RURAL SERVICES NETWORK

Rural Economy Seminar

April 2026

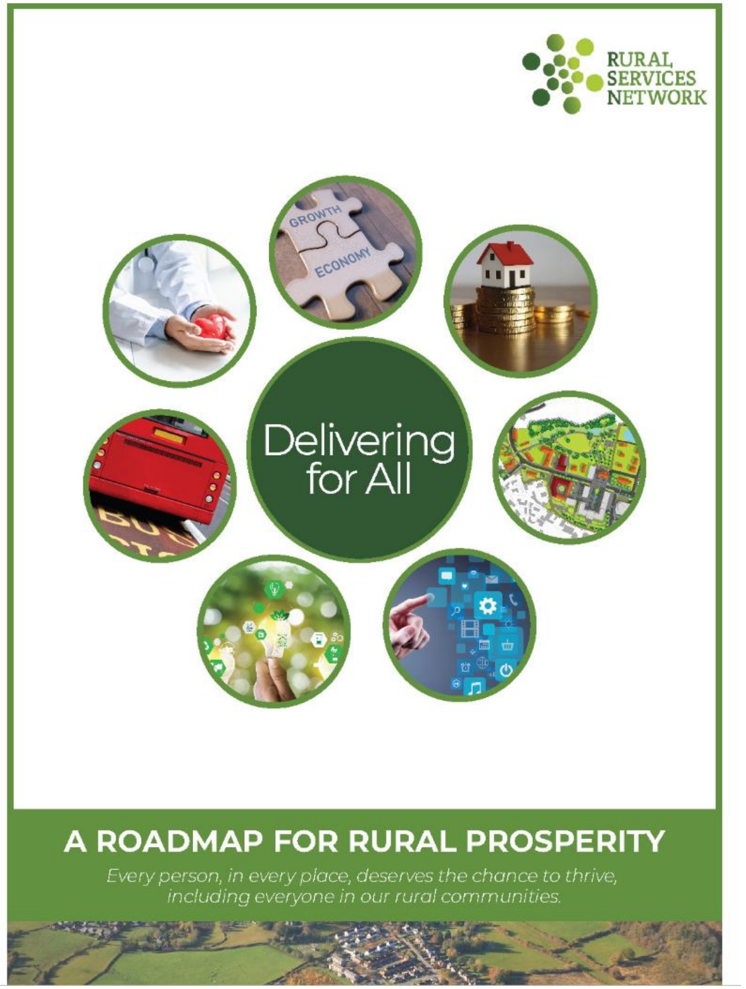
The Rural Services Network

Membership body of around 450 organisations

Special Interest Group of the Local Government Association

National Champion for rural services ensuring that rural have a strong voice

Delivering for All



Three foundations for effective rural policy

Fairly Funded Rural Public Services

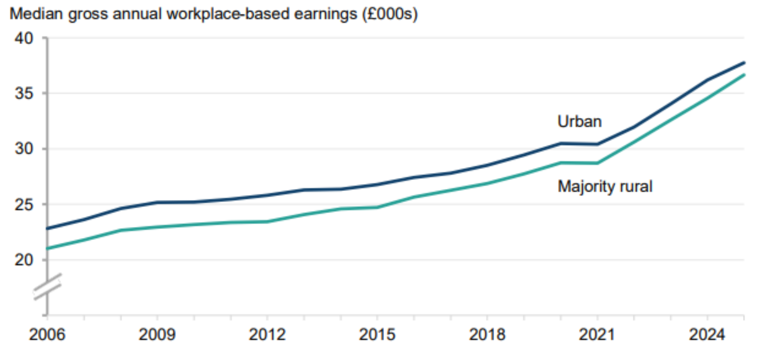
Use of the right measures & metrics to understand rural Challenges

A Rural Specific Plan

Rural Economy Facts

Wages earned in the rural economy are lower than in urban areas

Figure B-1: Line chart showing median workplace-based earnings for majority rural and urban local authorities, as defined within the 2021 Rural-Urban Classification, in England, current prices (not adjusted for inflation), 2006 to 2025 (Note B-5)
"Urban" excludes London. Annual gross earnings are presented in thousands.



In 2023, rural areas contributed £259 billion to England's Gross Value Added (GVA), representing 12.2% of the total GVA for England.

