

THE POLITICS OF RURAL DEPRIVATION*

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Background

For about twenty years, successive British Governments have had policies for tackling deprivation. In government, the problem of deprivation has been regarded as an urban one, reflected in physical and environmental decay, unemployment, poverty, and overcrowded housing conditions. By contrast, images of rurality have consistently been highly romanticised versions of everything that rural life is not, and particularly so in the Scottish Highlands. According to Knox and Cottam, there is a fictional image of:

“a spectacular heatherclad landscape dotted with picturesque cottages and inhabited by hardworking but unimaginative ginger-haired people who love accordion music, dressing up in kilts and sporrans, and live on whisky and porridge – has been particularly effective in obscuring some of the harder aspects of rural living conditions.”⁽¹⁾

There have been attempts recently to redress the balance⁽²⁾, but nevertheless, these two sets of images, on urban and rural deprivation, are completely consonant with the present urban focus of deprivation policy. Deprivation is regarded as an urban *phenomenon*; a *multiple concept* combining several facets of disadvantage, including low income, unemployment, poor housing, lack of basic amenities and services, and a poor physical environment, whose interaction provides the problems of the disadvantaged; and *spatially concentrated*, and this areal focus led policy-makers to believe the problems were politically containable within identified geographic areas. Most of the policy initiatives, such as the Urban Programme, Educational Priority Areas, or Housing Action Areas, sought to practice *positive discrimination* through the preferential concentration of resources to areas or institutions in greatest need, and *community regeneration*, whereby patterns of economic and social decline would be reversed through community action and self-help.⁽³⁾

In England, rural responses to government policy began in response to Peter Shore's 1977 announcement that the causes of urban decline were structural, and required shifts in resources in mainstream programmes, such as the Rate Support Grant, as well as the special schemes of assistance.

Several reports recording the existence of rural deprivation were produced, and demands for additional funds for tackling rural deprivation were made. So far, these have been resisted. These argued that rural deprivation is less visible and less concentrated than urban deprivation and, moreover, has qualitatively different manifestations in social isolation and inaccessibility to public services on grounds of both location and low levels of provision.⁽⁴⁾

In Scotland, the lead in raising the initiative on rural deprivation was taken by the regional and district councils in Strathclyde. A Joint Working Party was formed in 1979, which reported in 1982. It concluded there were special problems in Strathclyde's remoter rural areas. This research showed that these remoter rural areas typically have a higher cost structure and lower income base than the Strathclyde average. These three factors combined – special problems, low indigenous income and high costs – put the remoter rural areas at a serious disadvantage compared with more favoured areas. It made recommendations for local policy changes to respond to these needs, and suggested the creation of an independent rural aid fund as a desirable and necessary complement to existing provision.⁽⁵⁾

The Joint Working Party Report was submitted to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) who agreed to raise the matter with Government. In 1985, the Scottish Office and COSLA met to discuss the proposal by the local authorities for the creation of a Rural Aid Fund, with aims and format similar to Urban Aid.

The Scottish Office Minister, Mr Alan Stewart, responded by pointing to the recent evidence of the article in the June 1985 issue of the *Scottish Economic Bulletin*, which purported to show that in general rural areas were faring better than other parts of the country and the level of government assistance in the main sectors of economic activity was higher per head of population than elsewhere. He saw a need to define what problems the proposed fund should assist, given the assistance already available through the Scottish Development Agency and other services, to ask whether such purposes were not already served by local authorities existing powers, and which new resources outwith the Rate Support Grant were needed.

The Convention's response was to associate its proposals with a counter-deprivation strategy. It saw the fund as serving the remoter rural areas of rural Scotland as distinct from the generality of rural areas, some of which had problems of social deprivation which paralleled those of deprived urban areas and justified a similar response from Government. The main orientation of the fund would be of a social and community nature, and therefore be complementary to the work of the SDA. The Fund was needed as authorities lacked the resources to tackle the problem.

