

Rural Development Sub-committee

Poverty and Deprivation in Rural Wales

July 2008

Contents	Page
Introduction and Background	1
Key Themes Identified from the Evidence	16
Income and Employment	17
Benefit Take-up	20
Transport	21
Housing	23
Access to Services	26
Government Policies	32
Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation	36
Allocation of Resources to Rural Areas	38
Annex 1 – Summary of Recommendations	40
Annex 2 – Key Welsh Assembly Government Policies to tackle Poverty and Deprivation	43
Annex 3 – Organisations and individuals who gave evidence in person to the Committee	47
Annex 4 - Schedule of Committee Papers Provided to Inform Oral Evidence	49
Annex 5 - List of Respondents to Call for Written Evidence	52

CHAIR'S INTRODUCTION

As a Committee, we were concerned that, whilst people across rural Wales appeared to be experiencing the impact of poverty and deprivation, the policies and programmes of the Welsh Assembly Government did not seem to reach them. All too often poverty is seen as a purely urban phenomenon and one that can be easily described in both social and economic terms. Rurality and sparsity can be significant elements in the social exclusion and deprivation suffered by people living in rural Wales.

The Welsh Assembly Government has made eradicating poverty and deprivation a policy priority and the Committee welcomes this commitment. However, the focus of its work and the concentration of anti-poverty measures and programmes, such as Communities First, have been almost exclusively in urban areas. Whilst this is understandable in many ways, it may mean that the very real needs of people living in poverty in rural Wales may not have been fully addressed.

Against this background, we launched our inquiry to try to understand more about the nature and extent of poverty and deprivation in rural Wales and to see whether these issues were receiving an adequate response from the Welsh Assembly Government. As part of this inquiry, the Committee wanted to examine and scrutinise Government policies in so much as they affect the different population groups living in rural communities. The Committee therefore adopted a citizen-centred approach to the inquiry by holding focused evidence sessions in relation to the three population groups below:

- children and young people;
- the economically active and the economically inactive; and
- older people.

Over the last six months, we received written evidence from a wide range of organisations and took oral evidence from children, academics, statutory and voluntary bodies, women's groups, statisticians, local authorities and older people. We would like to take the opportunity to thank everyone who took the time to provide written or oral evidence to this inquiry.

We would also like to thank Lorraine Barrett AM who, although not a formal Member of the Committee, attended all of our evidence sessions and provided a valuable contribution to the report.

We are confident that the evidence we have gathered from this broad variety of perspectives has provided us with a solid foundation on which to base our recommendations to the Welsh Assembly Government. We hope that these recommendations will be given full consideration in the interests of enhancing the lives of the 'hidden' people living in poverty and deprivation in rural Wales.

This report is the first in a series of reports on rural life. The Committee will, over the term of this Assembly, address a number of different issues as they affect the quality of life, the opportunities and the services available to people in rural Wales. Taken together, we hope that the recommendations will strengthen the work of the Government as a whole in addressing the issues facing people in poverty throughout rural Wales.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alun Davies'.

Alun Davies AM
Chair, Rural Development Sub-Committee

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Origins of the Inquiry

1.1 Many rural communities and individuals living within those communities are concerned that the difficulties they face due to their geographic location in Wales often are insufficiently addressed by the Welsh Assembly Government.

1.2 Poverty is often not recognised as being relevant to rural areas because the population density and the dispersed nature of the communities can mean that those experiencing poverty or deprivation are hidden within statistical indicators. The *Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2008*¹ identified that almost half of “income deprived” people live in the most deprived 30% of Wales. This means that the other half is more sparsely spread over the remaining 70% of Wales. Many of the deprivation problems experienced by people in rural areas, for example, low paid jobs, are the same as those experienced by people in urban or valleys areas. Policies need to be devised that target the person and not the place.

1.3 The problems faced by those experiencing rural deprivation can vary across Wales and within local authority areas. Whilst there are many rural settlements whose inhabitants experience difficulties, for example in accessing services and making use of public transport, those living in the deeper rural areas often face even greater difficulties.

1.4 It is worth highlighting that during the course of the Committee’s inquiry, the UK economy has experienced a downturn. Fuel costs have risen at an unprecedented rate and food prices have increased. According to the Energy Information Administration², in June 2007, the cost of a barrel of oil was \$67.50. By June 2008, this had risen dramatically to \$133.60. These events will have a greater impact upon those members of our communities who live on lower incomes, particularly in rural areas where people are heavily reliant on cars or where many homes are heated by oil.

Terms of Reference

1.5 At its meeting on 29 November 2007, the Rural Development Sub-Committee agreed to undertake an inquiry into poverty and deprivation in rural Wales. The Committee was concerned that the *Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation*, the main method for identifying and allocating resources to deprived areas, did not adequately reflect the needs of rural areas. Although research from the Wales Rural Observatory suggested that there were significant issues surrounding poverty and deprivation in rural areas, there was no evidence that the Welsh Assembly Government was using this research to formulate policies and programmes.

¹ Welsh Assembly Government, [Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation](#), 2008

² [Energy Information Administration](#)

1.6 The Committee was keen to understand more about the nature of poverty and deprivation in rural Wales in order to assess whether the Welsh Assembly Government was responding sufficiently well to the issues.

1.7 The terms of reference for the inquiry were:

- To examine issues relating to poverty and deprivation in rural Wales;
- To scrutinise the relevance and effectiveness of Welsh Assembly Government policy in this area.

1.8 Since the publication of the *Delivering Beyond Boundaries*³ report on the review of public service delivery by Sir Jeremy Beecham, the Welsh Assembly Government has been keen to build on the *Making the Connections* agenda by assuming more of a citizen centred approach. Citizen centred service provision is one of the principles at the heart of the Welsh Assembly Government's approach to the delivery of its programmes. In the interests of understanding the impact of Government policies and programmes on different population groups experiencing poverty and deprivation in rural Wales, the Committee also agreed to adopt a citizen centred approach for this inquiry.

1.9 The Committee therefore sought evidence on the nature and extent of poverty and deprivation and how it impacts on people living in rural Wales within the following population groups:

- Children and young people
- The economically active and the economically inactive
- Older people

1.10 It was felt that these groups were most likely to be either vulnerable to, or experiencing, poverty or deprivation. At the same time, if the Government's policies were having the desired and required impact then it is within these population groups that that impact and subsequent outcomes would be most keenly felt and most visible.

1.11 The Committee scrutinised the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government since this was considered the most relevant portfolio in terms of ensuring a cross cutting response to poverty, deprivation and service delivery. However, the Minister for Rural Affairs also provided a paper which outlined the work of each Assembly Government Minister with regards to rural poverty and deprivation. A summary of the key policy initiatives is contained at Annex 2.

³ Welsh Assembly Government, [Delivering Beyond Boundaries](#), 2006

Definitions

1.12 Whilst the Committee did not want the inquiry to focus simply on definitions, it was clear that some distinctions were required at the outset. In particular, it was the definition of poverty and the definition of rural that were most urgently required.

Poverty and Deprivation

1.13 There are several definitions of poverty and deprivation. For the purpose of the inquiry, the Committee agreed that the distinctions contained within the consultation document for the *Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation* issued in summer 2007⁴ would be used:

“Poverty means not having enough money (or other essentials to get by). Deprivation refers to problems caused by a general lack of resources and opportunities (not just money)”

1.14 Using this definition also enabled the Committee to understand the impact of economic, social, cultural and other issues on a person’s life and gave the Committee scope for more in-depth investigations.

Rural

1.15 The Committee accepts that there is no universally accepted definition of rural. For the purposes of this investigation the Committee recognises that there are many communities, for example in the South Wales Valleys that may sometimes be described as rural in nature due to particular factors such as access to services. However, at the same time the Committee understands that much of the data of relevance to this inquiry is only available at local authority level. Nine local authority areas in Wales are recognised as being primarily rural in nature, namely Isle of Anglesey, Gwynedd, Conwy, Denbighshire, Powys, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire and Monmouthshire.

1.16 The recent publication, *A Statistical Focus on Rural Wales*⁵ from Statistics for Wales attempts to define and describe different additional means of defining rural. The report also notes that whilst Wales is not amongst the most rural countries in Europe – in fact Wales is above the European average for population density. But a further comparison demonstrates that large parts of Wales are amongst the sparsest populated parts of the UK.

1.17 Whilst the Committee believed that it was useful to be in agreement over which areas in Wales are essentially ‘rural’ in nature, the focus of the inquiry was on people, the impact of poverty on people, and the experiences of people and communities living within those areas.

⁴ Welsh Assembly Government, [Consultation on proposed indications for updating the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation](#), 2007

⁵ Welsh Assembly Government Statistics for Wales, [A Statistical Focus on Rural Wales](#), 2008

Assessing Rurality

1.18 The Committee agreed that using local authority areas was a useful way of broadly defining which areas of Wales they considered rural, given that a significant amount of data is only available at local authority level. However, there are many ways of measuring or defining rurality⁶. For the purpose of this report, it is worth summarising these other methods; given their influence over the allocation of resources by the Welsh Assembly Government and the role they play in the local government settlement. The Minister for Social Justice and Local Government and the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) both referred to some of these methodologies during their evidence sessions.

Sparsity Measures

1.19 This calculates the number of people living in a given unit of land, for example persons per square kilometre. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) density threshold is 150 persons per square kilometre. This type of measure does not capture the fact that whilst areas can have similar numbers of people living within them, they could be dispersed differently.

Land Use Measures

1.20 This method involves classifying land use such as industrial, residential, agricultural, forestry, common land and designations such as National Parks or Special Sites of Scientific Interest. However, these measures only provide information on the type of land within a geographical area and not the people living in that area.

Settlement Size Measures

1.21 A settlement with less than 10,000 inhabitants is often classified as rural, whilst those with more are considered urban. This method can cause difficulties with regards to the definition of a 'settlement' but can be useful in terms of comparing different types of areas such as one with a large number of small settlements and another with a smaller number of larger settlements. Information such as the percentage of the population that lives in settlements of less than 10,000 can be obtained from such a classification. Indicators such as this are used in calculating the local government settlement. Paragraph 1.35 provides further information on the use of settlement size measures in the local government settlement.

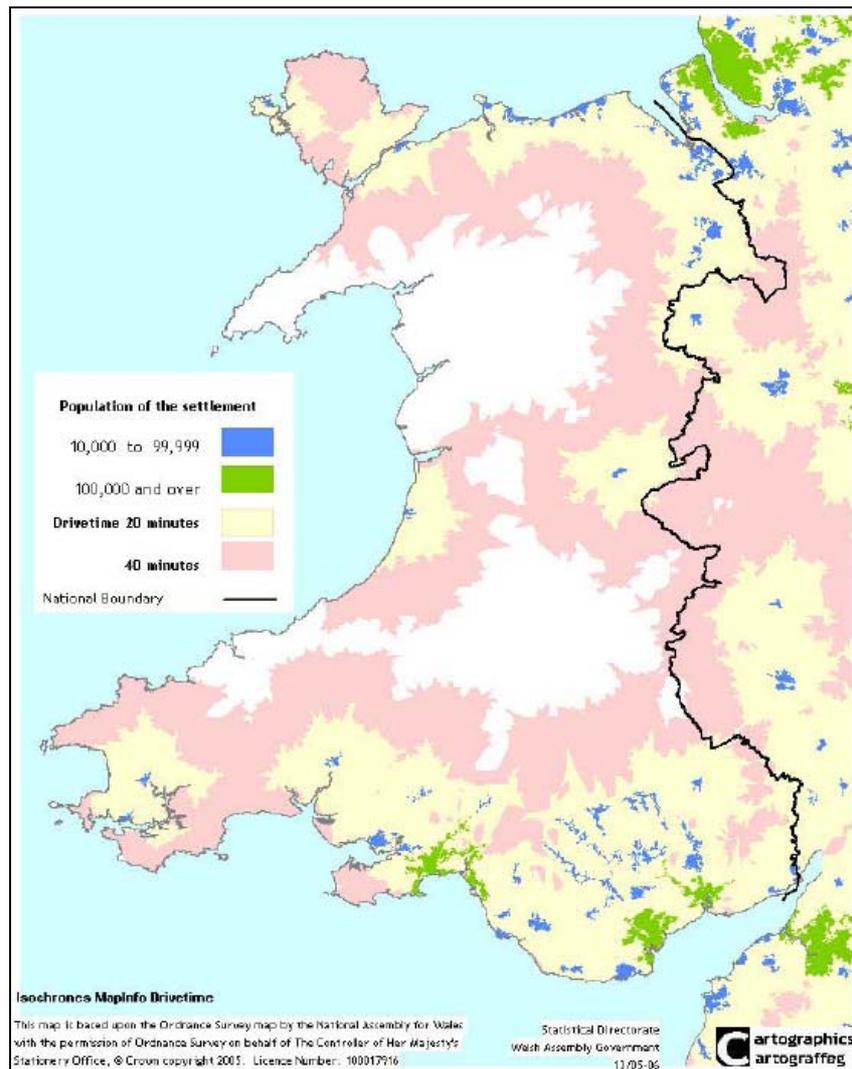
Figure 1 illustrates the patterns of settlements in Wales, based on census data from 2001. This provides an illustration of the spatial distribution of the larger settlements in Wales.

