

# Sustainable Rural Communities - full policy framework

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Sustainable Rural Communities: Consultation  
information for the Review of the Housing Executive's  
Rural Housing Policy

**Draft Proposals for Public Consultation  
January 2016**

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A Consultation Response Template has been provided on the Housing Executive website at <http://www.nihe.gov.uk/index/corporate/consultation.htm> to help shape your response to us. Please provide any additional comments you may have on the issues highlighted within this document.

Responses to the consultation should be forwarded to:

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To request a hard copy or an alternative format of the consultation papers please write or e-mail as detailed above.

Please note that the deadline for responses to this consultation is **Monday 21st March 2016, 5:00pm**. All responses should be received by then to ensure they can be fully considered.

## 1.0 Chairman's Foreword

- 1.1 The Northern Ireland countryside provides environmental, social and economic benefits to all dwellers, both urban and rural. It is our greatest asset and should be enjoyed, promoted, protected and enhanced. However, for the rural population who live in, work and maintain this asset, basic services are often less accessible and housing more unaffordable. When considering rural sustainable development it is important to recognise that achieving a healthy rural environment is inextricably linked with sustaining our rural communities who are essential to supporting and maintaining a vibrant rural economy.
- 1.2 The review of our Rural Homes and People Policy (2007-2015) is timely given the growing pressures from rural communities for local, affordable homes, the need to address increasing levels of unfitness and fuel poverty in rural areas and the national recognition that there is a need to support an ageing population, especially in isolated rural areas. Since the last rural housing review in 2006, there have been comprehensive structural changes, including the Reform of Local Government, the emergence of the eleven new councils and the revised administrative structure of the Housing Executive in line with the Social Housing Reform Programme. It is an appropriate time for us to revisit our rural housing approach, responding to the specific housing needs of rural communities and the need to work collaboratively with our key partners and the community to better meet these needs.
- 1.3 Therefore, at the heart of the rural housing policy framework there is a commitment to partnership working. Community Planning will present a new engagement framework with local councils and an opportunity to continue and extend our commitment to joint working. We continue to endorse the view that 'rural housing should not be considered as an isolated policy issue but rather an issue that connects to a range of environmental, social and public policy concerns'<sup>1</sup>. Views on our proposals are therefore welcome from as wide a constituency as possible including rural dwellers of all ages and backgrounds, community representatives as well as statutory, private and voluntary bodies.
- 1.4 The views of respondents will be used to develop, prioritise and where needed, amend our rural housing policy proposals and develop an associated action plan. We hope that this process will help us to maximise our contribution to enabling and supporting sustainable rural communities.

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<sup>1</sup> Northern Ireland - Republic of Ireland perspectives on rural planning and development – Murray M. and Scott, M.

## 2.0 Executive Summary

- 2.1 The first rural housing policy review by the Housing Executive in 1990/91 highlighted that rural housing circumstances were different from those in urban areas and in order for the Housing Executive to carry out its statutory duties across its full statutory remit, a specific rural approach was required.
- 2.2 The 'Rural Homes and People' policy commenced in May 2007 and was scheduled to be implemented over a six year period to coincide with the implementation of the Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2007-2013, administered by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD). The policy was extended in 2013 to take account of the timescales involved in the Review of Public Administration and the associated Reform of Local Government.
- 2.3 The timescale for the current review of rural housing policy is influenced by two key factors:
- 1) DARD's RDP 2014-2020 which was launched in August 2015 and;
  - 2) The implementation of the Reform of Public Administration and the introduction of the eleven new super councils with increased delivery powers and the legislative framework for Community Planning.
- 2.4 This consultation document sets out the proposals for a revised rural housing policy - 'Sustainable Rural Communities', taking account of the issues currently facing rural communities, within the wider European and UK context and also building on the achievements of the Housing Executive's 'Rural Homes and People' policy. It sets out:
- 1) The Policy Background;
  - 2) The Wider Context;
  - 3) A profile of rural Northern Ireland; and,
  - 4) The Policy Framework & Proposals.
- 2.5 The review focuses on how the Housing Executive can work in collaboration with housing providers, other government departments and agencies, councils and the voluntary and community sector to deliver housing and housing services in rural areas which will help to support and sustain rural communities within a Community Planning context.

### Drivers for change

- 2.6 An examination of rural demographics, social and economic trends and urban-rural variations, particularly in relation to housing, highlighted the following issues for rural areas:
- a) Between 2001 and 2011, the rural population increased more significantly than the urban population;
  - b) The age profile of the Northern Ireland population is increasing;
  - c) Rural areas have a higher proportion of large adult households;



- d) There is a higher proportion of skilled trade occupations and a lower proportion of professional and technical workers in rural areas, particularly in the west of Northern Ireland;
- e) Average weekly incomes are lower in rural areas, particularly in the west of Northern Ireland where almost 24% of individuals with low income (average weekly income below £264) reside;
- f) In 2014, house prices were on average 19% more expensive in rural areas (and 29% in the rural east) compared with urban areas;
- g) There has been a dramatic decrease in owner-occupation in rural areas from 76% in 2006 to 67% in 2011 and an increase in the private rented sector from 9% in 2006 to 13% in 2011;
- h) The proportion of social housing stock in rural areas (7%) remains significantly lower than in urban areas (18%);
- i) Vacancy levels (across all tenures) are higher in rural areas, particularly isolated rural areas where there are also higher levels of interior and exterior disrepair and where there has been a significant rise in unfitnes from 5% to 14%;
- j) Fuel poverty is higher in rural areas (44%) than in urban areas (41%) and 50% of those living in isolated rural areas are faced with fuel poverty.

2.7 Since the development and publication of the 'Rural Homes and People' policy in 2007 the strategic context for rural policy has changed significantly. The two most significant changes which will impact on rural housing and rural communities are:

- a) DARD has made considerable progress in raising the profile of rural issues in Northern Ireland and if passed, the proposed Rural Needs Bill will be the first primary legislation in the UK requiring all government departments and agencies to consider rural issues in new and revised policies and strategies;
- b) The reform of local government and the creation of new local councils with increased powers of delivery and local accountability. Engagement with local communities is at the heart of the new two-tier planning system and both Community Planning and Development Planning will be administered by local councils. This will have an impact on how we work collaboratively with councils to implement our rural housing policy in Northern Ireland.

### Revised rural housing policy proposals

2.8 The Housing Executive's contribution to supporting sustainable rural communities focuses on two key elements: **planning, enabling and improving rural homes**; and **supporting and investing in rural people**. Based on this the following five policy objectives are proposed:

- 1) To plan and enable the provision of affordable homes which meet rural housing needs;
- 2) To improve the condition of rural housing stock and reduce fuel poverty;
- 3) To provide housing support to vulnerable people in rural areas;
- 4) To contribute to the development of safe, cohesive and engaged rural neighbourhoods;
- 5) To work in partnership with others to assist in rural development.

- 2.9 To support the delivery of Policy Objective 1, the actions focus on reinforcing our rural housing enabler role by reviewing our latent need testing process, setting out rural housing requirements in a commissioning prospectus and working with others to address the increasing demand for mixed tenure and affordable housing in rural areas.
- 2.10 Policy Objective 2 focuses on the promotion of grants and new technological initiatives to help private sector home owners improve the fabric and thermal efficiency of their homes and on technologies which could help Housing Executive tenants reduce energy costs.
- 2.11 Under Policy Objective 3 we examine how we can better tailor housing support to vulnerable rural people, responding to local needs, promoting services in rural areas and working cross-departmentally to deliver efficient support services.
- 2.12 Policy Objective 4 is focused on empowering and supporting rural communities through the community cohesion programme. We also propose to promote and increase the role of our Rural Residents Forum to contribute their views on the delivery of new and revised Housing Executive policies/strategies.
- 2.13 Finally, Policy Objective 5 focuses on the continued support of the delivery of the DARD's RDP 2014-2020 with a renewed match funding initiative.
- 2.14 The supporting actions and outcomes are detailed in full in [section 7](#). These policy objectives and associated actions will form the basis for the associated Rural Action Plan 2016-2020.

## Consultation

- 2.15 In formulating a revised rural housing policy, the Housing Executive wishes to take account of the views of housing professionals, related statutory and voluntary/community bodies, rural communities, public representatives and private sector interests. This consultation provides an opportunity for all such groups and individuals to help shape the future rural activities of the Housing Executive working across all tenures and in conjunction with other agencies, to address rural concerns. Comments are invited from anyone with an interest in rural issues.

## Equality & Rural Proofing

- 2.16 The Housing Executive has carried out the following screening exercises on the draft rural housing policy proposals:
- a) Equality and Human Rights – to assess the potential impacts on Section 75 groups, human rights implications and opportunities for promoting good relations; and
  - b) Rural Issues Statement – to assess the potential impacts of a policy on people living in rural areas.
- 2.17 The screening documents are available to download at:  
<http://www.nihe.gov.uk/index/corporate/consultation.htm>.

- 2.18 Based on the evidence considered in these screening exercises, the Housing Executive has concluded that further assessments of impacts are not required (i.e. the policy has been screened out).
- 2.19 Equality and good relations are viewed as dynamic factors within this policy. Equality needs and good relations issues change constantly and this policy must remain flexible to address needs as and when they arise. It is proposed that equality and good relations will be included as standing items on the agenda at future meetings of the Policy Implementation Panel and the Rural Residents Forum to ensure that there is an opportunity for any panel/forum member to introduce issues at any time during the lifespan of the policy.

### 3.0 Introduction – Policy Background

- 3.1 The Housing Executive has a statutory responsibility under the 1981 Housing Act to assess housing needs, research housing conditions and to ensure programmes are in place to meet identified needs. This applies equally to urban and rural areas across Northern Ireland.
- 3.2 The Housing Executive's first rural policy 'The Way Ahead' was published in 1991. There were two key drivers for the introduction of this policy. Firstly, in 1988, the European Commission's publication 'The Future of Rural Society' cited that the largest problem facing rural areas was the 'provision of affordable housing for local communities'. The resultant pressures led to the NI Secretary of State appointing in 1989, an inter-departmental committee on rural development structures in Northern Ireland. The second aspect related solely to housing. The 1987 House Condition Survey demonstrated the widening gap between rural and urban house conditions with increasing concentration of unfitness in more isolated rural areas. It was in this context that the Housing Executive focused on developing the first specific rural housing policy and determined that the review should consider all aspects of rural housing activity (i.e. encompassing issues like housing conditions, housing need and supply, affordability, care in the community). The review in 1990/91 highlighted that rural circumstances were different from urban and in order for the Housing Executive to carry out its statutory duties across its full statutory remit; a specific rural approach was required.

#### Vision

- 3.3 The Housing Executive believes that the revised policy should contribute to the following overarching vision:

***'Housing services working in partnership to enable and support vibrant, shared and sustainable rural communities and provide economic, social and environmental benefits in rural areas'***

- 3.4 The policy principles which were agreed through intensive consultation for the first rural policy have been enshrined in the development of subsequent rural policies, 'Places for People' (2000-2006) and 'Rural Homes and People' (2007-2015). During preparation and pre-consultation for 'Sustainable Rural Communities', stakeholders agreed that these principles are still appropriate and should continue to shape this rural housing policy review and the associated action plan.

#### Principles

- The rural housing policy should contribute towards rural development objectives, within a framework of sustainable development;
- A rural approach is necessary not a revised urban approach;
- Partnership with others is critical for success;
- Tailoring to local circumstances is necessary in recognition of the diverse nature and sense of place existing in rural Northern Ireland;



- Working with rural communities is essential for effective rural development;
- Affordability and accessibility are at the core of potential housing solutions;
- Investment and resources must be directed to where they are most needed and to those who need them most;
- The rural housing policy should be mindful of Section 75 Equality legislation, with the emphasis on promotion of equality of opportunity in rural areas; and
- Opportunities should be availed of to test new approaches, learning from policy and best practice elsewhere.

### What do we mean by 'rural'?

- 3.5 Parallel to the introduction of Rural Homes and People, the Housing Executive adopted the urban/rural default definition recommended by the Northern Ireland Statistical Research Agency (NISRA) in 2005 in the 'Report of the Inter-Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group'. This report was based on the 2001 Census as well as the settlement boundaries as defined by DOE Planning Service in the adopted Area Plans at that time. All settlements were classified based on their population size and it was recommended that settlements included within bands A-E were considered to be urban and all settlements included with bands F-H considered to be rural (i.e. settlements with a population below 4,500).
- 3.6 In March 2015, NISRA published the 'Review of the Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements' which sets out a revision of the definition which was published in their 2005 report. A number of changes to the settlement bandings were recommended based on:
- population changes which became evident from the 2011 Census;
  - settlement development limits which have been revised in accordance with updated Area Plans; and,
  - similar definitions in England, Scotland & Wales.
- 3.7 The Housing Executive continues to base our rural definition on settlement bandings F-H but in line with NISRA's recommendations this now includes 'settlements with a population below 5,000'. Based on this definition, 667,000 people (35% of the total population of Northern Ireland) live in rural areas.

## 4.0 The Wider Context

4.1 In formulating a revised rural housing policy, the Housing Executive is mindful of a range of developments and issues which effectively set the overarching context in which the policy would operate. Such contextual matters will inevitably influence and shape the Housing Executive's approach to rural housing in the years ahead. This section provides background on these issues taking account of themes and perspectives in a European context as well as the experiences elsewhere in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland.

### The rural development perspective - European Rural Policy 2014-2020

4.2 With over 56% of the population in the Member States of the European Union (EU) living in rural areas, which cover 91% of the territory, rural development is a vitally important policy area. Farming and forestry remain crucial for land use and the management of natural resources in the EU's rural areas, and as a platform for economic diversification in rural communities. The strengthening of EU rural development policy is, therefore, an overall EU priority.

4.3 Known as the "second pillar" of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the EU's rural development policy has been improved for the period 2014-2020 through the process of wider CAP reform, via a number of legislative acts.

