

The Rural Facilities Monitor is an annual publication which tracks changes in the provision of services in rural areas of Aberdeenshire. Only those settlements with populations of less than 5,000 are classed as rural. Therefore Fraserburgh, Banff/Macduff, Peterhead, Ellon, Inverurie, Westhill, Banchory, Portlethen and Stonehaven are not included.

During 2008, the number of rural facilities in Aberdeenshire has fallen across most areas. Service provision in each settlement varies annually and is dependent on local as well as national factors. Closures may be temporary or permanent; for example shops, hotels and post offices may close for refurbishment one year and re-open the next so a degree of fluctuation is therefore inevitable. Because of these temporary fluctuations the monitor also analyses service changes since 1981, allowing a longer term trend to be obtained.

Since monitoring began in 1981, there has been a significant decline in the network of facilities in rural Aberdeenshire, particularly banks (-69%), petrol stations (-68%) and police stations (-59%). There has also been a drop in the number of rural post offices from 138 in 1981 to 83 in 2008 (-40%). This includes the four post offices closed in 2008 as a result of the Post Office Ltd Network Change Programme in which approximately 2,500 post offices were closed across the UK.

The large decline in some services can be attributed to widespread changes in transportation and communications, which have occurred since 1981. Between 1981 and 2001 the percentage of households with one or more cars increased from 72 to 82. One result of these changes has been that people tend to travel further to larger service centres and supermarkets for goods. Transportation initiatives across Aberdeenshire which make it easier for people to travel to larger centres, have strengthened this trend. Consumer choice has also been greatly increased, particularly in rural areas, by the growth of internet shopping. In 2007 Aberdeenshire became one of the first local authority areas in the UK to have more than half of its homes and businesses linked to broadband internet. In 2008 this figure was 57% and it can be expected to increase further over time.

The combined effect of these factors has been to put pressure on independent, local businesses, while most consumers have benefited from increased access to services and consequently more competitive prices. However, some sectors of the population, including the elderly, are typically less likely to have use of a car, or access to the internet. Therefore as the population in Aberdeenshire ages, local service provision could become an increasingly important issue.

Changes in Key Services

While many services are important in rural areas, some are seen as more critical in terms of their impact on quality of life and convenience and in maintaining the viability of self-contained, rural communities. These are shops, post offices, petrol stations, primary schools and doctors' surgeries. An analysis of change in the provision of each of these key facilities is presented below, broken down into the six administrative areas of Aberdeenshire.

Shops

Since 1981, there has been a reduction of 197 shops, a fall of 24%. This has been particularly severe in Banff and Buchan (-40%), Buchan (-33%) and Kincardine and Mearns (-33%). In addition there was a net decrease (-6) in the number of shops in Aberdeenshire over the course of 2008, with 24 shops opening and 30 closing. Four of the six areas experienced a net loss in shops.

Administrative Area	1981	2007	2008	Change 07/08	Change 81/08
Banff and Buchan	111	70	67	-3	-44
Buchan	123	84	83	-1	-40
Formartine	150	120	122	2	-28
Garioch	84	71	69	-2	-15
Marr	264	227	225	-2	-39
Kincardine and Mearns	94	63	63	0	-31
Aberdeenshire	826	635	629	-6	-197

In Formartine there was a net gain of 2 shops, whilst in Kincardine and Mearns the number of shops remained unchanged. Turriff, Laurencekirk and Huntly saw the most shop closures, but in Huntly this was nearly balanced by shop openings (giving a net loss of one shop). It should also be noted that where there have been shop openings, this is often where existing shop units have been re-opened as opposed to when a completely new shop opens in the settlement.

The decline in rural shops is likely to remain a problem as increasingly large retail developments are choosing to locate in the existing larger service towns, again threatening the survival of shops in smaller settlements. In addition, as access to the internet and broadband increases, rural shops may also be negatively affected by the rising trend in online retailing.