⁶ Welsh Assembly Government Statistics for Wales, [A Statistical Focus on Rural Wales](#), 2008

Access Measures

1.23 This is a dispersion measure which enables a calculation of travel time from individual households to a particular service. This can then be used to work out the share of the population that is within that given time of a service. Drive times are often used (an example is provided at Figure 2), but this can cause problems as not all members of the population have access to a car and access to a town centre does not necessarily mean access to a service.

Figure 2: Drive times to settlements of at least 10,000 persons, 2001⁸



⁸ Welsh Assembly Government Statistics for Wales, [A Statistical Focus on Rural Wales](#), 2008

Allocation of Welsh Assembly Government Resources

1.24 The Welsh Assembly Government delivers a range of programmes to tackle poverty and deprivation (see Annex 2). Many of these programmes target specific vulnerable groups, such as child poverty initiatives. Others are area-based, for example those promoting community regeneration in deprived areas (*Communities First*).

1.25 In rural areas specifically, programmes such as the *Rural Development Plan for Wales 2007–13*⁹ provide additional funds and support. However, these programmes are primarily designed to support economic activities related to the management of the land or to maintain and improve environmental quality. Some funds, however, are also available for community initiatives.

1.26 It is apparent that for many of the Welsh Assembly Government's anti-poverty programmes resources are allocated on a spatial basis defined as those areas experiencing the highest levels of multiple deprivation. This means that individuals who may be experiencing the same deprivation but who do not live in an area where these issues are widespread are not being reached.

The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation

1.27 The *Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation* was the focus of considerable discussion and evidence during the Committee's inquiry. Its use as the Government's primary tool in allocating some Welsh Assembly Government resources and as a means of describing deprivation mean that the index is of central importance in defining those parts of Wales where poverty is highest and where its impact is potentially greatest. The following provides an explanation of its purpose and uses.

1.28 The *Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2008* is designed to model deprivation and is the official measure of deprivation for small areas in Wales. Multiple deprivation is not a separate form of deprivation, it is a combination of the specific types of deprivation. Multiple deprivation is a complex concept and cannot be measured directly. However, the different forms of deprivation (or deprivation domains and indicators) can each be measured to some extent. The different forms of deprivation cannot then simply be added together to give an overall index as they may interact and have greater impact if found in certain combinations. Therefore, how components in the overall index are weighted and combined becomes a key issue.

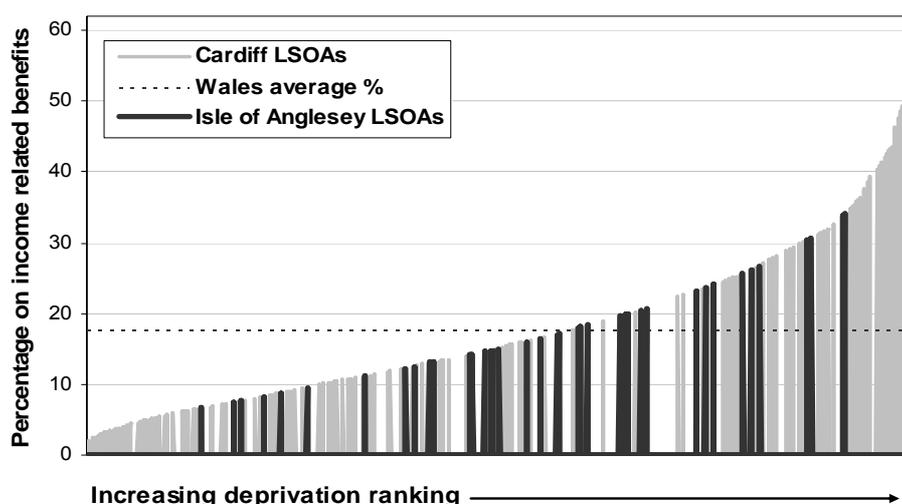
⁹ Welsh Assembly Government, [Rural Development Plan for Wales 2007 - 2013](#)

1.29 The index is composed of seven different deprivation domains, which in turn consist of a range of different indicators. These are weighted and combined in order to convert a group of separate measurements into a single score. Higher scores mean more deprivation. An area has a higher deprivation score than another if the proportion of people living there that are classed as deprived is higher. The area itself is not deprived; it is the circumstances and lifestyles of the people living within the area that affect its deprivation score.

1.30 Not all people living in areas with high levels of deprivation will be deprived. Similarly, some deprived people will live in areas with low levels of deprivation. One of the key findings of the *Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation* is that most deprived people live outside of the deprivation hotspots. The index is designed to identify concentrations of deprivation. If there are not a large number of deprived people living in an area, the area will not be identified as being deprived by the index. This is particularly relevant for rural areas.

1.31 The consultation on the proposed updates for *Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation* highlighted how dispersed deprivation is difficult to capture through the Index¹⁰. The percentage of people on income-related benefits in Isle of Anglesey and Cardiff is largely similar (17.6% for Isle of Anglesey and 17.9% for Cardiff). However, the distribution of income deprivation is very different. As Figure 3 shows, Cardiff has LSOAs (the small areas of geography used by the Index) at both extremes of the deprivation scale, whereas Anglesey's LSOAs are more clustered away from the extremes. This implies that the income-deprived population of Anglesey is more sparsely distributed across the authority, rather than there being very high or very low income-deprived areas.

Figure 3: Percentage of income-related benefits by LSOA and ranked position in Wales, WIMD 2005



Source: WIMD 2008 Consultation

¹⁰ Welsh Assembly Government, [Consultation on the proposed indicators for updating WIMD](#), June 2007

Local Government Settlement

1.32 The allocation of resources through the local government settlement has been discussed on a number of occasions throughout the inquiry. The local government settlement is allocated to local authorities through a formula based on a number of indicators agreed by the Welsh Assembly Government and the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA). These indicators can be divided into three types: client-based indicators, deprivation indicators and sparsity indicators. Client-based indicators, for example the number of pupils in secondary school, account for the allocation of 67 per cent of the revenue support grant. Deprivation indicators account for 27 per cent and sparsity indicators for 6 per cent.

1.33 Deprivation indicators are included in the settlement to capture the additional costs of providing services to areas with high levels of deprivation. Deprivation indicators include the number of income support recipients, the number of pensioners with limiting long-term illnesses and some indicators from the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation. These indicators are:

- The population of lower super output areas in the top 25 per cent of Index of Multiple Deprivation values (income/employment domains)
- The population of lower super output areas in the top 50 per cent of Index of Multiple Deprivation values (income/employment domains)

1.34 Sparsity indicators are applied to the formula in recognition of the extra costs involved in delivering services to a dispersed population. These indicators are divided into two types: settlement indicators and dispersion indicators.

1.35 Settlement indicators measure the amount of the population that lives outside a settlement of a certain size. Various settlement size thresholds are used in the local government settlement, ranging from settlements of 1,000 to 40,000 people. Dispersion indicators measure the distances travelled by populations living outside settlements of a given size (or threshold) in order to reach the nearest settlement of that given size. A number of key settlement thresholds are used in the local government settlement, ranging from 2,500 to 7,500. These indicators are designed to capture the additional time and distance costs associated with delivering services in dispersed communities.

1.36 Settlement indicators are included in the calculation of the revenue support grant for a number of services, including education, recreation and cultural services. Dispersion indicators are used in the formula for school meals, consumer protection and refuse collection. There are no settlement or dispersion indicators used in the calculation of the personal social services element of the revenue support grant. A comprehensive list of the indicators included in the revenue support grant is available in the Green Book for 2008-09¹¹.

¹¹ Welsh Assembly Government, [Welsh Local Government Revenue Settlement, 2008-09 \("The Green Book"\)](#), March 2008

The Treatment of Rurality within Government

1.37 Rural proofing is used to raise awareness of rural issues within the Welsh Assembly Government. The proofing process requires that policies and/or programmes delivered by the Welsh Assembly Government are considered against the conditions, needs and priorities of rural areas. This should ensure that in developing policy and/or programmes specific rural issues are taken into account and, where appropriate, provisions are made to address them. A paper provided by the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government gives the following example:

“ ... (rural proofing) takes account of the increased cost of delivery of a service; use alternative delivery methods to bring services closer to communities”

1.38 According to the Welsh Assembly Government, the Rural Policy Unit has been established within the Department for Rural Affairs to ensure that, through rural proofing, all Welsh Assembly Government policies and programmes take account of rurality and the needs of rural areas.

Policy Gateway

1.39 The Welsh Assembly Government's Policy Gateway is a tool designed for integrating policies. Proofing for rural issues is a mandatory requirement within the Policy Gateway. The Gateway includes questions relating to the Welsh Assembly Government's policy objectives for rural areas and has been revised to reflect the aspirations of *One Wales*. In developing new policies, departments are prompted

- to consult the Rural Policy Unit,
- to consider differential impacts in different parts of Wales,
- to consider how the policy will impact on rural issues.

The Nature of Poverty in Rural Wales

1.40 As part of the inquiry, the Committee examined qualitative evidence available by taking evidence on people's experiences. Before considering the evidence it may be useful to discuss the quantitative evidence available in this area. Some statistical information on rural Wales is therefore provided below.

