RURAL SERVICES NETWORK

Counting The Real Cost Of Rural Services

Around a quarter of England's councils are rural or predominantly rural, yet together they cover two thirds of England's land.



Funding And Council Tax

20% / 2%

Between 2024/25 and 2028/29, Government Funded Spending Power in urban areas is set to grow by 20%, against only 2% in rural.

Rural residents already pay 17% more per head in council tax than urban residents.

Roads, Winter Service And Buses

47% / 3.4 times / 2.4 times

Rural councils spend 47% more per head on highways and transport, 3.4 times as much on winter service and 2.4 times as much supporting bus services.

Source MHCLG, 2024/25 Revenue Outturn returns (as analysed in the RSN position paper)

Travel Time And Care Visits

80 minutes / 30% fewer

In one rural council, a round-trip visit commonly takes 80 minutes and travel takes up around a fifth of practitioner time.

In another, reablement workers, who help people regain independence after illness or a hospital stay, complete 30% fewer visits per shift in the council's most rural area than in its most urban area.

Home Care Costs

£4.25 / Around £2.6m

One rural council pays £4.25 an hour above its regional average for home care, around £2.6m a year for that service alone.

Home-To-School Transport Bids

One bid / 20 bids

A predominantly rural council received one bid for a rural home-to-school transport route, against 20 bids for a similar route in a more accessible area .

Annual Pupil Transport Costs

Around £8,900 / Around £1,900

One predominantly rural council spends around £8,900 a year transporting each pupil with special educational needs, against around £1,900 for a mainstream pupil.

What RSN Is Asking MHCLG To Change

MHCLG's Fair Funding Review 2.0 consultation document originally proposed a 2% remoteness weighting for Children's Services, matching the same 2% proposed for Adult Social Care; the remoteness adjustment was subsequently removed from every service except Adult Social Care.

- Apply the remoteness adjustment to children's social care, on the same basis as adult social care.
- Review the weighting of the accessibility adjustment, starting with waste, using evidence of cost rather than past spend alone.
- Recognise thin provider markets as a distinct cost driver, alongside support for joint procurement and market shaping.
- Set up a joint evidence programme with RSN to collect consistent data on the rural costs national returns cannot currently see.

Sources for the remoteness weighting MHCLG, The Fair Funding Review 2.0 consultation, Table 5 “Illustrative ACA Weightings” - MHCLG, Area Cost Adjustment Technical Note

Source Counting the cost of rural services, RSN, 2026

The position paper sets out the methodology and limitations. Council examples illustrate local experience.