

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

During 2009, the number of rural facilities in Aberdeenshire has fallen across all areas. Service provision in settlements can vary annually, dependent upon 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, significant decline has occurred across the network of facilities in rural Aberdeenshire, particularly with banks (-69%), petrol stations (-68%) and post offices (-57%).

The large decline in some facilities can be attributed to widespread changes in access and communications that have occurred since 1981 across the country.

For example, car ownership, which has increased in Aberdeenshire from 72% of households with one or more cars in 1981 to 82% in 2001, and transport initiatives across Aberdeenshire, have made it easier to travel to larger centres. As a result people tend to travel to larger service centres and to supermarkets for goods. In addition, 65% of Aberdeenshire households now have access to the internet: this has opened the market to a much wider range of goods and services for all consumers, particularly those in rural areas.

This has led to most consumers benefiting from increased access to services at more competitive prices, but at the expense of small, often independent, local businesses and services. However, some sectors of the population in particular the elderly, are typically less likely to have use of a car, or access to the internet. Therefore, as the population of Aberdeenshire ages, local service provision could become an increasingly important issue.

Although most of the facilities in rural areas have decreased dramatically in numbers, primary schools in Aberdeenshire have remained relatively unchanged over the 28 year period, with only a 10% decrease. This is due to their being vital to

remote communities and government funded, and therefore not so exposed to economic factors. Many of these school buildings however, have changed little in this period and are outdated and, in the larger settlements, over subscribed.

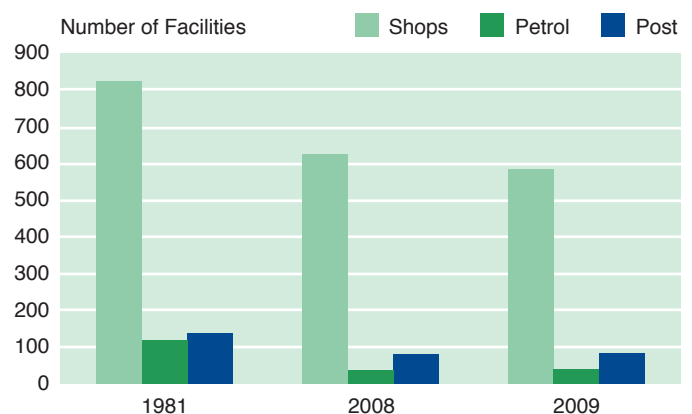
The Council's 21st Century School Improvement programme aims to replace or upgrade existing schools in order to meet future roll projections and deliver education fit for the 21st Century. It has been running since 2000 and has seen the building of new facilities at Meldrum School and Banff Primary School, and new builds at Strathburn and Port Errol Schools.

Future new builds will include Drumoak, Logie Durno and Rathen Schools. Many secondary schools too are in need of improvement. New secondary schools at Ellon and Laurencekirk will be built over the next five years, to replace the ageing schools.

Changes in Key Facilities

While many facilities are important in rural areas, some are seen as more critical than others for service provision and in terms of their impact on quality of life and convenience and in maintaining the viability of self-contained, rural communities. These are the shops, petrol stations, post offices, primary schools and doctor's 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.

Change in Three Key Facilities (Shops, Petrol Stations and Post Offices) from 1981 to 2008 / 2009.



Shops

Since 1981, there has been a reduction of 243 in the number of shops, a fall of 29%. The areas of Banff & Buchan (-48%), Buchan (-36%) and Kincardine & Mearns (-39%) have seen the most dramatic decreases in shops. In addition there was a net decrease (-46) in the number of shops in Aberdeenshire over the course of 2009. All six Areas experienced a net loss in shops.