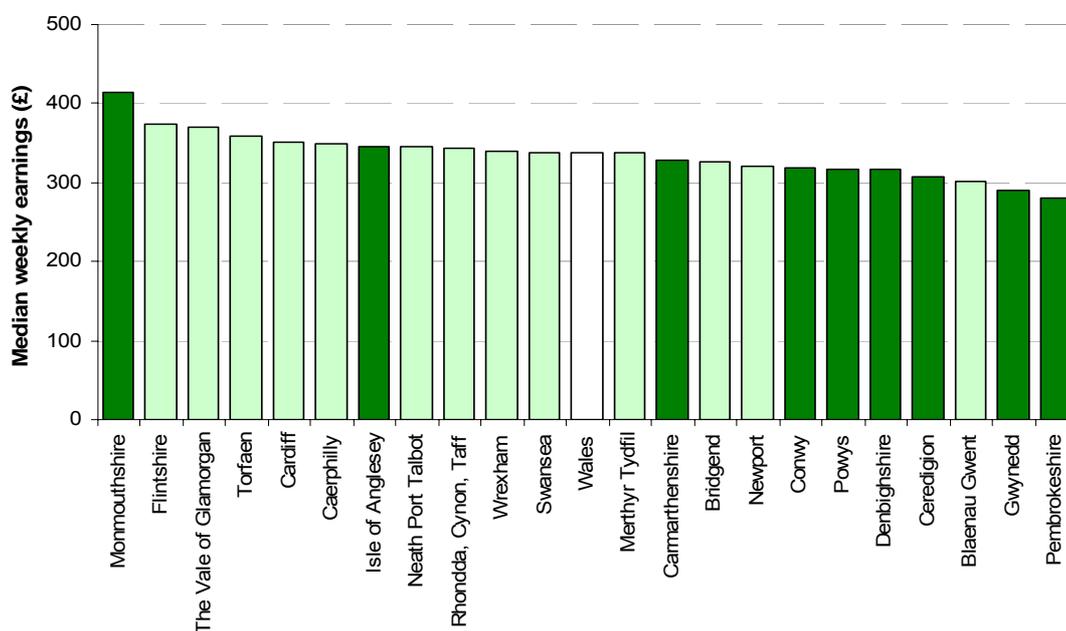
1.41 Many witnesses commented that measures of concentrations of poverty and deprivation are not the best way to identify poverty and deprivation in rural Wales, owing to its dispersed nature. However, a number of other measures are available which can help to illustrate the problems faced by rural unitary authorities.

1.42 Rural authorities tend to have higher levels of employment and lower levels of unemployment than urban and valleys authorities. They also have lower levels of economic inactivity¹². The agriculture and fishing industries make up 5.1 per cent of all employee jobs in rural Wales, compared to 0.4 per cent for urban and valleys areas. Levels of agriculture and fishing jobs are highest in mid Wales, where they comprise almost 10 per cent of all employee jobs.

1.43 Rural areas also have a high proportion of jobs in the distribution, hotels and restaurants sector, especially in-north Wales. This sector makes up 20.5 per cent of employee jobs in rural authorities¹³. Figures from the Office for National Statistics show that, on average, these sectors are paid less than the UK average. Median weekly earnings for the agriculture sector in 2007 were estimated to be £315, while earnings for the hotels and restaurants sector were £199. This compares to weekly earnings of £375 across the UK as a whole¹⁴.

1.44 As Figure 4 illustrates, low earnings are an issue for most rural authorities (shaded darker on the chart). Figures from the Office for National Statistics show that while Monmouthshire has the highest median weekly earnings of all unitary authorities, seven of the nine rural authorities have earnings below the Wales average¹⁵.

Figure 4: Median weekly earnings by local authority of residence, 2007



Source: Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, 2007

¹² Office for National Statistics, [Annual Population Survey](#), year to June 2007

¹³ Office for National Statistics, [Annual Business Inquiry](#), 2006

¹⁴ Office for National Statistics, [Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings](#) (Table 4.1a), 2007

¹⁵ Ibid, Table 8.1a

1.45 The figures on low earnings are supported by figures from HM Revenue and Customs which show that the rate of households claiming tax credits above the family element¹⁶ is the same in rural areas as it is in valleys authorities, at a rate of 148 tax credits per 1,000 households¹⁷. Figures on low earnings also contribute to the higher than average house price to earnings ratio in all nine rural authorities, with the highest ratios being in Monmouthshire and Ceredigion. In these two authorities, house prices are over nine times average earnings¹⁸.

1.46 Figure 5 shows the ratio of median house prices¹⁹ to gross median full-time pay by unitary authority in 2007²⁰. For Wales as a whole house prices in 2007 were 6.6 times full-time pay. This ratio was higher in all of the nine rural unitary authorities apart from Carmarthenshire where the ratio was equal to the Wales average. The highest ratios were for Monmouthshire and Ceredigion (9.6 and 9.4 respectively). In the remaining eleven authorities, the ratio was above the all Wales average for only three authorities – Wrexham at 6.8, Cardiff at 7.2 and Swansea at 7.1. The lowest ratios were for Neath Port Talbot (4.3) and Blaenau Gwent (4.5).

1.47 Figure 4 is based on weekly full time and part time earnings, whilst Figure 5 is based on gross annual full time earnings. The house price data in Figure 5 are based on provisional information; final information is due to be published in August 2008. With regards to earnings, no figures were available for Denbighshire for 2007 therefore 2006 figures were used for this local authority.

¹⁶ The family element of tax credits is available to all families with responsibility for a child and whose joint income does not exceed £58,175. By only examining households claiming above the family element, the focus is more on low income families.

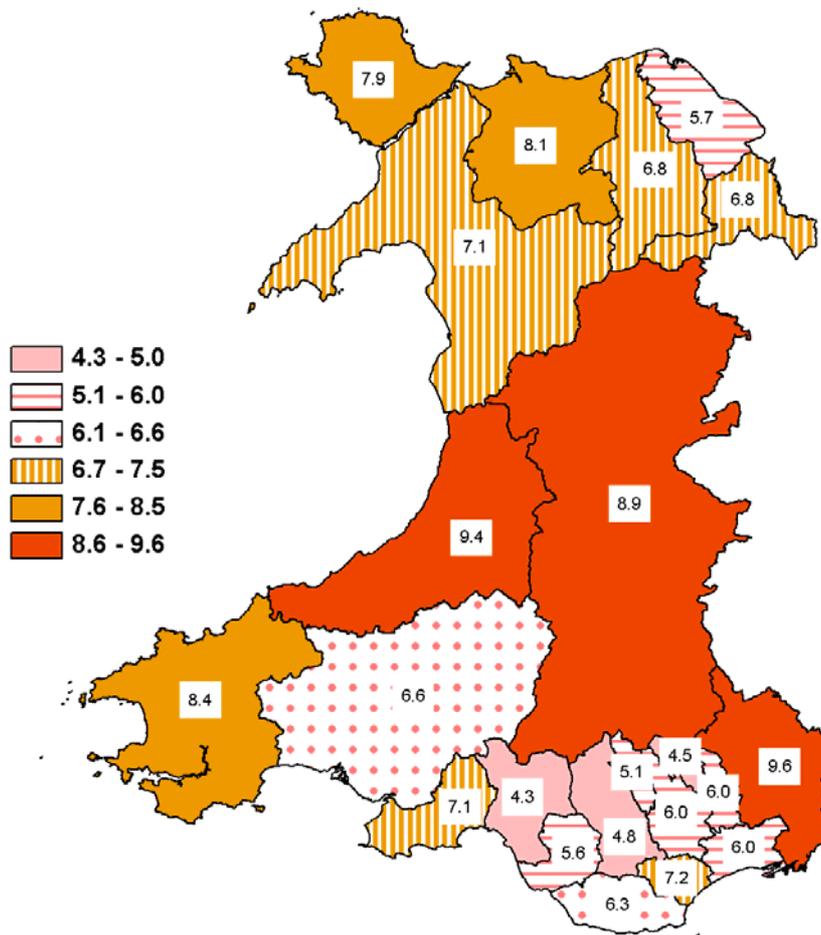
¹⁷ MRS calculations from [HM Revenue and Customs figures \(Dec 2007\)](#). Calculations exclude all student and all pensioner households.

¹⁸ MRS calculations from Land Registry and Office for National Statistics figures.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Office for National Statistics, [Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings](#), 2007

Figure 5: Ratio of median house prices to gross median full-time pay by local authority in 2007



Source: Land Registry and Office for National Statistics

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1.48 Rural Wales has a much higher percentage of people working from home than other areas of Wales (15.2 per cent, compared to 7.0 per cent for urban authorities and 6.4 for valleys authorities)²¹. These figures are particularly high for Powys and Ceredigion, possibly owing to a large number of agricultural businesses in these areas. Whilst the majority of people in rural areas of Wales travel less than 10 km to work, a higher percentage of people in rural areas are more likely than their urban or valleys counterparts to travel 30 km or more to get to work. When examining mode of transport, people in rural areas are more likely to walk to work (particularly in Gwynedd, Powys and Ceredigion) and are much less likely to use public transport²².

²¹ Office for National Statistics, [2001 Census](#)

²² *ibid*

1.49 Older people make up 27.2 per cent of the population of rural authorities, a higher proportion than in other areas of Wales²³. Many of the people in this age group live alone - the 2001 Census estimated that 60% of all pensioner households are made up of single pensioners. Pensioners are traditionally a group at high risk of poverty and deprivation. The UK Government's pension credit scheme aims to guarantee a minimum level of income for all pensioners. Figures from the Department for Work and Pensions show that take-up of all types of pension credits are lower in rural areas than in urban or valleys areas²⁴. This supports work carried out by the Commission for Rural Communities in England which found that pensioners living in villages, hamlets and isolated dwellings had significantly lower take-up rates of pension credits than other areas²⁵.

1.50 The Committee heard in its evidence from Age Concern Cymru and Help the Aged in Wales that concessionary bus passes had been welcomed across Wales, but that older people in rural areas were not able to make the most of these passes owing to the provision of public transport in their area. This is supported by figures published by the Local Government Data Unit Wales which show that take up of concessionary bus passes is at 65 per cent across rural authorities, compared to 90 per cent in urban authorities and 87 per cent in valleys authorities²⁶.

The Nature of Poverty in Rural Wales : Gwynedd Case Study

Research undertaken by Gwynedd County Council²⁷ was submitted to the Committee which illustrates many of issues facing those living in rural Wales. A summary of the main research findings is provided here as a case study. The aim of the study was to examine the variation in cost of living within Gwynedd, specifically comparing the rural and urban centres. Issues that were specifically explored were the cost of buying houses, the cost of running a house and the cost of getting to work and to public services. The main findings were as follows:

The causes of problems in accessing services in rural areas are diverse, complex and deeply rooted in the economy, geography and social fabric of rural areas

People living in rural areas of Gwynedd have to travel further to access services such as shopping, health, education and employment. This means extra costs for those lacking suitable transport, particularly the elderly, the young, single parents and the unemployed. Information from the 2005 Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation demonstrated that with regards to Access to Services, 51 per cent of the Lower Super Output Areas in Gwynedd are ranked amongst the 20 per cent most deprived in Wales.

²³ Office for National Statistics, [Mid year estimates of the population](#), 2007

²⁴ Department for Work and Pensions, [Pension Credit Estimates of Take-Up in 2005-06](#), March 2007

²⁵ Commission for Rural Communities, [Pension Credit Take-Up in Rural Areas: State of the Countryside Update](#), December 2007

²⁶ Local Government Data Unit, [Dissemination Tool](#)

²⁷ Cyngor Gwynedd Council *Living in Gwynedd: an examination of the costs and issues arising from living on the periphery* 2007

One of the most influential factors when considering the differences between living in urban and rural areas is the availability and cost of transport. The percentage of households with more than one car is significantly higher in rural areas than in urban wards.

Car ownership is a significant cost. Over half of Gwynedd households have gross incomes of between £7,500 and £10,000 and spend more than 10 per cent of their income on fuel costs. The report highlighted that car ownership is higher in rural wards than urban wards, and that a significant percentage of households in rural parts of the county owned more than one car or van. The report also calculated that the costs associated with travelling to work or to access services were higher due to the distances those in rural areas needed to travel to reach those services. Costs were highest for those living in Pen Llyn.

Housing prices, all in all are higher in the rural areas and in small villages.

Whether or not a household owns their home outright or is having to pay a mortgage (or rent) makes a significant difference to household outgoings. According to 2001 census data, more households living in rural and coastal areas of Llyn and Meirionydd owned their homes than in the more urban areas and adjacent villages in Arfon. A number of factors contributed to this, including age profile, immigration, the development of new housing estates and inherited property. The report provided an analysis of the monthly repayment necessary to buy a house at 2006 average prices²⁸ and demonstrated that mortgage repayments can be significantly higher in rural and coastal areas. Data used for calculating average private rental costs demonstrated that rents were higher in the Menai and North Wales Rural areas, with the variation in price across the type of accommodation being significant. For example, at Local Reference Rent prices in March 2006, average rents for a 2 room dwelling in the Llyn area was £261, whilst in the Menai and North Wales Rural Areas it was £309 and £287 respectively. The average Council Tax was found to be lower in the main towns and the largest villages.

