

FIFE RURAL PARTNERSHIP

FINAL REPORT

FIFE RURAL PARTNERSHIP

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FIFE RURAL PARTNERSHIP

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION 1:BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH	1
Introduction	1
Definitions	2
Overview of Fife Rural Partnership.....	2
The report.....	4
SECTION 2:RURAL ISSUES	5
Rurality and relative isolation	5
Population ISSUES.....	7
Deprivation	9
Economic issues.....	12
Voluntary and community activity.....	14
Transport.....	15
Housing	16
Education, skills and qualifications	18
The environment.....	19
Crime	20
Overview	21
SECTION 3:ADDITIONAL ISSUES FACING EQUALITY GROUPS	22
Wider equalities issues	22
A note about multiple identities	23
Young people	23
Older people.....	25
Disabled people.....	27
Lone parents	30
LGBT People.....	33
Ethnic minority Communities.....	34
Women.....	35
Overview	36
SECTION 4:THE WAY FORWARD	37
The “rural” dimension.....	37
The role of Fife Rural Partnership	38
Structure.....	39
Rural champions.....	40
Operational area.....	40
Suggestions about work the Partnership could undertake	41
Overview	53

SECTION 1: BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report was commissioned by Fife Rural Partnership in June 2010 to help redefine the strategic context within which the work of the Partnership takes place. The Partnership was first established more than 15 years ago, and rightly, it was perceived that its aims and objectives, as well as its mode of working, should be revisited.

Aim

1.2 The aim of the work was:

To carry out research into what it is like to 'live in rural Fife', in particular looking at evidence of disadvantage and outlining key priorities for intervention for a lead rural document

Purposes

1.3 The four purposes of the work, as described in the brief, were:

- To update Fife Rural Partnership's evidence base on rural disadvantage
- To inform the development of a lead document that will be used to direct the activities of Fife Rural Partnership and influence the plans and actions of other partnerships, partners and services in Fife
- To draw in pivotal elected members, managers, partnerships and services through the research
- To support the work of national networks in making the case for better recognition of rural disadvantage

Brief overview of the methodology

1.4 The work involved three key elements. These were:

- Desk research to identify relevant past Fife work, national studies and those that have been undertaken for other rural areas in Scotland; to draw on those studies and identify generic learning / focus points both in terms of (a) the evidence that it has been gleaned and (b) how it has been used to influence policy and practice (some discussions with study leads / local managers will be required)
- Analysis of Fife rural data with some limited and appropriate comparative analysis with Fife urban areas and rural data from elsewhere in Scotland to identify common and different issues.
- Interviews and group discussions with key participants.

1.5 A total of 40 individuals and groups contributed to this research, including staff from a variety of public and voluntary sector organisations, as well as community groups.

DEFINITIONS

1.6 For the purposes of this research, “rural” Fife has been defined using the following 2007 wards:

- Howe of Fife and Tay Coast
- Cupar
- Tay Bridgehead
- St Andrews
- East Neuk
- West Fife and Coastal Villages

1.7 In some cases, the first 5 of these wards have been aggregated to form a contiguous area “East Fife”. The remain ward is more generally referred to as the “West Fife Villages”, and this is generally preferred in the text.

1.8 Although St Andrews has been included in the data analysis, it is not classed as “rural” using the Scottish Government’s standard 6-fold rural classification and, as will be set out later, the Fife Rural Partnership has done relatively little work in the town. However, much of the economic health, and a good deal of the social and educational infrastructure in East Fife depends on the town. In essence, the town of St Andrews is integral to the solutions to the issues facing rural East Fife.

1.9 In practical terms, Fife Rural Partnership has not stuck rigidly to these boundaries. The most obvious example of this is the inclusion of the area around Largo which is part of a ward including Leven, but is generally included within the “East Neuk”.

1.10 One of the recommendations of this report (set out in Section 4) is that Fife Rural Partnership should be permitted to operate in any area considered as “rural”, or where similar characteristics apply, and have an impact on economic or social issues. Examples of the areas likely to be included using this definition would be villages in the Lochs ward and the area around Cardenden.

OVERVIEW OF FIFE RURAL PARTNERSHIP

1.11 Fife Rural Partnership (or “the Partnership”) was established in the mid1990s as a way of helping focus the work of key local stakeholders (including the then Fife Regional Council, North East Fife and Dunfermline District Councils and Fife Enterprise) on rural areas and rural issues¹. The model was designed to help provide a bridge between these agencies and rural communities, and the focus was on “making things happen”. Much of the early work was focused on economic development, but this has broadened over time, and much of the current work is

¹ At the outset, other partners, such as the then Fife Tourist Board, Elmwood College, and the Scottish Agricultural College were also involved.

more related to community development (albeit, in most cases, with an economic focus).

1.12 The Partnership is a separate legal entity, largely as a means of allowing it to apply for funding in its own right.

1.13 In the early stages, an “animateur” was appointed, and this role has now grown to include management and coordination, as well as project delivery. The coordinator is employed by Fife Council, and line management is also provided through the Council.

1.14 At various points over the 15 year life of the partnership, other staff have been employed, either in an administrative or project delivery capacity. At present, the Partnership has no additional staff, although two project staff are employed by VONEF but funded by the Partnership and one member of staff from Fife Community Safety Partnership also works specifically on rural issues. The Partnership also has access to limited administrative resources through Fife Council.

1.15 Over time, the range of organisations with some involvement with the partnership has grown and now includes, for example, more Fife Council services, a variety of voluntary organisations, the NHS and, on specific projects, Fife Constabulary and Fife Fire and Rescue.

1.16 In the last 2 – 3 years, a number of concerns have been expressed about the structure and operation of the partnership (rather than about the work undertaken specifically). For example, it has proved difficult to provide administrative support to meetings, and attendance from some services has been sporadic. Similarly, there has been a concern that the Partnership has become less strategic, and more focused on information exchange between partners (although it has been acknowledged that this is valuable in its own right).

1.17 For these reasons, it was agreed that two pieces of work would be undertaken in parallel. This work would focus on rural issues, and try to identify what may be the key priorities for work in the future. A separate piece of work, led by the coordinator and chair, has considered the structure and administration of the Partnership. In recognition of the fact that these issues are, to a large extent, interlinked, this research will, in Section 4, provide some suggestions in relation to structural issues.

1.18 Thus, at the present time, while direction of the work is nominally provided by the “Partnership”, meetings have been suspended pending the review of its structure.

1.19 The work of the Partnership has, however, continued. The Chair of the Partnership continues to meet with the coordinator, as do other elected members. Nominally, work is being directed by the Chair in consultation with others pending completion of consideration of the future structure of the Partnership.

1.20 The work of Fife Rural Partnership has, in the last 3 years, been largely focused on 3 main areas:

- The Tay Regeneration Initiative

- Community Development through supporting “enterprising communities”
- Rural advocacy and policy development

1.21 As will be set out in Section 4, some refocusing of this work will be suggested.

THE REPORT

1.22 This research is largely forward looking, and is not intended to be a review of the work of Fife Rural Partnership over the last 15 years. However, some aspects of the current work of the partnership will be referred to as part of the discussion of issues in the next section.

1.23 The report is in four sections: this section serves as a brief introduction; the next section covers issues relevant to rural communities in Fife; the third section covers additional issues relevant to specific groups; and the final section provides an overview of some key conclusions and suggestions for the way forward.

SECTION 2: RURAL ISSUES

2.1 This section considers evidence about Fife’s rural areas. It is supplemented by information in Section 3 about issues facing specific groups.

2.2 The information in both sections is drawn from a wide variety of sources, including the KnowFife dataset, the 2001 census, SIMD and the Fife Public Health Dataset, as well as interviews with a range of stakeholders from the public sector, voluntary sector and community organisations.

RURALITY AND RELATIVE ISOLATION

2.3 The table below gives an indication of the extent to which the wards which make up the Fife Rural Partnership areas can be considered “rural”. The Scottish Government classification provides for 6 types of area. None of the datazones in Fife are classified as “remote rural”, although, as can be seen from the table below, about 40% of the overall area (and more than half if St Andrews is excluded) is classed as “accessible rural”. Of the wards, the Howe and Tay Coast is by some margin the most “rural”, with parts of the ward (around Newburgh) being particularly isolated from larger settlements.

Table 1. Number of datazones in each 6-Fold Rural Classification

Area	6-Fold Classification by datazone		
	Other urban	Accessible small towns	Accessible rural
Cupar		10	6
East Neuk		8	10
Howe of Fife and Tay Coast			20
St Andrews	17		3
Tay Bridgehead		16	3
West Fife and Coastal Villages		13	10
Total "Rural Partnership areas"	17	47	52

2.4 By way of comparison, none of the other wards in Fife has a significant number of datazones classified as “accessible rural”. However, a small number of wards, while *largely* urban, have “rural” areas. Examples of this include the Leven, Kennoway and Largo ward; the Buckhaven, Methil and Wemyss ward; the Burntisland, Kinghorn and Western Kirkcaldy ward; and the Lochs ward.

2.5 The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation provides a consistent way of benchmarking the issues facing different areas in Scotland. Overall, there are around 6500 datazones in Scotland and these can be ranked, in order to show overall relative deprivation on a wide range of indicators. One of these indicators, geographic access, provides a picture of the relative isolation of datazones, and, at an aggregate level, of wards in Fife’s rural areas. This is made up by taking average drive times to a wide range of services, including GPs, schools and post offices. The table below shows an average rank for the datazones in each of the wards within the Rural Partnership operational area.

Table 2. Average SIMD rank geographic access 2009

Area	Average rank
Cupar	1652
East Neuk	2308
Howe of Fife and Tay Coast	1412
St Andrews	3579
Tay Bridgehead	2639
West Fife and Coastal Villages	1664
"Rural Partnership areas"	2208

2.6 On this basis, again the Howe and Tay Coast ward is the most inaccessible, but, by Scottish standards, none of the wards is particularly isolated. Overall, 18 data zones (out of 116 in total, or 98 excluding St Andrews) rank in the worst 10% in Scotland in terms of Geographic access, with 4 being in the worst 5%.

2.7 None of the wards as a whole is particularly “deprived” in relation to access to services, at least as defined through SIMD, but this masks wide variation in terms of individual settlements and individual services.

2.8 In terms of driving times to a range of essential services (as set out in SIMD), 18 data zones rank in the worst 10% in Scotland, while, in terms of public transport travel times, 17 rank in the worst 10%.

2.9 A consistent issue raised in the research was the difficulties caused by lack of access to public transport. This appears to be made up of three main factors: the frequency of services; travel times (and the related issue of the need to change buses); and costs.

2.10 SIMD provides a statistical analysis of average public transport access times to various services. This suggests the following:

- 26 datazones (22%) have a drive time of more than 20 minutes to a GP.
- 6 datazones (5%) have a travel time of more than 20 minutes to a Post Office.
- 56 datazones (48%) have a travel time of more than 20 minutes to significant shopping facilities.

2.11 There are also variations *within* areas. While most isolated data zones are remote from *all* services, this is not consistent. Using Newburgh as an example, driving times to GPs, a post office and primary school are relatively short, but times (both driving and particularly public transport travel) to shopping and secondary schools are long (and the case of the former, the longest in Fife).

2.12 Using census data from 2001 (which is clearly somewhat out of date), there are differences in the way in which people travel to work between rural areas and Fife as a whole. The table below uses approximations of the 2007 wards (based on 2000 wards):

Table 3. Modes of commuting

Area	Car driver	Car driver or passenger	Bus
Cupar	61%	67%	5%
East Neuk	59%	66%	7%
Howe of Fife and Tay Coast	65%	72%	7%
St Andrews	25%	29%	3%
Tay Bridgehead	56%	64%	12%
West Fife and Coastal Villages	59%	69%	12%
<i>Fife</i>	<i>55%</i>	<i>64%</i>	<i>10%</i>

2.13 The table illustrates that, as might be expected, levels of commuting by car are higher in rural areas than in Fife overall, but more striking is the very low level of commuting by bus evident in the Cupar, East Neuk and Howe of Fife wards. This is consistent with a view expressed by a number of interviewees that people face significant difficulties in accessing public transport (and will be discussed in more detail later).

POPULATION ISSUES

2.14 The table below suggests that, using the ward-based definition set out earlier, the population covered by the Rural Partnership is around 94,000, or about 26% of Fife's population.

Table 4. Population by ward 2008

Area	Total Population 2008
Cupar	14142
East Neuk	13057
Howe of Fife and Tay Coast	15255
St Andrews	18545
Tay Bridgehead	14738
<i>Total East Fife</i>	<i>75737</i>
West Fife and Coastal Villages	18251
<i>Total "Rural Partnership areas"</i>	<i>93988</i>
<i>Fife</i>	<i>361890</i>

2.15 The overall population of the area has risen since 2001 (by around 4%), largely as a result of house building. There are variations in this, as the overall population of the West Fife Villages has remained static overall, and, in the case of the East Neuk, has declined (albeit by about 1%).

2.16 The reason for the decline in the East Neuk appears to be that the increase in the number of houses has been offset by the number of these being used as second homes. Data at community council level (which is less reliable than at ward level) suggests that there has been a reduction in the population of Elie and Earlsferry of about 14%, St Monans of about 11% and Pittenwee of about 9%. Conversely, the population of Anstruther rose by about 5% while Crail remained static.

2.17 One contributor to the research suggested that the growth in the rural population could have been greater over this period had planning policies been less restrictive. In the view of the contributor, higher rates of managed growth in many communities (driven by releasing land for housing) could have been beneficial in terms of helping sustain local services (including schools, shops and transport services).

Age structure

2.18 There are marked differences in the age structure of the wards within the Rural Partnership area and Fife as a whole. This is illustrated in the table below:

Table 5. Breakdown of population by ward 2008

Area	Pop'tion	Children	Working Age	Pension Age
Cupar	13383	16.7%	59.1%	24.2%
East Neuk and Landward	12720	15.8%	56.5%	27.8%
Howe of Fife and Tay Coast	15693	17.5%	60.5%	22.0%
St Andrews	18971	9.6%	71.9%	18.5%
Tay Bridgehead	14548	18.9%	61.6%	19.4%
<i>East Fife</i>	<i>75315</i>	<i>15.3%</i>	<i>62.7%</i>	<i>22.0%</i>
West Fife and Coastal Villages	18408	18.0%	61.2%	20.8%
<i>Rural Partnership</i>	<i>93723</i>	<i>15.9%</i>	<i>62.4%</i>	<i>21.8%</i>
<i>Fife</i>	<i>361890</i>	<i>18.0%</i>	<i>61.6%</i>	<i>20.5%</i>

2.19 The table illustrates that four of the six wards, the East Neuk, Cupar, the Howe and West Fife Villages all have higher percentages of older people than is typical in Fife as a whole. The East Neuk and Cupar wards have the highest population of pension age people in Fife. It is interesting to note that the adjacent Leven, Kennoway and Largo ward (which contains a small rural area) also has a high percentage of people of pensionable age (nearly 24%).

2.20 It is also worth noting that Cupar and the East Neuk have among the highest proportion of residents over 80 and over 90 of any wards in Fife. Clearly, this has implications for the delivery of services, as well as in relation to the relative prevalence of age-related conditions such as dementia and physical impairment.

2.21 Using 2001 Census data approximately mapped to 2007 wards, the percentages of people economically inactive as a result of being retired is set out in the table on the next page.

Table 6. Percentage of economically inactive “retired”

Area	Average
Cupar	15.9%
East Neuk	25.3%
Howe of Fife and Tay Coast	15.9%
St Andrews	13.8%
Tay Bridgehead	16.7%
West Fife and Coastal Villages	14.8%
Fife	14.6%

2.22 2001 census data also suggests that the number of households comprised only of pensioners was generally much higher in rural wards than in Fife as a whole. For example, in the East Neuk, around 12% of households contained pensioners only, compared with 8.8% in Fife as a whole. Levels of all-pensioner households in some settlements (including St Andrews outside the central, student-dominated area) were higher still. The proportion of households with at least one person of pension age was also generally higher than in Fife as a whole.

2.23 The relatively low proportion of working age people also has implications for the supply of labour. The working age population in the East Neuk is the smallest in Fife by some margin, with Cupar (as well as the adjacent ward of Leven, Kennoway and Largo) also having a relatively low percentage.

DEPRIVATION

2.24 In terms of formal measures of deprivation, none of the wards which make up Fife’s rural areas ranks highly. The average SIMD ranking for the relevant wards is set out below:

Table 7. Average SIMD rank 2009

Area	Average rank	Vigintile
Cupar	4046	13
East Neuk	4174	13
Howe of Fife and Tay Coast	4239	14
St Andrews	5247	17
Tay Bridgehead	4782	15
West Fife and Coastal Villages	3533	11
Total "Rural Partnership areas"	4325	14

2.25 Overall, there has been little change since 2004 in terms of the overall average ranks of these wards. Two (East Neuk and St Andrews) have improved slightly, while the other four have worsened, again only slightly. In none of the cases is the relative change particularly large.

2.26 Within this, only 3 datazones, two in Valleyfield, Culross and Torryburn and one in Oakley Comrie and Blairhall were in the worst 15% in Scotland for 2009. Interestingly, in two cases, the datazones were not among the worst 15% in

2004, suggesting that, in these cases at least, there has been some worsening of relative deprivation.

2.27 In terms of residents in each ward who are income deprived, each of the 5 East Fife wards has a relatively low percentage, although the percentage in the West Fife Villages is closer to the Fife and Scottish averages. The pattern for employment-related deprivation is similar (although the gap between the West Fife Villages and Fife as a whole is, for this measure, wider). These findings are set out in the table below:

Table 8. Income and employment deprivation (2009 SIMD)

Area	% income deprived	% employment deprived
Cupar	8.1	9.6
East Neuk and Landward	7.9	9.8
Howe of Fife and Tay Coast	6.8	9.0
St Andrews	3.3	5.3
Tay Bridgehead	5.8	7.4
West Fife and Coastal Villages	11	12.3
<i>Fife</i>	11.6	14.3
<i>Scotland</i>	11.6	15.1

2.28 Although relative levels are low, SIMD estimates that there are 2868 people in East Fife and a further 1232 in the West Fife Villages who fall in to either of these categories. In some ways, this group may face *more* barriers than people in a similar situation in urban Fife (e.g., through lack of access to services and lack of access to opportunities). It is important, therefore, in assessing relative deprivation not to lose sight of the issues facing individuals in rural areas. This issue will be discussed further in Section 4.

2.29 Compared to all Fife wards, the rankings (out of 23) for each of the rural wards in relation to income deprivation were as follows:

Table 9. Rank among Fife wards income deprivation 2005

Area	Rank
Cupar	19
East Neuk	17
Howe of Fife and Tay Coast	19
St Andrews	23
Tay Bridgehead	22
West Fife and Coastal Villages	15

2.30 This provides additional confirmation that the rural wards have relatively low levels of income deprivation. The rankings for employment deprivation (not shown here) are similar.

2.31 Fife Council's Council Tax Benefit data also provides confirmation of the relative affluence of Fife rural areas

Table 10. Percentage of households claiming Council Tax benefit 2007

Area	Percentage
Cupar	13.0
East Neuk	13.9
Howe of Fife and Tay Coast	14.7
St Andrews	10.1
Tay Bridgehead	11.1
West Fife and Coastal Villages	16.4
<i>Fife</i>	<i>20.3</i>

2.32 For comparison, in a number of wards (e.g. Buckhaven and Methil; Lochgelly and Cardenden and the Lochs), the level of claiming is over 30%.

2.33 It is worth bearing in mind that, as will be set out in more detail in Section 4, formal measures of deprivation are rarely a good indicator of rural deprivation.

Unemployment

2.34 Fife Council currently publishes unemployment statistics using 2003 wards, rather than the 2007 wards used for most analyses in this report, but these still give a clear picture of the issue as it impacts on rural Fife.

2.35 As might be expected, unemployment is relatively low across East Fife, and is below the Fife average. At August 2010, none of the wards in East Fife approached the overall unemployment rate for Fife (4.4%). Of these, only Cupar North (3.5%) exceeded 3%. The total number of claimants in East Fife was less than 1,000, equating to a rate of around 1.9%.

2.36 Unemployment in the West Fife Villages, however, was higher, with the three relevant wards all above the Fife average, with Oakley, Saline and Steelend recording 5.5%, Blairhall, High Valleyfield & Torryburn 4.9% and Kincardine, Culross & Low Valleyfield 4.7%.

2.37 Overall, registered unemployment in all of the wards has declined in the last year, in common with Fife as a whole, although as might be expected, the outlook is uncertain.

Fuel poverty

2.38 To some extent, fuel poverty has a less direct link to other forms of deprivation. Broadly, households are considered to be in “fuel poverty” if they have to spend more than 10% of their household income on keeping their home satisfactorily warm. There are, in effect, three components to this indicator: income; fuel costs and housing conditions (particularly energy efficiency).

2.39 Typically, research shows that higher proportions of households in rural areas than urban areas tend to face fuel poverty, partly as a result of the higher levels of reliance on expensive fuel types, but also as a result of the prevalence of un-modernised housing and private lets.

2.40 Data from KnowFife is interesting in that it shows that 2 of the 5 rural wards (East Neuk and Tay Bridgehead) as well as St Andrews, have rates of fuel poverty higher than the Fife average. Indeed, the rates in St Andrews and the East Neuk are the highest in Fife.

2.41 UK research suggesting that rates are typically highest where there is a high level of reliance on private rented accommodation may help explain the St Andrews figure. The same research also suggested clear links between the age profile of households and fuel poverty, particularly rates of both all-pensioner and single pensioner households. As was set out elsewhere, the East Neuk has, by some margin, the highest levels of pensioner and single pensioner households.

Health issues

2.42 Although the range of health indicators available at ward level is relatively restricted, those that can be broken down in this way also support the view that formal measures of deprivation are relatively low in Fife's rural areas. For example, among health indicators which can be related directly to deprivation, the percentages of people reporting either that they were not in good health, or that they had a limiting long term illness were, in all cases, below, and generally well below the Fife average. Levels of low weight births were, with the exception of St Andrews, below the Fife average. In the East Neuk and Tay Bridgehead, levels were less than a fifth of the Fife (or Scottish) average.

2.43 Although not available at ward level, data from the Fife Public Health dataset also shows that indicators for North East Fife are generally supportive of the view that the area is relative affluent. For example, diverse indicators linked to deprivation ranging from levels of breast feeding, and levels of both smoking and drinking, to consumption of fruit and vegetables, all show that North East Fife is markedly different to the remainder of Fife. Interestingly, higher numbers of people in North East Fife reported good physical or emotional well being than in any other part of Fife.

ECONOMIC ISSUES

2.44 In terms of economic issues, there is relatively little in common between East Fife and the West Fife Villages, and, for that reason, the areas will be dealt with separately.

East Fife

2.45 It would be misleading to think of "East Fife" as a single economic unit, as there are significant variations across the area in both economic structure and employment patterns. This is most marked in the area around St Andrews, which has provides significant employment for people living in each of the other wards.

2.46 The St Andrews economy is dominated by the University and the hospitality sector. However, it is clear from commuting patterns that many employees commute from other areas, particularly the three adjacent wards.

2.47 The areas around Cupar and the Howe of Fife have a relatively high level of employment in both primary and secondary food production. Cupar's main industrial employer is Fisher Services, which provides linen clearing for the hospitality sector. Beyond this, the main employers are Fife Council, the NHS and Elmwood College.

2.48 The economy of the East Neuk is markedly different from the remainder of East Fife. There are no large employers, and virtually all non-public sector employment is in small and very small businesses. As in other rural areas, the most significant concentrations of employment are in personal services. Although historically and visually significant, fishing actually provides relatively few jobs, either directly or indirectly. Perhaps the key feature of the East Neuk labour market is that there is a very high level of commuting to other areas, reflecting the fact that there are few local jobs.

The West Fife Villages

2.49 The economy of the West Fife Villages has more in common with much of Central Fife than East Fife, having previously been dominated by coal mining.

2.50 As elsewhere, the main employer in the West Fife Villages is the public sector through both Fife Council and NHS organisations. The main industrial employer in the area is Scottish Power, through the Longannet Power Station complex, together with associated operations in relation to the disposal of ash. Beyond this, there are relatively small numbers involved in quarrying and agriculture. As is common in rural and semi-rural areas, personal services businesses also employ a higher than average proportion of the workforce (although still a small number of people).

2.51 However, as with much of the rest of south Fife, there are high levels of outward commuting, both to other parts of Fife, but also to Edinburgh, Glasgow and both Falkirk and Stirling.

Tourism

2.52 East Fife, and to a small, but still significant level, West Fife, are central to Fife's tourism offering. St Andrews is clearly a significant international destination, and its success has led to an increasing number of accommodation and golf developments in landward areas. The East Neuk is also a significant destination in its own right, primarily for short breaks.

2.53 Most of the new visitor attraction developments in Fife in the last 20 years have been undertaken in East Fife, including some (e.g. the Scottish Deer Centre and Scotland's Secret Bunker) in rural areas. St Andrews has a high concentration of both historic buildings and modern visitor attractions.

2.54 Within the West Fife Villages, Culross is the primary visitor destination, but there are also a number of historic buildings and sites in other villages.

2.55 The hospitality sector is a key, if seasonal employer in both St Andrews and the East Neuk and Cupar. Much of this employment is also part time, and increasing numbers of vacancies are being filled by workers from outside the UK.

2.56 St Andrews, although technically outwith the Fife Rural Partnership operating area, is centrally important to tourism across East Fife. It is key to attracting visitors to Fife, and other areas in East Fife can benefit in a number of ways, including meeting demand when accommodation in St Andrews is either in short supply or perceived to be too expensive, and in providing secondary visit destinations.

VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY ACTIVITY

2.57 The recent Scottish Government consultation “Give Rural Scotland a Voice” identified the importance of community empowerment to the sustainability of rural communities. This is clearly an area where Fife Rural Partnership has made a significant impact in the last five years, with much activity surrounding the development of community trusts and “enterprising communities”. These have been viewed as very effective in channelling community activity towards specific projects, and also in galvanizing communities themselves (as happened in, for example, Newburgh). However, trusts can be bureaucratic, and may be unwieldy. There is clear evidence from Fife Rural Partnership and others that the responsibilities of being a trust member (as well as the legal responsibilities of the trust itself) can be off-putting to some potential members.

2.58 There is no question, however, that the current pressure on public funding will make it less likely that community-based projects can be taken forward by the public sector. This makes it more likely that, if projects are to happen at all, they will have to be led by the community itself, or by voluntary organisations working in these areas. Clearly, this will not happen in isolation, and, although there is clear evidence from the trust development process that there are many people with specific skills within rural communities, some level of individual, organisational and community capacity building will be required. Traditionally, this role was played by Fife Council staff, although more recently, workers employed by the CVSs (working alongside Fife Rural Partnership) have done this. There was a recognition by some contributors that this is an area of activity which will be required in the future, and in which Fife Rural Partnership could have a continuing role.

2.59 Clearly, once capacity has been built to the extent that communities are able to identify and scope projects, there will also be a requirement for support in, for example, identifying potential funders, developing applications, contracting etc. Again, this is a role which Fife Rural Partnership has played, mostly in relation to the trusts, but also more widely, and is one which clearly could continue.

2.60 At a wider level, it is clear from a number of contributors that the voluntary sector in Fife’s rural areas is likely to face some funding-related difficulties over the next few years.

2.61 The voluntary sector in rural areas is made up of two components: Fife (or Scottish)-wide organisations, and those with a purely local focus. Taking the former first, those providing Fife-wide, or local services, are likely to face difficult decisions about the nature of the services that can be provided. While it was too early to be clear what impact any cuts would have on rural services, some contributors expressed a concern that these services, which are generally more expensive to deliver, and reach fewer clients, may be more at risk than those in urban areas.

TRANSPORT

2.62 The issue of transport was raised consistently throughout the research, and in a wide range of contexts. Transport is widely recognised as a major policy issue, and barrier to the development of rural areas in Scotland.

2.63 It was clear from the research that transport was also seen as a major barrier in Fife's rural areas. The issue is, however, complex and needs to be broken down in order to properly appreciate the issues.

Car ownership

2.64 Levels of car ownership in rural Fife, as in the rest of rural Scotland, are generally slightly higher than in urban areas, but this in itself is also misleading. Levels of multiple car ownership are also higher, but still significantly short of equating to the number of economically active adults. Personal transport generally is more important in rural areas, both for allowing access to employment but also social activities and access to services. A point made by a number of contributors to this research is that many women, as well as older children, may be unable to access a car, particularly during "working" hours, potentially limiting access to a wide range of opportunities.

2.65 It was also argued by a number of contributors that the consequences of not owning a car may be considerably worse than in urban areas. As will be set out below, public transport is generally quite limited and people (generally, although not always) have to travel greater distances to find economic and social opportunities, as well as accessing services. Thus, while it will vary from individual to individual, people without cars are generally more disadvantaged in rural areas. As will be set out later in more detail, levels of car ownership among some groups, particularly older people and lone parents, as well as people on low incomes, are very low and this has the practical effect of further constraining opportunities.

Public transport

2.66 There are also limitations to public transport in rural areas in Fife. The picture is mixed. Some towns, particularly Cupar, have excellent transport links, and others, particularly slightly larger towns such as Anstruther and Kincardine also have reasonably high levels of services. However, away from these locations, the frequency and, more significantly, the nature of services falls away rapidly.

2.67 There are two main issues. In most rural areas, services to main towns (where employment, training and services are concentrated) tend to be both infrequent and operate within only limited hours each day. This point was raised by elected members in West Fife in the context that the "last bus" from Dunfermline to many West Fife Villages is too early to allow full participation in economic and social activities.

2.68 The second main issue is that some journeys are very difficult (or effectively impossible) by public transport. Most public transport operates using a "hub and spoke" approach, with larger towns acting as the hub with feeder services serving individual villages. The issue is that travel between villages is generally only possible

via the main town. A number of examples of this were provided by contributors to this research, both in East Fife and the West Fife Villages. The practical effect of this is to limit movement and, for some employers in rural areas, to limit the pool from which workers could be drawn. As one young person noted in a group discussion, to travel from their home to a work opportunity relatively close by required two buses and took nearly two hours (and would be prohibitively expensive).

2.69 The need to change buses was raised as an issue in relation to travel by both lone parents and disabled people. In relation to lone parents travelling with children, it was suggested that this “doubled or quadrupled” the chances that a bus would not be able to accommodate a pushchair (as well as making it all but impossible for friends to travel together). For disabled people, the issue was similar, effectively multiplying the risk that any service would not be operated by low floor buses.

2.70 In relation to that point, it was noted that the prevalence of low floor buses is increasing, particularly on “main” routes. However, it was also suggested that many subsidiary routes in rural areas, which are often operated by small local transport companies, may use older, inaccessible vehicles. This issue has been recognised by both the UK and Scottish Governments, but the DDA deadline for full compliance with access standards is nearly a full decade away.

Taxis

2.71 Relatively few contributors identified taxis as an issue, except to the extent that, as a result of journey lengths, fares may be more expensive. This is an added burden for many in rural areas, as those with limited or no access to cars, and those living where public transport is most limited, tend to be particularly reliant on taxis.

2.72 As will be set out in the next section, one group for whom taxis are a concern is disabled people, who, generally, are more reliant on this mode of transport than other groups.

HOUSING

2.73 One of the key issues, raised by virtually all contributors, was housing. This is a complex issue, with a number of factors which impact on rural areas.

Housing tenure

2.74 There are marked differences in the broad pattern of housing tenure between Fife’s rural areas and elsewhere in the region. Levels of owner occupation are typically higher, and levels of social renting lower. In Cupar, St Andrews, the East Neuk and Tay Bridgehead, levels of private lets are much higher than the Fife average, in part due to the number of students studying at St Andrews University and Elmwood College.

2.75 Generally, the impact of students on the availability of housing is relatively small in Fife. However, as might be expected, the numbers of properties wholly occupied by students is much higher in both St Andrews and the Tay Bridgehead wards (12% and 9% respectively, compared to 1 – 2% typically elsewhere).

2.76 In Fife as a whole, relatively few homes are classified as “second” homes (about 1 – 2% typically). However, in the East Neuk, this figure is 12%, and in St Andrews 4%. Anecdotal evidence suggest that the percentage in some settlements, particularly Elie and to a lesser extent Crail are significantly higher even than this. The broad levels of second home ownership have been stable over an extended period.

2.77 The practical effect of the presence of both large numbers of students and many second homes has been to restrict the availability of housing to people usually resident in these communities. As will be set out below, in periods of relative economic prosperity, it has also had the effect of inflating prices.

Housing related deprivation

2.78 Overall, Fife’s rural areas are not ranked particularly highly in terms of housing-related deprivation. Paradoxically, parts of St Andrews and the Tay Bridgehead wards (where there are high numbers of students) rank relatively poorly as a result of “overcrowding.” However, elsewhere, there are isolated datazones where higher than average numbers of properties are overcrowded or lack central heating, but there is no consistent pattern.

First time purchases

2.79 One of the key issues raised by contributors to this research in relation to housing was the lack of affordable starter homes for young people either wishing to leave home and remain in their local area, or returning from college or university. Clearly, the recession has had a considerable impact on the availability of properties per se, but there are also underlying structural issues evident.

2.80 Although a relatively blunt measure, council tax bands are a reasonable indication of the overall relative pricing structure for houses in an area. In Fife as a whole, 52.8% of homes have been assessed as bands A or B. The table below sets out the relevant percentages for the rural wards.

Table 11. Percentage of homes in Bands A or B

Area	Percentage
Cupar	31.7
East Neuk and Landward	29.5
Howe of Fife and Tay Coast	37.7
St Andrews	15.3
Tay Bridgehead	34.2
West Fife and Coastal Villages	46.3
<i>Fife</i>	<i>52.8</i>

2.81 In some settlements, the percentage of houses in bands A or B are much lower even than those for whole wards set out in the table. For comparison, 88.6% of houses in Buckhaven and Methil (the highest in Fife) were assessed as Band A or B.

2.82 Overall, the housing market currently is beset with difficulties which make it difficult to draw an overall picture of availability and pricing. However, taking data

covering 2001-2006 (when growth was strong), it is clear that prices in Fife's rural areas outstripped Fife as a whole. As the table below shows, in three wards, average house prices more than doubled over this period. While part of this is due to new house building (and, therefore, larger and more expensive properties coming onto market), the effect was that average house prices in 2006 were high, thus making it extremely difficult for first time buyers (including young people leaving home and hoping to purchase in their home areas) to secure properties.

Table 12. Percentage growth in house sale prices 2001-2006

Area	Percentage increase	2006 average price
Cupar	123%	158,962
East Neuk and Landward	100%	180,320
Howe of Fife and Tay Coast	85%	146,110
St Andrews	96%	257,934
Tay Bridgehead	102%	158,093
West Fife and Coastal Villages	95%	139,951
<i>Fife</i>	<i>84%</i>	<i>125,000</i>

2.83 It is worth noting that these are ward-level statistics, and mask considerable variation within areas, in part as a result of different house styles, but also the relative market value of different locations.

2.84 As noted earlier, new housing developments in the early 2000s did lead to increases in population in some areas. However, this has not been uniform, with higher numbers of completions (relatively) in East Fife than the West Fife Villages.

EDUCATION, SKILLS AND QUALIFICATIONS

2.85 Overall, a very low proportion of residents of working age in Fife's rural areas have no qualifications. Only 20 of the 116 datazones are above the Scottish average on this measure. These datazones are scattered across Fife, with no particular pattern being discernable.

Table 13. Working age adults with no qualifications

Area	Percentage of Working age adults with no qualifications - 2001
Cupar	24.4
East Neuk	28.0
Howe of Fife and Tay Coast	28.8
St Andrews	17.3
Tay Bridgehead	19.6
West Fife and Coastal Villages	31.8
<i>Fife</i>	<i>32.2</i>
<i>Scotland</i>	<i>33.2</i>

2.86 There is a similar pattern evident in terms of level of qualifications. Albeit using slightly different geographic areas, the percentage of working age people with qualifications at level 4 (broadly equivalent to a degree) is much higher in each of the East Fife wards than in Fife as a whole. The percentage in the West Fife Villages is actually lower (14.4% against a Fife average of 17.6%).

2.87 Overall pupil performance at S4 is more than 6% above the Scottish average (as recorded in the SIMD). The proportions of young people entering higher education is also well above the Scottish average

THE ENVIRONMENT

2.88 Clearly, Fife's rural areas are centrally important in relation to environmental policy on a number of levels.

2.89 Fife's rural areas have traditionally made a significant contribution to economic development in Fife, largely through tourism (both overnight and day visitors), but also as a contributory factor in the decisions of both investing companies (admittedly now rare) and both individual entrepreneurs and skilled workers. Fife's rural areas also provide extensive green spaces, and contribute to health policy issues, such as exercise and reductions in obesity.

2.90 Fife's rural areas provide a high percentage of Fife's outdoor community facilities, including large areas of woodland (including both Devilla and Tentsmuir Forests, as well as many smaller woodlands such as Valleyfield and Ladybank) and beaches (including some of Scotland's best beaches in the East Neuk, at St Andrews and Tentsmuir). East Fife particularly has a very high number of golf courses throughout the area, not only those associated with St Andrews.

2.91 It is increasingly being recognised, however, that Fife's rural areas can make a significant impact in relation to climate change, particularly in relation to carbon capture and renewable energy.

2.92 The recently established Fife Environmental Partnership is likely to take forward work in relation to all of these areas over the next 1-2 years, through a central team and a network of task groups. The work is likely to be both strategic, and focused on delivery of initiatives.

2.93 At a more specific level, it is likely that the Take a Pride in Fife programme will be extended to cover both East Fife and the West Fife Villages. Part of this work crosses with issues which have been a key focus for Fife Rural Partnership in the last few years, including the development of green spaces for community access.

2.94 A wide range of other forms of work may be taken forward by the Partnership (subject to agreement) and in which it is possible to envisage a potential role for Fife Rural Partnership. These could include work on:

- Fuel poverty
- Sustainable transport
- Renewable energy
- Waste reduction

CRIME

2.95 As is clear from the statistics presented below, crime, in relative terms, is not a particularly serious issue in Fife's rural areas (although issues are clearly seen as serious by rural communities).

2.96 Crime rates are historically much lower in rural areas, and this is reflected in Fife. Crime rates have also fallen generally in the last 2-3 years.

2.97 By Fife standards, rural wards have very low levels of crime. Many of the datazones had less than 10 recorded crimes in 2009 (31 out of 116). Only 2 had more than 100 (both small town centres). Overall, only 3 datazones were in the worst 10% in Scotland (two in Cupar town centre, one in Anstruther) in terms of crimes per 100,000 population. (Interestingly, contributors to this research did not identify either community as particularly problematic in relation to crime or anti-social behaviour.) All of the wards, taken as a whole, were below the Scottish average in terms on this measure.

2.98 With a few exceptions, the nature of crime is similar in rural and urban areas, with the main variation being in terms of prevalence. Examples of most crimes were recorded in Fife's rural wards, but only those relating to a limited range of wildlife-related offences could be regarded as in any way unique to rural areas.

2.99 Police noted that there have been examples of anti-social behaviour in towns in both East and West Fife, but these have tended to be low level, and generally involve smaller numbers of people than in urban areas. The only relatively unusual aspect of crime in rural areas noted by police is that, from time to time, homes and businesses may be targeted by travelling criminals. This issue is relatively common in rural areas which are adjacent to larger towns and cities, but in Fife the absolute volume of these offences is low.

2.100 Fife Constabulary has, since January 2010, been engaged in a process of rolling out a "community engagement" model across Fife. It was suggested that this has already proved effective in helping draw in members of the public, community councils and elected members into the police's priority setting process.

2.101 The basis of the approach is that police proactively seek out members of the community and try to identify local crime patterns, as well as priorities. These then become local tasking priorities and officers have to report back to the same local groups on the success in addressing the identified issues.

2.102 Interestingly, it was suggested that this model may be likely to lead to a higher level of focus on crime issues relevant to communities in rural areas. To date, engagement has tended to be with whole communities, but work is underway to develop joint working with Age Concern focusing on both older people living independently and in residential or care home settings. (It is also worth noting that police also prioritise older people as victims of crime.)

2.103 Community engagement exercises thus far have identified similar priorities across a variety of communities in North East Fife, including speeding, poor driving, dog fouling and general anti-social behaviour. As might be expected, these are

generally different to those identified in urban areas. For example, none of the priorities identified have focused on either drugs or violence.

2.104 At present, Fife Constabulary has 14 officers and 5 sergeants based in North East Fife, largely operating from vehicles, as this provides more flexibility in relation to deployment. Fife Constabulary has also appointed a wildlife officer. It is worth noting that a Chief Superintendent leads for the force on wildlife crime. It was suggested that this as a reflection of the importance attached to this in rural areas.

2.105 In recent times there has been relatively little contact between Fife Constabulary and Fife Rural Partnership. Fife Constabulary has not generally been represented on the partnership, nor have there been specific contacts at staff level (although, as noted elsewhere, there are now good links between Fife Rural Partnership and the Community Safety Partnership).

OVERVIEW

2.106 This section has covered a range of social and economic issues relevant to rural Fife. The next section will address additional issues facing specific groups in rural Fife.

2.107 A discussion of the implications of the issues covered in both Sections 2 and 3 will be set out in Section 4.

SECTION 3: ADDITIONAL ISSUES FACING EQUALITY GROUPS

3.1 This section deals with issues facing equality groups living and working in rural areas in Fife.

WIDER EQUALITIES ISSUES

3.2 It is difficult to be precise about the number of people in rural Fife who could be considered to be part of any of the recognised equality groups.² This is partly due to issues with counting (e.g. that the Census is significantly out of date and some categories are not covered directly) and partly relating to changing concepts for example in relation to age and disability. Regardless of exact numbers, it is reasonable to conclude that a significant minority would consider themselves (or could be considered to be) covered by one, and often more definitions of an “equality group”.

3.3 As will be set out later in the specific discussions about individual equality groups, most individuals face two forms of barriers. One, shared with people in urban areas, relates to discrimination, for example on the grounds of race, age, impairment or other factor (or combination of factors). There is, however, a strong argument that many face additional barriers linked to where they live.

Representative structures

3.4 There is a loose representative structure in place for some, although not all equality groups in Fife. There are networks covering older people, disabled people, LGBT people (although this is at an early stage) and a number of both Fife-wide and local groups both of and for these groups. It would be reasonable to suggest that all are small, with relatively uncertain funding and a high level of reliance on voluntary activity.

3.5 It is clear that few have had any direct contact with Fife Rural Partnership in relation to policy issues.

A rural dimension to equality?

3.6 Interestingly, equality issues were viewed by some (although not all) of the contributors as having no specific rural dimension.

3.7 One area in which progress has been made is in relation to the incorporation of “people in rural areas” as a category within Fife Council’s integrated assessment framework. Fife Council has to consider race, disability and gender in relation to policy and spending issues, and has chosen to extend this, not only to sexual orientation, faith and age, but also to rurality. Clearly this has no statutory force, as this relates only to the designated categories.

3.8 It is too early to say what impact the inclusion of rurality will have on policy making, or spending decisions. Equally, it is too early to say much about the extent to which rural issues are genuinely being considered (although this is an issue Fife

² There is an argument advanced by many that rurality in itself should be regarded as an equality issue, but, for simplicity, the current report will exclude this.

Council intends to consider in the future). The intention is that the inclusion of “people in rural areas” will help policy makers (including elected members by extension) to consider rural issues.

3.9 As yet, Fife Rural Partnership has had only limited input into this process, although as will be set out in Section 4, this is one area where the Partnership could made a helpful contribution to policy making.

A NOTE ABOUT MULTIPLE IDENTITIES

3.10 Although the remainder of this section largely presents issues as if people fall into discrete groups, this is rarely the case in practice. For example, many older people also have significant sensory or physical impairments. Similarly, individuals from ethnic minority communities may be older, disabled or consider themselves to be LGBT.

YOUNG PEOPLE

3.11 Young people in rural area share many issues in common with those in urban areas. However, there are some issues which are either particular to, or exacerbated by living in a rural area. Contributors to this research identified a number of issues of this type.

3.12 As in urban areas, it was suggested that there may be tensions between generations. Some contributors suggested that these may be exacerbated by the lack of organised activities, or community facilities, meaning that young people are more likely to be “hanging around”. As set out below, this was considered by a number of contributors, including young people themselves, to be a particular issue in rural areas.

3.13 As might be expected, some young people considered that they were unfairly branded as “thugs” or “thieves” and targeted by police and others. This is, as might be expected, consistent with the views of young people in many areas, and is not specific to rural areas.

3.14 The most common issue identified, however, was a lack of things to do. Clearly, this has been identified by young people living in cities, as well as those in rural areas, but the issue does seem to be exacerbated by the rural location. For example, it was identified that some young people may live 10 or more miles from any sports facilities other than a football field. Difficulties in accessing swimming pools, and also games halls, were identified.

3.15 Some young people who took part in a group in the East Neuk, however, suggested that there are additional issues for young people who have little or no interest in sports (or, presumably, young people interested in more than sports).

3.16 In both east and West Fife, it was identified that many of the activities open to young people are centred around schools. This was not seen as an issue in itself, except to the extent that it could considerably extend the time a young person from a rural area spend away from home.

3.17 Concerns were also raised about transport links in relation to getting home from schools via public transport after “normal” finishing times.

3.18 In rural Fife, there is a lack of cinemas, a situation which has grown worse in the last 20 years as smaller local facilities have closed in favour of large regional multiplexes. It was identified that, for a young person to travel from the West Fife Villages to the Odeon complex at Dulloch Park may require 2 or 3 buses in each direction . From some locations, the journey is all but impossible, as the last service is too early to allow someone reliant on public transport to attend an evening screening.

3.19 A point raised by a number of contributors to this research (of all ages, but particularly relevant to young people) was the added costs of living in a rural area, allied to the relative lack of choice. Young people in the East Neuk, for example, suggested that basic supplies in the area were expensive, and there was no opportunity to buy clothes, music, electrical items etc locally (although it was identified that some “universal” items such as mobile phone and iTunes top up vouchers are relatively easy to obtain, even in small villages).

3.20 For these items, it was suggested that the choices were St Andrews, or more commonly Dundee or Kirkcaldy, with the added expense of fares. Clearly, for young people in the West Fife Villages, the main choice would be Dunfermline.

3.21 Interestingly, young people in the East Neuk also identified difficulties in accessing banks and auto tellers, particularly given that they were more reliant on using cash than may be, for example, their parents.

3.22 A key issues identified by young people was transport. Clearly, many young people living in rural areas rely on parents or other relatives to allow them to access services. This was the case, for example, for a number of young people brought together in a group in the East Neuk. Some could not have come to the meeting by any other form of transport due to time and connection issues.

3.23 Public transport was identified by young people as a key area of difficulty. The main issue, as with other groups, was the perceived lack of services, and the need for changes of service (which were not always seen to be coordinated). It was suggested that, for example, it may be difficult to attend college in Dunfermline, Levenmouth and Cupar from a rural area, partly as a result of a lack of services from some areas, but also as the timing of services would not allow, for example, a flexible (i.e. not 9:00 to 17:00) attendance pattern. It was also suggested that these difficulties make attending work placements (which are integral to most college courses) difficult.

3.24 A further issue raised by young people was the cost of public transport, particularly for those too old to qualify for concessions.

3.25 As noted at a number of points, one of the transport difficulties facing young people is that the last service for many buses is relatively early, making it difficult for some young people to attend, for example, events or to meet with friends. It was suggested that this may lead some young people to take risks, for example, in walking home along fast moving or unlit roads, or by taking lifts.

3.26 Looking forward, a number of the young people identified that they saw little for them in their home villages once they had achieved college or university qualifications. There appeared to be a presumption that they would move to a larger town, or city, as this was associated with finding work.

OLDER PEOPLE

3.27 As set out in Section 2, Fife's rural areas have a higher proportion of both older people and people who are retired than other parts of Fife. This is particularly true of areas around Cupar and in the East Neuk but is also the case in other areas. This pattern is similar to the pattern found in other rural areas, for example, Aberdeenshire or the Scottish Borders.

3.28 Older people in rural areas face most of the same issues as older people anywhere in Scotland, although, as will be set out later, some of these are exacerbated by locational factors.

3.29 A key issues facing many older people is poverty. Taken as a group, older people in Fife's rural areas may not be as disadvantaged as those in Fife as a whole (and particularly those in former coalfield and industrial areas), but at an individual level disadvantage is likely to be significant and may be exacerbated by living in a rural area.

3.30 There is no easy way to identify absolute or relative levels of pensioner poverty, and any analysis can only be partial, as many older people fail to claim benefits due to them (and upon which, any analysis has to be based).

3.31 In Fife as a whole, about 22.5% of people of pensionable age claim Pension Credit, designed to bolster the income of those on the lowest levels of income. All of the wards within the Rural Partnership area have relatively low levels of claiming.

Table 14. Percentage of people pensionable age claiming pension credit

Area	Percentage
Cupar	15.3%
East Neuk and Landward	18.1%
Howe of Fife and Tay Coast	18.4%
St Andrews	14.1%
Tay Bridgehead	17.1%
West Fife and Coastal Villages	16.8%
<i>Fife</i>	22.5%

3.32 It is difficult to be definitive about whether this suggests that either levels of claiming are low, or that incomes are generally higher.

3.33 Older people in rural areas, in common with some other equality groups, are likely to face higher levels of costs, for example as a result of extra heating (as well as generally less well-insulated houses) and transport costs. A knock-on issue for many older people of transport costs (and general transport difficulties) is a higher level of reliance on local shops, where choice is generally narrower and, most significantly, costs are often very much higher.

3.34 A key issue relevant to lack of income is lack of flexibility in accommodating changing needs. Thus, for example, older people may find it difficult to cope with unexpected rises in costs, such as, for example, may come about as a result of poor weather (although the UK Government seeks to address this through the Winter Fuel Allowance) or a change to a pattern of services (such as the changes in both the Shopping and Domestic Care services provided by Fife Council).

3.35 A further key issue facing older people generally and, again, one which is exacerbated by geographical factors, is isolation. This operates at two levels: social isolation and physical isolation. As set out in Section 2, a high (and increasing) proportion of older people live alone. In the past, in rural areas, this was perhaps less of an issue, as there were often multiple generations of family members in relatively close proximity. However, extended families have become increasingly fragmented, partly as a consequence of the out-migration of younger people to take up education and employment elsewhere.

3.36 One approach to addressing social isolation has been through the provision of community-based activities, both structured (for example through local authority or voluntary sector day centres) and less formal (for example, through lunch clubs). It is clear that, at least compared to more urban areas, there are relatively few formal or informal clubs, and limited provision of other types. Those which do exist may be difficult for some older people to access, as, even where transport is provided, journey times would be too long to be either comfortable or practical.

3.37 It is clear that, at least in some areas, community members have provided some support to older people on a voluntary basis, but this is patchy, and is not necessarily easy to sustain.

3.38 The other main way of reducing the impact of social isolation is through interaction with statutory services, largely home care, but also community nursing staff, meals on wheels and OTs. This remains centrally important, although the impact of Fife Council's plans to withdraw some services is not clear (largely as it is difficult to predict what the level of provision will be of replacement voluntary and private sector run services).

3.39 Physical isolation has a wide range of consequences, one of which is to exacerbate social isolation. A particular issue in rural areas is accessing services which are not delivered in a client's home. For older people, the most common services of this type are generally those relating to health.

3.40 Older people tend to have a high level of use of health services, particularly both day and in-patient hospital services. For some of Fife's rural communities, this presents particular difficulties as the two main Fife-based acute hospitals are distant from, for example, the West Fife Villages, Tay Coast or the East Neuk. Many appointments for North East Fife residents tend to be fulfilled by Ninewells Hospital in Dundee, which also requires a relatively long journey. In most cases, patient transport is provided. However, it is clear from discussions with representative groups that, for people in more remote areas, this may involve an extended journey time and a considerable wait at the hospital concerned.

3.41 It was clear from contributions to this research that older people may also face difficulties in accessing GP-practice based services, as well as pharmacies (although it was also noted that some pharmacies can deliver items to a patient's home). It was suggested that, for many older people in rural areas, taxis may be the only viable way of accessing GP-practice based services (thus adding to household costs).

3.42 Older people also face particular difficulties in accessing financial institutions, such as banks and building societies, and particularly post offices, through which many still receive their pensions. A key issue for many is also access to autotellers to withdraw cash. Although increasing numbers of small shops are offering these, this is generally on payment of a transaction charge. In urban areas, people tend to have more choice and can often avoid locations which impose a transaction charge.

3.43 Finally, it was noted that older people also face difficulties in accessing Fife Council services, again as these tend to be centralised in towns. Many of the same issues apply to access to Fife Council services as apply to hospital or GP-based services.

3.44 A specific issue for some older people identified by some contributors was difficulties in accessing information about services, as much of this is now routinely provided via Fife Direct and similar portals. The valuable role played by public libraries (as well as GP surgeries) in providing hard copy information, and often advice about access to services, was noted.

DISABLED PEOPLE

3.45 Many of the issues relevant to older people are equally relevant to disabled people. However, there are differences of emphasis, and variations in the ways that these issues are addressed which makes it useful to re-state them here.

3.46 Firstly, however, it is worth making clear that there is no definitive estimate of the number of disabled people in Fife, let alone within rural areas. Various estimates put the number of people in Scotland with an impairment or limiting long term illness at around 1 in 5 of the population, suggesting around 18,000 – 20,000 people in the wards covered by Fife Rural Partnership. Clearly, not all of those people will have impairments or illnesses severe enough to have a major impact on their lives, but many will.

3.47 While there are no viable statistics for disability per se, there are some which serve as a proxy. For example, statistics on the level of claims for incapacity benefit and severe disablement allowance can provide some indication (although, as these are non-universal benefits, they are always liable to be subject to distortions in relation to individual's choices on whether or not to make a claim).

3.48 Among the 5 East Fife rural wards, the level of claiming of incapacity benefit and severe disablement allowance is very low. In the case of the West Fife Villages, the rate is higher, but still below the Fife average. The rates of claiming in St Andrews and the Tay Bridgehead are the lowest in Fife.

3.49 The table below sets out information from the 2001 Census on the level of self-reported limiting long term illness, another common proxy used to estimate the numbers of disabled people.

Table 15. Percentage of people with LLTI (2001 ward approximations)

Area	Percentage
Cupar	19.9%
East Neuk and Landward	19.1%
Howe of Fife and Tay Coast	17.2%
St Andrews	15.7%
Tay Bridgehead	15.2%
West Fife and Coastal Villages	22.1%
<i>Fife</i>	<i>20.4%</i>

3.50 The table suggests that relative levels of limiting long term illness are much lower in East Fife than either the West Fife Villages, or in Fife as a whole. To some extent, this might be expected, given that this measure is linked, at least in younger people, with prior employment in heavy industry (such as coal mining). It is also likely that older people are less likely to describe the physical issues they face in this way, meaning that this measure can understate the level of difficulty facing older people.

3.51 What should be clear, however, is that, even if relative levels of LLTI are lower in East Fife, the *absolute* number of people facing health related issues is high and significant issue both for the delivery of services and for the availability of labour.

3.52 The issues identified most commonly as facing disabled people were: lack of access to transport; housing; difficulties in accessing services, and concerns about isolation. Clearly, these issues are linked.

3.53 Lack of access to transport is an issue which faces many disabled people, and covers a range of modes of transport.

3.54 National statistics suggest that a majority of disabled people neither own, nor have access for a car, but for many, this is the only viable means of transport. Although not reproduced here, data from the 2001 Census confirms that this is also true for each of the rural wards in Fife (bearing in mind the caveats identified above in relation to the lack of a clear statistical basis for “disability”).

3.55 In relation to public transport, a wide variety of issues were identified.

3.56 Although low floor buses are seen as a means of opening up travel opportunities for many disabled people, this needs to be seen in a wider context. Firstly, very few buses currently operating in rural areas have low floors, ramps or are otherwise accessible. (This is true of much of Scotland, not only rural areas in Fife.) Large areas of rural Fife have no low floor services at all, and it is clear from Scottish Government research, as well as anecdotal evidence from Fife Independent Disability Network, that even where low floor buses are part of a timetable, their actual availability may be patchy. Many rural areas are served by coaches, some of which have several steps.

3.57 However, a key difficulty for many disabled people is actually the lack of dedicated bus boarding points, or even, in some areas, a pavement.

3.58 For many, the main form of transport is either taxi or a specialist community transport provider. Taxis present a number of difficulties in rural areas, including cost, limited choice and the unsuitability of vehicles. At a practical level, many transport providers in rural areas (including community transport services) work under contract to Fife Council to provide school journeys, hence greatly reducing the times these modes of transport are available to disabled people (with knock-on impacts for social interaction, shopping and appointments)³.

3.59 However, for many disabled people, the key issue is not the availability of low floor buses or taxis, more that they are unable to move around freely due to barriers in the built environment. It is clear from Scottish Government research that the built environment is a significant factor inhibiting the movement of disabled people, particularly in rural areas. Villages are generally less likely to have pavements with dropped kerbs (or indeed pavements at all) and the limited choice of shops may make access and choice very restricted if one is inaccessible. Multi-modal journeys in East Fife or West Fife Villages are generally very difficult for disabled people for a variety of reasons, as are journeys requiring a change of bus.

3.60 Linked to transport, it was noted by a number of contributors that many disabled people (as well as people with long term health conditions) find it difficult to access hospital, and in some places even appointments at GP surgeries. Even where patient transport is provided, the distances involved can be considerable, leading both to having to sit for extended periods in patient transport and (often) facing extended waiting periods at hospital.

3.61 A further key issue facing disabled people relates to housing. Rural areas generally have a more limited choice of house types and relatively low levels of turnover. This is an issue for many people, but is particularly an issue for disabled people who require houses which have been, or which are capable of adaptation. The availability of social housing (which offers a route to more accessible housing for at least some disabled people in urban areas) is generally lower in rural areas. As noted in Section 2, Fife's rural areas also have relatively high levels of private rented property, with landlords generally being unwilling to consider, or fund adaptations.

3.62 The cumulative effect of these difficulties, as noted by a number of contributors, is that many disabled people either have to remain in unsuitable houses (which may severely limit their opportunities both socially and economically) or may have to move to another village or town, often some distance from support structures, friends or families.

3.63 These issues are particularly acute for people with progressive conditions, or who acquire an impairment or long term health condition. In these cases, the impact may also fall on their whole family.

³ This is also an issue for local transport schemes, which public sector owned transport vehicles are driven by volunteer drivers.

3.64 As with older people, access to services is a considerable issue for disabled people. One aspect of this (physical access) has already been covered, but there are others. Some contributors noted that it may be difficult for disabled people to access information about services. Two issues were noted in this regard. The first is the increasing reliance of service providers on the use of the internet. Even though investment has been made by some in accessible technologies, contributors noted that disabled people are both less likely to have access to the internet, and may also both lack knowledge of, and confidence in accessible technology. The second aspect of this relates to concerns about any reduction in the physical number of information or access points operated by service providers. This has been covered elsewhere in the report, but the point has been made that changes of this type are likely to have a particularly significant impact on people with limited access to personal transport.

3.65 Contributors also noted concerns about forthcoming changes to home care services, and more generally about the potential impact of shifting responsibility for identifying and commissioning services (such as shopping or housework) away from home care managers and on to individual disabled people. Across Fife and Scotland many disabled people use direct payments very successfully (and benefit from this) but it was noted that, with the recently announced changes, more disabled people would be expected to arrange aspects of their own care. It was also suggested that this may place a higher burden on support and representational services.

3.66 Finally in relation to this brief overview of issues, it was noted that disabled people in rural areas may find additional barriers to taking part in representational activities. Fife Independent Disability Network, for example, noted that it is very difficult for disabled people in East Fife to attend events, due to the costs involved (either to the individual or to the organisation). It was also noted that, even where events are held in East Fife, it may still be prohibitively expensive for people in outlying areas to attend.

3.67 The effect of this, as for other equality groups, is that representational and consultative activities (with the allied promotion of issues) tends to be concentrated in central Fife. This, in turn, makes it more likely that membership-based organisations are strong in urban areas, and less readily able to develop membership in rural areas.

3.68 The consequence of this is that the *additional* issues facing disabled people in rural areas tend not to become a specific focus of organisations. This is not unique to disability organisations, but makes it less likely, for example, that disabled people in rural areas will be able to engage in policy development or service reviews.

LONE PARENTS

3.69 Statistics about lone parents are generally derived from the 2001 Census and are considered to be very out of date. Information from One Parent Families Scotland suggests that there has been a significant rise in the number of lone parents over the last 10 years.

3.70 It is likely that the proportion of lone parents living in rural areas is lower than in urban areas, as lone parents tend to be more likely to live in relatively poor areas.

However, there is clear evidence that, as a group, they are likely to face a range of additional barriers. In Fife, the highest concentrations of lone parents are in parts of Kirkcaldy and Glenrothes, although one ward in Cupar is also above average.

3.71 Generally, lone parents experience more income-related deprivation than other families although at an individual level this will vary from family to family. The reasons for this are straightforward and relate to there being only one earner, or one beneficiary of state benefits.

3.72 Evidence from OPFS also suggests that the link between being a lone parent and child poverty remain strong. Know Fife data suggests that 40-45% of lone parents are reliant on benefits and a survey by Fife Gingerbread of lone parents in West Fife suggested that at least 70% have, or have had financial difficulties (primarily debt, but also relating to the affordability of basic essentials).

3.73 Evidence from the Labour Force Survey suggests that lone parents are much less likely to be in work than those in two parent households (with a gap of at least 15% between the two). While the Labour Force Survey data does not allow disaggregation by area for Fife, it is likely that lone parents in rural areas may face additional difficulties, in part as a result of the lack of overall opportunities, but also as a result of the combination of two factors: inadequate or expensive transport; and limited childcare availability (as well as issues with affordability).

3.74 Lone parents as a group have a very low level of car ownership and, although rates of car ownership in rural areas are generally higher than in urban areas, the level of ownership among lone parents in rural areas is low compared to other groups.

3.75 Many lone parents, therefore, rely on public transport, and, as a result, face many of the same difficulties as, for example, older people or disabled people (although generally, lone parents have only limited access to concessionary fares).

3.76 As noted in Section 2, a consistent issue raised by parents of young children, and by lone parents in rural areas, was the low number of bus services with buggy / wheelchair spaces. Similarly, the cost of fares in rural areas was also identified as a barrier, not only to taking up work or training opportunities, but also social and recreational opportunities (both for children and parents).

3.77 While the provision of both day and out of school childcare in Fife has risen considerably in the last 10 years, it was identified that cost and to some extent, availability remains an issue for lone parents.

3.78 One of the key difficulties facing lone parents in rural areas is accessing housing. Evidence from Fife Gingerbread suggests that, particularly among younger lone parents, the proportion living independently is low. This places additional pressures on both the young family and on the grandparents.

3.79 The reasons for this are related to relatively low levels of income and high house prices (exacerbated by low levels of savings). As set out in Section 2, house prices are generally higher in most of Fife's rural areas and, in common with other groups of young people, it was suggested that lone parents may find it difficult to

afford housing in their preferred area. Again as noted earlier, there is also a lack of social housing, with the consequence that many may be reliant on private lets as a way of leaving a parental home. However, evidence suggests that some lone parents would find it difficult to afford private rented accommodation (often through having low levels of savings). In some rural areas, lone parents also face intense competition from students for accommodation in the private sector.

3.80 Limited housing choice places additional strain on the parent, as any move of house involving moving to a new town or village, would make it more likely that the parent would be cut off from other family support.

3.81 Evidence from Fife Gingerbread suggests that the likelihood of losing this family support, or making it more difficult to access, acts as an inhibitor to lone parents seeking their own housing.

3.82 One consequence of lone parents not moving quickly to becoming independent was identified as being that they are less likely to learn both parenting and coping skills (although this is a key focus of organisations such as Gingerbread Fife and Home-Start).

3.83 A further issue for lone parents in rural areas is lack of access to some services. As noted in the previous section, many services are centralised in larger towns. This makes it difficult for lone parents to access these services due to cost issues, poor transport links (often involving a change of bus) and limited access to childcare⁴.

3.84 Clearly, for many lone parents, access to college can be difficult (even though colleges generally have good childcare provision). Evidence from Fife Gingerbread suggests that a number of the young parents working with the organisation in West Fife wish to attend college, but are effectively prevented from doing so by these access barriers.

3.85 Drawing this evidence together, it suggests that isolation is a key issue for many lone parents in rural areas. This impacts on a wide range of factors, but importantly, serves to constrain opportunities to, for example, find work or attend college.

3.86 Fife Rural Partnership has supported Fife Gingerbread to deploy a Development Worker in the West Fife Villages. The worker has employed a mix of one to one working and groupwork as a way of helping lone parents to cope better with their current circumstances, and potentially access new opportunities. At a local level, the work has also engaged other services, and has been viewed locally as very effective. The project has also been able to tap into other work being undertaken by Fife Gingerbread, such as the “Buddy Project” (a mentoring project bringing together both experienced and less experienced parents).

3.87 The nature of the support has varied across the strands of the project, but most has involved self-esteem and confidence building, as well as the delivery of

⁴ A survey by Gingerbread Fife suggests that a large majority of lone parents do not have access to a car, and most have never learned to drive.

specific home and parenting skills. It is worth noting that one of the group has been empowered to represent lone parent issues to local elected members, with a specific focus on improvements seen to be required to transportation links.

LGBT PEOPLE

3.88 At present, there is no Fife wide organisation representing the views and interests of LGBT people (although it is possible that this may be in place in due course).

3.89 There is some controversy about the likely proportion of the population who would consider themselves to be LGBT. At a UK level, Stonewall, using a variety of Government sources, had estimated that about 5% of the population would consider themselves to be LGBT. However, recent research published by OPCS has suggested that this may be an over-estimate, and that the true figure may be 1 – 2%.

3.90 Regardless of the *actual* figure, it is clear from research undertaken by Stonewall, and reflected locally in research for Fife Men in 2007, that the proportion of LGBT people in rural areas is significantly smaller than in urban areas. In this context, the proportion of people living in Fife's rural areas who would regard themselves as LGBT is likely to be less than 1%.

3.91 However, it is worth bearing in mind that the proportion of LGBT people likely to be out in rural areas is also much smaller than in urban areas. The reasons for this are generally related to visibility and fear of being subject to discrimination.

3.92 As might be expected, LGBT people face the same issues as the wider population living in rural areas, but may also face additional barriers. They are also likely to face many of the issues which impact on LGBT people in urban areas.

3.93 Evidence from gay men interviewed as part of research for the Fife Men project suggests that levels of overt discrimination in villages and small towns is arguably higher than in towns. The reason given for this is that it is generally easier to be anonymous in a larger settlement. The men concerned specifically highlighted the issues facing young people in small communities who are perceived to be somehow "different".

3.94 It was also suggested that it may be more difficult for LGBT people in rural areas to gain access to specialist services (although these often do not exist in towns either). The most common issue identified in this respect was access to specialist health services. It was also identified in the Fife Men report that LGBT people in rural areas (and smaller communities generally) may find it difficult to get access to peer support, for example in relation to coping with mental health issues, or harassment.

3.95 A further issue facing many LGBT people in rural areas is relative isolation. In larger towns, and particularly in cities, LGBT people generally can access "safe" clubs and other facilities if they wish. In smaller settlements, this is extremely unlikely. LGBT people in rural areas may find it difficult to meet socially, and there is, therefore, a risk of isolation.

ETHNIC MINORITY COMMUNITIES

3.96 At present, the proportion of residents within rural Fife from ethnic minority communities is small. The 2001 census suggests a total of less than 1%. Clearly this has grown in the intervening 9 years (although by how much is not clear).

3.97 Two factors are worth noting here. The first is that a significant minority of ethnic minority workers in rural Fife choose to live in urban areas, in order to be closer to services, places of worship or family members. The second is that there has been a substantial increase in the number of people from Eastern Europe both living, but particularly working in rural Fife.

3.98 Taken together, these observations suggest that the *population* of ethnic minority communities is likely to be a relatively poor guide to the scale of the *workforce*.

3.99 The population of people from Eastern Europe is likely to be quite volatile (based on experiences generally across the UK), but there is evidence of the initial group of migrant workers increasingly bringing other family members, including both children and older people, to live in the area. Over time, this is likely to place additional strain on some services, and highlights the need for both translation and interpretation services, as well as the need to develop awareness of social and religious customs (much in the way that services have had to do this for ethnic minority communities in the last 10 years).

3.100 At a wider level, it is likely that individual members of ethnic minority communities would face many of the same issues as those living in urban areas. However, as with other equality groups, these issues are likely to be amplified in rural areas.

3.101 Thus, for example, anecdotal evidence suggests that, in some villages, there may be only one or at most a very small number of ethnic minority families. Families in this position may be very visible. There is anecdotal evidence in rural Fife, as elsewhere, of both children and adults being subject to racist abuse (although the absolute scale of this, as identified through racist incident reporting procedures remains low).

3.102 Anecdotal evidence from community organisations suggests that ethnic minority businesses may be targeted in similar ways as in urban areas, for example, through graffiti or racist abuse.

3.103 As might be expected, it was also identified that members of ethnic minority communities living in rural areas are likely to find it difficult to both identify and access services. In many respects, these issues are the same as for other groups, with the added issues of both language and an absolute lack of services likely to be culturally sensitive.

3.104 A point made by contributors to this research was that many initiatives, including those in rural areas (such as Fife Rural Partnership or environmental initiatives) have not thus far engaged with either ethnic minority communities or businesses. It was suggested that this has had at least two consequences. The first

is that the needs and wishes of these communities may not have been reflected in policy development, and the second is that the contribution these communities could make to achieving, for example, policy targets has not been fully realised.

3.105 One good example, cooperation between countryside rangers and Frae Fife on helping to improve access to the countryside for ethnic minority communities was noted, and it was suggested that this could provide a model for working in the future specifically targeted on issues relevant to rural areas.

WOMEN

3.106 As in Fife and Scotland as a whole, a majority of the population in Fife's rural areas are women. The issue of multiple identities is perhaps most relevant to women. For example, among the retired population generally, a majority are women. At older ages, this disparity rises significantly. Among the population over 90, the overwhelming majority are women. More than 90% of lone parents are women. Particularly at older ages, a large majority of people who report significant sensory or mobility impairments are women.

3.107 Thus, many women are likely to experience the same issues and discrimination as other equality groups in rural areas, as well as many of the issues experienced by women in urban areas. Thus, many women are likely to experience multiple discrimination.

3.108 There is strong evidence that women continue to experience gender discrimination. This covers a wide range of issues such as in relation to employment in terms of:

- Difficulties in securing work appropriate to their skills and experience
- Pay differentials compared to men
- Difficulties in obtaining promoted posts

3.109 Although overall women are less likely to be victims of crime, and particularly violent crime, there are a wide range of offences, particularly domestic abuse and sexual offences, which are gendered in their nature, and which are likely to have a significant and long lasting impact on the women concerned.

3.110 Women in rural areas generally find it more difficult to access specialist services, for example relating to domestic and sexual abuse. In these circumstances, women often face having to travel to services, and refuge spaces in rural areas are generally very limited in number, and tend to be located in larger settlements. The practical effect of this is that women, in becoming safe from their abuser, often face being cut off from the immediate support of family and peers.

3.111 Although transport issues affect most equality groups, levels of car ownership are much lower among women. Even in rural areas (where having two or more cars is more common), evidence suggests that accessing a car may still be difficult.

3.112 A further issue relates to the availability and cost of childcare. As noted earlier in relation to lone parents, Fife has a significant amount of both out of school and day childcare, but the availability in rural areas remains inevitably patchy.

3.113 The practical effect of these issues is to limit the opportunities available to many women, particularly women with children and women with only moderate or no qualifications. There is also a clear knock-on effect in the rural economy, as businesses report finding it difficult to fill vacancies which require flexible working, and particularly working at times when buses are unlikely to be operating.

OVERVIEW

3.114 This section has explored *additional* issues facing members of equality groups living in rural areas.

3.115 The next section will draw together the findings set out in Sections 2 and 3, and identify some of the key issues facing rural Fife, as well as setting out some of the possible directions Fife Rural Partnership could take over the next two to three years.

SECTION 4: THE WAY FORWARD

4.1 The final section of this report covers two main areas. The first part of the section reviews the role of Fife Rural Partnership, as well as related issues such as structure. The final part of the section identifies potential approaches for the Fife Rural Partnership in helping to address issues which have been identified in this report.

THE “RURAL” DIMENSION

4.2 There were mixed views among contributors about whether there is a genuinely “rural” dimension to issues in Fife. This is perhaps not surprising as there can be no definitive answer to this, and direct experiences of rural issues are likely to vary.

4.3 Overall, it would be reasonable to conclude that most contributors identified that, even where there is no clear rural dimension, the fact of relative isolation, often coupled with transport difficulties, may be an additional barrier to participating in a range of activities, or accessing both services and opportunities.

4.4 Arguably, the issue about which there was a near consensus was that services in rural areas are virtually always more expensive to provide, and may also (along with goods) be more expensive for the consumer to purchase. There were a range of reasons identified for these higher costs, including diseconomies of scale and travelling distances. Against this, it was also noted that property can be less expensive to rent (although the level of availability, particularly of industrial and office space may be more limiting than cost).

4.5 Another issue about which there was generally seen to be a particular rural dimension was labour availability. At present, although there is little evidence of companies or organisations across Fife finding it particularly difficult to recruit most types of staff, there remain difficulties in rural areas in securing staff with appropriate levels of skill.

4.6 One of the key staffing issues for which there is a clear rural dimension is cover for sickness and absence, particularly in the personal services, tourism and retail sectors. Cover for staff illness is one of the key issues facing virtually all social service providers in Fife’s rural areas (and is a particular concern for disabled people and older people who employ personal assistants as a means of living independently).

4.7 As will be set out below, a potential role for Fife Rural Partnership could be in both helping staff recognise issues which should be taken into account when determining the impact of policy on rural areas, and also in helping Fife Council staff centrally in assessing the effectiveness (and representativeness) of the assessments undertaken through the Integrated Impact Assessment process. Staff from the Partnership could contribute to training or develop guidance material, as well as making available data on rural areas and providing a conduit to rural communities for policy makers wishing to, for example, explore options.

THE ROLE OF FIFE RURAL PARTNERSHIP

4.8 It is clear that there is a strong view that there is a continuing role for the Fife Rural Partnership. What is less clear is what that role should be. This will be explored below.

4.9 The Partnership was originally established to encourage and enable other organisations to work in rural areas. It was also intended that it should be a conduit for rural communities to policy makers. To a large extent, it has succeeded in this. However, the policy landscape in 2010 is significantly different to that following local government reorganisation in the mid 1990s when the Partnership was established. The key change has been the advent of community planning and the fact that this now reaches out across a wide range of policy areas. In 1995, partnership working was scarcely the norm, whereas now it is effectively built into the fabric of policy making.

4.10 The purpose of this report is not to assess whether it was right to establish Fife Rural Partnership in the mid-1990s, but to assess whether it remains necessary and, if so, what its role should be. However, a number of the issues which were pertinent in the mid-1990s and which helped justify the establishment of the Partnership arguably remain valid, and provide some justification for the continuing need for such an organisation.

4.11 Then, as now, Fife's rural areas were seen as relatively marginal. Fife was and is generally viewed as a largely urban local authority. Much of the population is concentrated in larger settlements. A high proportion of both public and private sector employment is concentrated in these settlements (including Cupar, which is arguably still seen as a county town, rather than as rural per se).

4.12 In policy terms, it is arguable from the assessment set out earlier that Fife's rural areas command relatively little weight in policy terms. There are few SOAs with any rural dimension. The Community Plan itself has few mentions of rural issues, and this is reflected in other subsidiary strategies and plans. "Rural Fife" is rarely regarded as a unit of analysis, and, as noted earlier, there is little evidence that impact on rural areas is a significant consideration in the Integrated Impact Assessment process.

4.13 Overall, however, there was a recognition that Fife's rural areas are facing, and will increasingly face challenges over the next few years. Many of these issues are essentially similar to those facing urban Fife, but they may be likely to have additional consequences for rural areas. At the very least, issues are likely to affect rural areas in different ways. As a number of contributors identified, Rural Fife needs to have a voice, or, as one contributor put it, "an advocate for rural issues". Another suggested that there was a need for a "pest" role in relation to promoting rural issues.

4.14 It is clear that there are other advocates for rural Fife. For example, there are more than 20 elected members representing rural constituencies. At a local level, there are a significant number of community councils. There are also other organisations with a "rural" focus, including VONEF, Elmwood College, SAC and others. Fife Council has a local office structure as well as a large number of devolved

services. Other organisations, such as NHS Fife and Fife Constabulary have a significant presence in rural areas.

4.15 The uniqueness of Fife Rural Partnership in the light of this is, arguably, its independence, as well as the fact that it has connections to all of these organisations. The Partnership staff and management group have an extensive knowledge of rural Fife and, beyond that, of rural policy. These things can be brought to bear in terms of both representing a “rural” view and enabling a bridge between policy makers and rural communities.

4.16 The benefits for the community planning partners are clear in terms of helping ensure the strength and inclusiveness of strategies and policies produced.

STRUCTURE

4.17 One of the key difficulties facing Fife Rural Partnership in the last 2 – 3 years has been the maintenance of the partnership itself.

4.18 As set out in Section 1, the partnership is scheduled to meet on a quarterly basis, although it has not done so for some time. The Partnership has no dedicated administrative support, and much of the organisation and follow up falls to policy staff (in addition to their roles in both developing and presenting papers to the meeting).

4.19 There did not appear to be a particular wish among those who participated in the research for a “formal” partnership, with the level of administration this would entail. It is also worth noting that a number of those with a direct and relevant interest in rural issues (including particularly equality groups) were unaware even of the partnership. Others indicated that they generally did not attend. Attendance patterns for recent meetings also suggests that even key Fife Council and NHS services attend only sporadically.

4.20 For these reasons, it is suggested that there seems to be little point in trying to revitalise the partnership in its current format.

4.21 One concern is, however, that the Partnership can apply for and hold funding in its own right. Given the difficulties likely to be faced in finding funding for initiatives of any kind in rural areas over the next three years, it would seem to be sensible to retain Fife Rural Partnership as a legal entity.

4.22 If this direction is chosen, this has some implications for the potential structure of the Partnership in the future. There could be a number of alternative approaches, either singly or in combination. These could include the removal of any management or advisory group, with staff remaining line-managed as currently and the direction of their work being provided by Fife Council managers (although this may make it difficult to maintain the Partnership as a legal entity). However, in order to maintain the legal entity, and arguably a stronger connection to rural areas, the development of a small management or advisory group, comprising say 4 – 6 members, including both elected members and officials may be a better approach. This group could meet quarterly to provide strategic direction for the work.

4.23 The management structure could be supplemented by:

- A virtual network of staff drawn from different services providing (for example) a brief quarterly update which could be collated and published using FifeDirect.
- An annual conference, focusing on a specific issue or issues, similar to the very successful conferences run by the Fife Violence Against Women Partnership.

4.24 Clearly, the final structure chosen is a matter for the Partnership.

RURAL CHAMPIONS

4.25 One of the main difficulties facing Fife Rural Partnership is likely to be scarcity of resources, particularly staff. This will mean that, as now, there will need to be a clear prioritisation of activity. As will be set out below, there are a wide range of ways in which the staff of the Partnership could contribute to work in Fife. Given the views of a number of contributors about the importance of rural issues being represented in other policy forums, it would be unfortunate if much of this could not be done due to a lack of staff resources.

4.26 However, it is recognised that there is little realistic prospect of any *increase* in staffing in the next three years. One potential approach to spreading the work of representing rural issues might involve the identification of a number of “champions” – effectively staff drawn from a variety of functions - who could speak on rural issues, and ensure feedback is provided to the partnership. It is clear that some staff have undertaken such a role “unofficially” over an extended period.

4.27 It does raise potential issues with conflict of interest, but it is presumed that these could be identified and addressed as they arise.

OPERATIONAL AREA

4.28 Fife Rural Partnership has traditionally operated in 5 wards, with further limited engagement in 3 more: St Andrews, Leven, Kennoway and Largo, and the Lochs. None of Fife’s wards are, by Scottish standards, remote, although, as set out in Section 2, more than half of the datazones in the 5 “core” wards are classified as “accessible rural”.

4.29 There appears to be no compelling reason to *reduce* the area of operation of Fife Rural Partnership. Each of the wards in East Fife, and the West Fife Villages, meet a test of reasonableness in relation to being considered “rural”, even though, in strict terms, a significant proportion of the area does not fall into the Scottish Government’s current 6-fold classification.

4.30 On that basis, there appears to be merit in considering whether other parts of Fife could reasonably be included in the broad operational area of the partnership. Using the Scottish Government’s classification, most of the area west and north of Dunfermline, but outside the West Fife and Coastal Villages ward, is also classified as “accessible rural”. This would include the area around Crossford and the area broadly from Townhill and Kingseat to the Perth and Kinross boundary (which is within the Dunfermline North and Lochs wards). Similarly, in Central Fife, the remainder of the Lochs ward, and the areas around Cardenden are classed as

“accessible small towns”. The area around Largo is also classified as accessible rural.

4.31 While there is administrative logic in having Fife Rural Partnership boundaries follow those of wards (for example, that it makes reporting most straightforward, both in terms of elected members, and in terms of data collection and dissemination), from a policy standpoint, there would be merit in allowing the Partnership to operate in *any* rural area in Fife. This would allow staff to provide support to projects and initiatives outside the current operational area where their expertise could be useful. It would also allow them to support projects where the underlying issues are related to, for example, isolation from services, or the potential closure of free-standing community facilities.

SUGGESTIONS ABOUT WORK THE PARTNERSHIP COULD UNDERTAKE

4.32 As set out in section 1, the work of Fife Rural Partnership has, in the last 3 years, been largely focused on 3 main areas:

- The Tay Regeneration Initiative
- Community Development
- Rural advocacy and policy development

4.33 It is suggested that work is progressively refocused back on the original role of the partnership, specifically empowering and enabling others to take forward work in rural areas. In essence, the Partnership should be in a position where any agency considering work in rural areas should be encouraged to seek an input on issues such the potential contribution of rural communities and the potential impacts of new policies or practices on these communities.

4.34 This could focus on issues such as:

- Information provision
- Research
- Local strategy development
- Advising on rural impacts
- Rural “proofing”
- Capacity building
- Supporting small community-led projects located in rural areas

4.35 One of the key areas in which the Rural Partnership could play a key role is in ensuring that the Fife Community Plan, and associated plans such as the Community Safety Plan, Community Care Plan and others properly reflect rural issues.

4.36 The Partnership should also have a representational role, with both staff and management group members (and potentially “rural champions” if this approach is adopted) representing the interests of rural areas in a variety of Forums.

4.37 It is also likely that the Partnership could (as it has done in the past) help other services gain access to rural communities, for example, to support consultation and engagement work.

4.38 All of this will require raising the current profile of the partnership. It is suggested that, once a new approach is agreed, a paper is submitted to relevant committees, and circulated to agencies outside Fife Council (primarily community-organisations, as well as equality organisations).

4.39 In the medium term, Fife Rural Partnership should consider whether workloads generated by these activities can be met from within current resources, and if not, consideration could be given to employing, or support the secondment of a workers with specific skills in this area.

4.40 The remainder of this report identifies some of the key issues which were set out in Sections 2 and 3 and makes some suggestions about ways in Fife Rural Partnership could undertake work in these areas.

Access to services

4.41 Access to services is a complex issue, and one which is arguably in a state of flux at present as Fife Council considers its options in relation to local offices and community halls.

4.42 No clear pattern emerged in the report in relation to lack of access to services. None of the settlements in Fife is particularly remote by the standards of, say, parts of the Highlands, Argyll and Bute or Aberdeenshire. However, nearly 20% of the datazones in Fife's rural areas are within the worst 10% in Scotland in terms of geographic access. This does provide some confirmation of the view of a number of contributors to this research that many people in rural areas find it difficult to reach basic services.

4.43 The issue is further complicated for some groups by, for example, the lack of accessible transport, the length of journeys, and by the costs involved. Thus, a village resident with access to a car may not *feel* isolated, while a neighbour reliant on public or community transport may find it very difficult to reach, for example, medical services or a Fife Council service, or to take part in everyday activities.

Potential role for Fife Rural Partnership

4.44 This suggests strongly that access to service should remain as a key issue for the Partnership, and that it should be a key focus of its work. It is likely that this could be taken forward in a number of ways, including:

- Providing input to policy formulation and decision making through, for example, the council's own Integrated Assessment process to make sure that access to services for people in rural areas, and particularly for those with no access to personal transport, is a key consideration⁵. A suggested way to take this forward is set out at 4.62 (below).
- As part of its periodic consultations with community groups, ensuring that access is a key part of any consultations.

⁵ Other public bodies also have Equality Impact Assessment processes, but these generally do not consider rurality as a pertinent issue. A role for the Partnership could be in encouraging other public services to include rurality as a relevant equality issues in these processes.

- As part of its work supporting “enterprising communities”, giving consideration to whether local solutions may help overcome some of the apparent access difficulties.

Sustainability of rural communities

4.45 It would be wrong to suggest that there is any immediate threat to the viability of rural communities in Fife. Although in some areas, population levels appear to have fallen over the last 10 years, these falls have been relatively small, and there is little evidence of a significant move away from villages and remoter rural areas.

4.46 However, the age structure of much of rural Fife is quite different to urban Fife:

- The population generally is older
- The proportions of the population aged over 80 and over 90 are higher than is typical in urban areas
- There are more people who are economically inactive, and particularly people who are inactive through retirement
- There are generally higher numbers of households with either lone pensioners, or two pensioners living together
- There are generally fewer people of working age
- There are generally fewer children and young people

4.47 These findings indicate a number of issues which are common across many rural areas:

- There is considerable strain placed on social care and health services, particularly as costs are also generally higher in these areas and staff availability is often problematic
- Businesses in rural areas tend to find it more difficult to recruit labour, in part due to the absolute low numbers of people available in the labour market, but also due to transport and childcare issues
- Services for children and young people are often marginal due to low numbers and high costs⁶

4.48 These issues are likely to get worse in the next 20 – 30 years, in line with forecasts of an ageing population. It seems likely that, within this period, in at least Cupar and the East Neuk (including those parts which fall into adjacent wards), more than a third of the population will be retired, and the proportion of the population of working age may fall to around 50%. When allied to other forecasts, for example, that there will be a steep rise in the number of people diagnosed with dementia, this suggests clearly that there will be additional pressures on public and voluntary sector services.

⁶ For example, since the recent budget, a number of education authorities in rural areas in both Scotland and England have reported that they are considering closing or amalgamating primary schools.

Potential role for Fife Rural Partnership

4.49 While it is clear that population change is an issue for society as a whole, there are very particular issues for rural areas (as set out above). It is acknowledged that Fife Council, NHS Fife and Fife Elderly Forum are already working to look at short and medium term issues relating to the changing structure of the population and the delivery of services to older people. However, it is not clear that this work has a rural dimension. Accordingly, it is suggested that:

- The Partnership should consider carrying out detailed piece of work looking at the detailed implications of population change in rural areas, particularly in relation to the East Neuk, but also other areas. This could focus on: the issues likely to arise for the delivery of services to older people and people with physical and sensory impairments; the labour market implications of the reducing numbers of working age people (as well as the increase in, for example, care responsibilities); and the sustainability of community based services for a variety of groups (including older people, and children). There may be merit in considering steps being taken in other areas with very high percentages of older people, such as, for example, parts of Argyll and Bute, parts of Dumfries and Galloway and parts of Aberdeenshire.

The nature of deprivation in rural areas

4.50 Measures of deprivation have largely been developed to cater for the issues facing urban areas. The focus of SIMD (and similar previous measures) has largely been on concentrations, rather than pockets of deprivation. These measures are simply not suitable for rural areas. Only three datazones (out of 116) in rural Fife fall within the worst 15% in Scotland as measured by SIMD, and none in the worst 10% or 5%.

4.51 The proportions of individuals recognised by SIMD as being income or employment deprived is uniformly very low in East Fife, and below average in the West Fife Villages.

4.52 Overall, about 4,000 people with East Fife and the West Fife Villages fall within the income or employment definitions used by SIMD. This equates to slightly more than 4% of the population, compared to 30% or more in some areas in the west of Scotland. However, these statistics mask the fact that deprivation is, in essence, an *individual* or *family* issue not a community issue per se.

4.53 There is a strong argument that people in poverty in rural areas often face *additional* difficulties compared to those in urban areas. These difficulties take a range of forms, and particularly affect people with no, or limited access to personal transport.

4.54 Costs tend to be higher in rural areas:

- Shopping choice tends to be limited
- Items tend to cost more in shops

- There is limited access to supermarkets and “pound” shops which are prevalent in towns
- Transport costs tend to be considerably higher
- Heating choices tend to be more limited and, in the case of electricity and non-mains gas, tend to be higher in price (and, as noted in the main body of the report, fuel poverty is a particular issue in most rural areas)

4.55 A common concern among people in rural areas who are income poor is that they have little choice but to travel to larger towns for some items, particularly children’s clothing and more specialist electrical items. Even using “day rider” type tickets, this adds significantly to family costs (particularly where children also need to be transported). This issue was also echoed by young people who participated in this research.

4.56 There are also additional issues for people with caring responsibilities due to the lack of alternative care services, effectively preventing them from improving their circumstances.

4.57 It is also difficult to measure whether the true level of rural poverty, particularly among groups such as older people, is actually obscured by low aspirations and hence endemic under-reporting of difficulties.

4.58 Opportunities also tend to be more limited in rural areas:

- There are often limited training or employment opportunities in rural areas, making it difficult for individuals to move back into the labour market
- It may be difficult to reach training or employment opportunities in urban areas, particularly where flexible attendance is required
- The cost of reaching work or training can be prohibitive
- Even in Fife (where childcare is more extensive than in most areas) there are likely to be difficulties both in terms of cost and availability

4.59 In most of rural Fife there are also limited services available to help people address their financial, employment or other concerns:

- Some employment and training programmes are focused on urban areas, or, even where they are open to all, might be difficult to reach
- Job Centres tend to be in larger towns
- Advisory services also tend to be in larger towns, or provide outreach services relatively infrequently
- Banking and other financial services (such as insurance brokers) are virtually always in medium and large towns. Outreach services are rare in Fife and other central belt rural areas
- Fife Council services tend to be in larger towns and villages, even in rural areas
- Poorer people tend to have more limited access to on-line services either at home or in public libraries, hence further limiting their

opportunities as well as making it less likely that they will be able to access lower cost options through, for example, on-line shopping

4.60 These are only some of the issues which impact on poverty and deprivation in rural areas. Clearly, there are also issues which are more common to larger urban areas which are less prevalent in rural areas (such as concentrations of poor housing, antisocial behaviour and crime), but it would be unwise to assume that, as formal indicators of deprivation relating to rural Fife are low, it is somehow not an issue.

Potential role for Fife Rural Partnership

4.61 Clearly, Fife Rural Partnership cannot address rural deprivation directly, but it can ensure that other services do. In essence, this was the original rationale for Fife Rural Partnership in the early 1990s. At that time, there was a concern among some elected members and officers that rural issues were being overlooked, and there is a danger that this remains true.

4.62 Accordingly, it is suggested that Fife Rural Partnership should:

- Develop a briefing document on rural deprivation and poverty, and the specific issues facing people in rural areas. This should be presented to appropriate committees and boards, and should also be circulated to appropriate officers across relevant services
- Fife Council and other services to whom the relevant duties apply should take specific steps to ensure that their Equality Impact processes address rural issues. To support this, it is suggested that Fife Rural Partnership should develop and undertake the following:
 - A short training module (2 – 3 hours) on rural issues, sources of information about rural areas and how to interpret these, and how to engage with rural communities. This can be deployed as part of the training which services provide to policy and management staff to support the EQIA process
 - A basic internet site (rather than FISH presence, which is limited in its reach) covering rural issues, so that staff can have access to key information
- While recognising that it will be a burden on staff time, Fife Rural Partnership should make policy makers and managers aware that it can provide specialist advice on rural issues as part of the policy development or review process
- It is strongly suggested that Fife Rural Partnership staff should be involved, at least for a limited period, in reviewing the equality impact assessments undertaken and, where necessary, offering additional support to services to improve these

4.63 Perhaps the key recommendation in the current climate is that all services should undertake a detailed rural impact assessment before considering any cuts to services.

Community capacity

4.64 Supporting the development of community capacity has been one of the key areas of work undertaken by Fife Rural Partnership over the period of its existence. Although the work now being taken forward as “supporting enterprising communities” is the most visible example, the Partnership has also supported other projects in the past which have both had a specific geographical focus, and have served to help communities develop the skills and experience to take forward projects at their own hand.

4.65 Evidence from the Scottish Household Survey (which is not readily disaggregated to a level of allow analysis of patterns in rural Fife) suggests that people in rural areas generally are more likely to be involved in community activities, and are more likely to volunteer. It is clear from the “supporting enterprising communities” projects that there is also a great deal of enthusiasm and commitment, as well as expertise (as well as a willingness to push back boundaries).

4.66 It is clear that, over the next 2 – 3 years, Fife Council and other partners will face significant funding difficulties. It is difficult to determine the likely scale of these, or the precise nature of the services likely to be affected. It would be reasonable to assume, as a starting point, that *all* services will be affected, at least to some extent. The ways in which rural areas will be affected by changes in Fife Council and other service levels is likely to vary.

4.67 One of the ways in which Fife Council has already signalled its determination to make service changes is through a reduction in the number of community facilities it operates. A definitive list is not yet available, but it seems likely that some will be in rural areas. Given the diseconomies of scale, and additional costs involved in running facilities in rural areas, it may even be that a higher proportion would be in rural areas.

4.68 The council has made it clear that it would be willing to consider transferring the operation of some community facilities to others. In rural areas, it seems unlikely that any operator other than the community itself could be found.

4.69 It also seems likely that there may be opportunities for community-based organisations to take over the delivery of some public services. The voluntary sector already delivers a significant element of a number of both council and NHS services, and this seems likely to increase. At a UK level, the coalition has indicated a strong willingness to support this approach, although the Scottish Government has not yet followed this lead to quite the same extent. Nonetheless, it seems likely that opportunities will arise of this nature. A small number of examples were identified of newly established organisations, albeit not non-profit organisations, being established to provide services to social work clients as a result of changes in home shopping and domestic care packages. This is likely to increase once self directed support becomes the default option for social care.

Potential role for Fife Rural Partnership

4.70 Perhaps the area identified most often by participants in this research as potentially benefiting from Partnership support was community capacity building. Fife

Rural Partnership already has a good and established track record in helping to establish or nurture community-based organisations. Thus far, these organisations have largely taken the form of community trusts, but, in the context of the management of community assets, this would not be the only option.

4.71 Among the difficulties likely to face community-based organisations in seeking to take over the operation of facilities previously run by Fife Council are likely to be a lack of previous experience within the group, as well as a lack of potential role models (including members of other groups which could act as mentors). Clearly, in the specific case of community trusts, this would be available, but it is less clear that previous experience could be carried over to other forms of enterprise.

4.72 It is suggested that, in the first instance, Fife Rural Partnership should consider the development of a “Community Assets” toolkit, or workbook. This approach, although less formally constructed, worked well in providing initial assistance to community trusts. Clearly, aspects of the approach taken with community trusts could be adapted for use in supporting other forms of organisation.

4.73 There would be merit in producing the toolkit in both a generic version and a version tailored specifically to taking over a community asset from a public body. Much of the content, however, would be shared.

4.74 It is suggested that the toolkit could consist of at least the following:

- Ways of establishing the views of, and engaging the local community
- Ways of establishing potential demand
- Critically examining the previous performance of the assets
- Identifying options
- Assess the feasibility of options
- Identifying costs
- Raising funding
- Forms of organisations (also covering responsibilities)
- Bidding and negotiating
- Legal agreements
- Other sources of support

4.75 In the light of the experiences of a small number of community trusts, it would also be helpful to have a section covering working with consultants (including, for example, architects or quantity surveyors).

4.76 It may also be helpful to have a section (probably supported by a short training course) on how public bodies work, and what both their needs and responsibilities are in relation to, for example, the transfer of assets, or, where relevant, the subcontracting of services.

4.77 Clearly, once a community organisation takes over the operation of a public asset or service, it would have an ongoing need for business support. One approach to this could be for the Partnership to provide this in partnership with the Business Gateway.

The rural economy

4.78 Although this section is labelled “the rural economy”, there are actually a number of “rural economies”. Perhaps the key economic factor facing most of the rural wards in Fife is the high level of out-migration, both on a daily basis, and, in the longer term, of younger people.

4.79 The focus of daily out-migration patterns clearly differs across Fife but the economic health of central Fife, Dundee and Edinburgh are crucially important to the sustainability of much of rural Fife.

4.80 Outwith Cupar (where there are some medium sized employers) virtually all rural employment in Fife is in small and generally very small businesses. Many of these businesses are highly seasonal (being involved in food production or hospitality) and there is clear evidence of fluctuating demand for labour.

4.81 Evidence from a variety of sources suggests that higher proportions of people in rural Fife (whether young people or adults) have qualifications, and these tend to be at a higher level than people living in urban areas. However, it is clear from the analysis of local employment that, with the exception of the public sector, most jobs are for people with lower skill levels. This helps explain the relatively high levels of out-migration.

4.82 However, it is also clear from anecdotal evidence that employers in rural areas, particularly those offering relatively low paid and seasonal work, often find it difficult to fill vacancies. This tends not to be evident from published statistics, as the absolute number of unfilled vacancies in each ward each month is likely to be low. Nonetheless, this is an important issue for these employers, and, as in other rural areas, the employment of people from eastern Europe has increased sharply as a way of addressing this.

Potential role for Fife Rural Partnership

4.83 Again, there is little Fife Rural Partnership can do directly to impact on the rural economy. However, it is suggested that wider work, for example, relating to raising awareness of rural issues among other services may be beneficial in helping focus work undertaken by, for example Fife Council and Business Gateway.

4.84 One specific focus for the Rural Partnership could be to work with the Fife Environmental Partnership to help businesses located in rural areas seek opportunities in both developing and utilising sustainable technologies. This is likely to be an area where government investment will remain relatively high in the light of its challenging climate change targets, and the apparently limited progress to date in some areas, including Fife.

4.85 Fife Rural Partnership has, in the past, provided assistance to visitor attractions and is currently helping support the development of visitor experiences along the Tay coast. These opportunities are likely to continue to arise in the future, particularly where local communities wish to market local assets to visitors.

Transportation

4.86 As might be expected, the issue of transport was raised by more contributors than any other single issue. Paradoxically, it is perhaps the issue that Fife Rural Partnership and its partners can do least about. Since the mid 1990s, transport services have been de-regulated and there are very limited opportunities for local authorities to specify or support specific services.

Potential role for Fife Rural Partnership

4.87 Clearly, local communities and local elected members already carry out a good deal of lobbying of both regional and local transport companies, and there seems little point in Fife Rural Partnership becoming involved in this directly.

4.88 The one area where Fife Rural Partnership could perhaps have a role is in relation to the development of community-owned or operated services. There is no reason why the models of community ownership promoted in relation to, for example, community assets, could not work in relation to the delivery of services (and this has been already suggested elsewhere in this report in relation to village halls).

4.89 It may be that Fife Rural Partnership could help support communities to explore non-private sector solutions to local transport issues, for example, through using volunteer drivers to link remote communities to scheduled services, or through increasing the out of hours use of assets owned by the public sector.

The environment

4.90 Fife's rural environment is likely to play an increasingly important role in, for example, helping with the achievement of climate change targets.

4.91 Leadership on this issue rests with the Fife Environmental Partnership, which is at an early stage of its development.

Potential role for Fife Rural Partnership

4.92 The area of environmental policy illustrates the dilemma facing Fife Rural Partnership. Potentially all of the activities of the Environmental Partnership have relevance for rural areas, and Fife Rural Partnership could, in theory, be represented on any of the likely sub-groups, or any area-specific group in East or West Fife. Clearly, however, this would not be possible at a purely practical level, and the Partnership is likely either to have to prioritise, or identify new modes of working, if environmental issues are to be effectively covered from a rural perspective.

4.93 In the short term, until the direction of the Environmental Partnership is clearer, it is suggested that Fife Rural Partnership should be represented either directly, or at least through a "rural champion" (as described earlier) in order to make sure that rural issues are central to the forward direction of the both the subgroups and Environmental Partnership as a whole.

4.94 As noted above, one area of more direct cooperation could be work to promote "green" technologies to businesses in Fife's rural areas, and the

identification of opportunities arising from, for example, carbon capture or renewable energy schemes.

Issues facing equality groups

4.95 Although it is difficult to be precise about the number of people in rural Fife who are covered by one or more equality group, it is reasonable to conclude that it is a significant number.

4.96 There is a strong argument that people in rural areas can face dual discrimination: discrimination on the basis of their membership of one or more equality groups, and secondly, that this may be exacerbated by where they live.

4.97 The discussion in Section 3 set out clearly that, for many people, rurality is an added barrier across a wide range of policy issues, including:

- Access to services
- Housing choice
- Transportation (including costs, limited services and lack of accessible services)
- Access to education and training
- Access to employment
- Particularly for young people, a lack of things to do
- Particularly for families, lack of access to facilities for children

4.98 For many people, the additional costs of living in rural areas represent a significant burden. This was identified as an additional difficulty for all equality groups. However, specific issues were identified for disabled people and older people (for example, relating to the costs of fuel and transport) and for lone parents (for example, in relation to transport, children's clothes, nappies etc).

4.99 At present, only some equality groups have any form of representative structure in place. While there is an Elderly Forum, a Disability Network and Frae Fife, there is no organisation representing women, older people, young people or LGBT people (although there are individual voluntary organisations working with all of these groups).

4.100 Fife Rural Partnership has had only sporadic contact with equality groups in the past, and it was clear from this research that some were not aware of the existence, let alone the work of Fife Rural Partnership.

4.101 It would be reasonable to conclude that consideration of equality issues in Fife rarely has a specific rural dimension. As set out in Section 3, some representative groups have, from time to time, attempted to carry out specific work in rural areas, or taken steps to include people from these areas in meetings and policy formulation. It is clear, however, that these efforts have had only limited success.

4.102 The reasons for this are complex, but include:

- The cost of operating in all parts of Fife is generally quite restrictive for smaller voluntary organisations

- None of the representative organisations has a base in rural Fife, and it is clear that rural membership is often more limited than in urban areas
- Where participants have to travel to meetings in central Fife, this is usually expensive, either for the participant or the organisation
- Technological solutions, such as video conferencing, do not appear to have gained widespread acceptance

A focus for Fife Rural Partnership

4.103 A clear recommendation arising from this research is that Fife Rural Partnership should be more proactive in engaging with equality networks. This was suggested by contributors to this research. As was set out earlier, it was suggested that Fife Rural Partnership could develop a network of “champions” as a way of broadening its reach. Turning this around, the Rural Partnership could itself become an “equality champion”.

4.104 All of Fife’s equality networks struggle to work in rural areas, and there may be ways in which Fife Rural Partnership could help to identify issues for equality groups, and try to ensure that these are considered carefully by agencies working in rural areas. Fife Rural Partnership could also be a useful partner for any equality-focussed organisation seeking to take forward work in a rural area (for example, in relation to community engagement, or reviewing service delivery).

4.105 While, in some respects, it might be sensible to recommend the development of a specific rural equality forum or network, there seems no way, in the current financial climate, that this could be resourced, or that relevant staff would be able to devote the time required. Accordingly, it is suggested that, at least as a minimum, Fife Rural Partnership and the equality networks ensure that each keeps the others up to date with developments, and that opportunities for joint working are taken when identified.

4.106 In relation to specific work, it is evident that relatively little is known in detail about equality issues in Fife’s rural areas and, as noted above, there has been relatively little focus on these issues.

4.107 It is suggested that Fife Rural Partnership could work with Fife Council and the equality networks (as well as relevant stand alone organisations such as Age Concern or Fife Flag) to develop number of short life groups focusing on each of the strands. Each could be brought together for a defined period (perhaps three or four meetings) with the purpose of bringing together a series of issues papers with suggestions for action. These could be directed at voluntary or statutory partners, or at promoting both community activity and engagement. The groups could consist of both community representatives and staff from service providers.

4.108 These groups could also serve to raise awareness of the specific issues facing equality groups in rural areas, and of ways in which services could be delivered to address identified needs. It is also suggested that, in the current economic climate, the fact of the groups, as well as their reports, would also help make the case for direct consideration of both equality and rurality when decisions

are being taken on the nature and scale of services to be delivered by the public sector.

4.109 Finally in this context, there may be merit in Fife Rural Partnership promoting a final “conference” at which each of the short life groups could present its report. The focus of the conference could also be on the identification of common strands arising from the individual reports.

4.110 As noted in Section 3, Fife Rural Partnership and Fife Gingerbread have carried out work with lone parents in the West Fife Villages. Although this work has not been specifically evaluated, it does appear to have been successful in encouraging a range of lone parents (many of whom are also young parents) to engage with services. The funding for this project is time-limited, but it is suggested that both funding for the continuation of this strand should be considered, but also funding to allow the service to be extended to other areas, for example in East Fife (where the issues facing lone parents are little different, but there is no dedicated service working with them).

OVERVIEW

4.111 It is interesting, although not surprising, that most of the issues identified in Section 2 (as well as some of those in Section 3) are similar to those identified as long ago as 1996 in the first study of rural deprivation, undertaken by Aberdeen University for Fife Council. That analysis showed that rural areas were at a disadvantage in terms of unequal access to services, poor transport, housing tenure and limited access to employment opportunities. That analysis, which was done on an area basis, was also found to mask considerable variation within areas.

4.112 It is also interesting to reflect on a survey done by Fife Council in 2002 to identify priorities for action in rural areas. This found that the main priorities were in the following areas, again consistent with the issues identified in this research:

- Community safety
- Access to services and information
- Mobility and transport
- Environmental and land issues
- Housing
- Health
- The economy

4.113 At a wider level, the Scottish Government undertook a stock-take of rural Scotland in 2009, which illustrated that many of the threats identified in Fife are common to Scotland as a whole, for example: outmigration, fuel poverty; limited access to services; and both the shortage and cost of housing. Among the strengths were also issues identified in this research, including levels of community empowerment, higher employment rates, high levels of skills and qualifications, the strong asset base, and the low levels of crime and disorder.

4.114 Arising from this, the Scottish Government identified a range of themes which it considered to be critical in the development of rural Scotland. Again, there is a close fit between these and some of the suggestions made in this section including:

- Creating balanced rural communities
- Improving supply of and access to affordable housing
- Improving access to services and mobility
- Enhancing social capital
- Promoting community empowerment
- Improving living standards and income levels

4.115 The ultimate conclusion of this report is that there remains a clear and identified need for Fife Rural Partnership. The report has set out a wide range of ways in which the Partnership can represent rural interests, and can ensure that services (in both the public and voluntary sectors) consider carefully the impact of their policies in rural areas. The scale of the challenges currently facing the public sector, and by extension, the voluntary sector, arguably make the need for the Partnership, and a strong voice for rural areas, more relevant even than when the Partnership was established in the mid-1990s.