4.4 In line with Europe 2020 (the EU's growth strategy for the coming decade) and the overall CAP objectives three long-term strategic objectives for EU rural development policy in the 2014-2020 period can be identified:

- Fostering the competitiveness of agriculture;
- Ensuring the sustainable management of natural resources, and climate action; and
- Achieving a balanced territorial development of rural economies and communities including the creation and maintenance of employment.

4.5 The rural development policy is implemented through national and/or regional rural development programmes (RDPs) which run for seven years. Funding is drawn partly from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and partly from national / regional and sometimes private sources and the implementation and impact of the policy is monitored and evaluated in detail<sup>2</sup>.

### European housing trends

4.6 The Housing Europe Observatory, the European Federation of Public, Cooperative and Social Housing published 'The State of Housing in the EU'<sup>3</sup> in May 2015 that reflects on the state of the housing sector in the continent. The report highlighted that the overall state of housing in the EU remains unstable. Six years after the low point of

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<sup>2</sup> European Commission , Rural Development 2014-2020  
Available at [http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rural-development-2014-2020/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rural-development-2014-2020/index_en.htm)

<sup>3</sup> The State of Housing in the EU, The Housing Europe Observatory, May 2015

2009 many steps remain to be taken to respond to two very alarming issues that emerge according to the statistics outlined in the report.

- 1) There are more people without a home today in Europe than six years ago.
- 2) There are not enough affordable homes available in most European countries to meet the increasing demand.

4.7 The report concluded that it would be difficult to propose a 'one size fits all' approach to housing markets and housing policy from the EU level. Instead, housing markets should be observed at a national and even regional level, since the needs of the metropolitan areas, which become increasingly dense, differ a lot from the needs of the rural areas.

4.8 The general key housing issues were summarised as follows:

- The rental sector is expensive;
- Home ownership is not an option due to the even higher cost; and
- There are not enough social homes, with waiting lists growing in a number of countries, including Italy, the UK, France and Ireland.

4.9 This leads in many countries to the generational phenomenon that the majority of people aged 18-34 still live with their parents- 66% of them in Italy, 58% in Portugal, 55% in Spain, 74% in Slovakia etc.

4.10 A large number of households are overburdened by housing costs and this becomes more and more evident in the debt-ridden countries like Greece, where more and more families appear to have difficulties in covering their housing expenses as the current economic crisis keeps evolving.

### **The rural housing perspective – Great Britain**

4.11 Between 2005 and 2009, the need for increased affordable rural housing throughout the UK was evidenced in three landmark reports, (Joseph Rowntree Foundation's "Homes for Rural Communities," the Taylor Review "Living, Working, Countryside", plus the suite of publications published as part of HRH The Prince of Wales' Affordable Rural Housing Initiative). The Localism Act 2011 and the National Planning Policy Framework introduced in 2012 have both afforded rural communities greater opportunities to deliver the recommendations of these reports, but rural housing shortages still remain and there is increasing pressure on the government to channel resources into increasing the stock of rural affordable homes.

4.12 Throughout the UK, the importance of assessing rural housing need and implementing local delivery strategies is recognised. In England, planning legislation has made specific allowances for the delivery of small rural housing schemes.

4.13 A report outlining the review of rural housing policy in the UK which was launched in 2014<sup>4</sup> concluded that there are housing shortages throughout the UK but that rural areas face particular difficulties as:

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<sup>4</sup> Affordable Housing: A fair Deal for Rural Communities - Report of the Review of Rural Housing Policy 2015

- competition from commuters, retirees and second home owners means on average rural house prices are 26% higher than in urban areas;
- local earnings are consistently lower in rural than urban areas, averaging £19,700 in rural districts compared with £26,900 for the major urban areas; and,
- there is much less housing association and council housing, not least because of higher levels of Right to Buy sales. 12% of rural housing stock is social housing compared with 19% in urban areas so housing affordability is a much greater problem.

## Scotland

- 4.14 'Homes Fit for the 21st Century'<sup>5</sup> sets out the Scottish Government's vision for housing to 2020 and actions and proposals to realise that vision. With a focus on strategic objectives to promote effective supply, choice and quality, the report recognises that radical and innovative measures are required to revise investment methods and make use of existing housing, and to change thinking on how people are supported in their housing choices.
- 4.15 The report recognises the need for more homes in each of the established tenures: owner occupation, private rent and social rent, but also recognises that there are growing numbers of people whose needs aren't met by any of these established tenures - people who can't access home ownership and are struggling to afford private rents, yet are unlikely to get a social let. To provide new options for this group, a substantial expansion of mid-range housing products are required. The Scottish Government have committed to continue to support shared equity, and in particular to expand provision of homes for intermediate rent.

## Wales

- 4.16 The Welsh Government also recognises that the affordability of housing is an issue for rural communities across Wales. A major factor contributing to the ability of people to access housing that is affordable is high house price to local income ratios. The current economic climate also challenges the availability of mortgages for individuals as well as generally putting pressure on the finance that is available for housing development.
- 4.17 The 'Joseph Rowntree Foundation Commission on Housing in Rural Wales'<sup>6</sup> (May 2008) recommended that a range of interrelated responses to the rural housing challenge were required, including the wider use of Rural Housing Enablers (RHE).

## Rural Housing Enablers

- 4.18 In Great Britain, Rural Housing Enablers (RHEs) have played an important role in engaging with rural communities in order to chart their housing needs and to bring

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<sup>5</sup> Homes Fit for the 21st Century: The Scottish Government's Strategy and Action Plan for Housing in the Next Decade: 2011-2020, Available at <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2011/02/03132933/0>

<sup>6</sup> JRF Commission on Rural Housing in Wales, June 2008

forward solutions to meeting those needs. Rural Housing Enabler activity has facilitated the development of new affordable housing for social rent and low cost home ownership in rural and remote areas. Councils in England have seen the benefit of directly employing RHEs to act as a key partner along with Parish Councils, local communities and housing associations to identify potential development sites, assess local housing need and deliver suitable housing schemes. The RHE is pivotal to enable the engagement process in order to ensure that the rural community achieve housing that meets their local needs and helps to sustain their rural community. In Scotland, RHEs have also contributed to a more effective use of the existing housing stock, restoring empty dwellings and using conversions and adaptations to achieve housing solutions for rural residents.

## Republic of Ireland

- 4.19 The Department of Environment, Community and Local Government's strategy<sup>7</sup> for rural development focuses on an inclusive approach to sustainable development, the integration of policies, a regional dimension and partnership with the rural community. The Rural White Paper 'Ensuring the Future – A Strategy for Rural Development in Ireland' (1999), sets out a vision and a framework for the development of rural communities in Ireland and marks an approach and commitment by Government to rural development.
- 4.20 The Department is also responsible for the Irish national housing policy which is set out in the Housing Policy Statement that was launched in June 2011. This document outlines a vision for the future of the housing sector in Ireland "based on choice, fairness, and equity across tenures and on delivering quality outcomes for the resources invested". The overall strategic objective will be to enable all household's access good quality housing appropriate to household circumstances and in their particular community of choice.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.environ.ie/en/Environment/>

## 5.0 The local Northern Ireland context

- 5.1 The context for the development of rural housing policy in Northern Ireland has changed considerably from the last review in 2007. There has been substantial progress in raising the profile of rural issues at Government level and the reform of local government and increased focus on collaborative working within the context of Community Planning, both of which are hoped to create opportunities for rural development in Northern Ireland. It will be vital to ensure that rural issues continue to be highlighted in the midst of ongoing change and that rural communities are fully represented in the preparation of local plans.

### Rural Development

- 5.2 The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD)<sup>8</sup> has responsibility for rural development and rural policy in Northern Ireland. These responsibilities include the management and implementation of the Northern Ireland RDP, rural proofing and the promotion of integrated rural policy making across government.

### Rural White Paper Action Plan

- 5.3 The DARD Rural Strategy 2007-2013 sought to provide a strategic framework for rural development policy and to facilitate a more coordinated approach to rural development over the period 2007-2013. While the DARD Rural Strategy focused on DARD's role in relation to rural policy, the Programme for Government (PfG) 2008-2011 recognised that while DARD had responsibility for rural development it was the responsibility of all government departments with functions in respect of rural areas to contribute to the development of a Rural White Paper. Following intensive cross-departmental engagement, the first Rural White Paper Action Plan was developed and rolled out for implementation in 2012.
- 5.4 The Rural White Paper Action Plan is an Executive initiative which aims to provide a framework for the Executive to work effectively together in seeking to address the main issues and challenges facing rural areas. The Rural White Paper Action Plan sets out both the Executive's vision and policy priorities for rural areas and includes over 90 actions from across all Departments covering a wide range of rural issues including broadband, healthcare, rural tourism, poverty and social isolation, housing, rural transport and planning.
- 5.5 The first action of the Rural White Paper Action Plan cross-references Spatial Framework Guidance (SFG13 & 14) of the Regional Development Strategy and requires that all government departments seek to support and sustain rural communities and to help improve accessibility for rural communities.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.dardni.gov.uk/>



- 5.6 Under the theme of 'Rural Communities' the Action Plan requires DSD to progress a number of housing-related actions and makes specific reference to the progression of the Housing Executive's Rural Action Plan.

### **Rural Proofing**

- 5.7 Rural Proofing was first introduced by DARD in 2002 and was reinforced in the 2008-2011 Programme for Government which stated that it was the responsibility of all government departments to consider the needs of rural dwellers. In order to enhance the rural proofing process, on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2015 the DARD minister introduced the 'Rural Needs Bill' into the Assembly. This proposed primary legislation will not only place a statutory duty on all central government departments and local councils to consider rural needs when developing and implementing government policies and strategies and delivering public services, but also requires them to compile, and make available in an open and transparent manner, information on how they have met that duty.

### **Northern Ireland Rural Development Plan 2014-2020**

- 5.8 In line with Europe 2020, the Northern Ireland RDP 2014-2020 was prepared following in-depth consultation with rural stakeholders (including the Housing Executive) and launched in August 2015. The aims of the Europe 2020 Strategy have been translated into three objectives that are relevant to rural development. It sees:
- a) Smart growth as being achieved through the competitiveness of our agriculture and food industries;
  - b) Sustainable growth through the sustainable management of our natural resources; and
  - c) Inclusive growth through balanced territorial development of rural areas.
- 5.9 Beneath these three objectives, the proposals specify six EU priorities for rural development. From an area-based rural regeneration perspective, the Housing Executive is mainly concerned with priority 6 of the programme 'social inclusion, poverty reduction and rural economic development'. Ten co-terminus Local Actions Groups (excluding Belfast) have been set up to administer the budget associated with this priority within the new council areas and initial work is underway to prepare the area based delivery strategies.

### **The Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework (TRPSI)**

- 5.10 The Programme for Government (PfG) 2011-15 included a commitment for DARD to bring forward a £13 million package of measures to tackle poverty and social isolation in rural areas. This PfG commitment was delivered through DARD's current TRPSI Framework 2011-15. The proposed successor Framework which is currently out for public consultation, seeks to support a further package of pilot measures during the period of the next PfG. The aim will be to test new models/approaches designed to address the rural aspects of poverty, social isolation which could be mainstreamed by government organisations.

## Sustainable Development Strategy for NI

- 5.11 The Sustainable Development Strategy for Northern Ireland<sup>9</sup> introduced in 2006, represents the first step in establishing the focus for tackling the challenges in securing a better future for the present generation and protecting the future for generations to come. A healthy environment, a thriving economy, prosperity and quality of life are all inextricably linked, and the principles underpinning the strategy recognise the need to ensure that our decision making processes recognise that linkage. It also means creating a network of well-connected sustainable communities with decent homes in places with clean, safe and green public spaces, where people are able to lead healthy lives, enjoy the environment around them and where people want to come to live and work.
- 5.12 The Strategy recognises that the scale of the challenge is larger in Northern Ireland where in comparison with the rest of the UK we experience higher levels of deprivation both within our urban areas and equally acutely within some of our more remote rural communities.

## Local Government Reform

- 5.13 One of the most significant outcomes of the Review of Public Administration<sup>10</sup> (RPA) has been the Reform of Local Government and the reduction from 26 to 11 local councils which were introduced in April 2015.
- 5.14 The Local Government Act (NI) 2014 provides the legislative framework for the new councils and their increased functions include planning, roads, local economic development, community development and tourism. The return of planning powers to the councils in April 2015 provides for a reformed, two-tier planning system that seeks to enhance local democratic accountability. Engagement with local communities is at the heart of the new system which is the first in the UK to have a statutory link between the community and the development plan.

## Statutory planning powers

- 5.15 The launch of the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) for Northern Ireland<sup>11</sup> in September 2015 was the first major step in equipping new local planning authorities with the strategic policy context within which to begin the preparation of their local Development Plans against which all local planning applications will be assessed. The purpose of the SPPS is to consolidate twenty separate planning policy publications into one document and to bring forward a new strategic planning policy relating to town centres and retailing. The statement sets out the core planning principles to underpin

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/sustain-develop.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/index/work-of-the-executive/review-of-public-administration-short-version.htm>

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.planningni.gov.uk/index/policy/ni\\_spps\\_sea\\_scoping\\_report-2.pdf](http://www.planningni.gov.uk/index/policy/ni_spps_sea_scoping_report-2.pdf)

delivery of the planning system including promoting sustainable development, well-being and shared space.

- 5.16 The SPPS requires that each council brings forward their own strategy for development in the countryside which sets out the need to manage development in a manner which strikes a balance between protection of the environment from inappropriate development, while supporting and sustaining vibrant rural communities consistent with the RDS. The statement does not include the stringent policies set out in PPS21 but instead places the onus on local planning authorities to prepare development plans which reflect broad policy objectives.
- 5.17 However, many current development plans are outdated and until a new suite of plans are adopted, local planning authorities will have to consider existing planning policy statements as a material consideration. In this transition period, PPS21 will continue to guide development decisions in rural Northern Ireland.
- 5.18 When PPS21 'Sustainable development in the countryside' was introduced in 2011, there was a shift from a presumption in favour of development in the countryside to a presumption against. However, the Planning Policy Statement also introduced a provision under Policy CTY5 for the development of up to 14 units of social/affordable housing outside of development limits, where there was demonstrable social housing need evidenced by the Housing Executive which could not be met within existing settlements. This policy has presented an opportunity to provide social housing for dispersed rural communities and outside of small, rural settlements with a population below 2250.

