



# Sustainable Rural Communities

Rural Strategy & Action Plan

2016 - 2020



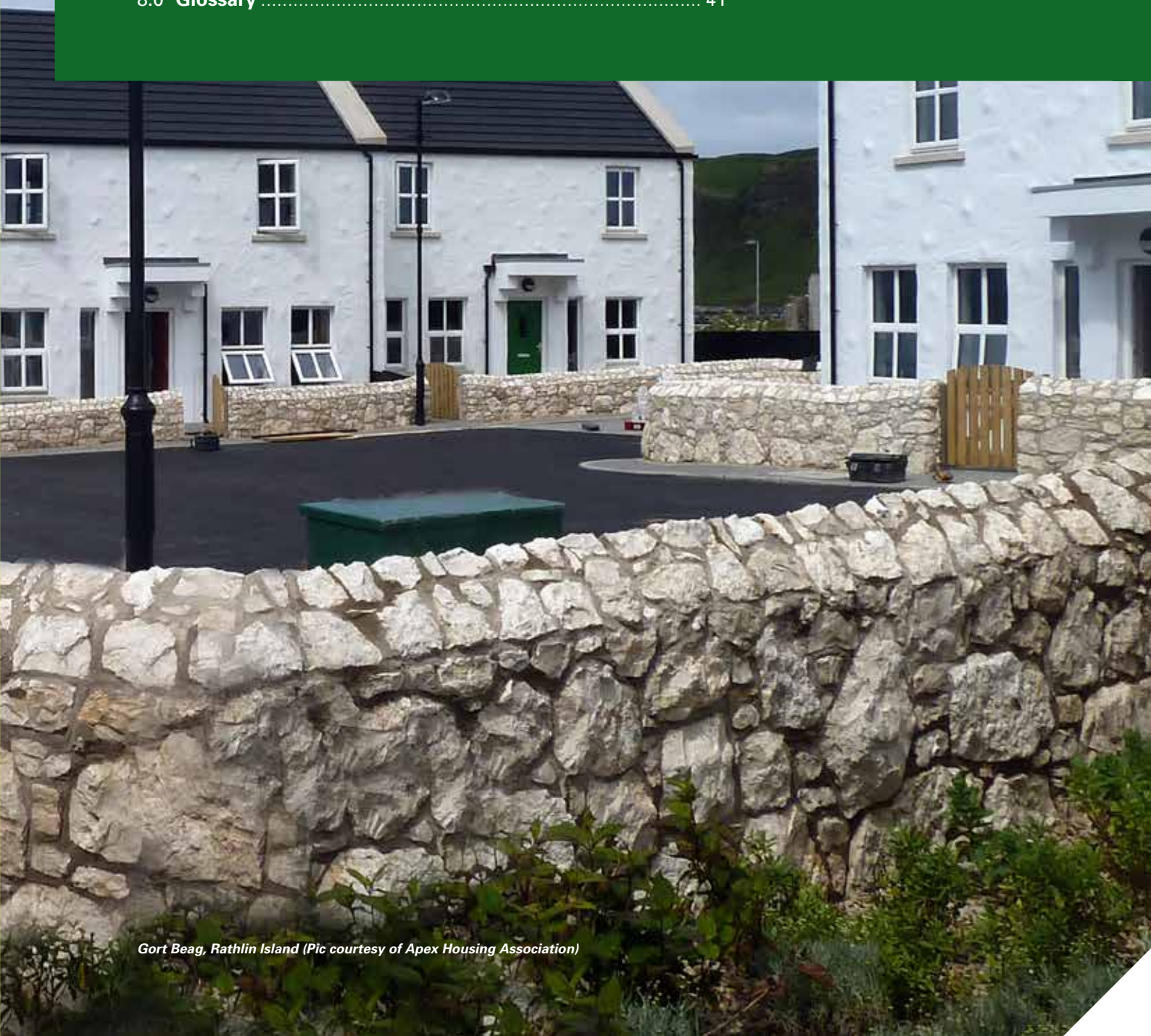


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## Rural Strategy & Action Plan

2016 - 2020

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An aerial photograph of a rural landscape. In the foreground, there is a field of tall, green grass with some dried stalks. The middle ground shows a small village with several houses and buildings, surrounded by green fields and trees. The background features rolling green hills and a large, prominent hill with a flat top under a clear blue sky.

*" We recognise the growing pressures from rural communities for local, affordable homes"*

# 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 This Rural Housing Strategy & Action Plan sets out the Housing Executive's contribution to sustaining our rural communities. We have reaffirmed our commitment to addressing the housing needs of rural residents and renewed our specific rural housing approach which has evolved significantly since it was first introduced in 1991. We recognise the growing pressures from rural communities for local, affordable homes, the need to address increasing levels of unfit 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.
- 1.3 'Sustainable Rural Communities' has been prepared following a full review of the outgoing 'Rural Homes and People' Strategy during 2015 and eight weeks of public consultation at the beginning of 2016. We would like to take this opportunity to thank those individuals and organisations who took the time to attend consultation events and who provided a wide range of detailed and informative consultation responses which have been afforded full consideration. The strategy has also been prepared in line with the Regional Development Strategy and the Sustainable Development Strategy for NI. It reflects recent, comprehensive structural changes, including the Reform of Local Government, the emergence of the 11 new councils and the revised administrative structure of the Housing Executive in line with the Social Housing Reform Programme.
- 1.4 Perhaps most importantly though, the launch of our Rural Housing Strategy is timely given the pending introduction of the Rural Needs Bill which places a statutory requirement on all public bodies and councils to consider the needs of rural communities in policies and services and to demonstrate how they have achieved this. This primary legislation is welcomed and endorsed by the Housing Executive. It provides an opportunity to refresh our rural proofing guidance, to promote the innovative programme of work set out in our Rural Action Plan and to work in collaboration with other public bodies and councils to deliver investment and support to enable vibrant and sustainable rural communities.



*Jenny Irvine, Arc Healthy Living Centre at stakeholder consultation event in February, 2016.*



*David Quinney Mee, Rathlin Development & Community Association.*

## 2.0 Introduction – Strategy Background

- 2.1 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.
- 2.2 However in 1991, the Housing Executive focused on developing the first specific rural housing policy in response to the findings of two key publications:
1. The 1988 Commission of the European Communities' publication 'The Future of Rural Society' cited that the largest problem facing rural areas was the 'provision of affordable housing for local communities'; and
  2. 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.
- 2.3 It was determined that the Housing Executive's first rural housing policy 'The Way Ahead' should consider all aspects of rural housing activity, encompassing issues such as housing conditions, housing need and supply, affordability and care in the community. Most significantly, the policy highlighted that rural circumstances were different from urban and recognised that in order for the Housing Executive to deliver on its statutory responsibilities in an equitable manner, **a specific rural approach was required.**
- 2.4 Since 1991, this specific rural approach has evolved through three consecutive rural housing policies/strategies in the context of changing governmental and organisational priorities and taking account of other environmental, social and economic factors impacting on rural communities. The preparation and implementation of the Rural Strategy is included as a priority in the Housing Executive's Corporate & Business Plan under Regional Services Objective 5 – Enabling sustainable neighbourhoods and regeneration. Just as important however, is the added recognition that the Rural Strategy encompasses all areas of Housing Executive responsibility and fundamental to its success is a commitment from internal departments to deliver on each individual aspect of the cross-divisional action plan.
- 2.5 The 2016-2020 Rural Strategy & Action Plan - 'Sustainable Rural Communities' has been shaped by:
- a) The recommendations from the review of the outgoing 'Rural Homes and People' strategy which took place during 2015 in consultation with internal representatives, external rural stakeholders, service providers and the Rural Residents' Forum; and
  - b) The numerous responses to the draft Rural Strategy which were received during eight weeks of public consultation in early 2016.
- 2.6 It is hoped that this strategy will ensure that the momentum gained in addressing rural housing inequalities over the last 25 years is maintained. The Housing Executive must take full advantage of the fresh opportunities for rural communities presented through increased collaborative working both with other government departments in the reformed structure and with the newly formed councils as part of the Community Planning process.

