

Aberdeenshire Council: Supplementary written evidence following the meeting on 23 September 2026

Supplementary Written Evidence: The Financial Impact of Rurality on Service Delivery in Aberdeenshire

1. Purpose

This submission provides supporting evidence for the assertion made during oral evidence that rurality materially affects the cost and capacity of service delivery in Aberdeenshire.

The evidence covers education and school transport, Home Care, roads and winter maintenance. It does not suggest that every rural service costs more or seek to calculate a single rural premium. It shows how sparsity, distance and infrastructure scale create pressures that population-based comparisons can conceal.

2. Summary of evidence

Service area	Evidence of rural cost pressure
Education	Estimated 2026/27 school costs vary substantially: primary schools range from approximately £5,000 to more than £25,000 per pupil, while academies range from approximately £7,300 to £14,900 per pupil.
School transport	Total school-related transport costs reach £5,064 per pupil at Strathdon Primary, while they are negligible at several large town-based schools. The figures include transport to and from school, T&S and in-year transportation.
Home Care	Current service analysis shows 48,363 travel hours alongside 193,909 direct care hours, equivalent to around 25 travel hours for every 100 direct care hours delivered.
Wider Care at Home	52.5% of Aberdeenshire's population lives in defined rural or remote categories, compared with 16.76% across Scotland. Aberdeenshire currently applies a 4% enhanced rural provider rate, which could represent an annual cost of approximately £452,000, as partial mitigation of rural delivery costs.
Roads	Aberdeenshire maintains more than 5,500 kilometres of roads, around 1,400 bridges, 76,000 drainage gullies and 48,000 streetlights.
Winter maintenance	Published Aberdeenshire expenditure ranges from approximately £4 million to £9 million, depending on winter severity. Aberdeen City's planned expenditure for 2025/26 was £1.57 million, although the figures are not directly comparable in all respects.

The common issue is the additional travel, locations, assets and workforce capacity needed to serve dispersed communities.

Evidence basis: the 2023/24 national primary and secondary comparisons use the Scottish Government-published source cited. The primary and academy school-level figures are Aberdeenshire Council 2026/27 management estimates from Book 1.xlsx and show estimated net cost per pupil. School transport figures cover all school-related transportation, including travel to and from school, T&S and in-year transportation. These costs are presented separately and are not added to school net costs. Home Care figures are recorded activity from Aberdeenshire management information, not annual totals.

3. Education and school transport

3.1 National comparison

Scottish Government-published figures for 2023/24 show that Aberdeenshire was not an average-spending outlier in either sector. Expenditure was £7,028 per primary pupil—£82, or 1.2%, below Glasgow—and £9,099 per secondary pupil—£244, or 2.6%, below Glasgow. Both figures were within the range of the three city authorities.

Authority	2023/24 Scottish Government-published expenditure per primary pupil
City of Edinburgh	£6,676
Aberdeen City	£6,953
Aberdeenshire	£7,028
Glasgow City	£7,110

Source: Scottish Government, Freedom of Information response 202400439341, local authority primary expenditure per pupil, 2023/24. The published comparison was based on unvalidated local authority returns and was incomplete at the point of publication; it is therefore indicative rather than a definitive national benchmark.

Authority	2023/24 Scottish Government-published expenditure per secondary pupil
City of Edinburgh	£8,524
Aberdeen City	£8,838
Aberdeenshire	£9,099
Glasgow City	£9,343

Source: Scottish Government, Freedom of Information response 202400439341, local authority secondary expenditure per pupil, 2023/24. The published comparison was based on unvalidated local authority returns and was incomplete at the point of publication; it is therefore indicative rather than a definitive national benchmark.

For secondary education, Aberdeenshire was £261 per pupil, or 3.0%, above Aberdeen City and £575, or 6.7%, above Edinburgh, but £244, or 2.6%, below Glasgow.

