

Rural Development Sub-Committee

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Annex A

Inquiry into Rural Poverty and Deprivation - Issues Paper

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1. Background

The Rural Development Sub-Committee intends to undertake an inquiry into the delivery of services in rural Wales. During initial discussions regarding the scope of such an inquiry it emerged that Members of the Committee were also keen to look at issues of poverty and deprivation affecting rural Wales, as a way of understanding the needs of rural areas and ways in which services should be provided. The Committee also wanted to gain a better understanding of the ways in which the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation is compiled, given that this is one of the main tools for assessing need and identifying deprived communities across Wales.

As part of its inquiry into Poverty and Deprivation in Rural Wales, the Committee has taken evidence from the following:

The Welsh Assembly Government Statistical Directorate on the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation;

The Wales Rural Observatory and the Commission for Rural Communities in England;

Barnardo's Cymru, NCH Cymru, Children's Commissioner for Wales, Funky Dragon and Children in Wales.

Future evidence sessions will take evidence on issues affecting:

The economically active and inactive;

Older people.

The Committee will also take evidence from the Welsh Local Government Association's Rural Forum.

2. Overview

2:1 Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation

Officials from the Statistical Directorate gave evidence to the Committee on the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD), the way it is compiled and what it aims to do.

The WIMD:

a) is a means of identifying concentrations of multiple deprivation at small-area level across Wales;

b) allows the ranking of areas from the most to the least deprived;

c) is a relative measure, not an absolute measure of deprivation which means that it is possible to see if one area is more deprived than another, but not by how much;

d) suits uses where the interest is in areas with high concentrations of deprivation.

Individual domains and underlying data sets can be used separately from the overall index to investigate issues the Committee may be interested in;

The 'weighting' for each domain is based on research which suggests which elements are the most important in terms of deprivation;

The Statistical Directorate provided a note on research that has been undertaken to measure the cost of delivering services across different geographical areas;

The Statistical Directorate is planning to issue a publication on sparsity, which according to the Officials was due at the end of February 2008. They are also due to release a 'Focus on: Rural Wales' publication.

2:2 Wales Rural Observatory

The Wales Rural Observatory's evidence from Professor Paul Millbourne was based on their research findings.

Key Issues:

20 - 25 per cent of households in rural Wales are experiencing some form of poverty;

25 per cent of households live below the 60 per cent national median income level;

Different issues affect eastern and western rural authorities;

Two thirds of households in rural Wales on low income are mainly comprised of elderly people, or those over 55 - economic inactivity is often due to the age of the population;

It is more difficult to provide services to lower-income groups in rural areas for reasons such as dispersed populations;

3 out of 10 households defined as living in poverty included people in work;

One of the main issues relating to service deprivation is transport; should services be provided locally, or is it more a matter of ensuring local people can access services?

National policies should take account of the rural dimensions of poverty and social exclusion;

More focus is needed on what is and what isn't working in a rural context.

2:3 Commission for Rural Communities

The Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) in England highlighted a number of problems they faced in terms of ensuring there is adequate recognition of the issues facing rural areas:

Rural proofing is required in England, but does not happen across the board. However, where it is obvious that there is a rural dimension, policies are rural proofed;

The CRC has found that policy makers are not convinced that rural disadvantage is an issue, especially in comparison with urban disadvantage;

The CRC has undertaken research that has found that that it is more likely that people on low incomes in rural areas will be working and not taking up benefits; research published by the CRC in December 2007 demonstrated a big difference in take up of pension credit between rural and urban areas;

The Indices of Deprivation in England do not show the nature of rural deprivation;

The CRC is considering how welfare reform could impact on people living in rural areas. For example, making benefits dependent on people taking up training and skills improvement programmes may be problematic if the programmes are not readily available in rural areas.

3. Children and young people

A number of themes can be drawn from the evidence regarding issues of poverty and deprivation facing children and young people in rural Wales.

3:1 General

In general, the witnesses felt that:

Current programmes are not meeting the needs of those in dispersed rural communities;

It is important that the Welsh Assembly Government engages and listens to children and young people to gain an understanding of their experiences;

Children and young people in rural areas have additional barriers to overcome to enable them to access their rights and entitlements;

Families facing rural poverty and deprivation don't just live in the areas perceived as 'rural';

Families living on low income/benefits are dispersed and live in isolated homes and small villages in almost every Local Authority in Wales, including those where child poverty rates are lower such as Monmouthshire and the Vale of Glamorgan;

Differences exist, not only across Wales but also within local authority areas;

Key opportunities for the Welsh Assembly Government to address some of these issues include the Wales Rural Development Plan, Communities Next and The Financial Inclusion Strategy.

3:2 WAG policy

Witnesses highlighted the following issues in relation to Welsh Assembly Government policy responses to issues of poverty and deprivation affecting children and young people in rural Wales:

There is a lack of specific focus on rural areas and their needs. Despite the statements in A Fairer Future for our Children very little seems to have been done in practice;

There is an overdependence on initiatives designed to tackle the impacts of poverty within designated and more highly populated geographical areas;

Existing programmes overlook the dispersed nature of poverty in rural communities (People not Places);

The experiences of children and young people living in poverty in rural areas are currently not being addressed in a strategic manner by the Welsh Assembly Government.

The Commitment to Child Poverty Proofing is welcomed; this could be developed further to include Rural Child Poverty Proofing.

3:3 Experiences and barriers

Poverty and deprivation can be grouped under three main themes: income, services and participation.

a). Income Poverty

Labour market structure can result in seasonal, low paid, part time work and high levels of selfemployment;

Opportunities for training and employment for young people are constrained;

In work poverty is a major factor that impacts on child poverty;

Access to childcare is limited;

Initiatives aimed at tackling child poverty and supporting parents into training and work are targeted in terms of density of population which means that rural areas miss out;

Lack of transport is a barrier to childcare and employment;

Benefit take up is low in rural areas and unemployment can be unreported;

b) Service Poverty

Access to services is constrained by the distance between home and services;

Cost of food may be inflated and access to cheaper food limited through distance;

Limited transport and low car ownership;

Lack of affordable housing with little opportunity for rented accommodation;

Delivering support services across rural areas poses challenges due to factors such as distribution of population and can often result in higher costs;

Accessing fundamental rights and entitlements such as play and leisure, training, entertainment, youth services and opportunities to participate can be difficult, particularly for young people.

c). Participation Poverty

Participation in social and leisure activities for children and young people in rural areas can be very limited due to distance, lack of transport and cost of access. For example, free swimming initiatives can't be accessed in many rural areas due to lack of facilities or difficulties in accessing those facilities;

Young people often compare their experiences with those of their peers in urban areas;

Exclusion from after school activities is often an issue due to the distance children have to travel home from school;

The widespread accessibility of broadband services means that young people now have more opportunities to participate, but this is not the case for all young people due to the cost of the service.

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