

Rural Services Network

Sounding Board Survey – March 2015

“Older Peoples Services”

A recent sounding board survey asked for information on the location and accessibility of various key services; sought opinions about changes in elderly people’s accessibility to services over the last 5 years; and enquired about the availability of housing suitable for older residents.

In total there were 214 responses from Parish Councillors and 30 from other Local Authority Councillors although it should be noted that the other Local Authority responses provided information on a total of 93 parishes.

The first question related to distances to various services from the largest village within a particular parish.

The table below provides figures for the percentage of parishes having specific services in their largest village and, in brackets, the percentage of parishes where the service is more than 5 miles away from the largest village.

	Parish Councillor responses	LA Councillor responses
Pub	73% (5%)	71% (6%)
Library/ mobile library	60% (11%)	55% (20%)
Post Office	46% (8%)	49% (16%)
Grocery shop	49% (10%)	54% (8%)
Pensioner social group	50% (21%)	45% (17%)
GP	33% (19%)	29% (21%)
Bank/ cash machine	32% (24%)	32% (24%)
Sheltered housing	35% (31%)	33% (25%)
Nursing/ care home	20% (31%)	12% (45%)

Public Houses were by far the most frequently found facility with libraries/ mobile libraries a perhaps unexpected second. Around half the largest villages in the parishes surveyed had a grocery shop and only slightly fewer had a Post Office. A similar number had some form of pensioner social group meeting at least weekly. However, only around a third had a GP surgery of any kind and one in five villages were more than 5 miles from such provision.

The next question asked whether, if not available actually within the village, these services/ facilities were conveniently accessible by bus.

	Parish Councillor responses		LA Councillor responses	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Pub	34%	66%	36%	64%
Library/ mobile library	43%	57%	47%	53%
Post Office	36%	64%	46%	54%
Grocery shop	34%	66%	55%	45%
Pensioner social group	26%	74%	47%	53%
GP	32%	68%	54%	46%
Bank/ cash machine	41%	60%	56%	44%
Sheltered housing	32%	68%	51%	49%
Nursing/ care home	31%	69%	50%	50%

These results illustrate the difficulty in accessing many key services by bus. Since the question related specifically to access by bus from the largest village in the Parish accessibility will be an even greater obstacle for those living in smaller settlements and the countryside.

It is interesting that the parish responses generally suggested that services/facilities were more difficult to access by bus than indicated by LA responses. This might be explained by the fact that two sets of responses cover different parishes (and the difference simply reflects the different characteristics of those parishes) or, perhaps more likely, that the parish respondents had a more detailed and realistic knowledge of the practicalities of using local buses.

Parish Councillors responses to a question asking about changes to specific issues experienced by elderly residents of their parish over a five year period were as follows (percentages):

Answer Options	Much better	A little better	About the same	Slightly worse	Much worse	Don't know
Accessibility of GP	4	5	57	18	14	1
Accessibility of outpatient hospital services	2	6	42	28	16	5
Social Care provided by Council	0	1	28	27	15	28
Social Care provided by the private sector	1	6	37	12	7	37
Social care provided by volunteers	1	11	36	9	3	40
Meals on wheels or similar service	0	1	27	12	14	46
Incidence of fuel poverty	0	3	21	22	13	40
Social isolation	0	5	39	27	16	14

Availability of public or community transport	2	9	36	23	28	2
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Local Authority Councillors responses to a similar question but relating to their Ward gave the following results (percentages):

Answer Options	Much better	A little better	About the same	Slightly worse	Much worse	Don't know
Accessibility of GP	0	7	71	18	4	0
Accessibility of outpatient hospital services	0	15	55	19	11	0
Social Care provided by Council	0	4	42	31	15	8
Social Care provided by the private sector	0	7	61	14	7	11
Social care provided by volunteers	0	18	61	0	4	18
Meals on wheels or similar service	0	11	32	25	14	18
Incidence of fuel poverty	4	4	54	18	14	7
Social isolation	0	14	50	21	7	7
Availability of public or community transport	4	15	27	44	15	0

Other than for 'social care provided for volunteers' there was a general recognition of decline in the availability or accessibility of a range services to the elderly. Health care was identified as less accessible and social care worse than five years ago. Social isolation and fuel poverty were also identified as having generally increased. Notably over a quarter of the parish responses thought the availability of public or community transport was **much worse** now than 5 years ago-this will clearly have impacted the accessibility of other services although other factors such as service cut-backs and centralisation will also have contributed to these trends.

46% of Parish Councillors responses suggested that there was adequate housing suitable for older people within the Parish but 54% thought that there was not. The need for sheltered housing and suitably designed smaller units such as two bedroom bungalows were suggested by several respondents. Of the responses from other Local Authority Councillors just 38% thought there was adequate housing suitable for the elderly within their Ward compared to 62% who did not. Again sheltered housing and small bungalows were the unmet needs most often identified. One specifically mentioned the need for affordable housing for the elderly.

Overall these survey results paint a rather depressing picture particularly given the anticipated demographic changes of an increasing elderly rural population and expected further public sector cuts.