The Government was unconvinced by these points, and rejected the

proposals formally in a letter of April 1986, arguing along the lines used by the Minister at the meeting. In doing so, it linked COSLA's request for a Rural Aid Fund with the Committee on Scottish Affairs' recommendation for a Rural Development Fund, and saw the general considerations set out in the Government's reply to the Committee as being equally relevant to the COSLA proposal. This must in itself be dubious, as one proposal was concerned with economic development, and the other with social and community development. But, in short, the Government's response was to say it was *already allocating a lot of resources to rural areas, and the case for increasing this was not justified*.

The response to the Committee simply set out the main government spending programmes. It noted that the SDA spends 25% of its main programme budgets in rural Scotland, which represents only 20% of the total population. The Government gives extensive financial support to rural areas in the area of *transport*.

In terms of the *health* service, the formula for resource allocation (SHARE) recognises the particular problems of sparsely populated areas by a weighting in the assessed demand for community health services, and through other specific schemes. For *local authority services*, the RSG provides a further means of support for rural areas, as the client group approach to grant distribution takes special account of the needs of authorities in sparsely populated areas, by ensuring that their extra costs of providing services are recognised more precisely and systematically. The combined effect of these measures, it was claimed, was that the Government was already providing a range of assistance to rural areas well in excess of the £25 million proposed budget for a Rural Development Fund and, therefore, such a fund would be unlikely to make any significant contribution to the needs of rural areas beyond the present extensive measures of support.

The local authority initiative in response to this rebuttal was taken by Dumfries and Galloway Regional Council, who commissioned consultants to provide a critique of the Government's position. This was completed in March 1987 by economist Tony Mackay. In reviewing the article in *Scottish Economic Bulletin*, which formed the essential basis of the Government's response, he concluded that it was "more an attempt to provide evidence to support the view of the Scottish Office that rural areas are treated favourably in central government spending programmes than an objective analysis of the data available. By a selective choice of statistics, it gives a misleading picture".⁽⁶⁾

Mackay's analysis concentrated on the economic statistics in the paper, and did not tackle the issues raised by the Government over the Scottish Health Service Resource Allocation Scheme or RSG. He argued that the concentration was on direct support of economic activities in rural

Scotland and Scotland as a whole, thereby excluding public expenditure where the economic impact is indirect, e.g. through infrastructure provision. In terms of agricultural assistance, Mackay argued that it was misleading to imply that agricultural expenditure is a form of rural subsidy, as it is intended to help consumers throughout the UK and the EEC. Moreover, the focus on support for the rural economy ignored special assistance to 'urban' economic activities and, as a result, the conclusion that rural Scotland received about 49% of relevant central government expenditure was erroneous. A more accurate figure would be 19%.

As important, for present purposes, the emphasis on economic development monies ignored a whole dimension of COSLA's proposal which related to social and community development, not economic development. A central concern in relation to rural areas is the low availability and accessibility of public services, and this in itself may compound the problem of rural economic development by making many rural areas unattractive prospects for business and industrial location. Within the Convention, the whole issue has been referred to its Economic Affairs Committee, and the emphasis has shifted somewhat to a rural "Development" Fund rather than a Rural Aid Fund. Our concern, however, is with rural deprivation. In this article, we seek firstly to evaluate the arguments made by government about rural needs and, secondly, to examine the evidence about the existence of rural deprivation in Scotland.

Deprivation and Resource Allocation

We should begin, therefore, with a definition. An official Scottish Office study suggests the following:

"Deprivation is a concept frequently used in the discussion of social inequality. It has no precise meaning, but a household may be said to be deprived when its welfare falls below some generally agreed standards. The concept goes beyond the single notion of financial poverty, i.e. insufficient income in terms of some standard of need, to encompass other aspects of welfare observed from or influenced by the activities of the state, for example, the provision of health care, education, housing and recreational provision."⁽⁷⁾

In short, it is clear that it is 'resources' not simply financial income that should be related to needs and this includes central and local government service provision in support of "generally agreed standards". Although part of the aim of measuring deprivation is to target public services, access to public services themselves will also be central to measuring deprivation in the first place.⁽⁸⁾

In our view, this creates a major conceptual and measurement problem for public policy, as the most readily usable data, the Census,

takes no account of the "access" issue, and we shall return to this later in the paper.