### **Social Housing Reform Programme (SHRP)**

- 5.19 The Minister for Social Development announced, in January 2013, proposals to overhaul the delivery of social housing in Northern Ireland through the Social Housing Reform Programme (SHRP)<sup>12</sup>.
- 5.20 The stated vision of the programme is to create: "Housing structures that support the provision of social and affordable homes, in thriving communities where people are proud to live." The four principle aims of the project are to:
- 1) Improve housing structures, making the system financially sustainable for tenants and the NI Executive;
  - 2) Ensure delivery of well-maintained housing stock and increase investment in social housing more generally;
  - 3) Improve the focus on strategy and regional delivery of services; and
  - 4) Create space and freedom for social landlords to play a more proactive and innovative role in the communities they serve.
- 5.21 To deliver these aims, four projects have been established within the programme:
- 1) Rent, regulation and inspection project;

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.nicva.org/key-issues/social-housing-reform-programme>

- 2) Governance and local government engagement project;
- 3) Regional housing body project; and,
- 4) Landlord re-structuring project.

5.22 The Housing Executive has commenced the implementation of projects 3 & 4 by aligning its internal structure, with the creation of separate Landlord Services and Regional Services divisions. Whilst the Regional Services division has responsibility for the rural housing policy, in the preparation of policy recommendations, detailed consultation has taken place with the Landlord Services Division, particularly with respect to those functions which they are directly responsible for.

## Welfare Reform

5.23 Work is underway to prepare the necessary legislation required to effect proposed welfare changes as set out in 'A Fresh Start' - The Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan<sup>13</sup>. The Executive agreed additional funds to 'top-up' the UK welfare measures in Northern Ireland over the next four years. These measures include:

- introduction of Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payment;
- changes to Housing Benefit;
- introduction of a Benefit Cap;
- changes to Employment and Support Allowance; and the
- Introduction of new Fraud and Error powers.

5.24 When legislation is in place, impacts of the reforms will have to be closely monitored in rural areas, particularly in isolated rural areas where, for example, disposable income is often reduced by increased travel and fuel costs.

## Together: Building a United Community (TBUC)

5.25 The 'Together: Building a United Community' (TBUC)<sup>14</sup> Strategy, published in 2013 by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), reflects the Northern Ireland Executive's commitment to improving community relations and continuing the journey towards a more united and shared society. The TBUC Strategy outlines how Government, community and individuals will work together to build a united community and achieve change against the following key priorities:

- Our people and young people;
- Our shared community;
- Our safe community;
- Our cultural expression.

5.26 Good Relations is not a new concept to the Housing Executive and we have a wealth of experience dealing with these issues at a local level. The Housing Executive

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/a-fresh-start-stormont-agreement.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/together-building-a-united-community>

Community Cohesion Strategy is about developing and using this experience and all work undertaken under this strategy will be reflective of the overall aims of TBUC. It is critical that the revised rural policy gives full cognisance to this important aspect of government policy to provide appropriate support to rural communities in Northern Ireland.

## Our Children and Young People

- 5.27 OFMDFM's Children and Young People's Unit published their ten year Strategy for children and young people in Northern Ireland 'Our Children and Young People – Our Pledge'<sup>15</sup>, in June 2006. This Strategy aims to ensure that all children and young people are “fulfilling their potential” by 2016 and that “...all children and young people living in Northern Ireland will thrive and look forward with confidence to the future”. Aimed primarily at those who develop policy and who provide services which affect children and young people, it complements Northern Ireland's position in relation to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). It encompasses all children under the age of 18, and for children who are/have been in care, and children with a disability; the age limit extends to 21.
- 5.28 The Housing Executive was consulted and contributed to the development of this Strategy and have since produced our own Children and Young People's Policy Statement which draws together the key responsibilities of the Housing Executive that individually and corporately contribute in some way to the promotion of equality of opportunity for children and young people.
- 5.29 In developing the proposals in this rural policy review, the Housing Executive has been mindful of the needs and requirements of children and young people. Rural housing policy proposals are aimed at contributing to the development of a healthy, safe environment for children and young people in rural areas.

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/ten-year-strategy.pdf>

## Key Issues

The following key issues are summarised from the contextual issues discussed above:

- 1) With over 56% of the population in the Member States of the EU living in rural areas, rural development is a vitally important policy area;
- 2) The EU's rural development policy will be implemented through the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme 2014-2020;
- 3) There are insufficient affordable homes in most European countries to meet the increasing demand, with waiting lists for social housing growing in a number of countries, including Italy, the UK, France and Ireland;
- 4) In the UK, competition from commuters, retirees and second home owners means on average rural house prices are 26% higher than in urban areas whilst average earnings are almost 26% lower and there is a lower proportion of housing association and council housing;
- 5) In 'Homes Fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century', the Scottish Government have committed to expand provision of homes for intermediate rent for the growing sector of people who can't access home ownership and are struggling to afford private rents, yet are unlikely to get a social let;
- 6) The role of Rural Housing Enablers has been recognised in various rural housing research papers and is promoted throughout the UK, as an important element in delivering local, affordable rural housing schemes;
- 7) The NI Programme for Government's recognition that it all government departments have a responsibility for rural areas, was pivotal in raising the profile of rural policy and of establishing the need for the proposed Rural Needs Bill;
- 8) The requirement for the Housing Executive to deliver a 'Rural Action Plan' was reinforced in the Executive's Rural White Paper Action Plan 2012-2015;
- 9) The return of planning powers to the councils in April 2015 provides for a reformed, NI planning system with a statutory link between the Community and Development Plans which is hoped to present an opportunity to address housing shortages in rural areas; and
- 10) Despite a change in the structure of the Housing Executive in line with the DSD's Social Housing Reform Programme, the rural housing policy will continue to operate on a cross-divisional basis.



## 6.0 Profile of Rural Northern Ireland

- 6.1 While reference was made in the previous chapter to the strategic policy context for the rural housing policy review, this chapter examines demographics and considers social and economic trends and urban-rural variations, particularly in relation to housing.
- 6.2 Statistical information is drawn from NISRA census-based data<sup>16</sup>, the Housing Executive's 2011 House Condition Survey<sup>17</sup> and 2015-2018 Northern Ireland Housing Market Review & Perspective and also the Family Resources Survey (FRS) urban/rural publication produced by DSD IN 2013.

### Population

- 6.3 At the last census in 2011, the population of rural Northern Ireland was approximately 667,000 representing 35% of the total population. While the total population increased by 7% over this ten year period, there was an increase of 15% in the rural population. This represents the fastest growth in population between consecutive Censuses since the 1960s.

Population change 2001 2011				
	Total Population 2001	Total Population 2011	Population Increase	% Increase
RURAL	580,382	666,878	86,496	15%
URBAN	1,108,453	1,147,419	38,966	4%
Total	1,688,838	1,814,318	125,480	7%

Table 1: Population Change - Source: NISRA, Census 2011



- 6.4 Census results demonstrate that the age profile of the Northern Ireland population is generally increasing. The number of people aged 65 and over increased by 18% and the number of people aged 85 and over increased by 35% in Northern Ireland since 2001. This trend was broadly the same in both urban and rural areas however this has a significant implication for the current and future accessible needs of the housing stock in rural areas, together with increased housing support needs.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.dardni.gov.uk/index/statistics.htm>

<sup>17</sup> [http://www.nihe.gov.uk/northern\\_ireland\\_house\\_condition\\_survey\\_main\\_report\\_2011.pdf](http://www.nihe.gov.uk/northern_ireland_house_condition_survey_main_report_2011.pdf)

6.5 The results highlight urban/rural variations in household composition. While there is a high proportion of one person households and lone parent families in urban areas, statistics reveal that rural areas have a higher proportion of large adult households and large families. In particular, the number and proportion of households with non-dependent children increased, as the trend for adult children to leave the family home permanently was reversed and accelerated with the onset of the economic downturn in 2008.

### Employment status & income in rural areas

6.6 The rural landscape of Northern Ireland has been shaped by a traditional settlement pattern based on small holdings and family farms. Generations of farmers and farming communities have not only made an important contribution to the regional economy, but have also worked, protected and enhanced the countryside. Over the past ten years, the role of agriculture in the Northern Ireland economy has declined but the agri-food industry has grown significantly and inputs are largely sourced from local agriculture. The business mix in rural areas is similar to urban areas and is characterised by high levels of small and micro businesses and self-employment.

		Standard Occupational Classification										Percentage of working males
Urban Rural Classification	Managers Directors & Senior Officials	Professional Occupations	Associate Prof. & Technical Occupations	Admin & Secretarial Occupations	Skilled Trade Occupations	Caring, leisure and other Service Occupations	Sales & Customer Service	Process Plant & Machine Operatives	Elementary Occupations	Not Recorded	Sample size (=100%)	
<b>Male</b>												
BMUA	10	17	15	8	18	4	9	8	10	1	277	
Urban East	8	10	10	9	26	5	7	17	10	0	106	
Urban West	9	10	11	1	21	5	10	18	13	2	145	
Rural East	8	12	8	5	28	4	6	11	17	1	151	
Rural West	6	6	5	3	49	1	1	15	14	0	213	
BMUA	9	8	15	8	18	4	9	8	10	1	277	
Urban	9	10	10	4	23	5	9	18	12	1	251	
Rural	7	9	6	4	41	2	3	13	15	-	364	
<b>All</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>892</b>	
		Standard Occupational Classification										Percentage of working females
Urban Rural Classification	Managers Directors & Senior Officials	Professional Occupations	Associate Prof. & Technical Occupations	Admin & Secretarial Occupations	Skilled Trade Occupations	Caring, leisure and other Service Occupations	Sales & Customer Service	Process Plant & Machine Operatives	Elementary Occupations	Not Recorded	Sample size (=100%)	
<b>Female</b>												
BMUA	6	25	8	25	1	12	10	1	12	0	274	
Urban East	8	17	10	22	3	18	7	1	14	1	120	
Urban West	7	18	9	14	2	14	21	0	15	0	140	
Rural East	7	18	11	27	4	18	8	1	6	1	146	
Rural West	7	17	6	20	5	19	13	3	10	0	182	
BMUA	6	25	8	25	1	12	10	1	12	0	274	
Urban	7	18	9	17	2	16	15	-	15	-	260	
Rural	7	17	8	23	5	18	11	2	8	-	328	
<b>All</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>862</b>	

**Table 2: Working adults by gender, urban rural classification and standard occupational classification – Source: NISRA 2013**

6.7 The table above highlights the higher proportion of skilled trade occupations and lower proportion of professional and technical occupations in rural areas, particularly in the west of Northern Ireland.

- 6.8 The 2011 House Condition Survey indicates that 31% of household reference persons that are working reside in rural areas. Proportion of household reference persons who were working (14%) or retired (13%) and living in isolated rural areas were similar to the overall average (13%). Household reference persons who were not working (9%) were least likely to be living in isolated rural areas.
- 6.9 Households with incomes of between £10,000 and £14,999 (20%) were least likely to live in rural areas, while those with £30,000 or more (35%) were most likely to live in rural areas (compared with 2% overall). However, in contrast, above average proportions of households with an income of less than £7000 lived in isolated rural areas.
- 6.10 More recently, the Family Resources Survey (FRS) urban/rural publication produced by DSD IN 2013, demonstrated that average weekly earnings of people in rural areas were consistently below those living in urban areas over the years 2007 to 2012. The FRS also highlighted that 24% of individuals in relative low-income (i.e. an average weekly income below £264) resided in the rural west of Northern Ireland.



Median weekly income

- 6.11 Figure 1 below highlights the spatial distribution of low-income households but it should also be noted that due to their location, rural residents will spend on average a higher proportion of their income (after housing costs) on travel costs and on fuel costs especially in isolated rural areas (see fuel poverty 6.21). This will directly impact on the amount of disposable income which is available to these rural households.

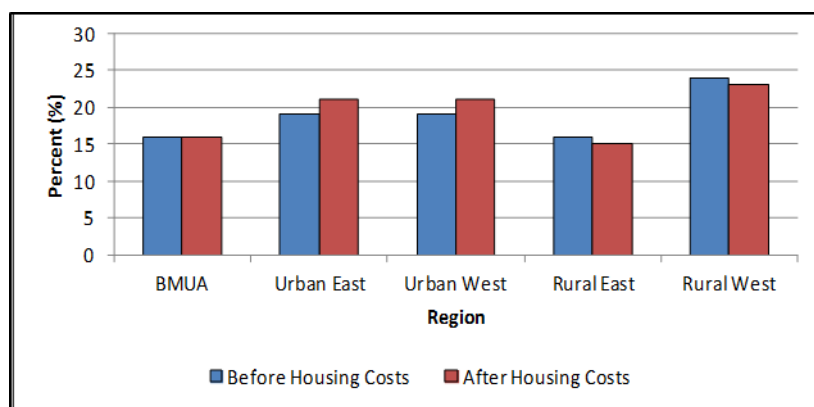


Figure 1: Percentage of individuals in relative low-income by urban/rural classification – Source: NISRA 2013

## Housing distribution

6.12 The 2011 House Condition Survey established that there were 760,000 dwellings in Northern Ireland of which 230,300 were located in rural settlements. Growth has been comparable in urban and rural areas with the proportion of rural stock remaining at 30% since 2001.