A row of traditional stone houses in a rural area, featuring multiple chimneys and windows with light blue curtains. The houses are built with rough-hewn stone and have dark roofs. In the foreground, there is a lush green lawn with various flowers, including pink and red hydrangeas, and a wooden fence. The sky is clear and blue.

*"Every government department has a responsibility in respect of rural areas"*



## 3.0 Strategic Context

- 3.1 The context for the development of rural policies and strategies in Northern Ireland has changed considerably since the last review in 2007. Most notably, there has been substantial progress in raising the profile of rural issues at ministerial level.
- 3.2 Firstly, the Programme for Government (PfG) 2008-2011 recognised that while the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD)<sup>1</sup> has responsibility for rural development, every government department has a responsibility in respect of rural areas and therefore all departments must contribute to the development of a Rural White Paper. Following intensive cross-departmental engagement, the NI Executive's first **Rural White Paper Action Plan** was developed and rolled out for implementation in 2012. Under the theme of 'Rural Communities' the action plan required the Department of Social Development (DSD)<sup>2</sup> to progress a number of housing-related actions and made specific reference to the progression of the **Housing Executive's Rural Action Plan**.
- 3.3 The 2008-2011 PfG also reaffirmed the responsibility of DARD to provide a support and advice service to government departments on the rural proofing process which had previously been introduced by the NI Executive in 2002. **Rural proofing** is the process by which all policies and strategies are assessed to determine whether they have a differential impact on rural areas and, where appropriate, adjustments are made to take account of particular rural circumstances.
- 3.4 In order to further enhance the rural proofing process and to extend the duty to the newly formed local councils, on 9th November 2015 the DARD minister introduced the '**Rural Needs Bill**' into the Assembly. The Bill passed its final stage in March 2016 and was granted Royal Assent on 9th May 2016. This primary legislation not only places a statutory duty on all central government departments and local councils to pay due regard to 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.
- 3.5 The Housing Executive has endorsed and implemented rural proofing since it was first introduced in 2002. The procedures are in place to rural proof all new and revised corporate strategies and policies and a training programme has been developed and delivered to ensure that policy owners are aware of their responsibility to consider whether a new policy will have a disproportionate impact on rural customers. The introduction of the Rural Needs Bill provides the legislative basis for this work and an opportunity for the Housing Executive to reinforce our commitment to addressing the needs of rural communities.

<sup>1</sup> DARD was replaced with the Department of the Environment, Agriculture and Rural Affairs in May 2016

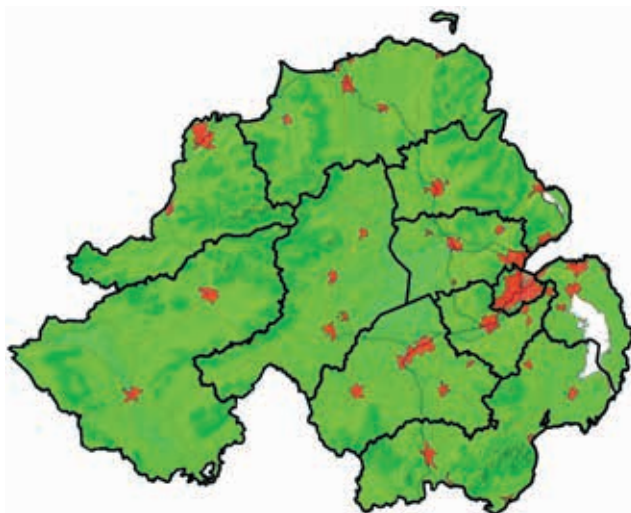
<sup>2</sup> DSD was replaced with the Department for Communities in May 2016



*" all settlements with  
a population less than  
5,000 are considered to  
be rural"*

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

- 4.1 There is not currently a standardised definition of 'rural' in Northern Ireland and the term can have different meanings across government departments and between service providers. The Housing Executive has adopted the most widely accepted urban/rural default definition as recommended by the Northern Ireland Statistical Research Agency (NISRA) in the 'Review of the Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements' which was published in March 2015.
- 4.2 NISRA classify every settlement as defined in extant Area Plans, based on their population size in the 2011 Census. All settlements included within population bands A-E (greater than 5,000) are considered to be urban and all settlements included within population bands F-H (less than 5,000) are considered to be rural.
- 4.3 Based on this definition, there are 596 adopted rural settlements located within an extensive rural hinterland which accounts for approximately 75% of the total land mass of Northern Ireland. In 2011, 667,000 people (37% of the total population of Northern Ireland) resided in rural areas.



Urban/Rural NI: NISRA March 2015

- Rural (Settlements and open countryside population <5,000)
- Urban (Settlements with population >5,000)

- 4.4 During the review of the outgoing 'Rural Homes and People' policy in 2015, an examination of rural demographics, social and economic trends and urban-rural variations, particularly in relation to housing, identified the following key statistics for rural areas<sup>1</sup>:
- a) Between NI Census' in 2001 and 2011, **the rural population increased** by 15%, the urban population increased by 7%;
  - b) The **age profile of Northern Ireland is increasing**, between 2001 and 2011 the number of people aged 65 and over increased by 18% and the number of people aged 85 and over increased by 35%;
  - c) **Average weekly incomes are on average lower** in rural areas, particularly in the west of the province where almost 24% of individuals with low income (average weekly income below £264) reside;
  - d) 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;
  - e) At March 2016, approximately **13.5% of those on the waiting list** for social housing and **11% of those who were registered as homeless**, wished to be housed in a rural area;
  - f) The proportion of **social housing stock** in rural areas (**7%**) remains significantly lower than in urban areas (18%);
  - g) There was a significant **rise in unfitness in private sector housing stock in rural areas** from 4% in 2006 to 9% in 2011 and 5% to 14% in isolated rural areas;
  - h) **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.

<sup>1</sup> Statistical information is drawn from NISRA census-based data, the Housing Executive's 2011 House Condition Survey and 2015-2018 Northern Ireland Housing Market Review & Perspective and also the Family Resources Survey (FRS) urban/rural publication produced by DSD IN 2013.

Harbour  
Lights Cafe  
Tel: 028 2888 5868

CARNLOUGH COMMUNITY  
ASSOCIATION GROUP  
TELEPHONE: 028 2888 6188

SJM  
SPECIALIST  
JANUARY



Carnlough Community Association make use of Housing Executive community grant.

# 5.0 Strategy Framework

- 5.1 The Housing Executive believes that the Rural Strategy should contribute to the following overarching vision for rural housing:

**‘Vibrant, shared, healthy and sustainable rural communities where everyone has access to decent and affordable housing’.**

- 5.2 The principles which were agreed through intensive consultation for the first rural policy have been enshrined in the development of the subsequent rural policies/strategies, ‘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 the approach moving forward.

## Principles

- 1) The Rural Strategy should contribute towards rural development objectives, within a framework of sustainable development;
- 2) A rural approach is necessary not a revised urban approach;
- 3) Partnership with others is critical for success;
- 4) Tailoring to local circumstances is necessary in recognition of the diverse nature and sense of place existing in rural Northern Ireland;
- 5) Working with rural communities is essential for effective rural development;
- 6) Affordability and accessibility are at the core of potential housing solutions;
- 7) Investment and resources must be directed to where they are most needed and to those who need them most;
- 8) The Rural Strategy should be mindful of Section 75 Equality Legislation, with the emphasis on promotion of equality of opportunity in rural areas; and
- 9) Opportunities should be availed of to test new approaches, learning from policy and best practice elsewhere.

## Sustainable rural communities

- 5.3 In line with these principles and reflecting the aims of the Regional Development Strategy (RDS) 2035, sustainable communities are at the core of this strategy. The RDS recognises that ‘the rural community is the custodian of our exceptional natural and built environment’ and aims to sustain the overall strength of the rural community living in small towns, villages, small rural settlements and the open countryside. In order to achieve this, new development and employment opportunities are required which respect local, social and environmental circumstances. This is also reflected in the Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland (SPPS) which seeks to ‘manage growth to achieve appropriate and sustainable patterns of development which supports a vibrant rural community’.

