

Archwilydd Cyffredinol Cymru
Auditor General for Wales

Local Government Services to Rural Communities



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Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

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Councils are not yet finding sustainable ways to help rural communities overcome the challenges they face and need to think and act differently

- 1 Delivering fair and equitable public services and maintaining specialist provision in rural areas is challenging due to geography, distance, cost and scalability. A tradition of strong community resilience and a culture of self-reliance in rural areas, can often mask significant problems. The loss of the 'cornerstones' of village life such as banks, schools, and post offices and poor access to key infrastructure like public transport and superfast broadband can compound the challenge of sustaining public services in rural communities.

What we mean by 'Rural Wales':

There is no single agreed definition of a rural Wales. The classification used by Welsh Government defines roughly 20% of the overall Welsh population as living in rural areas. For the purpose of this study, and in line with the Welsh Local Government Association's rural policy forum, we classify nine authorities as rural, 11 authorities as semi-rural and two authorities as non-rural and urban.

PRIMARILY RURAL

- 1 Carmarthenshire
- 2 Ceredigion
- 3 Conwy
- 4 Denbighshire
- 5 Gwynedd
- 6 Isle of Anglesey
- 7 Monmouthshire
- 8 Pembrokeshire
- 9 Powys



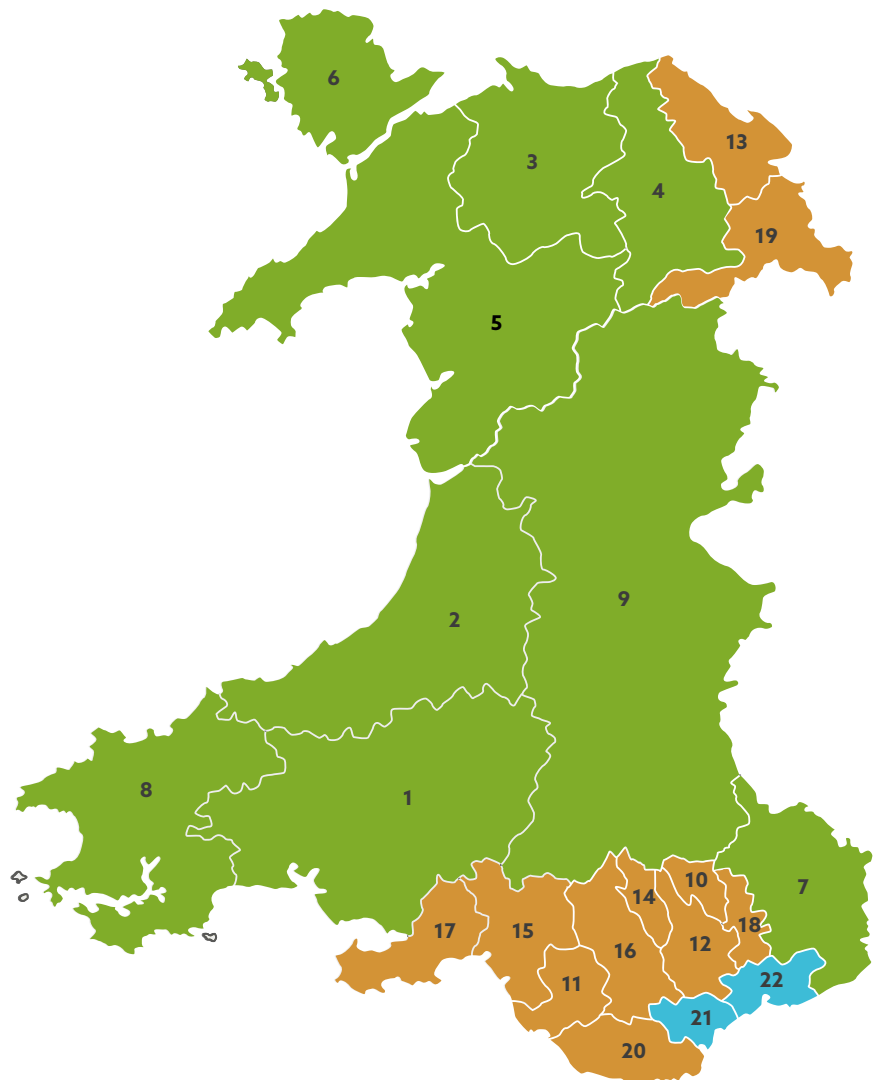
SEMI-RURAL/URBAN

- 10 Blaenau Gwent
- 11 Bridgend
- 12 Caerphilly
- 13 Flintshire
- 14 Merthyr Tydfil
- 15 Neath Port Talbot
- 16 Rhondda Cynon Taf
- 17 Swansea
- 18 Torfaen
- 19 Wrexham
- 20 Vale of Glamorgan



FULLY URBAN

- 21 Cardiff
- 22 Newport



- 2 Since 2010-11, councils have faced significant financial constraints. Net revenues from Welsh Government grants, business rates and collected council tax fell by 7.5% between 2009-10 and 2016-17 (excluding fees and charges), which is the equivalent to £529 million¹. The Welsh Local Government Association estimates that austerity has resulted in councils cutting spending by over £1 billion in real terms and 25,000 jobs being lost in councils since 2010-11². The impact of austerity on provision of services is resulting in councils facing tough choices and requires them to identify alternative service models and new ways of working to maintain and protect services.
- 3 Under its [Programme for Government 2016-2021](#), the Welsh Government has set an outcome of ‘Successful, Sustainable Rural Communities’. Under this outcome, there are specific targets and actions for public bodies, including local government³. This review assesses how local government directly provides services to rural communities, and how councils work with others, and considers whether they:
 - a have clear priorities for services to rural communities based on an understanding of needs and demands;
 - b are making best use of resources by, for example, developing new joint models of service delivery such as gateway services or joint service and community hubs;
 - c are making best use of facilities, co-location and/or transfer and use of assets;
 - d are supporting citizens to become more resilient and self-reliant; and
 - e are taking a longer-term place based view on how best to deliver services.
- 4 Our review methods are set out in [Appendix 1](#). Based on the findings of this audit, the Auditor General has concluded that **councils are not yet finding sustainable ways to help rural communities overcome the challenges they face and need to think and act differently.**

1 www.walespublicservices2025.org.uk/files/2017/11/Austerity-and-Local-Government.pdf

2 www.wlga.wales/local-government-settlement-the-war-of-attrition-continues-says-wlga

3 Priority 4 relates to public bodies supporting community-led projects, promote skills development, job creation, entrepreneurship, community energy, rural transport and broadband access. Priority five focuses on safeguarding social housing in rural communities by ending ‘Right to Buy’ and continuing to support the work of Rural Housing Enablers.

Our findings

- 5 For many people in rural Wales, it is a great place to live and work. However, reductions in public spending coupled with socio-economic change, poor infrastructure and ongoing public service delivery challenges are resulting in services being less accessible and effective compared to urban areas.
- 6 **Part 1** of this report examines the shifting face of rural Wales, looking at demographic challenges in providing services to dispersed communities in rural areas. The loss of the cornerstones of village life – banks and post offices for example – and poor infrastructure have adversely affected rural communities.
- 7 **Part 2** examines how public bodies are currently responding to the challenge of planning and delivering services in rural Wales. We find that public bodies who cover both rural and urban areas too often create and deliver services shaped by their urban context. Whilst there are significant variations in the local environment, policy choices and councils' operational structures, there is also a steady drift towards standardisation and centralisation based on a perception of being able to manage costs and increase efficiency. Public bodies continue to deliver a 'one size fits all approach' which is creating and reinforcing 'rural inequality'⁴.
- 8 Finally, **Part 3** concludes that with fewer resources, rising demand and complex delivery challenges, public bodies need to work together in deciding how they set priorities and deliver frontline services if they are to meet the long-term needs of citizens. From our review we have identified there are opportunities to do things differently and to provide solutions that can better meet the future needs of rural Wales. Key to addressing this challenge is to make a reality of co-ordinated and integrated services to maximise both the use of resources and the quality of service delivery. This requires liaison and co-operation between public, private and voluntary sector providers, including the development of multi-purpose, cross-sector hubs. Public bodies also need to do more to equip citizens and communities to become more resilient and self-reliant as public finances continue to reduce.

