



**Older People's Commissioner for Wales**  
**Comisiynydd Pobl Hŷn Cymru**

## **EQUALITY & RURALITY FACTSHEET**

### **Introduction**

Whilst rurality is not a protected characteristic in the Equality Act 2010 the issues for older people arising from living in rural areas can have a direct impact upon their wellbeing and quality of life.

Powys, Ceredigion, Gwynedd, Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire are ranked amongst the twenty lowest population density areas across all 348 local authority areas in England and Wales. Although accurate data for Wales is lacking, in 2012 the Commission for Rural Communities estimated 23% of the rural population to be aged 65 and over, compared to 18% in urban areas.

### **The issues**

For many older people, retiring to a small village or rural area is a positive and welcoming idea. However, if their circumstances change the experience of ageing can turn into a negative experience very quickly. This is especially so as older people develop additional needs which need additional or more complex service provision from public agencies.

The Commission for Rural Communities identified as a problem the lack of engagement and consultation with older people in rural areas. The Audit Commission in England believes that in relation to housing planning strategists are using an approach that focuses on dependency which does not serve older people well.

There are indications that older people are healthier in rural areas. However, more needs to be done to support independent living and the

creation of 'age friendly' communities. Older people are more likely to be homeowners but tend to live in older properties so the availability of 'home improvement agency' services is vital in rural areas.

Independent access to transport is a critical issue for older people in rural areas but age discrimination in the financial services sector, particularly in relation to insurance, can make this necessity costly. Reliance on heating fuel, as opposed to being linked to the gas system, may contribute to older people in rural areas experiencing fuel poverty.

The decline in local services such as banks and post offices must be seen in terms of the erosion of the infrastructure for the provision of information and advice services. Technology must be better utilised to provide services to older people in rural areas. Whilst there is increasing use of assistive technologies, better broadband provision in rural areas would facilitate wider use of digital technology.

Paying for care is as much an issue for older people living in rural areas as anywhere else but housing options available to those in rural areas who want to 'downsize' need consideration. Planning regulations in greenbelt areas and national parks will have an impact on the development of retirement housing. The possibility of co-housing and extra-care or sheltered care complexes becoming 'rural hubs' for older people could be explored.

## **Conclusions**

There is increasing recognition of the need for older people's services to be integrated across housing, health and social care and there are increasing moves towards policy convergence in these fields in urban areas. This must be replicated in rural communities to facilitate and support telecare, home adaptation and hospital discharge services.

The needs of older people in rural areas are the same as those in urban areas but they are intensified by isolation. Transportation is the common link across all policy and service areas and must be addressed as a matter of urgency.

To see the evidence base for this factsheet and further resources visit [www.olderpeoplewales.com](http://www.olderpeoplewales.com)