- 5.4 The Housing Executive recognises the importance of contributing to the creation of sustainable and balanced rural communities, **‘places where people want to live and work, now and in the future’**<sup>2</sup>. Based on the eight characteristics of a sustainable community recommended in the 2005 Bristol Accord which are reflected within the Northern Ireland Executive’s 2010 Sustainable Development Strategy, the Housing Executive recognises that in order to be sustainable, a rural community should be:

- **Active, inclusive and safe;**  
All residents should have access to a decent, accessible and affordable

<sup>2</sup> Bristol Accord – Conclusions of Ministerial Informal on Sustainable Communities in Europe, UK Presidency 2005

home within a safe, fair, tolerant and cohesive neighbourhood where there is a positive sense of community.

- **Well run;**  
There should be effective and inclusive participation, representation and leadership.
- **Well connected;**  
Accessible by transport links (especially public transport), have access to broadband and incorporate facilities which encourage safe walking and cycling.
- **Well served;**  
All residents should have access to a range of services including public, private, community and voluntary services which are accessible, promote health and well-being, reduce deprivation, social exclusion and poverty and increase opportunities for all.
- **Environmentally sensitive;**  
Existing housing stock should benefit from energy efficiency measures and new housing should be developed in line with European sustainability standards enabling a lifestyle that minimises negative environmental impacts.
- **Thriving;**  
Attractive and accessible rural areas which can or have attracted private sector investment, enabling a diverse and innovative local economy and securing training and employment opportunities for local people.
- **Well designed and built; and**  
A quality built and natural environment which includes housing which is sensitively designed to reflect local character and setting and incorporating a range of house types and tenures to address housing needs and support balanced communities.
- **Fair for everyone.**  
Facilities and services should be accessible for all residents as well as those from other areas and different community backgrounds, both now and in the future.

5.5 The Housing Executive delivers a range of housing services which contribute to the achievement of each of these components and also to **place making** which brings them together into holistic and people focused plans and programmes for an area. As partners in the community planning process and statutory consultees in the local development plan process, the Housing Executive have an opportunity to actively contribute to collaborative place making through which a common vision for a place can be agreed and realised. Based on this and considering the overarching principles and the main issues affecting rural communities, the following 5 strategic objectives provide the direction for the Rural Strategy over the next 4 years:

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.**

5.6 The delivery of each of these objectives is supported by a range of short and medium term actions supported by a number of specific rural policies and procedures. The 2016-2020 Rural Action Plan (section 7) comprises all of these supporting actions as well as the outcomes by which the progress of each action can be measured on a quarterly basis and long term impacts which reflect the Housing Executive's vision for rural housing and our contribution to the enabling and support of sustainable rural communities.



Housing development in Charlemont (Pic courtesy of Choice Housing Association)

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

- 5.7 The Housing Executive considers 'affordable housing' to be both social rented housing (housing provided at an affordable rent by a registered housing association to households in housing need) and intermediate housing (Shared ownership housing provided by a registered housing association to households who can afford a small mortgage but are not able to own the property outright). The provision of decent and affordable homes (for sale and rent) is critical in sustaining vibrant rural communities and improving social, environmental and economic well-being.
- 5.8 In March 2016, 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. Based on trends of rural housing stress, the Housing Executive's Strategic Guidelines sets a percentage target for rural schemes on the Social Housing Development Programme. However, there are two key factors impacting on the provision of social homes in those rural locations where they are most required:
- **The identification of social housing need:** The Housing Executive recognises that because there is less existing social housing located in rural areas and/or a large proportion of stock has been sold, 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. Economies



*Shared housing development in Saintfield (Pic courtesy of Choice Housing Association)*



*Housing development in Forkhill (Pic courtesy of Fold Housing Association)*



of scale can deter housing providers from developing rural schemes where the waiting list would demonstrate only a marginal need whilst local people and public representatives may feel that people would come forward if new homes were provided.

- **The identification of land which is suitable and available for housing development:** It is becoming increasingly difficult for housing associations to source development sites in rural locations for the delivery of rural housing schemes. Historically, housing associations have found difficulty in competing with the private sector in acquiring sites for social housing within the restricted Housing Association Grant funding regime.

5.9 In order to address this and to promote and contribute to sustainable rural communities which are **'active and inclusive, well connected and well designed and built'**, the Housing Executive will continue to provide a rural housing enabler service, assisting rural communities who wish to examine the provision of affordable housing in their locality. This service will incorporate the assessment of rural housing need, the identification of potential development sites, engagement with housing associations and local councils and the examination of the potential to facilitate mixed tenure schemes.

5.10 The following actions have been identified to support the delivery of Objective 1 over the next four years:

**Action 1: Review the current policy and procedures for examining rural housing need during 2016 and thereafter undertake an annual programme of rural housing needs surveys in approximately five rural locations.**

5.11 The Housing Executive will work with local communities to identify hidden or 'latent' housing need in selected rural settlements. Previous 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 a site had been earmarked (i.e. people came forward when it seemed realistic that a scheme would be delivered).

5.12 The current policy and procedures for rural housing needs surveys will be reviewed during 2016, examining the potential to increase housing association involvement in the process and to broaden the scope to include an examination of the demand for affordable/mixed tenure housing.

**Action 2: Examine the potential to capture information from rural housing applicants which may help determine where housing shortages exist in rural areas.**

5.13 In 2014, the Housing Executive embarked upon a Transformation programme, the role of which is to examine, redesign and improve the quality and efficiency of front-line housing services and to increase our focus on customer service. With an emphasis on providing comprehensive housing advice to rural customers, frontend Housing Executive staff are developing an awareness of all housing options in the rural locality as well as the capacity to signpost to other tenures where there may be a more suitable housing solution.

5.14 The new approach presents an opportunity to capture information from new and existing customers 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 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.

**Action 3: Ensure rural need for affordable housing is highlighted to local councils in the annual Housing Needs Assessment and in the Housing Market Analysis.**

5.15 Under the new two-tier planning system each of the 11 councils will now prepare new Local Development Plans (LDPs) which will provide certainty regarding the supply of land required to meet affordable housing need. Each LDP will zone land, set key site requirements, include a development management policy and could potentially include a developer contribution policy to encourage the delivery of affordable housing. The Housing Executive's Housing Need Assessment and Housing Market Analysis will provide the evidence base for social and intermediate housing needs and will assist local councils in the identification of sites to meet this need. It will be crucial to highlight rural housing need based on local waiting lists for social housing and taking account of the outcomes of rural housing need surveys (discussed above) to ensure that land is made available in rural settlements for future housing development.

**Action 4: Based on levels of rural housing need, set and monitor a strategic target for delivery of the Social Housing Development Programme in rural areas and seek to ensure sufficient rural schemes are included to meet this target.**

5.16 The Housing Executive's Strategic Guidelines will include a percentage target for the Social Housing Development Programme for rural new build schemes which is based on analysis of housing need in rural areas - this is usually around 10%. The Housing Executive will liaise with housing associations to ensure that sufficient schemes are included on the programme to address rural housing need. Transfer schemes (Housing Executive land) will be facilitated wherever possible and Existing Satisfactory Purchases (existing properties on the open market) and Off the Shelf units (private new build properties) will be supported where need is marginal.

**Action 5: Highlight to housing providers in the Housing Executive's Commissioning Prospectus those rural locations where social/affordable housing is required.**

5.17 The Housing Executive's commissioning prospectus for each council area will set out localised rural housing need based on the Housing Need Assessment and Strategic Guidelines. The commissioning prospectus will be used by the Housing Executive's Regional Place-shapers to guide housing associations to seek sites 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 rural housing needs survey.

**Action 6: Undertake a programme of site identification studies to support and encourage the provision of housing in rural areas where unmet need has been identified.**

5.18 Housing Executive planners will assist housing providers in seeking development sites by preparing detailed site identification studies which examine all opportunities for housing schemes within and around rural settlements which have been highlighted in the commissioning prospectus. Priority will be given to sites which are still within Housing Executive ownership as well as any other available surplus public sector lands.

