

COMMISSION FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES

Evidence to the DFES/HM Treasury Joint Policy Review on Children and Young People -September 2006

Introduction

The Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to the review. Our evidence is based on research which the CRC and its predecessor bodies has undertaken on issues relating to children, young people and families who live in rural areas in England.

The CRC was represented at the first HM Treasury/DFES joint policy review meeting with key stakeholders, which took evidence in July 2006. This consultation will be a unique opportunity for stakeholders and organisations with an interest in children and young people's issues to influence directly the outcomes of the forthcoming 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review. We endorse the approach of both Departments in requesting evidence from those organisations which have experience of reaching out to disadvantaged communities.

The CRC and its predecessor bodies have a wealth of experience of issues associated with socio economic issues and policies in rural areas and their impact on children and young people. This response highlights related good practice and research and provides a broad picture of rural issues relating to the three review areas. Many of the individual consultation questions relate to specific service expertise, on which we do not have direct experience. We have, therefore, confined our response to those questions on which we can make a useful contribution.

Key points

In our view, there are four key points which need to be addressed across all three review areas:

- **Data.** There should not be over-reliance on aggregate statistics that show area concentrations of deprivation. Rural poverty and disadvantage exists, but is scattered and hard to identify through conventional data sets. It is important to ensure that strategies are developed that can capture those suffering deprivation, wherever they live, and to target services appropriately.
- **Rural Premium.** The cost of delivering services is frequently higher in rural areas. The effects of sparsity needs to be taken into account and allowed for in the costs of services.
- **Rural proofing.** Service providers need to take account of and report explicitly on the rural dimension of their client groups' needs and how services will meet those needs.
- **Pilots.** Where pilots are carried out for schemes, these should take place in rural areas, as well as urban, to identify any difficulties in their application and test whether any adjustments are needed early in the life of new initiatives.

Commission for Rural Communities – role and purpose

- The Commission for Rural Communities will be formally established on 1 October (it has been operating as a distinct division of the Countryside Agency since April 2005) and will have three main roles: rural advocate – providing a voice for England’s rural people, businesses and communities; expert adviser - providing well-informed, independent advice to government and others on issues affecting rural communities and businesses; and independent watchdog – monitoring and reporting on the impact and delivery of policies and programmes nationally, regionally and locally. The Commission has a particular focus on rural disadvantage.

The Commission believes that England’s rural communities should be diverse, thriving and sustainable, where everyone is able to play a full part in society and where no-one is disadvantaged. It will speak up for rural people and communities, especially those experiencing disadvantage, and ensure that policies take full account of rural needs and circumstances, holding government and others to account for their delivery.

One key aspect of the work of the Commission is the identification and dissemination of best practice. This includes benchmarking, evaluating and monitoring good practice and innovation, sharing lessons and disseminating information from across England and beyond.

The Commission’s work on disadvantage

The Commission has undertaken a major study on rural disadvantage which explores the difference living in a rural area makes to disadvantage and the effectiveness of policy responses in addressing rural disadvantage. This is particularly relevant to issues of *family prosperity*.

The study was launched in March 2005 with the publication of a discussion document seeking stakeholders’ views on how the Commission should focus the study. There was an enthusiastic response from a wide range of different stakeholders, almost all of whom welcomed the study and felt it would make a useful contribution to tackling rural disadvantage. The stakeholder feedback highlighted young people as one of the key groups being disadvantaged in rural areas. We have set up a learning network to share information about the study and to give stakeholders an opportunity to feed in to it. The learning network includes a discussion stream specifically relating to young people.

The evidence report was completed in June 2006. It provides a typology of poverty in rural areas: financial poverty, access poverty and network poverty. It will be important to take all these factors into account in services for young people and their families:

- ***financial poverty*** also affects children and young people in rural areas, even in apparently prosperous areas
- ***access poverty*** features very largely in the lives of rural children and young people and is particularly important in the lives of teenagers
- ***network poverty*** can affect the lives of children and young people in rural areas more than those in urban areas. In some areas there is evidence that rural social networks are breaking down.

The study made 23 recommendations for tackling rural disadvantage, including ensuring better take-up benefits; supporting access to childcare; reducing the costs of travel and providing alternative travel for those who do not have their own; improving the supply of affordable housing; reflecting rurality in resource allocations; and ensuring that people are targeted, rather than places.

Of particular interest to the Treasury reviews is the survey of 4,000 rural residents commissioned as part of the disadvantage study, which showed that the primary concern was the lack of activities and facilities for teenagers.

