



Arsyllfa **Wledig** Cymru
Wales **Rural** Observatory

KEY FINDINGS: PAPER 4

A Survey of Rural Services in Wales

The survey of rural services forms an important element of the 'rural services' work programme of the Wales Rural Observatory. It represents the first attempt to survey levels of service provision in rural Wales since the mid 1990s. This paper summarises the key findings from this survey.

Utilising the Town and Community Council as the unit of analysis, questionnaires were sent to all 593 Town and Community Council Clerks in rural areas of Wales. The objective of the survey was to obtain information on the levels, types, openings and closures, accessibility, and quality of services facilities in rural Wales. The survey has achieved a response rate of nearly 70% from a representative range of Town and Community Councils in terms of population size and geographical location.

The findings from this survey will provide important contextual information for other research carried out by the Observatory, and inform policy makers in Wales of the 'state of services' in rural Wales.

Key findings

Of the Town and Community Councils that responded:

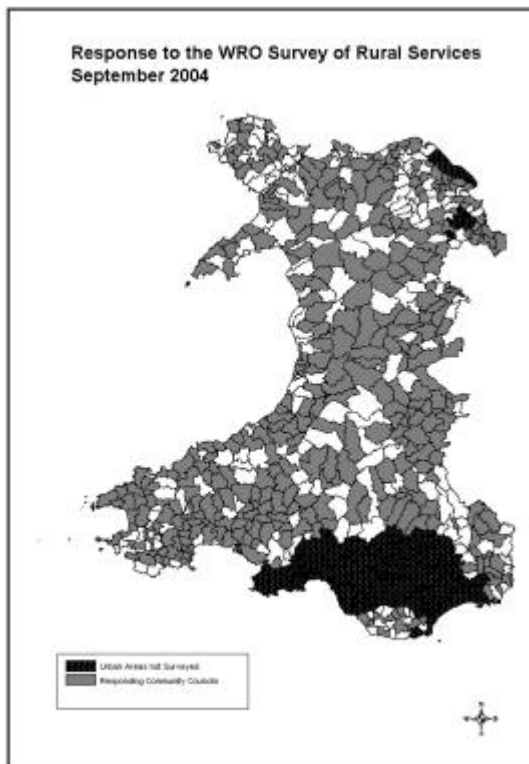
- 33% have a shop selling food only or non food items only
- 62% have a general store selling both food and non-food items
- 80% have a post office
- 7% have a farmers market
- 64% have food outlets (cafes, restaurants, take-aways)
- 69% have a petrol station combined with a shop
- 15% have a bank and 10% have a building society
- 92% have a public house
- 32% have a GP surgery
- 16% have a dental surgery
- 25% have a pharmacy
- 83% have groups for children
- 83% have a primary school
- 26% have a secondary school
- 33% have day-care groups for the elderly and people with disabilities
- 28% have a community internet facility
- 98% have a local meeting room of some kind available for public use
- 94% have a bus service
- 63% have recycling facilities



KEY FINDINGS

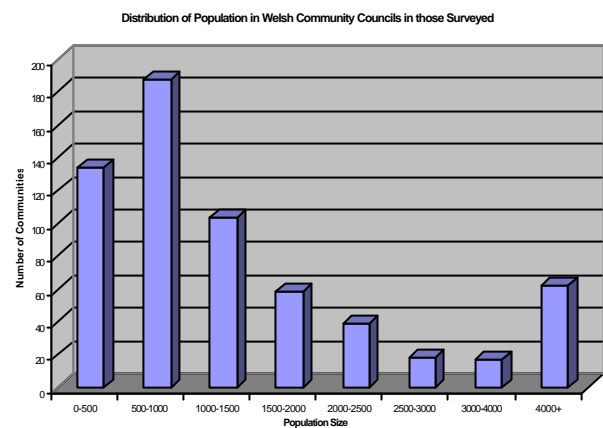
Introduction

This report presents summary findings from the Wales Rural Observatory survey of rural services 2004. This survey represents the first attempt to survey levels of service provision in rural Wales since a similar independent academic research study carried out in the mid 1990's (Higgs and White, 2000). The survey took the Town and Community Council as the unit of analysis with questionnaires being sent to all Town and Community Clerks in rural areas of Wales. The survey has achieved a response rate of nearly 70%. The map below displays the response rate together with those communities not surveyed. It is clear from the map that the response is fairly uniform, in spatial terms.



