



Sustaining Rural Services and Infrastructure Survey Wales

Introduction

Over the period February 2017 – April 2017 PLANED, as part of the SPARCE (Strengthening participation among rural people in Europe) project distributed surveys and started conversations about rural services.

The Aim of the project was to clarify key issues when considering rural services and infrastructure, identification of case studies to show how rural services can be sustained by communal action. Agree a consensus on how citizens can participate in shaping policy and taking action. Disseminate ideas and suggestions throughout Europe.

Methodology

The survey, designed by ACRE, was slightly adapted and translated into Welsh. It was distributed through PLANED networks, via Wales Rural Network and online using Twitter and Facebook.

PLANED also used a number of events to talk about the survey and get first hand responses. These events were: The Pembrokeshire Enterprise Network and Community Forum focus group, held in Pembrokeshire.



Pembrokeshire Enterprise Network Event 14th March 2017

Results

There were 56 replies to the survey in total. 52 replied in English language and 4 in Welsh. The majority of respondents were from Pembrokeshire, however there was a cross country spread of responses.

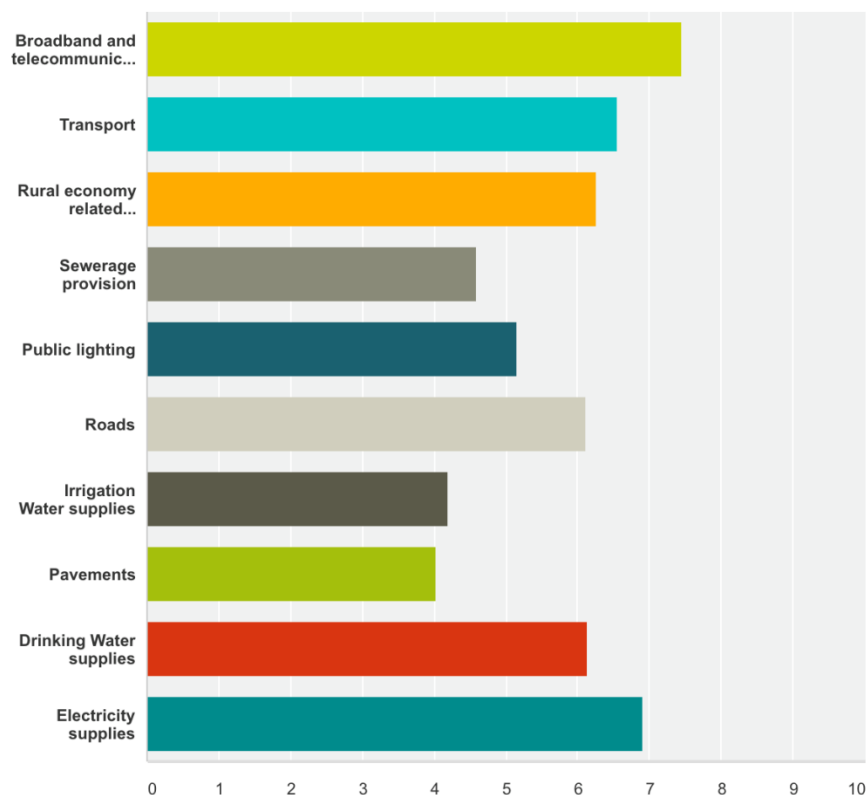


The average size of community was 2,500

Ranking of Infrastructure

Which of the following types of infrastructure are important in your rural community? Please rank in order of importance 10 being the most important and 1 being the least important!

Answered: 34 Skipped: 15



We asked people who responded in general terms ‘*what are the condition, sustainability and access to each in your rural community?*’ The following are ranked in order of importance (according to responses).

1. Broadband and telecommunications

Providers

There are multiple Internet Service Providers (ISP) – but the infrastructure provider in Wales is BT Openreach. In terms of line rental and ISP's there are over 400 different providers including BT Retail, Virgin and Talk Talk.

Through the Welsh Government Superfast Cymru project there is a roll out of service which aims to bring access to high speed broadband to the majority of homes and businesses in Wales that cannot get it through the private sector's own commercial programmes. There is also the possibility of satellite broadband and Welsh Government offer financial support for homes and businesses who wish to do this. Multiple providers of telecommunications all of whom are private sector i.e. EE, Vodafone.