We noted that the Government's response to COSLA was simply to point to its general expenditure programmes which benefit rural areas. From a *rural deprivation* perspective, the key mechanisms are those in support of public services, and here the Government's response is quite disingenuous. For example, the benefits gained by rural areas through SHARE arise from the weighting they receive which reflects the widely recognised high unit costs of service provision in rural areas, rather than the existence of deprivation. In fact, the Government only recognises deprivation as a needs factor in two programmes, Urban Aid and the Rate Support Grant, and therefore the rigour of Government's argument that existing resource allocation systems already take account of rural needs stands or falls by these two programmes. Spending on other programmes per se is not evidence that rural deprivation, the focus of the COSLA initiative, is adequately covered in existing programmes when these have entirely different objectives. Moreover, existing resource allocation mechanisms also purport to take account of the needs of urban areas, but they still benefit from additional monies through the Urban Programme.

In the main, resources are allocated to tackle deprivation through two main spending programmes, the Rate Support Grant and the Urban Programme. Local authority revenue expenditure programmes amount to something over £3 billion in Scotland, but only a very small proportion of that is in recognition of problems of deprivation. Expenditure under the Urban Programme is about £30 million per annum. The Urban Programme seeks to channel funds to local authorities with problems of social deprivation. A recent review of the Urban Programme in Scotland stated the intention of "agreeing lists with authorities to focus the Programme's resources in the deprived *urban* areas of greatest need".⁽⁹⁾

This report notes that the statutory power for the Urban Programme requires the expenditure to be incurred in "any urban area of special need" but does not in itself define 'urban', and confirms the political decision to continue with the broad approach of defining areas with a population of over 10,000 as urban. In terms of multiple deprivation the resources will be concentrated in those areas in the worst 10% based on enumeration districts.

In short, as a second Scottish Office paper makes clear, urban aid is "seen as a main funding mechanism for inner city policy", with the emphasis on encouraging local authorities to adopt an area-based approach to problems of urban deprivation.⁽¹⁰⁾

The governmental review of the programme concluded that the Urban Programme has proved itself to be of value in mobilising resources to tackle

the problems of areas of special need. Its priorities are:

- to continue to use an *area-based* approach focusing upon deprived areas and those at risk of deprivation.
- to emphasise the importance of *voluntary effort* by giving priority to projects undertaken by voluntary effort.
- to support projects involving the *mobilisation of private sector resources*.
- *no net increase in local authority staffing* should result.

We would draw attention to two dimensions of the Urban Programme that cast doubt on the efficiency and equity of concentrating additional resources on a narrow band of urban areas. First, although area deprivation is presented as *the* central criterion of the programme, it is at present a necessary but not sufficient condition for resource allocation. It acts as an initial filter in the sense that authorities can apply for funding only on behalf of certain areas. Thereafter whether a project put forward is funded or not depends entirely on the merits and relevance of project applications.

Central to this will be demonstrating client need (for innovatory social services, for playgroups and nurseries, play areas and schemes etc.), and the degree to which a proposed project meets other criteria suggested by government from time to time, e.g. co-ordinating voluntary, private and statutory provision. The decision to fund any particular project is therefore based on client need and related criteria, *not* area deprivation criteria. All the area criteria do are to ration the right to *apply for* resources; they are not used to ration the resources themselves.

The Urban Programme, therefore, combines area and client criteria within the one programme. The problem is that it does so in an illogical, inefficient and inequitable way. It is illogical because, in allocating resources to client based services, areas warranting additional resources should be defined in terms of concentration of client need for particular provision. In the Urban Programme, the right of concentrations of clients to have their needs met is determined by where they live. Location becomes the primary criterion, not concentration of need, yet within the targeted areas specific projects are then funded in terms of demonstrated client need.

