

Impact on Reducing Rural Isolation

FINAL RESEARCH REPORT

Prepared for the Big Lottery Fund

by

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Executive Summary

Background & Context

Leisure Futures Ltd was appointed by The Big Lottery Fund (BIG) in November 2010 to investigate and report on how projects funded by BIG to date have reduced rural isolation and to make recommendations for BIG-funded programmes aimed at further reducing rural isolation.

The findings are based on secondary sources, including a review of previous programme evaluations commissioned by BIG, and primary research with BIG-funded projects in the most rural areas of England and Scotland. 475 projects received a questionnaire concerning rural isolation. 166 completed questionnaires were returned. 52 projects were interviewed as case studies.

Key Research Findings

Socio-economic trends: The structural demographic change towards an older population in the UK is the single most significant factor in increasing the prevalence of rural isolation.

Impacts of policy: Cuts in rural public transport and rises in the costs of fuel (due in part to taxation policy) impact most on rural isolation.

Interventions by others: The voluntary and community sector is the main provider of services that address rural isolation supported by BIG, the other lottery distributors, local authorities, health service providers and charities.

Volunteer-centred initiatives such as 'Village Agents', supported by local infrastructure organisations, have proved particularly successful.

As with BIG, with a few exceptions, the investment programmes of the other lottery distributors do not target rural areas directly.

There are some Corporate and Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives that aim to reduce rural isolation but these are limited and need encouragement.

BIG activities: BIG investment made in rural projects is effective. 96% of survey respondents consider their project is reducing rural isolation.

BIG's accessible small grants ideally suit initiatives in rural areas.

The larger Reaching Communities and Investing in Communities open programmes also appear successful at reaching pockets of rural isolation.

The investment programme in England aimed at capacity building (BASIS) has also worked well in a number of the most rural regions and, in the latest round, has helped large numbers of rural voluntary and community organisations to survive and become more robust.

BIG award process: The introduction of a two-stage approach to the Reaching Communities programme is making the process easier and quicker for the smaller voluntary and community sector groups that are more prevalent in rural areas.

Support from infrastructure organisations (supported by BIG's BASIS fund) has been important in ensuring rural applicants in England have received a fair share of investment to date from BIG's programmes.

There is scope to refine the process by which BIG has sought to 'rural-proof' the new capital element of the Reaching Communities programme in England.

BIG project support cost factors: There is a significant 'rural cost premium' in supporting projects in rural areas.

Key success factors: The key factors contributing to the achievements of the most successful projects in reducing rural isolation are:

- Inclusion of a transport element
- Five-year awards and, in selected cases, 'continuation funding'
- Support provided to build social capital
- Partnership working and involving beneficiaries
- Achieving quality and energy efficiency (community buildings projects)
- Strong project leadership
- Recognising and supporting volunteers

Lessons learnt: Key lessons learned from the research are that:

- Learning should be shared more effectively
- The needs of rurally isolated young people (not just the elderly or those in hardship) must be recognised
- Community roots / personality are key to success
- Innovation should continue to be supported (e.g. in transport solutions)
- Local services are best for sustainability
- The understanding of rural issues is key to effective funding decisions
- Infrastructure support to build capacity and advise on volunteer exit strategies / succession planning is important
- Deprivation statistics should be used with care when seeking to target rural areas

Conclusions

BIG-funded projects are helping reduce rural isolation for a large number of people living in rural areas. The funding is reaching people in rural communities who are isolated as a result of low income, poor health or disability. It is also reaching a wider group of older rural residents who are not economically disadvantaged but experience isolation as a result of lack of social contact for a variety of reasons.

For many projects in rural areas supported by BIG, reducing isolation is not an explicit aim. Nevertheless it is recognised by those responsible for rural projects as an important outcome for the people they aim to reach.

Projects that impact directly by increasing social contact and improving access to local services are the most effective in reducing rural isolation.

Local roots or 'personality' is important to the effectiveness of voluntary and community organisations working to reduce rural isolation. Generally, rural voluntary and community sector organisations (VCSOs) are smaller than their urban counterparts and have access to fewer resources. Carefully targeted capacity building and support are important to sustain the success of many smaller VCSOs working to reduce rural isolation.

Isolation is a growing problem in the rural areas of the UK due to a range of socio-economic and cultural trends. However, it is not always easy to identify. More investment, innovation and effective 'rural-proofing' of BIG's funding programmes are needed to ensure rural isolation is further reduced.

Recommendations

On the basis of the research findings we make the following recommendations for BIG to consider in shaping its future investment programmes to further reduce rural isolation:

1. Continue to invest mainly through small grants and open programmes
2. Retain up to five year revenue funding
3. Retain 'continuation funding' option where appropriate
4. Plan to invest in preventative social support and rural transport for the elderly and the disabled in response to this growing unmet need
5. Improve effectiveness of 'rural-proofing' measures in consultation with ACRE
6. Adopt social return on investment and well-being evaluation models
7. Greater targeting of investment in capacity-building based on learning
8. Develop learning and support 'resource packages' for specific project types proven effective in reducing rural isolation
9. Consider the feasibility of a commercial sponsorship fund for rural isolation projects
10. Consider the feasibility of an innovation fund for rural community transport projects

1 Research Aims

- 1.1 Leisure Futures Ltd was appointed by The Big Lottery Fund (BIG) in November 2010 to investigate and report on how projects funded by BIG to date have reduced rural isolation and to make recommendations for BIG-funded programmes aimed at further reducing rural isolation.
- 1.2 Initially, the brief limited the research and report to the South West of England and Scotland. Following initial background research into the distribution of rural populations and rural disadvantage in England, it was agreed to extend the geographical remit of the research to include two further regions in England with a high prevalence of rurality and significant areas of disadvantage, namely the East Region and Yorkshire & The Humber Region.
- 1.3 The purpose of the research is to inform future strategies of BIG for reducing rural isolation through its investment programmes.
- 1.4 Specifically, the research seeks to provide answers to a range of questions identified in 2009 by BIG's 'Evidence Gathering Group' convened to consider the issue of rural isolation. These research questions divide into three categories as follows:

Contextual questions about rural isolation...

- What is the relationship between socio-economic change in rural areas (e.g. ageing population, growth in immigration) and the prevalence of isolation?
- How have national and local policies affected people who experience or are vulnerable to rural isolation?
- What funded initiatives have others in the public, voluntary and private sectors tried and how did they go about it?

Questions about investment by BIG to reduce rural isolation...

- What is working well in terms of activities and types of BIG project that are proving effective in reducing rural isolation?
- How have the successful projects achieved these impacts – i.e. what are the key success factors?
- What lessons have been learnt from supporting projects that aim to reduce rural isolation?

Questions about BIG's grant process in rural areas...

- What has been the process by which BIG has awarded grants to rural areas to date?
- How much does it cost BIG to support projects in rural areas compared to projects in urban areas?

2 Methodology

- 2.1 An approach to the research was developed in discussion with members of the BIG Research & Learning Team at a briefing at end November 2010.
- 2.2 The agreed approach with regard to the **contextual questions** - i.e. the impacts of socio-economic change, rural policy and initiatives on rural isolation - was to focus the research on secondary sources. In particular, reports by the Commission for Rural Communities in England on behalf of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), reports on rural affairs for the Scottish Government Enterprise and Environment Directorate, and research across the UK by the Young Foundation and Carnegie UK Trust (supported by BIG). A number of studies and reports of relevance available from the Rural Communities Action Network (RCAN) across England and regional observatories have also been considered in this secondary source review.
- 2.3 The research questions concerning **BIG's investment** in reducing rural isolation - i.e. its effectiveness, success factors and learning - are addressed both by means of review of previous programme evaluation reports commissioned by BIG and primary research (surveys and consultation) with samples of funded projects.
- 2.4 Two project samples were selected from predominantly rural local authority areas in three English regions - the South West, the East and Yorkshire & The Humber - and in Scotland, and agreed with the relevant BIG Programme Managers. A main sample of 475 projects was selected to receive a questionnaire concerning rural isolation by email with a target of 100 completed returns. 166 completed questionnaires were returned. The questions were designed to gather data on project leaders' perceptions as to:
 - The seriousness of rural isolation as a problem (overall and for particular population groups)
 - The causes of rural isolation
 - How the project is seeking to address rural isolation (overall and among particular population groups)
 - Whether outcomes that help reduce rural isolation are being measured and achieved (overall and by outcome)
 - The most effective types of project activity in reducing rural isolation
 - Key success factors for projects aiming to reduce rural isolation
 - Whether BIG should design and promote some investment programmes specifically for rural areas

- Whether BIG investment programmes should relate to community need regardless of population density
- 2.5 From within the main project sample, a smaller sample of 52 projects (13 per region) was selected for case study consultation. 20 were the subject of visits and interviews with leaders, partners and beneficiaries concerning the relevant research questions. The remaining 32 were contacted by telephone.
 - 2.6 30 of the 52 projects are presented as full case studies under separate cover. Key findings and learning points from the other 22 are summarised at Appendix C.
 - 2.7 The **process questions** were addressed mainly by telephone discussions with BIG staff, combined with review of published material concerning the investment programmes and primary research into the relative costs of provided support to rural and urban projects.
 - 2.8 The research and consultations were carried out between end November 2010 and mid March 2011. The information set out in this report is therefore accurate as at mid March 2011.

3 Background to Rural Isolation

Rural local authority classifications

3.1 Since 2005, Defra has used three classifications for rural local authority areas based on population:

- *'Significant rural'* - a district with fewer than 37,000 people or that has more than 26 per cent of its population living in rural settlements and larger market towns.
- *'Rural 50'* - districts with at least 50 per cent but less than 80 per cent of its population living in rural settlements and larger market towns.
- *'Rural 80'* - districts with at least 80 per cent of its population living in rural settlements and larger market towns.

3.2 Reflecting the more dispersed population in Scotland, the Scottish Government's rural classifications are based on much smaller populations:

- *'Accessible rural'* - areas with a population less than 3,000 and within a 30 minute drive time of a settlement with a population of 10,000.
- *'Remote rural'* - areas with a population less than 3,000 and within a 30 to 60 minute drive time of a settlement with a population of 10,000.
- *'Very remote rural'* - areas with a population less than 3,000 and over a 60 minute drive time of a settlement with a population of 10,000.

3.3 For the purposes of this research, in England, we have selected the samples of projects surveyed and interviewed from local authority areas with at least 50% of the population living in rural settlements and larger market towns (i.e. either 'Rural 50' or 'Rural 80' local authorities). In the South West Region, approaching two thirds of the 37 local authorities (62%) are predominantly rural, in Yorkshire & Humberside a third (33%) and, in the East Region 38%. (A full list of these 'predominantly rural' local authorities is at Appendix D).

3.4 In Scotland, we have selected projects from within the 14 local authorities of the 32 (44%) that include within their boundaries significant areas classified as 'remote rural' (i.e. with a population of less than 3,000 and at least 30 minutes drive from a settlement of 10,000 people or more).

Definition of rural isolation

3.5 For the purposes of this research we have used the following definition for rural isolation, devised by us and agreed with the BIG Research & Learning Team:

Rural isolation is the feelings of powerlessness and disconnection experienced by individuals or groups as a consequence of living in a rural area.

Causes of rural isolation

3.6 The Commission for Rural Communities¹ has identified three main causes of rural isolation in England:

- i) Lack of income and employment
- ii) Lack of access to transport and other services
- iii) Lack of contact with, and help from, relatives, friends, neighbours etc.

3.7 The Scottish Government in its recent response to the 'Speak Up for Rural Scotland' consultation² identifies a range of priorities for infrastructure (e.g. public transport, broadband), land use, community participation, community enterprise, business and skills. These priorities are aimed at addressing the same causes of rural isolation.

Scale and distribution of rural isolation

3.8 Over a fifth of the population of England (11 million people) live and work in rural areas³. The most rural counties in England are Cornwall, Norfolk and Yorkshire. All the regions, with the exception of London and the South East, include extensive areas that are rural and sparsely populated.

3.9 In Scotland, the proportion of the population living in rural areas is similar to that in England at around 19% (just under a million people).⁴ The local authorities with the largest 'very remote rural' areas are the Highlands & Islands, Argyll & Bute, Aberdeenshire and parts of Perth & Kinross, Dumfries & Galloway, South Ayrshire and the Borders. Rural Scotland accounts for 95% of the land area.

3.10 There is net migration gain in predominantly rural areas; in England in 2007/08 this amounted to nearly 65,000 people⁵. The fastest growth is seen in parts of Devon, Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire and North Yorkshire amongst other places⁶. In the same period in Scotland there was a net migration gain of 12,300 in rural areas³.

¹ The Commission for Rural Communities Annual Review (2006)

² Our Rural Future, The Scottish Government (2011)

³ Buonfino, A and Geissendorfer, L, Mapping Rural Needs in Britain and Ireland: A report for the Carnegie UK Trust (2007)

⁴ Socio-Economic Briefing on Rural Scotland: Demography (2010)

⁵ Ten Big Numbers (2009): Commission for Rural Communities

⁶ The Commission for Rural Communities: State of the Countryside (2010)

- 3.11 Most of the rural population do not experience rural isolation. The majority possess the mobility, resources and social contacts not to experience feelings of disconnection or powerlessness as a result of this life choice. This is evidenced in England by the summary findings of the 2009 Rural Insights Survey carried out by IPSOS Mori for The Commission for Rural Communities concerning: i) satisfaction with the area in which people live, and ii) quality of life:

Satisfaction... *Those living in rural areas are relatively more satisfied with the area in which they live than those living in urban areas; 94% versus 89% very/fairly satisfied. The most striking difference in opinion occurs in terms of the proportion very satisfied; 46% of those living in urban areas say they are very satisfied, whereas this figure is 60% or over for those in rural areas, regardless of rurality type.*

Source: Rural Insights Survey IPSOS Mori (2009)

Quality of life... *Perceptions of quality of life occur in a similar pattern to that of satisfaction with the area. Those living in rural areas are significantly more likely to rate their quality of life as good (i.e. very or fairly good) than those living in urban areas; 92% versus 87%. We again see a difference in terms of the proportion picking 'very good' to describe things but the difference is less marked; 46% in rural areas versus 36% in urban areas.*

Source: Rural Insights Survey IPSOS Mori (2009)

- 3.12 The pattern is similar in Scotland as evidenced by findings of the 2009 Scottish Household Survey summarised here:

Rating of neighbourhood... *Relative to the rest of Scotland, a higher percentage of people in rural Scotland rate their neighbourhood as 'very good' as a place to live. This is especially apparent in remote rural areas, where 80% of people rate their neighbourhood as a very good place to live, compared to 69% in accessible rural areas and 51% in the rest of Scotland. Nonetheless, in all areas of Scotland, over 90% rate their neighbourhood as a 'very good' or a 'fairly good' place to live.*

Source: Rural Scotland Key Facts (2010)

- 3.13 However, sparsely populated and remote rural areas often fare the worst on indicators of disadvantage and isolation, particularly the proportion of households with low incomes and the distance required to travel to access key services.

- 3.14 Research by the Young Foundation⁶ shows that, often, pockets of disadvantage exist in rural areas, surrounded by relative affluence, and these pockets of disadvantage also go unnoticed in areas of low population density. Unlike urban areas, the isolation of those living in rural areas can be well hidden and rural pride can exacerbate the problem as it prevents them accessing services they are entitled to or that could help them because they feel they are 'not for them'⁸.

- 3.15 The 2009 Rural Insights Survey supports the view that income is a key factor in people's perceptions of quality of life in rural areas in England:

⁶ The Young Foundation 'Sinking and Swimming: understanding Britain's unmet needs' (2009)

⁸ The Young Foundation 'Mapping Rural Needs' for Carnegie UK Trust (2007)

Those out of work in rural areas and who feel affected by the recession are significantly less likely to be positive about their quality of life.

Source: Rural Insights Survey IPSOS Mori (2009)

3.16 The following statistics provide further indications as to the nature, scale and distribution of rural isolation in England and Scotland against two of the key causes: i) low income and employment, and ii) lack of access to transport and other services:

Indicator	England	Scotland
Household Income & Employment	<p>Overall household income in all rural settlements tends to be higher than urban, but households in more sparsely populated settings have a lower income than both urban and less sparsely populated rural areas. This is most likely to be associated with lower wage levels in these areas and higher proportions of population of pension age.</p> <p>The differences in levels of median household income are quite marked between sparsely populated rural areas (£16,500 per annum) and less sparsely populated rural areas (£19,200).</p> <p>One in four households located in the sparsest rural areas of the country are in income poverty (less than 60% of the median income) before housing costs have been accounted for.</p> <p>The settlements in England with the lowest mean gross weekly wages are small rural towns located in sparsely populated areas (£316 per week).</p> <p>In all regions, unemployment rates are lower by at least 1% in rural 50 and rural 80 areas compared to urban areas but more people work part time.</p>	<p>Relative to the rest of Scotland, there is a higher percentage of households in rural areas with a net annual household income of over £20,000 especially in accessible rural areas.</p> <p>However, median hourly pay rates are lowest in the remote rural areas at £10.31.</p> <p>The percent of the total population that is 'income deprived' is lower in rural areas than the rest of Scotland, and is lowest overall in accessible rural areas.</p> <p>The percent of the working age population that are 'employment deprived' is also lower in rural areas than in the rest of Scotland.</p> <p>Unemployment rates are slightly lower in rural Scotland than in the rest of Scotland. As in England, more people in rural areas in Scotland only work part time.</p>
Housing	<p>In rural areas those with the lowest household income have to pay six times their annual household income to purchase the cheapest housing in their area, this compares to a multiple of 5.2 of annual household income in urban areas. In hamlets in sparse areas of the country multiples of 9.2 annual household incomes would have to be spent to purchase the cheapest house. These multiples have got less due to average property prices falling during the recession.</p> <p>16.3% of sheltered housing units are found in</p>	<p>The highest average (mean) price was in accessible rural areas, around £16,000 higher than in remote rural areas and approximately £48,000 higher than in the rest of Scotland.</p> <p>Housing in rural Scotland is generally much less energy efficient than those in the rest of Scotland. In remote rural areas, 13% of households were classified as having a good energy efficiency rating compared to 31% in accessible rural areas and 55% in the rest of Scotland.</p> <p>Houses in remote rural areas are more likely to</p>

Indicator	England	Scotland
	<p>rural areas, while 22.8% of the population over retirement age live in rural areas.</p> <p>52% of houses in hamlet and isolated dwellings areas were built before 1919 compared to 18% in urban areas.</p> <p>28% of those households not on the mains gas network in villages and hamlets are in fuel poverty compared with the 13% who are on the mains gas network. The comparative figures for urban areas are 18% and 12%.</p>	<p>have poor energy efficiency with 18% of households being classed as having poor energy efficiency in remote rural areas compared to 9% in accessible rural areas and 2% of households in the rest of Scotland.</p> <p>50% of households in remote rural areas are classed as being 'fuel poor' (i.e. spend 10%+ of total income on household fuel) or 'extreme fuel poor' (20% of income) compared to 31% in accessible rural areas and 24% in the rest of Scotland.</p>
Transport	<p>The distance people in villages and hamlets travel each year is approximately 40% more than in urban areas. People in villages and hamlets travel approximately 8,600 miles by car (as a driver or passenger) compared with 4,800 miles for those in urban areas.</p> <p>96% of households in urban areas have an hourly or better bus service within 13 minutes walk compared with 50% in villages and hamlets. 77% of those eligible in urban areas have a concessionary fare pass compared with 53% in villages and 49% in hamlets.</p> <p>Poorer people in rural areas have to spend more of their income on transport, due to the need to travel greater distances to access goods, services and employment (People in the lowest income quintile in villages and hamlets spend on average £50 per week on travel compared with £28 in urban areas).</p>	<p>Asked whether they particularly liked 'Good Public Transport' as a characteristic of the area in which they lived, 2% of remote rural households answered yes, 6% of accessible rural households and 24% of households in the rest of Scotland.</p> <p>89% of the population of the rest of Scotland live within 6 minutes of the nearest bus stop, compared to 68% and 57% of the population in accessible rural and remote rural areas. In addition, 11% of the remote rural and 4% of the accessible rural population do not have access to a bus service at all.</p> <p>More than half of residents in rural Scotland spend over £100 per month on fuel. This is a higher proportion than in the rest of Scotland.</p>
Access to Services	<p>The number of cash points in rural areas rose by 73% between 2000 and 2010, while the number of Job Centres fell by 56%. Numbers of GP surgeries also increased (NB. This includes outreach services) while Post Offices, banks and building societies, primary schools and petrol stations also saw falls.</p> <p>Whilst over 98% of urban residents have the following services within 4km, for rural residents 51% have a bank or building society, 85% have a cash point, 80% a GP surgery, 62% a supermarket, 57% an NHS dentist, 67% a pharmacy and 48% a secondary school.</p> <p>Between 40% and 50% of households in rural areas are connected to the internet. Approximately 5% of rural households were using dial-up in 2009 compared with 2% in urban areas.</p>	<p>People in remote rural areas are less likely to live within 15 minute drive to key services, than those in accessible rural areas and the rest of Scotland. For example 93% of people in remote rural areas live within a 15 minutes drive time to a GP compared to 100% of the population of accessible rural areas and of the rest of Scotland. The greatest difference observed is the drive to the nearest retail centre. 69% of people in remote rural areas live within 15 minutes drive time of a retail centre, compared to 100% of people in accessible rural areas and the rest of Scotland.</p> <p>In remote rural areas only 27% live within 15 minutes of a GP by public transport and 15% within a 15 minute drive time by public transport of shopping facilities.</p> <p>67% of households in remote rural areas and 72% in accessible rural areas are connected to the internet. Approximately 6% in remote areas were using dial-up in 2009 compared to 3% in urban areas.</p>

Sources: England: The Commission for Rural Communities State of the Countryside 2010 report; Defra RDPE 2009-2013 Analysis Chapter 3.
Scotland: The Scottish Executive's Rural Scotland Key Facts 2010 report

Social Isolation

- 3.17 The third major cause of rural isolation is the social isolation and loneliness that can result from lack of contact with, and help from, relatives, friends, neighbours and others. Social isolation is a prime cause of depression and other forms of mental illness in the population.
- 3.18 As evidenced by the Rural Insights Survey and research in Scotland, in comparison to urban areas, many rural communities have stronger social networks and high levels of volunteering, although less so in the most remote rural areas where the distance between people is greatest.

In Scotland...