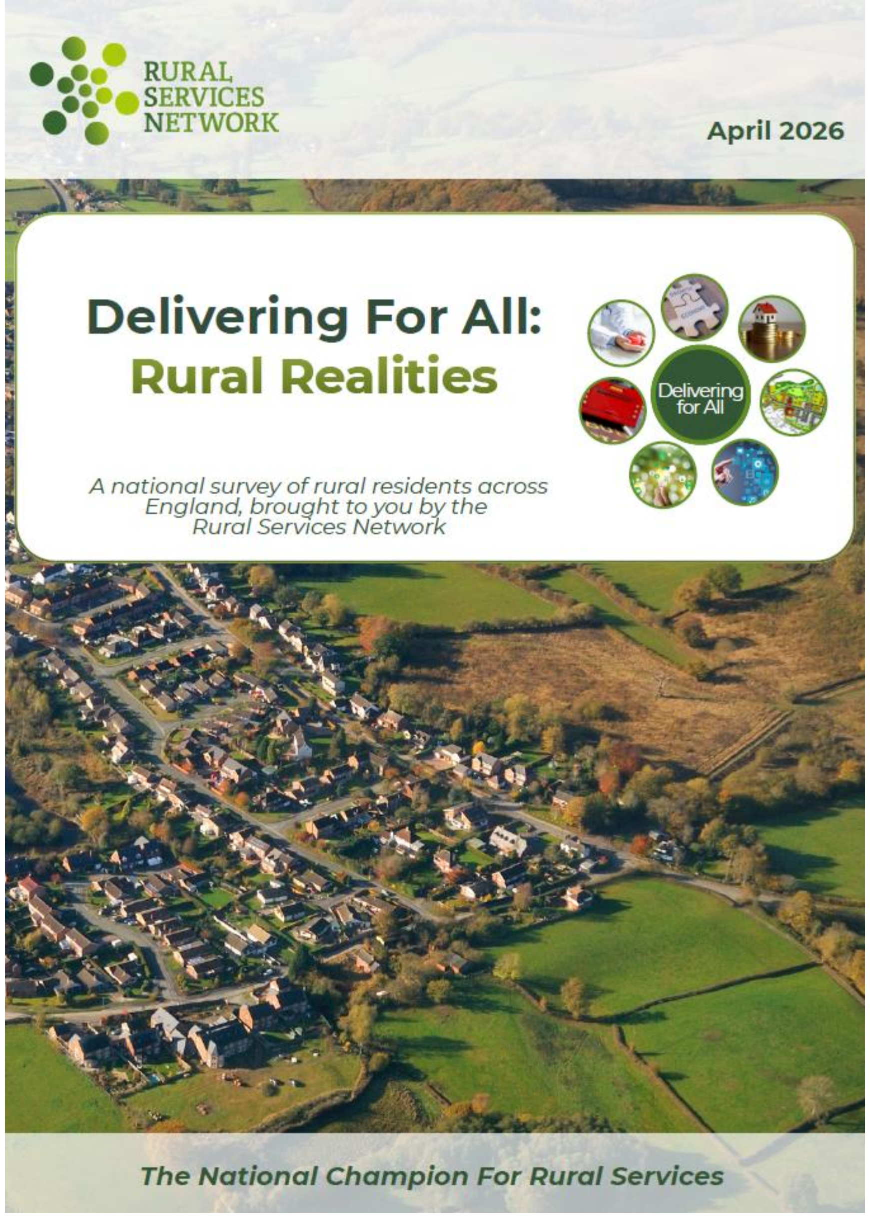
Table E-5: Gross Value Added (GVA) per workforce job (WFJ) as percentage of England level, within each area described in the 2021 Rural-Urban Classification in England, as at 2001, 2011, and 2023
Productivity (GVA per WFJ) has been presented as a percentage of the England total excluding London, creating an index of change; values have been rounded to the nearest 0.1%.

Rural-Urban Classification	2001	2011	2023
Majority rural	96.2	90.6	91.7
Intermediate rural	99.7	95.7	96.8
Majority or intermediate rural	**98.1**	**93.3**	**94.4**
Intermediate urban	105.8	103.0	101.1
Urban (excluding London)	99.5	102.1	102.1
London	145.3	155.1	142.9
England excluding London	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Productivity in rural areas is lower than the national average.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/698db176492ea446ea7f42f8/7_Rural_Economic_Bulletin_11_02_2026_v2.pdf

Rural Realities



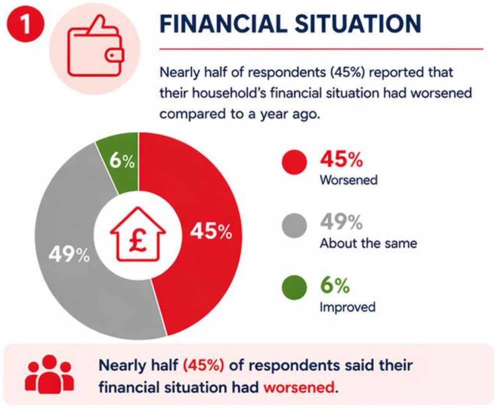
Research report published this week by the Rural Services Network