Condition, sustainability and access to each in your rural community.

Responses were mixed regarding these issues, which is no surprise! Of the responses / comments the majority (14) said that their broadband and telecommunications were “poor,” or “very poor”, only 2 said “terrible”. 8 rated the service “good” (although patchy and flaky) and 2 respondents said “excellent”. Not everyone commented and it was difficult to differentiate between phone and broadband.

Some respondents said that the service was patchy and slow. Some had no phone coverage at all and others felt there was little chance of some rural communities ever accessing superfast broadband.

However some people did say that their service was excellent.

“Internet and telecommunications network connectivity within Powys is generally poor. Many smaller, rurally isolated communities and dwellings are within mobile network blank-spots” “Of 10 wards with the slowest download speed in the UK, 3 are within Powys.”

“Personal and individual supplies are available and good. A more comprehensive community service would be beneficial e.g. free wifi hotspots”.

2. Electricity Supplies

Rated as the second most important service infrastructure, in rural communities.

Providers

Provided by private companies (mainly the “Big 6”) Western Power provides the infrastructure in South Wales and Scottish Power in North Wales. Welsh Government are currently looking into setting up their own electricity supply company.

Condition, sustainability and access to each in your rural community.

It would be fair to say that in Wales there is good electricity infrastructure. Comments made were generally “good” or “OK”. Someone hinted at the fact that power cuts are now less frequent than in the past. However someone else said, *“The village is at high altitude close to the Irish Sea and so subject to extreme weather conditions which can lead to power outage a few times a year”* another person said *“bad weather disrupts supply”*.

Communities in rural Pembrokeshire have looked at undergrounding cables. This was done in Narberth as part of an enhancement scheme. Someone suggested more *“underground supplies”* which would reduce the vulnerability due to adverse weather conditions of disruption.

Opportunities for future development were identified and Wales is pioneering energy generation, *“Electricity networks need to work in partnership with communities in their development of hydro schemes”*

“There are a few emergent community energy generation schemes in Powys”

Of the respondents who provided comments to this section 17 said “good”, 2 were either upgrading and needed upgrading, 5 said they were affected by power shortage during adverse weather conditions.

3. Transport

Ranked 3rd was transport infrastructure. It is widely agreed that there is an ongoing issue with availability of public transport in rural areas.

Providers

Provision of transport is a mix of private companies, local government subsidised bus services and community transport. It seems there are differences across the country in this make-up of provision.

Condition, sustainability and access to each in your rural community.

Respondents commented the service was “poor” (17 respondents) and suggested that it seemed to be “getting worse”. *“Local public transport services are poor and getting worse”*.

“Bus services [in Powys] aside from a couple of cross-Wales routes, are sparse, infrequent and localised. Both bus and rail services receive significant levels of public subsidy.”

A small minority (8) who commented, said they have a “good” service. The majority of those responding said the service is “poor”, “minimal”, and “unreliable”.

“Very limited public transport, the infrastructure is present but out of date and services are too infrequent to be useful” Some services stop at 5.30pm so cannot be use for shift work or other opportunities. Because of this they are used less and consequently services are removed because they are not economically viable.”

There are opportunities for greater use of trains and access either though safe walking routes and/or opening new lines. A train line from Carmarthen to Aberystwyth was suggested.

There is a good hourly bus service running from Haverfordwest to Aberystwyth that is supported by the Welsh Government and a train service from Fishguard and Goodwick which is good.

“Powys has only 2 rural rail lines which only serve a small number of Powys communities and have infrequent train services. Mainline services have to be accessed out of the county”

“Powys has one of the largest Community Transport infrastructures in Wales with 20 services currently in operation. This provides invaluable support for isolated and vulnerable citizens to access essential services and amenities and many journey’s for health related needs and appointments. However, also these services charge affordable fare to their users they are dependent upon grant funding and small public sector funding to sustain their operations”

Someone suggested, *“better communication between commercial operators and communities, to develop a more sustainable and coordinated approach”*.

