impact of Brexit on key policy areas. It also explains the process for leaving the EU.

Economic Viability in Rural Areas

Our starting point is that a Vibrant Rural Economy and the Protection of our Historic Countryside are not in conflict if properly and sensitively planned and implemented.

Initial discussions have suggested that the future economic viability of rural areas is dependent on Government policy and investment into the following Three Pillars:-

- **INFRASTRUCTURE (including Broadband speeds and mobile connectivity)**
- **PLANNING**
- **ECONOMIC SUPPORT WHERE MARKET FAILURE CAN BE DEMONSTRATED**

However, Economic Viability cannot be achieved unless there is also social viability. With the core funding of local government services by 2020 changing to Business Rates Retention and Council Tax real challenges lie ahead. There is an acknowledged affordable housing crisis across rural England. This and access to services, an ageing population and rural vulnerability generally are all existing major issues (which are likely to get worse not better based on current trends) affecting rural areas and the rural economy.

It is this whole package of issues rural organisations should be forming common voice over and seeking to influence government policy and investment in the negotiations about leaving the EU but also, perhaps even more importantly, in the years beyond 2020 when the country is more master to its own destiny.

Suggested initial priorities for wider rural services and rural development?

We suggest that if we do not act, others will dominate discussion and potential influence with government over the future shape of policy and funding impacting on England and rural areas will miss out.

We further suggest that, if we do not act together there is a real danger that a confused and inconsistent set of voices from bodies representing “rural” will be heard by government, not understood and therefore largely ignored.

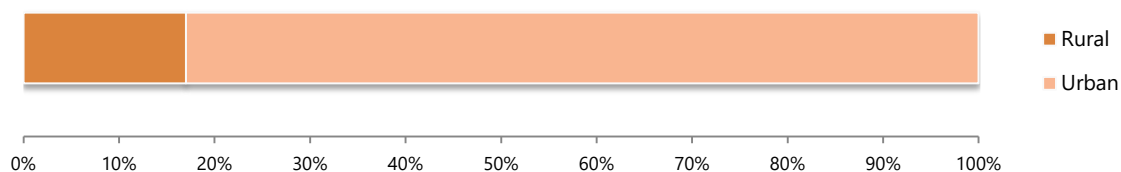
The suggested way forward is as follows:

1. An initial meeting is held to discuss whether or not a “common rural voice” can be achieved and how it might operate
2. If the principle is agreed to form a small Steering Group to progress matters
3. Agree an initial list of shared goals across organisations with a strong rural interest.
4. Agree the need for (jointly specified and funded) targeted research and analysis to support action (policies and investments by government) in achieving these goals including an initial assessment of what rural areas look like now economically and socially in the context of current funding pressures and beyond 2020
5. Agree broad communications activity

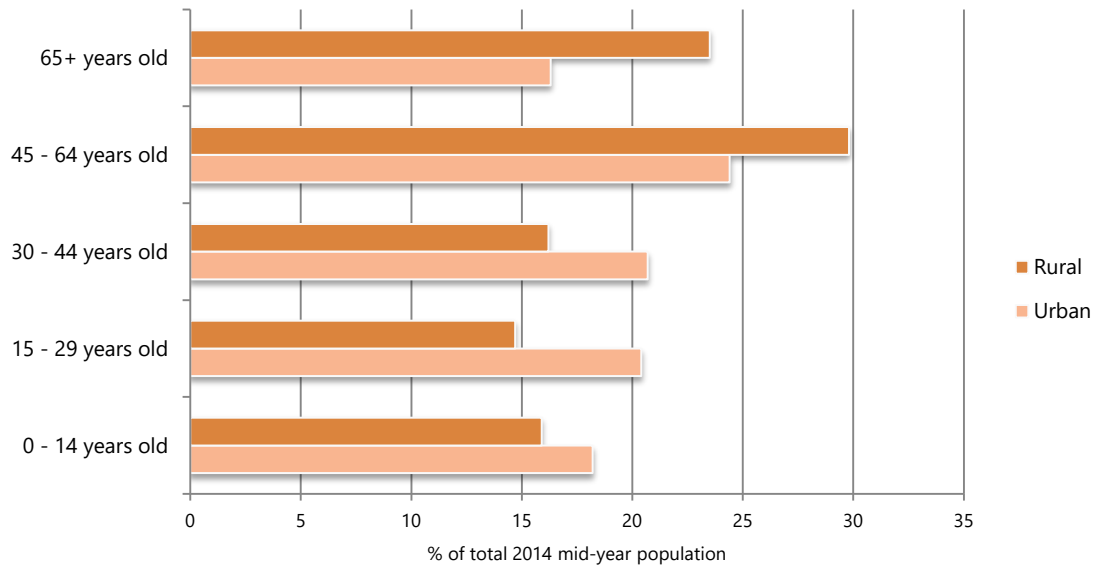


What does rural England look like?

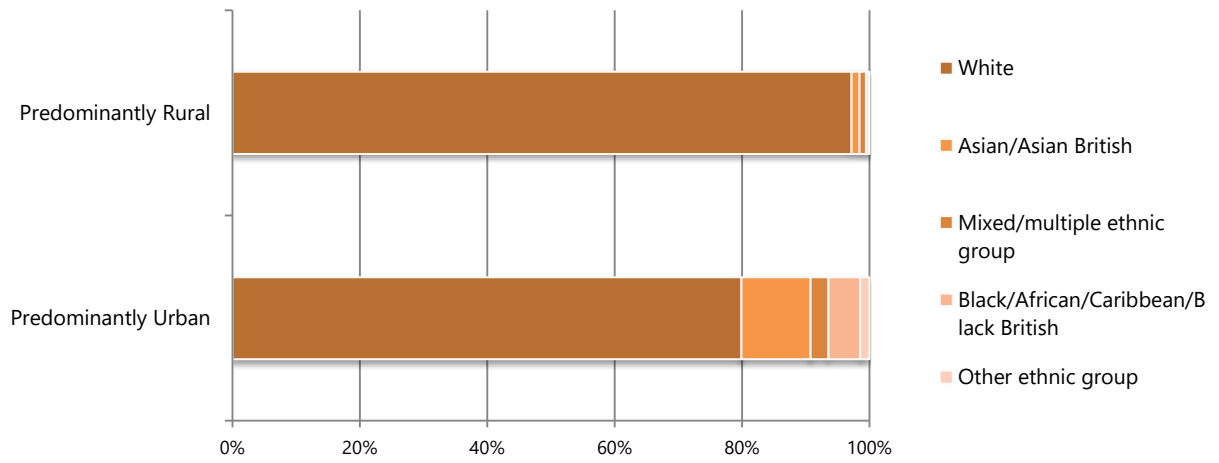
9.3 million people live in rural areas of England, that's **17.0%** of the English population (2014 mid-year population estimate)



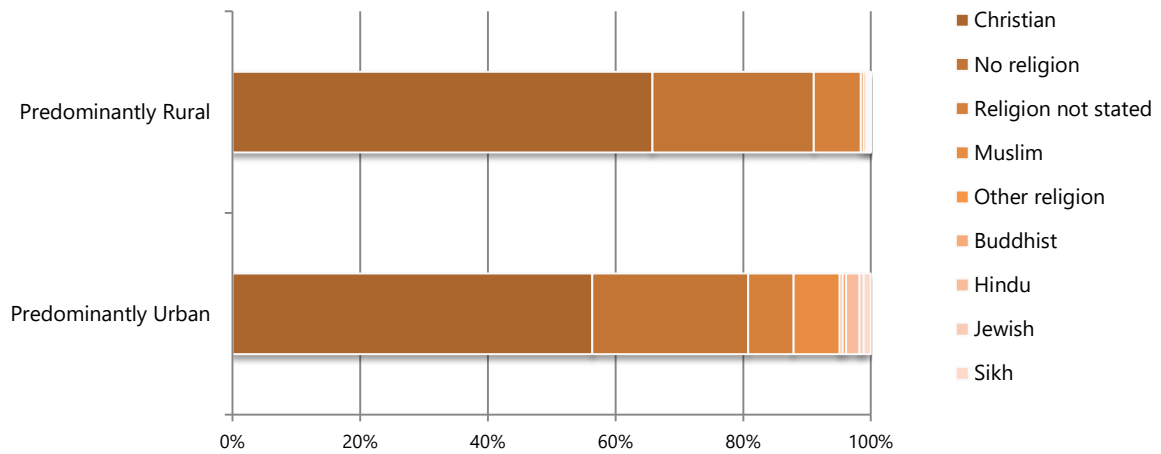
Rural England tends to have **higher proportions of older residents** and a **lower proportion of younger residents**