4 By rural inequality, we mean the real and perceived imbalance and difference in the quality, accessibility, and affordability of service provision in rural areas compared to urban ones. Not only can a 'one size fits all' approach stifle innovation, it can work against current policy shifts towards personalisation of services, particularly in social care. An over generalised view of service demand and people's needs can hinder the targeting of increasingly scarce resources and impede prevention activity. It can restrict people's personal choices. A 'one size fits all' approach is not a solution to policy variance and inconsistencies in services.

Recommendations

- 9 We have made recommendations for improvement and these are set out below.

Recommendations

- R1 Socio economic change, poor infrastructure and shifts in provision of key services and facilities has resulted in the residualisation of communities in rural Wales. (See paragraphs 1.2 – 1.16) **We recommend that Welsh Government support public bodies to deliver a more integrated approach to service delivery in rural areas by:**
- refreshing rural grant programmes to create sustainable financial structures, with multi-year allocations; and
 - helping people and businesses make the most of digital connectivity through targeted and more effective business and adult education support programmes.
- R2 The role of Public Service Boards is evolving but there are opportunities to articulate a clearer and more ambitious shared vision for rural Wales (see paragraphs 2.2 to 2.9 and 2.28 to 2.31). **We recommend that PSB public services partners respond more effectively to the challenges faced by rural communities by:**
- assessing the strengths and weaknesses of their different rural communities using the Welsh Governments Rural Proofing Tool and identify and agree the local and strategic actions needed to support community sustainability; and
 - ensuring the Local Well-Being Plan sets out a more optimistic and ambitious vision for ‘place’ with joint priorities co-produced by partners and with citizens to address agreed challenges.
- R3 To help sustain rural communities, public services need to think differently in the future (see paragraphs 3.1 to 3.12). **We recommend councils provide a more effective response to the challenges faced by rural communities by:**
- ensuring service commissioners have cost data and qualitative information on the full range of service options available; and
 - using citizens’ views on the availability, affordability, accessibility, adequacy and acceptability of council services to shape the delivery and integration of services.

Recommendations

- R4 To help sustain rural communities, public services need to act differently in the future (see paragraphs 3.1 to 3.12). **We recommend councils do more to develop community resilience and self-help by:**
- **working with relevant bodies such as the Wales Co-operative Centre to support social enterprise and more collaborative business models;**
 - **providing tailored community outreach for those who face multiple barriers to accessing public services and work;**
 - **enhancing and recognising the role of town and community councils by capitalising on their local knowledge and supporting them to do more;**
 - **encouraging a more integrated approach to service delivery in rural areas by establishing pan-public service community hubs, networks of expertise, and clusters of advice and prevention services;**
 - **enabling local action by supporting community asset transfer identifying which assets are suitable to transfer, and having the right systems in place to make things happen; and**
 - **improving community-based leadership by developing networks of interest, training and coaching, and encouraging volunteering.**

Part 1 – Socio economic change, poor infrastructure and shifts in how key services and facilities are provided has resulted in the residualisation of communities in rural Wales

1.1 Public services are key to helping and protecting citizens, and traditionally focus on solving problems. However, there are a host of challenges that face the Welsh public sector in the 21st century. In this part of the report, we consider the implications of the shifting face of rural Wales looking at the impact of population, employment and housing changes in the recent past. We also consider the infrastructure challenge of providing public and other services to dispersed communities in rural Wales – the quality of roads, access to broadband and the provision of key services such as banks and post offices. We also consider citizens views on local public service provision and recent changes. These challenges are often interconnected, defining the operating environment in which public bodies deliver services.

Demographic change and challenges in encouraging employment has impacted on the sustainability of communities and services

Rural communities are ageing more quickly and the rate of new household formation slowing than other parts of Wales

1.2 Demographic changes are increasing pressure on already stretched public services such as social care as demand for services increase. Depopulation and an ageing society in remoter rural areas is also resulting in local services becoming less viable. The demography of rural Wales and, in particular, the growing number of older people, has implications for the future of public service provision – for example increasing demand on social care and housing services. Between 2012 and 2016 all nine primarily rural councils have seen a reduction in the number of people aged under 18 and an increase in the number of people aged over 65. Whilst all rural areas will see the number of households in their area increase by 2035, eight of the nine primarily rural authorities will see new household formation at levels lower than the Welsh average. Daffodil⁵ forecasts that this trend will continue for the next 20 years.

5 Daffodil is a web-based system developed by the Institute of Public Care for the Welsh Government, which pulls together in one place the information needed to plan care, support and housing services in the future.

The lack of well paid jobs and difficulties creating and maintaining employment has encouraged younger people to move away

- 1.3 Our analysis highlights that, in some aspects, the economy of rural Wales is performing well. The employment rate in primarily rural authorities has seen a greater increase since 2007-08 than other parts of Wales, and all rural areas (with the exception of Ceredigion) at levels above the Welsh average. Overall, fewer people in rural Wales are economically inactive, unemployed or in receipt of welfare benefits than other parts of the country⁶.
- 1.4 Despite these changes, rural Wales faces some significant economic challenges. Developing and sustaining a high skills economy can be difficult because the labour market is relatively small and there can often be a mismatch between having a workforce with the right skills to attract inward investment. New businesses are less prevalent in rural than urban areas. Whilst six of the nine primarily rural authorities have seen more businesses created than closed in 2016, the rate of growth has been gradually reducing since 2013 and the number of active business enterprises per 10,000 population fell in eight of the nine primarily rural authorities between 2008 and 2016.
- 1.5 Most communities in Wales have seen average (mean) gross weekly earnings increase since 2012, but seven of the nine primarily rural authorities have average weekly wages below the overall Welsh average and in Pembrokeshire, wages have fallen⁷. Comparatively, rural Wales has lower wages and the gap between the counties with the lowest and highest average earnings is widening.
- 1.6 The economy of rural Wales is heavily geared towards self-employment and smaller businesses. In 2016-17, self-employment levels in the nine primarily rural authorities were above the Welsh average. Only one other authority (Torfaen) is above the Welsh average⁸. Data published by the Office of National Statistics show that a greater proportion of the workforce are employed in micro (between 1 and 9 employees) and small (between 10 and 49 employees) businesses in rural Wales than other parts of the country⁹. For example in 2017, 40.1% of the workforce in Powys worked in micro businesses compared to 13.8% in Cardiff.

6 www.nomisweb.co.uk/articles/1048.aspx

7 <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Business-Economy-and-Labour-Market/People-and-Work/Earnings/averageweeklyearnings-by-welshlocalareas-year>

8 <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Business-Economy-and-Labour-Market/Businesses/Business-Demography>

9 www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/business/activitysizeandlocation/bulletins/ukbusinessactivitysizeandlocation/2017

- 1.7 Research shows that young people in rural areas are more likely to be in low paid work, insecure employment or working within smaller firms than their urban counterparts. A particular challenge for young people is the difficulty in progressing in work due to the concentration of small firms, which offer limited opportunities for young people to upgrade their skills and progress. Consequently, this results in young people feeling that they are being 'pushed' away from rural areas because of the lack of opportunities and lower wages, and 'pulled' to urban areas because they have better job opportunities, progression prospects and higher salaries¹⁰.

Poor infrastructure and changes in how key services and facilities are delivered has adversely affected rural communities

- 1.8 A well-connected and good quality road network, regular and inexpensive public transport, affordable housing, accessible public and private services and excellent broadband coverage are key pre-requisites of creating sustainable rural communities. These building blocks connect people to the services they need so they can thrive and grow. But citizens we surveyed raised concerns that the foundations of rural life, the things that contribute to making their community a great place to live and work, coupled with the impact of public funding cuts and continuing economic uncertainty, have changed their communities in recent years, and not always for the better.