- *A higher percentage of residents of 'remote rural' and 'accessible' rural Scotland particularly like the safe environment and the friendliness in their community. Friendliness: 86% in remote rural, 82% accessible rural, 68% rest of Scotland.*
- *In rural Scotland, more people give up their time to help as a volunteer/organiser than in the rest of Scotland. A greater proportion of people aged 16-64 gave up time to work as a volunteer/organiser, compared to people aged 65+, in all areas of Scotland. The highest rate of volunteering was observed for people aged 16-64 in remote rural areas.*

Source: The Scottish Executive's Rural Scotland Key Facts 2010 report

In England...

- *In general people in rural areas are more likely to report that "people from different backgrounds get on well" in their area but in parts of Lincolnshire and Norfolk there is less confidence that people get on well.*
- *The Place Survey shows that the pattern of giving unpaid help to groups, clubs and other organisations is higher in rural areas. The South West, Yorkshire and parts of the West Midlands and East of England tend to have the highest rates of giving unpaid help. According to research carried out in 2006 (the Housing and Support Needs of Older People; Commission for Rural Communities 2006), informal help from neighbours, family and friends was frequently reported as the main form of support that people could rely on.*

Source: Rural Insights Survey IPSOS Mori (2009)

- 3.19 As with economic disadvantage, this positive overall picture of greater community engagement and cohesion in rural areas when compared to urban areas masks the very real problems of social isolation for individuals and particular population groups. Isolation for people in these groups may be completely unrelated to economic disadvantage; affluent people can be socially isolated too. However, where social and economic disadvantage combine, the cumulative effect causes particularly acute isolation.

3.20 The population groups most at risk of experiencing rural social isolation are:

- *People living alone* - Most particularly those, usually older people, who are the surviving partner following bereavement (most commonly women) or where their partner is hospitalised or moved into care due to frailty or ill health.
- *People living in very remote locations* - For example on farms or in isolated homes several miles from a nearest neighbour.
- *The mentally ill and those with physical frailty or disability* - Poor mental health and limited personal mobility are clearly major isolating factors and are particularly prevalent among people over pension age who comprise a large and growing proportion of most rural populations.
- *Family carers* - Rural social isolation can be a real problem for family carers of all ages who often find it more difficult than carers in urban locations to access support services, social and employment opportunities and respite.
- *Young families new to rural areas* - particularly mothers at home alone during the day with young children and without access to a car or friends and family in the area.
- *Children and young people* - Young people without transport and with low disposable income can also become socially isolated in the more remote areas, particularly those areas without a school or recreational amenities within walking or cycling distance from where they live.
- *Overseas migrants* - Particularly those who do not speak sufficient English to understand how to access services or to communicate socially, do not have friends or family in the area and may face negative attitudes.
- *Black and minority ethnic (BME) and lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender (LGBT) groups* – Who grow up in or move into a rural community with very few or no other BME or LGBT residents and may face negative attitudes.

3.21 Statistics and research findings summarised below serve as broad indicators of the scale of rural social isolation in among these high risk groups:

Groups most at risk of rural social isolation	England	Scotland
Pensioners living alone	One in four older people live alone in rural areas of England currently. This is forecast to increase to nearly one in three (32%) by 2020.	Pensioners living alone in Scotland currently account for 15% of households in remote rural areas, 12% in accessible rural compared to 13% in the rest of Scotland.

Groups most at risk of rural social isolation	England	Scotland
Disabled people	<p>At the last census (2001), just over 6.5m people in England and Wales had a long-term limiting illness or disability (LLTI), 17.5% of the population. The proportion of the population with LLTI increases with age. The older population profile of rural areas means that a higher proportion of people are in receipt of Attendance Allowance (a non means tested benefit for people aged over 65 with a long term disability) than in urban areas. Some 1.6 million people nationally (2.9% of population) successfully claim this allowance.</p>	<p>At the last census (2001), just over 746,000 people in Scotland had a long-term limiting illness or disability (20% of the population). Of those disabled people of working age, 15.9% live in rural areas. In August 2003, 554,000 people of working age in Scotland were claiming one or more key disability related benefits: 185,200 were in receipt of Incapacity Benefit (6% of the working age population); 281,200 were in receipt of Disability Living allowance (9%); 133,800 received Attendance Allowance; 36,400 received Severe Disablement Allowance.</p>

Groups most at risk of rural social isolation	Britain
People with mental health problems	<p>Overall, people who live in rural areas are likely to experience slightly better mental health than people living in urban areas.</p> <p>However, there are significantly fewer health services in rural areas compared to urban areas. If an individual with a mental health problem lives in a rural area they may be left with two choices; to stay where they are and not get the treatment they need or move to a more urban area where help is available.</p> <p>Mental health problems are common in older adults who form a larger proportion of the population in most rural areas. Around 40% of older people who visit a GP are thought to have a mental health problem. Around 50% of older general hospitals patients might also experience a mental health problem. In care homes, as many as 60% of older residents might suffer from some form of mental illness.</p> <p>Older people who experience a physical illness or disability are more likely to also experience a mental health problem.</p> <p>The most common mental health problem among older people is depression. Estimates suggest that around 10-15% of people over 65 experience symptoms of clinical depression. Many more - around one in five - show some signs of cognitive impairment.</p> <p>Around 750,000 people in the UK are suffering from dementia. Those with Alzheimer's disease make up around 55% of all cases of dementia.</p>
People in very remote locations	<p>Farmers and farm workers – many of whom live in very remote locations - are at high risk for stress, depression and suicide. Farmers who develop mental health problems rarely approach mental health services, because of the perceived stigma and the shame of being seen as 'not coping'. Mental health services may also be difficult to reach geographically. In addition, farmers work long hours and may not be able to take time off to use mental health services when GP surgeries or health clinics are open.</p>

Groups most at risk of rural social isolation	Britain
Family carers	<p>Around 6 million people (11% of the population aged five years and over) provided unpaid care in the UK in April 2001. While 45% of carers were aged between 45 and 64, a number of the very young and very old also provided care.</p> <p>By 2037, it's anticipated that the number of carers will increase to 9 million.</p> <p>In 2001, 1.2 million men and 1.6 million women aged 50 and over in England and Wales were providing unpaid care to family members, neighbours or relatives. This represents 16% and 17% of older men and women respectively.</p> <p>In August 2003, 40,600 people received Carers Allowance in Scotland.</p> <p>Comic Relief provides significant funding to projects to support family carers of all ages throughout the UK. In 2011, Comic Relief estimates there are over 700,000 young carers aged under 18 years in the UK.</p>
Overseas migrants	<p>The Gangmasters Licensing Authority (www.gla.gov.uk), which regulates those who provide labour in agriculture, forestry, horticulture, shellfish gathering and food processing and packaging, estimate that about three-quarters of the estimated 650,000 workers in licensed companies are from outside Britain. Many come from further afield, for example, from Asia and the Middle East.</p> <p>With the expansion of the European Union, the number of eastern European migrant workers more than doubled between 2005 and 2009, to about 250,000. This number has reduced slightly over the last two years as the gap between the economies of Britain and the European Union Accession Countries has narrowed. Very high proportions of migrant workers are registering in rural agricultural areas, such as Kent, the Marches, Norfolk, Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire and the Scottish Borders.</p>
BME and LGBT individuals	<p>The population of people from specific black and minority ethnic groups rarely reaches a critical mass in rural areas, which means that local service planning often overlooks their needs. A similar situation applies to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, who are often 'invisible' in rural areas. People in all these groups may also face more discrimination and negative attitudes than elsewhere.</p>

Sources:

- How Fair is Britain? Equality and Human Rights Commission Triennial Review 2010
- The National Housing Federation (2010)
- The Scottish Executive's Rural Scotland Key Facts 2010 report
- Benefits and Tax Credits in Scotland: Report for August 2003 (Scottish Executive, 2004)
- Office for National Statistics
- Family Resources Survey (FRS) Disability prevalence estimates 2007/8
- MIND UK fact sheets
- Commission for Rural Communities, 2008, NHS Review - a rural response
- The Disabled Living Foundation Key Facts 2009
- Equal support: do identity-based voluntary and community groups need identity-based organisational development? A report by Equal to the Occasion for the Big Lottery Fund 2010

4 Findings

4.1 Impacts of Socio Economic Change on Rural Isolation

Introduction

4.1.1 The first research question concerns '*the relationship between socio-economic change and the prevalence of isolation in rural areas*'. The analysis in this section of the report builds on the background to rural isolation described in the previous section.

4.1.2 The main socio-economic changes that impact on the prevalence of rural isolation relate to:

- Change in the demography (age) of rural populations
- Change in rural economies
- Change in strength of community identity within rural populations
- Change in the ethnicity of rural populations

Ageing rural populations

4.1.3 The structural demographic change towards an older population in the UK is much higher in rural areas than in towns and cities and is the single most significant factor in increasing the prevalence of rural isolation.

4.1.4 The key changes in the age of the rural population that impact on isolation are:

Rural population age changes...

- *Increasing life expectancy and higher proportions of older people in the groups at high risk of experiencing isolation. Rural and urban age structures were broadly similar in 1985 but rural areas had seen more changes by 2005 with a marked decrease in the proportion of the population aged 15-29 and an increase in the proportions aged 40-59 and those aged over 80.*
- *The average age in rural areas is now five years higher than that in urban areas. For example, in Sidmouth in the South West, people aged 75 are now the predominant age group. Now, in many areas of the South West, East Anglia, Yorkshire and Scotland, 60 to 74 year olds are the largest population group and continue to grow in size.*
- *In England, the population in rural areas who are aged 65 and over is projected to increase by 62% between 2009 and 2029.⁹*
- *Internal migration from towns and cities to rural retirement areas is contributing to the growing number and proportion of older residents in rural communities as well as pushing up house prices making them less affordable for local people.*

⁹ RuSource Briefing 858 Older People in Rural Areas (2009)

- 4.1.5 The ageing of the rural population can be expected to lead to further falls in school rolls and will not help the viability of facilities for young people. On the other hand it will significantly increase demand for support services for older people and mean that more people are eligible for concessionary travel placing further pressure on adult social care services and the viability of rural bus services.
- 4.1.6 In rural areas, older people contribute to organising community activity and are often the main users of village facilities such as village, community and church halls. However, as more older people in rural populations become frail, they begin to rely on such facilities and services and support from family and friends to remain local rather than move away to more supported accommodation.
- 4.1.7 Families are now much more dispersed than in previous generations and more couples over retirement age are choosing to move to the country - particularly to rural coastal areas - while they are still active and mobile to benefit from the better quality of life. This 'active retired' rural population group tend to be at greater risk of experiencing rural isolation when faced with a family crisis such as illness or loss of their partner, particularly if the partner who falls ill or dies is the one who drives. Often lacking the long-standing local social networks of lifelong village residents, this group may become seriously isolated while falling 'below the radar' of formal social care service providers. Many people in these circumstances are often very wary of drawing the attention of the statutory care services to their plight for fear of compromising their independence.
- 4.1.8 BIG's investment in rural amenities, for example through 'Community Buildings' in England and 'Growing Community Assets' in Scotland, helps address the rural isolation brought about by the growing number and proportion of elderly people in rural populations. For example, Glenfarg Village Hall 5 miles north of Kinross in Perth & Kinross (Appendix C Case Study No. 35): *"If the old hall had closed and not been replaced there would have been nowhere for the frail and elderly to go and their social isolation would have increased. It is now the social hub (Pierette Melville, Glenfarg Village Hall Committee).*
- 4.1.9 The growing numbers of elderly people in care homes in rural areas are also not immune from experiencing isolation. Accessing social opportunities outside the home is usually much more difficult for rural care home residents than in urban areas due to the greater distances involved. Visits from friends and family members can be more infrequent for the same reason. The Care Home Relatives and Residents Association recently surveyed residents and staff in 686 Care Homes across the UK in both urban and rural locations and found 46,000 people in care homes socially isolated due to having no contact at all with friends or relatives.

- 4.1.10 In those rural areas with particularly high numbers of very elderly residents voluntary and community sector organisations that provide befriending support - many supported by BIG - are finding growing need for their services.
- 4.1.11 This impact of population age change is evidenced by our case study consultations with projects, for example the Cowal Befrienders in Argyll & Bute (Case Study No. 22), Enable Scotland (No. 12) in Ayrshire and Dumfries & Galloway, Voluntary Action Orkney (No. 25), Friends of the Elderly (No. 11) in Bridlington on the Yorkshire coast, and a number of projects in both the East and South West regions (see Appendix C).

Changing rural economies

- 4.1.12 Greater mechanisation in farming and the agricultural industries, rises in the amount of food that is imported, decline of the UK fishing industry, the rise in commuting and second home ownership, and the growth in home working resulting from changes in patterns of working and greater access to broadband services. These are all important changes affecting rural economies. So too, are the increasing costs of rural housing in the most popular retirement and commuter areas, and the ever-increasing costs of heating fuel and transport for those living in remote rural communities.
- 4.1.13 As detailed in the previous section of this report, despite these rural economic trends, average household incomes remain higher on average in rural areas than in urban areas. However, in sparsely populated rural areas, average incomes are lower and, in all rural areas, the average masks severe economic disadvantage and deprivation for many individuals and families.
- 4.1.14 The cumulative impact of these economic changes on elderly people on basic pension and living allowances for example can be very isolating. Of most relevance to this age group are the higher costs of home heating and transport particularly in the most remote rural areas.
- 4.1.15 The impacts on young people in families on low incomes can also be isolating due to the high costs of accessing amenities and services in the nearest towns and the heavy reliance on relatively low paid and part time jobs in rural agriculture and tourism.
- 4.1.16 Sustaining village assets becomes more difficult in the face of these rural socio-economic trends. As more young people move away to study, find work and an affordable place to live, the economic sustainability of local assets (e.g. village halls, shops, pubs, garages, post offices) and services (e.g. social care and young people's services) increasingly comes under threat.
- 4.1.17 Financial hardship is a major cause of rural isolation. Statistics collated

by the Citizen's Advice Bureau network (via its 'Case' database of clients' postcodes) evidence the impact of the recent economic recession on demand for debt advice in rural areas. During the first quarter of 2009/10, 98,500 people located in rural areas sought advice through CAB on issues relating to debt despite the fact that nearly 5% of rural households are located more than 10 miles from a CAB office. This is a significant increase on the same quarter in the two preceding years.

- 4.1.18 The increase in rural isolation resulting from economic change is evidenced by many of the case studies at Appendix C. For example, the growing difficulties young people in rural communities find in accessing work is the driver behind the 'Wheels to Work' schemes of Community First Wiltshire supported by BIG and the Salisbury Plain Leader Local Action Group (Case Study No. 10), and of Rycat Community Transport (No. 6) in the rural areas around Malton and Scarborough in North Yorkshire. Isolation due to economic hardship is also the key feature of the CAB advice and support projects featured in North Norfolk (No. 31) and in Selby, North Yorkshire (No. 30).

Changes in strength of community identity within rural populations

- 4.1.19 According to the latest Rural Insights Survey (2009), most residents, be they in rural or urban areas, think the overall prosperity of their local area is *'much the same as always'*. Those in rural areas are slightly less negative about the prosperity of their local areas than their urban counterparts; however, those in the rural sparse areas are most negative. Here, 23% say that their local area is *'on the way down'* or *'struggling'*. Residents in rural areas who consider the area's prosperity to be rising also tend to feel that decision makers understand local needs. The net positive score for prosperity (i.e. *'really thriving'* plus *'on the way up'*, minus *'on the way down'* and *'struggling'*) has fallen significantly in rural areas since 2006 although the movement in opinion is less pronounced in rural sparse areas.
- 4.1.20 There was a strong sense in 2006 that decision-makers were out of touch with rural needs and circumstances and this persists: By a margin of four to one, residents in rural areas think that decision-makers *'rarely'* or *'never'* understand local needs and circumstances rather than *'always'* or *'usually'* doing this. This sentiment is more pronounced in sparse rural areas than it is in less sparse areas, although by no means unique to rural areas as urban residents are equally doubtful.
- 4.1.21 The 2008 Place Survey of 1,000 residents in each of the 326 English local authority districts and unitary authorities found that people who lived in urban areas were more likely to say that their local area had got better in the last two years (15%) than those living in rural areas (12%).

4.1.22 It would appear from these surveys that rural residents' perceptions of the community in which they live have become slightly less positive since 2006. It is likely that, in the main, this is a reflection of the impacts of economic change and, in some communities, the closure of village amenities such as shops and post offices. Less positive feelings of community impact in turn on social isolation as people socialise less and become more inward looking.

4.1.23 Many of the case study projects supported by BIG have impacted very positively in countering this trend, particularly those that have facilitated the retention and re-launch of village halls and shops. Examples include: The Three Villages Hall in Arrochar (Case Study No. 44) in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park; new village hall projects in Hacheston (No. 42) and Occold (No. 37) in Suffolk; and in Bishop Wilton (No.39) and Sutton under Whitstonecliffe (No. 38) in Yorkshire.

Changes in ethnicity in rural populations

4.1.24 New arrivals to rural areas in the UK from black and minority ethnic communities can experience profound feelings of isolation whether as a result of lack of English language skills, financial hardship or negative attitudes shown by people in their new communities with different socio-cultural customs. The pattern of BME migration change in rural areas of the UK is summarised below:

BME migration changes...

- *Slowing but continuing overseas immigration to rural areas. In 2006/07 some 116,000 migrants registered for National Insurance in rural local authority areas. Proportionally, the most rapid increase has occurred in rural areas - a 231% increase since 2002/03 in rural authorities, compared with an 86% increase in urban authorities. This inflow has slowed again during the recession and as the pound has weakened¹⁰.*
- *In recent years, net immigration was greatest in England in the South West, Yorkshire and the Humber and East of England. It was lowest in the North East*
- *Of the migrants who settle in rural areas, a greater proportion come from European Union Accession countries than is the case in urban areas. About 70% of such migrants to Rural 50 and Rural 80 areas are from central and eastern Europe compared to about 31% in Major urban, 43% in Large and 50% in Other urban areas¹¹*
- *In Scotland there has been significant inward migration from European Union Accession Countries in parts of the Scottish Borders local authority area in particular since 2004¹²*

¹⁰ DWP National Insurance Number Recording System (2008)

¹¹ RuSource Briefing 458 Population and Migration (2007)

¹² The Scottish Executive's Rural Scotland Key Facts 2010 report

- 4.1.25 Not surprisingly given the very different ethnic compositions of the urban and rural populations in the UK, the 2009 Citizenship Survey carried out on behalf of the Department for Communities & Local Government (CLG) found people living in urban areas (83%) were more likely than those in rural areas (70%) to report that they had regular meaningful interactions with people from different ethnic or religious backgrounds. People living in urban areas (55%) were also more likely than those in rural areas (42%) to have friends from different ethnic groups to themselves.
- 4.1.26 Overall the 2008 Place Survey in England (also commissioned by the CLG), in mapping responses to the statement *“people from different backgrounds get on well together”*, found that rural areas generally have greater contentment than urban, but not in all areas. Parts of Lincolnshire, Norfolk and County Durham in particular show lower contentment.
- 4.1.27 In one of these areas, north Norfolk, the King’s Lynn Area Resettlement Support (Klars) project case study (No. 33 at Appendix C) describes the isolation experienced by newcomers from other countries and the impacts of this organisation’s work, supported by BIG, in mitigating the impacts.
- 4.1.28 Similarly, in the Scottish Borders local authority area in Scotland, there has been rapid growth in new arrivals from EU Accession Countries in recent years. The Eildon Enterprise Peer Mentoring project (Appendix C, No. 32) illustrates the work of this social enterprise in helping to both reduce the isolation experienced by individual newcomers to the area and improve integration with the indigenous community. Here, according to the Chair of the Migrant Support Group, a Polish Volunteer Development Worker recruited and trained as part of this project: *“has increased the confidence of the migrant community to work with the local community. He has helped us convince the indigenous population of the contribution of the migrant population to the community”*.

4.2 The Impacts of Policy on Rural Isolation

Introduction

- 4.2.1 This second set of research findings addresses the question ‘*How have national and local policies affected people who experience or are vulnerable to rural isolation?*’
- 4.2.2 Networks of organisations making rural policy in the UK are complex and have developed differently in each country at national and local levels. The key rural policy makers and their priorities are summarised below. We then consider the impact of policies on the problem of rural isolation illustrated by examples from our consultation with BIG project leaders and partners in rural areas.

The Rural Policy Framework

England National Policy

- 4.2.3 **Defra & ACRE:** In England, national rural policy is determined by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and informed by a departmental Rural Communities Policy Unit (RCPU). This Unit is being strengthened currently and a new rural resource website set up in response to the Government decision to abolish the Commission for Rural Communities.
- 4.2.4 Action for Communities in Rural England (ACRE) acts as the Government’s eyes and ears on the ground in approximately 11,000 rural communities across England. ACRE is commissioned by Defra to facilitate delivery of four main ministerial priority objectives through a funding agreement for the next four years to the Rural Community Action Network (RCAN). RCAN comprises ACRE, at national level, plus 37 Rural Community Action Network members – eight regional bodies and 29 Rural Community Councils (charitable local development agencies, generally based at county level). RCAN staff (about 1,000 in all across rural areas of England) aim to address rural deprivation and, in so doing, reduce rural isolation.
- 4.2.5 Priority policy objectives for the next four years (and the lead government departments responsible for each) are:

Defra rural policy priorities...

- *Fuel poverty and local fuel generation (Department of Energy and Climate Change)*
- *Access to services (Department of Transport)*
- *Rural broadband services (Department of Culture, Media and Sport)*
- *Rural housing (Department for Communities and Local Government)*

- 4.2.6 This funding for the Rural Community Action Network (RCAN) will enable ACRE to disseminate these rural policy priorities, develop and promote best practice to inspire others to emulate and to provide feedback to government departments.
- 4.2.7 This work is co-ordinated at regional level via the eight regional bodies (e.g. South West Acre Network, Rural Action East, Yorkshire and the Humber Community Action Network) and, at county level, via the Rural Community Councils. These are not always easily identified as RCCs from their titles (e.g. 'Dorset Community Action', 'Wiltshire Community First', 'The Community Council of Devon'). The different titles reflect the fact that many of these rural development charities are also 'Councils for Voluntary Services' (CVS) organisations and part of the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) network. Together, the 37 RCCs provide national coverage of rural counties. All affiliate to ACRE via their respective regional ACRE bodies.
- 4.2.8 **Localism:** The second key strand of national policy in England likely to impact on rural isolation is the Big Society agenda and the Localism Bill introduced to Parliament in December 2010 by the Minister of State for Decentralisation. These proposals, should they become law, will impact on local decision making in rural communities in the following ways:

Localism Bill relevant policy proposals...