Another piece of work directly related to disadvantaged families is our work on the lack of affordable rural housing. As part of our evidence to the Government's Affordable Rural Housing Commission earlier this year, we carried out a housing inquiry which included visits to each of the eight English regions (excluding London) where we met local people and undertook in-depth interviewing, focus group discussions with cross sections of the local community, including 'seldom heard' individuals, and evening public meetings open to all. In addition, website comments were welcomed. In total 837 people provided evidence.

The lack of affordable housing is an acute problem in most rural areas. In the smallest rural settlements, average house prices can be around 10 times local household incomes. Second homes or holiday homes now make up almost 1 in 10 households in smaller rural settlements. Between 1999-2000 and 2003-4, the number of rural households accepted as homeless and in priority need increased by almost a third. Long waiting lists, resulting, at the extreme end in rough sleeping and sofa surfing, are contributing to loss of social networks and damage to community cohesion.

Increasing the supply of affordable housing is crucial for the well-being of families, children and young people in rural areas.

The Commission's work on young people

We contributed to the SEU report 'Transitions – Young adults with complex lives', which highlighted the need to organise services across age boundaries, as well as to take into account the thinking and behaviours of young people themselves. The result was a rural section in the report recognising the specific needs of rural young people and making sure they were taken into account in the action plan. ***We would like to see the same approach adopted in these current reviews.***

During the last year, we have initiated a cross-sector Rural Youth Provision Working Group, attended by The Prince's Trust, the Rural Youth Network, the DfES, the Social Exclusion Unit and Defra. It provides a forum for information exchange, as well as enabling us to feed into important initiatives, such as the implementation of the Youth Matters Green Paper.

With the Rural Youth Network and The Prince's Trust, we organised a 'Seeing is Believing' tour, for officials from government departments, enabling them to visit youth projects, dealing with young people with complex needs, in the North East. All those attending were struck by the high quality of work being undertaken and greatly

appreciated the opportunity to talk directly to young people and project workers. We have organised a follow-up event in Gloucestershire with the Rural Youth Network.

We have been working with The Prince's Trust to highlight the important role that Youth Cafes are playing in rural areas. The concept has proved very successful in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland and we recently visited a Youth Café in Worcestershire to make a short film about secondary school choice, as an input into our current thematic study on Choice. Youth cafes are facilities that are designed, set up and run by young people themselves - 'by young people, for young people'. They are safe, secure and alcohol free places. They very clearly fit the Youth Matters slogan of 'Somewhere to go, something to do'. Young people have produced a Youth Café Survival guide, available through The Prince's Trust, who have also just received Big Lottery Fund grant to set up more cafes. Youth Cafés are an excellent example of community-led projects.

The Commission's work on children

The CRC commissioned the National Council for Voluntary ChildCare Organisations (NCVCCO) to examine the development of Phase 1 (August 2004 – March 2006) children's centres in rural areas and to demonstrate the part they play in improving access to services for the most disadvantaged children under 5 and their families living in rural areas. The data presented came from responses to questionnaires completed by rural children centres, interviews with local authority children's centre lead officers and Government Office advisers and with parents who used the children centres. The report highlighted the Sure Start Unit's 'rural uplift' funding, which was welcomed by the Commission. However, whether or not these sums were adequate to meet the challenge of getting services to scattered and isolated communities was also examined.

The report had the following key findings:

- Current targets for the roll out of children's centres should be reassessed to determine whether they meet the needs of rural families and are best placed to tackle the nature of rural disadvantage.
- The needs of children and families of migrant workers are not well understood and pose significant challenges for children's centres, not least in terms of language and cultural differences, but how much they can contribute to rural life. The CRC is currently completing a scoping study on migrant workers in rural areas and their social and economic impact, including on provision of services in rural communities.
- Consultation and community development within rural communities need extending and investing to ensure that services have the support of residents; that change-averse cultures and attitudes are challenged; and that best use is made of the skills and networks already provided by the voluntary and community sector.
- The co-ordination of policies and programmes for children across government, which impact upon rural communities, need to be improved to ensure that they are mutually reinforcing and make the best use of resources to combat poverty and disadvantage.

The overarching message of the report is that the development of children's centres in rural areas provides clear evidence that equality is not achieved by providing the same service for everyone. Rural proofing must be sensitive to the ways that rurality combines with other types of disadvantage to compound the lack of opportunity and service access experienced by children and families in rural areas. The report goes on to recommend that positive steps should be taken to develop programmes for rural children and families, which are particular to their circumstances, rather than mirroring service configurations which may work in urban areas.