The study identified a number of groups that were most vulnerable to disadvantage, and recommended that these should be a focus for Gwynedd Council's work in the future, namely:

- People with no access to private transport
- Older people
- Low income households not taking up their benefit entitlement
- Those living without the support of extended family networks
- Those living alone
- People who are in and out of low quality, poorly paid occupations within tourism, care or agriculture, as well as migrant workers.

²⁸ Calculated at the Standard Variable Rate at the time, which was 7.50 per cent. The calculations assumed the purchaser had no equity from previous property purchases or any deposit to contribute. The figures were calculated in 2006.

2. KEY THEMES IDENTIFIED FROM THE EVIDENCE

2.1 During the course of its inquiry, the Committee took evidence from stakeholders, both orally and in writing, as well as the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government. A full list of those providing evidence to the Committee is at Annex 3.

2.2 During the inquiry the Committee identified a number of themes and threads which were common throughout the evidence. Whilst each one of the population groups identified in the terms of reference was impacted differently, these themes or threads recurred. It became apparent as we gathered our evidence that the main issues emerging were common across all of the population groups.

2.3 Whilst this report focuses on those policy areas where the Welsh Assembly Government has legislative competence, other issues, such as benefits and social security schemes, pensions, welfare reform and taxes, were reported in the evidence gathered, but are only discussed in the report in terms of increasing awareness of the available support.

2.4 The key themes emerging from the inquiry were:

- Income and employment;
- Benefit take-up;
- Transport;
- Housing;
- Access to services;
- Government policies;
- Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation;
- Allocation of resources to rural areas.

3. INCOME AND EMPLOYMENT

3.1 Research from the Wales Rural Observatory suggested that 25 per cent of households in rural Wales were living below the 60 per cent national median income level, which was widely accepted as the indicator of low income or poverty at a UK level. Furthermore, 20 per cent of employed people in rural Wales were living below that low income figure. There also appeared to be a strong east-west division, where the more remote, western parts of rural Wales had the highest levels of low income and poverty and the eastern border areas, particularly Monmouthshire, experiencing the highest income levels for Wales.

3.2 The Committee received evidence that many economically active people in rural Wales remain in poverty because employment opportunities often do not provide adequate income. Work is often seasonal and does not provide long term career prospects and a high dependence on the public sector, small local businesses and the declining agricultural sector result in generally low wage levels. The lack of variation and high quality employment opportunities, coupled with the high cost of living, means many young people move away to attend university or secure employment and do not return.

3.3 As part of their evidence, the Citizens' Advice Bureau argued that a lack of many different employment options in rural areas could be problematic and that many people in rural areas lost out financially when trying to make the shift from benefits to the workplace.

3.4 According to the WLGA, eight out of nine rural councils are in a worse situation in terms of income than the Welsh national average, and in terms of residual income, are often further disadvantaged due to higher costs of transport and goods. It argued that further research was required nationally to identify the impact on residual income; what people can afford to buy; and how that affects their quality of life day-to-day. More holistic work was needed across Wales to identify these problems to ensure appropriate intervention strategies were in place.

3.5 The National Children's Home Cymru believed that access to employment usually depends on car ownership in rural areas. The Citizens' Advice Bureau claimed that transport was often a factor in exacerbating or complicating opportunities for employment in rural areas, for example, because of the distance from work or from public agencies; lack of public transport; or the cost of running a car.

3.6 Jobcentre Plus explained that, since the closure of a number of rural offices two to three years ago, many people were facing longer journeys to jobcentre offices. The Citizens' Advice Bureau urged the Welsh Assembly Government to work with the Department for Work and Pensions and Jobcentre Plus in creating suitable local arrangements where access and travel to job centres is prohibitively expensive or difficult.

3.7 Another barrier to participating in the labour market for many families is access to affordable childcare. A survey by the Wales Rural Observatory found that over 70% of rural towns and communities did not have a publicly run nursery. Childcare provision is lower in rural areas and it is often difficult for families to access the right kind of childcare, such as Welsh language provision. Many families rely on informal childcare (family members, etc) for which no reimbursement can be claimed. In addition to this, a lack of good quality and accessible caring facilities for an older family member can also cause barriers for an individual in accessing work.

3.8 Research conducted by Barnardo's Cymru showed that fathers in Gwynedd were relying on informal childcare provided by relatives to enable them to participate in employment. Local childcare was seen to be limited and expensive and some fathers were even forced away from their home areas because of limited local labour market opportunities.

3.9 It was widely accepted that low pay in the childcare sector was contributing to difficulties in providing quality, affordable childcare in rural areas. The GWLAd project argued that the childcare sector must provide a more attractive career path for individuals, but in doing so, must not become unaffordable.

3.10 The Committee accepts that there is an urgent need to address the shortage of affordable childcare in rural areas, including Welsh language provision, in order to facilitate employment, education and training opportunities.

3.11 Where rural businesses were facing youth migration, Chwarae Teg suggested that flexible working could be the key to recruiting and retaining talented individuals. Chwarae Teg promotes the flexible working agenda amongst businesses to help reduce barriers to entering, staying in and progressing in the workforce. Jobcentre Plus provides a childcare partnership manager in each district, who work closely with the local authorities' childcare information service on raising awareness of available childcare for those looking for work.

Recommendation 1: The Committee therefore recommends that the Welsh Assembly Government works with the childcare sector to develop structured career paths and training to encourage recruitment and retention in the profession, taking particular account of Welsh language needs.

Recommendation 2: The Committee urges the Welsh Assembly Government to consider the issues facing rural areas and the role of childcare in developing the rural economy when progressing the *One Wales* commitment to increase the provision of affordable childcare in the areas of greatest need.

3.12 Evidence from National Children's Home Cymru projects with young carers in the north-west suggested that it was particularly difficult for parents with a disabled child to access employment, and that young carers were likely to be living on benefits.

3.13 The WLGA argued for a more coherent and creative joint vision between the Welsh Assembly Government and local authorities in relation to arrangements and funding for relocation of public sector jobs. For example, Gwynedd Council highlighted benefits of opening a new contact centre in the south of the county, such as provision of 35 jobs for people from a number of outlying villages.

Recommendation 3: The Committee believes that there is a need for a robust economic strategy in Wales which seeks to develop a more varied economy in rural Wales. The Committee therefore recommends that the Welsh Assembly Government provides targeted resources, including business support, to create a more varied rural economy beyond the current base.

4. BENEFIT TAKE-UP

4.1 Witnesses agreed that people in rural areas were less likely to claim benefits than in urban areas. The Commission for Rural Communities had evidence to back up this claim in England and the WLGA suggested that families in rural Wales were not claiming benefits that they were entitled to because they believed that there was a social stigma attached to accessing benefits.

4.2 According to Age Concern Cymru, older people were traditionally used to paying their own way and felt some shame in asking for help. Help the Aged suggested that they were reluctant to become dependent on the state and had adapted to relative levels of hardship, living with less, and playing down that hardship. Age Concern Cymru suggested that the system for claiming council tax, housing, and other benefits must be simplified for older people. It had joined with the pension service to hold a drop-in surgery twice a month, in addition to home visits, where they found that older people tended to respond more positively and more openly to the voluntary sector than to statutory agencies. Gwynedd Council also showed good practice in this area, by employing officers to specifically target pensioners in taking up their benefit entitlements.

4.3 A number of the written responses received highlighted the role the voluntary sector could play in providing advice and information in this area and called for greater funding stability for such projects.

Recommendation 4: The Committee recommends that as part of the Financial Inclusion Strategy the Assembly Government recognises the importance of the voluntary sector, particularly the Citizens' Advice Bureau, and local authorities in encouraging benefit take-up and ensures that both sectors are adequately resourced to continue providing these essential services.

5. TRANSPORT

5.1 Transport was one of the main difficulties for all population groups in rural areas. Many witnesses stressed a considerable need for integrated, accessible and affordable transport in rural areas, particularly in light of evidence from the Citizens' Advice Bureau to suggest their clients often get into debt due to the costs of running a car. The continued increases in fuel costs will undoubtedly cause even greater problems for these people.

5.2 For older people, transport was key to remaining independent, socialising and accessing hospital and other appointments. Age Concern Cymru and Help the Aged in Wales argued that many older people in rural areas own a car because they felt this was the only way they could participate in and access services.

5.3 In oral evidence, Help the Aged in Wales drew attention to the difficulties associated with using public transport to attend hospital appointments or visit partners in hospital. One case quoted involved a journey in excess of six hours which resulted in only one hour and 47 minutes of visiting time. It was suggested that better integration of transport and visiting times was needed. This view was supported by Ceredigion Community Health Council and the North Wales Economic Forum who, in their written evidence, suggested that *"the Assembly could facilitate joint working between local authorities and NHS agencies to examine cross-boundary transport arrangements."*

5.4 A high proportion of older women still do not drive, which can leave them isolated and deprived, particularly if they are bereaved or widowed. Problems also occur for older people who have to give up driving and become reliant on family, friends or neighbours, and whilst the introduction of the concessionary fare scheme for the over 60's was welcomed, it was felt to be of little use if it was not supported by a reliable bus service.

"Free bus passes for older people are fine but no use if there are no buses or you cannot get on one." – a comment often heard from older people according to the Welsh Local Government Association.

5.5 Help the Aged in Wales suggested that alternative concessions should be looked at, such as taxis; trains where available; and other means of community transport. The Committee is aware of 'Bwcabus', a pilot scheme in Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion, which uses GPS-based demand responsive transport in rural areas to offset the impact of a steady decline in public transport. The pilot recognises that groups of society are constrained in relation to when and where they travel, by factors such as timing and frequency of service. The Committee believes that projects such as this are essential in enabling mobility and access to resources that are often not available locally to people without cars and provides an element of choice that can reduce car dependency.

Recommendation 5: The Committee welcomes the free bus pass scheme for older people but is concerned that older people in rural areas are not able to take sufficient advantage of this scheme. The Committee therefore urges the Welsh Assembly Government to broaden the free bus pass scheme to allow concessionary travel for older people on other forms of transport, such as trains and community transport, where adequate bus provision is not available.

Recommendation 6: The Committee also urges the Welsh Assembly Government to encourage and support the development of community transport schemes that meet the needs of those living in rural areas.

5.6 The Committee also heard concerns about the lack of bus shelters; inaccessible buses and lack of information about bus services.

5.7 Transport was also one of the main issues facing young people in rural areas. Funky Dragon claimed that, because of the unreliability and infrequency of the bus service, young people tended to rely on their parents for lifts or cycled. Where public transport was costly and unreliable, and lifts and cycle-paths were unavailable, sustaining friendships; accessing part-time jobs; and engaging in after-school activities proved challenging in rural communities. Children in Wales argued that lack of transport could lead to some young people feeling “left out”, because they were unable to participate in social activities with their friends. Funky Dragon felt that young people generally enjoyed living in rural areas and therefore, if the issue of transport could be dealt with effectively, feelings of isolation could be removed.

5.8 Children’s groups would welcome improvements to public transport, for example, by having more regular and direct buses that drop-off at the cinema or other places enjoyed by young people. There were also concerns from young people about their safety when waiting for buses or when cycling, and they would like to see more lighting and better traffic control in the more isolated areas. Funky Dragon suggested that the Welsh Assembly Government should consider creating more safe cycle paths in rural areas, in line with what was happening in urban areas.