3.2 Estimated 2026/27 school-level variation

School	Type	Roll	Estimated net cost per pupil
Arduthie Primary	Primary	410	£5,046
Strathdon Primary	Primary	14	£25,130
Peterhead Academy	Academy	1,388	£7,343
Turriff Academy	Academy	598	£9,945

Alford Academy	Academy	669	£14,852
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Source: Aberdeenshire Council 2026/27 management estimates in Book 1.xlsx, including estimated school rolls and net running cost per pupil. The table presents selected primary and academy examples to illustrate variation; it is not an authority-wide average.

The 2026/27 estimates show material variation within both sectors. Primary examples range from £5,046 to £25,130 per pupil, while academy examples range from £7,343 at Peterhead Academy to £14,852 at Alford Academy. Smaller rolls and rural transport requirements are important contributors, although the figures also reflect each school's staffing, premises, income and service profile.

School-estate changes must also consider educational benefit, travel, alternative capacity, community impact and the statutory process for rural school closures. The authority-wide average therefore conceals substantial local variation.

3.3 School transport

School transport provides a more direct measure of the effect of distance and sparsity.

School	All school-related transport cost per pupil
Strathdon Primary	£5,064
Kennethmont Primary	£4,012
Towie Primary	£3,825
Arduthie Primary	£1
Elrick Primary	£2
Uryside Primary	£10

Source: Aberdeenshire Council management information, total school-related transport cost per pupil. The figures include transport to and from school, T&S and in-year transportation, and are shown separately from school net costs.

The figures cover all school-related transportation, including travel to and from school, T&S and in-year transportation. These are all transportation costs associated with supporting rural schools and are therefore relevant to the assessment of rural cost pressure. In the most rural locations, total transport costs can exceed £3,000 per pupil and reach £5,064; in larger settlements they can be negligible. The figures are presented separately from school net costs and are not added to them.

4. Home Care and Health & Social Care

4.1 Travel and service capacity

Travel is a direct call on Home Care capacity: paid time spent reaching dispersed clients cannot also be used to provide care.

For the period covered by the Council's current in-house Home Care analysis, the recorded activity is:

Measure	Hours
Direct care hours	193,909
Travel hours	48,363

Source: Aberdeenshire Council management information, in-house Home Care activity analysis. Figures are recorded activity and are not presented as annual totals.

For every 100 hours of direct care delivered, approximately 25 additional hours are recorded as travel between clients.

4.2 Scale of rural exposure

Further Aberdeenshire analysis identifies:

- 52.5% of Aberdeenshire's population lives in rural or remote categories, compared with 16.76% across Scotland;
- the 4% enhanced rural provider rate could represent an annual cost of approximately £452,000; and
- average weekly Care at Home costs are £598.23 in the enhanced-rate area, compared with £469.59 elsewhere, although differences in client need and package composition may also contribute.

The clearest directly identifiable rural cost is the 4% enhanced provider rate, which could represent an annual cost of approximately £452,000. The wider figures are drawn from management reports at particular points in time and may vary slightly depending on the reporting date. They support the existence of rural pressure but are not presented as wholly attributable to rurality or as a like-for-like efficiency comparison.

Where provision cannot be secured, the result can be unmet need, delayed discharge, more expensive delivery routes and reduced workforce capacity. The analysis records remote-marked unmet need rising from 31 clients requiring 237.5 hours a week to 77 clients requiring 668.5 hours a week; rural addresses accounted for an average 42.77% of delayed-discharge Care at Home hours during the period analysed in 2026.

Source: Aberdeenshire Council management information, rural and remote population analysis, enhanced provider rate, Care at Home package costs, unmet need and delayed-discharge activity.

Aberdeenshire is contributing to work with other rural authorities and COSLA to improve national evidence on travel, workforce availability, unmet need and delayed discharge in rural Home Care and wider Health and Social Care.

5. Roads and winter maintenance

Aberdeenshire is responsible for more than 5,500 kilometres of roads, around 1,400 bridges, 1,500 kilometres of footways, 76,000 drainage gullies and 48,000 streetlights. Transport Scotland reports that around 10% of Scotland's road network lies within Aberdeenshire.