Extended Schools

Access to *extended schools* services is vital to all children and young people in rural areas to increase opportunities and aspirations. This was a common thread throughout three separate pieces of research undertaken by the CRC, which included the children's centres in rural areas and the West Midlands' young people aspirations report and an 'Extended Schools in Rural Areas' research report. Extended school services are viewed as essential to the success of children's centres and are very much seen as going hand in hand as the way forward to ensuring widening out of school provision for children wherever they live.

However, rural areas are not adequately served by the extended schools initiative. We commissioned a small piece of research to monitor the development of extended schools in 11 local authority areas and to identify examples of good practice. A wide range of services were being offered through extended schools in two thirds of the LAs in the sample, which demonstrated multi-agency working. Eight per cent in the sample of schools offered some form of service covering the five components of the core extended schools offer, but no school in the sample currently provided 8am-6 pm childcare all year round. It was recommended that existing provision be audited, in order to build on what was currently available and more school partnerships/networks were needed to ensure the widest access to core services. Not surprisingly, the top three barriers to developing extended services cited by rural schools were: financial support, staff issues and transport. Only 15% of rural schools in the sample said that the LA was good at providing and meeting their specific needs. Also highlighted were concerns about management capacity, premises, parental demand, funding and sustainability, all of which were challenges for over two thirds of rural schools and 45% said that funding was the main issue, where they needed support from their LA to achieve the successful delivery of extended school services.

Issues facing children and young people in rural areas

According to our evidence and consultation feedback, young people living in rural areas face:

- lack of existing activities and facilities i.e. 'things to do & places to go', an issue for the development and implementation of the opportunity card
 - problems accessing good quality recreation and leisure facilities as these are often based in larger urban conurbations
- additional difficulties in accessing services, because of a lack of basic local provision and transport infrastructure
 - 29% per cent of rural settlements have no bus service at all

- people in rural areas travel more than 40% further than their urban counterparts each week, mainly because services and facilities are likely to be further away
- lack of local education, training and employment opportunities
 - nearly one in four 19 year olds in rural districts fail to achieve a basic qualification (NVQ1 or equivalent). One in twelve have no qualifications
 - lack of vocational training in rural areas, especially for those who are disadvantaged and isolated
 - most FE colleges are based in urban centres, so distance and cost of transport can be a problem for those on low incomes
 - there can be additional costs for training providers, as the numbers involved in rural areas are smaller and the cost of provision proportionally higher
- few opportunities for confidential advice, particularly face-to-face, e.g. on sexual and mental health, drug and alcohol misuse - an issue for the proposals for the provision of IAG and for the concept of a 'trusted adult'
 - rate of suicides for young people aged between 16 and 24 was higher in remote rural districts than accessible rural or urban districts
 - disadvantaged people living in rural areas often take longer to present themselves for treatment of health problems, because of increased distance and difficulty in accessing services, resulting in condition often being at a more advanced stage
 - the relative lack of anonymity in rural areas can also mean that people are more likely to hide their problems or less likely to access services which address their disadvantage

These issues are particularly relevant to two of the Treasury's four factors in its service review: *neighbourhood* and *public services*.

Issues for providers and policy makers

Data limitations

Much of our work has identified difficulties with data relating to rural issues. There is not a uniform use of a rural definition across central government departments and work with the LGA further highlighted the inconsistent use of rural/urban within and between local authorities. Since 2004 there had been an agreed, official Rural/Urban definition which uses population density and a sparsity analysis, but it is not clear how widely this is being used across government. This can make it difficult for policy-makers to identify and respond to rural issues.

We commissioned a short study on the use of data by public bodies (OPM 2006) which found that, often, rural data was not distinguishable from the whole and that, even where it was, little active use was made of the information.

A further concern about data is that rural disadvantage does not manifest itself in a concentrated form. It is spread and difficult to detect through the conventional, area-based regeneration-focused data. The situation is a little improved by the developments in the use of 'super-output' areas. We remain concerned that, given policy is driven by data based evidence, the rural dimensions of social problems will continue to be overlooked.

Rural premium

It is widely recognised that the unit cost of delivering services is frequently higher in a rural context. This is largely a consequence of what are described as 'geodemographic factors', a complex set of variables relating to distance, settlement pattern and population density. In order to reach young people in rural areas, services are often required to provide outreach, mobile units or transport solutions, all of which increase complexity and add to the cost of provision. Providing for scattered population dispersed over large areas also limits opportunities for economies of scale. These sparsity factors and the resulting 'rural premium' need to be better taken into account when considering the nature and funding of rural services.