5.9 Children in Wales highlighted the benefits of a two-year pilot scheme, which provided free transport for children and young people in three counties in Wales, and would like to see this pilot process extended to other areas. The National Children’s Home Cymru and Funky Dragon also supported the introduction of more free travel schemes for children and young people in school, full-time education, and training.

Recommendation 7: The Committee acknowledges the transport difficulties faced by young people in rural areas and recommends that the Assembly Government assesses the potential of rolling out free transport for children and young people across Wales, as already piloted in Wales.

6. HOUSING

6.1 Although rural housing was not a key focus for this inquiry, on the basis that it was being dealt with elsewhere, evidence gathered highlighted a number of issues, which are discussed below.

6.2 It was widely accepted that a lack of affordable housing, social housing and rented accommodation was a significant problem in rural areas. The disparity between income levels and house prices in rural areas had created a situation where many people were priced out of their local housing market, forcing them to relocate to other areas. The written submission from the Minister for Rural Affairs stated:

“On the supply side, dramatic increases in the cost of development land and property prices, together with the net loss of social rented accommodation over the last couple of decades through the Right to Buy were constantly mentioned as significant causes of access and affordability problems in the Welsh countryside”.

6.3 Help the Aged in Wales expressed concerns over the lack of social housing in rural areas, whilst the Citizens’ Advice Bureau highlighted shortages of suitable rented accommodation. The National Children’s Home Cymru provided examples of families living in council houses that are still reliant on coal fires, and others living in isolated farm houses, where there is no central heating.

6.4 The WLGA suggested that taxing second homes could reduce demand and create an income stream to tackle some of the problems that exist with affordable housing in rural areas.

6.5 Community Housing Cymru stated that additional pressure was being put on land supply for housing development by the large number of conservation areas and listed buildings in rural Wales. The small scale nature of housing development in rural areas resulted in less opportunity for cost savings and made it harder to utilise Section 106 agreements, as private developers were more reluctant to allocate homes for affordable housing.

Recommendation 8: The Committee recommends that the Welsh Assembly Government develops stronger planning guidance to enable the development of affordable housing in rural areas, and to assist local planning authorities to make more land available for affordable housing in rural areas.

6.6 In their written evidence, the Tenant Participation Advisory Service Cymru highlighted the difficulties in establishing the actual housing needs in rural areas. Many young people were unaware of their right to register for social housing or believed there was little chance of them being allocated a property therefore they did not register their need. There was also an issue of “no stock, no need” – if a rural community had no social landlord housing stock there would not be a register for the area and therefore no perceived need for social housing.

6.7 According to Anglesey Community Health Council, one particular group who experienced difficulties in accessing affordable housing were low income or economically inactive single childless men and women between the ages of 25 and 49. If they did not have problems which placed them in a vulnerable group already then they were unlikely to present as a service user until at crisis point because initiatives were targeted to vulnerable groups.

6.8 Conwy County Borough Council Social Services drew attention to a lack of suitable and affordable housing to meet the needs of the changing population, in particular bungalows, ground floor accommodation or adapted property for older people or those with serious disability.

6.9 Research from energywatch Wales suggests that incidence of fuel poverty in north Wales was substantially higher than in south Wales, due to lack of mains gas and a large proportion of hard-to-heat homes. Approximately 40 per cent of Welsh households with electricity as their main fuel were considered to be ‘fuel poor’. Evidence from witnesses, such as the Citizens’ Advice Bureau, showed that those people in rural areas that were not on mains gas were disadvantaged by the high cost of oil and the tendency that oil is only available in substantial quantities and in advance.

6.10 Pembrokeshire County Council drew attention to the fact that the types of buildings more common in rural areas tended to be less well insulated and the choice of heating fuels was limited and more expensive.

6.11 In the written submission from the Minister for Rural Affairs, the following comments were made in relation to fuel poverty:

“There are three main factors which influence fuel poverty; cost of fuel, household income and dwelling energy efficiency. Fuel poverty is not evenly distributed across all household types. For households in rural areas it can be harder to reduce fuel bills, as properties are often off the gas network, and may have solid walls which are expensive to insulate.

[...] Some households in rural areas may not be able to benefit from the most cost effective energy efficiency measures such as cavity wall insulation and gas central heating because of their construction or location”.

Recommendation 9: Whilst the Committee welcomes the Welsh Assembly Government's consultation on housing in rural areas²⁹, it is concerned as to the lack of urgency at which the shortage of affordable housing in Wales is currently being addressed. In the context of the above consultation, the Committee urges the Welsh Assembly Government to:

- **develop key worker schemes in rural areas**
- **encourage increased use of shared equity schemes**
- **make efforts to break down the barriers to enable local people to buy homes in their local areas.**
- **increase the supply of affordable housing beyond the 6,500 homes committed to within the *One Wales* document.**

²⁹ Welsh Assembly Government [Planning Policy Changes to Support Sustainable Development in Rural Areas - Meeting Housing Needs](#), July 2008

7. ACCESS TO SERVICES

General

7.1 One of the key characteristics of deprivation is difficulty in accessing services. According to Carmarthenshire County Council, the general needs of service users and communities in rural areas were not being met or understood. Research had shown that the core services needed to maintain a sense of community in a rural area included a shop, primary school, GP, community hall and post office. However, many rural areas were suffering a decline in such amenities which ultimately resulted in longer distances being travelled in order to access such services.

7.2 The Wales Rural Observatory suggested that people in rural areas were adopting quite complex coping strategies to deal with the limited provision of services and the retraction of local services in their communities.

7.3 Children in Wales suggested that many local authorities were using different models of service delivery, such as mobile provision, having smaller family centres located within local authority housing, using community transport and having more outreach services.

7.4 There were physical barriers to recreational, play or sports facilities, health services, such as GPs, and advice services. The Citizens' Advice Bureau argued that lack of advice provision in rural areas often masked unmet need.

7.5 The GWLAd project found that many people experienced difficulties in accessing information on a broad range of services and facilities – from bus timetables to welfare rights. It expressed a need for information hubs in each community in accessible, non-threatening locations.

7.6 The Committee understands that there is a great deal of innovation and creativity, particularly amongst the rural local authorities. For example, in the area of family support services, drop-in centres were being provided in town halls or community centres, more outreach work was being conducted, and dedicated telephone support lines were providing advice to those families unable to attend group sessions.

7.7 The Committee believes that the Welsh Assembly Government could do far more to co-ordinate such services and to promote best practice more systematically across rural Wales.

Bank and Post Office Closures

7.8 There was great concern amongst a number of witnesses that the closure of rural post offices would have a significant detrimental effect on rural communities and older people in particular. According to the Citizens' Advice Bureau, people living in rural areas feel that the post office acted as the centre of the community. Indeed, Age Concern Cymru quoted research that showed 76 per cent of people over the age of 65 in Wales used their post office at least once a week and this figure was higher in rural areas, for example, to 81 per cent in Gwynedd. They argued that the closure of that service would have significant implications for older people.

7.9 Concerns were also raised about lack of access to banking services in rural areas. According to the Citizens' Advice Bureau, just four per cent of villages in Wales now have a bank branch, following contraction of the bank branch network. Furthermore, it has evidence to suggest that there are growing numbers of "free ATM deserts", and that fee-charging ATMs, which fill gaps in provision, can dominate in rural and disadvantaged areas.

7.10 The Citizens' Advice Bureau suggested that enabling all bank customers to withdraw money from the post office would not only provide greater convenience for bank customers, but could also help enhance the viability of rural post offices.

Recommendation 10: The Committee recommends that the Post Office Development Fund includes the provision of free ATM services in rural areas as part of the range of services Post Offices provide.

Healthcare

7.11 A number of issues were raised in respect of healthcare mainly in relation to accessibility and support services.

7.12 A number of responses raised the issue of the long distances individuals in rural areas were expected to travel to attend their nearest hospital; whilst Carmarthenshire and Powys County Councils both expressed concern that people in rural areas were at higher risk due to the time taken for emergency services to reach them and the time taken to reach appropriate medical facilities.

7.13 The impact of isolation and loneliness on mental health was another recurring theme, coupled with limited access to support services. According to Carmarthenshire County Council "the Survey of Rural Services 2005 reveals that in more than nine out of ten communities in rural Wales no local support services are available for the unemployed, homeless groups, people with drug problems or women suffering domestic violence. In addition, 76% of rural communities have no provision for vulnerable young people and 58% lack any support services for vulnerable elderly groups."

7.14 Ceredigion Community Health Council made a number of suggestions for improving access, including:

- Making more services available near people's homes, so the health professionals were travelling rather than the patients;
- Increasing the use of technology to monitor chronic conditions in patient's homes (e.g. telephone consultations);
- Encouraging pharmacies to sign up to repeat dispensing and to make greater use of technology (e.g. ordering by telephone or e-mail);
- Making more services home-based, e.g. podiatry, dental care and eye tests.

7.15 Age Concern Cymru highlighted the lack of care home provision in rural communities. The majority of older people from rural communities needing such care would have to leave the community where they had spent their lifetime and may well have contributed to that community over a period of many years. They were forced to leave at a stage in life when they most needed the support of that community and often would be separated from family, friends and neighbours. They also cited difficulties where care homes existed in rural communities in "attracting the right calibre of staff, especially those who were sensitive to, and speak, the Welsh language" – the ability to converse in their first language being a huge issue for some older people.

Dentists

7.16 There was evidence to suggest difficulties in accessing NHS dentists in rural areas. According to the National Federation of Women's Institutes Wales "rural communities are concerned about the lack of dental surgeries as there is a chronic shortage of NHS dentists and other dental team members in parts of Wales, with 84% without a dental practice." The Citizens' Advice Bureau argued that this was particularly compounded for those without access to a car.

Recommendation 11: The Committee recommends that the Welsh Assembly Government ensures that the forthcoming Rural Health Plan will look at the flexible delivery of services for those individuals and communities who are located far from mainstream health provision.

ICT

7.17 It was widely recognised that difficulties exist in certain parts of Wales in terms of accessing broadband and digital technology and that many people in rural areas who were unable to afford this technology could become disadvantaged. According to Children in Wales, many schools set homework that relied on pupils having access to the internet and their families being able to afford broadband. The Wales Co-operative Centre suggested that many people in rural areas were missing out on cheaper banking and payment of bills, which were often better value on the internet.

7.18 In their written evidence, the Mid Wales Partnership's Information, Communications and Technology Advisory Group highlighted the "clear need for some sort of public sector intervention and support to provide high speed affordable ubiquitous broadband in rural Wales." They suggested that "this may not mean direct public subsidy but more innovative schemes by the public sector in partnership, supported by the Welsh Assembly."

Recommendation 12: The Committee recognises the disadvantages caused by lack of broadband provision and recommends that the Welsh Assembly Government brings forward proposals to remove any barriers to its provision in rural areas as a matter of urgency.

Social enterprises

7.19 The Wales Co-operative Centre highlighted opportunities for social enterprises and co-operatives to develop and grow within communities, such as farming co-operatives coming together to improve food supply, reduce food miles, promote healthy eating and improve sustainability of farms. Other opportunities include the development of community-owned facilities, such as rural post offices, village stores, community centres, and rural pubs. The Centre argued "that if we cannot encourage, in the shorter term, the individual sustainability of rural areas through sustainable social enterprises and co-operatives, for example, we need to identify programmes that provide the seed development for that future sustainability". The Committee believes that social enterprises have a significant role to play in preserving services essential to the sustainability of rural communities and strongly urges the Welsh Assembly Government to provide more leadership in this area.

Recommendation 13: The Committee recommends that the Welsh Assembly Government encourages the development of social enterprises as means of providing community-owned facilities in rural areas.