Administrative Area	1981	2008	2009	Change 08/09	Change 81/09
Banff and Buchan	111	67	58	-9	-53
Buchan	123	83	79	-4	-44
Formartine	150	122	114	-8	-36
Garioch	84	69	64	-5	-20
Marr	264	225	211	-14	-53
Kincardine and Mearns	94	63	57	-6	-37
Aberdeenshire	826	629	583	-46	-243

The overall decline in shops is accentuated as many of the shops which opened were in existing larger service centres (eg. Huntly, Alford). Some of the closures were in smaller settlements, where this was the only shop (or one of two) serving the community (eg. Durno, Whiterashes). The loss of just one shop in such circumstances can have a great impact. 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. There has been an increase in the number of supermarkets in small settlements over the last year, with a new Tesco in Newtonhill and a large increase in Co-op owned stores in rural settlements such as Pitmedden and Fyvie.

These new developments will lead to the closure of more small settlement shops due to them not being able to compete. In addition, as access to the internet increases, rural shops may also be negatively affected by the rising trend in online retailing.

Petrol Stations

Petrol stations have shown the largest proportional 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 & Mearns (-83%). There was, however, no change in the number of petrol stations from 2008 to 2009.

Administrative Area	1981	2008	2009	Change 08/09	Change 81/09
Banff and Buchan	16	7	7	0	-9
Buchan	17	5	5	0	-12
Formartine	22	6	6	0	-16
Garioch	19	3	3	0	-16
Marr	34	15	15	0	-19
Kincardine and Mearns	12	2	2	0	-10
Aberdeenshire	120	38	38	0	-82

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.

The 23rd of March 2010 issue of the Scotsman newspaper covered this subject, stating that despite a small increase in Scotland overall, the number of filling stations has hit a 'record low'. The Energy Institute has stated that each forecourt has to now, on average, supply 3,795 vehicles. This number will continue to rise due to the increase in car ownership and continued closure of petrol stations. This has led to concerns about the 'viability and sustainability' of rural communities.

Post Offices

There were 79 fewer post offices in 2009 than in 1981, a fall of 57%. The largest percentage losses over this period were in Marr (-69%) and Banff & Buchan (-70%). Over the last year there have been a total of 24 closures throughout Aberdeenshire, a 29% decrease. This is due to the Post Office Ltd Network Change Programme which was first introduced in 2007 in a bid to minimise losses for Post Office Ltd which in 2006/07 saw losses of around £4million per week.

Administrative Area	1981	2008	2009	Change 08/09	Change 81/09
Banff and Buchan	20	10	6	-4	-14
Buchan	19	16	11	-5	-8
Formartine	20	14	13	-1	-7
Garioch	22	10	8	-2	-14
Marr	36	19	11	-8	-25
Kincardine and Mearns	21	14	10	-4	-11
Aberdeenshire	138	83	59	-24	-79

During the summer of 2008 many post offices, mainly in rural areas, were earmarked for closures based on a set of access criteria. Post Office Ltd maintain, however that in any postcode district, 95% of the population must be within 6 miles of a branch. In addition, areas that are very remote and that currently do not fit the criteria may see additional services via mobile operations.

Primary Schools

The number of primary schools in rural Aberdeenshire has fallen by 14 since 1981, a drop of 10%. Garioch is the only Area to have not lost any over the period. Buchan lost 1, Formartine has lost 2, Banff & Buchan and Kincardine & Mearns lost 3 each and Marr lost 5. This has resulted in a net loss of 14 schools, despite there being several new schools built around Aberdeenshire: most of these were replacements for older schools. The new Lairhillock school for example replaced 2 primary schools - Netherley and Maryculter primary schools - resulting in a net loss of one school in Kincardine & Mearns from 2008 to 2009. New Aberdour School, in Banff & Buchan, closed because of a falling school roll.

Administrative Area	1981	2008	2009	Change 08/09	Change 81/09
Banff and Buchan	16	14	13	-1	-3
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	18	-1	-3
Aberdeenshire	136	124	122	-2	-14

Doctors' Surgeries

Between 1981 and 2009 only 2 GP surgeries closed. This illustrates how important GP surgeries have been in rural Aberdeenshire as the population has risen and aged, a trend also evident in the rest of Scotland.