Poor transport infrastructure has affected citizens ability to access facilities, services and work

- 1.9 Whilst the quality of roads are improving across Wales, authorities in rural Wales have the poorest quality roads¹¹. Rural authorities also disproportionately cover the bulk of the Welsh road network with 66.3% of roads in the nine primarily rural authorities. Some 56% of Town and Community Councils responding to our survey rated the condition of roads as in poor condition, a finding echoed by 31% of citizens who replied to our survey.

¹⁰ www.dera.ioe.ac.uk/15199/1/Barriers-to-education-employment-and-training-for-young-people-in-rural-areas.pdf

¹¹ <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Transport/Roads/Lengths-and-Conditions>

1.10 Research by the Campaign for Better Transport shows that whilst most councils in Wales maintained or increased investment between 2010-11 and 2016-17, they still reduced their expenditure on local bus routes by £5.1 million (24%). The largest increase was in Powys, where the budget increased by roughly £690,000 and the largest cut in Gwynedd, where the budget reduced by over £1 million¹². Respondents to both our public and Town and Community Council surveys noted that public transport is less available than in the past and fear this decline is set to continue. Citizens cited Powys, Monmouthshire and Ceredigion as the areas with the least accessible public transport. Town and Community Councils across Wales similarly highlighted a decline in the availability of public transport with 50% of respondents stating services had decreased in their community.

Citizens are being prevented from accessing and using public services because of poor broadband coverage

- 1.11 Superfast broadband is essential for consumers and businesses. It can help improve access to information, advice and help for citizens, and support public bodies to channel shift services to make it easier for citizens to access and use them but also to increase efficiency and create savings. Digital services also allow businesses to provide flexible working for employees so that they can work from home and access company systems remotely, saving costs and reducing carbon footprints.
- 1.12 The UK has poor broadband infrastructure, Wales has the poorest broadband links in the UK and rural areas in Wales the poorest access to services. An analysis of over 63 million broadband speed tests worldwide revealed that the UK sits in 31st place, with an average speed of 16.51 Mbps¹³. Seven of the ten wards in Great Britain with the lowest average download speed are in Wales and located in Gwynedd, Powys, Monmouthshire, Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire¹⁴.
- 1.13 The findings of our Town and Community Council survey echo these conclusions. A number of respondents commented on poor superfast broadband speed and ongoing difficulties accessing online information, completing forms and applications. The result is that rather than improving access to services, poor broadband coverage is resulting in services becoming less available and accessible especially as councils are increasing their provision of online services.

¹² www.bettertransport.org.uk/sites/default/files/research-files/2010_final_buscuts.pdf

¹³ The data rates of modern residential high-speed Internet connections are commonly expressed in megabits per second (Mbps). www.docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1A8LDcCLY3HN5Oqys6VxB0ug8xgroDADVIA2BeAF_tSM/edit#gid=0

¹⁴ www.researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06643/SN06643.pdf

Bank and post office closures have adversely affected many Welsh communities

1.14 The growth in online and mobile services have seen a reduction in banks and post offices. Research by Which estimates that 93 banks have closed since 2015¹⁵. Of these, 50 banks closed in the nine rural authority areas, 36 in mixed urban/rural and six in urban authority areas. Powys has seen the largest number of closures in Wales with the loss of 11 banks since 2015. Post office provision has similarly fallen across all Welsh communities since 2007¹⁶. Research by Deloitte¹⁷ and by Move your money¹⁸ highlight that the majority of closures happen in areas that are more dependent on bank and post office branches and most likely to be adversely affected by their shutting. For example, Deloitte classifies many areas of rural Wales as ‘declining rural communities’ who will experience further closures because of ‘shrinking footfall and reduced demand for financial products and services’.

There have been difficulties in developing and accessing housing in some rural areas

1.15 More people own their home than rent in rural areas. The nine primarily rural authorities have levels of owner occupation equal to or greater than the Welsh average but levels of social housing – rented from a housing association or council – are, overall, below the Welsh average¹⁹. House prices are also generally higher in rural areas than in urban communities. For example, in May 2018 six of the nine primarily rural counties recorded average sale prices in excess of the Welsh average of £148,894²⁰. In recent years, new house building in rural Wales has mostly remained static but in four of the nine primarily rural authorities – Isle of Anglesey, Denbighshire, Monmouthshire and Powys – new dwelling construction has fallen²¹.

15 www.which.co.uk/news/2017/04/mapped-the-482-bank-branches-closing-in-2017/

16 Post Office Limited Network Report 2017; and www.researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN02585/SN02585.pdf

17 www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/uk/Documents/financial-services/deloitte-uk-bricks-and-clicks.pdf

18 www.drive.google.com/file/d/0BxHxIVSxtvx2YVRtLTZDdkl0a0E/view

19 <https://stats.wales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Housing/Dwelling-Stock-Estimates/dwellingstockestimates-by-localauthority-tenure>

20 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-house-price-index-wales-may-2018/uk-house-price-index-wales-may-2018>

21 <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/new-house-building/?lang=en>

1.16 Citizens responding to our survey highlighted the availability of housing, especially for younger people, the lack of affordable housing and rising house prices as growing problems. Welsh Government has supported authorities to create Rural Housing Enabler²² (RHE) posts to assist development of housing in rural communities. Despite investing in this important role, the supply of new affordable housing has not significantly increased and a recent report highlighted that ‘the dilemma facing all those involved in the RHE project is that delivery of rural affordable housing remains low’²³.

Citizens generally feel that key council services are not as available, affordable, accessible, adequate and acceptable as they used to be

- 1.17 Citizens we surveyed believe there has been a decline in council services in the last five years. According to 43% of citizen survey respondents, council services have got worse over the past five years, compared to 39% who state there is no change. Only 10% say services have improved. 24% note that council services they use have been stopped and 10% that services are now restricted. Just under half of citizens responding to our survey said that the council services they use are unaffordable to them.
- 1.18 Despite recognising that things need to change, citizens’ reaction to alternative service delivery models is mixed. Just under half are open to the idea of encouraging communities to run services themselves, particularly those in younger age groups. However, whilst residents accept the need to deliver future services differently, roughly seven in ten survey respondents still want council services delivered as they are now.
- 1.19 With increasingly constrained budgets, citizens are less positive about the future of public services. Only 29% agree that their local council will be able to deliver high quality services in the future but most citizens responding to our survey are unwilling to pay more council tax. Town and Community Councils responding to our survey support these conclusions, in particular, that the cost of council services have increased and become less accessible and available.

22 Rural Housing Enablers work with rural communities to identify local need for affordable homes and then work with the local community to find a suitable opportunity to develop housing.

23 <http://rhewales.co.uk/images/user/Evaluation%20Rural%20Housing%20Enablers%20Wales%20Final%20Report%202014.pdf>

Exhibit 1: the impact of service change on citizens and communities in rural Wales

Citizens and town and community councillors have seen a reduction in public services in rural Wales.

Comments from Citizens on changes to public services



Comments from Town and Community Councils on changes to public services.

'Low percentage of people are internet users and there is limited public transport.'

'Elderly people and young people are disadvantaged by lack of locally available facilities and the reliability of public transport, which is both inefficient and infrequent.'

'Closing of library services has made it more difficult for people to pay council tax and council house rent.'

'People without their own transport cannot get to work using public transport on time. School buses often late. Young people looking for work whose parents do not drive do not find work easy. They cannot afford or are unable to travel far for work. Lack of bus service no chemist no local doctor no library living rural now means being cut off more especially for the sick or elderly.'

'No public transport and no services in the area other than what is put on my community in the village hall. So anyone who can't drive is not able to access services.'