Education

7.20 The Citizens' Advice Bureau argued that opportunities for training for young people were particularly constrained. The GWLAd project stated that lack of transport and limited availability of childcare were still significant barriers to engaging in learning in rural areas. In order to engage rural populations in learning, learning needs to be taken to potential learners in their own communities. There was a lack of information about learning opportunities and where to look for information acts as a barrier for many people.

7.21 The main written evidence received in relation to education came from Anglesey County Council and related to children with special educational needs; notably that children with physical learning disabilities had to travel 25 miles a day to attend a special school and children with autism were being isolated more than necessary due to the rural nature of their districts.

Participation in Community Life

7.22 Isolation in rural areas appeared to be more prevalent amongst the older population but also existed amongst younger people.

7.23 Age Concern Cymru argued that imaginative-thinking was required in relation to providing opportunities for participation by older people, with a view to helping them remain active and “giving them a reason to get out of bed in the morning”. They also suggested that the role, knowledge and experience of the voluntary sector in providing information and advice to older people should be recognised.

7.24 Organisations representing older people suggested that they were keen to enjoy and contribute to their rural community and its economy as older workers, carers, and volunteers. Some older people would also like to see more and varied opportunities to undertake lifelong learning provision within their communities. Others were keen to participate in community groups and forums. The Welsh Assembly Government’s Strategy for Older People was commended for its commitment to strengthening forums, which allowed older people to come together, feel empowered, and influence development of their local area. Help the Aged in Wales argued that such involvement could help tackle exclusion, isolation and loneliness; however, more guidance was required from central government on the creation, objectives, and proposed outcomes of such forums.

7.25 Concerns were expressed among a number of witnesses regarding the impact on rural communities of outward migration, predominantly among young people, and high inward migration from urban areas, who were according to Community Housing Cymru “in search of an idyllic lifestyle”. The combined effect of these trends was the creation of a rural population with a much higher proportion of older people, resulting in detrimental effects on the sustainability of communities, as service requirements change. Community Housing Cymru further argued that, as a result, schools and other businesses, which relied heavily on young people and families, could struggle with long-term viability.

7.26 The National Farmers’ Union claimed that, in some areas, lack of employment and lack of basic facilities were forcing young people away from an area. Gwynedd Council highlighted anecdotal evidence of a drift of young people from more rural parts of Gwynedd to the county’s main towns in the search for employment, with many leaving the county altogether.

7.27 Monmouthshire County Council highlighted that it had one of the lowest levels of 20-24 year olds at 4.1 per cent compared to the all Wales average of 5.5%. They argued that this was probably due to the high number of school leavers going onto higher education and not returning, and young people in lower paid work having to move out of the county to find affordable housing. They argued that this resulted in lower levels of community participation, loss of services and rural skills and lower levels of young entrepreneurship in the county.

7.28 Help the Aged in Wales expressed concerns regarding the inability of incomers settling in rural Wales to integrate with the indigenous Welsh-speaking communities, and the potential for marginalising such communities. Crossroads Wales argued that older people whose first language was Welsh could find it more difficult to communicate with health and social professionals through the medium of English.

7.29 Help the Aged in Wales also emphasised the need for a more strategic approach to tackling isolation and a renewed emphasis on intergenerational work to deal with migration of younger people away from rural areas, leaving older people without necessary networks and support mechanisms.

7.30 As discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, lack of transport had a considerable effect on the ability of young people to meet friends and engage in social activities. Funky Dragon expressed concerns that this often led to feelings of isolation and feeling the 'odd-one-out', which in turn could lead to social, emotional and mental difficulties.

8. GOVERNMENT POLICIES

8.1 Witnesses broadly agreed that there was a need for strategic alignment of all Welsh Assembly Government policies and strategies. Age Concern Cymru specifically argued for a joined-up approach across social justice; health and social care; education; and transport departments in the Welsh Assembly Government, and across local authorities. The office of the Children’s Commissioner for Wales stressed “it is vital that rural poverty issues are better addressed by the Welsh Assembly Government and at a local authority level”.

8.2 The Wales Co-operative Centre was “frustrated at the sheer number of Welsh Assembly Government policies and strategies that were being developed and promoted”, and argued for more focus on assessing the actions and outputs of such policies and strategies. The Wales Rural Observatory also highlighted the need for more formal evaluation of the impacts of anti-poverty and welfare policies in rural areas across the United Kingdom, for example on the impacts of welfare reform, the New Deal, and minimum wage on disadvantaged groups in rural areas.

8.3 The Committee is concerned that many anti-poverty initiatives are delivered through area-based initiatives which do not, by their nature, reach rural areas.

Recommendation 14: The Committee recommends that the Welsh Assembly Government’s *One Wales* commitment to review existing anti-poverty programmes includes an evaluation of their progress and impact on the lives of people and communities in rural Wales.

Recommendation 15: The Committee would like to receive an annual report on the progress of the Welsh Assembly Government’s anti poverty initiatives in rural Wales.

8.4 The WLGA urged the Welsh Assembly Government to provide a definition of “deep rural areas”, as contained in the *One Wales* commitment “to identify and address the particular needs of deep rural areas”. It also argued there was a need for research and scenario planning looking at 10 to 15 years time, focusing in particular on what would happen if current demographic, economic and societal trends continued, and with the current policies in place. The WLGA further argued that “if we could see where we would be in 15 years’ time, we could start to put in place the sorts of strategy and policy intervention that will limit the damage”. They provided the example that, “if you came up with a model for critical thresholds in terms of the population mix within specific communities, you might designate a particular status for planning there for new houses”.

8.5 The Office of the Children’s Commissioner for Wales raised concerns regarding the apparent over-dependence on initiatives designed to tackle the impacts of child poverty within designated and more highly populated geographical areas. This is in light of the Commissioner’s comments that targets to halve child poverty by 2010 and to end it by 2020 will not be met.

8.6 Help the Aged in Wales argued that there was a lack of data on which to measure whether rural issues have been addressed within the Strategy for Older People. It expressed concerns that implementation of the Strategy had been on a project-basis rather than a strategic approach, which could have the effect of diminishing any overall long-term results. There was also some concern that the Strategy’s funding had been allocated on a formula based on population number, which did not take into account the additional costs of addressing rural needs.

8.7 The Minister highlighted that “there is rural engagement as part of the policy gateway and there are rural impact assessments, through which all policies have to go through”.

8.8 The WLGA argued the need for effective rural-proofing of all Welsh Assembly Government policies and initiatives to ensure the impact of new policies on rural areas was considered and appropriately reflected. They also suggested that “rural-proofing should also apply to new and specific emerging grants”, particularly “as the Assembly now has £642 million worth of specific grants in local government, and the grant conditions were the key to taking that forward”.

8.9 However, evidence from England, where rural-proofing already takes place, showed that its application had been patchy. The Commission for Rural Communities, which is responsible for monitoring rural-proofing in England, explained the process: “there should be, first, proper consideration of whether there was a rural dimension to that particular policy, secondly, an analysis to say what that is, and, thirdly, consideration of whether the policy itself needs to be adapted if it is to be delivered in a rural area”.

8.10 They went on to suggest that where there was an obvious rural dimension, particularly relating to agriculture, policies were generally rural-proofed; however, it was not something that policy-makers would consider systematically. The Commission for Rural Communities was currently gathering examples of good practice in rural-proofing internationally and discussing with government departments and stakeholders the best way to take forward rural-proofing to deliver real benefits for rural communities.

8.11 Children in Wales went a step further in suggesting that all policies and programmes across Welsh Assembly Government ministerial portfolios should be rural child poverty proofed, to consider the impact of decisions on children, young people and families living in poverty within rural communities.

8.12 Carmarthenshire County Council called for “the establishment of a specialist development agency for rural Wales with a multi-agency membership” which “would make a positive step towards a collaborative approach in dealing with poverty and deprivation in rural areas”.

8.13 The Wales Rural Observatory argued that “there should be much more leadership to try to take forward and pilot new initiatives in different places.

8.14 On the basis of the evaluation of those pilot schemes, those programmes should be rolled out more generally across rural Wales”.

8.15 The Committee is concerned that several witnesses felt there was a lack of ownership of rural regeneration and ambiguity over who is championing rural issues at Welsh Assembly Government level. The Committee has heard evidence that the Assembly Government has not placed a sufficiently high priority on understanding the different ways in which poverty and deprivation impact people in rural areas.

8.16 The Committee’s inquiry has also revealed that rural proofing processes are not adequate and recommends that this be strengthened.

Recommendation 16: The Committee notes that the Commission for Rural Communities in England has a statutory function to monitor and report the effectiveness of policies in England in meeting rural needs³⁰. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Assembly Government works with the Commission for Rural Communities in England to learn from effective rural proofing practice elsewhere. The Committee also recommends that the Welsh Assembly Government considers the need for legislation to ensure that policies in Wales are rural proofed.

Recommendation 17: The Committee would like to see increased transparency and monitoring of the Welsh Assembly Government’s rural proofing processes by an external evaluation. The Committee recommends that the Minister for Rural Affairs reports annually to the Committee on the Welsh Assembly Government’s rural proofing process. The Wales Rural Observatory should play a role in evaluating the rural proofing process.

Recommendation 18: The Committee would like to see the Welsh Assembly Government facilitating greater discussion between local authorities, agencies and the voluntary sector in order to develop innovative approaches to address the problems of rural areas. The Committee would support the idea of an annual event aimed at encouraging discussion and sharing of best practice.

³⁰ The *Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006* states that one of the statutory functions of the Commission for Rural Communities is “*monitoring, and making reports about, the way in which relevant persons’ policies are developed, adopted and implemented (by rural proofing or otherwise) and the extent to which those policies are meeting rural needs*”.

Recommendation 19: The Committee urgently requests that the Welsh Assembly Government provides a definition of what is meant by the term “deep rural areas”, as used in the *One Wales* document, and how this will influence policy development.

9. WELSH INDEX OF MULTIPLE DEPRIVATION

9.1 The Welsh Assembly Government Statistical Directorate explained that the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation was suited to uses where the interest is in areas with high concentrations of deprivation. The Directorate argued that “the statistical evidence indicates that rural Wales does not generally see the polarised areas of deprivation or poverty that would be evident in more urban areas”. This view was shared by the Wales Rural Observatory and the Commission for Rural Communities, who stressed the specific purpose of the Index was to measure spatial concentrations of multiple disadvantage or deprivation.

9.2 There was general agreement amongst witnesses that the nature of rural poverty was different to urban poverty, which was easier to see and measure and therefore easier to respond to. People in rural areas were often not recognised as being amongst the worst deprived due to the fact that the index measured concentrations. Whilst there were people experiencing poverty and deprivation throughout rural areas, they often lived in close proximity to people with a far greater degree of affluence, which created small pockets of deprivation within an area otherwise seen as prosperous.

9.3 Initiatives such as Communities First/Communities Next, which were aimed at improving the living conditions and prospects for people in the most disadvantaged communities across Wales, did not reach deprived individuals in rural communities. By the nature of the index, the most deprived communities tended to be the most densely populated areas.

9.4 Barnardo’s Cymru had concerns that unless a way of measuring rural deprivation could be identified; it would be difficult to secure resources to work with those families that were in need.

9.5 Wales Rural Observatory argued that there was always a need to develop more sophisticated, sensitive indicators, and the WLGA suggested that a review of the index, and regular monitoring of its use, was needed to ensure it was an effective tool in allocating resources to the people most in need. It further argued that a peripherality index could be developed to sit alongside the main index, to ensure that rural local authorities did not lose out on funding.

9.6 Key issues highlighted in the written evidence submitted to the Committee were:

- The need to capture measures of housing affordability and quality of employment;
- Greater recognition of the difference between peripheral areas and rural areas, as poverty and deprivation was often different in each;
- Formulas for allocating funding to public bodies failing to take greater account of the additional costs of providing services in sparsely populated areas;

- Greater emphasis needing to be put on families and individuals rather than neighbourhood/area based factors;
- Identifying need at a local level rather than applying a blanket approach.