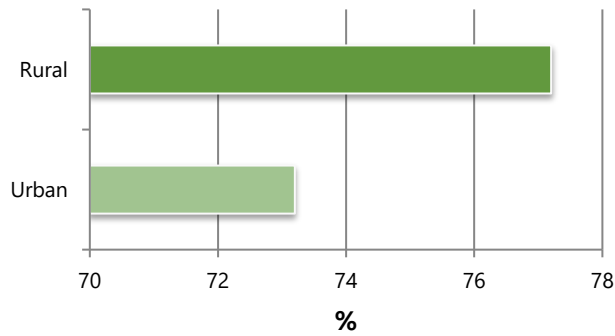
Ethnicity



Religion

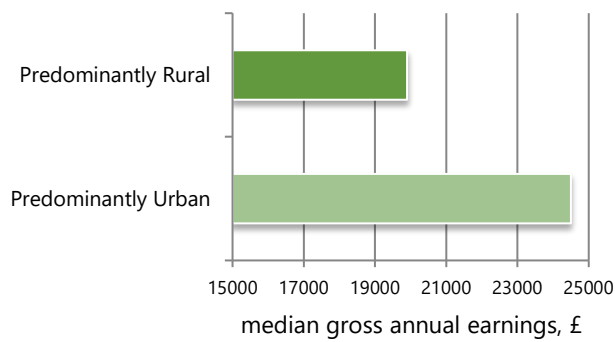


According to Census 2011 data, rural England is less ethnically diverse and predominantly Christian in faith



Rural England has a higher proportion of working age population (16-64) who are employed ONS Labour Market Statistics

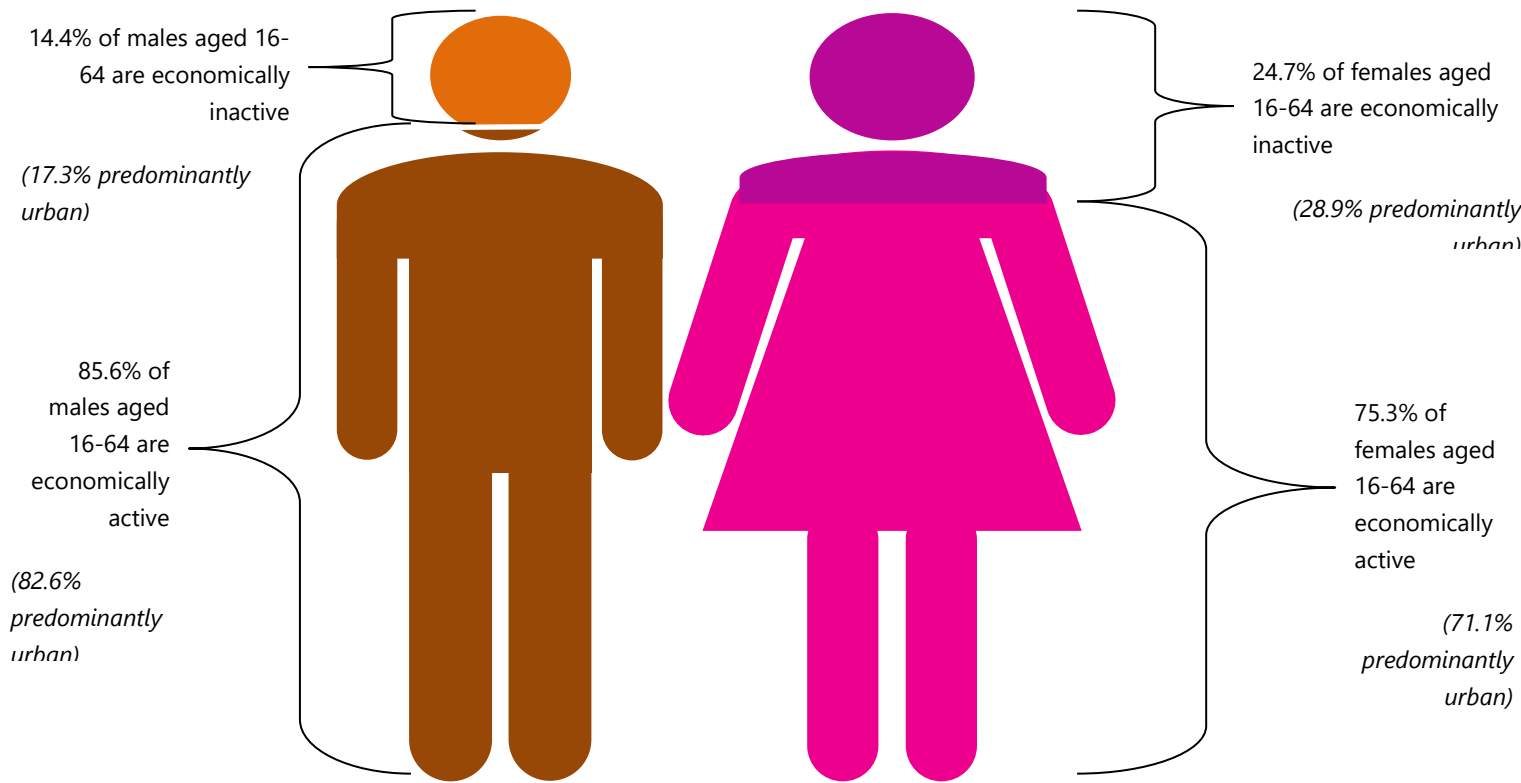
2015



however, the workplace based median annual earnings for **predominantly rural areas is 18.8% lower** than for predominantly urban areas Annual Survey of

Hours and Earnings 2013

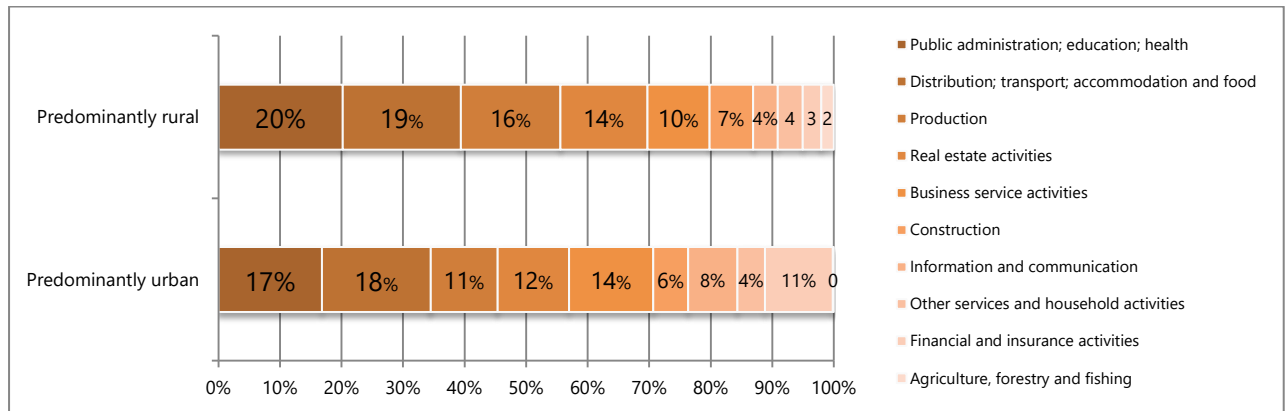
Economic activity in predominantly rural areas