Administrative Area	1981	2008	2009	Change 08/09	Change 81/09
Banff and Buchan	4	4	4	0	0
Buchan	10	10	10	0	0
Formartine	8	8	8	0	0
Garioch	4	4	4	0	0
Marr	10	10	10	0	0
Kincardine and Mearns	5	3	3	0	-2
Aberdeenshire	41	39	39	0	-2

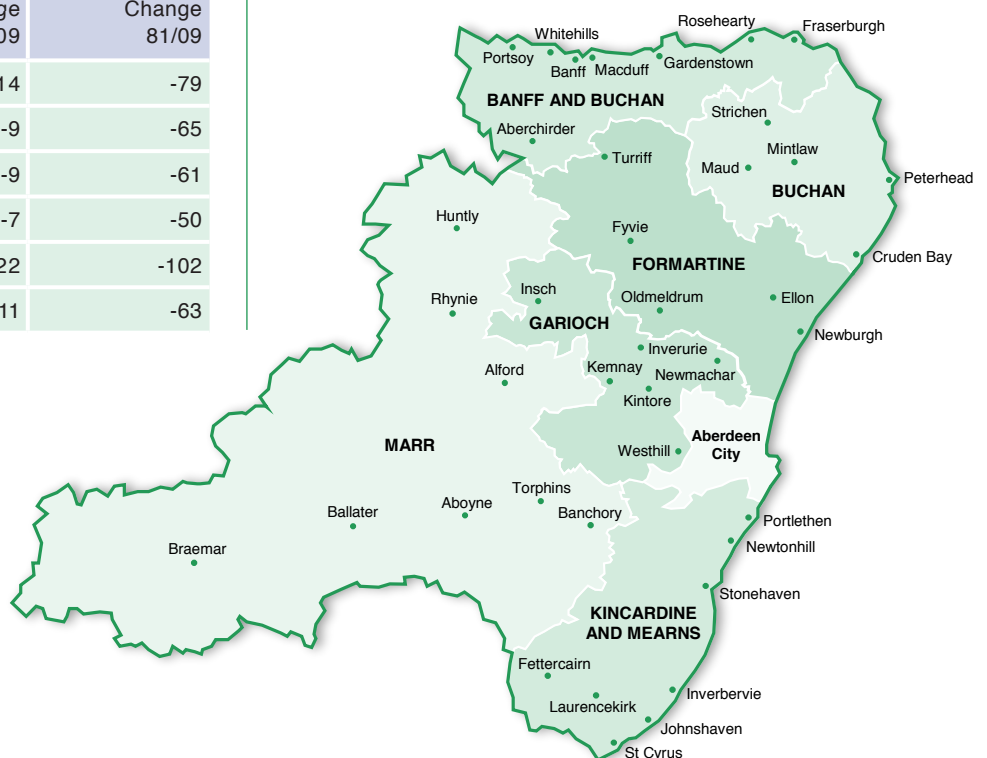
Changes in Key Facilities by Area

All Areas have seen significant losses in key facilities, of between 27% and 47% since 1981. The largest declines have been in Banff & Buchan (-47%) and Kincardine & Mearns (-35%).

Administrative Area	Change 08/09	Change 81/09
Banff and Buchan	-14	-79
Buchan	-9	-65
Formartine	-9	-61
Garioch	-7	-50
Marr	-22	-102
Kincardine and Mearns	-11	-63

Changes in Other Facilities

Map - Aberdeenshire's Administrative Areas



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 2009 there were some small changes in the numbers of banks, chemists, halls and churches. The biggest change was seen in licensed premises (hotels and pubs) where there was a net loss of 17 establishments. The number of licensed premises has declined by 22% since 1981.

