

Rural Development Sub-Committee
Issues re:- Poverty & Deprivation in Rural Wales.
Relevance & Effectiveness of W.A. in this area.

Poverty.. not having enough money or other essentials to 'get by'.
Deprivation refers to problems caused by a general lack of resources and opportunities. (Not just money.)

"One Cannot Live on A View."

GENERAL

Almost all costs related to life and work are higher in rural areas.
Housing and maintenance; Transport and Travel; Fuel for home and transport; Food purchased for families and stock.
This must be compared with the issue that, in general, incomes (where work is possible and obtainable) are lower paid and the access distances are greater than in urban catchment areas.
Council Tax is disproportionately high given regard to the older housing stock, limited amenities/services provided or accessible in geographically remote rural locations..e.g. Consult with CADW the costs of maintaining occupied Rural Listed Domestic Buildings. Owner occupiers are unable to repair/restore these. Fuel poverty is an accepted situation for many.
Social deprivation may be attributed to the systematic closure of smaller schools, shops, post offices and public houses. Many religious groups also face significant decline. Closure of small local Livestock Markets, Abattoirs and even the demise of Country Shows, ---All have created an insidious undermining of rural life and loss of social contact which has been more than evident as 'Policy' for the past decade and may be compared with the deliberate approach towards "urbanisation" in Spain during the 1970/80's and is readily defined as Social Engineering. (Manscholt Plan.)
Housing scarcity is rife across the rural sector especially within National Parks who would appear to discount the need for Family Labour in an era of the ageing Farm workforce. In fact, Planning would seem to be loaded *against family cohesion*, and the local indigenous population yet *in favour* of incoming distance-working professionals and retirees. The undeniable Housing Shortage in rural areas will not be solved by building new property which is financially beyond the buying/mortgaging scope of the low paid local population or denying family farms the opportunity to convert redundant structures to house the future work-force as happens now.
This approach creates deprivation for the would-be resident local population and is socially divisive.
It is not possible to promote artificial social cohesion - but comparatively easy to organise poverty where there is such great and unalterable disparity of household incomes = Structured Socio-economic Imbalance.
Stress and Mental Health problems should be assessed for rural Wales.
Query level of consultation and prescription for these in rural practices.

(2)

WAG should adopt greater concern for these situations than LA's as the latter frequently appear to benefit disproportionately from the financial resources available from would-be incoming Commercial and Residential applicants.
If this is not the case then at least a broader, all-Wales approach would

seem to be preferable to support the indigenous rural population.

(3)

Anti-Poverty measures known of?

Free 'Bus travel for those of pensionable age.

This is most valuable to those served by 'bus transport but of none to those where no such service exists!

The newly announced removal of Car Parking Charges at Hospitals is welcomed as being of particular assistance to the elderly and low income groups..

(4)

Clearly, isolation is a significant factor in rural living even though it may be a life choice, people should not be penalised for the decision.

The highest cost in many households to-day has become transport for work and supply needs. Most rural based families already consider and minimise vehicle journeys to cope with their diminished spend in to-day's inflationary economy.

Some means of assistance with the necessary costs of transport by car should be devised. Not for leisure/enjoyment/social travel but purely for servicing household/work/health needs.

Road Fund Concession; Fuel Vouchers; Tax Rebate for Self-employed & Micro-businesses... especially those whose work is rural based/operating. These could be Postcode evaluated, Work related or assessed on Household inhabitants resident at any remote location.

The very nature of Rural Wales and its infrastructure is such that additional bus services seldom counteract the travel difficulties for either work or family management issues to the wider area. The large additional cost of providing an underused bus service is possibly more than the adoption of one or more of the appropriate suggested options above.

(5)

Even in the People's Republic of China for those living/working in rural areas (acknowledged as being disadvantaged), concessions in the form of reduced or removed taxation have been adopted.

In Canada, for those in wide rural areas, local telephone calls are free of charge in order to maintain safe contact and social cohesion.

The U.K. appears to penalise its rural population to a harsher extent than most other nations. Central Government has seemingly disregarded this group as having little 'vote value'.

Population Groups

(7)

Children from the lowest earning rural households are disadvantaged by distance and isolation - even school transport (distance to central pick-up points) in some cases. Teenagers by lack of access to Tertiary Education, Work, Social locations and Public Transport.

(8)&(9)

Car-sharing and Hospital Car Services which once formed an important link for many have been partially eliminated by high and rising Insurance Premia. Vehicle Insurance, in addition to Tax and Fuel costs are rendering motor travel a luxury in rural locations. Young Drivers can seldom afford insurance, running costs and car purchase on their low wages. This forces numbers of them into economic inactivity or driving Uninsured/M.o.T Tested.

Mothers, wishing/needing to return to work face High Childcare costs which, in spite of Tax Aid, fail to yield sufficient margins over expenditure due to the low wage-earning economy within accessible areas of employment.
e.g. Both parents working with 2 young children, small mortgage, a car (wife's transport for part time work.) and van (S/E husband's work transport.) have NO surplus income over expenditure at all in an example from this family. Social life is negligible, holidays impossible and children's activities risk severe limitation due to cash shortage. Work Hours 80+ per week p/p.
Economically Inactive similars fare better in immediate terms.

Rural Exclusion and Isolation has increased dramatically in the past 10 years, exacerbated by the influx of urban commuters/retirees who have little direct input into their new surroundings nor any understanding of local lifestyle or tradition.

Many established, rural families who once knew and interacted with the majority their neighbours for miles around - especially those engaged in farming - will agree that they know very few residents who live within even close proximity to-day. This disadvantages the indigenous population.
It is alarmingly similar to the changes which occurred in the London Home Counties during the 1960's when the poorer, local working population was 'driven out' of traditional homes and work by incoming London commuters. Is this the desired plan for Rural Wales?

Anyone living in the countryside without travel access is becomes extremely disadvantaged. This situation creates economic inactivity and social restriction especially where the continued run-down of agricultural-based employment, retail and small industry increase travel-to-work distances..

Examples provided, which are but a few, indicate that Rural Life in Wales is being systematically 'Priced Out of Existence.' Market Forces must not be used as a means to eliminate this small but valuable sector of society.

(11)

Consider, Publicise and Introduce some if not all of the suggested measures. Seek to preserve what remains of agricultural enterprises, small and micro-businesses especially those in remote locations. e.g. Hills and Uplands..

Use Post Code/Specific Location Data to support Income Tax/Council Tax/ Transport Tax Concessions directed specifically to benefit these Remote Rural Areas.

"Urban Regeneration" has received *repeated* funding input - often in areas where the work ethic is not strong. Consider directing renewed hope and encouragement to the countryside before enthusiasm to work is lost here too.

"It is no longer possible to live cheaply in the countryside."

K.J. Somerfield.

Resident/Farming at the above location since 1963. with knowledge/experience of Rural Life and Economies of Spain; Portugal; Corsica; Ethiopia; Australia and China.