Annual population survey, Jan'15 to Dec'15

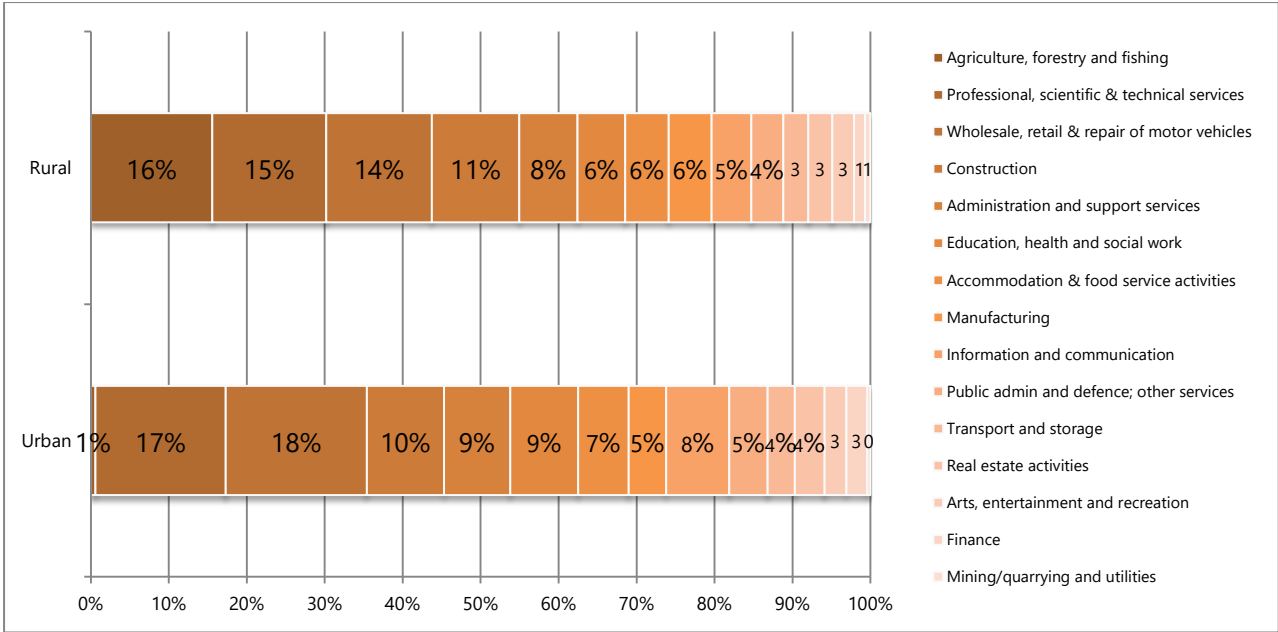
Gross Value Added by industry as a percentage of the total GVA for Predominantly Rural areas shows Public Administration, Education, Health as the largest sector, slightly higher than Distribution, Transport, Accommodation and Food.

Gross Value Added measures the contribution to the economy of each individual producer, industry or sector in the country. However there are some gaps in the coverage of the Annual Business Survey; agriculture for example is only partially covered and self employment is not included in the data. This may lead to underestimations of economic value.



Office for National Statistics, Gross Value Added data, 2014

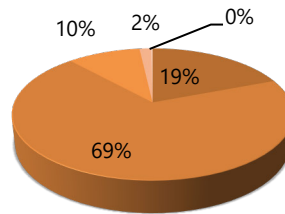
The percentage by industry of local units of registered businesses within all rural areas shows Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing as the largest sector, slightly higher than Professional, Scientific & Technical services.



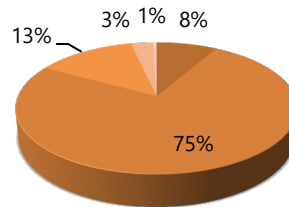
Inter-Departmental Business Register 2014/15

The percentage of local units of registered businesses within set size bands:

All Rural



All Urban

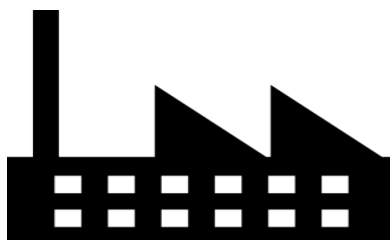


■ with no employees ■ 1-9 employees ■ 10-49 employees ■ 50-249 employees ■ 250 and more employees

Inter-Departmental Business Register 2014/15

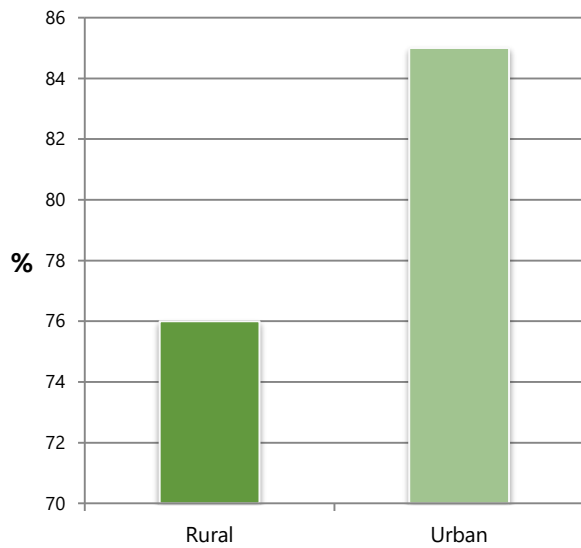


22% of rural workers work from home (12% urban)



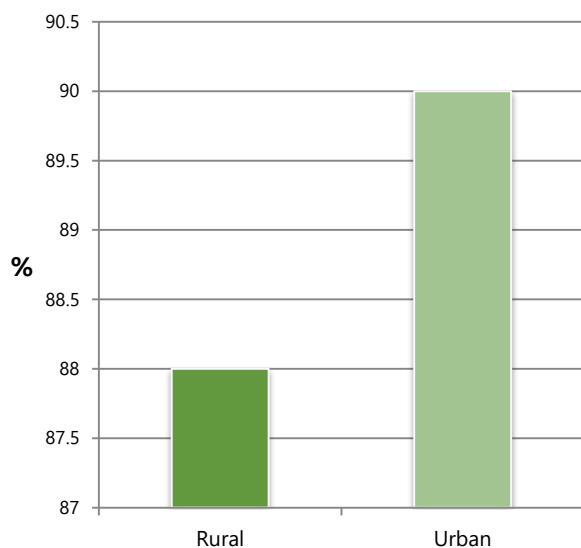
78% of rural workers work elsewhere (88% urban)

(Labour Force Survey, 2013)



76% of the rural population has 'reasonable' access to centres of employment by public transport or walking

(2013, DfT National Transport Survey)