In Pembrokeshire, PLANED has been working on a partnership project looking at transport across the county, and the service (public and private) for people with disabilities is deemed to be very poor. Problems with taxis not turning up, buses only having room for one wheel chair user, and lack of knowledge from staff for the transport services leads to uncomfortable conversations and situations. Members of the network include DEWIS, PACTO, Pembrokeshire Access Group and PLANED, with an open door policy to anyone who would like to voice a barrier they have experienced.

4. Rural Economy related infrastructure (banks, markets and business facilities which could include cold storage and milk collection)

Ranked 4th in order of importance

Providers

Providers of these economy related services are a mix of public, private and third sector and mainly private sector.

Condition, sustainability and access to each in your rural community.

A number of comments identified the fact that this sort of infrastructure was fragmented – strong in some communities, whilst non-existent in others. There is a continuing trend for banks to close in small towns and villages, which was highlighted by the majority (14 out of 25 who commented on this question) of respondents. Also the lack of post offices, shops and public houses came up several times.

“Poor business support was identified and challenging market conditions, with reducing local business support (e.g. banks and advisory services)”

The Pembrokeshire Business Panel and Pembrokeshire Enterprise Network have identified that there is insufficient assistance for start up business and established macro and micro business growth. They have also identified that there is a lack of skills and entrepreneurship training for young people. This is reflected in the

Community Action Plans (2011 - 2014), and there is a need for a greater investment in the skills agenda.

“Increasingly difficult to get to the bank, 15 miles to good supermarket, few local shopping facilities”

“Communities in Powys are experiencing the progressive closure of crucial high street amenities e.g. banks, with several of its main market towns now being without high street banking service. The number of livestock markets within the county has seen significant reduction in local livestock markets (crucial in a county with a significant rural economy based predominantly upon hill sheep farming) since the foot and mouth crisis. This has damaged the agricultural economy but also consequently damaged local retailers and services due to loss of trade previously generated from market days.”

There were some positive comments:-

“Mixed fortunes New businesses opening, but the bank and post office have shut”. 2 respondents said they were “good”.

“In general, the town is in a good position, mostly due to seasonal visitors in very high numbers”.

Milk storage and collection is “good”.

5. Roads

Providers

Whilst trunk roads are maintained directly through Welsh Government and are the arteries of the Welsh transport system, the majority of road infrastructure is managed by each of the 22 local authority in Wales (Local Government).

Condition, sustainability and access to each in your rural community.

Again there is a mixed picture! The majority of comments were that they were “good” (15 positive comments), 6 people said they were “poor” or in “need of upgrade”. As often comes up in community appraisals and action plans, potholes are a major bug bear, especially in rural communities.

Comments were that there is generally good condition for main and trunk roads, but poorer in rural areas. Some roads have been identified at being at risk from coastal erosion (Newgale, Pembrokeshire), and are prone to flooding.

“There are maintenance concerns for roads and many needing resurfacing”. At a time of local authority cut backs – people have noticed a decline in maintenance of their

roads. *“As of March 2017 there is a maintenance backlog of £57million and there has been progressive deterioration in road surface quality in recent years”.*

As identified in community action plans, speed on some rural roads remains an issue – needing reduced speed limits through villages. Someone brought up the fact that roads in their community were not gritted or ploughed in ice/ snow conditions.

6. Drinking water

Ranked 6th – one would assume that it would be a top priority if drinking water was not freely available in Wales.

Providers

In Wales, water is supplied by Dwr Cymru (Welsh Water), a not for profit company. Dwr Cymru does not have shareholders, and any financial surpluses are reinvested in the business for the benefit of customers

Condition, sustainability and access to each in your rural community.

All respondents who commented on this section (24) said the service was “good”. *“These do not feature significantly as a concern in public engagement exercises and consultations; however Powys does have a few small communities and farms which are not upon the mains network and someone commented that, there are pressures from time to time due to very old pipes”*

7. Public lighting

Providers

Managed by the local authority. (Local Government)

Condition, sustainability and access to each in your rural community.