- *Devolving more powers and opportunities to innovate local government*
- *Giving voluntary and community groups more opportunities to bid for local government contracts to deliver local services to local people*
- *Giving local people opportunities to nominate those local amenities most important as community assets and to plan and raise funds to purchase these should they be put on the market or at risk of closure*
- *More opportunities to call for local referendums to vote on local issues including decisions on Council Tax rises*
- *Neighbourhood development planning by local neighbourhood forums and parish councils, including a 'community right to build' small community-owned developments*
- *Greater local powers over how the 'Community Infrastructure Levy' on developers is spent in the locality including maintaining existing community infrastructure*
- *Giving more powers to local government to decide on social housing policies*

England Local Policy

- 4.2.9 **Local Strategic Partnerships:** At the local statutory planning authority level (county, unitary and district), rural policy is currently determined

by Local Strategic Partnerships following a process of community involvement and articulated in the Local Development Framework, a portfolio of documents comprising a Core Strategy, thematic policies and area action plans.

4.2.10 Since 2000, in rural areas, many parish and town councils have developed parish or town plans (usually with support from their Rural Community Council) in order to establish local needs and priorities, influence and inform policy making by the local planning authority, police and primary care health providers, and as an evidence base in bids for funding.

Scotland National Policy

4.2.11 **Enterprise & Environment Directorate:** The Scottish Government Enterprise and Environment Directorate leads on national rural policy in Scotland. Rural affairs policy has recently been subject to a major consultation 'Speak Up for Rural Scotland'. The Scottish Government's response, 'Our Rural Future', was published in March 2011. The policy priorities of relevance to addressing rural isolation in Scotland are:

Scottish Government rural policy priorities...

- *Higher speed broadband*
- *Improved supply of sustainable affordable housing where needed, with appropriate design*
- *Affordable motor fuel through seeking reductions from UK Government in fuel duty in remote rural Scotland, and the effective use of public transport including encouraging local authority provision and co-ordination of demand responsive and community transport schemes*
- *Improving rural healthcare services*
- *A more effective partnership between communities and Community Planning Partnerships/Local Authorities to include: continued development of Community Councils as the key driver for community empowerment; developing more community engagement tools (e.g. (VOiCE – Visioning Outcomes in Community Engagement) to help plan, record and monitor community engagement activity; more skills training and demonstration projects*
- *Capacity and skills development for communities through continued support to the Third Sector in leadership skills and sharing through the Scottish National Rural Network*
- *More community control of assets/resources – e.g. funding the Development Trust Association Scotland to look at asset transfer from local authorities to community groups*

- *Promotion of Development Trusts and Social Enterprises and facilitate and support to be self-funding through providing business development support and grants via the Scottish Investment Fund*
- *Support to local rural businesses growth – e.g. skills training and consultancy via Business Gateway, Highland and Islands Enterprise etc. and encouraging bank lending to sustainable rural businesses*

Scotland Local Policy

4.2.12 **Community Planning Partnerships:** Scottish local planning authorities still produce Structure Plans and Local Area Plans as opposed to the Local Development Framework approach now in place across England. These are developed by Area Community Planning Partnerships (equivalent to the Local Strategic Partnerships in England).

4.2.13 At town and parish level, there is a similar drive as in England towards neighbourhood planning supported by Community Councils, although there are fewer of these currently in Scotland than in England.

The Impacts of Policy on Rural Isolation

4.2.14 Findings of the Rural Insights Surveys of 2006 and 2009 are a good starting point for considering the impact of rural policies to date on the prevalence of rural isolation in England.

4.2.15 In the 2006 survey, the top five actions residents suggested when asked what they would like to see done to improve the local quality of life, were (in order):

1. Activities and facilities for teenagers
2. Public transport
3. Road safety
4. Shopping facilities
5. Facilities for young children.

4.2.16 By 2009, the order had changed to:

1. Public transport
2. Shopping facilities
3. Activities and facilities for teenagers
4. Road/pavement maintenance
5. Job prospects; road safety; facilities for young children (tied).

4.2.17 A 2010 report by the Rural Services Network representing 250 rural organisations in England also found that rural residents place public transport as a top priority.

4.2.18 **Impacts of transport policy:** It is apparent, both from these rural

public attitude surveys and from our own consultation within the RCAN network and with a wide range of voluntary and community sector organisations working in rural communities, that transport is now the top priority in most rural communities.

- 4.2.19 The rise in priority is due in part to the increasing numbers of people living in rural areas who do not have access to private transport (for reasons of health, income or age). More directly, it is due to the steady rise in the costs of fuel, fuel duty and insurance for private transport and a decline in the frequency of public subsidised bus services operating in rural areas.
- 4.2.20 Continuing rises in the cost of fuel (driven by uncertainty of supply and fuel duty policies) will cause more rural isolation in the view of the Director of Action for Rural Communities in the South West: *“The biggest barrier causing physical isolation is lack of access to transport, whether transport for people to access services or to take services to people in their homes or village halls. It is bad now but, with fuel prices set to continue to rise, there is a real risk that rural isolation will get much worse. At the moment most people can still get around but the cost rises are beginning to make it marginal for more people. There is a danger of increasing polarisation in rural communities and barriers building between the majority who have the means to stay independent and those who do not.”* (Chris Head, Director SWAN)
- 4.2.21 Throughout the UK, since deregulation of the bus services in 1985, services linking the more remote rural communities to towns have either been lost completely or substantially cut. Small commercial bus operators are contracted by local authorities to run subsidised services in rural communities. In many areas, planning and co-ordination of connections across areas served by more than one operator is poor. The impact is that for many people journeys to services in the nearest town become impractical. As a result the services are under-used and eventually may be cut with the result that more people become rurally isolated. In Scotland this problem was mentioned by several of the consultees.
- 4.2.22 At the rural county and district levels, many local authorities reflect the rise in priority of rural transport in Local Transport Plans and follow this through with funding to subsidise commercial rural bus services and local not-for-profit community transport schemes. Currently, the Community Transport Association estimates there are approximately 1,700 community transport organisations in England with 10,000 staff, all run on a not-for-profit basis. However, local authorities are receiving on average 18.5% less funding from central government over the next two years. In response many councils have recently announced cuts in rural transport budgets. Some estimates put the total value of the cuts in rural areas of England at around £135m.

4.2.23 Looking to the future, the Government recently announced proposals for a £360m 'Local Sustainable Transport Fund' in the white paper 'Creating Growth, Cutting Carbon' which aims to encourage greater use of public transport and more walking and cycling. One of three stated aims of the strategy, which sets out a vision for local solutions which will have a national impact, is '*giving local people more power over initiating innovative transport schemes in their own areas to better meet local needs*'.

4.2.24 In Scotland, Transport Scotland (the agency of the Scottish Government responsible for national transport) is working to implement the National Transport Strategy published in 2006. Improving the quality, accessibility and affordability of public transport is one of three strategic outcomes. Government commitments towards this outcome include:

- Introducing a national concessionary travel scheme (free bus travel for people aged 60+, disabled people was introduced in April 2006; one third off bus, rail and ferry travel for 16-18 year olds and young full-time volunteers to age 25 from January 2007; two free return ferry journeys per annum for young residents of Scottish Islands)
- Undertaking a review of ferry services with a view to developing a long-term strategy for lifeline services to 2025
- Reviewing the affordability of public transport in relation to ferry, rail and bus services
- Amending the legislation on Bus Services Operators grant (BSOG) to allow claims to be made in respect of fully flexible services
- Publishing our Bus Action Plan to help achieve a step change in the quality of bus service provision (see box below)
- Introducing integrated ticketing pilots to enhance the passenger journey.

Rural/Small Urban Scotland

The Bus Quality Audit noted that for many people living in market towns the private car is an essential part of life and that car drivers preferred to use their cars because there were no time restraints. There was a recurring theme linked to the infrequency – sometimes recognised as inevitable – of buses in less populated areas. The Audit noted further that in rural areas, for people who 'live off the beaten track', there will be bus services for school children with occasional other services to town. Bus journeys would have to be very carefully planned. The Audit commented that, unless something innovative can be done, it seems unlikely that this situation will change. For deeply rural areas, such as in Angus, the Audit commented that there could be scope to develop something on the Lincolnshire model, with minibuses and demand responsive services feeding into the main road services on a regular basis at properly established hubs.

Extract from Moving into the Future, An Action Plan for Buses in Scotland, Scottish Executive (2006)

4.2.25 **Impacts of adult social care policy:** The Adult Social Care Green Paper for England and Wales, 'Independence, Well-being and Choice', anticipates greater personalisation and choice for service users and includes positive messages about user empowerment. However, the policy drive in England towards 'self-directed support' and personal

care budgets is having considerable impact on the demand and need for advisory services among the elderly and disabled people, according to the organisations we have consulted. Anxiety about the possible implications of these changes is reported as increasingly common on the part of isolated individuals and their families. Some are concerned that they may lose access to group social activities as a result.

- 4.2.26 For example, Friends of the Elderly a small charity supporting the elderly and disabled in Bridlington in The East Riding of Yorkshire (Case Study No. 11 at Appendix C) reported that: *“Many retired here when active and now struggle to live independently with limited personalised care packages from social services and care providers of very variable quality”*. (Julie Sayles, Friends of the Elderly, Bridlington)
- 4.2.27 The policy drive in recent years of many local Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) towards a more preventative approach to health care services - i.e. addressing minor problems before they become major ones - has had considerable positive impact on outcomes for many rurally isolated people with health care needs that fall in the gap between health and social care services. This policy emphasis on public health and prevention is set to continue under the Government’s proposals.
- 4.2.28 Some voluntary and community adult social care organisations we consulted in the course of this research stated that their health partners are increasing preventative funding - e.g. NHS Cambridgeshire’s support to the ‘Welcome Home from Hospital’ outreach service provided by the Cambridgeshire Care Network (Case Study No. 19). However, whilst all PCTs recognise the cost effectiveness of expanding their preventative services and seek to prioritise expenditure in this area of care, budgets to support expansion are lacking in many areas. Other care organisations we spoke to were facing cuts in funding support from their health partners. For example Action for Blind People (No. 34) is finding a reduction in funding for Eye Clinic Liaison Officer posts in some hospitals due to budget constraints. These posts are vital to link patients to the community support services patients need to combat isolation.
- 4.2.29 Feedback from care and advice charities supported by BIG in rural areas shows the speed and scale of the policy changes in adult social care in England are making more of the most vulnerable feel more isolated and in need of advice and support.
- 4.2.30 Recognition, partnership and joint working between health providers, local authorities and voluntary sector carer organisations currently is more integrated in Scottish social policy than is the case in England and Wales. The need for the NHS to play its part in supporting carers is recognised in key Scottish health policy documents, the most recent being 'Building a Health Service Fit for the Future' (2005). This report, also known as the 'Kerr Report', sets out a 20-year plan for the NHS and shifts the emphasis from hospital-based care to preventative, anticipatory care rather than reactive management.

- 4.2.31 **Impacts of welfare policy:** The new Welfare Reform Bill introduced to Parliament in February 2011 aims to simplify the benefit system and to help people to move into and progress in work while protecting the most vulnerable.
- 4.2.32 Most of those we consulted in rurally based Citizen's Advice Bureaux and in other independent charities providing advisory services to vulnerable people welcomed the ambition to simplify the system but expressed real concerns about the impacts on isolated and vulnerable people and on the capacity of the public and voluntary sector advice services to cope with the inevitable increase in demand for advice and support. A fundamental point of concern is the belief that the provisions in the new Bill fail to recognise adequately the complexity and fragility of people's circumstances. Research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) in 2010¹³ evidences the difficult circumstances many jobless adults experience:
- 4.2.33 50% claim benefits because they have a disability or have health problems; 30% are claiming because they are unemployed; and 20% are claiming because they are a lone parent or a carer.
- 4.2.34 The feedback we received in our consultation with organisations working to advise people in rural poverty endorsed the following view expressed in a recent article by the Chief Executive of JRF: *"The lives of people in poverty are, like all our lives, complex. They don't fit easily into neat bureaucratic boxes. Jobs are temporary, conditions change, families break up, elderly relatives need care – all these things happen to us, and yet for people in poverty and dependent on benefits these changes can be catastrophic. We need a benefits system that will enable them to survive and find a route out of poverty. A civilised society should protect people who are in need and do so in a way that allows them the security, and the confidence, to recover".* (Julia Unwin CBE, JRF, 18 February 2011)
- 4.2.35 **Impacts of housing policy:** As discussed in the previous section concerning the impacts of socio-economic change on rural isolation, shortage of affordable housing for young people in rural towns and villages is a key cause of young people moving away which, in turn, weakens the sustainability of rural businesses and local services for those who remain.
- 4.2.36 A policy to provide more affordable housing in all communities, urban and rural, was introduced in 2007 following the Barker Review of 2004, and driven by The Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) towards the achievement of targets agreed through a framework of regional spatial strategies. While many new homes were built in the following

11 Working Age 'Welfare': 'Who get it, why and what it costs' Peter Kenway et al for Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2010)

two years, the global financial crisis slowed private investment very significantly and the supply of new affordable housing declined rapidly with greater reliance for investment on the public sector.

- 4.2.37 Abolition of the Regional Government Offices and the regional spatial strategies in England proposed by the present Government as part of its Localism Bill will place a greater reliance on local councils and new local development trusts to enable communities to provide homes for local people. The Department for Communities and Local Government are developing proposals to reform the HCA and to provide incentives to local councils to deliver sustainable development including new homes and businesses.
- 4.2.38 Feedback from members of the RCAN network gained through our research indicates a lack of confidence that the shortage of affordable housing in rural areas will be addressed in the short to medium term given the 'flatness' of the financial markets and concerns regarding how local authorities will prevent local lobbies from blocking new schemes.
- 4.2.39 **Impact of policies for young people:** Recent policies that have impacted positively on the lives of some young people living in rural areas of England include the Youth Matters agenda and the drive towards providing all young people with opportunities for five hours a week on average of 'positive activities'.
- 4.2.40 Feedback from projects supported by BIG and working with young people - e.g. Somerset Rural Youth Project (No. 47) and Richmondshire Leisure Trust (No. 46) - suggest that delivery of this policy agenda is very challenging in remote rural communities for those young people lacking access to transport from parents and the cost and infrequency of buses in the evenings and at weekends.
- 4.2.41 Of more significant impact on young people in English rural communities are the recent changes in education maintenance allowance (EMA) and cuts in careers and employment support services. These changes affect rural young people disproportionately due to their physical isolation. The changes to the Education Maintenance Allowance, closure of many Connexions careers advisory services for 13 to 25 year olds and Job Centres in smaller market towns and rural communities are already impacting on the isolation of some young people in rural areas. As one RCC Director said: *"The closure of Job Centres in some rural towns in the South West will mean that many people will have to travel a whole day to get to and from their nearest job centre by bus."* (Chris Head, SWAN)
- 4.2.42 A further policy change of likely relevance to the isolation of rural young people is the Department for Work and Pensions new 'Work Programme' for employment related support. The way the delivery of this new support programme for young people is structured - with

contracts let to prime contractors in framework 'lots' along regional lines and then sub-contracted to smaller sub-contractors in local areas - may result in young people in small rural communities missing out. The numbers of young people in the more remote areas will be small and the costs of accessing them relatively high. As such, there is a risk that local contractors delivering the support will treat young people from these rural areas as low priority.

4.2.43 For those voluntary and community sector organisations working with young people in rural areas, demands on their support are already increasing as a result of these policy changes and cuts. The case studies at Appendix C featuring Young People March (No. 50), The Teignbridge CVS (No. 1) and The Mullion Youth & Community Centre (No. 49) evidence the impact of these young people's policy changes.

4.2.44 In Scotland, the Scottish Government launched its first national youth strategy 'Moving Forward' in 2007. Unlike Youth Matters in England, Moving Forward did not establish specific outcome targets of hours per week of access to 'positive activities for young people'. The main provisions were greater recognition of the professional status of youth work in Scotland and funding of £8m nationally towards: a £2.5m Youth Opportunities Fund, a £5m Youth Work Facilities Improvement Fund and a £500,000 Voluntary Organisations Support Fund for national organisations. Unlike in England, the Scottish Government has retained the Educational Maintenance Allowance for young people in full at the present time.

4.2.45 **Impacts of rural broadband policy:** The UK Government published the strategy 'Britain's Superfast Broadband Strategy' in December 2010. This was followed in Scotland by 'Scotland's Digital Future: A Strategy for Scotland' in March 2011. Of particular relevance to rural areas, the proposals set out in these two documents include:

- A 'digital hub' in every community
- Investing £50 million in a second wave of pilot projects to test how this can be delivered (four pilots are underway on how to deliver superfast broadband to remote and rural areas).
- In total £530 million is allocated at UK level for broadband delivery. In Scotland, during 2011, In order to secure the best possible share, the Government has committed to '*work with Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, local authorities and other stakeholders to collectively develop a strategic infrastructure plan for Scotland which will comprise regional broadband strategies*'¹⁴.

4.2.46 The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, said on publication of the UK proposals: "*Rolling out superfast broadband is probably the single most important thing we can do to ensure the*

¹⁴ Scotland's Digital Future: A Strategy for Scotland (2011)

sustainability of our rural communities in the 21st Century and end the digital divide. Reliable internet access is vital for business and education, and will help to promote social inclusion and improve life in rural areas right across the country. The new broadband strategy is a vital part of our commitment to improving the lives of people living in rural communities.”
(Caroline Spelman, Defra, December 2010)

- 4.2.47 A number of projects featured as case studies on addressing rural isolation at Appendix C are focused on helping older residents in remote rural areas to learn how to access the internet and online information services. Examples include Norwich County Council's 'Surf's Up' project taking internet skills training to all its libraries and offering community transport to bring people from villages to and from the sessions (No. 51). Another is East Cornwall CVS (No. 2) who take a mobile broadband hub and suite of laptops out to village halls around the county. A third is The Life Centre in North Yorkshire (No. 52) which is starting up a similar scheme in the villages around the Wolds and Dales. In Scotland, The Pulteneytown People's Project in Wick (No. 45) is another good example.
- 4.2.48 Whilst there was general consensus among those consulted in the course of this research that this policy is a positive initiative in addressing rural isolation, there are considerable concerns regarding the extent to which the policy is both 'rural-proofed' and 'age-proofed'.
- 4.2.49 The rural concerns centre on the pace of change on putting public services online running ahead of the installation of the broadband infrastructure to allow people in rural areas to access them. For example, the RCAN network in England report rural post office closures in areas without universal broadband service have been justified on the grounds that the services are now available online.
- 4.2.50 The concerns relating to age-proofing are perhaps more intractable. First, many older people will never be able to access services online regardless of the extent of skills training services made available. People with arthritic hands or with poor memories are just two examples. Second, for those who are able and keen to go online, the scale of the training and support required and the need to tailor training to suit the needs of the individual are not appreciated sufficiently. Action for Blind, for example, is supported by BIG to help the visually impaired in rural areas to access one to one support with the internet and other assistive technologies. However, the number of people needing this level of support to help overcome their feelings of isolation cannot be reached without substantial additional funding.
- 4.2.51 The affordability of computers and broadband services (both home-based and mobile) for people on very low incomes is another issue. Whilst not a rural-specific issue, those people on low incomes in rural areas without personal broadband generally will find it harder to access e-services in libraries and other community settings than their urban counterparts.

4.2.52 Finally, too much internet training through adult continuing education services is certification based. As evidenced by the 'Surf's Up' project in Norfolk's libraries (No. 51), this is inappropriate for the needs of the older population.

4.3 Interventions by Others to Reduce Rural Isolation

Introduction

4.3.1 The research question addressed in this section is '*What funded initiatives have others in the public, voluntary and private sectors tried and how did they go about it?*'

4.3.2 In this section we identify the main initiatives and approaches adopted by each sector that touch on the causes of social isolation. Our intention is to help identify learning points to inform BIG's approach moving forward. The findings also point up opportunities for achieving 'added value' from future BIG programmes by partnership working and complementing interventions of others.

Public Sector Interventions

4.3.3 **The National Rural Development Programmes:** In the public sector, rural intervention is shaped by the Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) for each UK country. The RDPs in England (RDPE) and Scotland (SRDP) are designed to improve the competitiveness and sustainability of rural businesses, safeguard and enhance the countryside and help rural communities to thrive. These policy objectives are backed with funding from the national governments and the European Union.

4.3.4 The focus of the current programmes (running to 2013) is not on isolation issues but on safeguarding and enhancing the countryside. However, two of four policy objectives - i.e. '*Improving the quality of life in rural areas and encouraging diversification of the rural economy*' and '*Building local capacity for employment and diversification*' - do impact on rural isolation. The latter, commonly known as the 'Leader' programme (Links Between Activities Developing the Rural Economy), implements local rural development plans through Local Action Groups (LAGs). Currently administered in England by the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and delivered mainly via the network of Rural Community Councils, from July 2011, these initiatives will be administered by Defra directly at national level. It is expected that the new regional Local Enterprise Partnerships will be involved in the delivery of the RDPE moving forward. It is noted that Defra has had to reduce funding for projects under this programme to 2013 as part of current constraints on public spending.

4.3.5 An example of an initiative impacting on rural isolation under the RDPE Leader programme in partnership with BIG is the Wiltshire First led

'Wheels to Work' initiative (Case Study No. 10 at Appendix C). This RCC has been working with Salisbury Plain Local Action Group, a local social housing provider and other partners to help young people living in this rural area to access work and work related training. Another Local Action Group in the South West, covering the Somerset Levels and Moors has been distributing Leader funding from the RDPE (totalling £1.8m) against six themes. This includes a Village Halls and Community Buildings small grant scheme. As noted above, currently, funding for these and future Leader initiatives is uncertain and a number of schemes have closed early.

4.3.6 Similarly, The Community & Social Enterprise Fund 2010-2013 is another funding stream within the RDPE programme impacting on rural isolation in England that is under threat from budget constraints and the abolition of the Regional Development Agencies. In the South West, distributed by the South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA) to March 2011, this fund had £7m+ available to directly support the provision and delivery of sustainable services in rural areas in the South West region through grants and business advice. These services include; access to childcare, rural community shops, 'multi use' rural community facilities or renewable energy projects which benefit the whole community and generate income. The primary focus of the fund is to support voluntary and community organisations to become more self-financing and sustainable by the development of community and social enterprise activities. The fund is for new, existing or developing projects in rural areas - specifically for towns and villages with a population of less than 10,000 - across the whole of South West England.

