

## Committee Visit to Blairgowrie

The Committee undertook informal engagement with local stakeholders to understand rural challenges in healthcare, transport, food security, housing, and fuel poverty.

Meetings were held at:

- [Wisecraft](#) (mental health and wellbeing support via [PKAVS](#)) – focus on healthcare and transport.
- [Blairgowrie and Rattray Initiative](#) (BARI) – focus on food, housing, and fuel poverty.

There was an additional visit to the Rattray Community Garden, a volunteer-led growing initiative organised by Blairgowrie and Rattray Development Trust.

As well as Committee members, participants included third sector organisations, service users, and council officers.

### Issues raised

#### Healthcare

Wisecraft provides a range of activities, for example, joinery, art and walking, for people aged 16 and over. Participation is based on referral to the service, which can include self-referral.

The Committee heard from users of the service who said they had benefitted from the service – they reported improvements to their mental health and building confidence in themselves.

A major barrier to accessing healthcare is the distance to the service and extra costs. For example, it can be hard to attend a 9am hospital appointment if it is a long distance, with additional costs if you choose to stay overnight.

The Committee also heard about challenges in providing home care services to people living in remote areas.

#### Transport

A common theme across rural areas is the lack of affordable and reliable transport services. This can increase inequalities in accessing health and social care services.

Kinloch Rannoch has a Community Taxi service, which is run by volunteers. The Community Taxi provides a flexible service as it can be used for accessing services and social activities.

One participant used the term 'ruralised' to describe an isolated person living in a rural area - someone who finds it daunting to make trips to less rural places.

## **Food Security**

The Committee heard about the BARI food project, which reduces 70 tonnes of waste a year. It has a food store which is open to everyone, however the unpredictability of its products means that it could not be relied on for doing a family shop. It is better for single people who need a few things.

There was agreement that for many, the stigma of food insecurity remains a barrier in accessing food support. That is why the food store is made as welcoming as possible, a place for people to connect with others.

There was also discussion about the need to teach cooking skills and the benefits of using locally sources healthy food.

## **Housing and Fuel Poverty**

The Committee heard about the lack of affordable housing in rural areas, which can deter people from taking up jobs in the area.

There was discussion about fuel poverty. One participant talked of the need for a nationwide survey to identify those living in fuel poverty. There are four factors that identify fuel poverty – household income, energy prices, energy efficiency of the home and how energy is used in the home (i.e. behaviours).

Rurality exacerbates fuel poverty as many of the homes are old properties. Retrofitting older homes in Scotland is a major financial challenge for most households. Even though there are grants and loans available to help affordability is still an issue. New build homes often fail on efficiency due to the fabric of the building and poor insulation. The Committee heard that we need to build homes that are properly insulated and require minimum heating in order to avoid creating multiple issues for future generations.

## **Other issues – financial pressures**

Several participants spoke about the additional financial pressures for those living in rural areas. While these may be similar to financial pressures face by people across Scotland, they can be felt more keenly in rural areas. For example:

- Jobs can be seasonal and low-paid
- There is a lack of affordable and available childcare
- The cost of groceries can be higher in rural areas as there is a reliance on smaller shops rather than big supermarkets.
- There can be pockets of deprivation hidden in affluent areas, and data challenges make it difficult to reach those who may be 'hidden'.