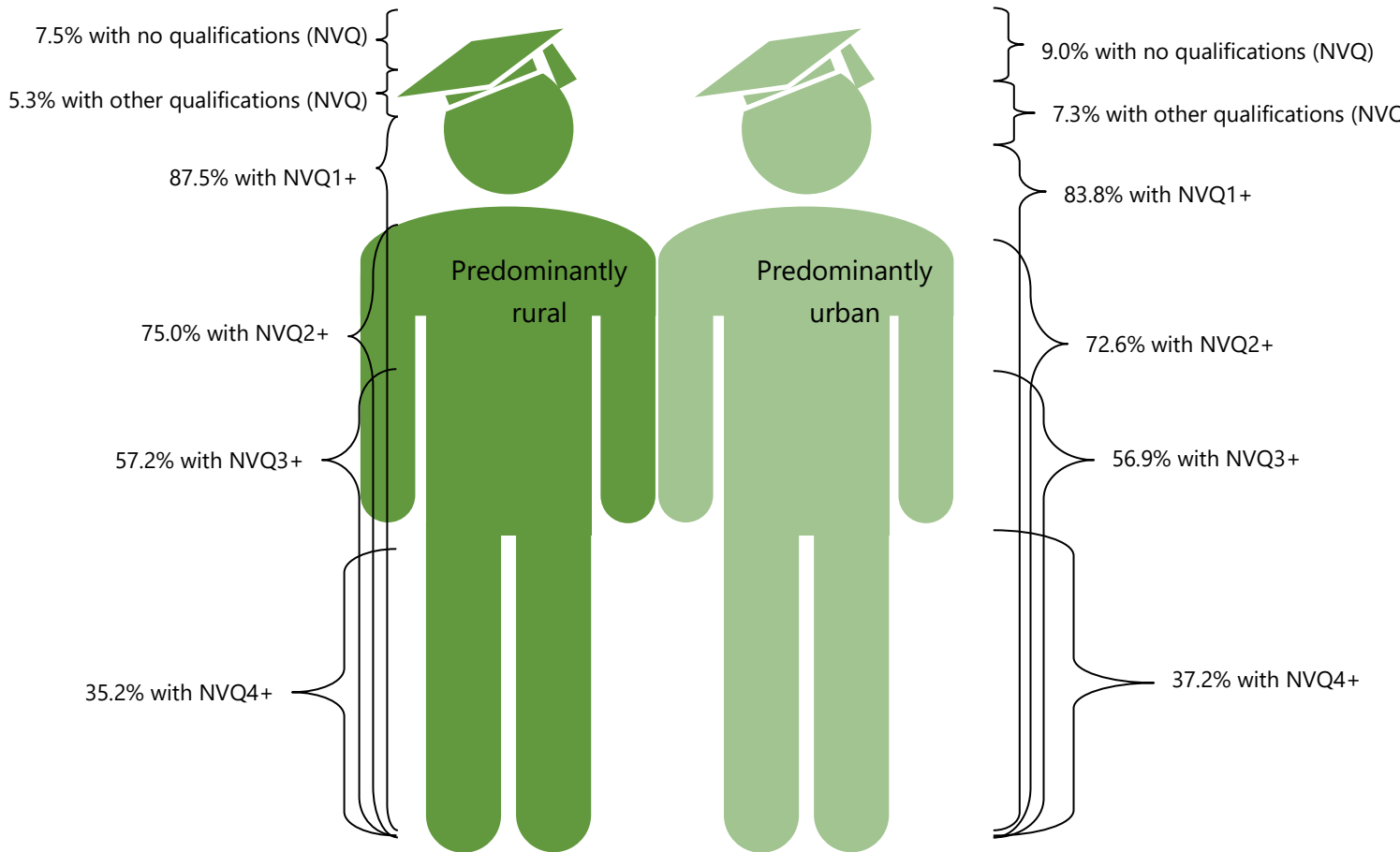
88% of the rural population has 'reasonable' access to centres of employment by car

(2013, DfT National Transport Survey)

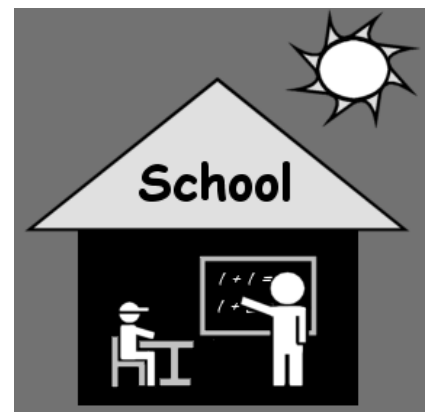
'Reasonable access' is a measure of accessibility which takes into account the sensitivity of users to the travel time. It therefore takes into account how likely they are to travel to the given service location by different modes of transport, given the time it will take and users' willingness to undertake the journey.