Further there is now considerable evidence that deprivation is far more widespread than originally assumed, and this is certainly true of Scotland as a whole, with the major exception of Glasgow.⁽¹¹⁾ Where the majority of deprived people do *not* live in 'areas of deprivation', and substantial numbers of those living in such areas are not themselves deprived, the basis

of the area approach is highly questionable. Equivalently sized client groups with equivalent needs, e.g. poor elderly people with high support needs, will have their access to additional service determined by where they live, not in terms of their living conditions and state of welfare. Equally, non-deprived families in deprived areas get the benefit of additional educational provision, while deprived families in non-deprived areas do not. Where the basis of service provision is client need, it is unfair to ration resources by locational criteria.

It is also inefficient as a mechanism for meeting need. Again, for client services, any resource mechanism based on the 10% worst areas, by given deprivation criteria, will target resources on a minority of deprived households. It is inefficient because areas viewed as deprived because of their elderly populations can apply for additional resources for child services, and vice versa. *The combinations of indicators used to identify areas stand in no direct relation to the projects actually funded.* Finally, it is inefficient because it assumes that putting additional resources into areas is an effective mechanism for getting services across to the most deprived households, whilst in practice, the better off in these areas may also benefit.

The second major point is that, though the deprivation element is emphasised, the programme has emphasised innovation and experimentation in service development, and the need to co-ordinate statutory and voluntary effort. It has also emphasised projects that diminish demands on mainstream budgets and are therefore cost beneficial. Indeed, Strathclyde Region, the major beneficiary of the programme makes service innovation and cost-benefit in relation to mainstream budget control criteria for evaluating funded projects.⁽¹²⁾

The Urban Programme may therefore be viewed as an action research and development fund that finances attempts at improving the cost effectiveness and target efficiency of local authority provision by permitting experiments in alternative types of service and patterns of service delivery. The evidence is that urban authorities have used the opportunity intelligently and well. Intermediate treatment (IT) in the social work area is now widely recognised to be a cost-effective alternative to previous institutional provision, and is now part of mainstream provision. In education, home-school link initiatives and pre-school education initiatives have become part of mainstream policy. In leisure and recreation, community development approaches that evolved within urban programme funding have become central to recreation policy. All these experiments were possible because authorities were not forced to carry the initial funding liability alone, and successful experiments can then be taken over into mainstream funding.

The research and development dimension of the Urban Programme would be of crucial importance to rural authorities. Given the initially

lower service base available and given the serious problems of service delivery to a highly dispersed population, rural authorities have a particular need to experiment and innovate in both types of service and strategies for service delivery. Equally, given low resources overall, the availability of monies to stimulate and co-ordinate voluntary and informal provision with public provision would be of great importance. At present, rural authorities who perhaps most need it are denied the experimental capacity that the Urban Programme gives urban authorities. Indeed, innovation in service development and improved cost-effectiveness is, perhaps, the major success story of the Urban Programme, and it is a very questionable economy to withhold resources to facilitate this from rural authorities.

The second major resource allocation mechanism is the Rate Support Grant, which the government believes systematically takes account of the needs of rural areas.⁽¹³⁾ It is certainly true that the Resources Element of the Rate Support Grant, which seeks to equalise the tax raising capacities of local authorities, provides considerable benefit to the majority of rural authorities who have a low rating resource base. However, the biggest portion of the grant is distributed through the Needs Element, based on a series of factors deemed to be indicative of an authority's need to spend, and it is in this portion that any allowance for rural deprivation would be made. In fact, as it operates, allowances for deprivation uniformly allocate money to urban areas, and away from rural areas.

Assessments of needs are based on the Client Group Method, which allocates a predetermined level of expenditure provision among local authorities, or estimates of their relative needs. A primary indicator is defined for each component of a service, which is seen as being the main determinant of demand and having the strongest influence on expenditure. Thereafter, secondary indicators redistribute allocations of resources where factors outwith the control of the authority also influence expenditure.