13 comments (out of the 26 people who commented) were “good” or “OK”. Some people have suggested that lighting could be turned off during the night (12midnight - 6am) to save on costs. *“There is a mixed picture concerns about industrial light pollution on dark skies and nature, but in some areas road safety and community safety could be improved by better lighting”.*

Some have said there is limited public lighting but do not want more, as they live in designated dark spot and night pollution is not wanted.

“Still too much orange sodium lighting that ruins the heavens at night. Rogue orange farm lights are a problem too”

8. Sewerage provision

Providers

Mains sewage infrastructure for people who have access to it is provided by Dwr Cymru (see response to question 6). People who are not on mains sewage have private drainage systems.

Condition, sustainability and access to each in your rural community.

Sewage provision often comes up in community action planning and appraisals as many rural villages in Pembrokeshire are not on the mains sewerage system. However the general response from the Wales wide questionnaire was pretty positive – that the provision was good across the board and that there were not any major issues. The cost to install mains sewage from Welsh Water, however, was felt to be prohibitive.

There were a minority of negative comments relating to the poor infrastructure in villages.

“Rural areas have Victorian sewage system with all water drainage going into one system. With climate change and more rainfall and flooding system cannot cope.”

9. Irrigation of water supplies

Providers

Not sure who takes ownership, possibly Dwr Cymru?

Condition, sustainability and access to each in your rural community.

People’s comments were that they either did not know anything about irrigation of water supplies or that there was no problem what so ever. *“Plenty of water in Wales!”*

People did comment that flooding is an issue – that if it is not managed effectively by regularly inspection and by keeping the ditches and drains cleared it presents problems.

“These do not feature significantly as a concern in public engagement exercises and consultations; however Powys does have a few small communities and farms which are not upon the mains network.”

10.pavements

Last in the ranking was pavements.

Providers

Managed by each of the local authorities in Wales. (Local Government)

Condition, sustainability and access to each in your rural community.

By and large not a wide spread problem – but some roads are dangerous due to no pavements.

As with public lighting in community consultations (Pembrokeshire) there are always opposing views on living in the countryside and not having pavements and lighting, as opposed to increase lighting and better pavements/ footpaths. Some people want them and some do not.

“Concern over pavements (either lack of pavements in smaller communities and their condition within larger communities) is a common place feature of the results of public engagement exercises and consultations.”

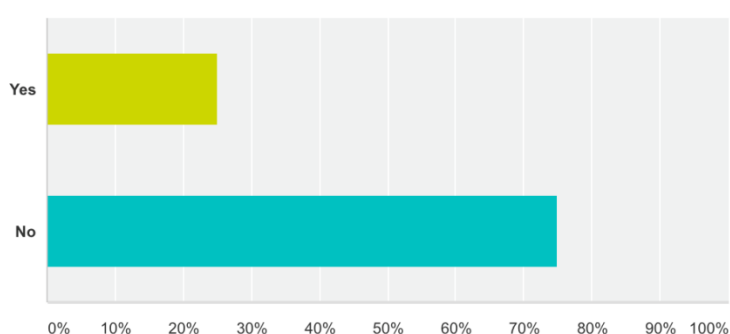
Pavements within towns have been highlighted as needing to be improved (Fishguard, Pembrokeshire). Some say provision is “poor but not necessary” Most say, if they have them, condition is “good”.

In towns, pavements that are wheelchair accessible are an issue.

Ranking of services are important in your rural community?

In general terms are services equally distributed, sustainable and accessible in your rural communities?