The question of population distribution in the Town and Community Councils surveyed is an important one as it will often be the case that particular services are less likely to be present in areas with dispersed populations. The graph below displays the number of Town and Community Councils within

particular population bands in the surveyed communities. Clearly a large proportion of those Town and Community Councils surveyed have populations below 500 and between 500-1000 people. In these Council areas we might expect relatively low levels of service provision beyond the most basic service facilities (shop, pub, post office, primary school). Throughout this summary report, the data is disaggregated into these population bands to facilitate the description and analysis of the results.



Shops and Other Services

This section outlines the findings from the questionnaire on key services such as shops (food and non-food), banks and building societies, post offices, food establishments and public houses.

Shops selling only food tend to concentrate in Councils with higher populations; 39% in the 1000-2000 population band and 46.2% in the 2000-4000 band. A significant proportion of communities within these areas, therefore, do not possess a shop that sells only food. In communities whose populations are less than 1000, 80-90% of Councils do not have a shop that sells only food

The most common shop in rural areas of Wales is the general store, selling both food and non-food items. The presence, or absence, of these services is strongly correlated with population size. Around 35% of communities with a population less than 500, have such a service, this rises to 74% for communities in the 1000-2000 population band and 83.3% in the 2000-4000 band. These

figures highlight a significant proportion of Councils, even in the higher population bands, without this key service facility.

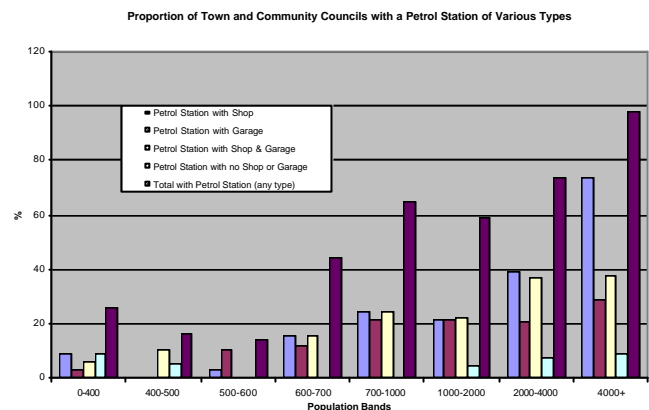
Post offices are considered to be a key service in rural areas (RDC, 1995). Information was collected on the presence of various forms of post offices in rural communities; whether, for example, there was a separate post office, a post office combined with a shop, or a post office combined with another service. Of all the Councils that responded, 80% have a post office in their community. A small proportion of communities possess a separate post office (not combined with another service); this ranges from 13.6% - 23.3% in communities of less than 1000 population, and only reaching 32.4% in the 2000-4000 population band. The most common form of post office is one that is attached to a shop. 62-69% of Councils with populations between 600 and 4000, have this facility. This indicates fairly good levels of provision of this particular service, there is still, however, a significant number of communities with no provision.

Banks and Building Societies are services that have started to disappear from rural villages as financial services have become rationalised and centralised (RDC, 1995; CA, 2000). The total percentage of responding Town and Community Councils with no full-time bank is 85%, while 90% of Councils do not have a building society. As expected, there is a strong correlation with population size; with no, or little provision in Town and Community Council areas whose population is below 1000.

The public house is a key service in rural areas serving as a focal point for the community and playing host to community events and, sometimes, other services e.g. post office services. Rural Wales appears well served by public houses with 89% of the responding Town and Community Councils had a public house that serves meals. This figure is even higher (92%) when it is combined with those public houses that do not serve meals.

Petrol-filling stations often provide more than just fuel for private or commercial transport. Most petrol stations have shops selling

convenience items, such as newspapers and confectionery, and many have a wider range of goods available, including basic foods. Petrol-filling stations are not only a local service as customers are often “passing-by”, so location on main transport routes or the proximity of larger population bases is generally more important than proximity to smaller rural settlements (CA, 2001). The questionnaire included questions on Petrol Stations with a Shop, with a Garage, with a Shop and Garage, or without both a Shop and a Garage. The graph below displays the rates of provision of petrol stations of these various types in the responding Town and Community Councils. The most common type of petrol station is one with a shop, but the presence, or otherwise, of such a service is dependent on the population size of the Council. 29.3% of responding Councils have a petrol station with a shop.



Medical Services

Medical services are clearly of key importance, and one might expect that these types of services would be centred in the main settlements in rural areas of Wales. For particular types of primary medical service – the GP surgery or dentist – a significant population base is essential to provide the adequate customer base, or ‘list size’. This section highlights the provision, or otherwise, of GP surgeries, health centres, dental surgeries, and pharmacies. General levels of provision based on all responding Councils are as follows; 68% of Councils do not have a GP Practice, 84% don’t possess a dental practice, and 75% of responding Town and

Community Councils do not have a pharmacy service.

With regard to GP surgeries, as might be expected, in population bands below 1000 people, less than 15% of communities have a GP surgery (this is as low as 2.7% in the 400-500 band). In the 1000-2000 and 2000-4000 population bands (where 32.3% and 66.7% respectively have a surgery) there are still a significant proportion of the communities with no GP surgery. Again the provision of health centres is strongly correlated with population; only communities within the highest population bands have significant levels of provision of health centres. Dental surgeries are customer dependent and are unregulated (i.e. dentists can locate where they wish). This is reflected in the analysis, which indicates that there are only dental surgeries located in communities with over 1000 people – and only significant levels in the 4000+ category (BMA, 2005). Similarly the provision of pharmacy services tends to concentrate in communities that have larger populations.

Education and Day Care

The provision of accessible childcare services in rural areas is of key importance given its role in allowing members of the family unit to gain employment. In terms of nursery and playgroup provision, 74% of responding Town and Community Councils did not have a publicly run nursery and 78% are without a privately run nursery, however, only 38% did not have a playgroup.

The survey gathered information on levels of school provision in rural areas of Wales and found that only 17% of Councils did not have a school for the 5-11 age group, 74% did not have a school for the 12-16 age group, and 78% did not have a school for the 17-18 age group. Town and Community Councils are well served by schools catering for the 5-11 age-group with 66%; this figure rises for those communities with more than 500 people. The proportion of communities with schools for the 12-16 age group is correlated with population size, as one might expect, the top population bands have significant levels of

provision – 76% of communities in the 4000+ band. This pattern is replicated for the 16-18 age-group.

The survey provided information on levels of provision of day-care services for the elderly and the disabled. Of all responding Councils, 74% did not have day-care facilities for the elderly and 89% did not have day-care provision for the disabled.

Places of Worship/ Information and Welfare

A high proportion of Town and Community Councils have some provision for Places of Worship, whether with a Minister resident – where the highest proportions of communities with this service are in the highest population bands (over 70% in the 1000 and above population bands), or with the Minister not resident, which is more common in those communities with lower population levels (90% have this service in population bands up to 700 people).

The survey collected information on the presence, or otherwise, of permanent libraries and mobile libraries in Town and Community Councils. Of those who responded, 79% did not have a permanent library and 33% did not have a mobile library service.

Information on various types of advice services – community legal service, counselling service, Citizen's Advice Bureau, Job Centre – was collected. In all cases, the proportion of communities with services is very much dependent on population size, with only the most populated communities having significant levels of provision. Whilst the qualitative data does to some extent support the quantitative material, some respondents pointed to the fact that information and advice can be sought via Citizen's Advice, Job Centres and legal services in the surrounding towns.

Data on the numbers of Social Rented Landlords and Exceptions Policies provides information on the provision of affordable housing in rural communities. There was a significant non-response to these questions, but of those who did respond, it was shown that levels of affordable housing provision are low across most population bands – particularly in terms of Exceptions Policy provision. In general terms, 85% of responding Councils do not have affordable housing provision through a Social Rented Landlord and 96% do not have provision through the Exceptions Policy.

Recreation facilities and Community Activities

There is good provision of Village Halls and Church Halls in many of the responding Town and Community Councils (71% and 66% respectively). However, there are slightly fewer School Halls and Community Centres present (49% and 40% respectively).

