

## Older people and younger people in rural areas: is deprivation an issue?

1.45pm, Jon Carling, independent consultant

### **The Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) published the following two key reports in 2012:**

- Social Isolation Experienced by Older People in Rural Areas
- Barriers to Education, Employment and Training for Young People in Rural Areas

The CRC closed on 31 March 2013. The following short abstracts of the reports are taken directly from the Commission's website.

### **Social Isolation Experienced by Older People in Rural Areas**

*The Commission has published a major report into social isolation experienced by older people in England's rural areas. At a time when spending reductions are leading to changes in the way that public services such as care, housing and transport are provided in rural areas, the report considers the impact of those changes on the lives of older people. The report concludes that:*

- 23% of the rural population are over retirement age compared to 18% in urban areas, and the proportion is expected to rise.
- The cost of providing social care to older people in rural communities is higher than in urban areas, and many local authorities are having to charge more, or provide care only to the most needy, in rural areas compared to urban. For example, rural dwellers are receiving lower personal budgets for comparable needs while having to pay more for the services they receive
- Although Government proposals to increase the level of funding available to rural local authorities are welcome, they are unlikely to address the greater imbalance between the level of need, and the amount of funding available for services such as social care for older people in rural areas compared to urban areas. We call on the Government to consider this further
- Community transport is increasingly important as the number of scheduled bus services in rural areas falls. However, older people can experience very different levels of access to bus services in different areas, including:
  - different levels of subsidy for scheduled bus services in different areas
  - concessionary passes that are valid on community transport in some areas but not others
  - concessionary fares available before 9.30am in some areas but not others
- The CRC suggests that the Government investigates the merits of offering older people a personal budget for transport, to replace the concessionary fares system.
- People tend to have changing housing needs as they grow older, and the CRC calls for a wider range of housing, or housing adaptations, to be available – rented or privately owned. We believe that the National Planning Policy Framework will assist in helping local people determine the numbers

and types of housing available. It is crucial that Government monitors its success.

- The CRC has come across a large number of volunteer-run projects, led by local communities working in partnership with private or public sector bodies, which have made a tremendous difference to the lives of older people in rural areas. This success could be enhanced further, at minimal cost, if mentoring or leadership training were available to volunteers wishing to establish or manage community activities

### **Barriers to Education, Employment and Training for Young People in Rural Areas**

*The CRC has published a major new report into the barriers to education, employment and training experienced by young people in England's rural areas. The report finds that whilst there are clear associated challenges for all young people across England, there is also a rural dimension to the issue.*

Key points in the report include:

- The speed at which young people have become NEET (not in education, employment or training) has increased more quickly in rural areas than in urban since the start of the recession.
- Young people living in rural areas frequently have to travel long distances to work, training and education, yet the high cost and low availability of public and private transport can have a negative impact on opportunities.
- There are concerns that the additional cost of delivering employment and training services in rural areas is leading providers to focus on more highly populated parts of the country.
- The report also calls for the appointment of a Government Minister for young people, which would include acting as a focal point and representative for rural youth affairs within and across central government.

Both reports are available on the website of the **Rural Services Network** at:  
<http://www.rsnonline.org.uk/intelligence/commission-for-rural-communities>

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