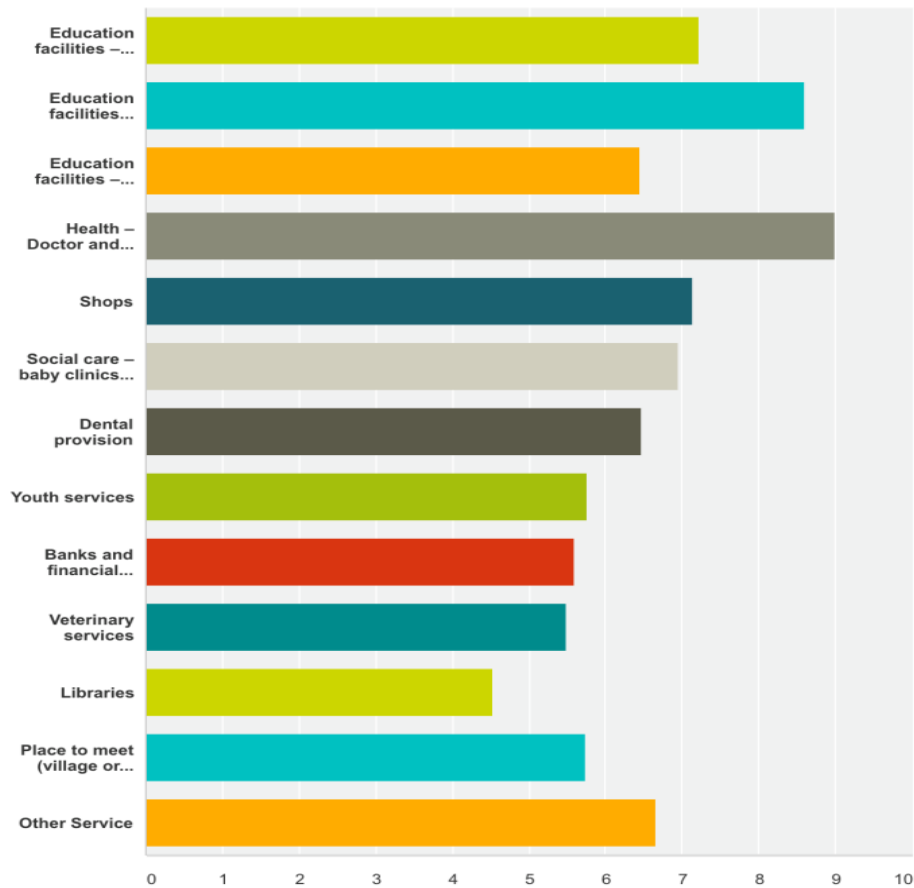
Answered: 24 Skipped: 25



Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	25.00% 6
No	75.00% 18
Total	24

**Which of the following services are important in your rural community?12
being the most important and 1 being the
least important!**

Answered: 25 Skipped: 24



Ranked in order of most important:-

1. Health – doctors and hospitals
2. Education Facilities – primary and secondary school
3. Education facilities – infant, early years
4. Shops
5. Social care – baby clinics, chiropody & other services
6. Other service
7. Dental provision
8. Education facilities – higher education and university
9. Youth services
10. Place to meet (village or community hall or centre)
11. Banks and financial services
12. Veterinary services

Service Providers

Service	Main provider
Health – doctors and hospitals	Central (Welsh) Government, National Health Board regional health authority
Education Facilities – primary and secondary school	Provided by local authority/ local government.
Education facilities – infant, early years	Provided by the local authority in the main, but there are also third sector and private early years provision. Education policy is directed by Welsh Government.
Shops	Private businesses, independent traders, large multinationals, there are some community shops.
Social care – baby clinics, chiropody & other services	Mixed mainly central government, local authority, Regional Health Board (National Health Service), some private companies.
Other service:- Libraries	Local authority owned.
Dental provision	Private and NHS service. Regional Health Boards have the responsibility to ensure adequate provision of NHS dental services to the population within their area.
Education facilities – higher education and university	Mixed private and central government funding, some local authority funding
Youth services	Local authority and third sector.
Place to meet (village or community hall or centre)	Local authority and community council and third sector owned and run.
Banks and financial services	Private businesses, there are some credit unions. Credit unions are financial co-operatives owned and managed by the members who use them. At present, there are 21 credit unions covering the whole of Wales
Veterinary services	Private sector – one person has said community.

Location of services:-

A lot of very specific geographic information was provided, but in general terms the majority of services were based in the larger towns and villages.

What main factor inhibits the better provision or threatens the future viability of rural services and infrastructure?

Comments provided: -

“Small and fragmented populations – high costs of services and reduced public purse”.

“Lack of money/ funding / investment”

“Lack of understanding by councils of the needs of the 21st century.”