**Action 7: Examine the potential to pilot a rural mixed tenure scheme based on other examples of best practice including community self-build.**

5.19 The Housing Executive supports the development of balanced communities, a principle of both the RDS and SPPS. The SPPS states that “good quality housing offering a variety of house types, sizes and tenures is fundamental to the building of balanced communities, allowing people from different backgrounds to live together, strengthening economic sustainability, community cohesion, reducing social division and exclusion and increasing well-being”. The Housing Executive will continue to encourage the development of mixed tenure housing schemes which will provide a more diverse range of housing options for rural dwellers and which may also improve economies of scale for housing providers. We will also examine the potential for other models of housing development such as community self-build which may be an attractive low cost alternative for

those who could not otherwise afford to build their own home.

5.20 Working in partnership with delivery agents as well as local communities will be essential in establishing support for this type of initiative which could assist in increasing housing supply and also in developing local skills.



*Children from St Paul's Primary School Irvinestown who participated in a 'Draw Your Dream Home' competition this year with Area Manager, Eddie Doherty.*



*Niall Fitzpatrick, from the Housing Executive's Downpatrick office, showing Ms Ross from Drumaness the new new heating control.*

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

5.21 The most recent House Condition Survey (2011) attributes increasing rates of house 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 and paying an excessive amount for household energy bills could have direct consequences for their health and wellbeing.

5.22 The Housing Executive has three key roles in contributing to the improvement of the condition of rural housing stock and delivering and promoting measures which will help to reduce levels of fuel poverty:

1. As a major landlord in rural Northern

Ireland (approximately 14,000 dwellings), there is a duty to maintain a decent standard of social housing stock which is accessible, affordable and meets the needs of rural tenants;

2. The Private Sector Home Improvement Grants programme offers support through the Disabled Facilities Grant to rural owner occupiers and private tenants who require adaptations to meet their individual needs. Discretionary grants (renovation and replacement grants) are also available in exceptional circumstances;
3. As the Home Energy Conservation Authority in Northern Ireland the Housing Executive also has a key role in identifying, promoting and monitoring progress of energy efficiency throughout all tenures in the residential sector in Northern Ireland.

5.23 In order to contribute to sustainable rural communities which are **'well served and environmentally sensitive'**, the following policy actions have been identified to support the delivery of Policy Objective 2 over the next four years:

**Action 8: Ensure that Housing Executive planned maintenance programmes deliver investment to rural housing stock in accordance with the new Asset Management Strategy.**

5.24 Savills PLC carried out a condition survey of the Housing Executive's stock between August 2014 and January 2015 and found that although the stock meets the minimum standards for housing as set out in the Fitness Standard and Decent Homes standard, major investment is needed to achieve and maintain a modern housing standard for the stock over the next 30 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 and this will be followed by a new 10 Year Investment Plan that will set out where and in what we will invest during that period. Both the Asset Management Strategy and the 10 Year Investment Plan will pay due regard to the needs of our rural stock.

**Action 9: Monitor the uptake of Private Sector Improvement Grants in rural areas to ensure that rural home owners receive an appropriate share of grant aid.**

5.25 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%. However, although they are only awarded in very restricted numbers certain discretionary grants (renovation and replacement grants) are still available when the owner occupier can demonstrate exceptional circumstances, such as a risk to health and safety. These grants could enable necessary improvement works to rural homes in a poor state of repair and therefore it will be important to ensure that an equitable share is directed towards rural areas.

5.26 Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) and Repair Grants 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 and it will be important to highlight the continued availability of this grant, particularly in rural areas where there may often be less alternative housing options for less mobile rural dwellers.

**Action 10: Promote any new and existing Private Sector Improvement Grants which could improve the fabric of housing in rural locations.**

5.27 The Housing Executive will continue to promote available private sector grants in rural areas, in particular through our local offices, through our rural publications and rural information seminars and with rural community groups primarily through the Rural Residents' Forum.

# Cavanaleck Leaf Centre



Cavanaleck Oil Buying Club in Fermanagh.

**Action 11: Monitor the uptake of the Affordable Warmth and Boiler Replacement schemes in rural areas.**

5.28 Measures which are currently available to owner occupiers to improve the thermal efficiency of their homes include the Affordable Warmth scheme which is administered by the Housing Executive together with the Boiler Replacement Scheme which has been extended until March 2017. The Affordable Warmth scheme is an initiative targeted at areas with high levels of fuel poverty where there has been low uptake of assistance through self-referral. The scheme offers funding for a range of works including the installation/replacement of heating installations, insulation measures and the replacement of defective windows. Eligibility is based on the income of the household. The Boiler Replacement Allowance is available to owner occupiers with a boiler that is over 15 years old below certain income thresholds. Both of these schemes contribute to alleviating fuel poverty in rural areas and the Housing Executive will continue to monitor and report on uptake on an urban/rural basis.

**Action 12: Contribute to the DfC policy review on support for repair and improvement in the private sector and any revised scheme of assistance which emerges from the review.**

5.29 A project board including the DfC and Housing Executive are reviewing the current home improvement grants scheme and associated legislation. The outcomes of this review will be particularly important for rural owner occupiers given that housing unfitness is approximately 9% in rural areas compared to the Northern Ireland average of 5%.

**Action 13: Register and renew registrations of Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO) identified in rural areas as required.**

5.30 Until the function is transferred to the councils in 2017, the Housing Executive will continue to implement a statutory registration scheme for HMOs which also requires these properties to comply with set physical and management standards. It is important that relevant standards are rolled out for HMOs in rural areas.

**Action 14: Monitor uptake of the Housing Executive/Bryson Energy Oil Buying Clubs scheme in rural areas.**

5.31 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 community oil-buying clubs have been set up which have enabled members to pool their oil purchases and order smaller amounts on a monthly basis resulting in considerable savings. This is an effective and worthwhile initiative which will be further promoted in rural areas in order to expand membership of existing clubs, 80% of which are currently located in rural areas.

**Action 15: Ensure that rural areas are included in the Housing Executive's energy efficiency promotional activities including a target of 35% of the schools programme in rural schools.**

5.32 As the Home Energy Conservation Authority in Northern Ireland the Housing Executive manages an annual energy efficiency marketing campaign which includes promoting available grant aid, raising awareness and providing advice

and assistance on behavioural changes that will help householders make savings and reduce energy consumption. 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
- The Department for the Economy (DfE) - who are currently seeking to introduce the EnergyWise initiative which will provide much needed investment in the energy services sector and target support for low income households not eligible for DfC's Affordable Warmth scheme.

5.33 It is essential that the availability of energy advice and financial incentives will be promoted in rural areas through the schools programme, through rural publications, events and seminars and with our Rural Residents' Forum and external rural agencies.

### **Action 16: Target at least 15% of the Housing Executive's Solar Photovoltaic (PV) programme in rural areas.**

5.34 Following a successful pilot to install Solar PV panels on 1,000 Housing Executive properties in 2015/16, Landlord Services are proposing to expand the programme to include a further 2,000 Housing Executive properties as well as offices and commercial properties. 30% of the properties included in the pilot were located in rural areas but a target of 15% appropriately reflects the proportion of rural Housing Executive stock.

### **Action 17: Consider alternative sources of energy and innovative technologies which could improve the energy efficiency of Housing Executive stock in rural areas.**

5.35 The Housing Executive will continue to 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. The accessibility of such pilot schemes in rural areas will be fully considered in each case.

5.36 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.

5.37 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 anaerobic digester plants outside Cookstown and Irvinestown to heat nearby housing (both tenanted and owner occupied).





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

5.38 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.

5.39 The Housing Executive recognises that the population is ageing and there is 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.

5.40 In order to contribute to sustainable rural communities which are **'inclusive, well served and fair for everyone'**, the following policy actions have been identified to support the delivery of Policy Objective 3 over the next four years:

**Action 18: Measure and monitor the extent of homeless applicants who wish to be housed in a rural location in order to inform the review of the Homelessness Strategy and to assist in ongoing strategic planning of services.**

5.41 The common waiting list for social housing includes applicants who are assessed as being homeless (Full Duty Applicants). It is possible therefore to determine the number of homeless applicants who wish to be housed in rural locations and to monitor this on a quarterly basis in order to determine trends.