In our view, the basic principles of the Client Group Method are sound. There have been some problems of conceptualisation and measurement in practice, but client group treatments are subject to a continuing process of refinement and development, and this has also been the case with "deprivation".⁽¹⁴⁾

The use of multiple deprivation as a need indicator in the client group approach has been as a *secondary indicator*, though the variable itself has changed on several occasions. The Client Group Method was used first as the basis of current expenditure guidelines in 1982-3, and then for Rate Support Grant in 1984-5. When first used, however, there was only *one* secondary adjustment for multiple deprivation. This was in the social work casework and administration category, where a strong relationship was found between expenditure per client and multiple deprivation.

As a result, the government decided to make an *ad hoc* adjustment of £18m to direct resources to certain urban local authorities, because:

"The government consider it important that local authorities where the incidence of multiple deprivation is higher than average should receive more resources to cope with this problem."⁽¹⁵⁾

However, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities argued against such ad hoc policy adjustments. As a result, the Multiple Deprivation Allowance was withdrawn in 1983-4, and reviews of the impact of both sparsity and multiple deprivation were included in the Work Programme of the Distribution Committee of the Working Party of Local Government Finance.

The impact of the introduction of the Client Group Method was a broader recognition of the incidence of deprivation and sparsity across authorities. By 1984-5, only three regional and two district services had adjustments for deprivation whilst seven regional and three district service treatments had adjustments for sparsity, and rural authorities gained resources as a result. This would appear to support the Scottish Office view that the method takes systematic account of rural expenditure needs, but that needs qualification.

It is certainly the case that client group assessments successfully identify high unit costs of provision *in some services*. Where service provision is heavily influenced by national standards, and broadly comparable throughout the country, the higher unit costs in rural areas will be revealed through regression analysis. There is, however, a second dimension to sparsity, which is central to evaluating whether the method takes account of the manifestations of rural deprivation, this reflecting the case for additional resources in a Rural Aid Fund. That is, where the costs of service provision are so high that only minimal provision is made, then the expenditure need for such provision *will not* be revealed by correlations with past expenditure. In short, the unmet need resulting from low levels of public service provision, which is central to any concept of rural deprivation, is ignored for the purposes of Rate Support Grant.

The Central Research Unit noted this problem in a report on sparsity to the Distribution Committee:

"Either the need for the service, as judged by the providing authority is low and the service is not provided at all in parts of the area, or is provided at a lower level, or that the costs of *providing a service* are so high that only a minimal service can be afforded."

Moreover, the paper shows that the method cannot take account of the

latter factor:

“In the light of discussions held recently with a number of authorities, it is evident that *local discretion* is a major factor in determining expenditure and therefore authorities having the same rating on the sparsity measure may expend a *significantly different* amount of money per unit of primary indicators on the same service.

The Client Group Method attempts, through its use of secondary indicators, to distinguish between those demand factors which reflect actual need (usually a large number of clients together with those production factors which affect costs of provision locally) from these factors which reflect the demand for a higher quality of service.

If needs factors are not *reflected in actual expenditure*, then the method *assumes that need is low* and therefore it *cannot* take into account situations where, even with *high need* and/or *high unit provision costs, expenditure is low.*” (our emphasis)

This is precisely the situation pertaining in many remoter rural areas.

The result is, therefore, that the service availability dimension of rural deprivation *will not be* revealed by correlations with past expenditure, as low provision will result in low spending. Moreover, the only adjustments made for deprivation are based on the urban indicators developed in connection with the Urban Programme, and have the effect of directing resources away from rural areas, although conceptual improvements have been achieved in some services by shifting from area or household measures of multiple deprivation to more direct indicators of deprived groups.

In total, some £25m of expenditure need is redistributed for deprivation factors, and this is only 0.43% of total expenditure provision for regions, and 1.1% of district expenditure provision. However, this amount in total is almost as large as the entire Urban Programme, and the resources are concentrated in Strathclyde Region. At regional level, Strathclyde Region gained the resources at the expense of all other authorities, whilst at district level, ten districts in Strathclyde and Dundee gained from the adjustments.