Dwelling Tenure		Urban/Rural Location										
Tenure	2006					2011						
	Urban		Total Rural		Total	Urban		Total Rural		Total		
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Owner Occupied	3076	65.00	1612	34.60	4688	100.00	3142	67.30	1548	33.00	4690	100.00
	62.3		76.4		66.5		59.3		67.2		61.7	
	6184	76.05	1903	23.00	8087	100.00	9560	76.02	2984	23.08	1254	100.00
Private Rented & Others	12.5		9.0		11.5		18.0		13.0		16.5	
	9941	86.05	1556	13.00	1149	100.00	9371	84.06	1705	15.00	1107	100.00
	20.1		7.4		13.3		17.7		7.4		14.6	
Social Housing Vacant	2496	61.09	1534	38.01	4030	100.00	2616	47.08	2857	52.00	5473	100.00
	5.1		7.3		5.7		4.9		12.4		7.2	
	4938	70.10	2111	30.00	7050	100.00	5297	69.07	2303	30.00	7600	100.00
Total	100.0		100.0		100.0		100.0		100.0		100.0	

Table 3: Dwelling Tenure – Urban/Rural Location – Source: NIHE House Condition Survey 2006/2011

## Tenure distribution

- 6.13 There were significant changes in tenure composition in rural Northern Ireland between 2006 and 2011. The proportion of owner occupied housing stock in rural areas decreased dramatically from 76% in 2006 to 67% in 2011 whilst it remained broadly the same (62%) for the same period in urban areas. The proportion of rural housing stock being privately rented rose from 9% in 2006 to 13% in 2011, although this represents a small reduction since 2009 when the proportion was 15%. In 2011, 7% of rural housing was in the social sector as opposed to 18% in urban areas.
- 6.14 The decrease in owner occupation and increase in private renting has been attributed to the difficulties in achieving finance to become an owner occupier, the shortage of social housing in areas of high demand as well as growing interest from investors in the buy-to-let market. The housing market is still undergoing a period of stabilisation. Over the policy period, the number of new private sector homes is likely to remain well below the recent historic trend and house prices are likely to rise, reflecting improvements in the affordability ratio. Younger households, who may have become first-time buyers in previous decades, have in recent years been looking more towards the private rented sector because of their inability to afford their own home.

## Affordability

6.15 Average house prices in rural areas are consistently higher than in urban areas. However, there is also a variance in prices between the rural east and the rural west of Northern Ireland (see Table below). This demonstrates the extent to which house prices are influenced in rural areas which are particularly attractive to retirees, second home owners and commuters. Migration from urban to rural areas pushes rural house prices above the regional average. In 2014, house prices were on average 19% more expensive in rural areas (and 29% more expensive in the rural east) compared with urban areas. Considering that average earnings are lower in rural areas (see 6.10), the combination of high cost homes with low rural wages highlights that rural housing is out of reach for many rural dwellers and that there is a need to address this with the delivery of affordable housing.

	Rural	Urban	BMUA	Urban East	Urban West	Rural East	Rural West	
2009	Q1	£146,914	£124,805	£129,091	£120,198	£119,986	£158,597	£136,186
	Q2	£149,103	£125,585	£132,697	£117,332	£118,491	£159,262	£139,675
	Q3	£148,107	£127,342	£136,194	£118,803	£117,154	£160,201	£137,023
	Q4	£149,772	£126,508	£134,259	£119,501	£117,028	£160,978	£139,437
2010	Q1	£145,538	£125,610	£132,940	£117,058	£116,877	£154,062	£136,912
	Q2	£143,474	£124,662	£133,041	£117,060	£112,493	£153,476	£133,512
	Q3	£141,461	£122,082	£129,823	£115,944	£109,823	£153,199	£129,932
	Q4	£135,238	£114,697	£120,336	£109,482	£106,341	£144,043	£126,440
2011	Q1	£130,238	£107,377	£112,639	£100,851	£100,809	£139,303	£121,952
	Q2	£126,743	£106,651	£112,689	£100,875	£97,524	£135,401	£118,819
	Q3	£125,238	£104,477	£111,072	£99,598	£93,243	£138,161	£113,781
	Q4	£121,267	£101,178	£108,442	£94,819	£89,925	£133,543	£110,365
2012	Q1	£118,477	£94,481	£100,023	£88,436	£87,582	£127,106	£109,867
	Q2	£117,307	£94,066	£100,077	£88,844	£85,504	£126,384	£108,263
	Q3	£113,486	£92,351	£99,085	£85,561	£83,705	£122,932	£104,116
	Q4	£111,218	£89,908	£96,497	£83,609	£81,156	£121,590	£101,093
2013	Q1	£108,918	£90,255	£95,427	£83,969	£84,231	£116,772	£100,532
	Q2	£111,574	£91,754	£97,143	£84,670	£86,061	£119,067	£103,524
	Q3	£113,087	£93,795	£99,750	£85,212	£88,392	£119,857	£105,715
	Q4	£112,477	£94,714	£101,239	£86,519	£87,614	£120,221	£104,182
2014	Q1	£116,467	£97,780	£104,188	£92,688	£88,161	£126,396	£105,378
	Q2	£121,534	£101,341	£108,289	£95,016	£91,685	£131,295	£110,525
	Q3	£121,922	£103,134	£110,373	£95,809	£93,782	£131,492	£111,154

Table 4: Standardised price of residential property by quarter 2005-2014 – Source: NISRA 2014

## Vacancy

6.16 In 2011, 12.4% of total rural dwellings were vacant (17% in isolated rural areas) as compared to 4.9% in urban areas. The 2011 Northern Ireland Census of Employment attributes the increase in levels of rural vacancy to depopulation of remote rural areas with the declining number of farms and the concentration of jobs in the Belfast Metropolitan Area. However, in addition 3-4,000 new dwellings across Northern Ireland

remained on the market unsold in 2011 which is testament to the fact that the housing boom in the mid-2000s was unsustainable.

### Condition of housing stock

- 6.17 The Housing Executive's House Condition Surveys have assessed dwelling conditions against the Statutory Fitness Standard since 1974. However, for the first time, the 2011 House Condition Survey showed an increase in the number of unfit dwellings in Northern Ireland. This reflects a number of factors including lower disposable incomes, the higher rate of vacancy and the reduced availability of home improvement grants.
- 6.18 There was a significant increase in the rate of unfitness in rural areas (from 4% in 2009 to 9% in 2011) and in isolated rural areas from 5% in 2009 to 14% in 2011. 60% of all unfit properties (21,120) were located in rural areas.
- 6.19 There was a clear relationship between unfitness and dwelling age. While the age profile of the Northern Ireland housing stock is increasingly modern, with approximately 40% having been built since 1908, a higher than average proportion (43.8%) of housing stock in remote rural areas pre-dates 1919. This along with an increase in the rate of vacancy explains at least in part why there was an increase in the rate of unfitness in rural areas from 4% in 2009 to 9% in 2011 and in isolated rural areas the unfitness rate increased from 5% to 14%.
- 6.20 As with unfitness, there was an association between vacancy and disrepair. The likelihood of disrepair (external or internal) was clearly associated with the length of time a dwelling had been vacant. 63% of all dwellings that had been vacant for less than one year had at least one fault, whereas for dwellings vacant for more than one year the figure rose to 83%. The level of disrepair was higher in rural areas (53%) than in urban areas (48%). Isolated rural areas in particular had a high level of disrepair (55%) with higher levels of interior and exterior disrepair than any other location.

### Fuel Poverty

- 6.21 Low income, high fuel costs, poor energy efficiency and an over dependence on oil are the main contributors to fuel poverty in Northern Ireland despite significant investment from the Housing Executive and DSD into improving the energy efficiency of social stock. However, the 2011 House Condition Survey indicates that fuel poverty was also correlated to a number of other factors including dwelling age, age of household and employment status of household. This explains in part why fuel poverty is higher (44%) in rural areas than in urban areas (41%). The highest rate of fuel poverty was found in households living in isolated rural areas (50%).



## Key Issues

The following key issues are summarised from the statistics highlighted above:

- a) Between 2001 and 2011, the rural population increased more significantly than the urban population;
- b) The age profile of Northern Ireland population is increasing;
- c) Rural areas have a higher proportion of large adult households;
- d) There is a higher proportion of skilled trade occupations and a lower proportion of professional and technical workers in rural areas, particularly in the west of Northern Ireland;
- e) Average weekly incomes are lower in rural areas, particularly in the west of Northern Ireland where almost 24% of individuals with low income (average weekly income below £264) reside;
- f) In 2014, house prices were on average 19% more expensive in rural areas (and 29% in the rural east) compared with urban areas;
- g) There has been a dramatic decrease in owner-occupation in rural areas from 76% in 2006 to 67% in 2011 and an increase in the private rented sector from 9% in 2006 to 13% in 2011;
- h) The proportion of social housing stock in rural areas (7%) remains significantly lower than in urban areas (18%);
- i) Vacancy levels (across all tenures) are higher in rural areas, particularly isolated rural areas where there are also higher levels of interior and exterior disrepair and where there has been a significant rise in unfitness from 5% to 14%; and
- j) Fuel poverty is higher in rural areas (44%) than in urban areas (41%) and 50% of those living in isolated rural areas are faced with fuel poverty.

## 7.0 Policy Framework & Proposals

- 7.1 The previous sections have shown the range of housing and related issues which should be considered and addressed in the Housing Executive's revised rural housing policy. Taking account of these and of the Housing Executive's overall strategic objectives, this policy framework sets out the proposed strategic approach to supporting sustainable rural communities and the associated direction for rural housing and housing support services.
- 7.2 The Housing Executive would consider that our essential contribution to supporting sustainable rural communities, would focus on two key elements;
- 1) Planning for, enabling and improving rural homes and
  - 2) Supporting and investing in rural people.
- 7.3 Based on this, the following 5 policy objectives have emerged:

### Policy objectives

- 1) To plan for and enable the provision of affordable homes which meet rural housing needs;
  - 2) To improve the condition of rural housing stock and reduce fuel poverty;
  - 3) To provide housing support to vulnerable people in rural areas;
  - 4) To contribute to the development of safe, cohesive and engaged rural neighbourhoods; and
  - 5) To work in partnership with others to assist in rural development.
- 7.4 The supporting actions which will be required to achieve each of these policy objectives are outlined below and outcomes have been identified by which future progress can be measured. These policy objectives and associated actions should form the basis for the associated Rural Action Plan.

### **Policy Objective 1: To plan for and enable the provision of affordable homes which meet rural housing needs.**

- 7.5 The Housing Executive recognises that because there is less existing social housing located in rural areas (approximately 14% of Housing Executive stock), people living in these areas are less likely to come forward and register on the social housing waiting list or will register for the nearest town or city where they have a more realistic chance of achieving a home to meet their needs. In order to address this issue and to enable the planning and delivery of rural homes, every year the Housing Executive works with local communities to identify hidden housing need in selected rural settlements - 'latent demand tests'. We also liaise with Planning Service (now local councils) and housing providers to facilitate the provision of affordable homes which meet rural housing needs.
- 7.6 Significant progress was made under Rural Homes and People in addressing the gap between social housing need and the delivery of social new build in rural areas. The introduction of a rural enabler service coordinated by the Housing Executive Rural Unit incorporated the assessment of need and more intensive follow up with providers to facilitate delivery. In line with this approach, an enhanced method of latent demand testing was applied in 98 rural locations and a % rural target of the Social Housing Development Programme enabled the delivery of 983 units in rural areas between 2007 and 2015.
- 7.7 However, last year (2014/15) the rural target for social housing was not achieved. This was not unexpected as there had been increased difficulty for housing associations in finding sites in rural locations for the delivery of small housing schemes. In recent years the rural new build programme has comprised largely of transfer schemes (Housing Executive land) or Existing Satisfactory Purchases (existing properties on the open market) and Off the Shelf units (private new build properties). Whilst these alternatives will address the short-term social need in a rural location, they are not increasing the overall housing stock and therefore not addressing the long-term housing shortages for rural areas.
- 7.8 In June 2015, rural applicants made up 13.5% of the total waiting list for social housing and 12% of the total applicants who are deemed as being in housing stress which highlights the need to continue to increase the number of new social units in rural areas.
- 7.9 There is a need to reconsider how we can encourage and facilitate housing providers to deliver homes which meet rural housing needs. The following policy actions have been identified to support Policy Objective 1:
- Policy Action 1) Set out specific rural housing requirements at council level in the Housing Executive's Commissioning Prospectus.**
- 7.10 The Housing Executive's proposed 'Commissioning Prospectus' for each council area will set out localised rural housing need based on the Housing Executive's Housing Need Assessment and strategic guidelines. The purpose of this will be to guide

housing associations to seek sites and to develop schemes which address identified rural housing needs at council level. The prospectus will recommend that housing associations concentrate on identifying sites in those rural locations both where unmet need exists and where hidden demand is suspected. Subsequently if and when sites are identified for a potential scheme the Housing Executive will provide support by carrying out a local needs test.

**Policy Action 2) Review the current process of rural latent demand testing taking into consideration the increasing need for intermediate/mixed tenure housing in rural areas.**

- 7.11 Based on the enhanced rural latent demand testing process introduced under through Rural Homes and People, there has been intensive testing over the last 7 years (up to 20 locations per year). This testing has mainly taken place in locations where the Housing Executive is in ownership of undeveloped land or in a number of cases where a public representative has requested a test on behalf of a rural community but where no land has been identified. This process has been successful in enabling many rural new build schemes, but has been most effective in areas where land had already been identified for a potential scheme (i.e. more people come forward when it was more likely that a housing scheme would be delivered).
- 7.12 The requirement for housing associations to identify sites in rural areas highlighted within the Commissioning Prospectus, presents an opportunity for a dual approach to rural latent need testing. Based on initial desk top research (i.e. the Housing Needs Assessment, turnover of existing stock, recent HA schemes, need within the wider LHA), the programme of tests could be split into 2 categories:
- 1) Areas where a test has been requested by a public representative and/or the Housing Executive is in ownership of a potential development site but where the desk top research does not suggest that there may be housing need. This should be a streamlined test which is carried out before a housing association is nominated.
  - 2) Areas where a test has been requested by a public representative and the desk top analysis suggests that hidden need may exist. This should be an enhanced test which is carried out after a site has been identified, registered and a housing association nominated.
- 7.13 This differs from the current process where in most circumstances the needs test is carried out before a development site is identified and investigated by a housing association. The revised approach may also afford the opportunity to involve the housing associations in the testing process and could facilitate the support of larger schemes in rural locations and promote diversification of tenure. The revised process also ensures that we continue to test in locations where we have little evidence of hidden housing need but where a test has been requested on behalf of a rural community.
- 7.14 Through engagement with various rural communities to undertake testing, it has also become evident that in some rural areas there are households whose housing options

are very limited or non-existent within their area but who are not eligible for social housing (i.e. the assessment process demonstrates that they don't have enough points to be deemed as being in housing stress). However, measuring this sector is difficult as it has not been captured in household surveys and/or there may be a lack of awareness of what affordable/intermediate housing actually is<sup>18</sup>.