Post Offices

There were 55 fewer post offices in 2008 than in 1981, a fall of 40%. The largest percentage losses over this period were in Garioch (-55%) and Banff and Buchan (-50%). In 2008 Post Office Ltd implemented its Network Change Programme. Four post offices were closed in Aberdeenshire; 2 in Banff and Buchan, 1 in Buchan and 1 in Marr.

A further 18 post offices saw a decrease in opening hours. Only Garioch was unaffected by service loss in 2008. However, as noted above, it remains the area which has experienced the greatest overall loss since 1981.

Administrative Area	1981	2007	2008	Change 07/08	Change 81/08
Banff and Buchan	20	12	10	-2	-10
Buchan	19	17	16	-1	-3
Formartine	20	14	14	0	-6
Garioch	22	10	10	0	-12
Marr	36	20	19	-1	-17
Kincardine and Mearns	21	14	14	0	-7
Aberdeenshire	138	87	83	-4	-55

As part of the Network Change Programme three post offices were expected to show an increase in opening hours, 1 in Buchan and 2 in Formartine. Difficulties in the proposed partnership arrangement in Cuminestown meant that a mobile post office service was introduced towards the end of the year. This may be a temporary measure only. Overall, the effect of the Network Change Programme has been to substantially reduce the Post Office service in rural Aberdeenshire.

Petrol Stations

Administrative Area	1981	2007	2008	Change 07/08	Change 81/08
Banff and Buchan	16	7	7	0	-9
Buchan	17	6	5	-1	-12
Formartine	22	6	6	0	-16
Garioch	19	4	3	-1	-16
Marr	34	16	15	-1	-19
Kincardine and Mearns	12	3	2	-1	-10
Aberdeenshire	120	42	38	-4	-82

The number of petrol stations in Aberdeenshire continues to fall with a further 4 closures in 2008. Petrol stations have shown the largest percentage decline of the five key facilities monitored with a reduction of 82 since 1981, a 68% fall. This has been most severe in Garioch (-84%) and Kincardine and Mearns (-83%).

Declining incomes from petrol retailing, rising storage costs and stricter trading regulations combined with the potential profits to be made by selling the land for other uses such as housing development, are key to closures across all areas. In addition, competition from cheaper petrol prices is likely to be a significant factor in areas close to Aberdeen City and local supermarkets.

Primary Schools

The number of primary schools in rural Aberdeenshire has fallen by 12 since 1981, a drop of 8.8%. Garioch is the only area to have not lost any over the period while Banff and Buchan, Formartine, and Kincardine and Mearns lost two each and Marr lost five. There have been no changes to the total number of primary schools since 2005.

Administrative Area	1981	2007	2008	Change 07/08	Change 81/08
Banff and Buchan	16	14	14	0	-2
Buchan	20	19	19	0	-1
Formartine	24	22	22	0	-2
Garioch	19	19	19	0	0
Marr	36	31	31	0	-5
Kincardine and Mearns	21	19	19	0	-2
Aberdeenshire	136	124	124	0	-12

Note: In 1984, two junior secondary schools closed; New Pitsligo and St Johns, and Rosehearty. However, these schools were not strictly considered secondary schools and they are excluded from the analysis. Meldrum Academy, a new secondary school, opened in 2002.

Doctors' Surgeries

Between 1981 and 2008 only 1 GP surgery closed. This illustrates how important GP surgeries have been in rural Aberdeenshire as the population has grown and aged, a trend also evident in the rest of Scotland.

Changes in Key Facilities by Area

Administrative Area	Change 07/08	Change 81/08
Banff and Buchan	-4	-65
Buchan	-3	-56
Formartine	2	-52
Garioch	-3	-43
Marr	-4	-80
Kincardine and Mearns	-1	-50

All areas have seen losses in key facilities of between 21% and 39% since 1981. The largest declines were in Banff and Buchan (-39%) and Kincardine and Mearns (-34%).

In 2008, Formartine experienced a net gain in the number of key facilities (shops) whilst every other area experienced a net loss.