5.42 The Housing Executive's Homelessness Strategy will be reviewed in 2016/17 with a new homelessness strategy being published in April 2017. The strategy will have to take account of the extent and nature of rural homelessness. Subsequently each of the 13 Area Homeless Action Plans should identify and set out measures to address rural homelessness at a local level. Temporary accommodation can be a particular problem for those faced with homelessness in a rural area and options to deal with any potential issues/gaps in provision should be explored.

**Action 19: Ensure that the 'housing options' approach including the new policy, procedures and associated training take account of housing support issues which are specific to rural areas.**

5.43 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 housing staff's increased awareness of local housing support services and the capacity to draw on these services to provide long term, sustainable solutions for customers.

5.44 Analysis of the current 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 the following four key housing options available to new applicants:

1. Stay in their existing home;
2. Stay in their existing home with support;
3. Move (social, private, temporary accommodation);or
4. Move with support.

5.45 It will be important to ensure that the housing options approach is fully rural proofed at the outset in order to ensure that there will not be a disproportionate impact for rural customers and/or that any impact will be mitigated.

**Action 20: Promote the availability of homelessness advice and support services in rural areas.**

5.46 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 local district offices for housing advice & support.

**Action 21: Carry out an exercise to gather information on existing Supporting People services by client group so as to identify potential gaps in rural areas and examine best practice elsewhere to address these.**

5.47 The Housing Executive's Supporting People programme provides housing-related advice and funding for support services to help make it easier for vulnerable people to live independently. Services are tailored to meet the needs of a range of groups including older people, those who are homeless, at risk of domestic violence or people with addiction problems. Whilst support services are widely available across Northern Ireland, it will be useful to map the location of service users in order to determine the uptake in rural areas and where gaps in provision may exist. This in turn will help inform the development of the Housing Executive's Strategic Needs Assessment and associated Commissioning Plans which will set out how and where Supporting People resources will be allocated.

**Action 22: Develop Outcomes Framework for all Supporting People services to include an update on rural dwellers where appropriate.**

5.48 The Outcomes Framework will provide an insight into the customer's experience of housing support services including how accessible the service was, how the service addressed their needs and any skills developed as a result. These experiences could inform the commissioning of services helping to ensure that future programmes are both responsive to need and an efficient use of resources.

**Action 23: Examine the potential to fund a rural community based service aimed at older people.**

5.49 Many rural communities have concerns about the social isolation and more limited access to services experienced by older rural dwellers. Fold HA and Shelter NI both receive Supporting People funding to deliver a 'handyman' service targeted at vulnerable households providing weather-proofing and safety and security checks for a nominal charge. Services of this nature would have particular benefits in rural areas and the potential for the Housing Executive to fund at least one future rural community based service will be explored.

**Action 24: Monitor assessment and provision of housing for wheelchair needs and provision for complex needs on a rural-urban basis.**

5.50 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 2016, there were 86 wheelchair applicants and 535 complex needs applicants on the waiting list for social housing in rural areas. The Housing Executive are also 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 be a lower turnover of housing stock and a reluctance to move away from the community.

5.51 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.

**Action 25: Enable cross-representation between the Rural Residents Forum and the Disability Forum to ensure that the particular challenges facing people with disabilities in rural areas are considered when scrutinising new policies and services.**

5.52 Both rural residents and residents with disabilities are currently represented as 'hard to reach groups' within the Housing Executive's Housing Forum structure. However, rural residents with disabilities face their own particular set of challenges in terms of accessing services and community based facilities which can often lead to social exclusion and isolation. It is important therefore, to have a representative who can review Housing Executive policies, strategies and services from this perspective.

**Action 26: Monitor the development of pending welfare changes and mitigations on Housing Executive activities to determine if any changes are required as a consequence.**

5.53 The implications of Welfare Reform for rural householders could be significant and will be determined by 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.



*Margaret in Castlehill House, Lisnaskea.*



*Pictured at the opening of the new sculpture at Carrosyl are from left, Maree Hensey and Mark Ryan, Sculptures; Sean Keenan, Arts Council; Kathleen Breen, Carrosyl Community Association and Stephanie Kenny Quinn, Artist Facilitator.*

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

5.54 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.

5.55 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. The Housing Executive's Communities Department is dedicated to working with our social housing communities in both urban and rural areas, offering them the tools they need to create safe and inclusive neighbourhoods and improve outlook and quality of life.

- 5.56 In order to create sustainable rural communities which are **'active, inclusive, safe, well run and fair for everyone'**, the Housing Executive has teams dedicated to:
- a) Community Cohesion;
  - b) Community Safety; and
  - c) Community Involvement.

5.57 The following policy actions have been identified to support the delivery of Policy Action 4 over the next four years:

**Action 27: Promote and develop the role of the Rural Residents' Forum in the rural proofing of new and revised Housing Executive policies and strategies.**

5.58 Introduced in 2009, the Rural Residents' Forum is coordinated by Rural Community Network and serves as a focus group where housing issues can be discussed and rural views heard. The forum is embedded within the community involvement structure. Representatives participate in scrutiny panels and inter-agency groups at area level as well as the Central Housing 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.

5.59 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 be reinforced when the Rural Needs Bill takes full effect in 2018.

**Action 28: Undertake at least one rural research project a year with the Rural Residents' Forum and Rural Community Network.**

5.60 The Rural Residents' Forum has an important role in the delivery of the Rural Strategy and Action Plan. 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.

5.61 However they also produce their own annual action plan in which they set out their agreed objectives and associated range of work activities for the year based on issues and concerns raised by members. This will include the scrutiny of housing related services and the provision of rural responses to relevant departmental consultation papers but will also highlight at least one area that they think would benefit from further research. The Housing Executive will support this project wherever possible and will ensure that any findings recommendations are directed to the appropriate department.

**Action 29: Ensure that at least one young person from a rural area is included in the shadow housing forum.**

5.62 The Housing Executive has a long established mechanism for engagement with our tenants who are actively involved in shaping corporate policies and procedures. However, in order to ensure that the needs of young people are fully represented, the Housing Executive are currently working with the NI Youth Forum in order to develop a 'shadow housing forum' who will be trained and mentored to scrutinise housing and housing support services. It is envisaged that in time, members of the shadow forum will graduate to the central housing forum. It will be important to ensure that at least one young person from a rural area is considered for this initiative.

**Action 30: Ensure that rural areas are considered for funding/support programmes stemming from the Housing Executive’s Community Cohesion Strategy including:**

- **At least 4 rural estates in the BRIC 2 programme;**
- **At least 10 rural projects considered for Estate Based Strategy funding.**

5.63 The Housing Executive’s Community Cohesion Strategy 2015-2020, which was developed in line with OFM/DFM’s ‘Together: Building a United Community’ (TBUC) Strategy 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 focuses on 5 key areas:

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

5.64 The various funding/support programmes associated with the strategy will be delivered by 6 area based Good Relations Officers, a Race Relations Officer, a TBUC Shared Housing Officer, a TBUC Interface Officer and promoted 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 with Housing Executive’s Estate Based Strategy Funding. 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.

**Action 31: Consider how the Housing Executive can provide support to agencies and departments in the delivery of ‘contested space’ interventions in a rural context.**

5.65 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 and/or 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.

5.66 The Housing Executive will continue to engage with a range of partners including the Rural Community Network and the Community Relations Council through forums such as ‘Beyond Belfast’ and the Inter-Community Network which will examine how community divisions can be addressed and will consider the particular challenges for rural areas.

**Action 32: Ensure that rural housing schemes are considered for the TBUC shared new build programme, subject to eligibility criteria.**

5.67 The Housing Executive work with the DfC and housing associations to deliver the TBUC shared new build programme of social/affordable housing. Mixed housing schemes are encouraged and facilitated

in selected areas where the local waiting list would support it and where it will be practicable, desirable and safe. The TBUC funding is directed at facilitating tenant consultation within the new housing development and in developing a good relations plan which will encourage social bonding, bridging and linking within the wider community. Potential rural new build schemes will be assessed to determine their eligibility for the shared new build programme.

**Action 33: Promote the availability of advice and support services which deal with community safety in rural areas.**

5.68 The Housing Executive's Community Safety Strategy focuses on three key areas:

- Tackling fear;
- The fear of crime; and
- Anti-social behaviour.