Facility	1981	2008	2009	Change 08/09	Change 81/09
Secondary School	9	8	8	0	-1
Bank	72	22	22	0	-50
Chemist	26	32	32	0	6
Police	29	12	14	2	-15
Fire	15	15	15	0	0
Hall	129	117	111	-6	-17
Library	22	26	28	2	6
Church	188	160	147	-13	-41
MOT Garage	80	74	73	-1	-7
Licensed Premises	221	190	173	-17	-48
Smithy	*	19	11	-8	*

Note: Since 1981, 2 secondary schools have closed, these were; New Pitsligo and St Johns and Rosehearty both closing in 1984. However, these schools were junior secondary schools and therefore not strictly considered secondaries. When these 2 schools are excluded from the analysis, overall there is a net increase of 1: Meldrum Academy opened in 2002.

Change in Key Rural Facilities 1981-2009, Aberdeenshire's Administrative Areas

Facility	Banff and Buchan Summary							Buchan Summary						
	1981	2008	2009	08/09	%08/09	81/09	%81/09	1981	2008	2009	08/09	%08/09	81/09	%81/09
Shop	111	67	58	-9	-13%	-53	-48%	123	83	79	-4	-5%	-44	-36%
Primary School	16	14	13	-1	-7%	-3	-13%	20	19	19	0	0%	-1	-5%
Post Office	20	10	6	-4	-40%	-14	-70%	19	16	11	-5	-31%	-8	-42%
Petrol Station	16	7	7	0	0%	-9	-56%	17	5	5	0	0%	-12	-71%
Doctors' Surgery	4	4	4	0	0%	0	0%	10	10	10	0	0%	0	0%
Total	167	102	88	-14	-14%	-79	-47%	189	133	124	-9	-7%	-65	-34%
	<i>Excludes Fraserburgh, Banff and Macduff</i>							<i>Excludes Peterhead</i>						

Facility	Formartine Summary							Garioch Summary						
	1981	2008	2009	08/09	%08/09	81/09	%81/09	1981	2008	2009	08/09	%08/09	81/09	%81/09
Shop	150	122	114	-8	-7%	-36	-24%	84	69	64	-5	-7%	-20	-24%
Primary School	24	22	22	0	0%	-2	-8%	19	19	19	0	0%	0	0%
Post Office	20	14	13	-1	-7%	-7	-35%	22	10	8	-2	-20%	-14	-64%
Petrol Station	22	6	6	0	0%	-16	-73%	19	3	3	0	0%	-16	-84%
Doctors' Surgery	8	8	8	0	0%	0	0%	4	4	4	0	0%	0	0%
Total	224	172	163	-9	-5%	-61	-27%	148	105	98	-7	-7%	-49	-33%
	<i>Excludes Ellon</i>							<i>Excludes Inverurie and Westhill</i>						

Facility	Marr Summary							Kincardine and Mearns Summary						
	1981	2008	2009	08/09	%08/09	81/09	%81/09	1981	2008	2009	08/09	%08/09	81/09	%81/09
Shop	264	225	211	-14	-6%	-53	-20%	94	63	57	-6	-10%	-37	-39%
Primary School	36	31	31	0	0%	-5	-14%	21	19	18	-1	-5%	-3	-14%
Post Office	36	19	11	-8	-42%	-25	-69%	21	14	10	-4	-29%	-11	-52%
Petrol Station	34	15	15	0	0%	-19	-56%	12	2	2	0	0%	-10	-83%
Doctors' Surgery	10	10	10	0	0%	0	0%	5	3	3	0	0%	-2	-40%
Total	380	300	278	-22	-6%	-102	-27%	153	101	90	-11	-7%	-63	-41%
	<i>Excludes Banchory</i>							<i>Excludes Stonehaven and Portlethen</i>						

Settlements with population greater than 5,000 have been excluded from analysis.

Sources include: Grampian Valuation Joint Board (Aberdeenshire Valuation Roll 2009); NHS Grampian (surgery list 2009).
The publishers assume no responsibility for errors, omissions or inaccuracies of source statistics.