- 7.15 The Housing Executive will further research this demand in rural areas and engage with housing associations (including Co-Ownership) to investigate an extension of their product range. This evidence could be captured at least in part by broadening the scope of the existing rural housing need test.

**Policy Action 3) Support and encourage the provision of rural housing through the identification and investigation of potential housing sites in rural areas with unmet housing need.**

- 7.16 One of the major issues affecting the delivery of social housing schemes particularly in rural areas is the availability of land. Whilst the Housing Executive is still a major landowner and will transfer lands where possible to housing associations for housing development, the majority of our land supply is classified as amenity space located around and within our existing estates. There are few adequately sized, developable Housing Executive sites remaining in rural areas with unmet housing need.

- 7.17 In order to assist housing associations in identifying land (in private ownership) which is readily available for development, Housing Executive planners prepare site identification studies for 'hotspot' areas of housing need, examining any opportunity for housing schemes in the rural context.

- 7.18 Some housing associations have also undertaken 'Design & Build' competitions where they have invited both contractors and landowners to engage in a tendering process for a social housing contract. This process could make land available in areas of high housing need as well as presenting an opportunity for local businesses and landowners to benefit from the scheme.

**Policy Action 4) Increase the capacity of Housing Executive operational housing staff to examine all available housing options with rural customers.**

- 7.19 In 2014, the Housing Executive introduced a Transformation Team whose role is to examine, redesign and improve the quality of our front end housing services and to increase our focus on customer service. One of the first and most significant changes that has been introduced since the organisation embarked on our 'Journey to Excellence' is the 'housing options' approach. Since the introduction of the pilots in Belfast (urban), Causeway and Newry (urban and rural) Area Offices, the emphasis has been on 'helping people to solve their housing problem' with the examination of all

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<sup>18</sup> Intermediate housing is defined in draft Planning Policy Statement 22 'Affordable Housing', as '*shared ownership housing provided through a registered housing association which helps households who can afford a small mortgage, but that are not able to afford to buy a property outright*'.

housing options available to new customers including private tenure, as opposed to automatic registration on the waiting list for social housing.

- 7.20 In 2011, only 7% of rural housing stock was in the social sector and therefore the new approach could be critical to rural customers. For many people seeking a home in their rural area, the only available option may be in the private rented sector, which rose significantly in rural Northern Ireland from 13% in 2006 to 18% in 2011. The compulsory registration of private landlords has enabled private rented stock levels to be monitored and available properties are often marketed on property websites and on the specific websites of local estate agents. The Housing Executive's Private Rented Sector Access Scheme administered by Smartmove has been set up specifically to help customers establish and maintain tenancies in private rented accommodation.
- 7.21 However, as discussed above, affordable home ownership may also be a suitable option for customers in some rural areas. The housing market is slowly beginning to recover after the 2008/09 financial crisis and properties which were buy-to-let during the boom may gradually become available for first time buyers as house prices increase.
- 7.22 In providing comprehensive housing advice to rural customers, frontline Housing Executive staff will be developing an awareness of all housing options in the rural locality and the knowledge and capacity to signpost to other tenures where there may be a more suitable housing solution.
- 7.23 It will also be important to capture front end information from new and existing customers onto the waiting list as to what their housing aspirations are, regarding both location and tenure and to monitor how they have been 'helped to solve their housing problem'. This information may be useful in determining where rural housing shortages exist (latent demand) and what the barriers/opportunities are for rural housing which inevitably will enable us to plan more effectively and to encourage housing association delivery in rural locations.

**Policy Action 5) Develop a model for the delivery of rural intermediate/mixed-tenure housing schemes based on the outcomes of the affordable housing pilots and other examples of best practice.**

- 7.24 Objective 7 of 'Facing the Future: The Housing Strategy for Northern Ireland' introduced the Affordable Home Loans Scheme (the local version of Get Britain Building) in order to encourage and support housing association delivery of affordable housing. The first two affordable pilots are being delivered in partnership with the Housing Executive and DSD at two rural locations including St. James' Park, Hillsborough and Coastguard Road, Portballintrae. At this stage it is anticipated that a mix of low cost home ownership and shared ownership will be offered through the schemes which are both hoped to be on-site in March 2016.
- 7.25 It is critical that the planning, development, up-take and resulting customer feedback from both schemes is captured and the models used as a promotional tool for further affordable and mixed tenure schemes. Although all Housing Executive estates are now

mixed tenure by default as a result of the House Sales scheme, it may be important to address public perceptions of social and mixed-tenure housing through marketing and promotion of new and existing schemes.

**Policy Action 6) Examine other models of housing delivery in rural areas, learning from and building on the success of pilots and other examples of best practice**

- 7.26 The Housing Executive has responsibility for delivering the DSD's Empty Homes Strategy and works in partnership with housing associations to determine areas which should be targeted for investment. In 2011, 12.4% of all rural dwellings were vacant (17% in isolated rural areas) as compared to 4.9% in urban areas<sup>19</sup>.
- 7.27 However, in the rural context empty properties are often one-offs, isolated, detached/semi-detached, in a state of disrepair and/or located in areas where there is no social housing need. Such properties can be costly to refurbish and are therefore not considered as a feasible option by housing associations. However, one advantage that rural properties often have over urban properties is the size of the associated plot of land. The Housing Executive still owns circa. 650 rural cottages and often when they become vacant and cannot be re-let, they are sold on the open market. We will consider other options for each case, for example, working in partnership with Habitat for Humanity to deliver a community refurbishment project which could result in an affordable property for a local household.

**Community Self-Build**

- 7.28 Alternatively, if the property was not suitable for refurbishment, the cleared site or indeed any surplus Housing Executive site could be considered for a community self-build project. The potential for this initiative was previously examined with Habitat for Humanity but was abandoned when the financial crisis of 2008/09 caused a massive fluctuation in property prices. There could be great interest in a self-build project which would result in low-cost or shared equity housing, and this should be fully explored in the rural context.
- 7.29 Working in partnership with delivery agents as well as local communities will be essential in establishing support for either of these initiatives which could assist in regenerating rural areas and developing local skills.

**Policy Action 7) Investigate the opportunities for rural housing development which are presented through new and existing planning policies.**

- 7.30 As outlined in [section 5](#), the return of planning powers to the councils in April 2015 has presented an opportunity for local planning authorities to shape their local development plans based on the specific needs of their local communities.

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<sup>19</sup> 2011 NIHE House Condition Survey



- 7.31 Community planning presents a new and welcome opportunity for the Housing Executive to engage and work in partnership with other public agencies to improve health and well-being within communities. The statutory link between Community Plans and Development Plans will ensure that development proposals are measured against and shaped to reflect the needs of the local population. The forum will present an opportunity to engage with other public sector policy makers and landowners in order to plan in a holistic way.
- 7.32 The provision of new housing will be a priority for the new councils and the Housing Executive's Housing Investment Plans will set out the projected social housing requirement for each council area for the next 4 years. As a statutory partner at the Community Planning table, the Housing Executive have the opportunity to discuss with other community partners, where and how these needs can be met, possibly as one element within wider neighbourhood regeneration. In this way, we can ensure that social housing is fully considered by stakeholders in the development of the community plan and in turn this will be reflected in the land zoning designations in the associated Development Plan for the council area.
- 7.33 However, many existing development plans are outdated and until a new suite of plans are adopted, local planning authorities will have to consider existing planning policy statements as a material consideration. In this transition period, PPS21 'Sustainable Development in the Countryside', will continue to guide development decisions in rural Northern Ireland. This policy includes a provision for the development of up to 14 units of social/affordable housing outside of development limits, where there is demonstrable social housing need which cannot be met within existing settlements. Given that land is in short supply in rural settlements, opportunities still remain to develop social/affordable and/or mixed tenure housing outside of established settlements which would meet the needs of small rural communities.

### 7.34 Outcomes and Impacts for Policy Objective 1

<b>Policy Objective 1: To plan for and enable the provision of affordable homes which meet rural housing needs.</b>			
<b>Outputs Policy Actions:</b>	<b>Outcomes Short Term:</b>	<b>Outcomes Medium Term:</b>	<b>Long Term Impacts:</b>
1) Set out specific rural housing requirements at council level in the Housing Executive's Commissioning Prospectus.  2) Review the current process of rural latent demand testing taking into consideration the increasing need for intermediate/mixed tenure housing in rural areas.  3) Support and encourage the provision of rural housing through the identification and investigation of potential housing sites in rural areas with unmet housing need.	Potential rural social housing schemes identified with housing providers.  The need for rural housing is investigated through local housing needs tests.	Meet the rural % target of the Social Housing Development Programme.	Social housing is provided in rural areas where unmet need has been identified.
4) Increase the capacity of Housing Executive's operational housing staff to examine all available housing options with rural customers.  5) Develop a model for the delivery of rural intermediate/mixed-tenure housing schemes based on the outcomes of the affordable housing pilots and other examples of best practice.  6) Examine other models of housing delivery in rural areas, learning from and building on the success of pilots and other examples of best practice.  7) Investigate the opportunities for rural housing development which are presented through new and existing planning policies.	Demand for affordable/intermediate and mixed-tenure housing is evidenced at council level and investigated through local needs tests.	Increased rural schemes are identified with housing providers.	Affordable/intermediate and/or mixed-tenure housing is provided in rural areas where demand has been identified.

## **Policy Objective 2: To improve the condition of rural housing stock and reduce fuel poverty**

- 7.35 The most recent House Condition Survey (2011) attributes increasing rates of unfitness in rural areas over the period 2009-2011, to the ageing stock, higher vacancy rates, lower disposable income and the reduced availability of home improvement grants. For many rural people, living in sub-standard and deteriorating conditions could have direct consequences for their health and wellbeing.
- 7.36 The objective of 'improving rural house conditions' has been a priority in previous rural housing policies with private sector improvement grants promoted as the key mechanism for addressing rural unfitness. Under Rural Homes and People, the Housing Executive set out to continue with this proactive approach, also seeking to target concentrations of unfitness designated as 'Rural Priority Areas'. However, the reduction in the private sector grants budget since 2009 has resulted in restricted approval of discretionary grants (replacement, renovation and home improvement grants for owner occupiers) and instead a greater focus on the promotion of mandatory grants (Disabled Facilities Grants and Home Repairs Grants for Landlords). During the eight year span of Rural Homes and People, there were approximately 25,400 Warm Homes installations, 5,427 boiler replacements and approximately 1658 private sector improvement grant approvals in rural areas which will have contributed to the improvement of fabric and energy efficiency of these rural properties.
- 7.37 In order to achieve Policy Objective 2, there is a need to address rural Housing Executive properties in improvement programmes, to promote existing available grant funding and to examine the potential for piloting new initiatives using improved technologies where possible. The following policy actions have been identified to support Policy Objective 2:

### **Policy Action 8) Ensure that Housing Executive programmes deliver investment to achieve and maintain modern social housing standards in rural housing stock in accordance with our new Asset Management Strategy.**

- 7.38 As part of the Asset Management Commission awarded by the Department for Social Development in July 2014, Savills PLC carried out a condition survey of the Housing Executive's stock between August 2014 and January 2015. Savills found that although the stock meets the minimum standards for housing as set out in the Fitness Standard and Decent Homes standard, there is a significant investment needed to achieve and maintain a modern housing standard for the stock over the next thirty years. An initial analysis of the data suggests that there is no significant differential between the condition and investment requirements of our rural and urban stock. A new Asset Management Strategy has been prepared that determines how we will target investment activity in the future, based on an asset performance evaluation of the financial and social sustainability of the stock. This will be followed by the first of a series of 5 Year Investment Plans that will set out where and in what we will invest during that period. Both the Asset Management Strategy and the 5 Year Investment Plan will pay due regard to the needs of our rural stock.

**Policy Action 9) Promote new and existing Private Sector Improvement Grants which could improve the fabric of housing in rural locations.**

- 7.39 Whilst Housing Executive stock may not contribute to rural unfitness levels, the reduction of the private sector grants budget has been one factor which has contributed to a lack of investment in older, private sector housing stock in rural areas and especially in isolated rural areas where unfitness has now risen to approximately 14%. Discretionary grants are now only available when the owner occupier can demonstrate exceptional circumstances, such as a risk to health and safety and are awarded in very restricted numbers.
- 7.40 The Housing Executive is currently investigating with DSD the potential to pilot a 'private loans' scheme to replace the former discretionary grants. The loan is to be made available to low income households and landlords to allow for home repairs and improvements. The Housing Executive is currently developing a pilot scheme to test the appetite for this type of initiative and in discussions with DSD to assess the financial viability of the scheme.
- 7.41 The loan could be an attractive option for rural landlords and owner occupiers who need financial assistance to address structural or thermal problems in their homes and the high occurrence of rural unfitness should be considered if the pilot scheme is to be extended.
- 7.42 The Housing Executive will continue to promote all available private sector grants in rural areas and with rural community groups. Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) and Home Repair Assistance Grants (HRAs) for landlords are both mandatory grants which are available on the same basis as before. The DFG is crucial in enabling the adaptation of properties to a standard which is accessible for elderly and disabled owner occupiers. Although they are only awarded in exceptional circumstances, it is essential that we continue to promote discretionary grants which may be the only available source of financial assistance for rural dwellers living in properties which are in a state of disrepair which will inevitably impact on their health and safety.