Community Asset Transfers have increasingly been used by councils to save money but have not always resulted in sustainable solutions

- 1.20 With less money available to maintain key assets – for example, community halls, playing fields and changing rooms – councils are closing or selling off community assets to balance the books. In rural areas, these facilities are often key components of village life, the things that help communities to thrive and survive. Rather than closing amenities, one option for councils is to pursue a Community Asset Transfer (CAT)²⁴. Consequently, the approach to CAT is indicative of how well public bodies support and encourage communities to do more for themselves and protect services.
- 1.21 We found that more community asset transfers are happening. Twenty five percent of those responding to our Town and Community Council survey stated they have been involved in the transfer of open spaces, 19% the transfer of a village or community hall, 9% of bus shelters and 2% of streetlights. In Neath Port Talbot, the council has transferred 55 assets including eight community centres and nine libraries into community control and is supporting the development of social enterprises. Research by Locality²⁵ concluded that the public bodies who are good at transferring assets have some common features. Namely, good quality and supportive guidance with short end-to-end processes for overseeing and approving cases. Critically, the success of transfers is founded on shared responsibility; both from the council transferring the asset, but also the community group and the body taking on responsibility.

²⁴ CAT involves the transfer of ownership or management of land and buildings and represents an opportunity for public bodies to sustain services, and help rural communities develop greater self-resilience.

²⁵ <http://locality.org.uk/services-tools/support-for-community-organisations/ownership-and-management-of-land-and-buildings>

- 1.22 We are concerned that councils are not always doing all they can to ensure a smooth handover and create a sustainable legacy. For instance, councils could do more to build capacity in their communities to be able to take on and successfully sustain assets. Only seven councils, of which four are primarily rural, provide capacity building, training, mentoring, and financial support to community groups and potential transferees. Only 15% of those Town and Community Councils responding to our survey who have taken on responsibility for an asset, received some form of financial assistance from their council, and only 10% ongoing support after transfer. For the bulk of assets transferred, Town and Community Councils take the asset in good faith and often feel they have to take on the transfer even when they do not have the skills, capacity or resources to maintain the asset.
- 1.23 CAT policies and business case templates often lack detail on the criteria used to decide on transfers, in particular demonstrating financial health and proven record of accomplishment is often overlooked or not detailed. Only five councils signpost expert guidance on CATs aimed at community groups produced by Welsh Government²⁶ and others. Applicants are often not required to set out how service provision will change or the impact of the transfer on protecting and promoting the Welsh language. Too often councils operate a 'one size fits all' approach and do not differentiate between the size of asset to be transferred. Generally, councils initiate and encourage the transfer but the risks associated with taking on an asset are not always transparently set out. Councils often do not require a business case nor do they have an equality impact assessment to support the disposal.
- 1.24 See our more detailed report on [Community Asset Transfers](#).

26 The Welsh Governments Best Practice Guide provides good information and helpful resources to encourage councils to collaborate with community groups to both build capacity and enable successful transfers: <http://gov.wales/docs/dsjlg/publications/comm/160310-community-asset-transfer-env2.pdf>.

Part 2 – Councils and their partners are not always responding effectively to the challenges faced by rural communities

2.1 In the preceding section, we have highlighted the difficulties that councils and their partners face, and need to overcome, in providing services to rural communities. The infrastructure gap facing our villages and rural communities is not only physical or digital; it is social and public. The renewal of rural Wales depends on public bodies working strategically and smartly together to understand and address these gaps. Individual agencies alone cannot solve problems. In this part of the report, we review how councils and their partners plan to support and sustain their rural communities in the future, through the work of Public Service Boards (PSBs). We review the quality of needs assessments, the effectiveness of partnership arrangements, the impact of consultation and engagement with citizens in setting priorities and actions, and the approach to collaboration and service integration. The section concludes with an assessment of how public bodies evaluate impact in deciding future choices.

The role of Public Service Boards is evolving but there are opportunities to articulate a clearer and more ambitious shared vision for rural Wales

2.2 Under the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 (the 'Act'), partnership arrangements in Wales are changing. The creation of PSBs helps to strengthen joint working across all public services. PSBs are required to complete assessments of local wellbeing and identify areas where the PSB can have the biggest collective impact (towards the well-being goals) by working together. PSBs therefore offer the opportunity to move from multiple organisation planning and silo working to the creation of single place based strategies.

- 2.3 We identified some positive approaches that are creating a well-articulated vision for the future. For example, Monmouthshire's People Place Prosperity Strategy²⁷ recognises the different communities within the county and how meeting needs, and demand varies, is specific to local communities and requires different responses. In comparison however, some PSBs continue to deliver a one size fits all approach based on universal eligibility and centralised delivery models. Wellbeing Assessments and Plans have a number of shortcomings when considering rural areas. Too often, they act as a plan to make a plan and have not moved from analysing the current situation to actually setting out a shared vision underpinned by actions to make things better. Actions in the Wellbeing Plans we examined are very broad and it is often not clear who will do what or how services in rural areas will become more adequate, accessible, available, affordable, or acceptable.
- 2.4 Opportunities to collaborate and integrate services to maximise impact and make best use of resources are under developed or not pursued. Despite working together in recent years, key PSB partners have not clarified what they have learnt so far by looking at what works well and why. Wellbeing Assessments we reviewed did not consider future spending and the opportunities to pool budgets. In addition, service capabilities, impacts of prevention work, options for improvement, and information on spending and budgets are often lacking in Assessments.
- 2.5 PSBs do not always assess the capabilities of current services nor identify the contribution the private and third sectors can make. Social enterprises, which offer a community led response to the challenge of residualisation, are a particularly important option that PSBs should support, but their role is mostly overlooked. The establishment or involvement of social enterprises is not without challenge or risk – there is a mixed record of accomplishment of success and councils have examples of lost time and money trying to support them.
- 2.6 Nonetheless, with increasing pressures on the public purse and a commitment by policy makers to design services around the needs of citizens, it is clear that the private, third and social enterprise sectors have an important and growing role to play. They offer flexibility to harness and improve quality and achieve innovation, but PSBs need to integrate services at the point of delivery to identify and support the most appropriate response, be it from the public, private, or third sector, including social enterprises.

27 <https://democracy.monmouthshire.gov.uk/documents/s13975/180418%20Draft%20Social%20Justice%20Strategy%20V5%20Appendix%20A%20180502.pdf>

2.7 PSBs have much to do in order to improve relations with Town and Community Councils. Only 11% of Town and Community Councils responding to our survey indicated that they had a good working relationship with their PSB, compared to the 66% of respondents who felt that they had a good working relationship with their council. Almost a third of Town and Community Council respondents indicated they did not understand the role of PSBs.

Analysis of data to understand problems and agree appropriate solutions is poor

2.8 PSBs are using data to understand the challenges they need to address and to review past performance. Some PSBs – Pembrokeshire, Ceredigion, and Carmarthenshire PSBs – are also collaborating and have joint wellbeing guidance, a Joint Methodology Framework, and actively share reports, data and information. Several PSBs are planning to map all service and community assets – for example, Pembrokeshire, Ceredigion, Neath Port Talbot, Swansea, and the Vale of Glamorgan – to identify how best to collectively optimise asset use and delivery of services. Pembrokeshire, Powys and Conwy and Denbighshire PSBs also have information strategies to improve how they collect and analyse data.

2.9 However, we also identified some common weaknesses in current approaches. The root cause of problems in different communities are not identified because data is often collected, managed and analysed in silos and/or at a county level only. This can result in organisations overlooking the different challenges in diverse rural areas. Councils recognise that their data is not robust and has limitations, and that they do not have the right skills nor capacity to make the best use of data.

2.10 There is little demonstration of how public bodies understand the diverse nature of their rural communities. For example, in those Wellbeing Assessments and Plans that mention rural matters, infrastructure is a common area for improvement, but Plans contain few specific actions or steps to improve infrastructure, such as actions to improve roads and cycle ways, integrate public transport and extend broadband networks.