The qualification attainment of those aged 16 to 64 Annual Population Survey

Jan15-Dec15

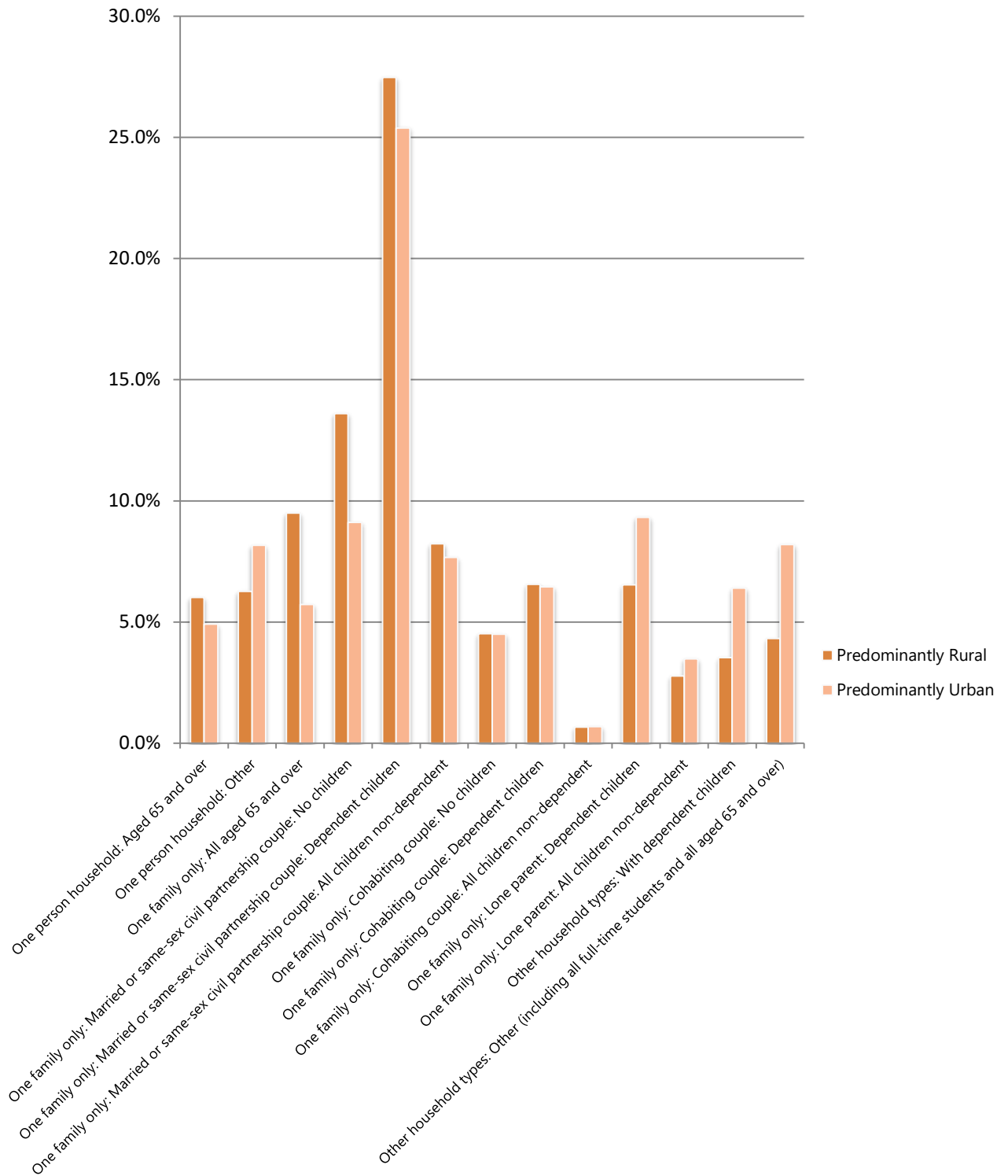


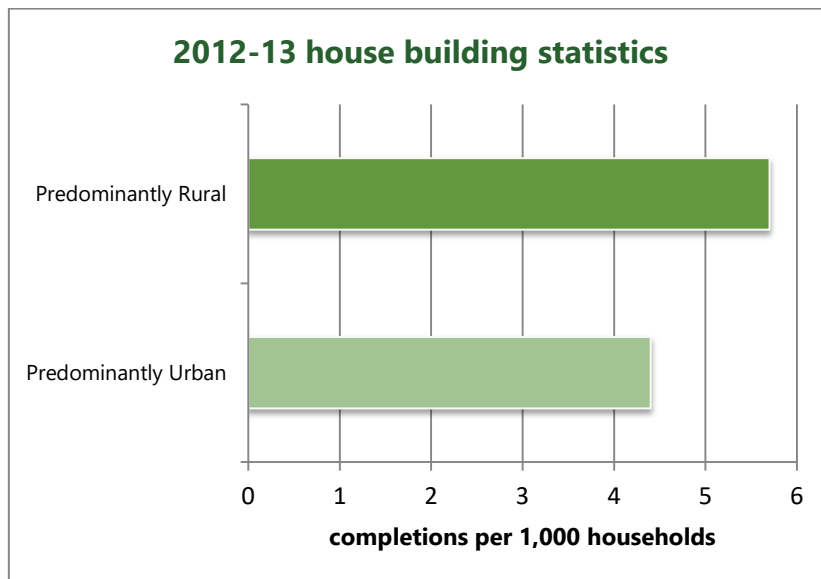
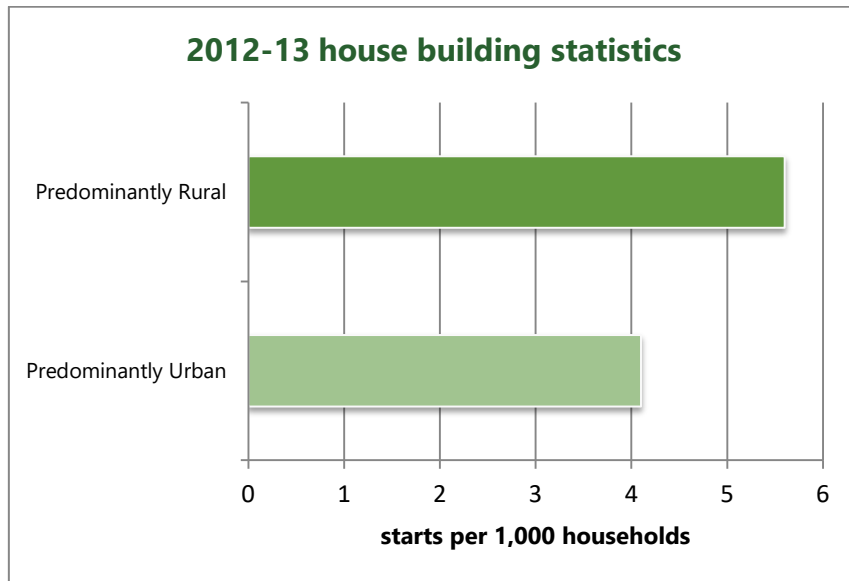
31.9% of working population resident in **predominantly rural** areas have a qualification at **NVQ4 or above** (32.6% in predominantly urban areas) ONS Annual Population Survey, 2011



70.7% of pupils resident in **rural** areas leave school with **5+ GCSEs grade A*-C** (urban areas 64.8%) Department for Education 2013/14

Household Composition





There is a higher rate of house-builds started and completed in predominantly rural areas than in predominantly urban areas and compared with the national average.



In 2012, **predominantly rural** areas (by local authority classification) had a **ratio of lower quartile house price to lower quartile workplace based earnings** of **7.9**. This is in comparison to predominantly urban areas

DCLG Live tables on housing market & house prices



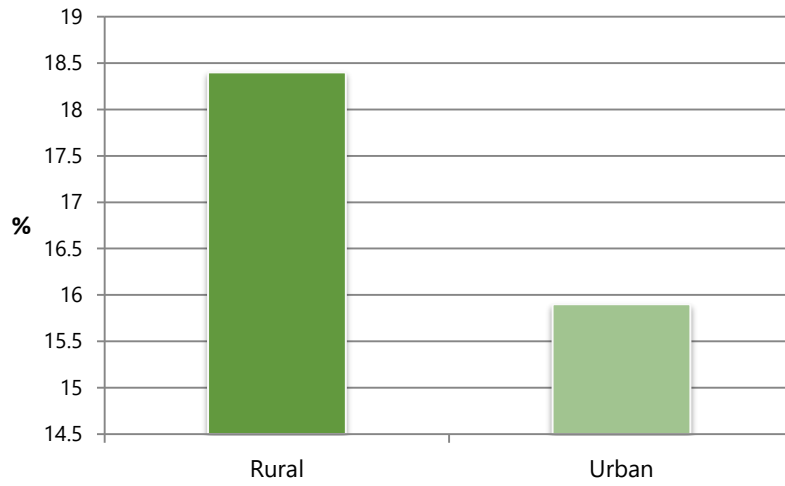
The average **private registered providers rent** in **predominantly rural** areas (by local authority classification) in March 2013 was **£87 per week**. This is in comparison to £84 per week for predominantly urban (excluding London) areas

DCLG Live tables on Private Registered Provider rents

This comes with a backdrop of rural residents paying on average £81 per head more in council tax than their urban neighbours. This is a result of year on year

underfunding through the Government grant system (figures from 2015-16
settlement calculations)

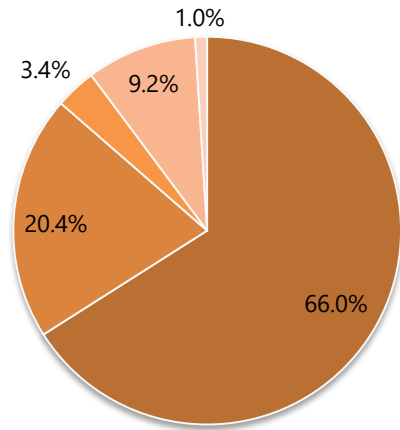
Percentage of households in fuel poverty, 2010



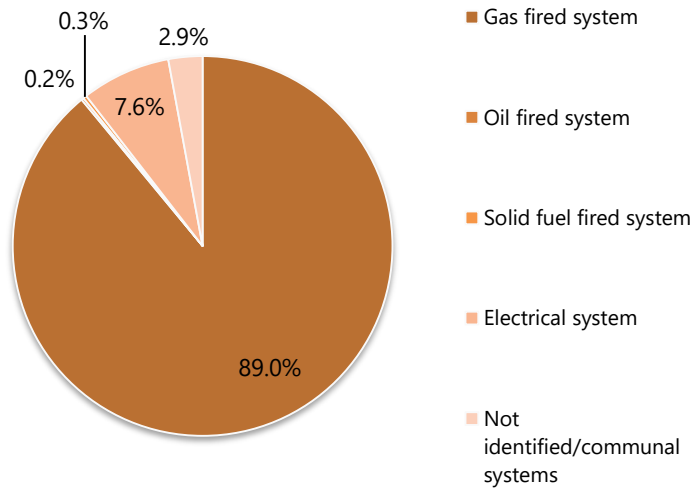
DECC Modelled fuel poverty estimates

The percentage of households by main fuel type DCLG, English Housing Survey 2010

Rural



Urban



- Gas fired system
- Oil fired system
- Solid fuel fired system
- Electrical system
- Not identified/communal systems

Household car availability

(DfT National Travel Survey 2012)