4.3.7 The Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP), administered by The Scottish Government Enterprise and Environment Directorate, includes two strands relevant to rural isolation. The first, as in England, is the Leader initiative. Leader Scotland will deliver support of around £52m to rural areas by 2013. An additional £19.2m Convergence Funding has been awarded to seven Local Action Groups LAGs in the Highlands and Islands in recognition of its previous status as a disadvantaged and remote area. The second strand provides funding towards rural priorities in each of eleven Scottish local authority areas. A Regional Proposal Assessment Committee decides on allocations based on two rounds of applications per annum. Case Officers in area offices provide advice to applicants. A number of these SRDP projects have combined with BIG funding to reduce rural isolation, for example Aberfoyle Services Hub in Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park (Case Study No. 36 at Appendix C).

4.3.8 **Local Authority Rural Strategies and Action Plans:** It is not a statutory requirement for local authorities to have a separate strategy for rural issues. As such, local authorities adopt very different approaches. Some have a group responsible for rural affairs as part of their Local Strategic Partnership responsible for rural-proofing the

LSP's area Community Strategy. Most in rural areas have Rural Transport Partnerships to draw up Local Transport Plans. Some, for example Devon, have 'Community Teams' who work with town and parish councils, the RCAN network and other voluntary and community sector organisations in rural areas to develop parish plans and distribute small local authority grants and funding for rural initiatives. Most rural local authorities have small grant programmes available to support village halls and similar projects. Most of the village hall schemes consulted as part of this research, (whether in England and funded by BIG's Community Buildings programme or in Scotland and funded under the Growing Community Assets investment programme), also received grants from their local authority.

- 4.3.9 **Scottish Community Plans:** The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 provides for area 'Community Planning Partnerships' (CPPs). The CPPs are broadly equivalent to the Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) operating across local authority areas in England. As with the LSPs, there is no statutory requirement to consider rural issues although most CPPs in Scotland have a community planning strategic partnership or forum for rural affairs to ensure that effective linkages are made with other strands of the Community Plan.
- 4.3.10 **Town, Parish & Community Plans:** In England, at the town and parish level, community planning is encouraged by the districts (and county councils in two-tier areas) together with RCAN and other voluntary and community sector networks. Priority interventions of town or parish councils are often funded through a parish precept. Scotland has a network of 1,200 community councils at local level which operate in a similar way to English parish councils. These are statutory bodies with rights, abilities and duties granted under the Scottish Local Government Act 1973.
- 4.3.11 Somerset Rural Youth Project (No. 47) and Cambridgeshire Care Network (No. 19) are just two examples in the case studies at Appendix C of projects where BIG funding is working effectively in partnership with town and parish councils.
- 4.3.12 All of the case studies featuring investment from BIG's BASIS programme - providing infrastructure support to rural voluntary and community sector organisations - are also supporting more effective and inclusive parish and neighbourhood planning.
- 4.3.13 **Defra Rural Pathfinders:** Between 2005 and 2008, Defra designated eight Rural Pathfinder Areas across England to test ways of achieving more partnerships in delivering services in rural areas, more innovation and better prioritisation of existing resources towards areas, communities and people with greatest needs. The Dorset Rural Pathfinder in the South West Region identified four main challenges following a period of consultation. The third of these, '*connecting rural service delivery to community planning*' included:

- The production of a toolkit ('Shaping our Communities') to help local community and parish planning groups turn ideas into action through a parish plan
- Design and delivery of a programme of community capacity-building training
- Implementation of the 'Connecting Dorset' project, to extend standard e-government and e-services to local communities in Dorset by providing all Town and Parish Councils, and village and community halls, with a broadband web connection, computer equipment, training and support.

4.3.14 In many of the Rural Pathfinder areas, BIG's BASIS projects (providing infrastructure support to voluntary and community organisations in rural areas) are building on and helping to sustain some of these and similar initiatives such as those funded by the European Union below.

4.3.15 **European Union initiatives:** Less prosperous regions in the UK, including the former mining regions of Cornwall and South Yorkshire, are eligible for EU funding under the Objective One programme 2007-2013 supporting development in the less prosperous regions of Europe. An example in Yorkshire is the 'Rural Target Fund' distributed (until March 2012) by the Regional Development Agency (Yorkshire Forward) and supporting rural communities in 50 priority parishes in South Yorkshire with the Yorkshire RCC acting as the rural enabling body.

4.3.16 Cornwall, Yorkshire and the Humber and the East of England are among 13 regions with allocations of European Social Fund (ESF) money to 2013 towards projects that extend employment opportunities and develop a skilled and adaptable workforce. Many of the case studies featured on the ESF pages of the DWP website involve projects to help isolated people in these rural regions find employment. One example featured is the work of 'Inclusion Cornwall' and 'Cornwall Works 50+' to support a Gulf War veteran who suffered from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder to set up a social enterprise running surfing courses for the isolated over 50s to boost their confidence.

4.3.17 **Capacitybuilders:** Capacitybuilders is a non-departmental public body which leads government investment in third sector support services primarily funded by the Office for Civil Society; part of the Cabinet Office. By March 2011 Capacitybuilders will have provided more than £170m of funding to enable voluntary and community organisations, social enterprises and groups working within communities to access better support and advice services. A proportion of this investment has supported organisations and groups working to reduce rural isolation. In some cases, BIG's investment in rural projects has added value to work supported by Capacitybuilders. In October 2010, Government took the decision to close down Capacitybuilders at the end of March 2011. If this funding

support is not replaced and delivered either directly by Government or via another organisation, demands on BIG from third sector organisations for investment in support and advice services are likely to increase quite substantially.

- 4.3.18 **Primary Care Trusts:** Many PCTs operating in rural areas of England provide funding and staff resources in partnerships with local authority adult social care services and third sector care organisations aimed at preventative interventions with older people. BIG supports a number of these interventions, for example the Cambridgeshire Care Network 'Welcome Home from Hospital' scheme (Case Study No. 19 at Appendix C). From 2012/13, responsibility for these initiatives is likely to pass to GP practices under the Government's proposals set out in the Health & Social Care Bill currently before Parliament.
- 4.3.19 **NHS Scotland** comprises eight Special NHS Boards, including the national health improvement agency NHS Health Scotland, plus 14 area NHS Health Boards. The area health boards have a similar role to the area PCTs in England in promoting and protecting public health working strategically through area-based Community Health Partnerships (CHPs). The CHPs manage a range of community health services such as District Nurses and Health Visitors and support the work of third sector care organisations.
- 4.3.20 **Partnerships for Older People's Projects (POPPs):** Partnerships for Older People Projects (POPP) was a £60m programme run by the Department of Health in England between 2006 and 2009 to develop and evaluate services and approaches for older people aimed at promoting health, well-being and independence and preventing or delaying the need for higher intensity or institutional care. The focus of the POPP programme was to test and evaluate different models of service through 29 local authority-led pilots including a number in rural areas. The pilots aimed to create a sustainable shift in resources and culture away from institutional and hospital based crisis care for older people towards earlier, targeted interventions for older people within their own homes and communities. Over 260,000 people - two thirds aged 75 and over - used one or more of the POPP services. These services were aimed at meeting low level to high level needs and ranged from rapid response services, to mental health cafés with open door access for older people, to falls prevention services, telephone advice services and befriending schemes. The evidence and learning from the pilots has supported council-led partnerships with PCTs and other agencies in a number of the 29 pilot areas to invest in preventative approaches that improve the quality of life of older people and are cost-effective.
- 4.3.21 **Defra Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund (ALSF):** Since 2007, ACRE has delivered an annual grants programme funded by **COMMA** to compensate communities affected by quarrying, by supporting community-based projects in their area. Approximately £1.8m has been

awarded to date to 190 projects. Other not-for-profit agencies including **WREN** and **Biffaward** also grant aid community projects in areas affected by quarrying using Government Landfill Tax Credits. Most of these projects are in rural areas. Many are also supported by BIG, for example Bishop Wilton Village Hall in The East Riding of Yorkshire (Case Study No. 39 at Appendix C).

Third Sector interventions

4.3.22 **Carnegie UK Trust:** The Carnegie UK Trust is responsible for the Rural Action Research Programme (supported by BIG) and documented in a '*Manifesto and Charter for Rural Communities*' in 2009. Three enabling factors for excellent rural development identified in this document are:

- Growing the capacity of local people, agencies and professionals that support rural communities; building strong social networks founded on high levels of volunteering and skilled support.
- Enhancing community assets
- Effective community led planning and stronger local governance

4.3.23 The evidence suggested that dynamic, vibrant and sustainable communities need creative people working together, assets to support their aspirations and agencies and local people collaborating to an agreed plan. Specific 'Ideas for Action' arising from this work were put forward. BIG is supporting a number of these initiatives, for example skilled parish plan facilitators through its BASIS programme. Other ideas put forward by Carnegie UK Trust include:

Growing the capacity of local people...

- *Community Learning Accounts' where a rural community determines how a pot of money can be deployed to provide learning in priority areas*
- *Pioneering rural communities to be able to generate an income for their communities from 'rural development tourism' i.e. payment for their time and expertise as 'host organisations'*
- *'Community of Practice' bursaries for individuals engaging their communities in planning*

Enhancing community assets...

- *Government support to catalyse the development of expertise in community asset management by professionals who fully appreciate the need to embrace social objectives*
- *National and regional level support to pioneering Community Land Trusts working to transform rural affordable housing provision*

Effective community led planning...

- *More effective engagement with rural communities by planners and other professionals using best practice learning (e.g. Devon Heartlands)*

4.3.24 **Rural Communities Action Network (RCAN):** The Rural Community Councils are effectively the rural arm of the National Council of Voluntary Organisations and, in partnership with local volunteer action organisations, the RCCs are the prime deliverers of support services and advice to individuals and voluntary and community groups in rural communities. The independent governance of each RCC results in each having a different focus or specialist expertise according to local priority needs. For example: Wiltshire First specialises in financial support to people and groups in rural isolation (e.g. credit unions, insurance, small bank loans); Gloucestershire RCC has a focus on rural capacity building through a network of 'Village Agents'; Cornwall RCC specialises in mental health support services in rural areas. Each RCC shares its specialist expertise via the regional and national ACRE network and through partners including BIG.

4.3.25 ACRE Scotland operates as an investment cooperative for people interested in investing in rural community businesses, for example community shops.

4.3.26 The ACRE network of RCCs is the lead agency in England for advisory services on rural community buildings. Statistics and good practise advice is available to all rural communities concerning all aspects of village halls and community buildings by means of its 'Village Advisers'. Interestingly, its 2009 'National Village Hall Survey' report found that 45% of village hall committees had never accessed this advice service. Other key findings of relevance to BIG's future support to Community Buildings in villages were:

National Village Hall Survey in England 2009 Summary findings...

- *58% of halls reported being the only multi-purpose meeting place in the community.*
- *Volunteers contributed 18.5 hours per week on average to running the hall. 75% of halls cost less than £10,000 pa to run, 51% cost less than £5,000 pa*
- *75% of all halls provide a focus for local democratic engagement. 72% support local community group fundraising and 50% provide a venue for activity supporting health needs.*
- *Hall use has trebled since 1988 but 10% of halls require urgent repairs to keep them in use.*
- *46% of halls usually earn sufficient income to make a surplus, 27% of halls receive some financial support from their parish council, and the remainder rely on fundraising effort to survive.*
- *Only 3% of halls receive regular local authority funding. 46% receive no discretionary rate relief.*
- *61% of halls that carried out recent improvements say this led to provision of new services. 78% of improvements cost less than £50,000 with 31% costing less than £10,000.*

- 60% are planning major improvements in the next 5 years, 35% will require grant funding of under £20,000 whilst 8% say they will require over £200,000.

4.3.27 Similar research was carried out in 2008 of Scottish rural village halls. The research focused on five themes: the condition and maintenance of the buildings; their ownership; their management and governance; types of users; and uses to which the village halls are put. The main findings were:

- **National Village Hall Survey in Scotland 2008: Summary Findings...**
-
- Over two-thirds of those surveyed are more than 50 years old and require improvements to make them either “fit for purpose” and/or to comply with legislation.
- The main source of fuel for over two-thirds of village halls is electricity, with only a minority having renewable energy installations and less than half with any energy conservation measures.
- Almost four-fifths of the rural community facilities are owned by local communities, with the majority of management committees having difficulty in recruiting and retaining volunteers.
- Less than one fifth of respondent committees had prepared a business plan in the past five years, and almost two-thirds had no budget preparation year-on-year.
- Virtually no committees had received training in business planning, management or governance in the past year, and less than one fifth had been to workshops or networking events.
- Over three-quarters being used by young and elderly people, and more than half providing a venue for parents and toddlers.
- The principal purpose of the facilities appears to be providing a venue for community activities, rather than as a service point for public services (such as library, local authority services, post office, GP).

4.3.28 **Rural Forums:** In most English regions, Rural Forums are established to develop strategies and action plans, usually coordinated by a member of the RCAN network with wide representation from across the voluntary and community sector. A good example is Yorkshire and the Humber Forum. This group led by the RCCs ‘Rural Action Yorkshire’ and ‘Humber Wolds RCC’ recently published a report ‘*Rural priorities: Key work areas of rural voluntary and community organisations in Yorkshire and the Humber*’. This report sets out existing voluntary and community sector led initiatives aimed at combating rural isolation, many supported with funding from BIG.

4.3.29 **The Plunkett Foundation:** The Plunkett Foundation helps rural communities in England through community-ownership to take control of the issues affecting them. The focus of the Foundation’s work is:

- Helping rural communities to set up and run community-owned shops with a range of partner organisations

- Supporting rural communities to establish a wide range of other community-owned rural services, including community transport
- Promoting and supporting the development of community food and farming enterprises across England through leading the BIG-funded 'Making Local Food Work' programme and other community food and farming enterprises
- Advocating and raising awareness amongst policy makers, support organisations and rural communities themselves of the ability of rural communities to take control through community-ownership of the issues affecting them

The Plunkett Foundation is already an important partner for BIG in the 'Making Local Food Work' programme in England. Given the Foundation's expertise in other key rural activities, it would seem appropriate for BIG to liaise closely with the Foundation in determining the most effective ways to use lottery investment addressing rural isolation. Whilst the Foundation's work is focussed on England, it is also a centre of information and ideas relating to rural co-operatives and social enterprise worldwide. This information and learning will have relevance to work to address rural isolation throughout the UK.

4.3.30 **The Groundwork Trust:** 'Community Spaces' was a £50 million grants programme managed by Groundwork UK as an Award Partner to the BIG. Until January 2011, the programme provided grants of between £10,000 and £450,000 to help not-for profit community groups create or improve green and open spaces. Organisations supported included community groups registered charities and trusts, church based and other faith groups, friends of groups and tenants and residents associations, etc. The type of activities funded included improvements to play areas, community gardens, parks, wildlife areas, ponds, courts and village greens, etc. A high proportion of these projects are in rural areas.

4.3.31 **GrantScape Community Greenspace Challenge:** The GrantScape Community Greenspace Challenge is a c. £500,000 grant programme open until May 2011 and designed to support local communities in creating enjoyable new outdoor greenspaces, including by transforming existing unloved areas. It is specifically designed to benefit the environment both for people and for wildlife, supporting people's health, well-being and access to nature. As such, these projects in rural areas will provide places for people to walk and socialise helping to reduce isolation. The local authority areas eligible to apply include Cambridgeshire and rural Central Bedfordshire in the Eastern Region.

4.3.32 **Disability and mental health charities:** All the main disability and mental health charities help to reduce rural isolation by providing web based information and support services. The mental health charity, Mind, offers a dedicated 'Rural Stress Helpline', a confidential telephone listening and support service for anyone in a rural area who is feeling troubled, anxious, worried, stressed or needs information. Age Concern in Devon co-ordinates 'The Time for Life Consortium',

part of the Devon Community Mentoring Service, capitalising on the relatively strong social networks in rural communities to tackle loneliness and isolation through providing mentors to befriend and help people to get out and meet others.

4.3.33 Equalities action groups: Several initiatives are tackling negative attitudes towards BME and LGBT groups in rural areas of the UK, at both national and local levels. These initiatives include:

- The Equality and Human Rights Commission's 'Beyond Tolerance' project is looking at the issues for LGBT groups across the UK
- Action for Social Integration (www.afsi.org.uk) is a registered charity that aims to advance social and cultural integration, social justice, inclusion, equality and diversity, and to eliminate prejudice and discrimination in relation to asylum seekers, refugees and minority ethnic communities from all ethnic backgrounds.
- Intercom (www.intercomtrust.org.uk) is an umbrella organisation for LGBT communities dispersed across rural areas in the south west of England.
- Citizen's Advice and Age UK have both highlighted the risk of isolation for BME and LGBT groups in rural areas, and both have local support groups across England and Scotland.
- The Highlands & Islands Equalities Forum works to raise awareness of equality and diversity in rural Scotland "and to create a positive environment for groups and individuals who currently face isolation and discrimination".

4.3.34 Advice and support organisations: Both in England and Scotland, there are extensive rural networks of public, private and voluntary sector organisations with websites containing information and resources and signposts to area and local community websites and other resources. At national level these are 'The Rural Services Network in England' and 'The Scottish National Rural Network'. Their aims are to:

- Represent the case for a better deal for rural service provision
- Exchange useful and relevant information
- Develop and share best practice

4.3.35 The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) and the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) also have web-based information services. The latter has a rural specific site 'Rural Direct' and publishes a monthly newsletter for community groups interested in SRDP and related funding opportunities. In England, The National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA) is a further source of advice and support for local charities and community groups, although not rural specific.

4.3.36 At regional and local levels in Scotland, as in England, there are a multitude of social enterprises working with local authorities, housing associations and community organisations to help develop ideas and bring community facilities and enterprise projects to fruition in the rural

areas. Community Link Scotland is just one example in Scotland, a partner in a number of Big Lottery projects including the Arrochar & Tarbet Community Development Trust (see Case Study No. 44 at Appendix C).

- 4.3.37 **Community Foundations:** At local level, the village hall or village school are the hub of village communities as meeting points and venues for community activities organised by informal groups - for example talks, coffee mornings, book clubs, walks, pensioners groups etc. These groups are ineligible for grants from most funding agencies. However, the Community Foundations in England and Scotland provide a mechanism for support to groups that do not have a formal governance structure and therefore play a key role in the vitality of village communities and reducing rural isolation.
- 4.3.38 **University of the Third Age:** U3A, or 'The Third Age Trust' is a significant charity in helping the over 50s to address social isolation in rural areas through sharing learning experiences. It has 250,000 members across nearly 800 independent U3As. Many U3As have successfully accessed Awards for All funding from BIG for specific initiatives.
- 4.3.39 **Grant aiding charitable trusts:** There are a multitude of charities that provide grants to projects working to address rural isolation for specific at risk groups. For example Comic Relief is a major funder of projects in the UK to support family carers. The Tykes Young Karers project in Sutherland (No. 26), Scotland is just one example of a rural carer support project supported by Comic Relief in partnership with BIG. Other grant aiding charities recurring in our research as partners in rural isolation projects include: The Robertson Trust, The Volant Charitable Trust (JK Rowling), the Co-Operative Group's Communities Fund, The Garfield Weston Foundation, Lloyds TSB Trust, Henry Smith Trust, The Royal British Legion. There are many more.
- 4.3.40 **The Community Transport Association:** As part of the Department of Transport's £560m investment to 'kick start' sustainable transport projects to help create economic growth and reduce carbon emissions, 76 rural local authorities will receive consultancy advice (in a partnership with the Community Transport Association) to assist in the setting up and management of community transport services. A further initial initiative from this investment is a fund of £10m to be distributed to existing community transport schemes to ease the burden on cuts to subsidised local authority services. This funding will be distributed across the country, providing transport to schools and hospitals in remote rural areas, which could potentially be isolated without the services.
- 4.3.41 **Community Land Trusts:** A Community Land Trust (CLT) is a non-profit, community-based organisation run by volunteers that develops housing or other assets at permanently affordable levels for long-term

community benefit. It does this by separating the value of the building from the land that it stands on and, in the case of shared-equity homes, fixing the resale percentage, thereby enabling occupiers to pay for the use of buildings and services at prices they can afford. The CLT holds the land asset in trust for long-term community benefit. Running in the UK since 2008, there are now over 80 organisations that define themselves as CLTs, many of these are in rural areas, particularly in Devon and Cornwall in the South West.

- 4.3.42 **Charity Bank:** Many social enterprises, charities and community organisations working to reduce rural isolation throughout the UK are supported with funding from the Charity Bank, itself a registered charity.

Interventions by other lottery distributors

- 4.3.43 The approaches taken by the other lottery distributors to combating rural isolation are summarised below:

- 4.3.44 **Sport England:** Sport England's main Small Grants programme reaches rural areas in similar way to the Awards for All programme of BIG. The majority of these awards are for revenue projects i.e. supporting new sports programmes, teams and coaching. Sport England also promotes a series of 'Themed Funding Rounds'. In 2008, it ran a targeted funding round for Rural Communities. A postcode eligibility tool was used to target rural areas based on the rural 50 and rural 80 definitions. Feedback from RCCs suggests that some errors were made in the design of the tool (e.g. use of unitary level ONS data as opposed to district level). This rendered some very rural areas ineligible. Other sport lottery funding reaching rural communities is distributed by national governing bodies of sport funded by the lottery via Sport England. Some of the sports governing bodies have county networks and programmes to support rural grass roots clubs and parish council facilities.

- 4.3.45 **sportscotland:** In Scotland there is no separate Small Grants programme for sports revenue projects up to £10,000. All small grants applications for sports revenue projects are made to the Awards for All Scotland programme. **sportscotland** also promotes a Sports Facilities Fund of capital grants with two strands, one for capital projects under £100,000 in value and one for projects costing more than £100,000. To encourage applications from regeneration areas and remote rural areas, **sportscotland** requires a lower percentage contribution of the project costs for all applicants other than local authorities. For most projects, the applicant is required to raise half the costs. In regeneration areas and remote rural areas the percentage is relaxed to 10% provided the applicant is able to demonstrate that at least 70% of the members and/or users are residents of the regeneration/remote rural area. In remote rural areas, this concession is limited to projects

costing under £200,000.

4.3.46 **Arts Council England:** The main ACE lottery funded open programme is 'Grants for the Arts' offering up to £30,000 for 3 years for individual artists and up to £100,000 for groups. There is no rural-proofing within the grant programme criteria and guidelines. These are:

- The quality of the activity, or its ongoing effect on artistic practice (or both) and the quality of experience for audiences and those taking part.
- How the activity increases opportunities for the public to engage in arts activities.
- How the activity will be managed and its ongoing effect.
- How realistic the activity is financially and its future effect.