Councils are not always tapping into their communities to help them prioritise and deliver services

- 2.11 Involving partners and the public in developing and shaping the services they provide and receive can have a wide range of benefits: for public bodies, the public involved and society more widely. Engaging key groups at an early stage can help shape delivery choices so the services provided are more meaningful and useful to the people who use them, and will consequently make a more positive impact. Good communication and engagement can also stimulate interest and encourage people to become more involved in shaping and delivering services.
- 2.12 Several Wellbeing Assessments identify the potential for social capital²⁸ and volunteering. Powys PSB recognises that many people are willing to volunteer, and the focus on encouraging social capital in Monmouthshire's Wellbeing Plan is a particular strength that can be built on. The findings of our citizen's survey highlight the potential benefit of social capital with roughly half of the people we surveyed open to the idea of encouraging communities to run services themselves, particularly those in younger age groups (61% of 16-34 year olds).
- 2.13 Engagement work is often via established channels. For example, in tackling loneliness and isolation in rural areas, community involvement has involved traditional 'set piece' events, online consultation, and some basic social media shout outs. Where engagement happens, it is mostly focused on one-off issues rather than driving a fundamental shift in approach. Other ways of engaging and involving the public are not regularly pursued; for instance using a programme of targeted surveys of a representative cross section of the community, annually posting surveys with council tax bills or other correspondence, and examining common themes from correspondence and community contact over the last few years.

²⁸ Social capital is the economic resources obtained from interactions between businesses or public bodies and individuals or networks of individuals.

- 2.14 A number of public bodies have sought to improve public engagement by developing corporate standards and approaches. These include:
- a Gwynedd County Council's central engagement team's internal guidance and toolkit to support services in engaging with service users and communities, and its citizen-focused approach under the Ffordd Gwynedd principle.
 - b Dyfed Powys Police and Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority have established 'customer service excellence standards' and monitor service provision against these, which enables the service to address problems as they are identified.
 - c the Isle of Anglesey County Council in collaboration with Medrwn Mon's Community Voices project (a third sector initiative) engages with people with protected characteristics in reviewing services. In addition, the council's Engagement and Consultation Board is also mapping approaches to engagement to determine what works and why to provide further resources that support relevant engagement activities.
 - d the Vale of Glamorgan Council's approach to community engagement using a community mapping tool, although at the time of our review this had only been undertaken in four communities and not rolled out to all communities in the rural areas.
 - e the Welsh Government funded LEADER programme that encourages empowerment through local strategy development and resource allocation. Currently there are 18 Local Action Groups in Wales covering eligible wards in 21 Local Authority areas²⁹.
- 2.15 A strong and clear message from citizens is that councils are not good at communicating their vision of future services to communities so that people know what will be available, and what role the community itself can play. Most residents have not been given the chance to voice their opinions. Our citizen survey finds the majority of respondents' (83%) had not completed a survey or been asked for their views on the services they have used in the last 12 months.
- 2.16 Our findings suggest that Town and Community Councils are not being utilised to understand need, which is concerning given their strong links to village life in many remote and very rural areas of Wales. Very few indicate that their local authority or PSBs consult them in order to understand residents' needs. Only 30% of Town and Community Councils responding to our survey contributed to consultation activity to identify local needs in their area and only 7% in setting the priorities of their PSB. Similarly, a number of stakeholders we interviewed commented that engagement with the private sector and business community is not always effective.

²⁹ <https://gov.wales/topics/environmentcountryside/farmingandcountryside/cap/ruraldevelopment/wales-rural-development-programme-2014-2020/leader/?lang=en>

Whilst partnership working and collaboration is long established and can be effective, integration of services is limited

- 2.17 We found that most public bodies acknowledge that they do not have the capacity, resources or skills to respond to the needs of rural communities and know that they need to work differently and with others. With dispersed communities across much of Rural Wales and the new focus of the Act on combined service delivery options to address needs, there is an expectation that colocation, partnership working, and collaboration will increasingly become the standard model for delivering services, and a catalyst for integration of services.
- 2.18 Whilst councils recognise the value of joint and integrated working, they are not always organising and coordinating their work to make the best use of their expertise or realise the benefits that integration can bring. Rather, public bodies continue to focus on their own responsibilities, not the wider challenge of how public services collectively work together in an area.
- 2.19 For example, public bodies continue to operate out of separate buildings and run their own websites with their own information about their services and activities. Mapping provision is taking place but has not extended to reviewing current service delivery to identify options for co-location and integration. Collaboration is often based on opportunity or one-off relationships and not driven by place-based change or design.
- 2.20 Emergency services (Police and Fire) generally find working with other emergency services easier, but are less able to influence partnership working with other public bodies. Similarly, councils find it easier to engage with some bodies and agree joint priorities for action, for example housing associations, than others such as health boards. Regional arrangements have the potential to manage the effects of changing patterns of demand for services by sharing and integrating increasingly scarce resources and expertise. Our findings are consistent with the recent Parliamentary Review of Health and Social Care in Wales that found that the current pattern of health and social care provision is not fit for the future and emphasises the need for change³⁰.

30 <https://gov.wales/docs/dhss/publications/180116reviewen.pdf>

2.21 We did identify some good joint initiatives in rural areas such as the Rural North Flintshire Family Centre, integrated health and social care in the rural community of Llanrwst in Conwy County Borough, and the Health Challenge in Denbighshire. However, these are largely one-off initiatives rather than a fundamental shift in delivery with shared budgets, joint resourcing, integrated posts and delivery bases.

Managing and preventing demand is acknowledged as essential in maintaining services but progress is mixed

2.22 Preventing unnecessary and avoidable demand for services represents good value for money. Demand management can be a starting point for public service providers as they balance delivery of services that meet the needs of citizens with fewer resources at their disposal. To work, it requires collaboration, longer-term thinking, and an insight into how best to deliver services embracing new ways of working³¹.

2.23 Currently, too much prevention activity in rural areas centres on 'one off' approaches to reduce demand or prevent service requests. For instance, services are often located in main urban areas or larger towns, which can result in people living in more remote rural areas not using them because of their location and poor transport links. On paper, services appear accessible and configured to address need, but in reality, more dispersed rural communities do not use them.

2.24 Another common limitation in prevention activity we reviewed is its short-term nature, partly a reflection of funding cycles and annual grants. Likewise, weak evaluation of the wide variety of initiatives and limited sharing of project learning means there are risks to the sustainability of prevention projects by replicating problems and potentially duplicating efforts. In line with a public body's statutory responsibility, services are often designed to reduce risk, but focusing on this rarely leads to demand being addressed. Professionals can label service users and define their needs but this can overlook underlying problems. Consequently, demand escalates before there is an intervention because public bodies pass responsibility for addressing issues back and fore.

³¹ Appendix 10 of our report on [managing demand – homelessness](#) sets out some clear principles to help shape management of demand that can be applied to provision of services to rural areas.

- 2.25 The other part of the demand equation is supply, and the availability of qualified staff is one area where services are increasingly overstretched. National organisations we spoke to told us about recruitment problems in qualified primary school teachers, family doctors, planners and Welsh-speaking carers. A shortage of on-call retained fire fighters is leaving some stations in rural areas potentially under-resourced. Currently there are more than 400 on-call retained fire fighter vacancies across the three Welsh Fire and Rescue Authorities.
- 2.26 We found some positive approaches where organisations are preventing demand and increasing access to services. These include Mid and West Fire and Rescue Authority who use their Safe and Well Home safety checks, and risk based commercial inspections, to help people in rural communities. Similarly, Dyfed Powys Police Farmwatch project, a neighbourhood-policing project with a rural focus, which we highlight as good practice in [Appendix 3](#).
- 2.27 Other approaches to prevention and managing demand look to develop greater self-reliance in citizens, with public bodies looking to equip people to address their own problems. Self-sufficiency is often highlighted as central to rural life and there is a perception that rural communities are more resilient and need less support than urban areas. This is important because prevailing images of rural areas are often polarized as both declining and stagnant or alternatively that rural areas are picturesque and self-sufficient.
- 2.28 A few authorities actively test this perception highlighting community resilience, volunteering, and developing social capital as key strands of work. For example, the Future Monmouthshire programme includes a high-level vision of shifting the focus from direct provision to enabling communities and empowering citizens to do more for themselves. However, as noted in Part 1 of this report, the ageing profile of the rural population and the continuing outward migration of young people, and inward migration of older people,³² as well as volunteers' longer-term engagement or 'enthusiasm' can be lost through burn-out or competing commitments, raises challenges in creating greater self-sufficiency.

