



# Policy Position Paper

## Social Inclusion

*The causes of social exclusion are many and complex and one solution does not fit all. ACRE would like to see a range of targeted person-centred solutions to empower individuals and communities. It is essential that policy is 'rural proofed' and information is available nationally to identify where social exclusion is dispersed, as is the case in rural areas and that resources are allocated fairly based on need.*

Despite the apparent affluence and quality of life associated with rural areas, approximately 20% of residents experience social exclusion mainly as a result of their low incomes, inability to access services and higher costs of living. However, their circumstances remain largely hidden from public view because in the majority of rural communities, affluence and poverty exists side-by-side and the need is not picked up by the most widely used Government statistics. The traditional 'self-dependency' of rural communities compounds the problems because people do not declare or actively hide their situation. Also because rural social exclusion and deprivation is very often hidden, it can aggravate the disadvantage for these people and communities.

Social exclusion can be defined as the situation where some members of a community have fewer opportunities than the majority in the area. They often experience a combination of several kinds of deprivation and will usually have fewer prospects for the future. Rural social exclusion is higher amongst certain groups, notably Gypsies and Travellers, lone parents (and to some extent two parent families where

incomes are low or intermittent), the disabled, unemployed, those on low incomes, migrants, seasonal workers and young and older people.

A widening gap between the 'haves' and 'have not's' in rural areas is not reflected in area-based national statistics, even though it is common to use such measures to demonstrate whether government policy is producing a fair society. The current spatial analysis of deprivation using the Index of Multiple Deprivation fails to acknowledge the extent or impact of social exclusion and poverty across rural parts of the country so making it far more difficult to address within public policy responses.

There is no single solution to achieving a better quality of life for those who might otherwise be marginalised within their affluent surroundings. Solutions depend on combinations of factors that help empower individuals and communities. Tackling problems of lack of access to services and isolation from peer support is a key element, and central to the work of RCAN members. These include the availability of facilities for community activity, and the willingness of local people including parish councils, to understand and support those who are least able to articulate their needs.



### ACRE's rural vision

Our vision is that rural communities will increasingly take a leading role in ensuring the social, environmental and economic well-being of all their residents. They will do this in a way that provides for the present generation and also plans for future needs and future challenges. RCAN members will be there to stimulate their thinking, support their work and help turn their aspirations into reality.

# Issue

## socially excluded households tend to be scattered and hard to identify

Socially excluded households in rural areas tend to be geographically scattered and therefore not identifiable when the main characteristics of an area are profiled. The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) is the default statistical tool nationally but it does not drill down to the small areas of geography where the deprivation, social exclusion and poverty in rural areas will likely to be present. As such historical use of the IMD has made it harder to argue for the provision of support in rural areas.

### **Solution** Research to uncover previously hidden social exclusion and deprivation

To help identify previously hidden socially excluded individuals and communities, ACRE supports greater investment in research that captures small area data.

ACRE and members of the Rural Community Action Network (RCAN) commissioned Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion (OCSI) to develop the Index of Multiple Deprivation to a lower level of application, namely the lowest level that Census data is available – Census Output Area (COA) of between 100 and 300 people.

Its purpose is to promote the equitable allocation of resources by strengthening the evidence base on rural needs and providing evidence at a local level. This has helped to understand where rural areas may be at most risk and has in some cases led to increased regeneration funding to those areas and enabled mainstream services in rural areas to more effectively target services.

# Issue

## financial exclusion, barriers to work and loss of services in rural areas

Those who depend on public and community services are an increasing minority in many rural communities. Therefore, when services and local facilities such as post offices, shops and pubs become threatened with closure, the impact is exaggerated in this group. Alongside this, expenditure on public services is often substantially lower per head in rural areas than elsewhere, though the cost of providing services (per head) is often higher.

Services required in rural areas are the same as those in urban areas, including access to affordable personal credit, banking services and broadband. It is estimated 200,000 people in the rural UK do not have access to a bank account. Transport is also a challenge, especially for people without a car and who are poorly served by public or community transport. There are also well established barriers to housing caused by higher costs of open market housing and shortages of low cost housing of all tenures. Barriers to employment in rural areas are due to patterns of lower pay and seasonality of work alongside rising unemployment during the current recession. All issues can be magnified when there is lack of access to advice, information and support. This in turn can lead to lower welfare benefit take-up and participation in decision-making processes.

### **Solution** Partnership approach to improve financial inclusion

RCAN member, Rural Action Derbyshire, has taken a lead role in their county's Financial Inclusion Partnership, helping to bring together agencies to create a strategy to tackle financial exclusion. The aim of their work has been to create the conditions in Derbyshire which enable people to be financially included. They have achieved this by working

collectively to implement a strategy to inform and shape the work of all agencies concerned. Their work promotes economic support, learning and advice, identifies gaps in service provision and looks at ways of addressing unmet needs with a view to sharing good models of delivery across the county.