Rural

Urban

Households with no car/van

11%



28%

Households with one car/van

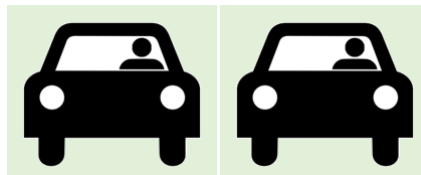
42%



45%

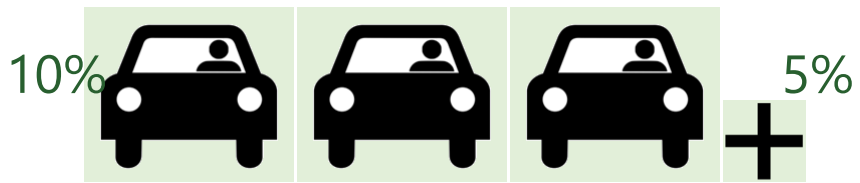
Households with two cars/vans

38%

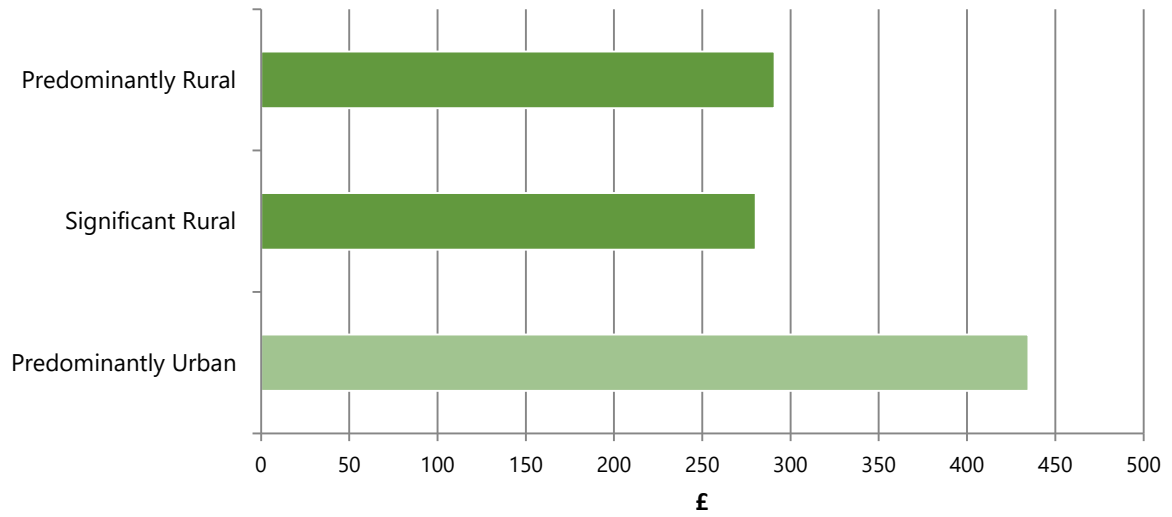


22%

Households with three or more cars/vans



Government Funded Spending Power per head (2016/17 Final Local Government Funding Settlement)



RSN analysis 2016

6. Rural Vulnerability

To consider how the RSN should tackle this increasing problem.
Attachment 5 - Report from the Corporate Director.

The situation relating to rural vulnerability is set to worsen this year. That may seem a dramatic statement. On what grounds can that possibly be a certainty?

People are moving/ retiring to rural areas in increasing number. People also however live longer in rural areas.

This situation in turn produces a situation where the number of people over 65 and over 80 and over 85 is increasing significantly faster than the relevant rate of growth nationally. This is at a time when rural lifestyles are threatened by facilities tending to be centralised further away from rural areas, austerity cuts are removing services like bus services completely and rural areas are falling further behind the rate that technological advantages are being introduced elsewhere. Additionally the amount of money available for community initiatives which are often particularly important in rural areas has shrunk markedly.

Many would argue that people in rural areas are consequently more vulnerable than i than they have been for many a long year and as the average population ages that situation can only become worse.

It seems to us that the one thing that must not happen is for the situation to be ignored. It is easy to pretend that as rural areas are prettier and a place where people might want to be, that issues like lower wages, higher council tax, fewer facilities, lesser than average social care provision, lower pro rata grant payments are all the price that people must pay for living in rural areas. Government, including some current Ministers, are guilty of such a stance.

Part of the work (perhaps closer to the Sparse Rural area work area) is to persuade government that this is real nonsense and that if they are not going to have a crisis in rural areas in say 10 years time then they must start to alter their thinking now.

However we feel there is an awful that can be done by RSN collectively and perhaps local authorities singularly to get ahead of what could be a really bad situation occurring.

We would suggest as follows:-

- (a) That ahead of the twice yearly Rural Assembly meeting a specific meeting should take place which will be of particular importance to members representing County and Unitary Councils but be open to all members on Rural Social Care, Health and Vulnerability which gives capacity for these topics to be looked at in specific detail.
- (b) Utility companies like Water, Energy and Telecom providers are, through their regulators, being encouraged to identify customers who are either permanently (or due to ill health temporarily) vulnerable. Conditions occasioning this can of course be both physical and mental and this can occur across the age range. Utility providers call this process safeguarding and it involves Priority Services Lists that people who identify themselves as having particular needs register themselves upon. Special measures are then considered for people when for example a water supply is interrupted or information given about how

costs could be minimised can be arrived at. There is a need to link such arrangements with local authority, Fire, Police, Ambulance and parish council involvement to ensure there is as much as can be achieved in joined up thinking and that people in rural areas who are obviously in far greater threat of feeling or becoming isolated are encouraged to take full advantage of these measures.

- (c) Consumer organisations like Citizens Advice, Health-Watch, Water Watch, and Neighbourhood Watch together with Age UK should all be involved with Local Authorities in considering the problem of the extra layer of vulnerability that exists in rural areas. There is no patent on thinking in relation to this issue. It is suggested that meetings across these sectors to lateral think would be of real value. Possibly we should be encouraging the Annual Rural Conferences in Cheltenham each September to assist in that process in relation to local branches of these Organisations being able to be joined in the rural debate with local authorities during the Conference.
- (d) Rural Vulnerability Day in Parliament – we have taken soundings from the Chair and Vice Chair of the APPG about this. Both are very keen on the concept of a specific day being staged and the Energy and Water providers seemed similarly enthusiastic.
- (e) Village SOS – This is a scheme which has been run by ACRE and Rose Regeneration over the past years. Based on a time limited Lottery Bid it is currently ended. RSN, ACRE and Rose Regeneration are keen to involve others to try for a continuation scheme and concerns surrounding rural vulnerability could perhaps be woven into this bid.
- (f) Parish Helpers
It would naturally be of the greatest assistance if there was a specific person on every rural Parish Council whose brief it was to look at vulnerability issues locally. Possibly there could be through the Parish Agent scheme which some RCCs have looked to initiate.

We have been trying to do some work to try to identify 20 rural sources in a rural community who could assist in circulating publicity about the Priority Services lists and may also be able, themselves, to encourage people who may feel vulnerable to register themselves. The attached sheet shows the detail, to achieve a full list for each rural parish is obviously a herculean task but it may ultimately be that the establishment of such detail would prove to be a big step forward.

- (g) Twenty Questions

It is very fully appreciated that this report asks far far more questions than it answers. It is a fact that as the average lifespan increases the percentage that is vulnerable for one reason or other increases. It is a fact that the very topography of rural areas introduces in itself an extra layer of potential vulnerability. It is also the situation that demographics would suggest that rural areas will see the worst of the problems. Whilst it will not be possible to take the individual problems away it is clearly an overall problem that requires as much cross organisational lateral thinking as possible to achieve strong systems, not for people to be spied on or over monitored by society, but to ensure that the social consequences arising are fully thought through and discussed and debated. We do feel as a network covering rural services we are best placed to try to do that.

We will continue to present at the very least annual reports to the Spring Meeting of the Rural Assembly on this massively complex issue.

TWENTY QUESTIONS

LOCAL INFORMATION

PARISH- Located in or directed relating to the Parish. (Through query to the Parish Council.)

Name of Council---

Name of Clerk-----

(1) Name of church(es) and local vicar.

(2) Village Hall Committee- any website domain name- contact

(3) Parish Council Website - (name of contact)

(4) Any Community Website- any domain name (name of contact)

(5) Any Church Magazine - name of editor or contact

(6) Any local Community Transport Group or Car Share Scheme- name of contact

(7) Name of local paper most frequently read by parishioners

(8) Age UK- name of any local contact and contact if known

(9) Citizens Advise Bureau – name of any local contact

(10) Carers Trust Members- are there any locally- name of any known contacts

(11) Names of Village Shop or Shops

(12) Names of Local Pub or Pubs

(13) Is there a Local Post Office if so please give details--

(14) Is there a Local School –if so please give details

(15) Community Council for the area- is anyone on the Parish Council involved with this. If so can we please have details?

(16) Names of any [Nursing/Care Home](#), Old People's Homes- Abbeyfield- Sheltered Housing Developments in the Parish

(17) Are there any Medical Centres – Doctors Surgeries in the Parish. If so can details be given

(18) Police Community Support Officers or Local Police Contact

(19) Village Agent – To be honest not sure what or who this is-?

(20) Any WI or Mothers Union?

WIDER INFORMATION

– Located out of the Parish (Through our own investigation).

(1) Closest Hospital

(2) District Council. + Any contacts considered relevant

(3) District Council Electoral Registration Officer-

(4) District Council Newsletter contact

(5) County Council- Directors of Social Care. Contacts in that Department.

(6) County Council Newsletter contact.

(7) Community Council for the area

(8) Village SOS Coordinators ,

Attachment 6

A Rural Panel and the Rural Sounding Boards

One of the undoubted problems is that because of their perceived location is that rural areas fail to get their messages across. Worst still, rural areas may have got out of the habit of even trying to raise their legitimate concerns.

The challenge then is to use modern technology to set up better networking with stronger and fuller networks.

Rural England is sometimes overlooked (or mainstreamed) because England is the most urbanised of the home Countries. This does little credit to the fact that virtually four fifths of the Country is rural and one fifth of the national population lives in these defined rural areas.

To get a rural slant on things would therefore do three things. Firstly, it would identify the rural feeling on rural issues. Secondly, it would establish if and how it might be differing from established national views and thirdly it would through these exercises remind Government that Rural England does exist and has independent stand points.

The difference between Sounding Boards and a Panel is one of its composition. A Sounding Board is as the phrase says, the established view of a group of representative people. A Panel has to be demographically and socially balanced so that it constitutes a statistically valid cross section. Its view will carry the greater weight because it can prove that that view is arrived at by an accurate cross section of society. Consequently a Panel requires more work and expense to maintain.

Both Rural England CIC and the RSN feel rural views could be far more forcefully conveyed by the establishment of a Rural Panel and by establishment of a series of Sounding Boards from various sectors.

We might like to establish:

1. A Rural Panel:-

Rural England has sent a brief to the University of Gloucestershire to commence the establishment of such a panel. It is hoped one can be established and be operating by the end of 2017.

2. Rural Sounding Boards

(a) Principal Authority Councillors

This is already established and will be used quarterly by the Rural Assembly to establish consultative views on any array of issues.

(b) Parish Councillors

Again this exists and has about 500 Parish Councillors upon it.

(c) Young People

We have been liaising with the Young Farmers Association and with UK Youth. Working with these Organisations we do feel we can obtain a strong view on topics as they are perceived by Young People.

(d) School Governors

We send a lot of emails to schools but response back is limited. We will need to try to activate about 100 rural school contacts – so this work is ongoing.

(e) Parish Councillors on Vulnerability

As has been indicated elsewhere on this Agenda, rural vulnerability is becoming a massive issue. It would assist many Rural England supporters (Water and Energy Companies) if there were the opportunity to take views on Parish Council perceptions of the situation.

(f) Rural Students – we hope we can form a small Sounding Board of PHD students studying rural issues.

(g) Small Businesses

This clearly is the cherry on the cake if such a Sounding Board could be successfully established for questions on economic growth, barriers to it and likely incentives are really important.

We are getting incrementally some information on people on Parish Councils who are involved with small businesses and we are moving towards a Board, working with the National Association of Enterprise Agencies. However, this is far from a strong cross section and work is necessary to find other sources to complete this important matrix. It is unfortunate that the Federation of Small Businesses have indicated they do not wish to work with us in this area.



LEXINGTON
COMMUNICATIONS

Rural Services Network Communications toolkit

February 2017



RURAL
SERVICES
NETWORK

Introduction

This communication toolkit provides information, checklists, and other modules designed to facilitate coherent messaging for RSN. It should give RSN and its partner organisations a solid footing from which to respond rapidly and in a focused way to planned or unexpected news developments.

The toolkit:

- provides a clear mission statement to guide all activity
- designates four core priority areas to focus on for 2017
- offers guidance on key messages
- documents key contact details of media spokespeople
- helps to agree simple sign-off procedures for communications
- highlights key assets to boost the quality of information you can offer
- provides advice on how to respond clearly, speedily and usefully to breaking news



Priorities and key messages

Mission statement

RSN is the national champion for rural services, ensuring that people in rural areas have a strong voice. We are fighting for a fair deal for rural communities to maintain their social and economic viability for the benefit of the nation as a whole.

Top priorities

Successful media handling commonly relies on distilling your assertions and evidence into key messages which encapsulate RSN's broad position on critical issues. These should be general enough to be deployed in response to a range of tough questions, without avoiding them, and simple enough that they stick in an interviewee's mind even when under pressure. The key messages will ensure that you always have a starting point and fall-back position.

Your current priorities are as follows:

1. The planning system
2. Affordable housing
3. Local Government funding
4. Public transport
5. Access to key health facilities and services
6. Older people's services
7. Fuel poverty
8. Viable village services
9. Broadband and connectivity
10. Rural economy

These can be further narrowed to four key priority areas:

1. Barriers to access (especially broadband and transport)
2. Future of rural areas
3. Funding
4. Health and welfare

1. Barriers to access

Spokespeople: Graham and Kerry

Transport

- Lack of public transport
- Reduced funding for community transport
- Impact on access to FE / lack of concessionary fares
- Fuel prices
- Public subsidy
- Uneconomic routes
- Congestion
- Road and winter maintenance

Broadband / connectivity

- Last five per cent
- Speed and access
- Lack of desire or ability to learn digital skills
- Rural connectivity keeping up with the pace of change

Key message:

Rural residents and businesses face multiple barriers in terms of access to key services, including transport and broadband. Yet councils providing services to rural residents receive less money from government, pay disproportionately more for fewer services and typically earn less than people in urban areas. As a result rural residents suffer multiple disadvantages.

2. Future of rural areas

Spokespeople: Graham and Andy

- Viable villages
- Rural economy
- Lack of affordable housing and housing generally
- Infrastructure
- Young people leaving – ‘brain drain’
- Young people living with parents (inability to get on the housing ladder)
- Access to jobs and training
- Low-wage economy
- Demographics (depopulation)
- Poor communications
- Importance of rural economy for the national economy
- Threats to green belt
- Media preoccupation with food and farming

Key message:

Rural communities contribute a great deal to the national economy but are facing threats to their future. This is due to a combination of chronic underfunding, demographic challenges, diminishing resources, with the needs of rural areas being systematically overlooked. Without action conditions in rural areas will deteriorate further. It is in the national interest that we all work together to revitalise this fundamental national asset.

3. Local Government Funding

Spokesperson: Graham

- Rural-urban comparison
- Most underfunded councils
- The need for a fair share in the distribution of funding
- Cuts
- Impact on council tax

Key message:

Central Government has historically and systematically underfunded rural areas giving them less grant per head than urban areas – despite the fact that it costs more to provide the services. Rural residents earn less on average than those in urban areas and therefore pay more Council Tax for fewer local government services. Government policy, implicitly, is that council services in rural areas are more reliant on funding through council tax than their urban counterparts. We demand fairer funding for all public services serving rural areas.

4. Health and welfare

Spokespeople: Jane and David

- Ageing population
- Social care (non-funding issues)
- Mental health
- Vulnerability
- Recruitment of health staff
- Specialisation of hospital facilities
- Ambulance waiting times
- Cost of health services in rural areas
- Resilience of services
- Isolation
- STP plans
- Community health provision
- Specialisation and centralisation of hospital facilities

Key message:

Despite its idyllic image, rural communities often experience difficulties in accessing health and support services. This is becoming increasingly difficult as specialist services are centralised to remain resilient and poor transport links reduce access. There are recruitment and retention issues amongst medical staff in rural areas. Rural residents are therefore vulnerable to isolation and poorer health outcomes in the long term.

Spokespeople

It is useful to have a set of designated spokespeople who are equipped to communicate the key messages, and likewise it would be helpful for them to 'own' a particular issue, as flagged above. The list below offers a directory of key spokespeople.