5.69 These issues are not unique to large urban estates and in rural areas, 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 including members of the Rural Residents' Forum 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.

**Action 34: Ensure that at least one rural community is included in the pilot demonstration project aimed at increasing digital inclusion.**

5.70 The Housing Executive and DfC are currently developing a pilot demonstration project aimed at increasing digital inclusion within social housing communities. It is hoped that user-friendly mobile devices will be made available for up to 15 residents within a housing area and associated training will be delivered in partnership with Supporting Communities NI to demonstrate how they can be used. The project has three key objectives:

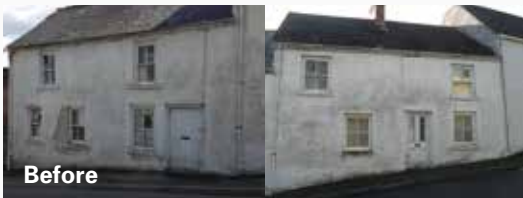
1. To build the capacity of individual tenants in using digital equipment;
2. To help tenants access, use and scrutinise online services e.g. for paying rent, paying bills, or seeking information;
3. To help address social isolation and encourage community involvement.

5.71 This project will have particular benefits for rural dwellers, especially in isolated locations where basic services are not as accessible and this will be considered when the pilot areas are selected.



*Pictured at the unveiling of the new artwork for Fintona are (behind Horse and Tram Mural l-r) Pauline Camac, Community Volunteer, Hannah Wilson, Fintona Youth Group and Eoin McGinn, Artist, Marilyn Giboney, Housing Executive Good Relations Officer, and Oonagh McAvinney, Housing Executive Area Manager.*





*Properties in Richill refurbished through the 'Heritage in Housing' initiative in 2015.*

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

5.72 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. However, the Housing Executive's contribution to regeneration extends beyond the provision of housing and includes the provision of funding and support aimed at empowering local communities to invest in their future.

5.73 In order to create sustainable rural communities which are **'active, inclusive, thriving, well served and well connected'** the Housing Executive offers a range of funding opportunities which are directed at both tenants (through our local offices) and other groups with an interest in nurturing and developing their rural community.

5.74 The following policy actions have been identified to support the delivery of Policy Action 5 over the next four years:

### **Action 35: Ensure that the issues facing rural communities are raised to local councils through the community planning process.**

5.75 The recent reform of local government brings with it a renewed focus on supporting a 'bottom-up' approach to regeneration. All 11 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.

5.76 The provision of new housing will be a priority for local councils and the Housing Executive's Housing Investment Plans will set out the projected housing requirement and social housing delivery programme for each council area. As a statutory partner at the community planning table, the Housing Executive has the opportunity to discuss with other community partners, where and how these needs can be met, possibly as one element within wider regeneration.

**Action 36: Promote and monitor the uptake in rural areas of Housing Executive community funding initiatives including:**

- **Community Grants;**
- **Social Enterprise Funding;**
- **Social Enterprise Agreements.**

5.77 The Housing Executive's Landlord Services Division offers three key programmes of investment funding to encourage and facilitate community-led social economy and social enterprise developments within its local social housing communities:

1. The Social Housing Enterprise Strategy, which was introduced in September 2015, offers social investment finance and other non-financial support to local community organisations, social enterprises and individual social entrepreneurs. Its aim is to develop viable and self-sustaining businesses which will

provide income and other socially and economically beneficial outcomes building vibrant and self-sustaining communities.

2. The community grants scheme which is administered through Housing Executive area offices provides funding to support local social housing communities, enhance their representative capacity and develop local social enterprise initiatives;
3. Local housing services managers can prepare Social Enterprise Agreements in collaboration with local social housing communities to provide one or more specific housing services. In return for those services the community organisation receives agreed fees which provide a regular income for the use and benefit of the local community. The services can include the management of open space around flats, bin/refuse management and estate walks.

5.78 All potential funding opportunities will be promoted through the Rural Residents Forum and through rural publications which will also feature case studies of successful projects. The uptake of each funding programme in rural areas will be monitored on a quarterly basis in collaboration with the Housing Executive's Social Investments Team.

**Action 37: Develop and implement a match funding programme to support the delivery of the 2014-2020 NI Rural Development Programme (RDP).**

5.79 Under 'Rural Homes and People', the Housing Executive reinforced their commitment to contribute to area based regeneration by working in partnership

with DARD (now DEARA) 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, 51 rural community projects were funded with a total investment of just under £446K.

- 5.80 Following the evaluation of the Housing Executive's previous RDP match funding initiative (2011-2014) and considering the proposals set out in each of the 11 Local Action Group's (LAGs) RDP Delivery Strategies, during 2016 the Housing Executive will develop a programme to support the new RDP (2014-2020) which was launched in August 2015.

### **Action 38: Monitor the delivery of the 'Heritage in Housing' initiative in rural areas.**

- 5.81 The Housing Executive's Heritage in Housing initiative is a match funding scheme targeted at town/village partnerships that have been successful in achieving the Heritage Lottery Fund's 'Townscape Heritage Initiative' (THI) funding to renovate buildings of historic/architectural interest within a designated conservation area. The additional funding from the Housing Executive (up to £30K) 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.

- 5.82 The scheme has been introduced in the rural villages of Portaferry and Richhill where preservation of the conservation area and the addition of central, affordable accommodation could make a significant contribution in terms of regeneration.

### **Action 39: Promote and administer the annual 'Rural Community Awards' competition.**

- 5.83 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.
- 5.84 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 to date 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.

**Action 40: Monitor and 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.**

5.85 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, including social enterprise initiatives. The Housing Executive's Community Asset Transfer policy enables 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.



*Cairns Residents Group, winner of 2015 Rural Community Award.*

## 6.0 Monitoring & Communication

6.1 The implementation of the Rural Strategy and delivery of the four year action plan will be monitored on a quarterly basis by the Rural Strategy Implementation Panel which is comprised of department leads from the Housing Executive's Regional Services, Landlord Services and Asset Management divisions and also external rural stakeholders including representatives from DfC, DEARA, NIFHA, RCN and RDC. This collaborative approach will be necessary to ensure that there is a corporate understanding of the (now statutory) requirement to consider the specific needs of rural communities and also to demonstrate how this has been achieved.

6.2 However, it will be equally as important to ensure that we communicate with rural communities themselves, to raise awareness of the housing services which we deliver and the support we can offer to help develop and sustain rural communities.

6.3 The following additional actions have been identified as being necessary to support the monitoring and communication of the Rural Action Plan over the next four years:

### **Action 41: Publicise the work undertaken by the Housing Executive in rural areas, including publication of 'Rural Matters' twice a year and production of an Annual Progress Report.**

6.4 The delivery of the Rural Action Plan will be highlighted through case studies and testimonials in our rural magazine which will also provide relevant information updates and promote up-coming schemes and funding programmes available to rural areas. This publication will be posted on the website and will be circulated to rural community and

voluntary organisations, local councils, politicians and our own local offices.

6.5 Social media is an increasingly effective tool for communicating rural events, initiatives and achievements and in raising awareness of housing support services and our rural housing needs tests.

6.6 The Annual Progress Report will provide details of business performance against agreed targets also highlighting achievements and areas which require a future focus.

### **Action 42: Monitor and report on the views of rural tenants on the services provided to them by the Housing Executive.**

6.7 The results of the Continuous Tenant Omnibus Survey (CTOS) are monitored on an urban/rural basis and the survey also contains questions specific to rural tenants. This enables the Housing Executive to quantify tenant satisfaction in rural areas and to isolate which particular services need to be developed or improved.

### **Action 43: Liaise with DEARA to revise the policy and procedures for rural proofing to reflect the provisions of the Rural Needs Bill.**

6.8 Now that the Rural Needs Bill has received Royal Assent, DEARA has a role in reviewing the current rural proofing guidance and training package to reflect the provisions of the Bill and the additional monitoring and reporting requirements. Rural awareness events will take place over the next two years which will provide an opportunity to review the Housing Executive rural proofing policy and develop a bespoke training package, well in advance of the Bill taking full effect in 2018.