A particular example of this problem is evident in the availability of young people's discretionary travel schemes in rural areas. Given geographical isolation, one would expect public policy to result in strongly supportive schemes for young people in rural areas. Unfortunately, this is not the case. A lack of financial resources appears to be a large part of the reason for this.

Capacity of providers

Rural areas have larger numbers of smaller voluntary organisations and their capacity is limited. The potential technological challenges and costs of implementing the opportunity card scheme are causing concern among rural youth providers¹.

Outmigration

Long-term sustainability of rural communities depends a mix of people of all age groups and from different walks of life. Out-migration of rural young people is an increasing issue. Better opportunities are needed for young people to be a part of their local community and to remain in rural areas if they so choose. We have recently commissioned research into the aspirations of young people in the rural West Midlands to understand better the factors that influence this pattern. Additionally, we have worked with the Institute of Public Policy Research on a report looking at rural youth transitions (August 2006).

The aspirations of young people in the rural West Midlands (Ecotec)

Young people interviewed in the West Midlands were not especially different in their aspirations than any other group of young people, although they did identify insufficient types of education and career opportunities in their areas.

Gaining education and other professional qualifications were identified as reasons to leave their local areas, although some young people hoped in the future to return to their local areas to take up FE and job opportunities, if they were available locally and within reasonable travelling distance.

Those young people who took up local employment opportunities tended to follow the apprenticeship route as plumbers, mechanics and joiners, or chose to attend local colleges, which focussed in agriculture and engineering subjects, and then hoped to take up careers in their local agriculture sector. Some young people even expressed an interest in setting up their own businesses within the agriculture sector, to open their own farm shop and other retail opportunities that might arise.

¹ Rural Youth Network, Youth Matters Green Paper Consultations (2005)

This study showed that females tended to demonstrate higher aspirations than their male counterparts and appeared more outward looking than young men, particularly those aged between 22-25. In contrast, whilst males wishing to pursue professional careers appeared as likely to migrate from rural areas as their female counterparts, they commonly expressed views about returning to their local areas and earning a living.

There was a strong sense that young people should be represented on all parish planning committees, to ensure that service developments were informed and shaped by future service users and providers needed to recognise the vital contribution made by young people to the longer-term vibrancy of their rural community. These measures could constructively help to reduce out-migration and contribute to addressing the democratic deficit.

‘Should I stay or should I go?’ Institute of Public Policy Research North

Further evidence on the out migration debate on young people in rural areas is a research report by the Institute for Public Policy Research North, supported by the CRC. The ‘Should I Stay or Should I Go’ Rural Youth Transitions report found that young people in rural areas could not access the education and training opportunities they needed, wanted or to which they were entitled. The report found that many young people in rural areas faced unclear or unequal opportunities. It suggests government policy inadvertently risks failing to provide opportunities necessary for young people’s engagement in education and training in rural areas and they are, therefore, at a disadvantage compared with their peers in towns and cities.

The report, published in August 2006, argues that the new 14-19 vocational diplomas are unlikely to be able to be offered consistently. It is unlikely that general FE colleges in rural areas will be able to offer all the new diplomas in every area, despite the fact that young people will have statutory entitlements to study these diplomas. This could exacerbate the numbers of young people leaving rural areas to obtain better education and employment opportunities, with more support needed for those young people who remain.

Methods of addressing these issues

Policy makers in central government need to identify the impact of their proposals on rural areas and, where relevant, adjust their policy or adopt specific measures to address any issues arising from them. Policies need to take account of and utilise solutions such as those outlined below:

- Allowing a higher revenue cost per young person to take account of the higher cost of providing services in rural areas. An NCVO report identifies mechanisms for full cost recovery of delivering services in rural areas².
- Larger catchment areas to cover a number of villages, small towns and surrounding countryside. We have good practice examples of co-location of services and the development of multi service centres in rural areas, as well as of effective use of outreach and mobile units.
- Recognising existing good practice in rural areas. There are a number of projects that we previously funded and with which we continue to work that utilise creative

² National Council for Voluntary Organisations ‘Contracting for Services; A rural analysis’ (2004)

solutions to delivering services to young people in rural areas, for example, Rural Activity Partnership in the East of England, YP2Clay in Cornwall, Rural Young Voices in Durham and national Wheels to Work.

- ‘Youth proofing’ policies and delivery. A very good example of youth proofing can be found in the work by Worcestershire Youth rural team. The project has involved young people in proofing policy and services by regional and local agencies via workshops.
- Rural proofing all initiatives to check their impact on rural residents and communities.