9.7 The Committee is concerned that many policies aimed at tackling poverty and deprivation are delivered through area-based initiatives, with the ranking within the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation forming the criteria for funding. The Committee was interested to learn of the work of the Wales Rural Observatory, but was unclear how this work had impacted on Government policies.

Recommendation 20: Whilst the Committee welcomes the contribution of the *Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation* in identifying concentrations of deprivation, it urges the Assembly Government to consider additional evidence in its formulation of anti-poverty policies, such as the work of the Wales Rural Observatory.

10. ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES TO RURAL AREAS

10.1 Many witnesses raised concerns about the allocation of resources to local authorities and possible deficiencies that exist in some rural areas. The WLGA suggested that funding formulae for local authorities need to be constantly under consideration and updated as necessary.

10.2 It was understood that in England, weighting in the funding formula for local authorities was given for rural affairs and dispersed populations; this weighting had increased over recent years. The WLGA claimed that even a very small weighting in Wales would mean an additional £9 million for the nine rural authorities.

10.3 Gwynedd Council argued that “due to the fact that the problems of dispersed deprivation are not highlighted, they are generally not given any attention in terms of resources”.

10.4 The Office of the Children’s Commissioner for Wales quoted ‘Good Life’ research, which suggested that in some rural areas, providing the same services costs two to three times more than in urban areas. It expressed concerns regarding the additional challenges for local authorities and other service providers in delivering services of equal standard within budgetary constraints.

10.5 Children in Wales claimed that some local authorities were finding it hard to justify providing services in those rural areas where only small numbers of people were likely to use them.

10.6 The Head of the Welsh Assembly Government’s Local Government Finance Division commented that:

“The dispersion indicators are ... intended more to monitor the cost of taking services out to the people who need it - so, the dispersion indicators would be most relevant to services like community care...”

10.7 However, the Committee has been unable to identify the use of any dispersion indicators in the calculation of the personal social services element of the revenue support grant.

10.8 The WLGA suggested that whilst the Welsh Assembly Government did appear to recognise to some extent the higher costs of providing local authority services in rural Wales; this was not recognised or understood across the board by all policy and decision-makers. Furthermore, according to the WLGA, rural local authorities believe that the various funding formulae used by the Welsh Assembly Government takes insufficient account of the extra costs of delivering services in sparsely populated environments. The WLGA further suggested the need for more discussion and consideration of the rural premium issue by the Welsh Assembly Government and full recognition of the additional costs of providing services in rural areas.

10.9 The Committee heard throughout the inquiry of the additional cost of delivering services in rural areas. The WLGA referred to this as the 'rural premium' and cited England as an example where rurality is given a greater weighting in the Local Government Settlement. However, the Committee was concerned to hear from the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government that this issue had not been raised with him.

Recommendation 21: The Committee strongly urges the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government to explore with the Welsh Local Government Association Rural Forum how issues of rurality could be better reflected in the Local Government Settlement.

Recommendation 22: The Committee recommends that the Welsh Assembly Government should undertake the necessary research to plan the long term provision of future services. This should include analysis of demographic and socio-economic trends to help understand how rural communities are changing and the services that they will require in the future.

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1: The Committee therefore recommends that the Welsh Assembly Government works with the childcare sector to develop structured career paths and training to encourage recruitment and retention in the profession, taking particular account of Welsh language needs.

Recommendation 2: The Committee urges the Welsh Assembly Government to consider the issues facing rural areas and the role of childcare in developing the rural economy when progressing the *One Wales* commitment to increase the provision of affordable childcare in the areas of greatest need.

Recommendation 3: The Committee believes that there is a need for a robust economic strategy in Wales which seeks to develop a more varied economy in rural Wales. The Committee therefore recommends that the Welsh Assembly Government provides targeted resources, including business support, to create a more varied rural economy beyond the current base.

Recommendation 4: The Committee recommends that as part of the Financial Inclusion Strategy the Assembly Government recognises the importance of the voluntary sector, particularly the Citizens' Advice Bureau, and local authorities in encouraging benefit take-up and ensures that both sectors are adequately resourced to continue providing these essential services.

Recommendation 5: The Committee welcomes the free bus pass scheme for older people but is concerned that older people in rural areas are not able to take sufficient advantage of this scheme. The Committee therefore urges the Welsh Assembly Government to broaden the free bus pass scheme to allow concessionary travel for older people on other forms of transport, such as trains and community transport, where adequate bus provision is not available.

Recommendation 6: The Committee also urges the Welsh Assembly Government to encourage and support the development of community transport schemes that meet the needs of those living in rural areas.

Recommendation 7: The Committee acknowledges the transport difficulties faced by young people in rural areas and recommends that the Assembly Government assesses the potential of rolling out free transport for children and young people across Wales, as already piloted in Wales.

Recommendation 8: The Committee recommends that the Welsh Assembly Government develops stronger planning guidance to enable the development of affordable housing in rural areas, and to assist local planning authorities to make more land available for affordable housing in rural areas.

Recommendation 9: Whilst the Committee welcomes the Welsh Assembly Government's consultation on housing in rural areas³¹, it is concerned as to the lack of urgency at which the shortage of affordable housing in Wales is currently being addressed. In the context of the above consultation, the Committee urges the Welsh Assembly Government to:

- develop key worker schemes in rural areas
- encourage increased use of shared equity schemes
- make efforts to break down the barriers to enable local people to buy homes in their local areas.
- increase the supply of affordable housing beyond the 6,500 homes committed to within the *One Wales* document.

Recommendation 10: The Committee recommends that the Post Office Development Fund includes the provision of free ATM services in rural areas as part of the range of services Post Offices provide.

Recommendation 11: The Committee recommends that the Welsh Assembly Government ensures that the forthcoming Rural Health Plan will look at the flexible delivery of services for those individuals and communities who are located far from mainstream health provision.

Recommendation 12: The Committee recognises the disadvantages caused by lack of broadband provision and recommends that the Welsh Assembly Government brings forward proposals to remove any barriers to its provision in rural areas as a matter of urgency.

Recommendation 13: The Committee recommends that the Welsh Assembly Government encourages the development of social enterprises as means of providing community-owned facilities in rural areas.

Recommendation 14: The Committee recommends that the Welsh Assembly Government's *One Wales* commitment to review existing anti-poverty programmes includes an evaluation of their progress and impact on the lives of people and communities in rural Wales.

Recommendation 15: The Committee would like to receive an annual report on the progress of the Welsh Assembly Government's anti poverty initiatives in rural Wales.

³¹ Welsh Assembly Government [Planning Policy Changes to Support Sustainable Development in Rural Areas - Meeting Housing Needs](#), July 2008

Recommendation 16: The Committee notes that the Commission for Rural Communities in England has a statutory function to monitor and report the effectiveness of policies in England in meeting rural needs³². The Committee recommends that the Welsh Assembly Government works with the Commission for Rural Communities in England to learn from effective rural proofing practice elsewhere. The Committee also recommends that the Welsh Assembly Government considers the need for legislation to ensure that policies in Wales are rural proofed.

Recommendation 17: The Committee would like to see increased transparency and monitoring of the Welsh Assembly Government's rural proofing processes by an external evaluation. The Committee recommends that the Minister for Rural Affairs reports annually to the Committee on the Welsh Assembly Government's rural proofing process. The Wales Rural Observatory should play a role in evaluating the rural proofing process.

Recommendation 18: The Committee would like to see the Welsh Assembly Government facilitating greater discussion between local authorities, agencies and the voluntary sector in order to develop innovative approaches to address the problems of rural areas. The Committee would support the idea of an annual event aimed at encouraging discussion and sharing of best practice.

Recommendation 19: The Committee urgently requests that the Welsh Assembly Government provides a definition of what is meant by the term "deep rural areas", as used in the *One Wales* document, and how this will influence policy development.

Recommendation 20: Whilst the Committee welcomes the contribution of the *Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation* in identifying concentrations of deprivation, it urges the Assembly Government to consider additional evidence in its formulation of anti-poverty policies, such as the work of the Wales Rural Observatory.

Recommendation 21: The Committee strongly urges the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government to explore with the Welsh Local Government Association Rural Forum how issues of rurality could be better reflected in the Local Government Settlement.

Recommendation 22: The Committee recommends that the Welsh Assembly Government should undertake the necessary research to plan the long term provision of future services. This should include analysis of demographic and socio-economic trends to help understand how rural communities are changing and the services that they will require in the future.

³² The *Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006* states that one of the statutory functions of the Commission for Rural Communities is "monitoring, and making reports about, the way in which relevant persons' policies are developed, adopted and implemented (by rural proofing or otherwise) and the extent to which those policies are meeting rural needs".

Key Welsh Assembly Government Policies to tackle Poverty and Deprivation

The following is a summary of information provided by the Minister for Rural Affairs as part of the inquiry outlining the work that is undertaken within each Ministerial portfolio with regards to poverty and deprivation.

Department for Rural Affairs

- The Department for Rural Affairs does not have a remit to directly address the issues of deprivation and poverty in rural areas. However, policies within the Department's portfolio affect these issues directly and indirectly.
- The **Rural Development Plan for Wales 2007 - 2013** brings funds to support rural communities and businesses; this enhances the quality of life in rural areas and the rural environment.
- **Direct payments** to farmers help support rural land-based economies.
- **Farm incomes** are subject to volatility, particularly as a result of recent animal health diseases, global prices and changes in feed prices. The Minister refers to a new **Farming Strategy**, to be developed by the Assembly Government in 2008.
- Farm businesses are increasingly gaining income from diversification into non-farming activities.

Department for Social Justice and Local Government

- The *One Wales* programme contains 26 commitments on which the Department for Social Justice and Local Government is taking a lead and which are linked to the poverty and deprivation agendas throughout Wales. A key priority highlighted is tackling child poverty.
- Work is ongoing to provide information on **child poverty** below the all-Wales level. Consideration is being given to the development of a **child index of deprivation**, for publication in the autumn.
- A **child wellbeing monitor** is under development, which will include reporting on aspects of child poverty.
- Support is being provided to a **pilot project** aimed at helping local government to reduce levels of child poverty. This is being done in partnership with Save the Children, and piloted in Gwynedd and Rhondda Cynon Taf.
- *One Wales* commits the Government to the development of **credit unions** throughout Wales. Credit unions are active in 21 local authorities at present.
- The **local government finance settlement** recognises rurality and deprivation; rurality or sparsity are recognised in two ways, through settlement³³ indicators and dispersion indicators.
- Four **Communities First** areas cover rural communities in Gwynedd, Flintshire, Powys and Ceredigion, which are referred to in the consultation paper on Communities Next.

³³ Settlement indicators are based on the population living outside key settlements and dispersion indicators are based on the distances that population have to travel to key settlements.

- A **financial inclusion strategy** will be developed in 2008 which will include ensuring benefit take up and the development of credit unions.
- Funding has been provided to local authorities to improve the standard of **Gypsy Traveller** sites, which include a number of rural sites in Gwynedd and Pembrokeshire.

Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills

- There is nothing within the various student support packages that is specifically targeted at students in rural areas; similarly with Higher Education. There is no weighting for rurality as occurs in some other types of intervention.
- An all Wales **school uniform grant scheme** is available to assist families on low income
- The **RAISE** programme is mainly distributed to urban and post-industrial schools, because they have higher levels of pupils qualifying for free school meals. The exception is Ynys Môn.
- In relation to **Youth and Adult Learning Opportunities**, there is a lack of additional Youth Service resources for young people living in rural areas, which includes places to meet, limited access to Youth Workers, poor transport and general lower levels of funding. Ceredigion is cited as an example where the 'spend per head' of youth population is lowest.
- **Skills that work for Wales** is the draft skills and employment strategy.