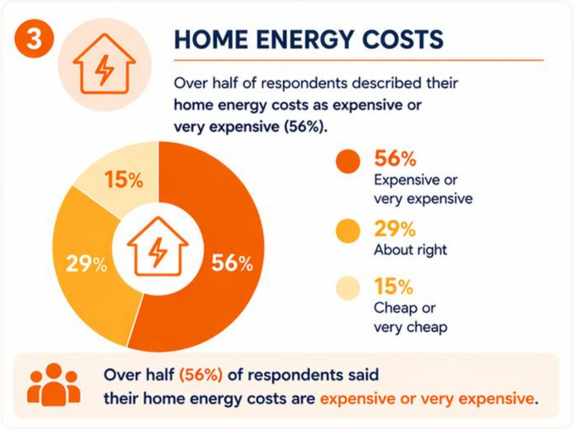
Gathers together the real life experiences of rural residents across England

Research was a mix of online survey and focus groups on key policy areas

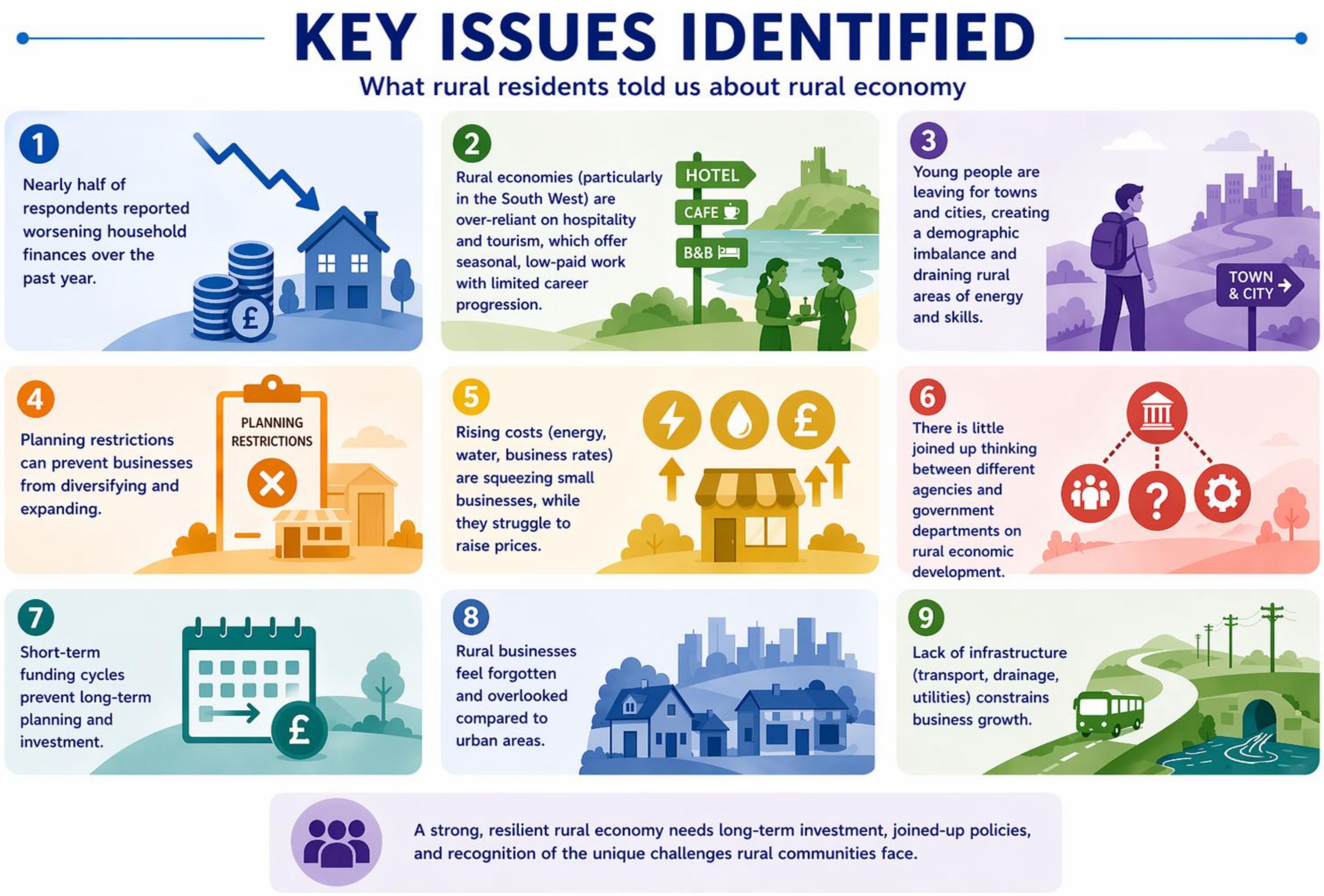
Key findings show that rural residents feel forgotten in national policy development and strategy