We also work in partnership with LGA, The Prince’s Trust and Sport England, amongst others, to identify good practice in delivering activities and opportunities to young people in rural areas.

The Commission’s responses to consultation questions

Below are comments and our responses to the individual consultation questions where we have relevant experience.

Service review

The myth of the ‘rural idyll’ still exists and means that many people find it difficult to accept that poverty and disadvantage can exist in, sometimes, beautiful surroundings. Low income, poor housing, inadequate services and limited transport characterise day-to-day life for many living in the countryside. For them, the current climate is one of anxiety, due to rapid economic change, as traditional forms of rural employment come under threat; vital services close or relocate; and younger people are forced to move to urban areas. Some earlier work we commissioned from NCH, to develop a better understanding of how families and children living on a low income in the countryside perceive their lives and respond to the difficulties they faced, contained a good spread of rural communities as case studies and drew on NCH’s extensive network of community based projects which gave them unique access to children, young people and families, many of whom were isolated, disadvantaged and living on low incomes. The key findings from the ‘Challenging the Rural Idyll’ case studies report were subsequently endorsed by our recent disadvantage study:

- Rural families living on low income felt that limited local service provision and transport problems could lead to a level of isolation and disadvantage of a nature different to that faced by their urban counterparts.
- The lack of local employment opportunities and the narrow range of jobs caused considerable concern. Also young people and adults felt disadvantaged by a lack of FE and training opportunities.
- Local health service provision in rural areas was limited and lacking in choice.
- Voluntary organisations were often the only source of help and support.
- Perceiving a lack of police presence in their local areas, rural people felt vulnerable to crime. Young people felt harassed by the police.

- Few leisure and entertainment facilities in rural areas, which limited young people's opportunities and the associated boredom and frustration, could lead to misuse of alcohol and drugs and vandalism.
- Expensive local retail services and the cost of travel to cheaper stores impacted heavily on the weekly budget of rural low income families.

It will be important that the service review recognises that problems of *family prosperity, parenting and parents' behaviour, neighbourhoods and public services* exist in rural areas and solutions need to be tailored to fit these circumstances.

Review of disabled children

Rural proofing is important, so that relevant services are accessible for these families and take account of rural premium. Families may face more access and network poverty in rural areas:

- Even where a family owns a car, many may not have private transport during the day – even more necessary for families with children with disabilities. This obviously restricts their ability to reach relevant groups or agencies, where they exist.
- Families with disabled children in rural areas may find it difficult to be part of support networks, formal or informal. Some support may be necessary to address these problems.

Where pilot projects are identified, it will be important to ensure that they include rural pilots.

Strategy for youth services

This review is of particular interest, since it is directly related to much of our current work on young people's issues. Again, we would like to stress the access and network poverty that young people suffer from. A lack of ability to travel independently constrains their ability to use facilities, even where they are accessible. This often diminishes the strength of their social groups.

'The current distribution of youth services and youth engagement activities is inadequate in rural areas and of great concern to rural residents (as evidenced in our Rural Insights survey of 4,000 rural residents for whom activities and facilities for teenagers were a prime concern).

Rural young people face problems (or have concerns) with visibility and confidentiality, as well as transport, when accessing services.

How can we best combine demand led provision for young people with provision that is planned and structured to have the best impact on outcomes for children and young people?

Options include funding and disseminating community led projects, such as Youth Cafes; funding for places to cater for the needs of rural young people with complex needs, who might need short term interventions, but for whom there are currently few places (for example Centrepoin Durham who cater for 100 young people but turn away up to 300 people per year).

What more can we do to support and enable young people to exert a strong demand side influence on provision? What would we expect in return from young people – their rights and responsibilities?

Options include working with specialists to identify and extend existing good work; developing peer interviewing and peer support skills among young people; undertaking capacity building activities to enable young people to influence services, drawing on voluntary sector experience in this area.

What principles and priorities should guide the allocation of current and future resources? And who do we need to target?

We are concerned about young people with mental health needs in rural areas. They have acute problems and anecdotal evidence suggests that the services provided are inadequate, particularly because provision is often far from home and little help is provided with travel, neither financial or practical support. Vulnerable, and sometimes distressed, young people have to find their own way to unfamiliar places far from home. More appropriate, local, small scale, tailored facilities are needed.

The provision of youth support services needs to be better advertised, so that young people understand how to access services, when they are in trouble, and that they understand how their confidentiality will be protected.

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