There is little evidence that the problems of rural deprivation are accommodated within either the Urban Programme or the Rate Support Grant. Certainly, in the latter case, one of the important characteristics of rural areas, namely sparsity, is recognised as causing high unit costs. But the initial approach from COSLA to the Scottish Office was for a rural equivalent to Urban Aid. As we have seen, rural areas and the rural poor have no equivalent scheme, and in the Rate Support Grant, deprivation is

still treated as mainly an urban phenomenon.

In fact, the Rate Support Grant takes *no account of the accessibility dimension* of rural deprivation at all. In areas of high discretion, where provision and spending are low, then need is also regarded as low. This is a serious defect of the client group methodology as it stands. Finally, rural expenditure needs have been under-assessed because of the inappropriate measures of urban deprivation which have been used.

CONCLUSION:

Rural Deprivation exists and warrants a Public Policy Response

The Government's response to local government's request to establish a Rural Aid Fund and that rural needs are adequately met from existing public expenditure is an inadequate one. We have shown that *no* allocation of resources to tackle the specific problems of rural deprivation exists, and that the effect of deprivation allowances in the RSG is to take resources away from rural authorities. Yet a large number of studies point to the existence of rural deprivation on a scale which warrants a public policy response. Miller's study, for example, shows that area measures of deprivation considerably under-estimate the extent of rural deprivation.⁽¹⁶⁾

Moreover, there is evidence that poverty and deprivation is concentrated amongst the same groups in rural areas as in urban areas; the elderly, the unemployed, and low income families. Rural areas have a “top heavy demography”, a disproportionate proportion of elderly people in the population. As Knox notes “a disproportionate number of the poor are elderly and a disproportionate number of the elderly are poor”. On his estimate, the incidence of multiply deprived pensioner households is higher in rural than in urban Scotland, and accounts for well over 50% of multiply deprived households in rural areas.⁽¹⁷⁾

The predominance of agriculture in the rural economy as a source of employment has in recent years been highly associated with low income occupations and unemployment. The Rural Indicators study, for example, suggest that the proportion of households in low socio-economic groups is higher in rural Scotland than in urban Scotland.⁽¹⁸⁾ On Knox's data, family size does not significantly differentiate the urban and rural deprived, therefore the needs – financial resources balance is at least as bad proportionately in rural as in urban areas. However, it should be noted that whatever the proportions of population involved, the absolute number and concentrations are very much lower in rural areas. This should be balanced however by noting that low income rural households face higher costs of living, a point demonstrated by the Scottish Consumer Council's “Rural Price Survey”.

The demographic and socio-economic composition of rural Scotland is therefore indicative of levels of deprivation equivalent to urban areas. This, however, has been argued on the basis of income considerations above. The third theme emergent from rural deprivation studies focuses on access to the other resources that support lifestyle and welfare, and the interaction of economic, demographic and public service factors in reinforcing patterns of deprivation. Studies have emphasised what are regarded as the two quite distinctive features of rural deprivation, namely low levels of public service provision, and poor accessibility to services, which underly the pattern of rural deprivation.

Constraints on public expenditure have over a number of years led to the contraction of rural services and the concentration of service provision in larger settlements. This adds to the problem of access, although only a minority of households do not have access to a car, and Moseley has argued that what matters is not households without the use of a car, but groups such as children, women, the elderly and the disabled, in short, the rural majority.⁽¹⁹⁾ With the decline in rural public transport, and the contraction of services, the problem is real indeed.