Changes in Other Facilities

Facility	1981	2007	2008	Change 07/08	Change 81/08
Secondary School	9	8	8	0	-1
Bank	72	23	22	-1	-50
Chemist	26	32	32	0	6
Police	29	12	12	0	-17
Fire	15	15	15	0	0
Hall	129	118	117	-1	-12
Library	22	26	26	0	4
Church	188	159	160	1	-28
MOT Garage	80	73	73	0	-7
Licensed Premises	221	196	190	-6	-31
Smithy	*	18	19	1	*

Apart from the five key facilities, changes in eleven other important rural facilities are monitored. Since 1981, the most dramatic loss of service has been in the number of banks, which fell by 69% over the period. There has also been a large drop in the number of police stations.

Over 2008 there were also some small changes in the number of banks, chemists, halls and churches. The biggest change was seen in licensed premises (hotels and pubs) where there was a net loss of 6 establishments. The number of licensed premises has declined by 14% since 1981.

Change in Key Rural Facilities 1981-2008, Aberdeenshire's Administrative Areas

Facility	Banff and Buchan Area							Buchan Area						
	1981	2007	2008	07/08	%07/08	81/08	%81/08	1981	2007	2008	07/08	%07/08	81/08	%81/08
Shop	111	70	67	-3	-4%	-44	-40%	123	84	83	-1	-5%	-40	-33%
Primary School	16	14	14	0	0%	-2	-13%	20	19	19	0	0%	-1	-5%
Post Office	20	12	10	-2	-17%	-10	-50%	19	17	16	-1	-6%	-3	-16%
Petrol Station	16	7	7	0	0%	-9	-56%	17	6	5	-1	-17%	-12	-71%
Doctors' Surgery	4	4	4	0	0%	0	0%	10	10	10	0	0%	0	0%
TOTAL	167	107	102	-5	-5%	-65	-39%	189	136	133	-3	2%	-56	-30%
	<i>Excludes Fraserburgh, Banff and Macduff</i>							<i>Excludes Peterhead</i>						

Facility	Formartine Area							Garioch Area						
	1981	2007	2008	07/08	%07/08	81/08	%81/08	1981	2007	2008	07/08	%07/08	81/08	%81/08
Shop	150	120	122	2	2%	-28	-19%	84	71	69	-2	-3%	-15	-18%
Primary School	24	22	22	0	0%	-2	-8%	19	19	19	0	0%	0	0%
Post Office	20	14	14	0	0%	-6	-30%	22	10	10	0	0%	-12	-55%
Petrol Station	22	6	6	0	0%	-16	-73%	19	4	3	-1	-25%	-16	-84%
Doctors' Surgery	8	8	8	0	0%	0	0%	4	4	4	0	0%	0	0%
TOTAL	224	170	172	2	1%	-52	-23%	148	108	105	-3	-3%	-43	-29%
	<i>Excludes Ellon</i>							<i>Excludes Inverurie and Westhill</i>						

Facility	Marr Area							Kincardine and Mearns Area						
	1981	2007	2008	07/08	%07/08	81/08	%81/08	1981	2007	2008	07/08	%07/08	81/08	%81/08
Shop	264	227	225	-2	-1%	-39	-15%	94	63	63	0	0%	-31	-33%
Primary School	36	31	31	0	0%	-5	-14%	21	19	19	0	0%	-2	-10%
Post Office	36	20	19	-1	-5%	-17	-47%	21	14	14	0	0%	-7	-33%
Petrol Station	34	16	15	-1	-6%	-19	-56%	12	3	2	-1	-33%	-10	-83%
Doctors' Surgery	10	10	10	0	0%	0	0%	5	4	4	0	0%	-1	-20%
TOTAL	380	304	300	-4	-1%	-80	-21%	153	103	102	-1	-1%	-51	-33%
	<i>Excludes Banchory</i>							<i>Excludes Stonehaven and Portlethen</i>						

Settlements with population > 5,000 have been excluded from analysis

Sources include: Grampian Valuation Joint Board (Aberdeenshire Valuation Roll 2008); NHS Grampian (surgery list 2008).

The publishers assume no responsibility for errors, omissions or inaccuracies of source statistics.