It is however important to remember that this needs to be refreshed regularly, with all spokespeople briefed on any new research or analysis. Likewise, there may be instances where none of the spokespeople are available, and another member of staff has to step in at the last minute.

Name	Title	Email	Landline	Mobile
Graham Biggs	Chief Executive, Rural Services Network	graham.biggs@sparse.gov.uk	01588 674922	07966 790197


Media inquiry form

In some cases your media engagement will be planned, for example a launch of a report. More frequently, it will be reactive – either a comment on a developing news story, or in response to a journalist inquiry.

On receiving an inquiry, remind all staff that no immediate comment should be made. Instead, media inquiries should be politely recorded using the Media Inquiry Form and forwarded to Graham Biggs and other spokespeople.

Below is a template to capture all relevant information from a media enquiry (including nature of inquiry and information on journalist / media outlet).

Media Inquiry form



- **INQUIRY TAKEN BY (Name):**

Date/ Time enquiry taken: _____
Name of media outlet: _____
- **JOURNALIST CONTACT DETAILS:**
Name _____
Phone _____ Mobile _____
E-mail _____
- **NATURE OF INQUIRY:**
 positive negative neutral

- **JOURNALIST DEADLINE:**

Deciding whether to comment

RSN's policy should in the main be to always accept broadcast interview invitations or provide comment, in order to ensure that your point of view is put across and give you a chance to highlight key issues. That said, there are circumstances where this would be inappropriate and, naturally, RSN is not in a position to respond to all media inquiries. In order to prioritise whether to issue a comment or provide an interview, the following questions should be considered:

1. Does it relate to one of your four priority areas?
2. Have you previously commented on a similar or related issue?
3. Is the issue likely to be covered by national publications?
4. Are your 'competitor' organisations likely to comment?
5. Do you have spokespeople available should there be a broadcast opportunity?

It is still possible and potentially advantageous to comment even if the answer to any of the above questions is no, but this should help you assess whether to do so.

With regard to a broadcast opportunity, be aware of the following considerations:

1. Do you understand the topic and have a clear position?
2. Are you in possession of all of the facts?
3. Do you have an appropriate spokesperson available?
4. What is the programme and what is its agenda?
5. Is it clear who else will be speaking on the programme or providing comment?
6. Is a competitor being interviewed? Or could they be invited to speak instead?

Whether or not you do comment or agree to an interview, it is important to respond to a journalist quickly. If they have asked for information by a specific deadline and you will not have it by then, contact them to check whether they will be able to extend their deadline.

Sign off procedures

Should you choose to comment, speed is off the essence. To that end it is key to have smooth sign-off processes, as detailed below. Remember, it does not matter who drafts the comment, as long as it is signed off and attributed to the correct spokesperson.

Sign off procedure:

1. Initial enquiry / news development
2. Graham Biggs to confirm whether a response is needed
3. If it is decided that a response is needed:
 - a. A statement should be drafted with the agreed mission statement and key messages kept in mind.
 - b. This should be attributed to the relevant spokesperson and signed off by them and Graham Biggs
 - c. This should be sent to the journalist / to wider press lists if it is a reactive statement
4. If it is decided that a response is not needed:
 - a. This should be conveyed to a journalist
 - b. If possible, they should be sent research or data relevant to their topic, under the clear proviso that this is background information rather than an official comment

To extend the life of your comment, it is worth considering the following questions:

1. Are other publications likely to cover the same issue – could you send it to them too?
2. Have you shared it on your social channels?
3. Is there a follow up activity, such as a letter to an editor or pitching for an op ed, that you should consider?
4. Is the journalist interested in this topic on a longer-term basis? If so, why not suggest meeting up for a coffee to brief them?

Proactive Activity

In addition to responding to journalist queries, it is important to identify proactive opportunities to comment or issue a press release on a particular topic. These can be in response to set piece events such as a Government announcement, or to highlight a piece of research in light of a news story, or indeed to sell in reports or studies that you have produced. Such proactive activity is absolutely vital in order to get your name out there and ensure the media is aware of your position on key issues and your ability to contribute to the ongoing conversation.

To simplify the process, we would recommend having a template for a press release or statement (within the body of an email) ready to go, including a notes to editors section. This will allow you to simply drop in your statement and the spokesperson quickly and efficiently. We would also recommend having a one line cover email pre-prepared that can be tailored, saying something along the lines of: 'Please find below a press statement from the Rural Services Network responding to today's announcement / speech / report.... Please do let me know of any questions or if you would like to arrange an interview on this topic'.

In order to speed up your ability to respond, we would suggest maintaining a grid of past press statements or comments, separated by topic. This will allow you to efficiently review your position and check that any new comment is in line with what has been said previously. It is important to remember that each time you issue a comment you can, within reason, use similar or even identical language to previous remarks on the subject, assuming your position remains the same. There is not necessarily a need to find a new angle. An example of the grid is below:

Date	Subject	Comment issued	Spokesperson
17/01/17	Rural service provision	The State of Rural Services 2016 Report collates and lays out recent evidence about the provision of services to residents and businesses in rural England, with worrying findings across transport, education, social care and retail. When it comes to access to further education and skills development, rural areas are suffering due to difficulties and poor transport services.	Margaret Clark CBE, Chair of Rural England's Stakeholder Group

It is also worth considering how you can extend the life of your statement or press release beyond an initial sell-in. Opinion pieces, blogs and letters to newspapers provide good ways to further a conversation and ensure RSN's perspective gets across. All publications have slightly different requirements, but when pitching it is best to send a bullet point outline of the proposed piece, setting out who would write it and what each paragraph would argue. With regard to letters, these should be no more than 200 words and should be submitted by 12pm for consideration.

Media handling - Tips and reminders

Below is guidance on how to interact with the media should an issue arise.

Answering inquiries

- Establish the issue before answering any questions, using the media inquiry form:
 - who they are and where they are calling from
 - why they want to speak to you
 - who else they are speaking with to develop their story
 - their copy deadline
- If you already have a response on this issue, agree to send it over.
- If you do not have a response and need to confirm this with colleagues / the spokesperson, offer to come back to the journalist later.
 - NEVER give out information which is not 100 per cent correct in order to meet a deadline

Simplicity is key

- Keep your responses simple
- Ensure you only communicate three to four key messages at most
- Too much detail might confuse the journalist and negatively affect the story

Help the journalist develop the story

- Use language the journalists will understand / do not use jargon
- Explain the implications for their readers / listeners / viewers / visitors and the importance of a balanced article
- Provide relevant information (key facts and figures, data, spokespeople etc.)
- Do not overpromise information or interviews, as failure to provide these could negatively impact the resulting coverage

Assets

It is vital to provide journalists with a full package of information on any given topic, in order to act as a useful source and ensure your key messages get across. The assets you should have banked and ready for use with media include:

Case studies

For example, a rural pensioner, a rural family, a rural business owner. These should be written up for sharing with journalists along with high resolution photographs of them. Ideally, these case studies should be willing to speak to media (print or broadcast) and should be equipped to communicate your topline messages.

Topline facts document

This should be a one-page document that collates internal and (if necessary) external evidence on your priority issues, so that in the event of a journalist inquiry you have concrete evidence to hand and can send them extracts or the full document. Information should be fully sourced and as up to date as possible. This will also enable you to contribute to the conversation in a way that a journalist would find useful and that will set you apart from your competitors.

Media list

An up to date media list, with local, regional and national contacts (print, online and broadcast) listed is absolutely imperative. Given that you cover particular sectors, it will be important to have current lists tracking sector journalists and publication, such as health, transport and education. Contacting the right person is half the battle when it comes to getting media coverage.

Third party stakeholders

In many cases it will be useful to have your arguments consolidated by third party stakeholders, such as MPs involved in RSN, or relevant sector organisations such as Age UK or the Association of Colleges. If you are putting out a press release on a piece of research, this is a crucial step to make your offer to a journalist more robust.

Member surveys

As a member organisation, you have access to a cohort of rural residents who you could survey on key issues. As well as the more comprehensive research you undertake, it may be useful to gauge the opinions of, for example, parish councillors on a relevant topic.



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