



CRC 16/08

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North-south divide blurs as rural deprivation grows

For its latest 'State of the countryside' update on specific rural issues, the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) has been looking at how rural places across England are faring when judged against official markers of deprivation, such as housing, income, health, access to jobs, training and services, crime rates, and environmental safety.

Overall, 'Rural analysis of the Index of Multiple Deprivation' reveals that:

- Although on average, rural areas suffer less deprivation than urban areas, when we look in detail at the scores for individual small rural areas on the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), we find that sparsely populated ones (i.e. those in the most rural areas) show higher levels of deprivation than their less sparsely populated counterparts.
- Many rural areas score poorly on the aspects of the deprivation indices which measure housing conditions, such as having no central heating, and on access to services.
- Comparing the 2004 and 2007 IMD ranks suggests that villages and hamlets have become relatively more deprived. Also, a regional comparison of change in average ranks showed that many areas in the south become relatively more deprived compared to areas in the north, indicating that the commonly perceived 'north-south' divide may be becoming less pronounced.
- While an analysis of the IMD can tell us something about patterns of deprivation in rural England, comparisons with analyses of other types of measurement, using data about low income or long-term illness, show that it does not give a full picture of where people suffering deprivation can be found – for example, whereas only 2.4% of areas in England in the worst 20% of IMD scores are in rural areas, 17% of households with less than 60% of the median income are located in rural areas.
- Public authorities need to identify where deprived rural people are, so that they can ensure they are offered support, and use a range of measures, in addition to the IMD, within their evidence base for policies and programmes. The model of deprivation on which the IMD is based (associating low income levels in a specific area with low educational qualifications and poor employment levels, influencing health inequalities and poor housing with high crime rates and a poor environment) is more applicable to concentrated deprivation that is typical of large towns and cities than to rural areas. The presence of rural people scattered across a wide geographical area who need support to move out of deprivation will not be 'picked up' by an approach that looks at the average scores for geographical areas, even at a small spatial scale.

Nicola Lloyd CRC's Director for Analysis explains: "The spatial differences shown in this report indicate why there is a need to approach matters relating to rural deprivation at a smaller spatial scale and in parallel with local knowledge and expertise. At a joint seminar held by CRC and Communities and Local Government (CLG) the participants discussed how a more sophisticated understanding of rural deprivation could be developed so that local bodies can determine how deprivation in their areas can be addressed through regeneration initiatives. The CRC and CLG should continue to work together to give public authorities who have to deal with these issues at local and regional levels the tools to address rural deprivation wherever it might be found."

ENDS

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Notes for editors:

1 'Rural analysis of the Index of Multiple Deprivation State of the countryside update 5', CRC WEB 38, December 2008 is available at www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/files/socupdate5.pdf

2 Further information of the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2007 can be found at: www.communities.gov.uk/communities/neighbourhoodrenewal/deprivation/deprivation07/

3 Further planned State of the countryside updates will be covering the following topics:

- Housing market
- Commercial investment in the urban fringe
- Financial inclusion
- Upland communities
- Employment and skills.

4 The CRC was established in April 2005 and became an independent body on 1 October 2006, following the enactment of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act, 2006. The role of the CRC is to provide well-informed, independent advice to Government and ensure that policies reflect the real needs and circumstances of people living and working in rural England. We give particular focus to tackling disadvantage and economic under-performance.

We have three key functions:

- advocate: the voice for rural people, business and communities;
- expert adviser: providing evidence-based, objective advice to Government and others; and
- independent watchdog: monitoring and reporting on the delivery of policies nationally, regionally and locally.

Further information about the CRC and its work can be found at: www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk