

RDC(3) P&D18

# **Rural Development Sub-Committee**

## **Inquiry into Poverty and Deprivation in Rural Wales**

### **Response from Gwynedd Council**

#### **Main Messages**

There are a number of messages which call for the attention of the Sub-committee within this document but the main messages are summarised here:-

- **A Vision for Rural Wales** – It appears that the Welsh Assembly does not have a meaningful vision for the rural areas of Wales. So far, it does appear that there is a vision for natural growth areas but that there is no viable policy direction for the rural areas, their nature and role for the future. A clear and viable policy must be developed.
- **The Nature of Rural Deprivation** – The nature and intensity of rural deprivation needs to be understood and that then should be highlighted and should influence key policy decisions in some of the areas noted in the paper which follows. The problem must be understood and then specific proposals prepared in response. Some of the points made in this document could be of assistance.
- **Spreading Growth** – Mechanisms are needed to spread growth out of the natural growth areas in order to combat some of the forces which create and reinforce deprivation in rural areas. Expecting growth to spread is not good enough. Ideas to do that need to be developed, tested and then definite policy steps need to be taken in order to spread growth.
- **Housing and Development in Rural Areas** – Suitable and affordable housing provision is crucial to the sustainability of rural areas. Therefore national and local policy proposals must work together to support development in rural areas in light of this. At the moment, that is not the case.
- **Transport and Access to Services** - Peripherality is at the core of the problems faced by rural areas. Effective and affordable transport arrangements must be available in order to ensure access to services and opportunities, which are at the heart of the concept of deprivation. Resources will be required to implement this.

#### **Foreword**

1. Gwynedd Council obviously operates in an area that is mainly rural and are very aware of the need to consider the nature of poverty and deprivation.

The Council, in its Three Year Strategic Plan, which is currently out for consultation, notes that the Rural Agenda is one of its Operational Priorities. In addition, the Council has another Operational Priority of Prioritising Communities of Need and, under that, Analysing how to Break the Cycle of Deprivation is a key plan.

2. The Council therefore welcomes the opportunity to contribute towards this scrutiny and hopes that strong policy proposals will be the outcome of the work which will make significant changes to the way rural areas are dealt with.

### **General Messages**

3. The main argument of this presentation is that the nature of rural poverty is quite different to urban poverty which is more obvious and easier to see and measure and therefore easier to respond to. There are many key elements of rural poverty which are hidden but are nevertheless real and intense. In Appendix 1 of this paper, some general points about the nature of Gwynedd as a county are noted which proves and shows the sort of poverty and a breakdown of the main poverty drivers in a rural county.

### **Grounding Messages in Specific Areas**

4. Here detailed points are notes that ground the above general messages in specific areas. In each case, we have outlined the nature of the rural poverty in the particular area, and have offered evidence, and have suggested key policy intervention in response.

#### **A. The Area – The Economically Inactive**

1. The challenge of dealing with economic inactivity and the nature of the specific rural poverty which is linked to this is a matter of grave importance to Gwynedd as a county.
2. The pattern of economic inactivity is higher in rural areas which are linked with many of the other areas which are noted below. A map showing the pattern of inactivity in the county is attached as Appendix 1.
3. Additionally, there are transport and access problems in those areas which make the situation worse. For example, because of the need to claim specific benefit to be eligible for support under the Genesis Plan, the situation of someone in the Bala area means that they have to travel to the Wrexham Job Centre (a two hour journey on a bus) to register and claim.

#### **Evidence**

- The lack of availability of jobs in rural areas and the difficulties of travelling to gain access to posts (with a view to income) are real problems in a rural area
- The areas where inactivity is high (above 28%) in work age population are the rural areas of Dwyfor and Meirionnydd
- The 50-65 age group is the only one in Wales which has not seen a reduction in economic inactivity rates and this is significant bearing in mind the age profile of rural areas

### **Proposals and Policy Intervention**

1. The Welsh Assembly Government should acknowledge the differences in the opportunities available to remote rural areas compared with more accessible areas, and the Sub-committee should ask the Welsh Assembly Government to investigate the differences in the economic performance of remote rural areas and accessible rural areas as a priority.
2. The Welsh Assembly Government should prioritise the quality of jobs (rather than the number of jobs) as a criteria for public investment in rural areas in Wales
3. The way in which the quality of self-employment in rural areas could be improved should be investigated, so that is it an appealing choice to people rather than an exigency with low wages in the absence of any other opportunities
4. An investigation of the number receiving benefits in work and out of work within the peripheral areas of Wales should be investigated and the need to increase the numbers receiving benefits in such areas considered.

### **B. The Area – Children and Young People**

1. Gwynedd is a pilot area for looking at child poverty and the background work to that project has shown that the nature of the area's economy and dependence on part-time and low work has a significant effect on child poverty.
2. Another important factor regarding the nature of rural poverty is the necessary networks to support close-knit communities – being family and care networks. This periphery drives demographic imbalance as the lack of opportunities for young people in rural areas is tied to worsening that

situation as less young people stay in an area.

3. Unless steps are taken to police against this tendency the rural communities will become less sustainable and the poverty in them will increase further.
4. Access to child care is also a matter of concern which is linked to the eagerness to secure access to work (as a firm solution towards moving from poverty). The Early Years Plan has been targeted towards the main poverty areas using the Multiple Poverty Index. This means that authorities are unable to use such resources flexibly to respond to the needs of rural areas.

#### **Evidence –**

- The levels of income in the South West and the North West are among the lowest with one in five in rural Wales on low incomes. Recent work by the Assembly on poverty has noted that employment is the way out of this circle.
- Research with fathers in Gwynedd has shown that informal and familial networks enable them to go to out to work as child care is scarce and too expensive
- Research by Gwynedd Council (which has been published by NCH and Wales Barnados) shows that taking part in leisure and social activities is very rare for children and young people in rural areas
- Between 1997-2001 there was an increase in emigration amongst the young 16 – 24 year old people in Gwynedd of 12% to 14%
- In a study under the Pathways Plan 36% of those under 26 noted that they were considering leaving rural areas
- The Census figures for 2001 shows that the 25-29, 30-34, 35-39, 40-44 age cohorts in Gwynedd is much lower than the average in Britain.
- The percentage of the people who receive Family Income Support is higher in rural areas than in urban areas, and the highest percentage of these receive benefits in the Western and rural peripheral areas - Pembrokeshire, Anglesey, Gwynedd and Carmarthenshire

#### **Proposals and Policy Intervention –**

1. Gwynedd Council and its partners through the programme Succeeding Locally have trialled an innovative plan to promote the advantages of rural areas to young people as areas to venture and contribute to the

economy and living communities

2. The intention is to develop a pilot to offer practical assistance to those which wish to return in 2008/13

### **C. The Area – Older People**

1. Rural Ageing is being ignored. The importance of support networks within communities that suffer from rural poverty has already been mentioned. These informal networks are important but access to services is essential for this support.
2. Poverty refers to problems that derive from the lack of resources and opportunities in general and the dangerous mix of varied disadvantage which come together in such areas. These include access to and the availability of services, and a recognition of the relationship between housing, transport and the ability to buy food.
3. Income poverty amongst the elderly is a significant factor in rural areas also and this, in turn, leads to problems of keeping warm in housing stock which are difficult to heat

#### **Evidence –**

- Powys (46%), Ceredigion (45%), Pembrokeshire (41%), Anglesey (25%), Monmouthshire (24%), Carmarthenshire (21%), and Gwynedd (20%) had the highest percentage of their Super Output Area in the ten per cent most deprived in Wales in terms of poverty of access to services

(NB The Index measured access to basic services such as access to a food shop, access to a public library, access to a doctor's surgery, access to a leisure centre, access to a primary school, access to a NHS dentist, access to a post office and to a secondary school)

#### **Proposals and Policy Intervention –**

1. An agreement is needed with the Pension Service on data sharing, amongst other issues, in order to facilitate the claiming of benefits
2. There should be pressure for free train journeys or other provision for older people and community transport when no buses are available
3. The accessibility of buildings and services for an ageing population should be considered eg closure of post offices

### **Ch. The Area – Transport**

1. Ease of access is a core and influential element of the nature of different rural poverty. This has an effect on many cohorts.
2. The costs for those which are in work are higher because of the effects of periphery and the need to travel further for work and essential services.
3. For the young, it means depriving them of opportunities and for the elderly it means difficulties in travelling to get access to basic services
4. For the elderly, it means a real difficulty in overcoming the difficulties with access to basic services recognised by the Deprivation Index.

### **Evidence –**

- It costs up to £170.92 per month to travel to work in Bangor from a rural area (Sarn Mellteyrn in Dwyfor) or £94.88 on a bus for the same journey (even though that journey would take 2 hours 25 minutes and it would not be possible to arrive before 9 a.m.)
- There is evidence that the number claiming benefit is lower in rural areas and that unemployment is under-estimated.

### **Proposals and Policy Intervention –**

1. There is a need for investment in the basic infrastructure of rural areas to ensure access – by road, transport provision and information technology
2. Specific support from the Assembly is required to support innovative integrated transport initiatives including community transport in rural areas
3. Specific plans should be developed such as the grant for school transport (Assembly through WLGA) for trialling new models in rural areas wider than the traditional community transport
4. Consideration should be given to ensuring a statutory budget for post-16 transport to education and training

### **D. The Area – Funding Sources**

1. Formulas which drive various financial sources tend to centre their attention depending on the density of the problem, and that in itself leads towards prioritising highly populated areas. That, even though the level and nature of the poverty in a rural area, in comparable terms even though different, can be as bad, if not worse.
2. The Multiple Deprivation Index and its review lead to using areas based on the population figures as building blocks for the index and is a further example of a formula being highly influenced by population density. Examples of this can be seen in the method of financing the Poverty Grant (which is allocated outside the Basic Spending Assessment) and the RHAGORI grant for raising the education achievement levels amongst underprivileged pupils.
3. Additionally there are formulas for allocating money to public bodies, often ignoring the higher cost of providing services in rural areas. As a result this cost will either fall as an additional burden on tax payers in those areas or will mean that those residents will receive a service of a lower standard than in other areas

#### **Evidence –**

- The Deprivation Grant is allocated on the basis of the Wales Multiple Deprivation Index which tends to concentrate on poverty in populated areas. As a result, Cardiff and Newport – two cities in the part of Wales that is considered to be most prosperous – more poverty monies per capita of their population than Gwynedd.
- The Dechrau'n Deg and CYMORTH money, to some extent has been allocated in the same way using the Poverty Index – as a result rural areas have lost out
- The RAISE grant was limited to those schools which had a proportion above a specific threshold of pupils that were claiming free meals. Because rural schools service wider and more diverse areas than urban schools only in a few of them were the number of pupils from underprivileged backgrounds enough, as a proportion of the total, to be eligible for any funds.
- There are no factors in the Basic Spending Assessment Formula to compensate local councils for, for example, the higher costs of providing home care to the elderly in rural areas. Evidence within Gwynedd shows that the cost of travelling to clients are approximately twice as high in the rural areas as in the urban areas.

### **Proposals and Policy Intervention –**

1. The work of establishing minimum standards in public services offers the opportunity to acknowledge the nature of poverty with regard to access to services by acknowledging the difficulties of reaching those standards in areas where costs are high in terms of providing those services.
2. There is an urgent need to move forward to gather evidence of such and correct the shortcomings in the funding formulas.
3. The use of indicators based on accumulation of poverty by financing services, to ensure that poverty in rural areas is not lost should be reviewed

### **Dd. The Area – Housing and Development in Rural Areas**

1. The state and nature of the current housing market in the rural areas of Gwynedd means that large numbers of the population cannot gain access to affordable housing to rent or buy. This is because of the relationship between high prices and low incomes.
2. The rural areas of coastal Gwynedd have a high proportion of summer or second homes in addition to great pressure for the local housing stock from outside Gwynedd leading to a low supply and high price on houses for local people.
3. A significant proportion of housing in the old slate areas of Gwynedd (which are rural areas) are sub-standard according to 21<sup>st</sup> Century standards.
4. There is a danger that the response of the Inspector to the Gwynedd Unitary Development Plan will mean that the Council is unable to implement some of its plans to respond to the rural housing crisis.
5. The quality and energy efficiency of homes, residents' incomes, the sort of fuel used in properties, and the growth in energy fuel bills are all influential factors which cause cases of fuel poverty in rural areas

### **Evidence –**

- The Rural Services Network in England have recently announced that the lack of affordable housing for rent or purchase is the biggest single factor facing people in rural areas “Affordable homes underpin the future sustainability of rural communities.”

- Between 1981 and 2006 40% of the local authority housing stock was sold under Right to Buy or Other Purchase
- According to the 2001 Census, 45% of houses in the Abersoch Ward, 46% of houses in the Aberdovey Ward, 20% of houses in the Corris/Mawddwy Ward, 37% of houses in the Llanbedrog Ward were second or holiday homes
- According to the 2001 Census 44% of house buyers in Aberdaron, 41% of house buyers in Abererch, 47% of house buyers in Botwnnog, 52% of house buyers in Harlech were from outside Gwynedd
- In 2006 the average price of houses sold in Abersoch was £380k compared to average home incomes of £25,420 (a ratio of 15:1).
- In Gwynedd in 2005 the ratio between average house prices to average salaries was 8:1
- In 2004, 38.6% (22,554) Gwynedd homes spent over 10% of their income on fuel bills and therefore suffered fuel poverty, with 11.8% spending over 20% and 4.2% spending over 30% therefore suffering severe fuel poverty. The situation has deteriorated following the recent increase in fuel costs.
- Because of the nature of the area, around 56.5% in Gwynedd were built before 1919, together with the fact that 60% of the housing stock were built with solid walls means that they are very old and very difficult to insulate. In addition only 49.2% of houses have access to the gas network

#### **Proposals and Policy Intervention –**

1. Planning Policy to be promote the provision of affordable housing should be developed in response to the need for affordable housing in rural communities.
2. The Welsh Assembly Government should secure resources to fund a network of Rural Housing Facilitators to serve Rural Wales.
3. The Welsh Assembly Government should develop measures to safeguard houses in rural areas from being turned into second / holiday homes.
4. The Welsh Assembly Government should take appropriate steps to prevent the right to buy on council / housing association houses.

5. There should be collaboration between developers, private landowners, housing associations, rural communities (through the work of the Rural Housing facilitators), Planning and Housing Authorities in order to develop an operational plan to provide a range of affordable houses in rural Welsh communities.
6. In 2004, Gwynedd Council ran a Pilot Scheme in the Private Housing Sector called “Here to Help” in partnership with British Gas. The Council and British Gas have decided to extend the Scheme across the County over a period of years. Free measures to install energy efficiency measures are provided, targeting the most disadvantaged wards first
7. Careful attention needs to be given to the area of renewable energy in the context of saving energy and reducing the carbon footprint

#### **E. The Area – Frameworks and Strategic Intervention**

1. All the above comments confirm the nature and extent of rural poverty and the importance of ensuring frameworks and strategic intervention in order to deal with it. It appears that many of the current frameworks are ineffective in terms of rural areas if they are not policing against their prosperity.
2. The direction of the Spatial Plan and the risk that the rise will be centralised in specific areas, mainly highly populated ones, polices against the prosperity of rural areas. That is why the Council is constantly emphasising the need to widen the growth from the Communities of Opportunity to Opportunities to the Communities of Need. As the proposition stands, there is a danger that centralising growth will attract people from the rural areas and intensify poverty in the remaining communities
3. The consultation on Next Communities is another example of a framework where there is a fear that it will take account of the whole elements of rural poverty (access to services, demographic changes, immigration, ageing population, lack of employment opportunities, affordable housing etc). The fact that there is a suggestion that the Rural Development Programme, and the limited resources of that programme, should address needs in rural areas shows a lack of understanding of the density and nature of the poverty in these areas

#### **Evidence –**

- The Rural Communities Commission in England has noted “Government policies need to better reflect the hidden and dispersed nature of rural poverty. Policies should be proofed against rural needs to ensure that

they are able to target people in need and not in areas.”

**Proposals and Policy Intervention –**

1. Steps should be promoted which will deal with the poverty process with the exception of in the rural areas, in addition to the results which have become apparent such as poverty
2. The Wales Assembly Government should be pressed into researching the possibility of preparing a peripheral Index Area for Wales, as an instrument to match the attitude of the general poverty index which concentrated on accumulation poverty
3. Wales Assembly Government should develop a Wales-wide Poverty Framework, noting their priorities for getting to grips with poverty of all sorts and assessing the need to consider different methods of implementing for accessible urban areas, accessible rural areas and remote rural areas
4. Gwynedd Council is trying to recognise a mechanism to spread growth from growth areas to areas of need, many of them in rural areas. Support for this from the Assembly with a view of widening these lessons to the rest of rural Wales would be of great advantage.
5. The consultation on Next Communities and the finance programme which will emerge give real attention to the nature of rural poverty and the need to respond to it in a meaningful way rather than suggest that answers can be packaged under the Rural Development Programme

**A. Gwynedd – A very marginal area with a dispersed population**

1. Gwynedd is a large county in terms of land area, sparsely populated and remote from large centers of population. Its peripheral means that it struggles to develop a balanced economic structure. There is anecdotal evidence of a drift of young people from more rural parts of Gwynedd to the County’s main towns in the search for employment, with many leaving the County altogether. The outlook for the Gwynedd rural economy is uncertain with the run down of decommissioning work at Trawsfynydd expected to take place over the next 5 years, the squeeze on public sector employment as a result of efficiency and collaboration targets, and the loss of other sources of quality employment opportunities in nearby areas such as Wylfa Power Station.
2. Population density is sparse in rural and coastal Gwynedd which affects the cost of service provision and creates problems with regard to contacting people to inform them about economic and social opportunities
3. Below we list some facts about Gwynedd and the impact of peripherality on its economic and social well being.

**Figure 1: Some crucial facts about Gwynedd and key deprivation drivers**

- **A peripheral area:**
  - *Some parts of the County are 140 miles from an international airport such as Manchester,*
  - *During 2005, the levels of deprivation of access to services were much worse in Gwynedd than the average for Wales,*
  - *Parts of the County are over 40 miles from a motorway.*
- **A housing market where people on low incomes find it difficult to purchase a house and unfit housing in Gwynedd is amongst the worst in Wales:**
  - *In 2005, the level of housing deprivation was much worse in Gwynedd and the Isle of Anglesey than the average for Wales,*
  - *In 2005, the average house price ratio to average salary was 8.1*

- **Earnings and low economic contribution :**
  - *In April 2003, earnings in Gwynedd were the lowest in Wales, over a quarter being below the average for Britain,*
  - *From the 12 regions in Wales where estimates of Gross Value Added for 2001 were calculated, Gwynedd was the 11<sup>th</sup> lowest of the 12 in terms of size of the economy, whilst the Isle of Anglesey was in 12<sup>th</sup> position.*
  
- **Low population density:**
  - *After Powys and Ceredigion, Gwynedd is the county with the lowest density of population,*
  - *Outside the urban areas, population density is very low – density is on average as low as 0.47 person per hectare in rural and coastal areas of the region.*

#### **Rural Poverty – A Different Phenomenon**

4. Considerable evidence has been gathered that demonstrates that rural deprivation is different to that found in urban areas. Research conducted for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2000) found that many rural areas are becoming increasingly exclusive with richer people able to afford homes while people on lower incomes, due in part to the lack of social housing, have to look elsewhere for accommodation. Key issues that have been identified are:
  - Lack of access to services
  - Distance from employment
  - Low incomes
  - Lack of transport and affordable housing
  - People living in rural areas not identifying themselves as disadvantaged

#### **Poverty in rural areas – a result of processes driven by sparsity and peripherality**

5. Poverty is generally taken to focus on the lack of material needs available to individuals and households to be able to participate reasonably in society. This concept of relative deprivation was advanced by Townsend (cited in Milbourne, 2005) who identified a poverty threshold above state benefit level. Whereas poverty can be seen as an outcome, its roots can often be found in the process of deprivation and exclusion, when people are not able to participate fully in society or in the labour market due to a multitude of barriers.

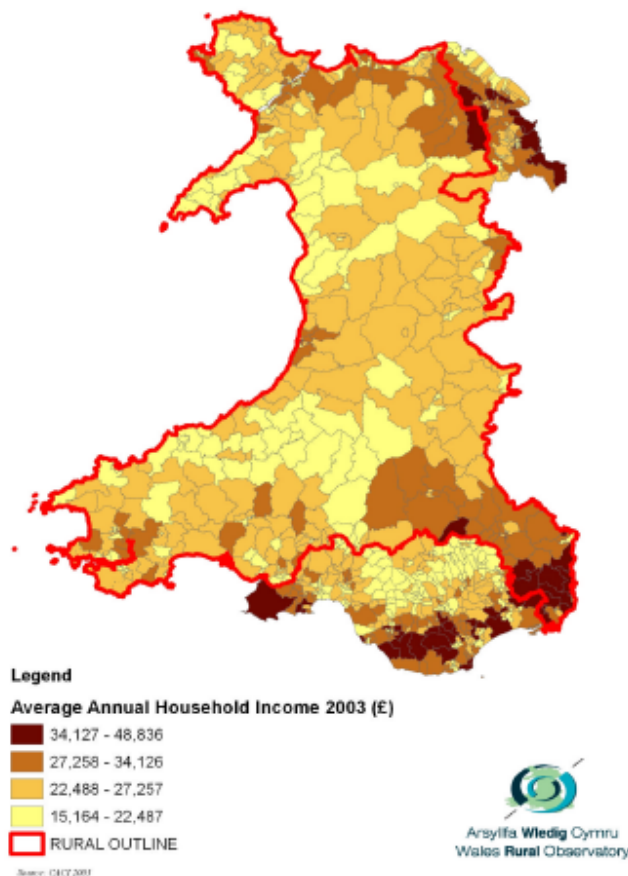
#### **Low quality economy – the impact of remote rurality**

6. Due to Gwynedd's peripheral location, its economic structure is vulnerable. The high quality of its environment means that there is a high proportion of employment in the tourism sector – 14.3% of the working age population were employed in tourism related industries in 2006 compared with 8.3% for Great Britain as a whole. The tourism industry is associated with relatively low earnings – in 2007, the median weekly pay for a full time job in the tourism industry in Wales was £294.70, compared with £308.30 for all jobs in services, and £331.70 for all jobs. The map below shows the variation in incomes at the local level, with some of the lowest ward level incomes to be found in the western most rural areas. This is an example of the difference that can be found between remotely rural and more accessible rural areas – more remote rural areas perform worse on deprivation indicators than more accessible areas.

### **Figure 5 – Mean annual household income in 2003 by wards**

Figure 5

Mean annual household income in 2003 by wards



7. Recent research for the Welsh Assembly Government (ESYS 2006) found that while considerable growth in employment had taken place in North West Wales between 1998 and 2004, much of the growth was in low value added sectors such as retail, tourism, food processing and low value manufacturing. The research also projected less employment growth over the next 10 years, but still higher than average growth in low value sectors such as health and social care (driven by changing demographics), retail and tourism. This means that the prospects for Gwynedd and North West Wales are likely to continue to be driven by growth in low value, and relatively low paid, sectors, which are unlikely to attract people to stay or return to the County.
8. Research carried out by Gwynedd Council (2006) found that a quality job was one that was secure, provided satisfaction and paid well. These sorts of jobs tend to be thin on the ground in Gwynedd, and are likely to remain so.
9. Self employment is a significant source of employment in rural areas –in 2001 26.6% of those in employment in Llanuwchllyn, 24.3% in Llanengan and 23.6 in Llandderfel. Research commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (1998) asserted that the dependence on small workplaces can trap people in low paid work:  
  
*“The incidence of persistent unemployment is less but that of persistent low pay greater for rural than for non-rural areas. Analysis of the key characteristics associated with low pay in general revealed only a few significant differences between rural and non-rural areas. The relatively low 'escape rate' from low pay for individuals employed in small rural workplaces, combined with their dominance in rural employment, suggests that the lack of opportunity to move to work for larger employers may be an important explanatory factor.” (JRF 1998).*
10. Employment accessibility has a positive and statistically significant influence on the employment rate – Recent work by Anne Green (2006) proximity to job opportunities increases the probability of being in employment and that it is as important to stimulate the demand for workers as it is to help people develop skills. By the very nature of many remotely rural as opposed to more accessible rural areas, people are not close to employers and therefore demand for labour is relatively low.

#### **Disadvantage in peripheral areas - measuring a different problem**

11. The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2005, despite its limitations in terms of being able to capture less concentrated forms of deprivation, identified the prevalence of housing and access to service deprivation in Gwynedd. This situation was also found in the Index of 2000. In our response to the WAG's consultation on the future development of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation, we recommended that measures of job quality should be included in the Employment Domain, as a way of reflecting the narrow range of jobs that can be available in rural areas.

12. Gwynedd is regularly placed near the bottom of the pay league in Wales – In 2006, Gwynedd's median household income was estimated at £22,707, 20<sup>th</sup> out of 22 UA's – only Blaenau Gwent and Merthyr Tudfil were estimated to have lower annual household incomes.
13. In the response to the proposed revision of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2005 made by Central Wales Plus, the group asked that the Welsh Assembly Government give consideration to the development of an all Wales Deprivation Framework. At present, it appears that the Welsh Assembly Government's approach is focussed on Communities First, with its focus on very small areas and the tendency to locate "solutions" to the "problems" in one and the same area.
14. Much is made of the assertion that rural poverty in particular is hidden – due to the dispersed nature of the population and anecdotal evidence that people living and working in rural areas are less likely to claim benefits. In the early 1990's research by Cloke et al (1997) identified an average of 28% of households in 4 rural areas of Wales were living in, or on the margins of, poverty. Research by the Wales Rural Observatory (2005) found that the proportion of the population who were receiving Working Families Tax Credit was higher in rural areas than in urban areas, with the highest proportions of benefit receipt evident in the westerly, and more peripheral rural areas – Pembrokeshire, Anglesey, **Gwynedd** and Carmarthenshire. The following quotation from the report emphasises the division between more and less peripheral areas and benefit receipt:

*“the most striking east-west spatial pattern is evident...the proportion of people in receipt of Job Seekers' Allowance, with high levels of benefit receipt evident in most wards in Anglesey, the north west of Gwynedd and south east Ceredigion. It is also clear that areas of Gwynedd and Anglesey exhibit similar benefits profiles to the Valleys.”*  
(p10)

#### **REFERENCES (NJ – to complete)**

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Map of Wards with high working age economic inactivity