4.3.47 **Youth Music:** Youth Music administers an open grants programme of awards for youth music projects costing between £5,000 and £30,000 on behalf of Arts Council England. No rural-proofing criteria are included in the programme guidelines.

4.3.48 Indeed, it is arguable that rural projects are disadvantaged by the 'unit cost' value for money criteria used in assessment of applications i.e. the amount applied for divided by the number of children and young people on the project. However, as part of its value for money assessment Youth Music also take into account the particular needs of the children and young people and the types of music making activities.

4.3.49 **Creative Scotland:** Creative Scotland was formed in July 2010 following a merger of Scottish Screen and the Scottish Arts Council. As in the case of *sportscotland*, small value applications for the creative arts (between £500 and £10,000) are directed to the Awards for All Scotland fund led by BIG. As a new organisation, its funding programmes and guidelines are currently under review. Separate grant application processes are in place for individuals and for arts organisations seeking funding for projects costing more than £10,000. There are no rural-proofing measures in the application guidelines.

4.3.50 **UK Heritage Lottery Fund:** HLF is currently running eight open funding programmes. There is no specific rural-proofing within the guidelines for these programmes. However, the 'Your Heritage' small grants programme (£3,000 to £50,000) is most suited to rural communities as a flexible programme particularly designed for voluntary and community groups and first-time applicants. It is noted that relatively small cost projects such as the upgrade of paths and cycle tracks can make a big impact on reducing isolation in rural areas. One example from our research is a re-instated and upgraded path with lighting linking the village of Sandford and the town of Crediton in Devon (Case Study No. 41 at Appendix C). This path provides a safe way for young people in particular to get to amenities in the town at evenings and weekends.

Interventions by the private sector

4.3.51 In recent years, private sector companies have recognised a number of business opportunities in serving the needs of isolated and disadvantaged people in rural communities. Whilst profit is the prime objective, these interventions do serve to reduce rural isolation, particularly for those people with the level of household income necessary to access these services. Key examples include:

- Rural bus service contractors
- Supermarkets serving rural communities providing shuttle bus services and home delivery
- Pre-packaged meal producers targeting the elderly and housebound markets (e.g. Wiltshire Farm Foods) with door to door delivery
- Local taxi companies (however, many rural areas have no accessible taxis for disabled people, or very limited supply)
- Communications and broadband video link technologies such as the 'TeleTalk' system successfully piloted in Richmondshire (however, large areas of rural England and Scotland do not yet have access to a broadband service)
- Niche companies offering home and village hall based services for the growing number of older people in rural communities (e.g. Silver Training offering one-to-one home based teaching in computers and the internet targeted at the over 50s in rural areas at charges of c. £30 per hour inclusive of travel and course materials)
- Corporate and Social Responsibility initiatives, for example:
 - The Microsoft Citizenship programme donating computers and software to local community projects and charities (e.g. Bridport Citizen's Advice Bureau providing financial and legal advice to people in need in rural West Dorset).
 - 'TalkTalk Lonely' a free service to TalkTalk customers offering weekly befriending calls with a member of staff

4.4 BIG Activities to Reduce Rural Isolation

Introduction

4.4.1 *'What is working well in terms of activities and types of BIG project that are proving effective in reducing rural isolation?'* This research question needs to be considered in the context of BIG's Strategic Framework to 2015 and the organisation's three UK-wide themes:

- Community Learning and Creating Opportunity
- Promoting Community Cohesion and Safety
- Promoting Well-being

4.4.2 Rural isolation, as an issue to be addressed by BIG, has relevance across all three themes. Most directly it is relevant in promoting well-being through investment to help overcome the feelings of powerlessness and disconnection experienced by individuals or groups as a consequence of living in a rural area.

4.4.3 In considering what activities and types of BIG project are proving effective, we also take account of the organisation's objective '...to move further along a spectrum from a funding distributor to an 'intelligent' funder i.e.

- Championing equalities and sustainable development
- Championing communities to thrive, be more robust, inclusive and tackle the issues that matter to them
- Using learning to influence public policy and practice
- Equipping communities to deal with the changes and challenges that modern life throws at them
- Reflecting the diversity of the UK'

Past initiatives impacting on rural isolation

4.4.4 BIG's predecessor bodies -The Community Fund and the New Opportunities Fund (NOF) - specifically targeted rural areas through two main programmes:

4.4.5 **Countryside Communities:** This programme targeted eight rural local authority areas in England, which were regarded as being both deprived and also as having missed out on their 'fair share' of Lottery funding. The initiative ended in March 2007. Countryside Communities focused on outreach and development activities, with the aim of increasing and improving applications received from the eight areas. The eight areas each had five-year targets for the amount of funding they would be expected to get. Five of the eight areas met the targets within the timeframe of the scheme.

4.4.6 **The Scottish Land Fund:** This programme allocated £15m to buy, develop and manage land and buildings in rural communities across Scotland. The scheme was part of NOF's 'Green Spaces and Sustainable Communities' programme administered by Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Scottish Enterprise. A team of land advisers worked with communities to develop proposals. The Scottish Land Fund provided the means for many communities to become involved in the ownership and management of the land on which they live. It also enabled communities to take on the ownership of local buildings and other assets to deliver key services or facilities e.g. social enterprises and meeting spaces. By the time of the programme closure in July 2006 just under £14m had been committed to 188 communities, nearly all of which were rural.

4.4.7 In 2004, SQW Ltd in association with Land Use Consultants evaluated the Scottish Land Fund on behalf of NOF, interviewing people from 20 of the then 86 projects. The consultants' found the main impact was social:

The very process of developing and running projects has had a positive effect on communities. In many, most if not all residents have been engaged in community groups, fundraising events or consultation. This has given people confidence in their ability to engage with authorities and funders, as well as to implement plans and manage buildings, land and other facilities. Project participants noted the importance of these processes in bringing communities together. Perhaps most directly of all, most projects have provided facilities and activities that allow people to meet and spend time together, strengthening bonds between community members and across generations.

Source: SQW & LUC Scottish Land Fund Report of Evaluation (2003)

4.4.8 Also in 2004, NOF commissioned a team from Strathclyde University to research how best to address the specific needs of rural communities in Scotland and to review the performance of the NOF in doing so between 1999 and April 2004 across all its' programmes in Scotland.

4.4.9 **New Opportunities Fund, Scotland:** The study took account of a NOF investment total of £267m across 21 programmes in Scotland. The key findings of relevance to this research were:

- *Overall, there were no significant differences between the distribution of funding to rural and urban areas, when compared with population and standard measures of deprivation. There were, however, variations by specific programmes.*
- *Rural areas account for 30 per cent of Scotland's population, and 18 per cent of the population considered 'most in need'.*
- *40 per cent of the projects funded were in rural areas, and those projects received 27 per cent of the total funding.*
- *Rural projects received an average of £33,000 per project location, while urban projects received an average of £65,000 per location.*

- *The average commitment per capita in urban Scotland (£53.66) was significantly higher than that of rural and small-town Scotland (£46.15).*
- *When comparing levels of funding with measures of deprivation, rural areas have been favoured over small towns.*
- *The Fund's differing delivery mechanisms may have affected take-up of funding in rural communities.*
- *Various wider factors relating to the specific circumstances and capacities of rural communities influenced the extent to which they chose to apply for funds, their success rate at application, and their subsequent success at running projects.*
- *BIG might consider a number of approaches to ensuring continuing equity in funding across Scotland, and to ensuring that we respond to the specific needs and perspectives of rural communities. One of the most effective ways of doing this would be to introduce a system of rural-proofing in developing and delivering new programmes.*

Source: Evaluation of New Opportunities Fund in Scotland, Strathclyde University (2004)

4.4.10 **Community Buildings:** Based on the learning from the success of the Scottish Land Fund and in response to expressed demand, £50m was allocated in two rounds in 2006 and 2007 towards sustainable community buildings in local areas in England. A competitive programme, the criteria sought projects that offered a wide range of activities and services and promoted community interaction and self-help. Whilst a full evaluation of this programme has not been undertaken, an internal 'First Analysis' by BIG staff shows that 93 of the 148 second round awards went to projects based in rural areas (i.e. 63%). The analysis also showed that the programme was substantially over-subscribed with particularly high demand from rural communities for replacement and upgraded village halls.

4.4.11 18 of the respondents to our questionnaire survey, and a further three of the projects we interviewed as case studies, received funding from this programme. The feedback received, in terms of the impacts on these new and improved village buildings on reducing rural isolation, was consistently positive. The quote below by the Hacheston Village Hall Playgroup co-ordinator in Suffolk typifies the main impact of the Community Buildings projects (Case Study No. 42): *"Many people living in the villages around here are alone all day and rely on coming to the Hall for regular social contact"* (Sandra Poacher, Hacheston Village Hall Playgroup Coordinator).

4.4.12 The critical contribution of Community Buildings to the well-being of rural residents of all ages and the vitality of rural communities has been recognised by BIG by its recent launch of a new capital element to its Reaching Communities programme. BIG's approach to 'rural-proofing' this new funding is discussed in more detail at section 4.5 of this report.

4.4.13 **Healthy Living Centres:** The Healthy Living Centres (HLC) programme was launched in 1999 by NOF. To 2007, over £280 million

was awarded by NOF (and since 2004 by BIG) to 352 HLCs across the UK for funding periods of up to five years. The aims of the HLC programme were:

- To promote health in its broadest sense
- To target areas and groups that represent the most disadvantaged sectors of the population
- To reduce differences in the quality of health between individuals, and improve the health of the worst off in society.

A number of HLCs supported by BIG are established in disadvantaged rural areas across the UK and used home visits or outreach with groups already working in the community to reach their target populations. A key lesson of relevance in the final evaluation of the programme in 2007 by The Bridge Consortium (led by The Tavistock Group) was: *'Broad programme aims and funding criteria can encourage innovation in the way that projects engage with communities to tackle local problems'*.

Current BIG initiatives impacting on rural isolation

UK wide

4.4.14 **Awards for All:** Our own research includes consultation with 60 Awards for All projects - 49 in England and 11 in Scotland - through a combination of questionnaire survey and case study interviews.

4.4.15 The feedback supported the findings of the PSI in 2008 in that the project leaders were very positive in terms of both the accessibility of this small grant fund to small community groups in rural areas, and the availability of support available with applications (e.g. from local authority grants officers, RCCs and others). They were also very positive about the impact of small grants in reducing rural isolation. For example, the grant of just £6,800 to the Woolavington Rural Activity Project in Somerset (Case Study No. 48) is providing access to drama workshops and other activities for around 150 children and young people in the village most of whom would be otherwise unable to access these kinds of social and learning opportunities. Indeed, the project leader here is adamant that small grants direct to local groups are the most effective in addressing rural isolation: *"Grant funds should be directed to the smaller organisations where parents and other residents - largely volunteers - will ensure they are spent carefully and achieve greater community benefit. Too much funding in the larger organisations with wider geographic remits is wasted."* (Christine Gale, Woolavington Rural Activity Project).

4.4.16 **Village SOS:** Village SOS is the only current BIG programme designed explicitly for rural communities. It is aimed at ideas for village enterprises that will revive their communities, create new jobs and improve the quality of life of local people. The programme is developed

in partnership with the BBC who are screening a six part series in 2011 to disseminate learning from six winning schemes (receiving in total £3m between them to develop their projects) and a further four short-listed villages that will be part of a learning campaign. It is too early to assess the impact of this programme on reducing rural isolation. However, based on the achievements of village business projects like Case Studies Nos. 41 & 43, Sandford Community Stores in Devon (supported by the Reaching Communities programme) and The Auchencairn Initiative's new Enterprise Centre in Dumfriesshire (supported by Growing Community Assets), we are confident that these projects will both impact significantly on reducing isolation within their own communities as well as provide invaluable learning and replicable good practice for social entrepreneurs in other rural communities.

4.4.17 **The Fair Share Trust:** This innovative programme was established in 2003 to build capacity and social capital in specified localities across the UK. NOF set up expendable endowments (managed by the Community Foundation Network) that allow communities to determine their own funding priorities. Although local Fair Share Trust areas are largely in urban areas, some rural areas were included, notably in South Lanarkshire, which was a case study in the evaluation of the initiative. In that area, the Fair Share Trust built voluntary and community sector activity, brought local residents together, and at the end of the programme had identified strategies for building on these achievements.

In England

4.4.18 **Reaching Communities:** Since its launch in 2005, Reaching Communities has been BIG's main open programme in England and has made in the order of 2,000 awards, the vast majority to voluntary led projects.

4.4.19 Reducing isolation is not an explicit aim. However it is implicit within the four intended programme outcomes i.e.

- People having better chances in life, including being able to get access to training and development to improve their life skills;
- Strong communities, with more active citizens, working together to tackle their problems;
- Improved rural and urban environments, which communities are better able to access and enjoy; and
- Healthier and more active people and communities.

4.4.20 Whilst these outcomes are broad and inclusive and the application assessment process is not based on 'unit cost' value for money criteria which tend to disadvantage applications from sparsely populated rural areas, there are no specific rural-proofing measures built into the Reaching Communities application process.

4.4.21 An evaluation of the first three years of the programme carried out by Ecorys for BIG in 2009 found that of 1,188 projects receiving funding in the first three years a quarter (304) were located in rural areas (self-defined by the applicant). 191 projects of 677 surveyed (28%) claimed to be measuring beneficiaries' confidence/self esteem as part of their self- evaluation, 67 (10%) well-being, 26 (4%) reduction in isolation.

4.4.22 The programmes guidance asks applicants to consider the question *'Will your project improve a community and the lives of those most in need?'*

4.4.23 On this point, Ecorys concluded from their research:

'Conveying important messages to applicants and projects about identifying, describing and meeting the needs of those 'most in need' requires further thought and action by BIG. Broadly speaking the nature of Reaching Communities with its open demand led structure and fairly open grant size and length restrictions, will generally lead to a huge diversity of local projects doing 'local good' rather than innovative or bespoke interventions or strategic projects targeting highly problematic individuals.'

Source: Evaluation of Reaching Communities in England and Northern Ireland Final Evaluation Report, Ecorys Research & Consulting (2010)

4.4.24 In our survey, approximately 50 of the rural projects that engaged in our research were supported with funding from Reaching Communities. Overall, these projects were impacting very significantly on rural isolation, in the main through care projects for the elderly and disabled providing social contact and support, but also through providing rural transport, improving services in villages and outreach services taking information and advice to people in need in their homes or villages.

4.4.25 **People's Millions:** The People's Millions is a competitive investment programme launched in 2005 and now providing funding of up to £60,000 to 60 projects annually across the 15 ITV regional news programme regions. The winning projects are decided by public vote following screening of the projects ideas each autumn. The criteria are inclusive aimed at projects to inspire local communities and involve local people working together to tackle a problem.

4.4.26 An evaluation of the programme by Leisure Futures in 2008 considered the issue of rurality and concluded at the time:

'There is a perception among projects and stakeholders that projects in towns stand a greater chance of winning than projects in more sparsely populated rural communities. However, analysis of a sample of 2007 finalists indicates that this is not the case. One possible explanation is that, in general, projects in smaller communities find it easier to engage with and mobilise local support than their counterparts in urban locations.'

Source: Evaluation of the People's Millions, Final Report, Leisure Futures (2008)

4.4.27 A large proportion of the winning projects implemented since 2005 provide improved local amenities and a wider range of activities for people in rural communities. These projects are reducing rural isolation for individuals in these communities.

4.4.28 **Building and Sustaining Infrastructure Services (BASIS):** Infrastructure services do vital work to help voluntary and community groups achieve their aims, through services such as training, providing information, representing community groups' interests, supporting networks and sharing good practice. The BASIS programme, now closed to new applications, aims to ensure that voluntary and community organisations throughout England have access to high quality support that will help them be more effective.

4.4.29 In 2006, a first round made awards of £101m to 206 voluntary and community sector infrastructure organisations to develop infrastructure support services across regions. In 2008 a second round took place with funding of £50m targeted to a narrowed set of priorities based on learning from round one as to the gaps in infrastructure support in each region. In the geographically dispersed regions with extensive rural communities, the priority for round two awards was for more outreach to ensure local communities and groups receive the support services they need to survive and thrive. Awards of between £10,000 and £500,000 were made for periods of up to five years.

4.4.30 As part of our research we have consulted with four infrastructure organisations delivering support to rural communities with funding from BASIS Round 2, Teignbridge CVS, Voluntary Norfolk, Humber & Wolds RCC and East Cornwall CVS. Case Studies Nos. 1 to 4 at Appendix C illustrate the impacts of this investment on the strength and sustainability of the voluntary and community sector in communities in these rural regions. The following quotes taken from an independent evaluation of the impacts of Voluntary Norfolk's rural development initiatives is typical of the type of impact achieved:

- *“When we first got in contact ... the whole thing was on the verge of collapse.”*
- *“We've just had a crisis recently. If Voluntary Norfolk hadn't been there I don't know what we'd have done.”*
- *“We might not exist. I think it's more likely that we'd be an informal little group of people who get together, but we wouldn't have the prestige ... we wouldn't have the respect, we wouldn't have achieved as much...”*

4.4.31 **Advice Plus:** The Advice Plus programme aims to help people in need access good quality advice on their legal rights and responsibilities, so that they can avoid or overcome disadvantage. To achieve this BIG has funded projects where organisations work together more effectively to deliver legal advice services across areas, both urban and rural. Round One awarded £30 million to 71

advice agencies across England in 2007. Advice Plus Round Two launched closed in April 2008 and funded third sector legal advice services with a budget of £20m across the nine England regions.

- 4.4.32 West Devon Citizen's Advice based in Okehampton lead one Advice Plus partnership (Case Study No. 29) and have found this programme invaluable in ensuring more people in need in rural areas get the legal advice they need to mitigate the risks of rural isolation:

"The long term aspect (5yrs) is fantastic and vital to be effective in rural areas where it takes time to generate awareness of new outreach services and to build relationships and trust.

Being innovative to reach rural people in need of advice and support is important – not simply the usual charity and local authority 'Roadshows' approach - but taking outreach to places where people already congregating such as markets, health centres and so on.

We are also finding that whilst most people coming to us or referred by our partners are elderly, we are getting more demand for advice from younger people – not just those suffering redundancy but also college students struggling with changes to the education maintenance allowance for example. We have a lunchtime outreach session arranged at the college now." (Amanda Kenyon, West Devon CAB).

In Scotland

- 4.4.33 In Scotland, BIG has been proactive in targeting investment to rural areas since 2006, building on the success of the NOF Scottish Land Fund programme. Growing Community Assets (GCA) in particular builds on a previous BIG programme, the Scottish Land Fund, which complemented the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 by enabling rural communities with a population of 10,000 or less to buy or manage their local assets. GCA extends the asset-based community development approach from purely rural communities to both rural and urban.

- 4.4.34 **Growing Community Assets:** GCA is one of three main BIG investment area in Scotland grouped under the generic title 'Investing in Communities 2'. The others are: Life Transitions and Supporting 21st Century Life.

- 4.4.35 BIG has commissioned SQW Consulting to evaluate the GCA investment area over a period of five years. The evaluation is looking in particular at the social, economic and environmental impact of the funded projects.

- 4.4.36 It is also exploring the effectiveness of the asset-based approach in rural and urban settings and the key factors that support successful community ownership and sustainability. Key findings from the consultant's year one report of relevance to the effectiveness of GCA in reducing rural isolation are:

Key findings...

- *It is not enough to give communities the capital to purchase assets. If they are to become truly empowered, they need to possess enough social capital in order to maximise the impact of asset ownership. Communities need skills, knowledge, contacts and confidence. GCA is helping communities to develop these skills.*
- *Projects which are investing grant money in community transport are already bringing social benefits to communities by helping to reduce social exclusion. The Rural Development Trust's Camglen initiative is one such example. This initiative provides transport for elderly people to access health and social activities.*
- *Projects which have provided community hubs have also brought social benefits to communities. Hubs provide a place for residents to interact with each other and build strong social networks.*
- *Through case studies, it has become evident that the strengthening of community spirit is happening in several projects as a social benefit of their grant.*

Source: SQW Year One Report on Growing Community Assets

4.4.37 Preliminary findings from the review of the second year of the programme indicate that between 65% and 70% of projects reported 'reduced isolation' as an unintended outcome where only 4% to 5% had this as an explicit aim.

4.4.38 An internal review of the whole of the Investing in Communities investment area in 2009 found:

*'Life Transitions and Supporting 21st Century Life have tended to cluster around the cities and urban areas experiencing significant deprivation although some are based in rural areas and are about reducing isolation. Awards through Growing Community Assets were initially concentrated within some rural areas, especially across the Highlands and Islands, although the pattern of our more recent awards reflect a commitment to achieving a spread of investment across the country, with greater numbers of urban based assets applications now receiving funding. **We recognise that there are challenges for us in reaching individuals and families facing a range of difficulties within smaller towns and rural settings**'.*

Source: Investing in Communities; Third annual review: Executive summary, The Big Lottery Fund (2009)

4.4.39 **Small grants:** In May 2008, BIG commissioned the Policy Studies Institute (PSI) to complete an evaluation to assess the purpose, benefit and potential of small grants. The evaluation was based on 2,800 projects throughout the UK with value of no more than £50,000.

4.4.40 The key findings were:

- *Many of the features in small grants programmes are important for applicants. These include the size of grant, the detail required for the application form, the focus of a programme and the speed of funding decisions.*
- *Small grants funding was perceived by some grant holders as a stepping-stone to develop the skills and experience necessary to apply for further grants. 58 per cent of BIG projects surveyed through the evaluation were first-time applicants*
- *Applying for small grants was particularly challenging for organisations that did not have any previous experience of funding.*
- *Some organisations would like further support in making the transition from small grants programmes to applying for larger sums of money.*
- *70 per cent of survey respondents found the monitoring process useful as it led to improvements within their projects and helped them to develop better management systems.*
- *71 per cent of the grant holders surveyed agreed that their project had been very successful in their local community, 60 per cent felt that individual lives had improved, 62 per cent offered more activities and 51 per cent had reached new beneficiaries.*
- *Despite the relatively small sums involved, small grants were cited as leading to a range of benefits: improvements in local facilities, an increase in community interaction and improvements in community cohesion, health and well-being.*
- *Small grants have helped organisations to improve the skills of staff and volunteers, increase their chances of sustainability, raise their profile in the local community, develop new partnerships and provided them with the opportunity to deliver more innovative solutions to local problems.*
- *Suggestions for improving small grants programmes include simplifying the application process, providing more support for organisations inexperienced at applying and managing grants, making quicker decisions about funding, providing better feedback about unsuccessful applications, awarding longer term funding and funding staff costs.*

Source: Evaluation of The Big Lottery Fund Small Grants Programmes, Policy Studies Institute (2008)

Research Question: What types of projects / activities work well in reducing rural isolation?