32 See <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/healthtopics/populations/ruralhealth>

Councils and their partners need to improve their understanding of the impact their decisions have on people from different communities

- 2.29 There is variable practice in how councils seek to understand and demonstrate the impact, or potential impact, of their decisions and services on citizens. Most councils undertake, for example, Human Rights Act, Legal, Equality and Welsh language risk/impact assessments when implementing new policies and plans or revising existing documentation. However, these tend to consider services at a council-wide level and do not look at the different needs of different communities. In addition, we also found very few examples of public bodies using the Welsh Governments Rural Proofing Tool in revising or developing services (see [Appendix 4](#)). Too often, this results in a single broad-brush analysis that can overlook and ignore differences.
- 2.30 Generally, councils often lack the data and evidence to judge the impact of their work on different rural communities, or to identify what works and how they can improve. Councils with larger urban areas and dispersed rural communities are particularly challenged by the one-size fits all approach to evidence and evaluation. Focusing on county level data to identify need and scrutinise performance does not provide the detail needed to shape services to the different rural communities.
- 2.31 Many organisations do not see rural issues as a distinct policy area. This is particularly applicable to those we have classed as mixed urban/rural councils. The impact of service change follows a one-size fits all approach centred on the ease of delivering services from larger centres. Moreover, because councils with a mix of larger urban centres and dispersed rural communities have not used the Welsh Governments Rural Proofing Tool to help shape context, this can result in an over emphasis on urban need and urban solutions.
- 2.32 Consequently, some councils are not focusing on rurality as a policy or delivery strand despite containing significant rural areas and rural communities. For instance, whilst public bodies like Neath Port Talbot understand the challenges facing people across their different communities, public service partners have mostly prioritised future work in the main urban areas of Neath, Aberavon and Port Talbot. Officers and members recognise that priorities for these areas may not be suitable for more rural and valleys communities.

Part 3 – To help sustain rural communities, councils and their partners need to think and act differently in the future

- 3.1 The way services are provided to communities, villages and towns in rural Wales needs to change. With significant cuts in public funding, councils have focused on to ‘salami slicing’ budgets and reducing non-statutory services. However, increasingly councils are reflecting that ‘more of the same’ is not a sustainable long-term response.
- 3.2 The policy direction of the Welsh Government is encouraging a rethink of the local public service model. Regional partnerships such as the Growing Mid Wales partnership covering Ceredigion and Powys County Councils, draw together local businesses, academic leaders and national and local government to create a vision for future growth. Shifting delivery to regional bodies is based on the view that a more systematic integrated response to problems is both possible and desirable. It also supports the integration of some local services, shifting investment away from a reactive service model towards more community-based and preventative solutions.
- 3.3 The evidence from our review highlights that councils alone cannot effectively solve the problems of rural Wales. A collaborative approach between public services working together with their communities and doing things differently is required. To achieve this, councils and their partners need to think and act differently, working together to build capacity, social capital and encourage communities and citizens to do more for themselves. Co-location and integration also needs to become the standard operating model going forward.
- 3.4 A place-based approach is therefore a good starting point in thinking about how best to reshape delivery of public services. Such an approach moves the debate from lots of separate and distinct front doors into individual services to a single front door, or gateway, to access public services. Taking such an approach places the citizen and community at the centre of service design because it allows public bodies to focus on the individual and their needs rather than organisational or professional boundaries.
- 3.5 This model sits well with provision in rural areas in a time of austerity because the cost of sharing offices is less and the prospect of retaining services enhanced. Working as a single place-based public system also provides the opportunity to focus more clearly on outcomes, because a broad range of factors influences outcomes and require an integrated response to resolve them³³.

33 The work of the Canadian Centre for Community Renewal is a good starting point for public bodies pursuing a place-based approach. Their detailed **Community Resilience Toolkit: A Resource for Rural Renewal and Recovery** provides a systematic guide to strengthening community resilience. The Toolkit focuses on helping organisations – community, statutory and private – to understand the concept of resilience, complete an

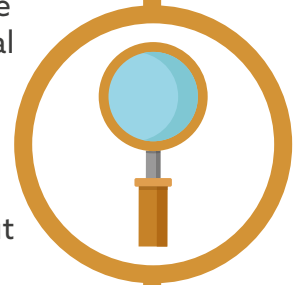
- 3.6 A whole system approach also recognises that very often citizens and service users have multiple needs, which require inputs from many public services to address them. Research by the Greater Manchester Public Service Reform Team³⁴ found that 48 individual citizens who sought help and assistance from public bodies had collectively made 1,235 requests or demands for assistance, an average of 26 per client. Under a traditional model of service delivery, where each agency operates independently, and often-different services within the same agency act in silos, the onus is on the citizen to seek a solution and it is down to them to work their way through the public service system. This can result in demand escalating and problems becoming more critical and costly to deal with because citizens may not know who to contact for assistance, and may not get the help they need at a time when problems can be resolved.
- 3.7 Councils and their partners should explore different system perspectives, including citizens, and ask what we need to support public bodies and people to contribute to improving outcomes³⁵. Research also suggests that to do this you need to understand the key perspectives within a local system (people and organisations); the role they can play in achieving positive change; and the collaborative local infrastructure needed to enable them to work towards shared objectives in the context of place³⁶. Our review has identified that there is potential to support a more sustainable future if councils and their partners shift to a place-based approach and think differently in designing services to respond to the needs of rural Wales. To make place based working a reality we have identified four key strands of work and these are set out below:

34 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/588237/Integrated_place_based_services_Academy_seminar_slidepack_310117.pdf

35 Collaborate CIC, February 2017.

36 <https://www.jrf.org.uk/why-we-need-build-social-capital-cities>

3.8. **A STRATEGIC PLACE BASED APPROACH** – councils and their partners recognise the scale of the problem they face in delivering services in rural Wales but are less clear on what they are going to do to overcome these. PSBs need to therefore develop a more ambitious and optimistic vision for the future, highlighting the good things about rural communities and pinpointing practical opportunities to improve people’s wellbeing. One way to achieve this is for PSBs to work with local partners and citizens to create a place-based vision and set out how local partners will integrate and collectively deliver services. The approach should build on the Local Well-being Plan setting out an agreed collective understanding of long-term community needs; the social and economic vision for place with joint priorities to address agreed challenges; and map the services, networks and facilities that are potentially available to co-locate and integrate services.



3.9. **WORKING COLLABORATIVELY AND INTEGRATING SERVICE DELIVERY** – even if under pressure, councils still need to be provided in rural Wales and it is the responsibility of public bodies to find the most efficient and effective (for the citizens) way to achieve this. A change in mind-set and an acceptance that acting alone is no longer viable is required. This will need a shift to co-financing and potentially compromise on service models delivery points, and a move to creating integrated public service and community hubs.

3.10. From the customer perspective multi-service hubs are a good option as they are convenient ‘one-stop shop’ and can become community focal points thereby enhancing social capital. They need to be multi-purpose, cross-sector and reflect local needs in terms of what they provide, hosting a range of partners and public services. Hubs can also extend the use of local assets and offer the potential to act as gateways to public services operating either as:

- a) Service hubs with a public sector focus – run by a council, housing association or other public sector organisation, bringing together different services under one roof.
- b) Community hubs run by community organisations – with different projects, activities and services, often run with a high level of involvement from the local community to fill gaps where public services have disappeared – for example supporting the work of credit unions.



3.11. ADDRESSING INFRASTRUCTURE GAPS – rural Wales has some significant infrastructure challenges. We recognise that addressing these are not always the primary responsibility of local government, cannot be dealt with by councils alone and requires support and assistance from others. However, councils and partners can pursue some steps. For instance:

- a) supporting an integrated public transport network aligning bus and cycling networks with rail services;
- b) help people and businesses make the most of digital connectivity by investing in infrastructure and digital skills (see the good practice example of Carmarthenshire County Council Boosting Wi-Fi connectivity rural areas in [Appendix 3](#));
- c) proactively promoting and raising awareness of infrastructure rollout e.g. Gwynedd Council increasing awareness and engagement with local communities and enhancing skills through their Digital Gwynedd project³⁷; and
- d) supporting community asset transfer by identifying which assets are suitable to transfer, and clarifying what needs to be done.



