

SPARSITY OF POPULATION IN HEREFORDSHIRE – FURTHER ISSUES

This paper follows on from a report on sparsity, produced by Herefordshire Council Research Team in November 2006. The report considered Herefordshire's position, relative to the other 149 English top tier¹ local authorities, in terms of 'sparsity' measures used in the Local Government Finance Settlement for 2006/07. This was to help understanding of the differences in population distribution between Herefordshire and other areas, and the possible implications of this for service provision.

Two further issues that were felt to be worth considering in relation to sparsity are distance from key services and road length. In this paper, Herefordshire's position is compared to the four other local authorities (Isles of Scilly, North Yorkshire, Rutland & Shropshire) that have been identified as being sparsely populated and 2 authorities (Cumbria & Northumberland) that have lower overall population density than Herefordshire.

DISTANCE FROM KEY SERVICES

Physical distance from services and facilities can be a problem, particularly for those living in rural areas, and has implications for local authorities in terms of public transport provision and other service delivery.

Data for the number of households living within various distance bandings of key services are made available at Output Area² level by the Countryside Agency. The simplest way of obtaining this data for rural areas³ within Herefordshire, along with comparative data for other authorities, is to access it via Defra's Rural Evidence Hub.

In the Countryside Agency's State of the Countryside reports, national and regional figures are presented for set distances and these have been used to compare the situation locally with elsewhere. It should be noted that the distances are 'how the crow flies' rather than distances by road.

The figures for Herefordshire and the six other local authorities (as described above) are presented in Table 1. The main points to note are as follows:

- Herefordshire has the smallest percentage of rural households within the set distance of 5 out of 10 of the key services; that is within 4km of a bank (31%), cash-point (56%), GP surgery (48%) and supermarket (34%) and within 2km of a primary school (66%).

¹ Top tier authorities are those authorities that are responsible for services that must be provided at the county council level, i.e. county councils (CCs), unitary authorities (UAs), metropolitan districts or city councils, and London boroughs.

² Output Areas (OAs) are statistical geographies of around 300 people and 125 households, which were automatically generated by the Office for National Statistics to group together postcodes of similar tenure. They nest within (current) wards and were used as 'building blocks' for lower layer super output areas (LSOAs).

³ Rural areas are those defined as such by Defra's 2004 rural-urban settlement classification, applied at OA level

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- Figures for Herefordshire are particularly low for the percentage of rural households within 4km of a bank (31%; next lowest is Shropshire – 50%) and a GP surgery (48%; next lowest is North Yorkshire – 66%)
- Only the Isles of Scilly have smaller proportions of rural households within 4km of a library, petrol station and secondary school but this council has unique issues, with it's population spread over five islands. The figures for Herefordshire are 36% within 4km of a library, 68% for a petrol station and 43% for a secondary school.
- For the 10 key services, job centres and post offices are the only ones for which Herefordshire has a greater percentage of rural households living within the set distance than the other mainland authorities. The figures for Herefordshire are 52% within 8km of a job centre and 72% within 2km of a post office.

ROAD LENGTH

Length of roads of different types within the county is of interest not only in relation to the costs of maintenance but also in terms of the implications for delivering other services to a scattered population.

As shown in Table 2, much the greatest proportion (77%) of Herefordshire roads by length fall into the category of other non-built up (i.e non principal roads in rural areas). This is also the predominant type of road for the other authorities, although the figures are lower with the exception of Shropshire (77%).

The final column in Table 2 provides the most relevant information in relation to sparsity: length of road (km) per 1000 population, together with rank out of all 150 top tier authorities in England. The main points to note are as follows:

- In terms of road length per 1000 population, no top tier authority is ranked higher than Herefordshire (18.35 km)
- Devon has the next highest value (17.28 km) – not shown in the table as it is not one of the chosen comparator authorities, followed by Shropshire (17.21 km)
- All six local authorities which have been used as comparators for Herefordshire in this paper feature in the top ten authorities for this measure.

CONTACT DETAILS

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Table1: % of households in rural areas who live within set distances of key services (2004)

Authority	Bank (<4km)	Cash point (<4km)	GP surgery (<4km)	Job Centre (<8km)	Library (<4km)	Petrol station (<4km)	Post Offices (<2km)	Primary schools (<2km)	Secondary schools (<4km)	Supermarkets (4km)
Herefordshire, County of (UA)	31%	56%	48%	52%	36%	68%	72%	66%	43%	34%
Isles of Scilly, Council of the	83%	81%	82%	0%	0%	0%	21%	77%	0%	83%
North Yorkshire (County Council)	55%	74%	66%	36%	58%	84%	81%	79%	51%	53%
Rutland (UA)	60%	62%	74%	72%	66%	87%	84%	79%	60%	61%
Shropshire (County Council)	50%	71%	67%	48%	62%	80%	71%	77%	46%	44%
Cumbria (County Council)	67%	77%	69%	54%	71%	85%	81%	83%	63%	66%
Northumberland (County Council)	66%	77%	72%	51%	73%	82%	86%	83%	71%	71%

Source: Countryside Agency

Notes:

- Figures for Herefordshire compared with the 4 other authorities in top 5 for 'sparsity' indicators (Isles of Scilly, North Yorkshire, Rutland & Shropshire) and 2 authorities that have lower overall population density than Herefordshire (Cumbria & Northumberland)
- Highlighting shows any figures that are **lower** than Herefordshire for each service

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Table 2: Types of road (% of total road length) and road length (km) per 1000 population

Authority	Principal roads		Other		Road length (km) per 1000 pop (rank)*
	Built up	Non built up	Built up	Non built up	
Herefordshire, County of (UA)	1.7%	9.0%	12.5%	76.8%	18.35 (1)
Isles of Scilly, Council of the	3.7%	18.2%	22.4%	54.5%	16.35 (4)
North Yorkshire (County Council)	2.3%	6.8%	25.9%	65.0%	13.56 (9)
Rutland (UA)	2.8%	8.4%	33.5%	55.2%	13.82 (8)
Shropshire (County Council)	1.3%	6.2%	15.6%	76.9%	17.21 (3)
Cumbria (County Council)	2.1%	6.4%	21.1%	70.3%	15.40 (6)
Northumberland (County Council)	1.7%	5.9%	23.3%	69.1%	15.89 (5)

Source: Research Team, using data presented in 2006/07 Local Government Finance Settlement

Notes:

- 'Built up' and 'non built up' relate to the settlement pattern
- Rank for road length per 1000 population figure is out of all 150 top tier authorities in England, with 1 representing the highest value.