

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an overview of results from a survey and data analysis about services in rural Wales undertaken by the Wales Rural Observatory during 2010.

KEY FINDINGS

- 25% of respondents considered overall service provision in their local area to be good or very good, 46% felt it was satisfactory and 29% believed it to be poor or very poor.
- Levels of local service provision and rates of satisfaction were generally higher in the larger rural settlements (above population of 1,000).
- Over a third (38%) of rural communities had a food only shop; this was 32% in 2004.
- Most respondents rated retail provision as poor (46%).
- Over half (57%) of communities contained a Post Office. However, 31% of respondents observed that the number of post offices had decreased since 2007.
- In 2010, 14% of communities had a bank, compared with 15% with a bank in 2004.
- At 82% most communities contained a public house, however, this compares with 92% in 2004. In 2010, 77% of public houses served meals.
- 37% of communities had a restaurant; 33% had a café; and 29% contained a takeaway.
- There was a GP surgery in 30% of rural communities, compared with 32% in 2004.
- A dentist surgery was present in 14% of communities. The figure in 2004 was 16%.
- 75% of communities contained a school for the 5-11 age group; 15% for the 12-16 age group; and 14% for the 17-18 age group.
- 27% of respondents observed that public transport had decreased in their community since 2007. 21% of communities operated dial-a-ride schemes and one in five had a community minibus/taxi.
- Recycling services were perceived as good by 53% of respondents.



The Research

By a team at Cardiff University for the Wales Rural Observatory (WRO)



Cronfa Amaethyddol Ewrop ar gyfer Datblygu
Gwledig; Ewrop yn Buddsoddi
mewn Ardaloedd Gwledig
The European Agricultural Fund for
Rural Development: Europe Investing in
Rural Areas



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

BACKGROUND

The provision of services in rural areas is an important concern for policy makers and politicians as well as social commentators. In many cases, problems with services are more acute in sparsely populated areas than in dense urban ones, due to the wide dispersion of populations and the decrease in locally based services.

This report provides an overview of results from a survey of rural services in Wales, conducted by the Wales Rural Observatory [WRO] in 2010. The 2010 survey is the third in a triennial series, following the 2004 and 2007 services surveys.

In keeping with the previous two surveys, the Community or Town Council is the spatial level of analysis (**termed 'community' onwards**).

The 2010 survey explored service provision within each community; changes in the levels of provision; perceptions of service levels; quality and accessibility of services; and problems experienced by different groups. More broadly, the project provides evidence to allow the Welsh Government to monitor the impact of its policies and inform the implementation of the Rural Development Plan [RDP].

METHODS

All communities in Wales were sent a questionnaire in English and Welsh, with a covering letter outlining the research project, the Wales Rural Observatory, and why it was important to contribute to the research. The letter also acknowledged the support for the project of One Voice Wales, which is the representative body for Town and Community Councils in Wales.

A change for 2010 was that survey respondents could now also participate using an online questionnaire available through the WRO website. Online completion was the preferred option because it facilitates faster and less labour-intensive data input of questionnaire data to the 'Statistical Package for Social Science' [SPSS].

The first round of questionnaires was sent out in November 2010, followed by a reminder. The questionnaire took approximately 30 minutes to complete. It was expected that community clerks would answer the majority of the questions as, although some do not reside in the community that they serve, their position in the council tends to lead them to possess a deep understanding of local issues and the locality.

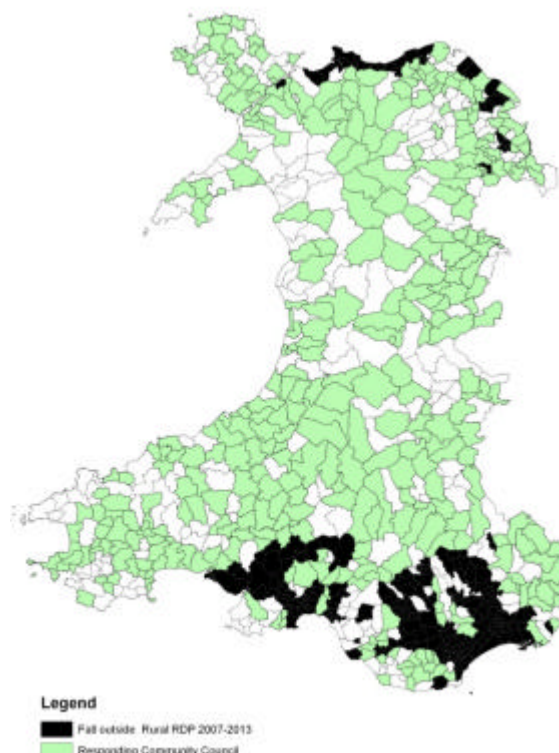
The first step in carrying out the analysis was to identify those rural Community Councils to be included in the study. Following discussions it was decided to employ the RDP 2007-2013 classification of rural.

One Voice Wales provided a list of 735 Town and Community Councils and associated clerks. A questionnaire was sent to all representative clerks, both urban and rural. There were 450 returns in total, out of 735 communities in all of Wales, representing a response rate of 61%.

Using the RDP 2007-2013 classification of rural Wales, 83% of the responding communities were considered rural, out of which 370 responses (61%) were received. The net result of this process was a reduction in the number of communities with larger populations surveyed.

Figure 1.1 shows the distribution of responses. From the map, we can see that there was a representative distribution of responses across rural Wales.

Fig 1.1 Distribution of survey responses within Wales



The statistical data from the questionnaire was analysed using SPSS, and the qualitative responses were coded thematically.

FINDINGS

Overall, 25% of clerks in rural Wales felt that service provision was good or very good, 46% considered it satisfactory and 29% considered it poor or very poor.