3.12. SUPPORTING SELF-HELP IN RURAL COMMUNITIES – provide the full range of services traditionally made available, councils and partners need to not only change how they work but they also need to encourage communities and citizens to do more for themselves by:

- a) improving community based leadership by developing networks of interest, supporting volunteering and encouraging people to step up;
- b) supporting social enterprise and more collaborative business models by identifying options for existing and new organisations;
- c) developing guidance, toolkits and networks that support the development of place based town/village planning and place plans created within and led by communities;
- d) providing tailored, community outreach to encourage and support communities to do more for themselves; and
- e) enhancing and recognise the role of town and community councils and working with and supporting them to do more.



³⁷ www.citizenonline.org.uk/digitalgwynedd

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Study Methodology

Our review methodology covered the following:

- A review of accumulated audit knowledge and practice.
- Communication and engagement with rural communities via attendance at the Royal Welsh Show and a range of local county fayres in Monmouthshire, the Vale of Glamorgan and the Isle of Anglesey.
- A detailed analysis of data drawn from StatsWales, the Local Government Data Unit Benchmarking Hub, the Office of National Statistics, NOMIS, the Institute of Public Care and HM Land Registry.
- A review of published literature including reports and primary research by the Wales Rural Observatory, the Commission for Rural Communities, Move your Money, Better Transport, Deloitte, Post Office Counters LTD, the Welsh Government, One Voice Wales, BDRC Continental, DCLG and DEFRA.
- An analysis of a sample of Public Service Board Well-being Assessment and Plans.
- A survey of 711 Town and Community Councils to identify the challenges they face in managing, maintaining and developing services to rural communities and how well they engage with and work in partnership with local authorities in respect of community asset transfers. We received responses from 355 bodies.
- A qualitative survey of 750 citizens to ascertain how well local government engage with and understand public perceptions in shaping services to rural communities. The survey question framework was framed to link with past research on services to rural communities, in particular the 2007 Wales Rural Observatory report 'Coping with Access to Services'³⁸ which identifies five important dimensions of delivering services in rural settings: adequate, accessible, available, affordable and acceptable.
- Interviews with key national stakeholders including Welsh Government, One Voice Wales, Society of Community Council Clerks, Welsh Local Government Association, third sector bodies, Community Housing Cymru, the Big Lottery, the Princes Trust, the National Farmers Union, academic institutions, private businesses and government agencies.
- Detailed fieldwork in Carmarthenshire, Isle of Anglesey, Gwynedd, Monmouthshire, Neath Port Talbot and the Vale of Glamorgan, the three National Park Authorities, Dyfed Powys Police and Mid and West Fire and Rescue Authority. Our fieldwork included interviews and focus groups with officers, members, and engagement with local partners.

³⁸ www.walesruralobservatory.org.uk/sites/default/files/12_CopingAccessServices.pdf

Appendix 2 – Defining ‘Rural’ Wales

A key difficulty in looking at this area of work is that there is no single agreed definition of a rural area in Wales. The Welsh Government differentiates between two categories - less sparse context and sparsest context - and between three settlement types.

Within the Less Sparse context there are:

- **Large Towns:** with populations of at least 10,000 people including Cardiff, Newport and Swansea along the North Wales coast, Deeside and Wrexham;
- **Small Towns:** settlements of less than 10,000 people in the more densely populated areas for example Denbigh and Monmouth – and also areas of urban fringe around the major settlements; and
- **Others:** villages, hamlets and dispersed dwellings in the less sparse areas

In the Sparsest context there are:

- **Large Towns:** settlements with a population of at least 10,000 people – Holyhead, Newtown, Aberystwyth and Carmarthen;
- **Small Towns:** in the less densely populated areas with less than 10,000 people; and
- **Others:** villages, hamlets and dispersed dwellings in the sparsest areas of Wales

According to the Welsh Government’s classification, nearly 20% of the overall Welsh population lives in areas that are broadly classified as rural. Of these rural residents, only 30 percent live in the sparsest large or small towns; the majority (70%) live in either ‘other’ less sparse or sparsest areas (Welsh Government, 2015).

According to the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation in 2014, these areas are ranked as some of the least deprived areas based on income, which would appear to indicate that rural areas suffer less poverty and deprivation than urban areas in Wales. The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) takes account of a range of factors when measuring deprivation. It identifies Isle of Anglesey, Powys, Ceredigion, Carmarthenshire, Neath Port Talbot, Bridgend and Caerphilly as the counties with the highest incidence of rural deprivation in Wales.

The WLGA’s rural policy forum consists of nine councils (Anglesey, Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Conwy, Denbighshire, Gwynedd, Monmouthshire, Pembrokeshire and Powys with representation from National Parks Wales.) In late 2015, the forum published a new series of priorities³⁹, which focus on three key areas - Future Generations; Our networks; and Our places.

³⁹ WLGA Rural Forum - A Manifesto of the WLGA Rural Forum for 2015-2020 <http://www.wlga.gov.uk/download.php?id=6257&l=1>

Appendix 3 – Good practice case studies



A strategic place based approach

Powys – the PSB has a sound process of reviewing data and the format of the wellbeing assessment reports are very accessible and cross-referenced with up-to-date data sources. Independent advice has been sought to give reassurance on data quality. Some comparison of data is made with councils outside Wales such as fly tipping, and with other regions in Wales including sustainable energy generation. A research library has been established which holds research papers and information on rural issues and this is referenced when deciding potential responses in its first Wellbeing Plan. The PSB's Well-Being Assessment rates the impact of each key finding against the seven well-being goals and whether they have a positive or negative affect on well-being. The Assessment uses a wide range of local and national data to make a considered analysis of domestic violence and abuse, public health issues, educational attainment in rural schools, locations and provision of suitable accommodation for older people, broadband connectivity, and the impact of cybercrime on local rural businesses. As a result, the PSB is in a better position to co-ordinate action more effectively.

Vale of Glamorgan – the Creative Rural Communities Team was established in 2004 in the Vale of Glamorgan and the work is undertaken in partnership with communities to develop innovative projects and ideas that will create long-term social and economic benefits for the area. The aim is to empower individuals to become actively involved in the future of their communities. The Creative Rural Communities Mapping project built upon findings of a tackling poverty analysis commissioned by the former Vale Local Service Board, which found that it is generally the St Athan area of the Vale of Glamorgan that experiences the most poverty and deprivation when compared to other rural parts of the Vale. The approach seeks to work with communities to identify both the Social Assets, for example, community groups, organisations and individuals as well as Physical Assets including Community centres, open spaces and businesses in a community. The council piloted the use of the mapping approach in three communities in the Rural Vale in St Athan, Wenvoe and Rhoose. The mapping process has brought people together across those communities and has led to the identification of what matters in those communities. In St Athan one of the main priorities that the community identified was better play areas for children. A local group of residents have formed a community group to tackle this need and are working with the council's play development officer to increase their knowledge around the delivery of play activities and the volunteers are receiving informal mentoring to assist them with developing play provision in the area.

Dyfed Powys Police – the Force’s rural policing strategy 2017-20 sets out what work is being planned to improve access to services in rural areas. The police are developing and supporting rural watch schemes, and increasing the number of Special Constables and volunteers working in rural communities. PCs and PSCOs are more accessible by being stationed in rural communities using shared facilities with Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service, the use of the pop up tents and marquees at the summer shows and events and the introduction of a number of twitter accounts with local police teams. Police officers and support staff are receiving enhanced levels of training to ensure they have the correct expertise to deal with rural crime; this is necessary due to the complex nature of certain rural crimes. Supporting these officers is a Rural Crime Coordinator.