Department for Health and Social Services

- *One Wales* commits the Government to developing a **Rural Health Plan for Wales**. This was announced by the Minister for Health and Social Services on 11 January 2008.
- **Designed to Add Value- a third dimension** is a strategic review which aims to help outline future directions for the voluntary and community sector in supporting the delivery of health and social care across Wales. One of the key themes is *Improving access to services for disadvantaged and rural communities*. It also recognises the role of the voluntary sector in supporting people's health and well-being in rural communities.
- The **National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity in Wales** sets national standards to improve and reduce variation in service delivery for children and young people – the strategy addresses issues such as education, housing, leisure and transport as well as health.
- **The Strategy for Older People and Link-Age Wales** aims to maximise the income and benefit take up amongst older people.

Department for Finance and Public Services Delivery

- The main aim of the department's work in relation to the delivery of public services is to embed the principles of citizen-centred services within the context of the Wales Spatial Plan.
- **Local Service Boards** are likely to be active in providing leadership to address issues affecting rural communities.
- **Citizen Centred Governance, Engagement and Access** relates to the delivery of services. The submission makes references to rural areas, and

the need for public service organisations to be more sensitive and responsible to the needs of the citizens they serve.

- Through the **Spatial Plan**, there should be work across Government departments to deal with issues identified. For example, in Central Wales, deprivation is one of the target indicators to underpin strategic intervention. Reference is also made to an exercise which is underway in North Wales to scope interventions designed to tackle economic activity.
- The paper refers to the need for **A Strategic Approach to Finance** which includes the scope for joint budgets to facilitate cross-portfolio working to deliver objectives.

Department for Heritage

- **Libraries** fall within the Minister's portfolio; work is being undertaken to assess the rural information needs of Mid Wales, which will focus particularly on health needs. Libraries are also providing a facility whereby patients are prescribed self-help books by their GPs.
- The paper refers to **tourism** being a vital driver in rural economies and a main source of employment in many rural areas. An Action Plan for the Countryside Experience was published in 2004 by the then WTB, which has resulted in investment in tourism from the Welsh Assembly Government of over £40 million since 2002. Similar initiatives include ADFYWIO, which assisted rural economies to recover following the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease in 2001 and Tourism Growth Areas, which have been directing funding towards areas with significant tourism potential (four rural areas were specifically targeted)
- The department has been providing free access to local authority swimming pools for children and young people during school holidays and is exploring extending this to other activities as well as investing in **increasing arts and sports council activity in the most deprived communities.**

Department for Environment, Sustainability and Housing

- **Fuel Poverty** is influenced by the cost of fuel, household income and dwelling energy efficiency. In rural areas it can be harder to reduce fuel bills due to factors such as properties not being on the gas network and walls being expensive to insulate. The Welsh Assembly Government has commissioned modelling to produce a small area fuel poverty indicator to enable an analysis of fuel poverty to be made at a more local level. Some households in rural areas are unable to access initiatives such as the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme due to their construction or location.
- According to the WIMD people in rural areas are generally not disadvantaged relative to people in urban areas, except in relation to geographical access to selected key services. Issues of **housing affordability** in rural areas are highlighted, through the high ratios between local incomes and house prices.
- Figures for **homelessness** show that statistics for rural areas are only slightly below urban areas. A report on good practice is due for dissemination following research into rural homelessness in 2006.
- Under the *One Wales* programme, the Welsh Assembly Government has launched policy interventions aimed at increasing the supply of affordable

housing by at least 6,500, including a Legislative Competence Order aimed at enabling the suspension of Right to Buy in areas of housing pressure.

- Through **Housing Renewal Areas**, the Welsh Assembly Government hopes to fund area based regeneration. An example is given of Llanwddyn in Powys, which uses a biomass energy scheme to heat the local school and over 40 houses in the area. This has also created local jobs with a sustainability focus.

Department for Economy and Transport

The commentary supplied by this department is as follows:

“The Department undertakes an advisory and consultation role on many of the policies outlined under the work of other Departments”.

No reference is made to the Convergence programme, which it is hoped will increase employment and GDP in West Wales and the Valleys.

Organisations and individuals who gave evidence in person to the Committee

Those giving evidence

Representing

17 January 2008

- Kate Chamberlain, Chief Statistician
- Dr Steven Marshall, Head of Core Statistics Unit

Welsh Assembly
Government

31 January 2008

- Nicola Lloyd
- Professor Paul Milbourne

Commission for Rural
Communities
Wales Rural
Observatory

6 March 2008

- Shôn Devey, Children's Services Manager
- Vivienne Laing, Policy and Public Affairs Manager
- Gareth Jones, Policy Officer (Policy and Service Evaluation)
- Sara Reid, Assistant Commissioner (Communities and Participation)
- Rachel Bennion
- Kelly Folksman
- Heather Grierson
- Lucy Ahktar, Parenting Development Officer
- Sean O'Neill, Policy Director

Barnardos Cymru
National Children's
Home, Cymru
Office of the Children's
Commissioner for
Wales

Funky Dragon

Children in Wales

17 April 2008

- Iain Walsh, Director, Economy and Labour Market Policy Division
- Linda Badman, Director
- Hayley Dunne, Business Development Officer
- Dr Brec'hed Piette, Director
- Jonathan Edwards, Public Affairs Officer
- Suzanne Gainard, Manager
- Ian Thomas, National Development Officer
- Simon Harris, Chief Executive

Department for Work
and Pensions
Jobcentre Plus Wales
Chwarae Teg
GWLAd Project
Citizens' Advice
Bureau
Carmarthen Citizens'
Advice Bureau
Citizens' Advice
Bureau Cymru
Wales Co-operative
Centre

24 April 2008

- Michelle Matheron, Policy Officer Age Concern Cymru
- John Clifford Jones, Chief Officer Age Concern Gwynedd a Môn
- Ana Palazon, Director Help the Aged in Wales
- Victoria Lloyd, Head of Public Affairs and Communications

7 May 2008

- Naomi Alleyne, Director for Social Justice and Equalities Welsh Local Government Association
- Harry Thomas, Chief Executive, Gwynedd Council
- Steve Thomas, Chief Executive

22 May 2008

- Dr Brian Gibbons AM, Minister for Social Justice and Local Government Welsh Assembly Government
- Dr Steven Marshall, Head of Core Statistics Unit
- David Powell, Head of Local Government Finance Division
- Dr Emyr Roberts, Director, Department for Social Justice and Local Government

Schedule of Committee Papers Provided to Inform Oral Evidence

Date	Name of Paper	Paper Reference Number
29 November 2007	Proposed Terms of Reference for the Inquiry into Poverty and Deprivation in Rural Wales	RDC(3)-07-07 : Paper 2
17 January 2008	Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation	RDC(3)-01-08 : Paper 1
31 January 2008	<p>Wales Rural Observatory Report on Poverty and Social Exclusion</p> <p>Paper from Commission for Rural Communities on Tackling Rural Disadvantage and Rural Proofing in England</p>	<p>RDC(3)-02-08 : Paper 1</p> <p>RDC(3)-02-08 : Paper 2</p>
6 March 2008	<p>Paper by Barnardo's Cymru on Poverty and Deprivation in Rural Wales</p> <p>Paper from the NCH Cymru on Poverty and Deprivation in Rural Wales</p> <p>Paper by Office of the Children's Commission for Wales on Poverty and Rural Deprivation in Wales</p> <p>Paper by Funky Dragon on Poverty and Rural Deprivation in Wales</p> <p>Consultation Response from Children in Wales on Poverty and Deprivation in Rural Wales</p> <p>Paper from Children in Wales on Poverty and Deprivation in Rural Wales</p>	<p>RDC(3)-03-08 : Paper 1</p> <p>RDC(3)-03-08 : Paper 2</p> <p>RDC(3)-03-08 : Paper 3</p> <p>RDC(3)-03-08 : Paper 4</p> <p>RDC(3)-03-08 : Paper 5</p> <p>RDC(3)-03-08 : Paper 5 Additional Paper</p>

13 March 2008	Emerging Themes from the Sub-committee's Inquiry into Poverty and Deprivation in Rural Wales	RDC(3)-04-08 : Paper 2
17 April 2008	Evidence on the Economically Inactive from the Department for Work and Pensions Paper from Chwarae Teg on Poverty and Deprivation in Rural Wales Paper by the Gaining Work, Learning and Advice Project on Poverty and Deprivation in Rural Wales Submission on the Economically Active from the Citizens' Advice Bureau, Cymru Submission on the Economically Active from the Wales Co-operative Centre	RDC(3)-05-08 : Paper 1 RDC(3)-05-08 : Paper 2 RDC(3)-05-08 : Paper 3 RDC(3)-05-08 : Paper 4 RDC(3)-05-08 : Paper 5
24 April 2008	Evidence from Age Concern Cymru on Poverty and Deprivation in Rural Wales as it affects older people Evidence from Help the Aged on Poverty and Deprivation in Rural Wales as it affects older people Paper to Note : Paper from Welsh Pensioners' Forum	RDC(3)-06-08 : Paper 2 RDC(3)-06-08 : Paper 3 RDC(3)-06-08 : Paper 4
7 May 2008	Paper from Welsh Local Government Association on key issues relating to inquiry into poverty and deprivation in rural Wales	RDC(3)-07-08 : Paper 1
22 May 2008	Paper from Welsh Assembly Government on inquiry into poverty and deprivation in rural Wales	RDC(3)-08-08 : Paper 1

Transcripts

Copies of all papers and transcripts of meetings can be found at:

<http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-committees/bus-committees-third1/bus-committees-third-rd-home.htm>

List of Respondents to Call for Written Evidence

The following organisations responded to the call for written evidence

Organisation	Committee Reference
Age Concern Cymru	RDC(3) P&D : 1
Anglesey Community Health Council	RDC(3) P&D : 2
Anglesey County Council	RDC(3) P&D : 3
Anti Poverty Network Cymru	RDC(3) P&D : 4
Brecknock & Radnor Crossroads Ltd and Montgomeryshire Crossroads Ltd	RDC(3) P&D : 5
Caerphilly County Borough Council	RDC(3) P&D : 6
Carmarthenshire County Council	RDC(3) P&D : 7
Ceredigion and Mid Wales NHS Trust	RDC(3) P&D : 8
Ceredigion Community Health Council	RDC(3) P&D : 9
Ceredigion County Council	RDC(3) P&D : 10
Church in Wales	RDC(3) P&D : 11
Community Housing Cymru	RDC(3) P&D : 12
Conwy County Borough Council, Rural Community Action	RDC(3) P&D : 13
Conwy County Borough Council Social Services	RDC(3) P&D : 14
Crossroads Caring for Carers Wales	RDC(3) P&D : 15
Cymorth Cymru	RDC(3) P&D : 16
Farmers' Union of Wales	RDC(3) P&D : 17
Gwynedd Council	RDC(3) P&D : 18
Mid Wales Partnership	RDC(3) P&D : 19
Monmouthshire County Council	RDC(3) P&D : 20
National Federation of Women's Institutes - Wales	RDC(3) P&D : 21
NEA Cymru	RDC(3) P&D : 22
NFU Cymru	RDC(3) P&D : 23
North Wales Economic Forum	RDC(3) P&D : 24
North West Wales NHS Trust	RDC(3) P&D : 25
Pembrokeshire County Council	RDC(3) P&D : 26
Powys County Council	RDC(3) P&D : 27
Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) Cymru	RDC(3) P&D : 28
Wales Young Farmers Club	RDC(3) P&D : 29
Welsh Local Government Association	RDC(3) P&D : 30
Vale of Glamorgan County Council	RDC(3) P&D : 31
K Somerfield	RDC(3) P&D : 32
Denbighshire Voluntary Services Council	RDC(3) P&D : 33