## Equality & Rural Proofing

6.9 The Housing Executive has carried out the following screening exercises on the Rural Strategy & Action Plan:

- 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.

6.10 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 strategy has been screened out).

6.11 Equality and good relations are viewed as dynamic factors within this strategy. Equality needs and good relations issues change constantly and this strategy 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 Rural Strategy 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 strategy.



## 7.0 Rural Action Plan 2016 - 2020



## OBJECTIVE 1: TO PLAN FOR AND ENABLE THE PROVISION OF AFFORDABLE HOMES WHICH MEET RURAL HOUSING NEEDS

Outputs - Actions:	Outcomes Short Term:	Outcomes Medium Term:	Long Term Impacts:
1. Review the current policy and procedures for examining rural housing need during 2016 and thereafter undertake an annual programme of rural housing needs surveys in approximately five rural locations.	Housing need identified in at least five rural locations.	Waiting lists accurately reflect the extent of rural housing need.	Affordable housing for sale and rent is provided in rural areas where demand has been identified contributing to sustainable rural communities which are <b>'active, inclusive, well connected, well designed and built'</b> .
2. Examine the potential to capture information from rural housing applicants which may help determine where housing shortages exist in rural areas.	Areas identified where rural housing shortages may exist	Increased rural new build schemes are identified with housing providers.	
3. Ensure rural need for social and affordable housing is highlighted to local councils in the annual Housing Needs Assessment and in the Housing Market Analysis.	Rural housing need highlighted to local councils.	Local Development Plans make provision for the need for affordable housing.	
4. Based on levels of rural housing need, set and monitor a strategic target for delivery of the Social Housing Development Programme in rural areas and seek to ensure sufficient rural schemes are included to meet this target.	Performance against rural new build target monitored and reported.		
5. Highlight to housing providers in the Housing Executive's Commissioning Prospectus those rural locations where social/affordable housing is required.	Rural housing requirements highlighted to housing providers.	Rural % target of the Social Housing Development Programme achieved.	
6. Undertake a programme of site identification studies to support and encourage the provision of rural housing in areas where unmet need has been identified.	Potential rural housing sites identified to housing providers.		
7. Examine the potential to pilot a rural mixed tenure scheme based on other examples of best practice including community self-build.	Mixed tenure housing scheme developed in a rural location.		



## OBJECTIVE 2: TO IMPROVE THE CONDITION OF RURAL HOUSING STOCK AND REDUCE FUEL POVERTY

Outputs - Actions:	Outcomes Short Term:	Outcomes Medium Term:	Long Term Impacts:
8. Ensure that Housing Executive planned maintenance programmes deliver investment to rural housing stock in accordance with the new Asset Management Strategy.	Rural housing stock is included in the planned maintenance programme.	Rural Housing Executive stock improved to a modern standard.	Modern and energy efficient rural Housing Executive stock.
9. Monitor the uptake of Private Sector Improvement Grants in rural areas to ensure that rural home owners receive an appropriate share of grant aid.	No. of rural grants approved and completed monitored and reported.	Equitable proportion of private sector improvement grant, affordable warmth and boiler replacement approvals in rural areas.	Reduction in fuel poverty. Reduction in dwelling unfitness.
10. Promote any new and existing Private Sector Improvement Grants which could improve the fabric of housing in rural locations.	Increased awareness in rural areas of available grants.	Reduced fuel costs for oil buying club members.	Increased energy efficiency in rural housing.
11. Monitor the uptake of the Affordable Warmth and Boiler Replacement schemes in rural areas.	No. of rural Affordable Warmth and Boiler Replacement approvals monitored and reported.	Reduced energy costs for Housing Executive tenants with Solar PV panels.	Contributing to sustainable rural communities which are <b>'well served and environmentally sensitive'</b> .
12. Contribute to the DfC policy review on support for repair and improvement in the private sector and any revised scheme of assistance which emerges from the review.	No. of registered rural HMOs monitored and reported.	Increased energy efficiency in rural Housing Executive stock.	
13. Register and renew registrations of Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO) identified in rural areas as required.	Increased rural membership of Oil Buying Clubs Scheme.		
14. Monitor uptake of the Housing Executive/Bryson Energy Oil Buying Clubs scheme in rural areas.	Increased awareness of home energy efficiency measures.		
15. Ensure that rural areas are included in the Housing Executive's energy efficiency promotional activities including a target of 35% of the schools programme in rural schools.	Uptake of solar PV scheme in rural areas.		
16. Target at least 15% of the Housing Executive's Solar Photovoltaic (PV) programme in rural areas.	Introduction/pilot of schemes which could improve energy efficiency of rural stock.		
17. Consider alternative sources of energy and innovative technologies which could improve the energy efficiency of Housing Executive stock in rural areas.			

## OBJECTIVE 3: TO PROVIDE HOUSING SUPPORT TO VULNERABLE PEOPLE IN RURAL AREAS

Outputs - Actions:	Outcomes Short Term:	Outcomes Medium Term:	Long Term Impacts:
18. <b>Measure and monitor the extent of homeless applicants who wish to be housed in a rural location in order to inform the review of the Homelessness Strategy and to assist in ongoing strategic planning of services.</b>	The number of homeless applicants who wish to be housed in a rural location is monitored and reported.	Equitable proportion of housing support services delivered in rural areas.	Suitable, long term housing solutions for rural customers.
19. <b>Ensure that the 'housing options' approach including the new policy, procedures and associated training take account of housing support issues which are specific to rural areas.</b>	Increased no. of rural applicants 'helped to solve their housing problem'.	The particular needs of vulnerable rural people are factored in the commissioning of future housing support services.	Housing support services which meet the needs of vulnerable people in rural areas.
20. <b>Promote the availability of homelessness advice and support services in rural areas.</b>	Increased awareness of homelessness advice and support services in rural areas.	Community based services funded for older people in rural areas.	Contributing to sustainable rural communities which are <b>'inclusive, well served and fair for everyone'</b> .
21. <b>Carry out an exercise to gather information on existing Supporting People services by client group so as to identify potential gaps in rural areas and examine best practice elsewhere to address these.</b>	The uptake of SP services is captured and analysed.	Increase in wheelchair accessible housing in rural areas.	
22. <b>Develop Outcomes Framework for all Supporting People services to include an update on rural dwellers where appropriate.</b>	Increased understanding of the outcomes of the SP strategy for rural dwellers.		
23. <b>Examine the potential to fund a rural community based service aimed at older people.</b>	Funding of a rural community based service aimed at older people.		
24. <b>Monitor assessment and provision of housing for wheelchair needs and provision for complex needs on a rural-urban basis.</b>	No. of applicants who require wheelchair housing monitored and reported.		
25. <b>Enable cross-representation between the Rural Residents' Forum and the Disability Forum to ensure that the particular challenges facing people with disabilities in rural areas are considered when scrutinising new policies and services.</b>	Increased awareness of the particular challenges facing people with disabilities living in rural areas.		
26. <b>Monitor the development of pending welfare changes and mitigations on Housing Executive activities to determine if any changes are required as a consequence.</b>	Housing Executive activities reviewed where necessary to reflect welfare changes.		