Finally, we believe that the conceptual basis of deprivation policy, and the measurement problems which results from it, serve to compound the mistaken views of the incidence of rural deprivation. Deprivation is a more widespread phenomenon than originally envisaged and in part this original failure reflected the attempt to provide measures of multiple, concentrated deprivation. Edwards rightly notes that it is unacceptable to adopt a 'hotch potch' approach "in which any variable deemed by the researcher to be vaguely relevant has been thrown in to the statistical melting pot".⁽²⁰⁾ As Hatch and Sharrot argue, there is a need for more precise and relevant indicators with greater illustration of causality.⁽²¹⁾

In practice, area-based positive discrimination is difficult to implement through the mainstream programmes of local government. A Scottish Office study, which monitored the impact of the Urban Programme, showed that 40% of the projects served all the residents of a particular area.⁽²²⁾ Strathclyde Regional Council, which has one of the most extensive deprivation strategies in local government, found a very high use of nursery schools in Areas of Priority Treatment by children from outwith the area.⁽²³⁾

That Region's review of its own social strategy shows that the sheer complexity of the process of designing Urban Programme projects diverts attention from the fundamental issue of directing mainline policies and budgets to the problems of the disadvantaged. After seven years of an area based strategy, this review still concluded that in future:

"...the Council will adopt a more rigorous and aggressive approach

to the implementation of its policy of positively discriminating in favour of the most disadvantaged. It will be particularly important to ensure that this policy is applied to all appropriate mainline budgets of the Council.

Conventional budgeting and staff dispositions have largely been inherited and as recent information has shown there had been only a limited levelling up of services in the Areas of Priority Treatment. The annual budget review is concerned only with the marginal activities of the Council. There has been a reluctance to examine how services can be made more relevant to local needs and indeed how staff, our most valuable resource, should be deployed."⁽²⁴⁾

The existing stance of government towards rural deprivation is therefore one of complacency. There is clear evidence that poverty and deprivation exists on a substantial scale in rural areas, and that the extent of rural deprivation has been consistently under-assessed by government. Secondly, the access dimension of rural deprivation is ignored for public resource allocation.

We do believe, however, that these issues could be tackled through a Rural Aid Fund which recognises the rural dimension of deprivation. As the Scottish Office's Urban Renewal Unit noted, deprivation:

"is not a single or simple concept – there are many different forms of deprivation which require to be measured in different ways, and proposed action must be based on detailed knowledge of particular circumstances."⁽²⁵⁾

This means that, in the rural case, rather than defining areas of eligibility, the emphasis should be on concentrating benefits on deprived groups, within a policy framework which accommodates that diversity. This would require a concern for specific projects meeting the needs of specific deprived groups, within a coherent local deprivation strategy.

Each project would therefore:

1. Identify the deprived groups at which the project is targeted.
2. Identify the *relevant community* at which the project is targeted, in terms of settlement. This would discuss both the distance from 'service centres' and the adequacy of public transport availability. In our view, with limited resources, there is a case for limiting approval to settlements more than ten miles from service centres rather than the five miles suggested by the JWP.
3. *Specify the policy objectives* that the project is seeking to meet.

4. Illustrate that the proposal is both *innovatory* and *cost-effective* in relation to mainstream programmes.
5. Demonstrate that the project is part of a *coherent local strategy* for tackling deprivation, and not simply an ad hoc way of supplementing mainstream service provision.

There is a substantive case for the introduction of a Rural Aid Fund, as part of the national commitment to retain and invigorate rural communities. Our view is that the £3m proposed by the JWP is too modest, and does not reflect the incidence of rural deprivation, which at individual household level is about the national average, and the rural share of the total population, which in terms of the definition used in government, is about 30 per cent in settlements less than 10,000. If the Urban Programme is the comparable government programme, then an appropriate sum would be about £10m. To date, an understandable concentration on urban deprivation has led to the neglect of those socially deprived in rural areas. The creation of a Rural Aid Fund would be a recognition of that, and stimulate community-based renewal in the remote rural areas. Equality of access to public services may be difficult to achieve in practice, but that is no excuse for not trying. A Rural Aid Fund would be a valuable step in the right direction.

*The authors are grateful for the financial support of Angus, Annandale and Eskdale, Clydesdale, Ettrick and Lauderdale, Nithsdale, Sutherland and Wigtown District Councils, Highland Regional Council, Shetland Islands Council, and Community Work North, for their research programme into Rural Deprivation in Scotland.

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