4.4.41 From our own primary research with projects in rural areas funded by BIG, we found that project activities that best address the issue of rural isolation fall into seven broad types, although most combine more than one of these elements.

4.4.42 Transport - whether for outreach transport or to bring people in need into a town-based venue - is the most common cross-cutting component, along with provision of information and advice.

4.4.43 The seven project activity types identified are:

1. Employment support
2. Transport support
3. Improving local services
4. Contact with others
5. Access to IT/ the internet
6. Capacity building
7. Information and advice

4.4.44 We have surveyed over 200 separate projects in rural areas (166 respondents to the main survey plus 52 case studies, of which 30 had not also completed a questionnaire). We have consulted directly through visits or by phone with 52 (mainly additional projects). These 52 case study projects are listed by activity type at Appendix B.

Research Question: To what extent is ‘reducing isolation’ an aim of rural projects supported by BIG?

4.4.45 Half of the rural projects in the main survey considered that reducing isolation was an explicit aim for use of the funding from BIG, and a further third (35%) considered reducing isolation a secondary aim for the projects’ beneficiaries.

4.4.46 In total, 78% of respondents felt that isolation was either ‘*a problem affecting a significant proportion of people*’ in their rural community (49%) or ‘*a very serious problem*’ (29%).

Research Question: How important is BIG’s investment in these projects?

4.4.47 BIG’s investment was critical to almost two thirds of these projects taking place at all. 63% maintained that the project would not have gone ahead, even in a reduced form, without the funding from BIG.

Research Question: What are the rural isolation priorities?

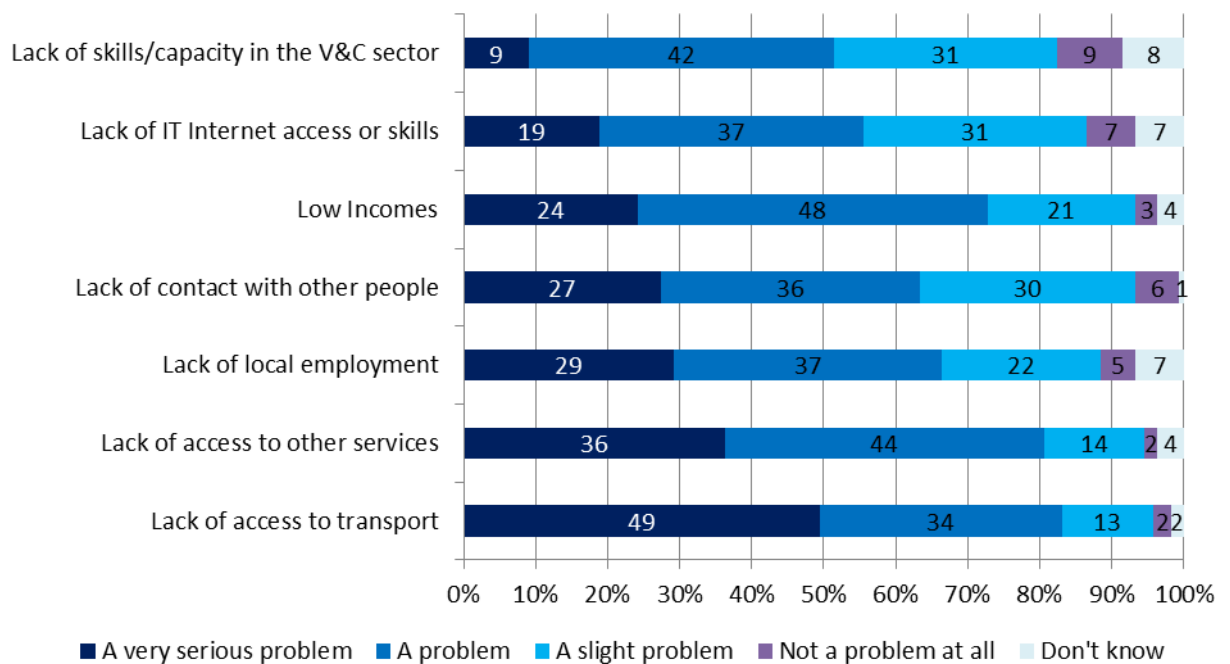
4.4.48 The results of the main survey show that leaders of rural projects consider the most serious isolation problems in rural areas to be (in rank order):

Rural Isolation Factor	A problem (affecting a significant proportion of people) %	A very serious problem %	Total %
1. Lack of access to transport	34	49	83
2. Lack of access to	44	36	80

Rural Isolation Factor	A problem (affecting a significant proportion of people) %	A very serious problem %	Total %
other local services			
3. Low incomes	48	24	72
4. Lack of local employment opportunities	37	29	66
5. Social isolation – lack of contact with other people	36	27	63
6. Lack of IT/internet access or skills	37	19	56
7. Lack of skills/capacity in the local voluntary sector	42	9	51

4.4.49 This is represented graphically in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Profile of respondent’s perception of the nature of the problems associated with rural isolation.



4.4.50 When the results for ‘a very serious problem’ are considered in isolation, it is clear that rural transport is the priority.

4.4.51 It is interesting to note that by far the greatest proportion of rural projects supported by BIG to date have related not to providing transport support directly (e.g. by providing community transport), but to social isolation i.e. ‘contact with others’ (38%) and to ‘improving access to local services’ (35%). From our case study work, it is

apparent that a large proportion of these projects also included some form of transport support service.

Research Question: Which population groups are affected most by rural isolation?

4.4.52 Analysis of the seriousness of the problem of isolation in rural communities for people of different generations, minority groups and types of disadvantage shows that people without access to a car are perceived as those most isolated, along with people with physical disabilities. This finding is unsurprising given the priority issue of transport.

4.4.53 With respect to different age groups older people and disabled people are by far the most isolated groups. Young people do experience rural isolation but to a lesser extent as most will experience some degree of engagement with their peers. For children up to age 16, going to school generally mitigates problems of rural isolation.

Age and rural isolation	A problem (affecting a significant proportion of people) %	A very serious problem %	Total %
Children	34	13	47
Young people (16-25 year olds)	41	21	62
Aged 65+	35	45	80

4.4.54 The table below shows how groups with specific health needs all have high levels of perceived problem with respect to rural isolation. People with physical disabilities are perceived to experience rural isolation the most.

Health and rural isolation	A problem (affecting a significant proportion of people) %	A very serious problem %	Total %
Physical disability	40	45	85
Mental illness	37	40	77
Carers (of family member with poor health)	38	34	72

4.4.55 Black and minority ethnic communities and migrant workers in comparison are groups that are perceived to have lower levels of problems with respect to rural isolation, although this will reflect the relatively low representations of these groups in most rural communities.

Ethnicity and isolation	A problem (affecting a significant proportion of people) %	A very serious problem %	Total %
BME	13	11	24

Migrant workers	16	10	26
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4.4.56 Socio economic factors and their association with rural isolation are mixed. Access to a car and low incomes both are perceived to be high problems in rural areas. Rural isolation is considered to a significant problem for Lone Parents, however homelessness is perceived to be a lower level problem with regard to rural isolation.

Socio economic factors and isolation	A problem (affecting a significant proportion of people) %	A very serious problem %	Total %
No access to a car	27	65	92
Low income	34	47	81
Homeless	15	20	35
Lone Parents	46	23	69

4.4.57 Whilst these findings are useful as an indicator of perceptions as to the population groups worst affected by rural isolation, care needs to be taken not to draw conclusions from this as to priorities for funding support. People in all groups can experience very serious problems of rural isolation and many will fall into more than one group, compounding their isolation.

Research Question: What are the most common activities of rural projects aimed at reducing isolation?

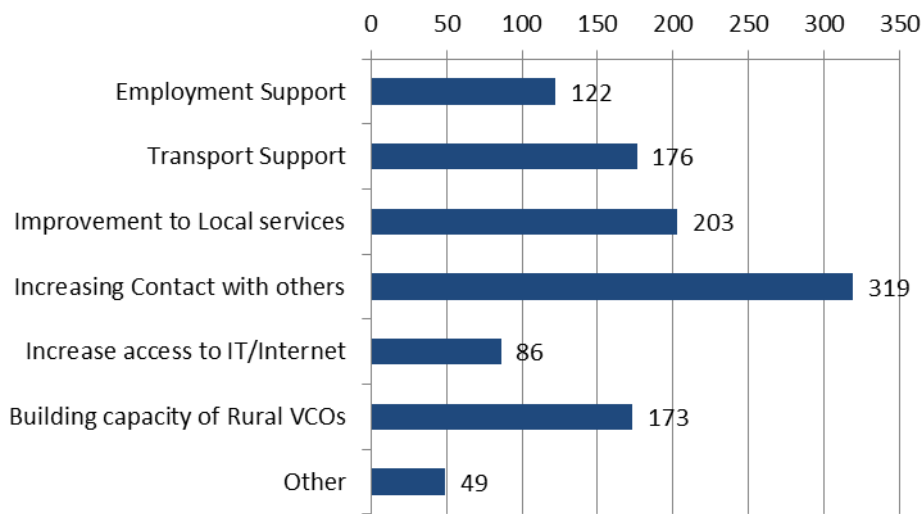
4.4.58 In response to the survey question '*Which of the following common project activities relevant to reducing rural isolation does your project best fit?*', approaching three quarters selected either 'Contact with Others' (38%) or 'Improving Local Services' (35%) with the remainder spread fairly evenly between another four named activity categories and 'other'. Several of the comments under 'other' indicated that some projects involve more than one type of activity, for example both 'Transport Support' and 'Local Services'. Analysis of the 52 case study projects supports the predominance of social contact and local services activities among rural projects. The sample of 52 case study projects was selected by manual search of BIG's project database (Merlin) for references to 'isolation' in the descriptions of those projects located in predominantly rural local authority areas. From this search the distribution of the project's main activities aimed at reducing rural isolation:

Contact with Others	31%
Improving Local Services	31%
Information and Advice	15%
Transport Support	12%
Building capacity of rural VCOs	8%
Increasing access to IT/internet	4%

Research Question: What activities are most effective in reducing rural isolation?

4.4.59 The survey shows that rural project leaders consider the following types of project the most effective by in reducing rural isolation (in rank order):

1. Increasing contact with others
2. Improvement to local services
3. Transport support
4. Building capacity of rural VCOs
5. Increasing access to IT/internet
6. Employment support
7. Other (The majority of 'other' responses involved Information and Advice activities).



4.4.60 Unsurprisingly, there is quite a strong correlation between the activities projects consider most effective in reducing rural isolation and the main activities of their own projects.

Research Question: Who is benefiting from BIG’s investment in reducing rural isolation?

4.4.61 The following tables show the perceptions of projects funded by BIG as to the extent to which the investment is benefiting different population groups:

Less isolated - age group	Small extent %	Large extent %	Total %
Children	23	48	71
Young people (16-25 year olds)	48	35	83
Aged 65+	23	60	83

Less isolated - health	Small extent %	Large extent %	Total %
Physical disability	47	38	85
Mental illness	50	28	78

Carers (of family member with poor health)	40	33	73
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Less isolated - ethnic group	Small extent %	Large extent %	Total %
BME	27	10	37
Migrant workers	24	7	31

Less isolated - socio economic circumstance	Small extent %	Large extent %	Total %
No access to a car	35	50	85
Low income	34	50	84
Homeless	17	7	24
Lone Parents	40	34	74

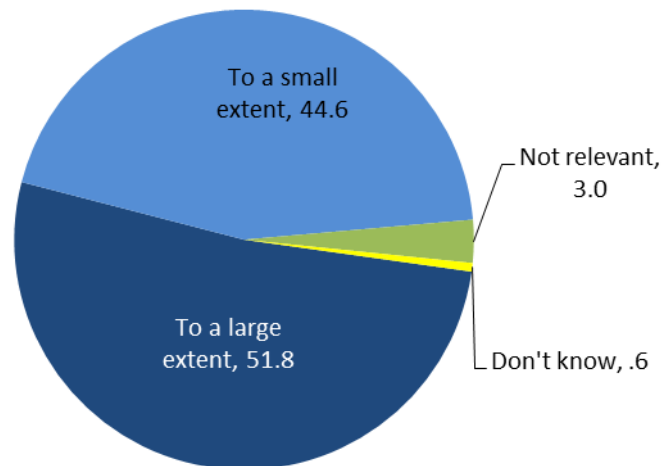
4.4.62 These findings evidence that BIG's investment in rural projects is effective in targeting disadvantage; over four fifths of projects bring benefits to people in rural areas on low incomes, without access to a car or with a disability.

Research Question: To what extent have projects supported by BIG impacted on rural isolation?

4.4.63 Reducing isolation was an explicit aim of just half of the rural projects that responded to the survey. 96% felt their project has (or will) impact in reducing rural isolation. Just over half (51%) of project leaders considered their project has/will impact on reducing rural isolation '*to a large extent*' and a further 45% '*to a small extent*'. Just 3% of project leaders considered reducing rural isolation '*not relevant*' to their project, and less than 1% responded '*don't know*'.

4.4.64 This is shown graphically in Figure 2 below:

Figure 2: The extent to which projects have impacted on reducing rural isolation



4.4.65 All 52 rural project leaders interviewed for the case studies considered that the investment by BIG in their projects was having a significant impact on reducing isolation for their clients / users.

4.4.66 The comments below illustrate the range of impacts identified:

No. 35 Glenfarg Village Hall – Community Asset (Improving Local Services)

“If the old hall had closed and not been replaced there would have been nowhere for the frail and elderly to go and their social isolation would have increased. It is now the social hub. We have regular soup lunches popular with our older residents and activities for all ages. We are often labelled merely a commuter village, but the hall now provides a focal point and brings an improved community spirit.” (Pierette Melville)

No. 12 Enable Scotland – Carer Support (Contact with Others)

“Each of our three rurally based support workers has a caseload of about 60 carers and their families. Our impact on these families is very significant. The social element is particularly highly valued. One challenge arising from this is that the need for the support tends to be permanent – we are unable to refer clients on after a period so demand gradually grows.” (Kathy Hunter)

No. 14 Norfolk Deaf – Minibus Outreach (Contact with Others / Information & Advice)

“Before we got the minibus, we had some static clinics in towns around the county but people struggled to get to them. Now we have around 3,500 people benefiting from the bus living in rural areas in all parts of the county. Having the bus has also helped these people maintain independence and have much more social contact than before. It also frees up more time for our team of 50 or so trained volunteers to do home visits to support the housebound.” (Pam Spicer)

No. 52 Living Springs Life Centre – Drop In (Contact with Others / Internet Training)

“If I weren’t coming here, I would be so lonely – now I can talk to people.” (An elderly beneficiary)

No. 5 North Tamar – Ring & Ride (Transport Support / Contact with Others)

“The area is popular for people to retire to from towns and cities. When a partner dies (most often the man), this leaves many women who cannot drive very isolated and, as relative newcomers, without a large network of local friends. Our service is invaluable to these women and to the less mobile elderly”. (Kathy Withall)

No. 29 West Devon Rural Partners – Outreach (Information & Advice)

“The flexibility allowed to us with this BIG Advice Plus programme has allowed us to take our Home Visiting Officers off home visiting temporarily to go into the factories to provide advice to those being made redundant with little prospect of alternative employment locally. This has been invaluable. The outreach presence and the home visits that lead from this are having a real impact on helping people make the right decisions to improve their lives”. (Amanda Kenyon)

No. 1 Total Support Teignbridge – Community Contacts (Capacity Building)

“The Community Contacts volunteering model developed with the Community Council for Devon is going well. Should exceed our target to establish this in 30 parishes or clusters of parishes in 3 years. An unexpected spin off impact from the pilot in West Devon was that support to the identified ‘Contacts’ or ‘Village Agents’ has been the catalyst for a new local service, say for older people, or re-establishing one that had lapsed with new, supported volunteers. Our CVS partners are also broadening their scope through exposure to a wider range of local groups than the traditional health and social care for the elderly groups they typically engage with”. (Beverly Jones)

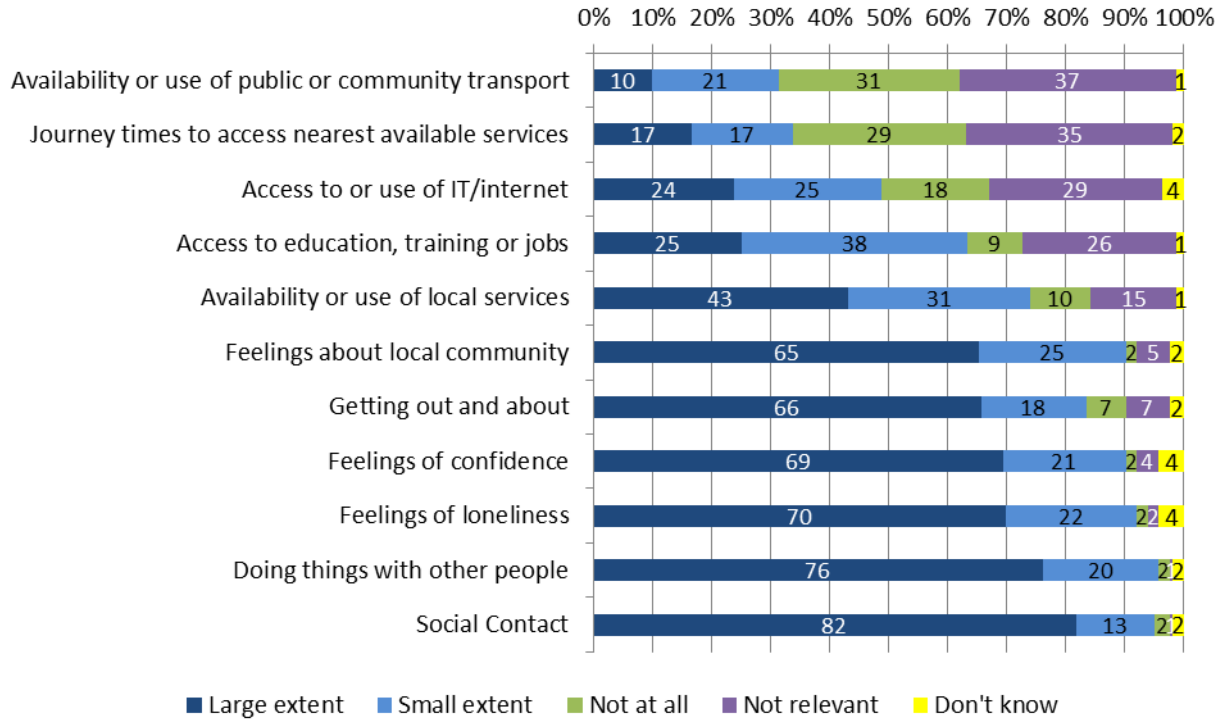
4.4.67 **What are the main outcomes?** Looking at the impacts in more detail, by far the greatest impact is in reducing social isolation. As illustrated in the graph below, the outcomes achieved in the perception of rural project leaders, are mainly social as opposed to outcomes addressing the physical causes of rural isolation.

4.4.68 The outcomes achieved ‘to a large extent’ were, in rank order:

1. Having more social contact
2. Doing more with other people
3. Feelings less lonely
4. Increased confidence
5. Getting out and about more
6. Enhanced feelings about local community
7. Greater availability or use of local services
8. Improved access to education, training or jobs
9. Access to or use of the internet
10. Reduced journey times to access services
11. Greater availability or use of public or community transport

4.4.69 The top six ranked outcomes relate to social benefits. This is illustrated in Figure 3:

Figure 3: The extent to which projects perceive they have/will achieve their outcomes amongst their intended beneficiaries.



Research Question: How sustainable are the impacts of the project on reducing isolation?

4.4.70 Respondents were asked whether they are seeing (or expect to see) the benefits of their project in reducing rural isolation continuing beyond the life of the project. 82% answered ‘yes’ and just under 4% ‘no’. The remainder of respondents either answered ‘don’t know’ or ‘not relevant’.

Looking to the future – likely impacts of new BIG initiatives on rural isolation

4.4.71 **People Powered Change:** Not a new programme, People Powered Change is the over-arching banner under which all BIG’s investments in England will sit. Any new programmes developed during 2011 and beyond will meet the aims set out under People Powered Change i.e. *creating new social capacity* by:

- Building on existing skills among people and communities
- Developing new and existing platforms to improve collaboration and effective networks
- Helping the people with big ideas and talent to grow their work.

- 4.4.72 **Transition Fund:** The Transition Fund is administered by BIG for the Office for Civil Society, Cabinet Office, in England. It is aimed at helping civil society organisations which deliver public services become stronger, more agile and adjust to the new spending environment. Four of the first 18 awards announced support transition for voluntary and community sector organisations working in rural areas to reduce isolation - 'Headway' and 'Living Options' working across rural Devon, 'Shire Training Workshops' involved in training support and volunteer programmes in Gloucestershire, and the 'Somerset Youth Volunteering Network'.
- 4.4.73 **Improving Futures:** Investment of £20m that will help give vulnerable young children across the UK a better future by supporting their families. The programme will fund up to 20 partnerships across the UK, each receiving a grant of up to £900,000 to work with families with children aged five to ten years old. The partnerships will be locally based – and for the first time engaging not only children's charities, but those that can help address families' housing, health, employment and other needs in partnership with each other and the public sector. This is a competitive programme and does not include any specific rural-proofing measures.
- 4.4.74 The issue of transport and access to facilities for children and their families in remote rural areas is an issue arising from our research e.g. with Home-Start projects in Dorset and in Devon (No. 17) aimed at families of younger children) and with the RCCs. This new investment presents opportunities for partnerships across rural areas to improve access to the newly provided Children's Centres in many areas of England.
- 4.4.75 Currently many families in rural areas without private transport cannot access these services. Where minibus services are linked to Children's Centres to facilitate access for families in remote rural locations, in some areas these links are at risk from budget cuts.
- 4.4.76 **Big Local Trust:** BIG in England is investing up to £200 million in 100 to 150 urban and rural neighbourhoods that have been overlooked for funding. The funding is to set up an independent charitable Trust (via the Community Development Foundation) that will support local funding schemes in the targeted neighbourhoods. The local funding schemes will enable people to make their communities better places to live in, by helping them develop the skills and confidence they need to the better. The Trust will have up to ten years to allocate its endowment. The first 50 areas have been chosen for investment. These include two in rural areas of the East Region (Ramsey in Huntingdonshire and an area of East Lindsey), St Blazey & Par in the Humber.