Rural Economy – lived experience





Rural Economy – key issues



Cross cutting issues prevent economic growth

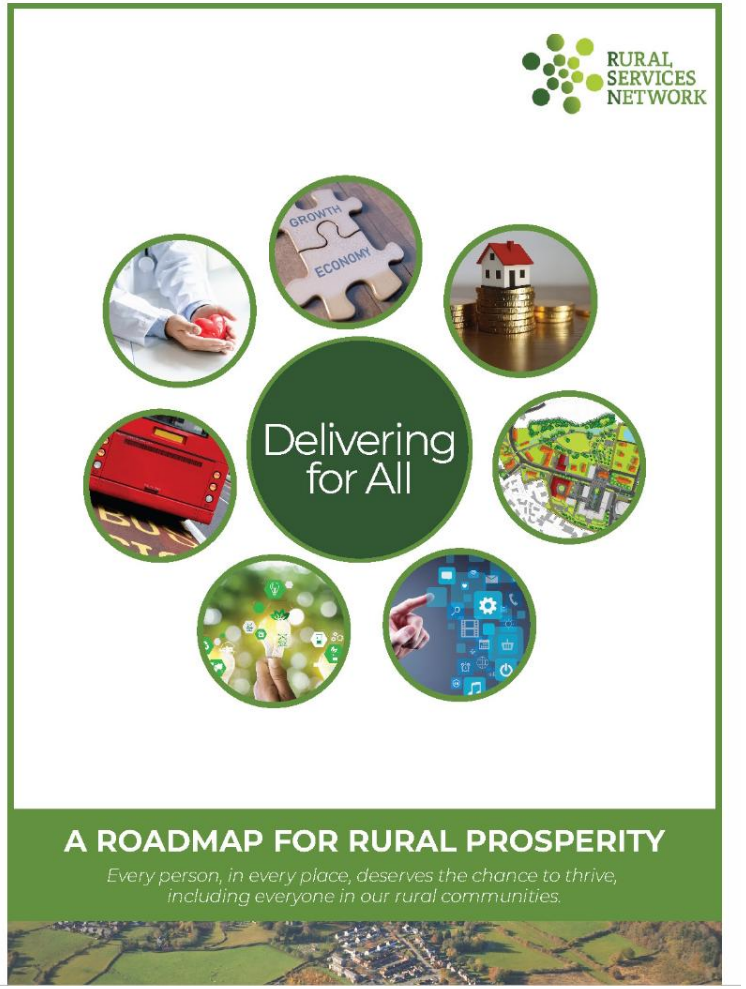
For example…

Businesses cannot recruit skilled workforce, if that workforce cannot afford to live locally, and there are no transport options available for them to access skills, training or employment.

There was a clear and consistent call for more coordinated, long-term planning and a more joined-up approach to supporting rural economies, with policies that better reflect the specific challenges and opportunities facing rural areas.

What is the answer?

www.rsnonline.org.uk/delivering-for-all



Key Asks

1. Fair Funding

Ensure that rural areas receive their fair share of support to grow the economy and create a system where decision making and resources are devolved to local areas as far as possible, creating the flexibility for tailored solutions to prioritise and meet local needs and opportunities.

2. Metrics and Measures

Protect rural communities by ensuring that the metrics used to devise strategies or programmes for growth (including skills) are not based on 'one-size-fits-all' thinking but reflect the disadvantage in rural economies within regions.

3. Rural Policy

Deliver a support programme for SMEs and community entrepreneurs in rural areas, especially start-ups and those seeking to grow.

Ensure policy and strategy is Rural Proofed in a way that is meaningful and demonstrable and also includes outcome monitoring. There is now a real case for placing Rural Proofing on a stronger legal footing, in the way that it has been in Northern Ireland.

Provide opportunities for the growth of the green economy and supporting infrastructure, namely the national grid and digital and mobile connectivity.

Everyone deserves the right to contribute to a thriving economy which is critical for national growth. SMEs, community enterprises, and green industries must be supported to unlock rural potential and drive innovation and employment.