The Force has also created county-based Rural Crime Forums, which bring together farming union representatives, Farmwatch coordinators, rural based community groups and local authorities. These forums help build confidence in reporting crime, find shared solutions and improve the exchange of information and intelligence to enable focused targeting of criminals and criminality. Dyfed Powys Police Rural Crime Strategy 2017 also outlines the specific rural challenges the force faces, and the resources it will put in place to implement the rural strategy. These include actions to improve prevention activity, detection and enforcement actions, intelligence sharing, and public reassurance work.



Working collaboratively and integrating service delivery

North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority – the Authority’s Community Assistance Team teamed up with Welsh Government, the three emergency services, Denbighshire County Council, Conwy County Borough Council, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, Galw Gofal Care Connect, and North Wales Regional Call Monitoring Service to offer integrated safety and health advice and respond to vulnerable people who experience a fall in their home. Referrals were made from hospitals, GPs, from family members, carers, or from the people themselves. As a result, demand for the services of the specialised Community Assistance Team continued to grow since the initiative aimed at protecting people in their homes began in August 2016. The Community Assistance Team benefited over a thousand people since the launch of the pilot in Denbighshire and Conwy. The scheme helped to reduce the number of people who needed to attend hospital, reducing the pressure and demands on ambulance and medical services. Funding for the project has now ended and it is no longer operating.



Addressing infrastructure gaps

Carmarthenshire County Council – a Wi-Fi initiative is boosting connectivity and economic regeneration in the rural towns and villages of Ammanford, Burry Port, Carmarthen, Llandovery, St Clears and Whitland. The project is backed by Carmarthenshire County Council, who have given grant funding and made a successful funding bid on behalf of the Grŵp Cefn Gwlad Local Action Group, which has secured funding of £120,000 from the national LEADER scheme. Town councils, businesses, organisations and individuals are now able to access digital on-line training resources to support digital skills development. The initiative also incorporates free local Wi-Fi. As a result, new opportunities for jobs, apprenticeships, work placements and digital volunteers are being created.

Community Asset Transfer – we identified the following authorities as having developed good approaches to community asset transfer:

- Rhondda Cynon Taf who have declared a number of assets as surplus to their needs (referred to as ‘Assets of Community Value’). The Council’s website includes guidance, online templates, a detailed building description and a single point of contact for information, all aimed at helping to ensure the smooth transfer of assets.
- Powys County Council advertises land and building assets that have the potential to be transferred. Online expressions of interest forms and a business case template is available that encourages a detailed and shared understanding of project risks.
- the Vale of Glamorgan Council has a comprehensive toolkit with guidance and templates and signposts applicants to further information and including potential financing.

Ceredigion – the responsibility for running the services at Tregaron Leisure Centre have been transferred by Ceredigion County Council to a local community group. The process was established following work undertaken by the Council’s Leisure Reconfiguration Board who identified Tregaron as suitable for transfer to the community – a process known as Community Asset Transfer. The Council then sought expressions of interest for the delivery of community sports activities from the leisure centre. Hamdden Caron Leisure are a group of volunteers from Tregaron and the surrounding area and gave an expression of interest to run the leisure centre after detailed consultation with users, non-users, and sports clubs in the area. A 30-year lease has now been signed between Ceredigion County Council and Hamdden Caron Leisure. The Leisure Centre now operates as a community hub for leisure and sporting activity with new sports clubs joining. The Council will continue to operate some services from the leisure centre and plans to develop more outreach services and drop in sessions in the future.



Supporting self-help in rural communities

Devon County Council is using its data to build community resilience in rural areas. Understanding the resilience of a local community is important so councils can target help and support where needed most, and people in rural communities can help themselves. Devon County Council provides an online view of community resilience for each Devon community using a range of national and local data, which has been mixed with information from the #WeAreDevon Survey 2016, and Community Insight Survey 2017. The resulting community resilience score integrates various national and local measures to indicate the resilience of communities in Devon. This is creating a dialogue between public bodies, and is mobilising action to plan for and recover from big events such as extreme weather and economic changes.

Devon Voluntary Action (DeVA) estimates there are 31,255 active volunteers. The Council is linking people and volunteers with those organisations who can help. The Council efforts are supported by an online independent advice centre known as Pinpoint that signposts thousands of services and community groups across Devon www.pinpointdevon.co.uk Over 500 community groups are registered and people can find a range of help and advice on how to maintain independent lives, find work, volunteer, improve personal wellbeing and build self-reliance.

Caffi Cletwr, Tre'r Ddôl, Ceredigion - With the support of Ceredigion County Council, Caffi Cletwr is developing a community-based approach to provide key services and tackle a number of issues facing the rural community in the village of Tre'r Ddôl and its surrounding areas. Tre'r Ddôl is a small community of roughly 600 residents and over the years has seen its local shop, church and primary school close. When faced with the local café also closing in 2009, a local community group gained grant funding from Ceredigion County Council, the Big Lottery Fund, European Union and businesses such as Santander and the Laura Ashely Foundation to purchase the business and develop a new café and shop in the heart of the village.

Caffi Cletwr is continuously evolving and the direction of its development is entirely dependent on the needs of the local community. It is continuously mapping the needs of the community in order to align their provision as closely as possible to residents' wishes. This has led to developing initiatives, which tackle issues that are synonymous with those faced by rural communities across Wales.

- Caffi Cletwr is much more than a café. In the wake of other community assets closing, this vibrant community centre provides a focal point where people can meet or pop in. Events are held and specific discounts on teas and coffees are aimed at elderly residents in order to encourage those who may otherwise not see or speak to anyone all day long to get out of the house.
- limited face-to-face interaction with public service providers. Ceredigion County Council makes use of Caffi Cletwr as a pick-up point for waste and recycling bags for citizens and its mobile library visits the café on a monthly basis, maximising its role as a community hub. Dyfed Powys Police has also made use of Caffi Cletwr by holding drop-in sessions with Police Community Support Officers at the café.
- fuel poverty: Caffi Cletwr arranges and facilitates a community syndicate for citizens to buy fuel for their oil-heated homes. Whereas citizens may otherwise have to purchase fuel in larger quantities from companies on an annual basis, by working on a syndicate basis citizens are able to purchase in smaller and more affordable quantities three or four times a year via the Caffi's fuel club. Buying 'in bulk' has also led to discounts for residents.
- lack of jobs for local people: Between the café and shop, Caffi Cletwr employs eight members of staff as full time equivalent. This includes a manager and assistant manager in the shop and three cooks in the café's kitchen. In addition, 50 volunteers are associated with the enterprise and regularly undertake jobs that need doing or help with organising community events held at the café.

Appendix 4 – Welsh Government Rural Proofing Tool questions

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- 1 Will your policy affect the availability of other public and private services in the rural area?
 - 2 Could you deliver the policy you are proposing to implement through existing service outlets? E.g. schools, banks and GP surgeries
 - 3 Will there be an extra cost to delivering your policy to rural areas?
 - 4 Will the policy affect travel needs or the ease and cost of travel for rural communities?
 - 5 Does the policy rely on communicating information to clients?
 - 6 Will the policy be delivered through the private sector or through a public-private partnership?
 - 7 Does the policy rely on infrastructure for delivery that may put rural communities at a disadvantage? E.g. Broadband ICT, main roads and utilities
 - 8 Will the policy impact on rural businesses particularly the self-employed and micro businesses and on the Third Sector including social enterprises and local voluntary organisations?
 - 9 Will the policy have a particular impact on land based industries and therefore on rural economies and the environment?
 - 10 Will the policy affect those on low wages or in part-time or seasonal employment?
 - 11 Will the policy target disadvantaged people living in rural areas?
 - 12 Will the policy rely on local organisations for delivery?
 - 13 Does the policy depend on a new building or development site?
 - 14 Will the policy impact on the quality and character of the natural and built rural landscape?
 - 15 Will the policy impact on people wishing to reach and use the countryside as a place for recreation and enjoyment?

An example of a completed assessment is [on the Welsh Government website](#).

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