- 4.4.77 **Investing in Ideas (Scotland):** The purpose of Investing in Ideas is to fund groups and organisations of all sizes to improve their skills and knowledge to think differently about how a service is delivered and/or help them to design and test new projects or better ways of working.
- 4.4.78 **Life Changes Trust (Scotland):** a new £50 million Lottery investment in Scotland to be launched in 2012 aimed at transforming the life chances of young people leaving care and fundamentally improving the lives of older people with dementia and their carers.

4.5 BIG award process to rural areas

Introduction

- 4.5.1 The next research question to be considered is: *'What has been the process by which BIG has awarded grants to rural areas to date?'*
- 4.5.2 To some extent, this question is addressed in a previous section in considering the range of BIG's initiatives and programmes impacting on the issue of rural isolation, and the types of project activity that are proving most effective.
- 4.5.3 This section focuses more closely on the findings from our research into the application and award processes in ensuring rural areas and the extent to which these ensure rural communities achieve a 'fair share' of overall programme investment.

Proportion of investment in rural areas

- 4.5.4 We have aggregated the total numbers of awards and their value in recent years across the main investment programmes in the regions within the scope of this study. We have then analysed the proportions of awards and value that has been awarded to projects located in the predominantly rural local authorities in these areas.
- 4.5.5 We found that in the three most rural English regions - the South West, East and Yorkshire & The Humber - approximately 40% of awards and a third (33%) of the total value of grants awarded across seven investment programmes went to organisations working in predominantly rural local authority areas.
- 4.5.6 In Scotland, the proportion of rural awards made was a little lower at 36% of the total. 30% of the total value of awards from Investment in Communities (including Growing Community Assets), People's Millions and Awards for All was to organisations in predominantly rural local authority areas. (Interestingly, the proportion of rural awards made at 36% is a little lower than that found by Strathclyde University in a similar analysis of NOF awards in Scotland in 2004 i.e. 40%. However, the proportional value of awards to rural areas by BIG is higher than that for NOF by three percentage points.)
- 4.5.7 This distribution of the number and value of awards compares to the rural population by region as follows:

Region	BIG awards to rural LAs (%)	Value of BIG awards to rural LAs (%)	Population in rural areas / small towns (%)
South West	61	51	34
East	22	13	31
Yorkshire & The Humber	42	34	20
Scotland	36	30	32

Source: Leisure Futures from analysis of Merlin database information (2010); rural population data from RDA and Scottish Government websites

4.5.8 The particularly high proportion of rural awards made in the South West compared to the other regions is mainly due to the fact that 61% of small Awards for All grants in this region since 2008 have been to projects located in predominantly rural local authorities. (The equivalent percentages for the East and Yorkshire & The Humber are 24% and 43% respectively).

4.5.9 Further analysis of the rural/urban investment by programme, shows that in England, the Community Buildings programme in 2007 and 2008 had the highest number and value of awards in rural areas followed by People's Millions and then Awards for All. In Scotland, Growing Community Assets and People's Millions have been the most successful programmes in serving rural communities:

England – 3 most rural regions combined

BIG investment programme	BIG awards to rural LAs (%)	Value of BIG awards to rural LAs (%)
Reaching Communities	30	28
Community Buildings	62	56
Community Libraries	17	16
Advice Plus	22	20
BASIS	37	34
People's Millions	49	50
Awards for All	42	40

Source: Leisure Futures from analysis of Merlin database information (2010)

Scotland

BIG investment programme	BIG awards to rural LAs (%)	Value of BIG awards to rural LAs (%)
Growing Community Assets	59	60
Other Investing in Communities programmes	18	16
People's Millions	60	62
Awards for All	36	35

Source: Leisure Futures from analysis of Merlin database information (2010)

The accessibility of small grants programmes

- 4.5.10 The success of Awards for All in reaching rural communities and impacting on rural isolation is evidenced both by this analysis and by the findings of our survey work with 50 Awards for All projects.
- 4.5.11 The Policy Studies Institute in its 2008 evaluation of small grants found that 58% of applicants were applying to the lottery for the first time.
- 4.5.12 The relative ease of completing the Awards for All forms, the speed of the funding decision and the award sums involved are all contributory factors to the accessibility of this funding programme to voluntary and community organisations in rural areas. Whilst the awards sums are too small for community asset projects, sums of up to £10,000 can make a significant impact - for example in expanding village activities – in reducing rural isolation.

The need for support with applications to Reaching Communities in England and Investing in Communities in Scotland

- 4.5.13 The other main investment programmes (Reaching Communities in England and Investing in Communities/Growing Community Assets in Scotland) are also proving effective in reaching rural communities. The analysis above indicates that approximately 30% of all Reaching Communities awards in the three most rural regions of England reach rural areas. In Scotland, 59% of Growing Community Assets projects and 18% of Investing in Communities projects to date have been in rural areas.
- 4.5.14 Our own research findings from consultation with a sample of these projects (as well as with the infrastructure organisations funded under the BASIS programme in the three regions in England) confirms the findings of earlier evaluation work that lack of social capital and capacity in some rural communities remains a barrier to applications to the larger investment programmes like Reaching Communities and Investing in Communities with more complex application processes.
- 4.5.15 Capacity building and support is important to ensure rurally-based applicants continue to get a fair share of investment from the larger award programmes. A key area for support is the application process itself, how to engage the beneficiaries, and how to structure applications around outcomes as opposed to simply activities.

The structure of the investment programmes

- 4.5.16 Whilst initially quite challenging to understand, the structure of the main programmes is sufficiently flexible to allow applicants to shape their

projects and applications according to local priority needs. Facets of this 'built in flexibility' include:

- Broad outcomes able to 'fit' many types of project and activity
- Open to revenue funding for up to five years not just capital funding
- Open to a transport element – capital, revenue or both

4.5.17 The recent introduction to the Reaching Communities programme of a two stage approach with an Outline Proposal Form and Fast Track assessment for smaller value projects is a further positive development in making the process easier and quicker for the smaller voluntary and community sector groups that are more prevalent in the rural areas.

4.5.18 The duration of the investment (for up to 5 years) is a particular strength for organisations in rural communities. Feedback from our interviews suggests it often takes longer than in urban areas to recruit staff and raise awareness of the initiative and new services in communities spread over a wide geographic area.

4.5.19 The introduction of 'Continuation Funding' from this year is also viewed very positively by organisations consulted working in rural communities where the opportunities to diversify income streams and become more sustainable are often more limited than in urban areas.

Rural-proofing

4.5.20 BIG's overall approach to the design of its programmes, award criteria and processes does not disadvantage rural applicants, assuming the applicant has the necessary capacity and skills (as discussed above). For example, care is taken to avoid simplistic evaluation processes based on a 'unit value' approach – i.e. number of beneficiaries per pound spent.

4.5.21 However, there are weaknesses in the process adopted in the new capital element of the Reaching Communities programme. This programme strives to direct a high proportion of new awards to the most deprived rural communities that have not previously benefited. However, the process adopted to achieve this is flawed.

4.5.22 The process adopted uses the 2007 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) and ranks the 32,000 Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) across England from most deprived to least deprived. Adjustments are made to this ranking to balance eligibility between three categories of LSOA i.e. urban, rural (town and fringe) or rural (village, hamlet and isolated dwellings).

4.5.23 The process also sets variable 'caps' so that only the most deprived LSOAs up to the cap are eligible to apply i.e.

- The most deprived 15 per cent of LSOAs categorised as urban
- The most deprived 20 per cent of LSOAs categorised as rural (town and fringe)
- The most deprived 50 per cent of LSOAs categorised as rural (villages/hamlets/isolated dwellings).

4.5.26 This approach gives nearly 6,000 eligible LSOAs across England excluding LSOAs already awarded a Communities Building grant from the previous community buildings programme.

4.5.27 LSOAs have between 1000 and 3000 people living in them with an average population of 1500 people. In most cases, these are smaller than wards, thus allowing the identification of smaller pockets of deprivation. The IMD brings together 37 different indicators which cover specific aspects or dimensions of deprivation: Income, Employment, Health and Disability, Education, Skills and Training, Barriers to Housing and Services, Living Environment and Crime. These are weighted and combined to create the overall IMD 2007.

4.5.28 Research ***Evidencing Rural Need*** commissioned by the Rural Community Action Network members¹⁵ found that this approach was primarily developed with urban centred deprivation in mind and as such does not provide a clear picture of rural deprivation. One of the major problems is the level at which data is aggregated. In rural areas a Super Output Area can be both very large and encompass many different communities. Therefore the resultant 'averaged' score for the area does not represent the real picture in any one of the individual communities. There is a real risk that this average score will hide pockets of high deprivation in small communities, as less deprived communities in the surrounding areas push down the deprivation scores.

4.5.29 The researchers have found that by analysing evidence of deprivation at a more detailed Output Area level (approximately 300 people in size) a truer picture of rural deprivation emerges. This mapping of the most deprived rural areas is completed for all 38 Rural Community Councils across England and is a resource available to BIG and other funding agencies on the ACRE website:

<http://www.rural-evidence.org.uk/reports/?view=all>

4.5.30 The main conclusion of the researchers is:

*'Put simply, rural areas are substantially more deprived based on the location of deprived **people** than based on the location of deprived **areas**. This level of understanding is a critical tool in influencing resource allocation for small rural communities and supporting local action such as Community Led Planning'.*

Source: OCSI Evidencing Rural Need (2010)

¹⁵ Evidencing Rural Need, Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion www.rural-evidence.org (2010)

Understanding and experience of grant officers of rural issues

4.5.31 This reliance on the IMD at LSOA level is perhaps symptomatic of a weakness in BIG's processes in ensuring that staff at all levels in the organisation understand the particular needs in rural areas, the complexities involved in identifying pockets of deprivation and the challenges and extra costs involved in reaching people in need.

4.5.32 As one CVS director said in interview:

There is an issue around the assessment of applications remotely by staff in Newcastle. There can be a real lack of understanding of rurality and the context of the area that is the subject of the application. It is much better when regional officers with knowledge of local rural issues are involved in assessment.

4.6 BIG project support cost factors

Introduction

- 4.6.1 The next research question considered in this section is: *'How much does it cost BIG to support projects in rural areas compared to projects in urban areas?'*
- 4.6.2 Our findings on this research question are based on discussion with BIG regional staff, relevant feedback from project leaders interviewed in the course of preparing the case studies and our own analysis of travel costs and journey times in the South West Region and in Scotland.

Key findings

- 4.6.3 Our key findings from this analysis are detailed at Appendix E and summarised here:
- In the South West, return journeys by car from BIG's Exeter Regional Office to support projects in rural locations take, on average, 25 minutes longer than the equivalent travel time to support projects in the region's seven urban centres (i.e. Exeter itself, Bournemouth, Bristol, Plymouth, Swindon, Gloucester and Taunton).
 - The travel costs of supporting rural projects in the South West (assuming journeys by car and the standard HMRC mileage rate to 31st March 2011 of 40p/mile) are, on average, just over £14 higher than the travel costs by car to urban centres. The disparity in travel cost is higher at around £35 if off peak train travel is considered. Whilst most rural projects can only realistically be accessed by car, many projects in urban areas can be reached from Exeter by rail and then locally by bus or taxi.
 - In Scotland, the additional time and costs of BIG's support to projects in rural mainland locations compared to those in Scotland's cities and largest towns are higher than in the English regions. Comparison of average return travel times from BIG Scotland's Glasgow base to Scotland's largest urban centres with average return travel times to the Highlands, Aberdeenshire, Dumfries & Galloway, the Borders and Argyll & Bute, show the travel time and cost are more than double to access rural areas. Again, as in the South West of England, the cost disparity assuming rail travel to the urban centres is higher still. Clearly, the differential in both time and cost of visiting projects in the islands is still higher as many journeys involve travel by air or ferry.
- 4.6.4 The additional costs of supporting projects in rural areas are compounded by the opportunity costs associated with the additional time out of the office. Most journeys to rural projects are made by car while some urban centres are accessible by train allowing work while travelling.

Case study examples

- 4.6.5 Many of the rural projects interviewed identified the fuel costs and journey times to access clients and organisations as a key constraint on the capacity of their services. Examples include:

No. 34 Action for the Blind

“The high cost of travel and staff time in delivering outreach support to individual clients in their homes in rural areas presents a major challenge for Action”. (Ric Allbrook, Action Devon & Cornwall)

No. 2 East Cornwall CVS

“Use of the mobile training suite to take training out to the rural communities - while more demanding in terms of project workers’ time and travel costs - is by far the most effective in getting the training to the people who really need it”. (Anna Hoyle, ECCVS)

No. 3 Voluntary Norfolk

Case studies compiled by Voluntary Norfolk highlight the extra costs of providing services in rural areas. Using six live outreach projects in North Norfolk, the report identifies a very significant ‘rural premium’ in mileage expenses and travel time that add to the costs of delivering community projects in rural areas. (Andrew Campbell, Voluntary Norfolk)

No. 12 Enable Scotland

“To mitigate the travel distances we do home working from three locations. The trainers travel from Edinburgh or Stirling which is very expensive. It is also very difficult with our workers on part time contracts and with the travel distances to get together to share learning etc. With fuel costs rising and local authority budget cuts, there is expectation that we need to do more for less”. (Kathy Hunter, Enable Scotland)

4.7 Key success factors

Introduction

4.7.1 In this section we draw out the main factors contributing to the success of projects in reducing rural isolation. This is based on a review of previous programme evaluation reports (where relevant), findings from our survey of rural projects and feedback from project leaders and others interviewed in the course of our research.

Previous evaluation findings

4.7.2 **Growing Community Assets (Year One Evaluation):** As detailed in an earlier section of this report, this five year evaluation by SQW Consulting considers the effectiveness of the asset-based approach in rural and urban settings and the key factors that support successful community ownership and sustainability. The year one report is based on a survey of 74 GCA projects (24 returns), 20 case study visits, and a face-to-face household survey in 15 of the case study areas. The main findings from this research of relevance to success in reducing rural isolation are:

- *More **social capital** (skills, knowledge, contacts and confidence) is needed in rural communities to maximise the impact of asset ownership*
- *Projects investing grant money in **community transport** are beneficial in reducing social exclusion and isolation*
- *Projects that provide **social hubs** are important to social networks in communities and community spirit*

4.7.3 **Reaching Communities (2007 to 2009 Evaluation):** This evaluation by Ecorys was based on analysis of BIG programme data on 1,436 Reaching Communities projects, feedback from 804 projects via annual surveys and 37 case study visits. The main success factors identified in the conclusions and the consultants' recommendations were:

- *Finding **ways to identify those most in need** (as discussed in the previous section, reliance on the 2007 Index of Multiple Deprivation at LSOA data level is too crude a measure to be effective in rural areas)*
- *Providing support to voluntary and community organisations with **planning for sustainability***
- ***Sharing learning***

4.7.4 **Small Grants (2009 Evaluation):** The Policy Studies Institute in their evaluation of BIG's small grants programmes highlighted the importance of support to small voluntary and community sector groups at the early project planning and application stages:

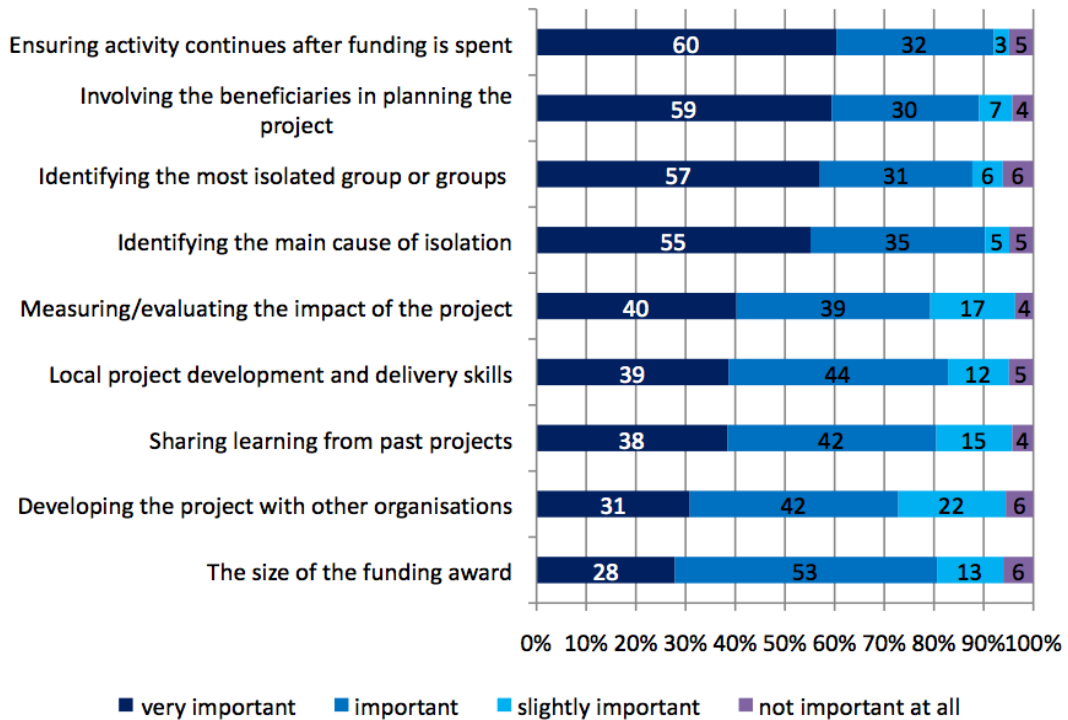
Half of small grant applicants sought help in completing their application forms, including a fifth who sought this from BIG. Several applicants also got support from community development workers, third sector umbrella organisations or other networks. These findings suggest that support for organisations who do not have experience of applying for funding is critical in helping them secure a grant. Funders may want to consider how they can provide further support for applicants that do not have much experience of applying for grants, or simplifying their application processes to make accessing funding easier for these organisations.

Survey findings

4.7.5 Respondents to the survey were asked to rate the importance of a range of factors to the success of a project aiming to reduce rural isolation on a scale of four with one 'not important at all' and four 'very important'. The four top ranked success factors for projects aimed at reducing rural isolation, using the 'very important' measure, were:

1. **Ensuring sustainability** - activity continues after funding is spent
2. **Involving the beneficiaries** in planning the project
3. **Identifying the most isolated** group or groups
4. **Identifying the causes of isolation**

Figure 4: Critical project factors for successfully addressing rural isolation



Interview findings

- 4.7.5 The critical success factors emerging from our research interviews with projects, partners and beneficiaries are summarised here.
- 4.7.6 **Including a transport element within rural projects:** The importance of access to transport as a success factor for projects aimed at reducing rural isolation is unquestionable. Some provision for transport, whether to take services out to people in their homes or village venues, or for vehicles and drivers to bring people to services in towns, is critical to the success of all types of project aimed at reducing rural isolation (other than those concerned with developing community assets). This is illustrated in the schedule of case study projects at Appendix B and in the examples below:

Case study examples...

Local bus services are vital to reducing rural isolation. This project has fully embraced this by securing tenure for the local bus operator running subsidised services under contracts with the local authority. We are also helping to keep garage repair and MOT services local as community landlord (No. 36 Aberfoyle Services Hub)

"It would be good if agencies had budgets purely for transport (for rural projects). We did not see the recent fuel price rises coming." (No. 26 Tykes Young Carers)

The high cost of travel and staff time in delivering outreach support to individual clients in their homes in rural areas presents a major challenge for Action. This, together with changes in demographics, in benefit entitlements, and in technologies makes it ever harder to keep up with demand for information, support and advice (No. 34 Action for the Blind)

- 4.7.7 **Up to five-year awards and 'continuation funding':** The availability of revenue funding for up to five years is fundamental to the success of a large number of BIG projects aiming to reduce rural isolation. This is true for social care projects as well as for advice-based projects and infrastructure support projects.
- 4.7.8 Voluntary and community sector organisations are filling gaps in social care and advice services in rural areas where provision by the public and private sectors do not exist or cannot meet the need. Generally, opportunities in rural areas for these organisations to diversify income streams and raise funds are more limited than in urban areas with their larger markets and business communities.
- 4.7.9 The introduction by BIG of a 'Continuation Funding' stream for successful but otherwise unsustainable Reaching Communities / Investing in Communities projects will be critical to the survival of some.

Case study examples...

The continuity of funding support from BIG through the award of two successive three-year grants, enabled Care Network to cope with the sudden loss of a Local Public Service Agreement reward grant in 2010. More importantly, it has allowed the Network to reach and support volunteers in more areas, maximising the impact of the funding on addressing rural isolation. (No. 19 Cambridgeshire Care Network)

The long term aspect (5yrs) of Advice Plus is fantastic and vital to be effective in rural areas where it takes time to generate awareness of new outreach services and to build relationships and trust (No. 29 West Devon Rural Partners)

Securing funding for five years has provided a measure of stability and enhanced the achievements of this project. Typically, it can take up to a year to set up a service and generate public awareness even with a strong core brand like CAB. (No. 31 North Norfolk CAB)

Continuity of funding support is important to provide the basics people need not provided by the statutory services. "Innovation in funding programmes is all well and good, but having established reputation and got the staff and volunteers with the range of skills needed, grant bodies need first to look to sustain the impacts of this basic work". (No. 27 Generic Advocacy Hambleton & Richmondshire)

4.7.10 Providing support to build social capital: In England, the drive by the Rural Action for Communities Network and many local authorities to stimulate and facilitate parish and neighbourhood planning (in some instances supported by Awards for All grants) is proving successful. As the Carnegie UK Trust conclude in the 2009 Rural Action Research Programme for BIG: *"The relatively modest investment in Parish Plans in England (circa £5,000 per plan) has yielded action plans where rural communities can achieve many positive outcomes through their own activity. Community led planning has to be resourced on an ongoing basis with skilled facilitation available to support volunteers on the ground."*

4.7.11 Also proving successful is the work of members of the RCAN and partners in volunteer action and the public sector to build social capital in rural communities by means of locally based development workers identifying and supporting influential local people (sometimes called 'Community Contacts' or 'Village Agents') to set up and sustain groups and services working to reduce isolation and build community voluntary action. Some of this local capacity building is supported by BASIS round two funding from BIG.

Case study example...

The outreach approach providing local, informed support from someone with an understanding of the locality, local deprivation and opportunities was critical to people's willingness to engage with the service (No. 3 Voluntary Norfolk)

4.7.12 Partnership working and involving beneficiaries: The projects that have the most impact on rural communities and the greatest chance of sustainability are those that adopt an inclusive approach right from the start by involving the intended beneficiaries in their planning.