5.1 Network burden per resident

Using the published network and population figures previously considered, the indicative comparison is:

Authority	Approximate road kilometres per 1,000 residents
Aberdeenshire	20.8
Aberdeen City	5.3
City of Edinburgh	3.7
Glasgow City	3.0

Sources and methodology: Transport Scotland, Scottish Transport Statistics, Road Network chapters for 2022 and 2023; published population data. Kilometres per 1,000 residents are indicative calculations derived from the published road-length and population figures.

These are calculations derived from published road-length and population data, not a single published performance indicator. They show that Aberdeenshire maintains about four times more road per resident than Aberdeen City, five to six times more than Edinburgh and around seven times more than Glasgow.

Population alone therefore understates the physical network that must be inspected, maintained and renewed for each resident.

5.2 Winter maintenance

Aberdeenshire is responsible for a road network of more than 5,500 kilometres. Winter maintenance is delivered on a risk-based basis, with approximately 1,800 kilometres—around 30% of the network—included in the priority treatment network. Expenditure ranges from approximately £4 million to £9 million depending on winter severity; it does not represent routine treatment of the full 5,500-kilometre network.

Aberdeen City's Winter Maintenance Plan for 2025/26 anticipated expenditure of £1.57 million, with additional spending if conditions were more severe.

Sources: Aberdeenshire Council, Winter Maintenance—Resources and Limitations; Aberdeen City Council, Winter Maintenance Plan 2025/26.

The figures are not directly comparable: Aberdeenshire's is a range and Aberdeen City's is a plan for one year, while weather, accounting and service standards also differ. Authorities generally use risk-based winter treatment priorities rather than treating every road in their networks. The comparison nevertheless illustrates the operational scale required across Aberdeenshire's larger network and geography.

6. Conclusion

The evidence shows a consistent pattern. Rurality creates measurable pressure through fixed provision spread across small populations, paid time absorbed by travel, larger transport and infrastructure networks per resident, and the operational complexity of maintaining access and resilience across dispersed communities.

- 2026/27 estimated costs ranging from around £5,000 to more than £25,000 per primary pupil and from around £7,300 to £14,900 per academy pupil in the examples shown;

- total school-related transport costs, including travel to and from school, T&S and in-year transportation, reaching £5,064 per pupil;
- 48,363 Home Care travel hours, equivalent to around 25 travel hours for every 100 direct care hours delivered;
- a potential annual cost of approximately £452,000 for the current 4% enhanced rural care-provider rate, which represents only partial mitigation;
- more than 5,500 kilometres of roads, approximately 1,400 bridges, 76,000 gullies and 48,000 streetlights; and
- winter maintenance costs ranging from approximately £4 million to £9 million, depending on conditions.

These figures should not be added together as a single rural-premium total. They are different measures of cost, capacity and infrastructure burden. Taken together, they demonstrate that population alone does not capture the practical requirements of delivering services across a large rural area.

The evidence supports the assertion made during oral evidence: rurality has a material impact on the cost, capacity and practical delivery of council services in Aberdeenshire.

7. Sources

Scottish Government. *Freedom of Information response 202400439341: local authority primary expenditure per pupil, 2023/24*. [Scottish Government publication](#).

Transport Scotland. *Scottish Transport Statistics 2023, Chapter 4: Road Network*. [Transport Scotland publication](#).

Transport Scotland. *Scottish Transport Statistics 2022, Chapter 4: Road Network*. [Transport Scotland publication](#).

Aberdeenshire Council. *Winter Maintenance: Resources and Limitations*. [Aberdeenshire Council publication](#).

Aberdeen City Council. *Winter Maintenance Plan 2025/26*. [Aberdeen City Council publication](#).

Aberdeenshire Council management information: primary school rolls and net cost per pupil; school transport cost per pupil; in-house Home Care activity; rural and remote population analysis; enhanced provider rate; Care at Home package costs; unmet need; and delayed-discharge activity.