**Policy Action 10) Promote new and existing initiatives which are available to owner occupiers to improve the fabric and thermal efficiency of their homes and help to tackle fuel poverty in rural areas.**

- 7.43 Many new and innovative technologies have been tried and tested by the Housing Executive in an effort to drive down energy costs for our own and private tenants and the problems associated specifically with older rural stock are recognised. 42% of households in Northern Ireland are deemed to be in fuel poverty and 50% of such households are located in isolated rural areas. Low income, high fuel costs, poor energy efficiency and an over dependence on oil are the main contributors to fuel poverty in Northern Ireland.
- 7.44 Following a Rural Energy seminar in 2013 which focused on minimising fuel costs, an Oil Buying Clubs Scheme was developed in partnership with Bryson Energy. To date 27 oil-buying clubs have been set up in rural areas enabling members to pool their oil

purchases and order smaller amounts resulting in considerable savings. This is an effective and worthwhile initiative which will be further promoted in rural areas.

- 7.45 As the Home Energy Conservation Authority in Northern Ireland the Housing Executive has a key role to identify, promote and monitor progress of energy efficiency throughout all tenures in the residential sector in Northern Ireland. In this capacity, the Housing Executive works in partnership with agencies such as Bryson Energy to promote the use of energy saving technologies in the private sector and DETI, who currently offer the NI Renewable Heat Incentive to owner occupiers who install air, ground or water source heat pumps, biomass boilers or solar thermal panels in their homes. This and any new financial incentives will be promoted in rural areas through our rural publications, at rural events and seminars and with our Rural Residents Forum and external rural agencies.
- 7.46 Measures which are currently available to owner occupiers to improve the fabric and thermal efficiency of their homes include the Affordable Warmth scheme which is jointly administered by the councils and the Housing Executive and the Housing Executive's Boiler Replacement Scheme which has just been extended for another year. The Affordable Warmth scheme is an initiative which is targeted at areas which have been identified as having high numbers of people in fuel poverty with limited opportunity for direct referral. For this reason, it is not a scheme which the Housing Executive can actively promote but it will still be important for us to monitor and report on uptake in rural areas.

**Policy Action 11) Consider alternative sources of energy and innovative technologies which could improve the energy efficiency of Housing Executive stock in rural areas.**

- 7.47 The Housing Executive will consider the benefits of using alternative energy sources as well as piloting new technologies which could bring down energy and maintenance costs for our own stock, e.g. new types of electric heating systems. However, the accessibility of such pilot schemes in rural areas will have to be fully considered in each case. The current focus is on developing a programme to install solar Photovoltaic (PV) panels on 1,000 Housing Executive properties which will help to reduce energy costs for tenants. At this early stage of development, it is anticipated that an equitable proportion of rural properties will benefit from the scheme.
- 7.48 In 2014, the Enterprise Minister announced plans to introduce a gas pipeline to the west of Northern Ireland which will serve approximately 40,000 new customers. Gas is a greener, more efficient alternative to oil and coal which will also enable easier budgeting of energy costs. Whilst the planned route of the network is through urban settlements in Tyrone, Fermanagh and Derry, many rural households who reside in villages along the main pipeline route will also benefit from the initiative.
- 7.49 Other potential, alternative energy sources include:
- a) Geothermal energy - the potential for this in Northern Ireland was highlighted following the discovery of a large reserve of geothermal energy (subterranean water source) in Antrim in 2007;

- b) Wind energy - Communities in Scotland enjoy huge community benefits through attracting wind energy companies to make use of available land in the Highlands and Islands; and
- c) Anaerobic digesters – the Housing Executive are examining proposals to take surplus heat and hot water from an anaerobic digester plants outside Cookstown and Irvinestown to heat nearby housing.

7.50 The Scottish Executive has recently been praised for their proactive approach in designating home energy efficiency a 'National Infrastructure Priority'. The Scottish Government has introduced a new package of measures in June 2015 with the aim of addressing climate change as well as reducing household energy bills and tackling fuel poverty. Support will be offered for all properties domestic and non-domestic to help achieve a good energy efficiency rating across the board. This will have a significant impact, particularly for people living in older, rural stock where radical measures are required (e.g. solid wall insulation) in order to ensure that people have access to warm, affordable, low carbon homes.

7.51 It will be useful to monitor the success of the Scottish approach and to examine the technologies required to achieve energy efficiency on such a large scale.

## 7.52 Outcomes and Indicators for Policy Objective 2

<b>Policy Objective 2: To improve the condition of rural housing stock and reduce fuel poverty</b>			
<b>Outputs Policy Actions:</b>	<b>Outcomes Short Term:</b>	<b>Outcomes Medium Term:</b>	<b>Long Term Impacts:</b>
<p>8) Ensure that Housing Executive programmes deliver investment to achieve and maintain modern social housing standards in Housing Executive rural housing stock in accordance with our new Asset Management Strategy.</p> <p>9) Promote new and existing Private Sector Improvement Grants which could improve the fabric of housing in rural locations.</p>	<p>Rural Housing Executive homes in need of repair and improvement identified through Stock Condition Survey.</p> <p>Available grants promoted at rural events and through rural publications.</p>	<p>Rural housing included in Housing Executive stock improvement programmes.</p> <p>% target of private sector grant approvals in rural areas achieved.</p>	<p>Existing rural homes benefit from improvement and investment.</p>
<p>10) Promote new and existing initiatives which are available to owner occupiers to improve the fabric and thermal efficiency of their homes and help to tackle fuel poverty in rural areas.</p> <p>11) Consider alternative sources of energy and innovative technologies which could improve the energy efficiency of Housing Executive stock in rural areas.</p>	<p>Available grants and energy initiatives promoted at rural events and through rural publications.</p> <p>Rural Housing Executive stock included in pilot of new technologies.</p>	<p>Oil Buying Clubs established in rural areas.</p> <p>% target of Affordable Warmth and Boiler Replacement approvals in rural areas.</p> <p>Uptake of the Solar PV scheme and other energy conservation initiatives in rural areas.</p>	<p>Decreased costs to rural dwellers to provide heat and power in their homes.</p>



**Policy Objective 3: To provide housing support to vulnerable people in rural areas.**

- 7.53 For people who are vulnerable, in need of additional support or have specific care needs, living in a small and/or dispersed rural community may increase feelings of loneliness, helplessness and isolation. When examining the processes for assisting vulnerable rural people in achieving a suitable housing solution or providing tailored housing support, the Housing Executive acknowledges that the urban approach may not always work in the rural context. For example, in rural areas there are often higher concentrations of owner occupiers and elderly people and therefore, there will be increasing demand for tailored services such as floating support, which enable people to maintain independence in their home. Models of support service delivery should be flexible to allow for specific solutions to be developed.
- 7.54 Under 'Rural Homes and People', significant progress was made in developing and extending floating support services. Bespoke services for older people, people with mental health issues, people with dementia and women at risk of domestic violence were extended to broaden their geographical coverage and provide support for people living in the most isolated rural areas. The Housing Executive also provides funding for accommodation based services throughout rural Northern Ireland. In order to raise awareness in rural communities of how people could get assistance if they were faced with the prospect of becoming homeless, the 'Rural Guide to Homelessness' was developed and distributed through our local offices.
- 7.55 Moving forward, the Housing Executive recognises that the population is ageing and that there will be an increasing need to provide housing support services which are flexible and sustainable and also to facilitate housing which is suitable for current needs but which is also adaptable to meet the future accessible needs of rural dwellers. The following policy actions have been identified to support Policy Objective 3:

**Policy Action 12) Focus on the prevention of homelessness in rural areas by examining all available options which will help people to stay in their existing homes where possible, close to existing family/support networks.**

- 7.56 Approximately 12% of people who are currently registered as homeless wish to be housed in a rural location. Analysis of the waiting list would indicate that the main cause of homelessness in rural areas is 'unreasonable accommodation' i.e. a home that does not adequately meet the needs of the occupant. This scenario may be the result of a number of different factors and every case requires a different solution. In rural areas in particular, where there is generally a lack of social housing and indeed a lack of available housing for any tenure, some customers would rather stay in inadequate accommodation than move to another location away from their family/support network. A flexible approach is required, with the examination of a range of options to help people remain in their existing homes where possible. This could be achieved through a package of housing support, through debt advice and counselling or even through advice on adaptations or Disabled Facilities Grants. The

frontline staff delivering this service will have to be aware that rural customers may require a tailored approach.

- 7.57 It was recognised in ‘Rural Homes and People’ that homelessness is an issue which can be hidden in rural areas as rural dwellers are often unaware of existing homelessness services and/or know that there is limited temporary accommodation available outside of urban settlements for those who do present as homeless. It is vital to promote awareness of our services in rural areas through our rural publications, website and social media as well as linking in with other rural organisations to signpost people to their local district offices for housing advice & support.

**Policy Action 13) Work in partnership with other agencies to provide vulnerable rural applicants with tailored advice and wrap-around support which could help them to sustain existing tenancies.**

- 7.58 With the introduction of the Housing Executive’s housing options approach in pilot areas, staff have been given the opportunity to apply both innovation and flexibility when dealing with customers which has enabled them to find housing solutions which are shaped to meet the specific needs of the individual. One of the main benefits of this new approach is the improved working relationship with our Supporting People unit and with Housing Executive funded service providers. Frontline staff have developed both an increased knowledge of existing services and the capacity to make referrals where they are required.
- 7.59 For vulnerable, rural people who have particular support needs, the Housing Executive’s frontline team are in a position to contact partner agencies such as Smartmove and De Paul who have a focus on helping susceptible applicants to set up and sustain housing tenancies. ‘Housing First’ is one service funded by the Housing Executive and delivered by De Paul which provides intensive support to those who are most socially excluded and marginalised in society (e.g. individuals with chronic addictions) and helps them to stay housed in suitable accommodation within their communities.
- 7.60 However, there is also an opportunity to familiarise staff with initiatives which are funded through DARD’s ‘Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation’ (TRPSI) Framework which are targeted at the most vulnerable rural dwellers and administered by Rural Support Networks, e.g. Maximising Access to services, grants and benefits in Rural Areas (MARA). Links with such agencies may enable future cross-referral.
- 7.61 There may be an opportunity to extend the responsibility to other Housing Executive staff such as grants officers who will on occasion come across individuals (owner occupiers) who are in need of intervention and support. In isolated rural areas in particular, there may be vulnerable residents who are not receiving their full entitlement of support and/or may be living in homes which are unsuitable for their needs and impacting on their health and well-being. It will be important to raise awareness among all frontline staff of the range of advice and support services which are available for different needs groups in their area and the capacity to make referrals if required.

- 7.62 The time taken by staff to signpost to other services will not only greatly benefit the customer but will also assist both the Housing Executive and support service providers in identifying housing support needs in rural areas and any associated gaps in current service provision. This in turn will inform the development of Housing Executive Commissioning Plans which set out how and where resources will be allocated.

**Policy Action 14) Develop secure cross-departmental data sharing systems which will facilitate more efficient housing support services in rural locations.**

- 7.63 The Housing Executive recognises that inter-agency partnership working is vital to address homelessness and work with external organisations such as Health and Social Care Trusts and service providers to deliver an effective and user friendly service. It has been recognised that this service could be further improved with the development of a Common Assessment Framework. This cross-departmental tool would enable secure data sharing and allow for the common and comprehensive assessment of health and social care needs of those presenting as homeless. This approach would ensure that an initial needs assessment of a customer's support needs would be accessible to all relevant support agencies in a secure environment, thus allowing appropriate help to be provided in a timely manner. Over time, a case history will be available for individuals with more complex needs and it is hoped that this will enable a more efficient approach to finding them a housing solution.
- 7.64 In rural areas, support services have to be versatile to cater for the needs of a smaller number of customers dispersed over a wider catchment area. The introduction of the Common Assessment Framework may help service providers to plan and coordinate floating support in rural locations, directing resources to where they are most needed and ultimately helping to improve the service.
- 7.65 In addition, the introduction of a Central Access Point for all homeless services would provide a centralised facility that would advise front end staff on current vacancies in temporary accommodation and available support services. This model, which already operates in several UK cities, would provide a known single point of access to address the accommodation and other support requirements of the homeless person.

**Policy Action 15) Encourage the provision of accessible stock to meet the needs of an ageing rural population.**

- 7.66 2011 Census results demonstrate that the age profile of the population is generally increasing but that this trend is broadly the same in both urban and rural areas. However recent research by Healthy Ageing in Rural Communities (HARC) Research Network (Older People in Rural Communities - 2014)<sup>20</sup> suggests that the dispersed distribution of the rural population requires that the capacity to support elderly rural

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<sup>20</sup> [http://harcresearch.com/images/HARC%20Report%20\(Low-Res-Final\).pdf](http://harcresearch.com/images/HARC%20Report%20(Low-Res-Final).pdf)

dwellers should be further examined and a failure to do this could impact on the sustainability of rural communities.

- 7.67 In order to meet the needs of an ageing population, housing providers will increasingly have to consider the provision of homes which are accessible for both wheelchair users and people who have a range of other complex needs. At March 2015, there were 94 wheelchair applicants and 520 complex needs applicants on the waiting list for social housing in rural areas. There are many more people in owner occupation, who are not currently registered for social housing but who reside in homes which are not suitable for their needs. The Housing Executive are considering how housing providers can be encouraged to deliver housing which meets the current needs of local applicants but which may also be adaptable to wheelchair standards should this be required in the future. This will be specifically pertinent in rural areas, where there tends to a lower turnover of housing stock and a reluctance to move away from the community.
- 7.68 The development of an Accessible Housing Register for social housing was identified as a recommendation within the Inter-Departmental Review of Adaptations. The accessible housing register is an information tool which has now been developed by the Housing Executive to enable housing authorities (Housing Executive and other housing associations) to identify specific properties that may meet the needs of a particular group of applicants on the social housing waiting list. Many of the properties which have already been identified are located in rural areas. The availability of this information to frontline staff could potentially have huge benefits for rural applicants, helping to ensure that adapted properties are reserved for those who require them.
- 7.69 The Accessible Housing Register will help to minimise waste by assisting social landlords to make more effective use of their existing adapted stock. Social landlords must strive to ensure adapted stock is occupied by those on the waiting list who need accessible housing. Currently the Housing Executive is actively considering initiatives for incentivising voluntary relocation of able tenants from adapted stock when it is required. Specific consideration will have to be given to rural areas in this exercise where there is generally a lack of any available size/type of social housing and people are less likely to want to relocate outside of their settlement.

