



Intro to launch of SORS 2021

I am Ewen Cameron and I sit in the Lords as an independent crossbench Peer. I am a bit of a rural has-been, having chaired the Countryside Agency and been the Prime Minister's Rural Advocate, and spent most of my life trying to get Governments to take rural issues seriously. Mostly I have failed – but I keep trying.

And my failure is quite worrying, because as the Social Mobility Commission reported in Nov 2017, social mobility and inter-generational poverty is as bad, if not worse, in rural England than in many of our urban slums.

And one of the reasons for this sad reality is the difficulty many of our rural population have in accessing services, whether they are provided by National Gov, LAs, the NHS or even the private sector – in the form of Banks etc.

And, as many of us know, one of the reasons for these accessing difficulties, which we rural folk encounter, is the gross imbalance in the funding PER HEAD of POPULATION of nearly all our rural services. This, in spite of the fact that these services obviously cost more to deliver per head, owing the distances involved and the sparsity of the population.

And another contributing factor to the difficulties encountered is because mostly Departments fail to collect their data in a way which might distinguish between their general performance, urban and rural, compared to their specific ability to reach out to those of their constituents who happen to live in small more remote communities.

So this research, which we are launching today, is absolutely crucial in giving us, and hopefully through us, the Gov and its departments, that vital on-going snapshot of how well rural services are being delivered, and what effect that delivery is having on the quality of life in our countryside.

So I want to thank all those stakeholders and supporters who have made this work possible – I won't mention them all by name but you can find them listed the final pages of the report.

So I'd now like to hand over to Brian Wilson, who is responsible for the Report, to give us his highlights of the State of Rural Services Report 2021.