# Issue

## support for specific communities

Evidence shows that social exclusion is higher amongst certain communities including Gypsies and Travellers and migrant workers. Aside from this situation being detrimental to these communities, the pattern of disadvantage can be repeated in subsequent generations. Therefore, timely and effective solutions specific to these communities needs are essential.

### **Solution** Tailored grassroots support and advice services

Experience shows that action needs to be tailored to the community, family or individuals needs. Several RCAN members are working with Gypsy and Traveller communities to improve social inclusion. The Travelling Together Team from Rural Community Action Nottinghamshire offers a free and confidential service to Gypsy and Travellers that has identified many areas where this community feels excluded; such as support for homeless families, help with finding accommodation and accessing housing benefit. The service aims to prevent homelessness and reduce isolation within the travelling community and develop services and networks for these often dispersed ethnic minorities. In a similar way, Surrey Community Action's support for the Gypsy and Traveller community aims to enhance their quality of life by providing access to advice, training, funding and advocacy. It has secured funding for two years to provide dedicated support to vulnerable adults in need of a housing-related support service to maintain their independent living. The project aims to improve housing for Gypsies and Travellers, raise the awareness of local authorities to their housing needs, improve health, access to education and employment and integration.

Another RCAN member, the Community Council of Devon's project, 'Safer Devon Migrant Worker Hubs', aims to provide support and access to migrant workers. The Hubs provide information, advice and guidance on local services to migrant workers and other Black and Minority Ethnic communities. It has promoted community safety among various target groups, improved networking and provided opportunities for local service providers from all sectors to meet the needs of minority communities and has promoted community cohesion.

Cornwall Rural Community Council's 'Young Carers Project', provides a support service to young carers aged under 18 by the way of one-to-one support, organised group work and activities, and raises awareness of young carer issues throughout the statutory and voluntary sectors. It offers young carers advice, information and emotional support, and the opportunity for activities and outings, often with other young carers in order to improve life chances, increase self-esteem and reduce isolation.



## About ACRE

Action with Communities in Rural England is the national umbrella body of the Rural Community Action Network (RCAN), which operates at national, regional and local level in support of rural communities across the country. We aim to promote a healthy, vibrant and sustainable rural community sector that is well connected to policy and decision-makers who play a part in delivering this aim. ACRE is nationally recognised for its expertise in ensuring rural community-led solutions are central to public policy debate.

ACRE is a member of:

- Homes & Communities Agency Rural Housing Advisory Group
- Age UK Rural Advisory Group
- Ministerial Task Force on climate change, the environment and sustainable development
- The new national rural coalition, under the chairmanship of Matthew Taylor MP, which aims to take forward his 2008 proposals to government on a Living, Working, Countryside.

## Rural Community Action Network (RCAN)

The RCAN comprises 38 Rural Community Councils (RCCs) at local level, RCC regional groupings and their national arm in ACRE, providing coverage of all rural areas throughout England. RCCs are county-based, independent, local development agencies that, for decades, have been delivering support on the ground to enable rural communities to improve quality of life for all. They act as a strategic voice for rural communities, allowing grassroots issues to be championed and solutions worked out in partnership between statutory, voluntary and private sector providers. Their strength lies in their ability to work within communities in an inclusive and holistic way, helping local people to develop local solutions and identify unmet needs through a unique approach to community-led planning. Alongside this, RCCs provide a trusted local support network for rural community groups, including dedicated expertise in arenas such as transport, housing, the management of community-owned facilities, social enterprise and rural services.

### RCAN national coverage, local reach

Members of the RCAN have a long history of supporting communities to find solutions to their needs. We do this by supporting all sections of the community to plan for the future and by developing relevant services that meet the needs of all generations. We do this with a passion for social inclusion, and high standards throughout the network.

Network members:

- Provide genuine reach into rural communities across England, linking national, regional and local policy with community action at the grassroots
- Promote and develop local solutions that benefit the social, environmental and economic well-being of communities
- Act as a focal point for partners across statutory, private and voluntary sectors, working together to benefit rural communities
- Tackle disadvantage by ensuring their work within rural communities reaches out to marginalised groups and encourages the development of local services for those least able to travel.

This document is one of a series covering the following topics, Rural Challenges, Community Led Planning, Climate Change, Rural Community Buildings, Housing, Rural Services, Transport, Sustainable Communities, Social Inclusion, Older People, Children & Young People, Healthcare and Digital Inclusion.



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