**Policy Action 16) Monitor the development of pending Welfare changes and mitigations on Housing Executive activities to determine if any changes are required as a consequence.**

- 7.70 The implications of Welfare Reform (5.23) for rural householders could be significant and will depend on the mitigation measures currently being developed as a result of the 'Fresh Start' agreement. The Housing Executive will therefore monitor the impact of pending Welfare changes and mitigations on its housing activities to determine if any changes are required as a consequence.

### 7.71 Outcomes and Indicators for Policy Objective 3

<b>Policy Objective 3: To provide housing support to vulnerable people in rural areas.</b>			
<b>Outputs Policy Actions:</b>	<i>Outcomes Short Term:</i>	<i>Outcomes Medium Term:</i>	<i>Long Term Impacts:</i>
<p>12) Focus on the prevention of homelessness in rural areas by examining all available options which will help people to stay in their existing homes where possible, close to existing family/support networks.</p> <p>13) Work in partnership with other agencies to provide vulnerable rural applicants with tailored advice and wrap-around support which could help them to sustain existing tenancies.</p> <p>14) Develop cross-departmental data sharing systems which will facilitate more efficient housing support services in rural locations.</p>	<p>Housing support services for homeless and/or vulnerable rural residents are promoted through rural publications.</p> <p>Rural needs are factored in the commissioning of support services.</p>	<p>Increased uptake of Housing Executive funded support services in rural areas</p>	<p>Increased number of rural people helped to 'solve their housing problem'.</p>
<p>15) Encourage the provision of accessible stock to meet the needs of an ageing rural population.</p> <p>16) Monitor the development of pending Welfare changes and mitigations on Housing Executive activities to determine if any changes are required as a consequence.</p>	<p>Need for accessible housing assessed in rural areas and highlighted with housing providers.</p> <p>Identification of any housing issues relevant to rural areas resulting from pending Welfare changes.</p>	<p>Increase in number of accessible properties provided in rural social housing schemes.</p>	<p>Accessible housing is provided in rural areas where need has been identified.</p>

#### **Policy Objective 4: To contribute to the development of safe, cohesive and engaged rural neighbourhoods.**

- 7.72 Some of the poorest and most deprived people in Northern Ireland currently reside in social housing, much of which is located within Housing Executive estates in both urban and rural areas. In our capacity as landlord, the Housing Executive is often presented with a range of issues which may not always be physical and/or easily rectifiable. Social issues are much more complex and there is not always a quick fix solution but instead a need for intervention, building relationships and capacity building. The Housing Executive's Neighbourhoods Department is dedicated to working with our communities, offering them the tools they need to create safe and inclusive neighbourhoods and improve outlook and quality of life.
- 7.73 In rural areas, where housing estates are generally smaller and tend to be more settled with a lower turnover of properties, there are still some communities that are faced with issues such as anti-social behaviour. For the most vulnerable rural residents, such issues can increase feelings of fear, loneliness and isolation. Therefore it is vital that tenants are aware that area based teams exist to record and deal with incidents that impact on community safety and to help address underlying problems which have led to those incidents taking place. Area based Housing Forum representatives also participate on council-wide Inter-Agency Panels which include other public sector agencies including PSNI and present a forum to discuss issues which impact on the safety and well-being of residents within the area.
- 7.74 The Housing Executive has a long established mechanism for engagement with our tenants who are actively involved in shaping organisational policies and procedures. The Housing Community Network structure was reviewed in 2013 in an effort to boost tenant involvement and to improve geographical coverage of representatives.
- 7.75 Under 'Rural Homes and People', the Rural Residents Forum was introduced in 2009 and comprises 12 community group representatives from across Northern Ireland. The Forum is coordinated by Rural Community Network and serves as a focus group where housing issues can be discussed and rural views heard. The role and structure of the group was revisited last year following which the group have produced an annual action plan setting out their annual activities including providing rural responses to relevant departmental consultation papers. The Rural Residents Forum is embedded within the community involvement structure and there is cross participation with other area based groups as well as the Central Forum. This allows for rural issues to be raised at a number of levels and also for members to bring updates back to their respective rural communities.

#### **Policy Action 17) Promote and develop the role of the Rural Residents Forum in the rural proofing of new and revised Housing Executive policies and strategies.**

- 7.76 The role of the Rural Residents Forum has gained momentum in recent years and is now critical within the Housing Executive's rural proofing process. Both internal and external policies and strategies are discussed with the group to examine the potential



implications for rural communities once a policy is adopted and enforced. The importance of this role will only be reinforced if the proposed Rural Needs Bill is introduced in 2016.

- 7.77 The Forum will also have an important role in the delivery of the revised Rural Policy and associated Action Plans. They provide a link to rural residents and community groups and are therefore well placed to communicate information on available Housing Executive funding/support and any initiatives/opportunities which could make a difference in rural areas.

**Policy Action 18) Ensure that rural areas are considered where possible for funding/support programmes stemming from the Housing Executive's Community Cohesion Strategy.**

- 7.78 Whilst divisions between people of different community backgrounds and traditions are often clearly defined in urban areas, in the rural context, invisible divisions can run between towns, villages and small settlements. People will worship and socialise in different ways, participate in different sports, attend different schools. These invisible divisions may limit access to services for residents of some areas or create duplication of services in others. Ultimately, this may have detrimental consequences for the sustainability of some small rural communities.

- 7.79 This issue is recognised within the Housing Executive's Community Cohesion Strategy 2015-2020, which was prepared in line with OFM/DFM's 'Together: Building a United Community' (TBUC) Strategy and reflects the commitment of the NI Executive to 'improve community relations and continue the journey towards a more united and shared society'. Based on the evolution of work and achievements from previous years, the strategy will be delivered under 5 key areas:

- 1) Segregation/Integration
- 2) Race Relations
- 3) Communities in Transition
- 4) Interface Areas
- 5) Flags, Emblems and Sectional Symbols

- 7.80 The various funding/support programmes associated with the Strategy will be delivered by a team of area based Good Relations Officers and through the Housing Community Network. A number of opportunities will be presented for rural communities particularly through programmes such as Building Relationships in Communities (BRIC) 2 and the Shared Communities programme. Such initiatives are driven by area based needs and it will be important to ensure that the needs of rural communities are highlighted at a local level. This will include identifying and addressing the specific needs and issues affecting Travellers and black and ethnic minority (BME) communities including migrant workers in rural areas.

- 7.81 The Housing Executive work with the DSD and housing associations to deliver the TBUC shared new build programme of social/affordable housing. To date four shared new build schemes have been developed in areas which complied with TBUC criteria, where communities signed up to a Community Charter based on Shared Housing



principles. One of the schemes identified as having shared housing potential is in the rural village of Saintfield and it is hoped that further rural areas will be selected for shared housing schemes over the policy period, promoting good relations and bridging the gap between different community backgrounds.

**Policy Action 19) Promote opportunities presented through Housing Executive funded community initiatives in rural areas and explore linkages between these and other external funding programmes.**

- 7.82 The Housing Executive has launched our first Social Enterprise Strategy ‘Social Investments in Social Housing Communities’ with the aim of offering investment and support to residents of social housing to develop businesses which are profitable but that will also provide social benefits for the local community. The Strategy recognises that there is already a vibrant social economy sector in Northern Ireland which is supported by voluntary organisations and social investors, but to date, there has been little impact for social housing communities, particularly in the rural context. There is an investment package associated with the Strategy which also seeks to support entrepreneurs by enabling partnership working and promoting the use of available Housing Executive assets such as commercial properties and surplus land. It is envisaged that the value of ‘return on investment’ will help to address issues of social and economic deprivation.
- 7.83 In the rural context, even a small-scale enterprise project could provide huge benefits within the community. The opportunities available to develop social economy should be promoted in rural estates through the Rural Residents Forum but also clear linkages with other funding programmes should be explored as well as links with those partaking in the mentoring programme ‘Village SOS’, which is administered by Rural Community Network.
- 7.84 Through the public consultation process for ‘Rural Homes and People’, it was communicated from young people living in rural areas that investment was needed to improve the visual outlook of their villages. Based on this and following consultation with the Rural Development Council, the Housing Executive’s Rural Community Awards competition was launched in spring 2014.
- 7.85 The competition which offers two awards, ‘Cleaner and Greener’ and ‘Community Spirit’ seeks to reward those community groups which have involved residents in taking pride and ownership of their village and have taken steps to improving the environment and/or services and facilities for their community members. The competition has generated huge interest over the last 2 years and has enabled community groups to showcase a wide range of projects including initiatives which support sustainable living and services which are accessible to the most vulnerable community members.
- 7.86 The competition is complemented by other Housing Executive community funding streams such as the Community Grants initiative and Community Cohesion programmes, both of which are endorsed and administered by local Area Managers.

7.87 It is important that the Housing Executive continue to promote the encouraging community development that is ongoing within rural areas both in our rural publications and on our website and through social media. We should also engage with other external funding/support bodies to consider how collaboration may help empower community groups, improving existing and future projects. It would be useful for example, to develop a partnership with the Rural Support Network which includes 16 delivery organisations located across Northern Ireland. This network, which is funded by DARD, offers community groups support and assistance in applying for funding and coordinating projects. By developing linkages between the rural support network, our established Rural Residents Forum and our local operational staff, we could help to ensure that those rural communities most in need of investment are aware and have the capacity to draw down on the funding they require.

### 7.88 Outcomes and Indicators for Policy Objective 4

<b>Policy Objective 4: To contribute to the development of safe, cohesive and engaged rural neighbourhoods.</b>			
<b>Outputs Policy Actions:</b>	<i>Outcomes Short Term:</i>	<i>Outcomes Medium Term:</i>	<i>Long Term Impacts:</i>
17) Promote and develop the role of the Rural Residents Forum in the rural proofing of new and revised Housing Executive policies and strategies.	Increased number of Housing Executive policies and strategies presented to Rural Residents Forum for review.	Rural issues taken into account in the development of new and revised Housing Executive policies and strategies.	An equitable share of housing and housing services available in rural areas.
18) Ensure that rural areas are considered where possible for funding/support programmes stemming from the Housing Executive's Community Cohesion Strategy.	Rural areas included in community cohesion programmes.  Rural schemes included in shared new build programme.	Community projects to build capacity and encourage shared living in rural areas.  Increased number of new build housing schemes which enable shared living in rural areas.	Safe, inclusive and shared rural communities.
19) Promote opportunities presented through Housing Executive funded community initiatives in rural areas and explore linkages between these and other external funding programmes.	Increased number and geographical spread of rural community groups availing of community funding opportunities.	Rural community projects promoting and improving health and well-being.	Improved social inclusion and access to community services in rural areas.

### **Policy Objective 5: To work in partnership with others to assist in rural development.**

- 7.89 The Housing Executive has a long history of working with development partners, local authorities and community groups to regenerate neighbourhoods in decline. Investment in new housing is a vital element in rebuilding communities and restoring a sense of pride and belonging. In rural areas in particular, new housing can be fundamental in sustaining the population and supporting local infrastructure and services. The Housing Executive have worked with and on behalf of many rural communities to identify the need for and enable the delivery of social housing as well as offering financial support to owner occupiers to improve their homes.
- 7.90 The recent reform of local government brings with it a renewed focus on supporting a 'bottom-up' approach to regeneration. All eleven of the new councils, including Belfast will now have a rural component and increased powers to deliver to rural communities through the community planning process. It is hoped that rural issues and regeneration in particular will be afforded greater consideration and investment and that the new councils will appreciate the value in sustaining their vibrant rural communities.

#### **Policy Action 20) Work in partnership with DARD, councils and other funding agencies to support and contribute to rural development.**

- 7.91 Under 'Rural Homes and People', the Housing Executive reinforced their commitment to contribute to area based regeneration by working in partnership with DARD to support the delivery of the NI RDP. Under the 'village renewal' and 'basic services' measures of the NI RDP 2007-2013, rural community groups could apply for up to 75% grant funding for projects which would help regenerate their local areas. Additional match funding of 25% (up to £20k) from the Housing Executive enabled many groups to draw down on RDP funding for community projects ranging from Village Plans to larger more strategic projects. In total over the three year span of the Housing Executive initiative, 54 rural community projects were funded with a total investment of just under £458K.
- 7.92 Following the full evaluation of the Housing Executive match funding initiative (2011-2014) and considering the outcomes of the review of the last programme at Council level, the Housing Executive will consider introducing a similar initiative to support the new RDP (2014-2020) which was launched in August 2015. The delivery structures for the next programme (i.e. LEADER - Local Action Groups) will be co-terminus and councils will take the lead in coordinating projects.
- 7.93 The coordinated council wide focus on RDP delivery may present an opportunity to target those rural communities which are most in need of investment and/or to develop strategic projects which will benefit the wider area. It will be essential for the Housing Executive to engage with each council in order to determine their rural priorities, the urban/rural data they will collate at council level and how we can work in partnership to deliver regeneration where it is required.

- 7.94 The Housing Executive's Living over the Shop (LOTS) initiative has now been replaced by the Heritage in Housing scheme which essentially has the same purpose, of bringing vacant, first floor space into residential use. This scheme is targeted at towns/villages which have been successful in achieving Heritage Lottery Funding to renovate buildings of historic/architectural interest within a conservation area. The additional funding from the Housing Executive will further reduce the cost of renovation for property owners and will enable the provision of accessible, affordable accommodation within the town centre which could contribute to vibrancy and sustainability.
- 7.95 To date, the scheme has been introduced in the rural villages of Portaferry and Richhill but potential remains to promote the scheme in other villages where preservation of the conservation area and the addition of central, affordable accommodation could make a significant contribution in terms of regeneration.

**Policy Action 21) Promote the use of surplus Housing Executive land and property in rural areas for community based projects which will promote health and well-being and/or facilitate social enterprise.**

- 7.96 Although Housing Executive development sites are transferred, where possible, to housing associations for new build schemes, the organisation still retains a considerable land asset. It may be necessary for the Housing Executive to consider alternative uses for our rural land & property assets in areas where we have established that there is no social housing need but where there may be an opportunity to develop a project that will benefit the community. The Housing Executive's Community Asset Transfer policy is currently being developed and this could enable the development of facilities which bring social benefits to rural communities and promote health and well-being e.g. the creation of shared, recreational spaces and places or the development of a social enterprise or the use of a community-let for social enterprise.

