CASE STUDIES

The cost of rural services in practice.

What does it take to deliver everyday services across rural areas? It can mean an 80-minute round trip for a care visit, a fleet of 59 vehicles to collect the bins, or a care workforce that depends on the cost and reliability of a ferry crossing.

These examples from councils show what delivering services looks like on the ground and why the funding formula needs to reflect the costs of serving rural communities.

Download, save and share the case study cards. Each example has an accompanying image you're welcome to download and share on social media, use in briefings or presentations, or send to your local MP.

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1. The cost of a care round
In one rural council, a round trip for a care visit commonly takes **80 minutes**. Travel accounts for around a fifth of practitioners' time.

Download the care round card

2. How many visits fit into a shift?
Reablement workers help people regain independence after illness or a hospital stay. In one rural council, they complete **30% fewer visits per shift** in the most rural area than in the most urban area.

Download the reablement visits card

3. What does it take to collect the bins?
One predominantly rural council runs **59 refuse collection vehicles**. It estimates it would need around half as many if the whole county were as densely populated as its main town.

Download the refuse collection card

4. What it takes to keep a rural fleet running
One council operates **nine depots and five fleet workshops** to cover its area.

Download the rural fleet card

5. The cost of providing home care
One rural council pays **£4.25 an hour above its regional average** for home care. That difference amounts to around **£2.6 million a year** for this service alone.

Download the home care card

6. Passenger transport contracts
Over five years, **17% of one rural council's passenger transport contracts** attracted one bid or none.

Download the passenger transport card

7. Bids for home-to-school transport
A rural home-to-school transport contract received **one bid**, compared with **20 bids** for a comparable contract on a more accessible route.

Download the home-to-school transport bids card

8. In-house children's residential care
One predominantly rural council expanded its in-house children's residential care to **around 30 places** because the market was failing to meet its needs. It also budgets for **about 140 external placements**.

Download the children's residential care card

9. Finding complex care placements locally
One predominantly rural council was able to place only **15% of children needing the most complex residential care** within its own area. Almost half were placed at a distance because few providers operate across its large rural area.

Download the local care placements card

10. Out-of-county placements and transport
One rural council places **20.9% of looked-after children** outside the county. It spends **£499,000 a year** transporting children in its care.

Download the out-of-county placements card

11. The cost of keeping services accessible
Alongside digital services, councils provide staffed offices, outreach points and assisted phone support. One rural council spends **up to £720,000 a year** on this support. Two other councils report spending **£37,000** and **£98,000** on rural outreach points.

Download the accessible services card

12. A care workforce that depends on a ferry
In one council area, the care workforce depends on the **cost and reliability of a ferry crossing**.

Download the ferry crossing card

13. Adult social care vacancies and agency staff
One rural council has a **9% to 12% vacancy rate** in adult social care and spends **£15.4 million a year** on agency staff to fill the gap.

Download the adult social care workforce card

14. Transport for pupils with special educational needs
One predominantly rural council spends **around £8,900 a year** transporting each pupil with special educational needs, compared with **around £1,900** for a mainstream pupil.

Download the pupil transport costs card

Source for all examples: *Counting the cost of rural services, Rural Services Network, 2026.*