“Within Powys, this dynamic is further exacerbated by its nature as a large geographical area with low and sparsely population. This brings with it disproportionate expenditure for key infrastructure e.g. highways, as well as the increased expenses involved in delivering face-to-face services due to lengthy travel times and costs. Similar issues of market accessibility and travel distance also act as an inhibitor to many types of business and manufacturing being able to operate within Powys, with further negative impacts upon the local economy as a consequence.”

“Increased costs of fuel and utilities”.

“Poor broadband facilities.”

“The UK Second homes culture”

“Accessible transport”

“A proper structured community development programme.”

“Geographic remoteness and low population - young generations moving away to seek employment”.

What main factors favour the provision, viability and improvement of rural services and infrastructure?

Comments provided were:-

“Demand and financial viability – volunteer services and community involvement.”

“Possibly Brexit will free local funding?”

“Funding – Big Lottery and EU”

“Within Powys there is a large and multifaceted third sector (over 4000 groups and organisations based in or operating within the county). This couples with a high proportion of volunteers within the population. There are many positive reasons for this e.g. community strength etc, but it is also a reflection of communities which have never received extensive provision of services but the public sector needing to develop their own approaches to developing ways to meet the needs of community members. This dynamic of active communities and citizens, willing to ‘do things for themselves’ represents a great asset in securing the sustainability of rural communities and services. However it cannot resolve also key issues of infrastructure weakness e.g. a deteriorating road network. Furthermore, this large and active third sector needs the practical support and capacity building provided through PAVO to sustain and develop its activity; both in terms of service development but crucially also volunteer recruitment, placement and support.”

“Investment – people want to live here and raise their families and for the village to be sustainable.”

“Community involvement”

“Population maintenance and increase in population”

“Transport and planning”

“Locally tailored initiative”

“Community engagement”

“Volunteers”

“Demand”

“Community cohesion”

Case Studies

Narberth Pool

Is the first community owned swimming pool in Pembrokeshire and the first low carbon one. It's energy needs are met by Narberth Energy, a Community Benefit Society operated in the interests of the people from Narberth and Pembrokeshire.

It is run for the benefit of the community at large, and all profits are re-invested back into the provision of this community owned and run service.

<http://swimnarberth.co.uk/>

Solva Care

Solva Care is a not-for-profit social initiative, which has been set up by Solva Community Council to offer friendly, local support and help to those who need it in Solva and the surrounding area. It is a community based project focusing on social care. It was set up in 2015, in response to wishes of the local residents, to support individuals and families with a variety of services. The initiative has been extended following the success of the Pilot Project.

- The aims of Solva Care are to maintain and improve health and wellbeing by:
- enabling residents to stay in their own homes and remain part of the community
- offering a way to counteract loneliness, isolation and social disadvantage
- providing extra support for those who are caring for relatives

<http://solvacare.co.uk/>

The Green Dragon Bus Service

A small group of people from Brynberian, Tegryn, Newport and Llangolman (Pembrokeshire) formed the Preseli Rural Transport Association in December 2002, with support from Pembrokeshire County Council. The PRTA with it's Green Dragon Buses, Clydau car club, and scooter scheme is now well established. Meeting the transport needs of people living in rural and isolated communities.

<http://amwphotos.co.uk/gd1/>

Antur Waunfawr

A social enterprise providing employment and training opportunities for people with learning disabilities in their own community. Antur Waunfawr demonstrated that, by giving people the chance of working in the community, and thus serving the community, they would be accepted as equal citizens. Antur Waunfawr is committed to developing in a sustainable way – which means that protecting the natural environment and developing green businesses is integral to the values of the company.

<http://www.anturwaunfawr.org/en/about-us/>

Car Chums Pembrokeshire

The LEADER project in Pembrokeshire, Arwain sir Benfro, funded PACTO (Pembrokeshire Association of Community transport Organisations) to carry out a feasibility study to assess the potential for encouraging and facilitating lift-sharing in Pembrokeshire and the extent to which this could help to address unmet transport needs within and around the County. This has led to the Take Me Too! Project creating and promoting a system to facilitate lift-sharing across rural Pembrokeshire. The project will: address unmet transport needs; provide access to services, activities and opportunities which are otherwise out of reach; build stronger more connected and resilient communities, and tackle transport poverty issues.