### 7.97 Outcomes and Indicators for Policy Objective 5

<b>Policy Objective 5: To work in partnership with others to assist in rural development</b>			
<b>Outputs Policy Actions:</b>	<i>Outcomes Short Term:</i>	<i>Outcomes Medium Term:</i>	<i>Long Term Impacts:</i>
20) Work in partnership with DARD, councils and other funding agencies to support and contribute to rural development.	Increased collaboration with local councils and other public agencies.	Increased number of joint funded community projects in rural areas.	Increase in number/quality of community services and facilities in rural areas
21) Promote the use of surplus Housing Executive land and property in rural areas for community based projects which will promote health and well-being and/or facilitate social enterprise	Community projects identified through Housing Executive RDP match funding initiative.		

## 8.0 Summary of Policy Objectives and Proposed Actions

8.1 Below is a summary of all of the proposed policy actions associated with the 5 policy objectives. This will be amended to reflect responses received during the consultation process and will form the basis for the 'Sustainable Rural Communities - Rural Action Plan'.

<b>Policy Objective 1: To plan for and enable the provision of affordable homes which meet rural housing needs.</b>			
<b>Outputs Policy Actions:</b>	<b>Outcomes Short Term:</b>	<b>Outcomes Medium Term:</b>	<b>Long Term Impacts:</b>
1) Set out specific rural housing requirements at council level in the Housing Executive Commissioning Prospectus.  2) Review the current process of rural latent demand testing taking into consideration the increasing need for intermediate/mixed tenure housing in rural areas.  3) Support and encourage the provision of rural housing through the identification and investigation of potential housing sites in rural areas with unmet housing need.	Potential rural social housing schemes identified with housing providers.  The need for rural housing is investigated through local housing needs tests.	Meet the rural % target of the Social Housing Development Programme.	Social housing is provided in rural areas where unmet need has been identified.
4) Increase the capacity of Housing Executive operational housing staff to examine all available housing options with rural customers.  5) Develop a model for the delivery of rural intermediate/mixed-tenure housing schemes based on the outcomes of the affordable housing pilots and other examples of best practice.  6) Examine other models of housing delivery in rural areas, learning from and building on the success of	Demand for affordable/intermediate and mixed-tenure housing is evidenced at council level and investigated through local needs tests.	Increased rural schemes are identified with housing providers.	Affordable/intermediate and/or mixed-tenure housing is provided in rural areas where demand has been identified.



<p>pilots and other examples of best practice.</p> <p>7) Investigate the opportunities for rural housing development which are presented through new and existing planning policies.</p>			
<b>Policy Objective 2: To improve the condition of rural housing stock and reduce fuel poverty</b>			
<b>Outputs Policy Actions:</b>	<b>Outcomes Short Term:</b>	<b>Outcomes Medium Term:</b>	<b>Long Term Impacts:</b>
<p>8) Ensure that Housing Executive programmes deliver investment to achieve and maintain modern social housing standards in rural housing stock in accordance with our new Asset Management Strategy.</p> <p>9) Promote new and existing Private Sector Improvement Grants which could improve the fabric of housing in rural locations.</p>	<p>Rural Housing Executive homes in need of repair and improvement identified through Stock Condition Survey.</p> <p>Available grants promoted at rural events and through rural publications.</p>	<p>Rural housing included in Housing Executive stock improvement programmes.</p> <p>% target of private sector grant approvals in rural areas achieved.</p>	<p>Existing rural homes benefit from improvement and investment.</p>
<p>10) Promote new and existing initiatives which are available to owner occupiers to improve the fabric and thermal efficiency of their homes and help to tackle fuel poverty in rural areas.</p> <p>11) Consider alternative sources of energy and innovative technologies which could improve the energy efficiency of Housing Executive stock in rural areas.</p>	<p>Available grants and energy initiatives promoted at rural events and through rural publications.</p> <p>Rural Housing Executive stock included in pilot of new technologies.</p>	<p>Oil Buying Clubs established in rural areas.</p> <p>% target of Affordable Warmth and Boiler Replacement approvals in rural areas.</p> <p>Uptake of the Solar PV scheme and other energy conservation initiatives in rural areas.</p>	<p>Decreased costs to rural dwellers to provide heat and power in their homes.</p>
<b>Policy Objective 3: To provide housing support to vulnerable people in rural areas.</b>			
<b>Outputs Policy Actions:</b>	<b>Outcomes Short Term:</b>	<b>Outcomes Medium Term:</b>	<b>Long Term Impacts:</b>
<p>12) Focus on the prevention of homelessness in rural areas by examining all available options which will help people to stay in their</p>	<p>Housing support services for homeless and/or vulnerable rural residents are</p>	<p>Increased uptake of Housing Executive funded support services in rural areas</p>	<p>Increased number of rural people helped to 'solve their housing problem'.</p>

<p>existing homes where possible, close to existing family/support networks.</p> <p>13) Work in partnership with other agencies to provide vulnerable rural applicants with tailored advice and wrap-around support which could help them to sustain existing tenancies.</p> <p>14) Develop cross-departmental data sharing systems which will facilitate more efficient housing support services in rural locations.</p>	<p>promoted through rural publications.</p> <p>Rural needs are factored in the commissioning of support services.</p>		
<p>15) Encourage the provision of accessible stock to meet the needs of an ageing rural population.</p> <p>16) Monitor the development of pending Welfare changes and mitigations on Housing Executive activities to determine if any changes are required as a consequence.</p>	<p>Need for accessible housing assessed in rural areas and highlighted with housing providers.</p> <p>Identification of any housing issues relevant to rural areas resulting from pending Welfare changes.</p>	<p>Increase in number of accessible properties provided in rural social housing schemes.</p>	<p>Accessible housing is provided in rural areas where need has been identified.</p>
<p><b>Policy Objective 4: To contribute to the development of safe, cohesive and engaged rural neighbourhoods.</b></p>			
<p><b>Outputs</b> <b>Policy Actions:</b></p>	<p><b>Outcomes</b> <b>Short Term:</b></p>	<p><b>Outcomes</b> <b>Medium Term:</b></p>	<p><b>Long Term</b> <b>Impacts:</b></p>
<p>17) Promote and develop the role of the Rural Residents Forum in the rural proofing of new and revised Housing Executive policies and strategies.</p>	<p>Increased number of Housing Executive policies and strategies presented to Rural Residents Forum for review.</p>	<p>Rural issues taken into account in the development of new and revised Housing Executive policies and strategies.</p>	<p>An equitable share of housing and housing services available in rural areas.</p>
<p>18) Ensure that rural areas are considered where possible for funding/support programmes stemming from the Housing Executive's Community Cohesion Strategy.</p>	<p>Rural areas included in community cohesion programmes.</p> <p>Rural schemes included in shared new build programme.</p>	<p>Community projects to build capacity and encourage shared living in rural areas.</p> <p>Increased number of new build housing schemes which enable shared living in rural areas.</p>	<p>Safe, inclusive and shared rural communities.</p>

19) Promote opportunities presented through Housing Executive funded community initiatives in rural areas and explore linkages between these and other external funding programmes.	Increased number and geographical spread of rural community groups availing of community funding opportunities.	Rural community projects promoting and improving health and well-being.	Improved social inclusion and access to community services in rural areas.
<b>Policy Objective 5: To work in partnership with others to assist in rural development</b>			
<b>Outputs Policy Actions:</b>	<b>Outcomes Short Term:</b>	<b>Outcomes Medium Term:</b>	<b>Long Term Impacts:</b>
20) Work in partnership with DARD, councils and other funding agencies to support and contribute to rural development.  21) Promote the use of surplus Housing Executive land and property in rural areas for community based projects which will promote health and well-being and/or facilitate social enterprise	Increased collaboration with local councils and other public agencies.  Community projects identified through Housing Executive RDP match funding initiative.	Increased number of joint funded community projects in rural areas.	Increase in number/quality of community services and facilities in rural areas

## APPENDIX 1: Glossary

Affordable Housing	Affordable housing is defined as social rented housing and intermediate housing for eligible households.
Affordable Warmth Scheme	DSD scheme for addressing fuel poverty in the private sector, delivered by the Housing Executive and local councils.
Building Relations in Communities (BRIC)	Provides training on good relations and funding for good relations plans.
Community Asset Transfer	Community Asset Transfer provides for a change in management and/or ownership of land or buildings, from public bodies to communities.
Community Cohesion	Cohesive communities are communities where there is a sense of belonging, and there are positive relationships within the community, regardless of background.
DARD	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.
Disabled Facility Grant (DFG)	A grant to help improve the home of a person with a disability who lives in the private sector to enable them to continue to live in their own home.
DSD	Department for Social Development.
Equity Sharing	Equity sharing allows social housing tenants to buy part of their dwelling (starting at 25%). The remaining portion is rented from the Housing Executive or registered housing association.
Europe 2020	10 year strategy proposed by the European Commission on 3 March 2010 for advancement of the economy of the European Union.
Floating Support	This enables users to maintain or regain independence in their own homes. Floating support is not tied to the accommodation but is delivered to individual users.
Fuel Poverty	A household is in fuel poverty if, in order to maintain an acceptable temperature throughout the home, it would have to spend more than 10% of its income on all household fuel.
Full Duty Applicant (FDA)	A Full Duty Applicant is a person to whom the Housing Executive owes a duty under Article 10 (2) of the Housing (NI) Order, 1988 to “secure that accommodation becomes available for his/her occupation”.
HCN	Housing Community Network assists residents’ associations to develop local services.
HCS	House Condition Survey, carried out by the Housing Executive.
HECA	Home Energy Conservation Authority, the Housing Executive is the HECA for Northern Ireland.
House Sales Scheme	The House Sales Scheme gives eligible tenants of the Housing Executive or registered housing association the right to buy their property from their landlord at a discount.
Housing Needs Assessment	This is an assessment of local housing needs primarily in relation to general needs social housing, supported housing, travellers and affordable housing.
Household	A single person living alone or a group of people living at the same address as their only or main residence either sharing a room or sharing at least one meal a day or sharing a substantial proportion of domestic shopping arrangements.
Household Reference Person	The member of the household who owns or pays the rent or mortgage on the property. Where two people have equal claim (e.g. husband and wife jointly owns the property) the household reference person is the person with the highest annual income.

Housing Stress	Applicants on the waiting list who have a points total in excess 30 points are considered to be in housing stress, or housing need.
Intermediate Housing	Intermediate Housing consists of shared ownership housing provided through a registered housing association (e.g. Co-Ownership Housing Association) and helps eligible households who can afford a small mortgage, but that are not able to afford to buy a property outright. The property is split between part ownership by the householder and part social renting from the registered housing association.
Large adult household	Three or more adults, related or unrelated, and no dependent children aged under 16.
Latent demand test	Housing needs survey carried out in a rural area to assess any potential hidden need.
Mandatory repair grant	This is a grant made available by the Housing Executive to landlords who have been served a repair notice by the council.
NI Housing Market: Review & Perspectives	Document published by the Housing Executive which draws together housing research and housing market intelligence for policy-makers and decisions makers in the public, private and voluntary sectors.
NISRA	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.
OFMDFM	Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.
Oil buying clubs	Oil buying clubs are designed to help consumers reduce their costs by purchasing oil orders in bulk as part of a group.
Photovoltaic (PV) panels	Solar electric panels attached to the roof of a house which when exposed to sunlight will generate electricity to power the home.
PPS	Planning Policy Statement.
RDP	Rural Development Programme.
RDS	Regional Development Strategy.
Renewable Heat Incentive	Grant support from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) available for owner occupiers to install renewable technologies in their home.
Shared Housing	These are communities where people choose to live with others regardless of their religion or race, in a neighbourhood that is safe and welcoming to all.
SHDP	Social Housing Development Programme, the SHDP provides grant to housing association to build social housing. The programme is managed by the Housing Executive on a three-year rolling programme.
Smartmove Housing	This is a charitable organisation offering advice; support and accommodation to people that are homeless and in acute housing need.
Social Enterprise	Social enterprises are businesses with primarily social objectives whose profits are reinvested to achieve these objectives in a community.
Social Rented Housing	Social Rented Housing is housing provided at an affordable rent by the Housing Executive and Registered housing association; that is, housing association, which are registered and regulated by the Department of Social Development as a social housing provider. Social rented accommodation is offered in accordance with the Common Selection Scheme, administered by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, which prioritises households who are living in unsuitable or insecure accommodation.
Supported Housing	A term used to describe a range of both long and short-term accommodation provided for people who need an additional level of

	housing related support to help them lead an independent life.
Supporting People Programme	The Supporting People programme is designed to provide housing related support to prevent difficulties that can typically lead to hospitalisation, homelessness or institutional care and can aid a smooth transition to independent living for those leaving an institutionalised environment.
TBUC	The Northern Ireland Executive Together Building a United Community Strategy containing objectives for a united and shared community and improved community relations.
Unfitness	<p>The current Fitness Standard is set out in Schedule 5 of the Housing (NI) Order 1992. This states that a dwelling is unfit for human habitation if it fails to meet one or more of the following requirements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is structurally stable;</li> <li>• It is free from serious disrepair;</li> <li>• It is free from dampness prejudicial to the health of the occupants (if any);</li> <li>• It has adequate provision for heating, lighting and ventilation;</li> <li>• It has an adequate supply of wholesome water;</li> <li>• There are satisfactory facilities in the house for the preparation and cooking of food, including a sink with a satisfactory supply of hot and cold water;</li> <li>• It has a suitably located water closet for the exclusive use of the occupants (if any);</li> <li>• It has, for the exclusive use of the occupants (if any), a suitably located fixed bath or shower and wash-hand basin, each of which is provided with a satisfactory supply of hot and cold water;</li> <li>• It has an effective system for the draining of foul, waste and surface water.</li> </ul>
Unmet Needs Prospectus	This advises housing association and developers on locations where there is a shortage of programmed development sites to meet the projected social housing need.