



Measuring Deprivation in Rural Areas – a seminar 5th December 2008

At this joint seminar between CRC and CLG (Regeneration Strategy Division) we agreed that *'what gets measured gets done'* – highlighting the key importance of developing and using measures that comprehensively reflect rural deprivation in England. The seminar opened with a presentation by Roger Wilshaw, Head of the Regeneration Strategy Unit at CLG, on *'Transforming Places, changing lives: a framework for regeneration'*, which has been out to consultation recently and is the current policy context for the deprivation measurement issue. Download this presentation at: <http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/files/clg%20rural.pdf>

Nicola Lloyd, Director for Analysis at CRC, then explained that they had commissioned the Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion (OCSI) to conduct an analysis of deprivation in rural areas at the end of last year, to provide further evidence which will help CRC fulfil its statutory role of 'tackling rural disadvantage'.

The main presentation was given by Tom Smith, Director of OCSI, who completed the project 'Deprivation in rural areas: Quantitative analysis and socio-economic classification' for the CRC in June this year. He explained that their analysis shows that deprived places in rural England tend to be at a much smaller scale than those in urban areas, both in terms of geographical area and numbers of people. He also described how OCSI's analysis of measures of deprivation, other than those included in the Indices of Deprivation, such as people with long-term limiting illness and part-time workers, shows that most deprived people do not live in those areas defined as highly deprived using the Index of Multiple Deprivation. In rural areas, deprivation tends to be much more dispersed than in urban areas.

Download this presentation at: http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/files/OCSI_CRC_EMAIL.pdf

A number of questions were raised by the participants. These included points about the greater proportion of older people in rural areas; the level of child poverty in rural areas; the non-inclusion of larger market towns (i.e. those between 10,000 and 30,000 population with a certain type of service endowment) in rural analysis; the methodological issues of comparing areas in the bottom 10% of the IMD and those in the bottom 20% and the issue of using 'artificial' cut-off points for funding allocation. A participant from the Office of National Statistics said that the OCSI dataset at output area level would be published on the Neighbourhood Statistics website soon. In terms of approach to the issue of deprivation, one participant said that there needs to be some attention to what rural areas can offer as a positive contribution to regeneration across a wider area. Another commented that one possible cause of individual deprivation is the non-take up of benefits, so this issue should be addressed by government, as well as focusing on regenerating specific deprived areas.

The third presentation was given by Tom Spencer and Paul Teasdale from the Scottish Government. Download the presentation at:

http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/files/ScottishGovernment_Ruralpoverty.pdf

They described how their focus is on developing measures of income poverty in rural areas, particularly as the Scottish IMD is not an ideal tool for examining rural deprivation because, like the English IMD, it is a measure of concentrated deprivation in geographical areas. The areas of most concentrated deprivation are almost all in urban areas.

Ninety-five percent of Scotland is rural using the Scottish definition.

This differs from the England and Wales definition because it excludes settlements over 3,000 and is based on drive times to centres of population. They have been looking at measures of the cost of living for Scotland so that these can be set alongside measures of low income and measures of the accessibility of goods and services. This is a difficult methodological problem, especially as the major source of official information on family spending the Expenditure and Food Survey has too small a sample to really reflect spending in rural Scotland.

The comments stimulated by this presentation introduced a range of new issues related to social policy, which were then explored further in the afternoon open discussion, chaired by Graham Garbutt, Chief Executive of the CRC. The question of choice and quality in public services was raised. This is a difficult model to apply in rural areas due to underdevelopment of the supply side of any market in public services. Another issue raised was the impact of the economic downturn which is hard to predict. The 1990s recession narrowed differences between the UK regions – unlike previous recessions. In the current recession jobs are already being lost in manufacturing industry and (at least in Scotland) it generally not recognised that a relatively high proportion of manufacturing jobs are in rural areas. A participant from Sussex commented that small businesses in her area are losing employment very fast now.

The question of how this recession might alter the common goal of economic development from growth to well-being and how that is more consistent with rural communities, where many people have chosen to live because of wider benefits, such as better education, environmental quality etc. was discussed. Other participants raised the need to challenge 'nimbyism' so that housing and business development can take place in rural areas; housing and services affordability and accessibility; the question of the 'rural premium' – the idea that as services can cost more to deliver in rural areas this cost should be taken into account when allocating resources for services in rural areas and the role of Local Area Agreements and the new Comprehensive Area Assessment in determining local regeneration needs and the interdependence of rural and urban areas in England. Graham Garbutt drew the audience back to the issue of measurement and the capacity of local communities and public authorities to operate effectively in the new devolved funding regimes so that the needs of deprived people in rural areas are properly reflected in their policies and programmes.

The seminar concluded with final statements from CRC and CLG about the importance of supporting local public authorities who need to be able to assess the level and patterns of rural deprivation in their own areas and take this information into account in their plans, as well as finding ways that this data and analysis can be used at national level to assess the need for resources to support social and economic development and regeneration directed from national programmes. The principle of devolution to regional and local government in the sub-national review underlies this approach and in many ways leadership at that level is what is required to take it forward, although the issue of capacity to do so still needs to be addressed.

In summary, Graham Garbutt said that the event had raised many questions about how to take this subject forward. These included how the increase in unemployment expected due to recession will be dealt with alongside the regeneration focus on tackling worklessness; how affordability is a key issue in the housing market and in terms of public services, which brings in the question of income levels and minimum incomes required for a decent standard of living; how rural areas are very diverse and variable so detailed analysis of local needs is essential; how regeneration targets should not just focus on volume; how benefits take-up should be raised as an objective of welfare policy and finally the wider question of how to secure sustainable rural communities for the future.