Shops

In 2010 there were large proportions of communities without a shop specifically for food (62%) or non-food items (74%). While only 10% had a supermarket, 54% had a general store.

Levels of shop provision rose above the rural average when community population was above 1,000 people.

Respondents were asked to assess general retail provision in their local area: 46% rated retail provision as poor.

Post Office

Across the survey, 57% of communities contained a Post Office. In terms of change, 31% of respondents observed that the number of post offices had decreased since 2007.

Longitudinal analysis showed that there had been an overall reduction in communities with Post Offices. This reduction was most severe in communities with a population of less than 500 people, where the proportion with this service was 45% in 2004 and 18% in 2010.

Banks and Building Societies

In 2010, 14% of communities in rural Wales had a bank and 9% had a building society.

The provision of banks and building societies varied according to the size of rural communities, with this facility being present in the majority of communities with populations of 2,000 or more but found rarely in communities containing less than 2,000 people.

A longitudinal comparison of communities in 2004 and 2010 showed an increase in part time banks.

Public Houses

In total, 82% of communities had a public house, compared with 92% in 2004. Over three quarters (77%) of public houses served meals

Food Outlets

Overall, 37% of responding communities had a restaurant, 33% had a café, and 29% had a take-away (all open all year around). Some cafés were seasonal (36%) and 26% of restaurants were also seasonal.

Medical Services

The provision of medical services in rural Wales was also low in 2010, 30% of rural communities had a GP, and only 14% had a NHS dental surgery. There were similarly low proportions of communities with pharmacies, health centres and hospitals. In 2004, more rural communities had a GP surgery (32%) and a dentist (16%).

The provision of medical services in smaller communities in rural Wales was particularly poor, while the majority of larger communities contained these facilities, with 97% of GPs, 62% of health centres, 88% of dental surgeries and 91% of pharmacies in communities with a population of at least 4,000 people. The concentration of these services can pose problems for people who are reliant on public transport to get to them.

Despite the low level of provision, just over half of respondents rated medical services as adequate - more rated them as good (28%) than poor (21%).

Educational Establishments and Care

Primary schools were found in 75% of rural communities. Education facilities for the older age groups were found only in the minority of communities.

The provision of educational establishments varied with population, for example 30% of rural communities with a population of between 0 and 400 people contained a primary school, compared with 100% of rural communities with a population over 4000 people.

Comparing communities longitudinally shows that schools for the 5-11 age group reduced in all community population groups especially those containing fewer than 500 people, where the level of provision fell from 56% in 2004 to 36% in 2010.

Places of Worship

Almost all (97%) communities contained a place of worship.

A quarter of respondents had a place of worship that was used for art/music; 23% were used for public meetings; 14% for school assemblies; and 38% had no other use.

Libraries

While 22% of communities had a permanent library, 64% were served by a mobile library.

Longitudinal analysis found library provision had decreased from 84% in 2004 to 78% in 2010. All reduction was from mobile libraries and fell most in less populated communities.

Access to information

At 68% most areas did not have a community internet facility. However, 85% had a public/council noticeboard and 65% had a community newsletter.

Broadband was reported to be available in the community by 85% of respondents. There was evidence that the service was not always evenly distributed throughout the community. Many respondents claimed that the service provided was poor with slow transfer speeds, and an erratic and patchy service.

Welfare

The provision of support and advice services was low throughout rural Wales and was concentrated in communities with a population of more than 2,000.

For welfare services 40% rated the provision as poor; 53% perceived the service to be adequate; and only 7% rated the level of welfare as good.

Recreation facilities

Less than half of respondents (44%) rated the level of recreational facilities as adequate and more suggested levels were bad (38%) than good (18%).

Community activities

Community activities included rugby/football clubs, pub games, arts and music events, Eisteddfodau, and agricultural and horticultural shows. However, 12% of respondents indicated that they did not have any community activities in their community.

The proportion of communities with groups for young people ranged between 26% and 39%. Two thirds of communities contained clubs for the over 60s and retired people.

Community transport

Almost two in five communities operated a bus service every day of the week (39%), whereas 29% operated six days a week and 15% operated on fewer days

Public transport was inconsistently provided within rural communities. Bus services varied, not only in the number of days they operated but also by the times of day they passed through the community. Train services were only available to a small proportion of communities.

Bus services that operated at peak hours were fairly limited for large parts of rural Wales, with less than half of communities in population bands below 1000 people having such services. Off-

peak bus service provision had improved levels of service at all population bands. However, this service level declined for the evening period. Dial-a-ride schemes were operated by 21% of communities and one in five had a community minibus/taxi. Across the survey, 27% of respondents argued that public transport had decreased in their community since 2007.

Recycling

Recycling facilities were provided in 92% of communities. Paper recycling was the most common recycling service provided, with 64% of communities having this service. A further 61% of communities had cans and plastics recycling facilities, 58% had a bottle bank and 36% had a clothes recycling scheme available. In 70% of communities, recycling was provided by the local authority at the kerbside. Recycling services were perceived as good by 53% of respondents.

Conclusion

Each community had its own unique service requirements and pressures but these tended to vary with population size. Certain services were more commonplace in rural Wales e.g. general store, post office, pub, primary school, place of worship, village/church hall. However, many of these and other services were being lost from the less populated communities. Service provision tended to fall as community population size decreased (especially in communities containing less than 1,000 people).

An enduring theme was the reliance on private transport for most members of rural communities. Particular groups, such as the young, elderly, less affluent, and those with certain disabilities, are therefore more susceptible to changes in service provision.

For further information

The full report for the Rural Services Survey 2010 is published by the WRO.

It is available free as a download from:
www.walesruralobservatory.org.uk
(Other formats available).

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