Case study examples...

Through Fenzone, the local youth council, YPM has achieved genuine engagement of its young members in decision-making, for example in deciding on behaviour rules and in planning activities and trips. This has resulted in real respect for the staff and the work they do as well as sense of ownership of the premises and equipment.

Through this inclusive management approach, and by providing training and employment opportunities for young volunteers to help run the service and work as peer mentors, the chances of sustaining the service beyond the period of the lottery grant are being maximised. (No. 50 Young People March)

Partner agencies have been attracted by success, grant aiding new services, contracting PPP to run services on their behalf, or making capital grants towards the costs of providing the new Centre. (No. 45 Pulteneytown People's Project)

"Key theme that funding agencies should stress in looking to address rural isolation most effectively – and reach the most isolated people – is partnership. Our partnership with the Children's Centres who already have contact with the most disadvantaged families is key to hitting our objectives. It also gives us options to sustain the project with the partners' resources when the lottery funding ends in 2012" (No. 46 Richmondshire Leisure Trust 'Burst Play')

4.7.13 Achieving quality and energy efficiency (community buildings projects): All the project leaders interviewed who were responsible for community building projects stressed the importance of attention to quality and energy efficiency at the planning stage to the ultimate success of their projects.

Case study examples...

By making the hall accessible and visually appealing it attracts a lot of hires for parties, wedding and Christenings among both local people and people from nearby communities. This approach has helped to sustain the running costs of the building (No. 35 Glenfarg Village Hall)

The high demand for use of the new Hall is testimony to the wisdom of providing quality over a cheaper, more utilitarian solution. This is further evidenced by the poor use of the former hall. "If you are making the effort to go out to a village event or activity you want to enjoy it, not go simply out of a sense of duty. I imagine it's not much fun line dancing with your coat on!" (No. 42 Hacheston Village Hall)

4.7.14 Strong project leadership: The success of all projects in the voluntary and community sector is heavily dependent of the qualities of one or a few individuals in terms of leadership and perseverance to 'see the job through'.

Case study examples...

This project owes its initial success on the capacity, skills and commitment of two project champions to drive the project along, supported by a small number of key people. Together, this group had the right mix of skills - in business, fund-raising and effective community engagement - to make it happen. Not all villages are so fortunate. Support will be needed in many cases to deliver similar achievements (No. 41 Sandford Community Stores)

“This was our third or fourth attempt at a major grant and we were successful this time because of the high level of local fundraising - 50% of the total costs of £460k. It is a real challenge to tie in the timing of the various grants. (No. 37 Occold Hall)

4.7.15 Recognising and supporting volunteers: Nearly all the projects we interviewed relied on the goodwill, skills and dedication of volunteers in order to reach people and reduce their sense of isolation. Sufficient resources within project plans for ongoing recruitment, training and support to volunteers is a critical success factor, whether a social care project, community transport scheme or an advice based project.

Case study examples...

The recruitment, selection, training and care of volunteers are crucial to the success of this project. In particular, volunteers need the skills to form a personal bond with someone at a distance while keeping the relationship within the boundary of friend/befriender. Support for volunteers includes a Peer Support Network comprising conference calls between small groups of volunteers facilitated by a trained senior volunteer. Senior volunteers are currently being trained to mentor new volunteers to increase capacity without increasing costs. (No. 18 Befrienders Highlands)

The success of this project lies largely with its volunteers. To be available at all times and provide flexible individual support requires a special level of commitment as well as a high level of empathy and understanding across the range of mental health issues. (No. 20 Suffolk Befriending Service)

4.7.16 Roots in the local community: Several of the social care projects we interviewed identified the importance to success of the organisation leading the service having a strong local roots and identity. Whilst the national charities benefit from strong brand recognition, governance and management systems, they can find it more difficult to engage local people in need in local delivery activity or to run successful local fund-raising campaigns.

Case study examples...

The charity's trustees feel that the small scale and local personality of the charity is a key reason for its success. The members are close to their workers/volunteers, who live in the area themselves and are, essentially, friends not simply project workers. Building this level of trust to reassure the anxiety of visually impaired people is critical to tackling their needs (No. 16 Sight Support Ryedale)

The effectiveness of the charity's work also owes a great deal to its local roots and independence. “This gives us both understanding of local needs and dynamics - one approach may work in one area but not so well in another - and the flexibility to respond accordingly. Our strength is our local ‘personality’ with volunteers who know their local communities” (No. 23 Ayrshire Hearing Support)

4.8 Lessons Learnt

Introduction

4.8.1 The final research question is '*What lessons have been learnt from supporting projects that aim to reduce rural isolation?*'

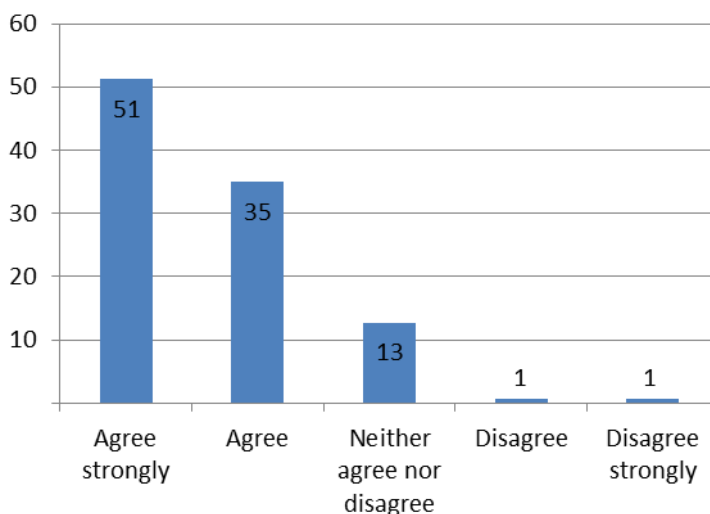
4.8.2 This last section details the main learning points identified by those delivering projects aimed at reducing isolations in rural areas with funding support from BIG.

Learning from the survey - targeted funding for rural areas?

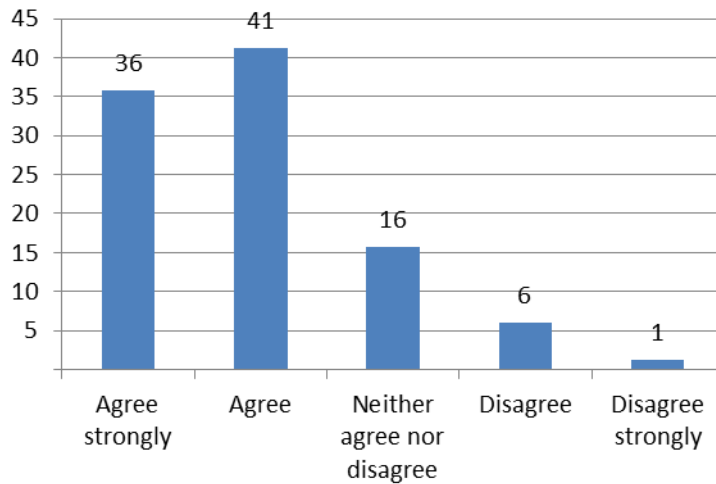
4.8.3 Survey respondents were asked how strongly they agreed or disagreed with two statements:

1. BIG should design and promote some investment programmes specifically for rural areas, and
2. All BIG programmes should relate to community need regardless of the population density of the area where the intended beneficiaries live.

4.8.4 A large majority (86%) either agree or agree strongly with the statement that BIG should design and promote some investment programmes specifically for rural areas.



4.8.5 Over three quarters (77%) also agree with the second statement that all investment should relate to community need regardless of population density (i.e. rurality). Feelings were generally less strong on this second statement with 36% agreeing strongly and 41% agreeing.



4.8.6 Those who agreed strongly with either statement were asked to explain why in a few words. The following is a broadly representative selection of the explanations provided by respondents:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Rural isolation is something that must be prioritised</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Higher costs and lower numbers make it difficult for rural areas to compete for funding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A dedicated rural budget would address the uneven distribution of funds to rural areas [NB. Our analysis at Section 4.5 does not support this perception as far as BIG funds are concerned]</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Lower numbers of organisations mean that there is less capacity for delivery of projects</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Every area or community has different needs and should be assessed according to that need and the capacity and availability of local service provision. Increased population can mean greater conflict and therefore greater need</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I agree strongly that some programmes should be specifically tailored for rural areas because I believe that retaining viable communities in isolated rural areas is ultimately beneficial for the whole country</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Isolation in rural areas has its own uniqueness; Cornwall's geographical landscape is a prime example of this. Access to services is a major issue. Community/individual engagement is more likely if services are brought into villages and hard to reach communities</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>People can be isolated and/or lonely regardless of the population density of the area in which they live. This is particularly the case for older people who may experience mobility difficulties and reduced levels of confidence</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>People in rural areas face all sorts of difficulties getting to services and activities particularly if they don't have a car. We make big efforts to go out to rural areas to deliver elements of our project but this is expensive to do</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>People in rural areas have a right to the same opportunities as people living in urban areas where there are many more public services</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Rural communities can be very strong and self-sustaining when they work well. Projects directed at enabling communities to help support more isolated members are very likely to develop a momentum of their own, enabling them to be sustained after the funding has ended</i>

- 4.8.7 The greater strength of agreement with the first of the two statements indicates that, overall, perhaps unsurprisingly, those delivering projects in rural areas marginally favour funding programmes specifically for rural areas as opposed to simply an assessment based on the broad criterion of 'community need'.
- 4.8.8 The strong agreement with the second statement (i.e. that community need should be the primary criterion for funding decisions) would appear to support the general approach adopted by BIG in basing its investment decisions on judgements as to community need and outcomes, as opposed to 'unit cost' outputs (i.e. the number of beneficiaries per £ awarded).

Learning from the case studies – ideas for shaping Big Lottery policy

- 4.8.9 As part of our interviews with the projects selected as case studies, project leaders and partners were asked for their ideas and suggestions for shaping BIG's future strategy in seeking to reduce rural isolation based on their own project experience and learning. As to be expected, the suggestions made closely match the success factors in the previous section.

Focus on access to transport

- *Transport and cost of transport is the main issue for young people in rural Somerset. We have found taking our vans and activities into villages works as a way to engage and then start to build local groups and their capacity to work together to solve community problems. We also found a 'can do' mentality important as this responds to the impatience of young people to get results quickly.*
- *We find transport falls outside the criteria of many funding agencies; perhaps there is a case for funding agencies to run a specific rural community transport investment programme.*
- *Specific funds for community transport, and continued funding for advisers and consultants to small charities should be considered in future planning of funding to address rural isolation.*
- *Transport planners should recognise that Wheels to Work schemes have a major impact on the lives of young people living in remote rural areas without access to alternative forms of public transport and that they require a significant subsidy to be sustained. Any cost benefit analysis should take fully into account the savings in benefits that accrue from getting more young people in rural areas into work. The added value for the young people is also considerable in terms of greater independence, personal development, road sense, responsibility and experience of financial management.*

Share learning

- *BIG could do a lot more to share learning between infrastructure building organisations and BASIS projects say through a forum and a managed interactive website where case studies, good practice examples and analysis and evaluation reports can be posted and shared on an open source basis and provide linkages to resources provided by others such as NCVO and NAVCA. As the BASIS 2 programme works through over the next couple of years, BIG has the opportunity to capitalise and share this learning particularly as these other organisations will have reduced funding and capacity.*
- *Locally, Home-Start South Hams seeks to pass on this learning to other groups that do not have the benefit of this kind of support from a national organisation. For example, joint training sessions, delivered to Home-Start UK quality standards, are held with staff at charities in Saltstone, Ivybridge and Totnes specialising in the care of elderly returning home from hospital*

Recognise the needs of rurally isolated young people

- *There is a funding gap for those young people who lead quite chaotic lives due to a range of family, lifestyle and mental health issues and in rurally isolated areas like this, without funding support whether from government sources or the lottery, they fall through the net.*
- *Wheels to Work schemes are very effective in impacting on rural isolation for young people and generate a large social return on investment*

Invest more in volunteers

- *A critical success factor is the investment in volunteers. Twelve training courses were made available to volunteers in the last two years, including First Aid, Moving and Handling, Visual Impairment Awareness and even subsidised Skid Pan Training. The achievements of volunteers are also celebrated in two annual social events organised specifically for them by the Project Team as a way of thanking them for their contribution.*
- *The commitment of local people to become volunteer trustees over a ten-year period has been critical to the project's success*
- *The recruitment, selection, training and care of volunteers are crucial to the success of this project. In particular, volunteers need the skills to form a personal bond with someone at a distance while keeping the relationship within the boundary of friend/befriender.*

Recognise the importance of community roots

- *Grant funds should be directed to the smaller organisations where parents and other residents – largely volunteers – will ensure they are spent carefully and achieve greater community benefit. Too much funding in the larger organisations with wider geographic remits is wasted.*

- *The small scale and local personality of the charity is a key reason for its success. The members are close to their workers/volunteers, who live in the area themselves and are, essentially, friends not simply project workers. Building this level of trust to reassure the anxiety of visually impaired people is critical to tackling their needs*

Support innovation

- *Being innovative to reach rural people in need of advice and support is important -not simply the usual charity and local authority 'Roadshows' approach - but taking outreach to places where people already congregating such as markets, health centres and so on.*
- *New technologies like Video Link piloted recently in the Two Dales (Swaledale and Arkengarthdale) could be really useful in reaching more people in rural areas if developed and driven by a lead agency.*

Local is best for sustainability

- *Small remote villages need a social hub for people to meet whether it's a shop or better still a village hall.*
- *BIG investment in rural areas should concentrate on helping to provide local amenities where possible to reduce environmental impact of people travelling to amenities elsewhere.*

Understanding of rural issues

- *BIG offices and grants officers are based in cities and often have little concept in assessing applications of what it is like to be over an hour from an M&S or Tesco and to live more than a mile from the nearest bus stop with a service that might only run once a week. Perhaps to gain a better understanding, visits should be made by staff to spend time with a few funded projects in an area over a few days.*
- *The BIG Board have a good understanding of where the need is in rural areas. We are more than happy with the Reaching Communities programme - whilst it is not only for rural areas, the criteria are the right ones to fit information and advice services like ours that aim to reach out to people who, due to their rural isolation, struggle to access the information and advice they need to make good decisions to change their lives for the better.*

Importance of funding continuity

- *Continuity of funding support is important to provide the basics people need not provided by the statutory services.*
- *With the high costs of diesel and everyone chasing the same pots of local authority funding, we really need some on-going sources of funding to sustain this success.*

- *With fuel costs rising and local authority budget cuts, there is expectation that we need to do more for less. Perhaps a fund should be considered to provide support to projects at risk from budget cuts.*
- *Our experience is that the BIG Grants Officer is very aware of the difficulties and extra costs of delivering support to carers in rural Sutherland and has invited an application for a grant extension in recognition of the extra costs of delivery now Highland Council has asked us to extend the project to cover the whole region.*
- *Continuity of funding is critical to sustaining these advice services in rural areas.*
- *Securing funding for five years has provided a measure of stability and enhanced the achievements of this project.*
- *The continuity of funding support from Big Lottery, through the award of two successive three-year grants, has been a major factor underpinning the Care Network's achievements in reducing rural isolation in Cambridgeshire*

Importance of working in partnership

- *The new Community Worker is finding the key to reducing isolation in the rural villages is to help individuals and small groups of dedicated volunteers in these communities to keep the flame of community activity going by become part of a larger network to reassure them they are not the only ones trying to do it and to share experiences. The worker identifies the individuals and then invites them to partners' meetings which is working in reducing the volunteers' sense of isolation.*
- *Capital for building projects is extremely hard to come by in smaller rural communities as there is limited population to raise funds within. Part of the solution here was to take a wider strategic approach harnessing the support of other local village communities lacking good quality community hall amenities of their own.*
- *A factor behind the success of this project to date has been the focus given by the charity to working in partnership with other organisations.*

Importance of infrastructure support

- *Local amenities are important in rural areas and BIG should continue to offer programmes with sufficiently flexible criteria to allow rural projects to gain grants on merit – not simply number of beneficiaries. Funding should also be continued for local infrastructure support as this helps the BIG investment to work better.*
- *By providing training and employment opportunities for young volunteers to help run the service and work as peer mentors, the chances of sustaining the service beyond the period of the lottery grant are being maximised.*

- *It is critical to sustaining and strengthening rural networks to support the key individual 'agents for change' in these communities to avoid volunteer burn out or fatigue. It is a role for the infrastructure organisation network to help with succession planning and exit strategies. This work is particularly important at the moment with the policy agenda of localism and the Big Society.*
- *Together, this group had the right mix of skills - in business, fund-raising and effective community engagement - to make it happen. Not all villages are so fortunate. Support will be needed in many cases to deliver similar achievements.*

Be careful in use of deprivation statistics

- *Deprivation statistics need to be considered carefully at a very local level in allocation of resources in rural areas – extreme poverty in this area masked by high incidence of wealthy second home owners in the same villages.*

Pay attention to quality and energy efficiency (community assets)

- *Quality is important to making community assets work and be sustainable*

5 Conclusions

- 5.1 BIG-funded projects are helping reduce rural isolation for a large number of people living in rural areas.
- 5.2 The funding is reaching people in rural communities who are isolated as a result of low income, poor health or disability.
- 5.3 It is also reaching a wider group of older rural residents who are not economically disadvantaged but experience isolation as a result of lack of social contact for a variety of reasons.
- 5.4 For many projects in rural areas supported by BIG, reducing isolation is not an explicit aim. Nevertheless it is recognised by those responsible for rural projects as an important outcome for the people they aim to reach.
- 5.5 Projects that impact directly by increasing social contact with others and improving access to local services are the most effective in reducing rural isolation.
- 5.6 Local roots or 'personality' is important to the effectiveness of voluntary and community organisations working to reduce rural isolation. Generally, rural VCSOs are smaller than their urban counterparts and have access to fewer resources. Carefully targeted capacity building and other forms of support are important to sustain the success of many smaller VCSOs working to reduce rural isolation.
- 5.7 Isolation is a growing problem in the rural areas of the UK due to a range of socio-economic and cultural trends. However, it is not readily identified by the most commonly used measures of relative deprivation. More investment, innovation and effective 'rural-proofing' of BIG's funding programmes are needed to ensure rural isolation is further reduced.

6 Recommendations

6.1 Continue to invest mainly through small grants and open programmes

BIG should continue to direct most of its investment in communities through the small grants programme (Awards for All) and through the two flexible, open programmes in England and Scotland (Reaching Communities and Investing in Communities). These are proving effective in reaching isolated people in rural areas.

6.2 Retain up to five year revenue funding

It is recommended that the current offer of up to five year revenue funding within these main funding programmes should be retained. This is particularly important in rural areas where projects generally take longer to establish than in urban settings (set up, staff, gain community awareness etc.)

6.3 Retain 'continuation funding' option where appropriate

It is further recommended that 'Continuation Funding' should continue to be offered on a selective basis to those projects facing budget cuts that have proven effective in reducing rural isolation and are operating in areas with no realistic opportunity to become self-sufficient.

6.4 Plan to invest in preventative social support and rural transport for the elderly and the disabled

In response to the demographic time bomb of growth in the elderly population, most particularly in rural areas, BIG should plan to invest more of its available resources in preventative social support projects for the elderly and disabled, led by third sector organisations. The investment should include adequate support for accessible transport and encourage partnership projects between social support and community transport providers. This could either be designed as a new programme or a strand within Reaching Communities / Investing in Communities.

6.5 Improve effectiveness of 'rural-proofing' measures

More care should be taken to ensure investment programmes aimed at reducing isolation are adequately 'rural-proofed'. In particular, we recommend BIG adopt the learning from the recent Rural Communities Action Network (RCAN) research with regard to assessing deprivation and community need (i.e. more consideration of

local 'people-based' evidence and less reliance on the area-based Index of Multiple Deprivation). Where the IMD is used, the smaller 'Output Area' level analyses should be used as opposed to the 'Lower Super Output Area' level used for the Community Buildings capital element of the Reaching Communities programme.

6.6 Adopt social return on investment and well-being evaluation

The current flexible targets and broad definitions of community need used in the main BIG programmes are positive in terms of rural-proofing. However, reporting and evaluation remains largely output based. A greater focus on social return on investment and well-being evaluation models (e.g. the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale) should be considered.

6.7 Greater targeting of investment in capacity-building based on learning from successes

There is a great deal of good practice learning available as to what works best in reducing rural isolation. Future investment in capacity building in rural communities should be directed towards types of organisation and initiative that have proved effective in rural communities e.g.

- 'Village Agent'/'Community Contacts' projects focusing on identifying, recruiting, training and supporting local individuals (e.g. the 'active retired') to provide face-to-face information and support and enable individuals to make informed choices about their future needs and to stimulate new local volunteering and community action.
- VCS organisations with strong roots in their rural communities -i.e. local 'personality'
- Community Assets projects that make use of available learning and support resources e.g. The Plunkett Foundation (village shops, post offices); RCAN (Village halls), Community Link Scotland (both), The Groundwork Trust (village greens etc)

6.8 Develop learning and support 'resource packages' for specific project types proven effective in reducing rural isolation

Similar 'resource packages' of learning and support should be developed for the other types of project that have proved effective in reducing rural isolation i.e. i) social support projects for the elderly and disabled; ii) community transport projects for the old and the young, iii) computer training projects and iv) advice and information projects for people in hardship. Once developed, these packages should be promoted through the RCAN, NCVO and NAVCA networks.

BIG should invest in infrastructure projects that identify (in partnership with local CVS groups and local authorities) where in their area there are the largest gaps in these services, and devise packages of support as needed to get these services going or to sustain those already in place but at risk.

6.9 Consider feasibility of a commercial sponsorship fund for rural isolation projects

To reduce the long-term dependence of rural CVS organisations on its investment programmes and to encourage more private investment, BIG should consider the feasibility of a corporate social responsibility (CSR) sponsorship match fund investment programme for rural social support, advice, and community transport projects. This could be developed along the lines of Sport England's Sportsmatch programme to stimulate private sector investment in reducing rural isolation.

6.10 Consider feasibility of innovation fund for rural community transport projects

Our final recommendation is that BIG consider the feasibility of introducing a programme of innovation funding for rural community transport projects to stimulate the sector, encourage partnerships between public, private and voluntary sector providers and local, more sustainable solutions (e.g. use of bio fuels, electric vehicles, mobility aids). Innovation funding support could also be extended to the development of video link systems between service providers and village halls and care homes (building on Richmondshire District Council's 'Two Dales Live' pilot).