## OBJECTIVE 4: TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF SAFE, COHESIVE AND ENGAGED RURAL NEIGHBOURHOODS

Outputs - Actions:	Outcomes Short Term:	Outcomes Medium Term:	Long Term Impacts:
27. <b>Promote and develop the role of the Rural Residents' Forum in the rural proofing of new and revised Housing Executive policies and strategies.</b>	Increased profile, diversity of membership and productivity of Rural Residents' Forum.	Rural needs and issues taken into account in the development of new and revised Housing Executive policies and strategies.	Safe, cohesive and engaged Housing Executive estates contributing to sustainable rural communities which are 'active, inclusive, safe, well run and fair for everyone'.
28. <b>Undertake at least one rural research project a year with the Rural Residents' Forum and Rural Community Network.</b>	Rural target of community cohesion programme monitored and reported.	Equitable proportion of rural schemes included in the community cohesion and shared new build programmes.	
29. <b>Ensure that at least one young person from a rural area is included in the shadow housing forum.</b>	Rural schemes included in the shared new build programme.		
30. <b>Ensure that rural areas are considered for funding/support programmes stemming from the Housing Executive's Community Cohesion Strategy including:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At least four rural estates in the BRIC 2 programme;</li> <li>• At least ten rural projects considered for Estate Based Strategy funding.</li> </ul>	Increased awareness of community cohesion, community involvement and community safety initiatives in rural areas.	Community based services funded to increase tenant capacity and involvement.	
31. <b>Consider how the Housing Executive can provide support to agencies and departments in the delivery of 'contested space' interventions in a rural context.</b>	Scheme to increase digital inclusion in one rural area.		
32. <b>Ensure that rural housing schemes are considered for the TBUC shared new build programme, subject to eligibility criteria.</b>			
33. <b>Promote the availability of advice and support services which deal with community safety in rural areas.</b>			
34. <b>Ensure that at least one rural community is included in the pilot demonstration project aimed at increasing digital inclusion.</b>			

## OBJECTIVE 5: TO WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH OTHERS TO ASSIST IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Outputs - Actions:	Outcomes Short Term:	Outcomes Medium Term:	Long Term Impacts:
35. <b>Ensure that the issues facing rural communities are raised to local councils through the community planning process.</b>	Rural housing issues are featured in the Housing Investment Plan for each council.	Every council pays due regard to the housing needs of their rural communities.	Sustainable rural communities which are <b>'active, inclusive, thriving well served and well connected'</b> .
36. <b>Promote and monitor the uptake in rural areas of Housing Executive community funding initiatives including:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Grants;</li> <li>• Social Enterprise Funding;</li> <li>• Social Enterprise Agreements.</li> </ul>	No. of Housing Executive funded community initiatives in rural areas monitored and reported.	Increased number of community development projects funded in rural areas.	
37. <b>Develop and implement a match funding programme to support the delivery of the 2014-2020 NI Rural Development Programme (RDP).</b>	Community projects identified through Housing Executive RDP match funding initiative.		
38. <b>Monitor the delivery of the 'Heritage in Housing' initiative in rural areas.</b>	Rural groups rewarded for their innovative and inclusive community led projects.		
39. <b>Promote and administer the annual 'Rural Community Awards' competition.</b>	Surplus Housing Executive assets used to support rural community based projects.		
40. <b>Monitor and 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.</b>			

## MONITORING & COMMUNICATION

Outputs - Actions:	Outcomes Short Term:	Outcomes Medium Term:	Long Term Impacts:
41. <b>Publicise the work undertaken by the Housing Executive in rural areas, including publication of 'Rural Matters' twice a year and production of an Annual Progress Report.</b>	Increased awareness of work undertaken by Housing Executive in rural areas.	Corporate policies and strategies which take account of the specific needs of rural dwellers.	Delivery of housing services which enable and support <b>'Vibrant, shared, healthy and sustainable rural communities where everyone has access to decent and affordable housing'</b> .
42. <b>Monitor and report on the views of rural tenants on the services provided to them by the Housing Executive.</b>	Increased awareness of the provisions of the Rural Needs Bill and of the need to rural proof corporate policies and strategies.	Equitable proportion of all Housing Executive services delivered in rural areas.	
43. <b>Liaise with DEARA to revise the policy and procedures for rural proofing to reflect the provisions of the Rural Needs Bill.</b>			

## APPENDIX 1: Glossary

<b>Affordable Housing</b>	Affordable housing is defined as social rented housing and intermediate housing for eligible households.
<b>Affordable Warmth Scheme</b>	DSD scheme for addressing fuel poverty in the private sector, delivered by the Housing Executive and local councils.
<b>Building Relations in Communities (BRIC)</b>	Provides training on good relations and funding for good relations plans.
<b>Community Asset Transfer</b>	Community Asset Transfer provides for a change in management and/or ownership of land or buildings, from public bodies to communities.
<b>Community Cohesion</b>	Cohesive communities are communities where there is a sense of belonging, and there are positive relationships within the community, regardless of background.
<b>DAERA</b>	Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, previously DOE and DARD.
<b>Disabled Facility Grant (DFG)</b>	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.
<b>DfC</b>	Department for Communities.
<b>Equity Sharing</b>	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.
<b>Floating Support</b>	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.
<b>Fuel Poverty</b>	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.
<b>Full Duty Applicant (FDA)</b>	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”.
<b>HCN</b>	Housing Community Network assists residents’ associations to develop local services.
<b>HCS</b>	House Condition Survey, carried out by the Housing Executive.
<b>HECA</b>	Home Energy Conservation Authority, the Housing Executive is the HECA for Northern Ireland.
<b>House Sales Scheme</b>	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.
<b>Housing Needs Assessment</b>	This is an assessment of local housing needs primarily in relation to general needs social housing, supported housing, travellers and affordable housing.
<b>Household</b>	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.
<b>Housing Stress</b>	Applicants on the waiting list who have a points total in excess 30 points are considered to be in housing stress, or housing need.
<b>Intermediate Housing</b>	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.
<b>Latent demand test</b>	Housing needs survey carried out in a rural area to assess any potential hidden need.

<b>Mandatory repair grant</b>	This is a grant made available by the Housing Executive to landlords who have been served a repair notice by the council.
<b>NISRA</b>	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.
<b>Oil buying clubs</b>	Oil buying clubs are designed to help consumers reduce their costs by purchasing oil orders in bulk as part of a group.
<b>Photovoltaic (PV) panels</b>	Solar electric panels attached to the roof of a house which when exposed to sunlight will generate electricity to power the home.
<b>PPS</b>	Planning Policy Statement.
<b>RDP</b>	Rural Development Programme.
<b>RDS</b>	Regional Development Strategy.
<b>Shared Housing</b>	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.
<b>SHDP</b>	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.
<b>Smartmove Housing</b>	This is a charitable organisation offering advice; support and accommodation to people that are homeless and in acute housing need.
<b>Social Enterprise</b>	Social enterprises are businesses with primarily social objectives whose profits are reinvested to achieve these objectives in a community.
<b>Social Rented Housing</b>	Social Rented Housing is housing provided at an affordable rent by the Housing Executive and Registered housing associations; that is, housing associations, 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.
<b>Supported Housing</b>	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.
<b>Supporting People Programme</b>	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.
<b>TBUC</b>	The Northern Ireland Executive Together Building a United Community Strategy containing objectives for a united and shared community and improved community relations.
<b>Unfitness</b>	<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>



# Embracing all our neighbours



If English is not your first language and you need help with interpreting & translation the Housing Executive can provide free services on request, please ask for further details at your local office.

## MANDARIN

如果英語不是你的母語，並且你需要幫助來進行口譯和文字翻譯，那麼Housing Executive可以根據請求而提供免費的服務，請在你當地的辦公室詢問進一步的詳情。

## CANTONESE

如果英語不是你的母語，並且你需要幫助來進行口譯和文字翻譯，那麼Housing Executive可以根據請求而提供免費的服務，請在你當地的辦公室詢問進一步的詳情。

## POLISH

Jeśli język angielski nie jest Państwa językiem ojczystym i potrzebują Państwo pomocy w zakresie tłumaczeń ustnych i pisemnych, Housing Executive oferuje bezpłatne usługi tłumaczeniowe na życzenie. O szczegóły prosimy pytać biuro lokalne.

## PORTUGUESE

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## LITHUANIAN

Jei anglų kalba nėra jūsų gimtoji kalba ir jums reikia pagalbos dėl vertimo žodžiu ir raštu, jums pageidaujant Housing Executive gali suteikti nemokamas vertimo paslaugas; dėl išsamesnės informacijos prašome kreiptis į vietinį skyrių.

## RUSSIAN

Если английский не является вашим родным языком и вам требуется помощь с устным и письменным переводом, Жилищное управление может предоставить по запросу бесплатные услуги переводчика. За более подробной информацией обратитесь в ваш местный офис.

## SLOVAK

Ak angličtina nie je váš materský jazyk a vyžadujete si pomoc s prekladom a tlmočením, kancelária úradu pre otázky bývania (Housing Executive) vám ochotne poskytne tieto služby bezplatne. Prosím, požiadajte svoju miestnu kanceláriu o viac informácií.

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