Whilst the quantitative data provides information on the levels of provision of recreation facilities, quality and accessibility issues can be induced from the qualitative data. One respondent, for example, stated that *'the facilities in the [village] hall need to be fundamentally improved'* (pop. 500-600). Another (pop. 0-400) suggested that whilst the village hall is the centre for numerous activities, income levels determine people's participation. This has connotations for social exclusion / inclusion at the micro-level.

Transport

Transport provision is of key importance in rural communities. The following section outlines data on the provision of bus and railway services, and various community transport services in Town and Community Council areas.

Only 6% of responding Town and Community Councils had no bus service at any time of the week. Bus services that run at peak hours are fairly limited in large parts of

rural Wales; only 50% of communities with less than 1000 people, have such service. This figure is slightly higher across all population bands for off-peak bus services, but falls again for services in the evening period.

Train services tend to be correlated with the population size of the Town or Community Council; 59% of those responding from communities with more than 4000 people have a train station, this falls to 10% or below for those with less than 1000 population.

The survey also collected information on Community Transport provision, specifically Dial-a-ride, community run minibus/taxi, and supermarket bus services. In general terms, 79% of responding Councils do not have a Dial-a-ride scheme, 83% do not have a community run minibus/taxi, and 79% do not have a supermarket bus service.

Crime Prevention

This section provides details on Community Safety Partnerships and Crime Prevention Advice services. In terms of Community Safety Partnerships, there is significant uptake of this particular initiative in responding rural Councils. This rises with population size; but even in communities with populations of 600 and less, 25% have this form of partnership. For Councils with a population of up to 2000, between 32% and 41% have a Community Safety Partnership, this rises to over 50% for communities with a population above 2000. A high proportion of rural communities have access to crime Prevention Advice services – 36-59% have such services in communities with populations less than 1000, rising to 70% in communities with 2000-4000 population, and 85% in communities with a population of more than 4000.

Recycling

The survey provided information on recycling facilities provided by the Local Authority, the Town or Community Council, and Voluntary Organisations.

Data collected on recycling facilities (which included provision of bottle banks, clothes recycling, paper recycling, cans and plastic recycling, and home collection of recycling material) revealed that recycling facilities provided by the Local Authority rise steadily through the population bands; 80% of communities with over 2000 people have some services. The provision of recycling facilities by the Town or Community Councils themselves, or by Voluntary Organisations is much lower; less than 10% of communities have any recycling facilities provided by these organisations, even in the highest population bands. Overall 63% of responding Town and Community Councils have some form of recycling facility.

These general trends relating to recycling facilities are substantiated by qualitative data collected in the survey. Whilst some respondents highlighted that they have to travel several miles out of the community to utilise recycling facilities, the majority stated that their community provides some form of recycling. A large proportion of these, however, suggested that this provision should be extended to include green waste, cardboard and plastic. Furthermore, a number of respondents would like to see the implementation of door-to-door recycling provision. This, as the quote below suggests, would extend access to certain sections of the population:

“Door-to-door collection would be much better especially for elderly people or those without cars”
(pop 1000-2000).

Conclusion

The 2004 Survey of Rural Services is a rich data source. Whilst it provides a set of baseline data on service provision, it will also enable comparisons to be made with previous surveys and with equivalent surveys in England. The value of the research will also emerge when the survey is updated in the future. This will allow for a valuable time-series analysis of changing levels of service provision across rural areas that will inform policy debates and decision making in rural Wales.

References:

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- Countryside Agency (2000) Rural Services in 2000. Wetherby: Countryside Agency
- Higgs, G. and White, S. (2000) Alternatives to Census-based Indicators of Social Disadvantage in Rural Communities. *Progress in Planning*. 53(1), 1-8
- Rural Development Commission (1995) *1994 Survey of Rural Services*, RDC, London.

This report is one of a series of reports produced on rural Wales by the Wales Rural Observatory.

The Wales Rural Observatory undertakes independent research and analysis on rural Wales. It is funded by the Welsh Assembly Government to support evidence-based policy-making.

The Observatory's activities are focused on four main areas:

- Collecting and analysing social and economic data on rural Wales
- Presenting these data within a Geographical Information System (GIS)
- Producing a series of descriptive and evaluative reports
- Monitoring and reviewing other research and policy relating to rural Wales

A website providing further information about the Wales Rural Observatory, including its activities and outputs, can be accessed at www.walesruralobservatory.org.uk

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