Other comments:

“Some form of industry other than agriculture and tourism would be desirable.”

“Provision of sustainable utilities should be made a priority.”

Conclusions

The picture of services and infrastructure in rural Wales is one of disparity of access.

The survey highlighted a number of problems.

1. **Broadband** – there is a disparity in coverage and reliability. The knock on effect is that it effect businesses, education amongst other things, even as someone commented, energy saving initiatives such as smart meters not being able to work.
2. The problem for people who are not digitally literate or have little or no access to broadband, coupled with the **digitisation of services** is a looming problem. Many services that the Post Office were able to provide locally are now done online. This creates further isolation and prevents people getting a good price for

services. Especially affected are the vulnerable in society, particularly older people.

3. **Lack of transport** (and thus poor access to services and employment) consistently rates as the most significant issue of concern for citizens in all public engagement activity. However there is positive momentum in communities addressing problems themselves, through community initiatives and social enterprise – however these too need to be financially supported for them to continue.
4. The **disparity of access to services and infrastructure** creates a divide in access and ability for business, communication, commerce and even in some cases energy saving and health initiatives.
5. This poses problems for **accessing work opportunities**, young people visiting friends and attending clubs and societies, Older people in isolation. Limited market opportunities for shopping. Many people rely on their own private vehicle for getting about to access employment and services. *“This creates a situation of ‘transport poverty’ in which the cost of vehicle ownership and fuel forms a disproportionate proportion of expenditure for families and individuals”*. High proportion of car ownership – according to the 2011 census, 87% of households in rural Pembrokeshire (excluding the communities of Haverfordwest, Milford Haven, and Pembroke/Pembroke Dock) have at least one car
6. “The **sustained reduction in public sector spending** (and consequent changes to models of service provision) is having a number of impacts upon service viability:
 - Shrinkage of services and their **centralisation** in a reduced number of locations
 - Progressive shift towards default provision of services **digitally** when the digital and telecommunications infrastructure is poorly developed and of varying availability
 - **Increased cost** for those now needing to travel further to access relocated services
 - Reduced public sector spend (in terms of service commissioned and staff number) impacting adversely upon the local economy and businesses
 - Expectations of cost savings from commissioned services reducing the monies received via contracts and grants for private and third sector services and adversely affecting their sustainability in turn
 - **Increased expectations** amongst public sector bodies and community and voluntary activity will ‘pick up’ delivery of services and amenities which the public sector can no longer afford to deliver itself, thus placing greater demands on the financial resources and volunteer capacity of these groups
 - **Loss of non-statutory services** e.g. youth service activities and venues.

Some issues with the survey must be considered in view of the findings.

1. **Telecommunications** (phone coverage and broadband were together in the questionnaire not separate). In some communities, such as Freshwater East in Pembrokeshire, they have good broadband provision but poor or non-existent mobile phone coverage. It would have been useful to separate out this question (broadband and telecommunications) assessing broadband speed and access and affordability and a separate column for phone coverage and signal strength.
2. **Drinking water** question part of the ranking. This was interesting because the survey was part of a wider 10 European country survey on infrastructure and services and it can not be assumed that people in Wales, because they have access to drinking water, ranked the service as not important, or less important.

PLANED Pembrokeshire Local Action Network for Enterprise and Development is

community-led partnership was established in 2001 and evolved from SPARC (South Pembrokeshire Action for Rural Communities) 1991-2001.

PLANED's aim is to engage local people in Pembrokeshire in improving their quality of life – culturally, socially, environmentally and economically.

PLANED works throughout Pembrokeshire, building on the local community led approach to rural development developed by SPARC in which communities, public sector and voluntary partners and special interest groups come together to undertake locally integrated development.

PLANED is also a process and special way of working. Its role is as an engager, a facilitator, a networker and a builder of partnerships:

www.planed.org.uk

The European Rural Parliament seeks to express the voice of rural communities; to articulate the concerns of rural people; and to promote self-help and action, in partnership with civil society and governments. Throughout 2017, we are working with other groups across Europe in preparing for the next European Rural Parliament which will be held in October 2017. By strengthening the network and enriching our evidence of issues facing rural communities, we will ensure our voice is heard.

