



Northern Ireland
Executive

www.northernireland.gov.uk

OUR PLAN:

Doing What Matters Most

Programme for Government
2024-2027

Rural Needs Impact Assessment



Appendix I - Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA) Template

SECTION 1 - Defining the activity subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016

1A. Name of Public Authority.

The Executive Office

1B. Please provide a short title which describes the activity being undertaken by the Public Authority that is subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016.

The development of a new Programme for Government (PfG).

1C. Please indicate which category the activity specified in Section 1B above relates to.

Developing a	Policy <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input type="checkbox"/>
Adopting a	Policy <input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input type="checkbox"/>
Implementing a	Policy <input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input type="checkbox"/>
Revising a	Policy <input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input type="checkbox"/>
Designing a Public Service	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Designing a Public Service	<input type="checkbox"/>		

1D. Please provide the official title (if any) of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service document or initiative relating to the category indicated in Section 1C above.

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1E. Please provide details of the aims and/or objectives of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service.

Section 20(3) of the Northern Ireland (NI) Act 1998 sets out that, 'the [Executive] Committee shall have the functions set out in Paragraphs 19 and 20 of Strand One of the Belfast Agreement'.

Paragraph 20 of the Agreement provides that:

‘The Executive Committee will seek to agree each year, and review as necessary, a programme incorporating an agreed budget linked to policies and programmes, subject to approval by the Assembly, after scrutiny in Assembly Committees, on a cross-community basis.’

The aim of such a programme is to provide clarity and shared purpose for the Executive so that only, ‘any significant or controversial matters that are clearly outside the scope of that programme’ will need to go to the Executive Committee for discussion and agreement.

The parties in the power-sharing Executive are democratically elected by their various constituents and communities. A Section 20 programme outlines areas of agreement.

The Programme for Government 2024-2027 ‘Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most’, as agreed by the Executive, aims more specifically to progress agreed priorities both in the short-term and the longer-term. It sets out the meaningful changes the Executive hopes to drive forward this year, commits to taking forward infrastructure projects, and sets the direction for the remainder of the mandate with a longer-term focus on Missions.

The [Programme](#) contains three core areas – Doing What Matters Most Today (i.e. immediate priorities for this year); Building New Foundations (i.e. upgrading public sector infrastructure); and Shaping a Better Tomorrow (i.e. building a foundation for the longer-term).

The ‘Doing What Matters Most Today’ section lists the following priorities:

- Grow a Globally Competitive and Sustainable Economy
- Deliver More Affordable, Accessible, High-Quality Early Learning and Childcare
- Cut Health Waiting Times
- Ending Violence Against Women and Girls
- Better Support for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs
- Provide More Social, Affordable and Sustainable Housing
- Safer Communities
- Protecting Lough Neagh and the Environment
- Reform and Transformation of Public Services

The ‘Building New Foundations’ section commits to investing in public infrastructure and reshaping delivery under the following headings:

- Boost Housing Funds
- Improve the Planning System
- Deliver Better Public Services
- Support Our Net Zero Future
- Manage Our Water
- Upgrade Stadia and Support Local Sports
- Retrofit Homes
- Improve Our Transport Infrastructure for Safer Travel, Connected Communities and Sustainable Economic Growth.

The ‘Shaping a Better Tomorrow’ section sets out a direction towards three Missions of People, Planet and Prosperity, underpinned by a cross-cutting commitment to Peace.

There are also sections which break down anticipated costs and lay out an approach to monitoring progress through a Wellbeing Framework. The Wellbeing Framework

is available online at: www.northernireland.gov.uk/wellbeing.

1F. What definition of 'rural' is the Public Authority using in respect of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?

Population Settlements of less than 5,000 (Default definition). ☒

Other Definition (Provide details and the rationale below). ☐

A definition of 'rural' is not applicable. ☐

Details of alternative definition of 'rural' used.

N/A

Rationale for using alternative definition of 'rural'.

N/A

Reasons why a definition of 'rural' is not applicable.

N/A

SECTION 2 - Understanding the impact of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

2A. Is the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service likely to impact on people in rural areas?

Yes ☒

No ☐ If the response is NO GO TO Section 2E.

2B. Please explain how the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas.

The high-level PfG aims to reflect the needs of society, in both urban and rural areas. It is based on a shared and strategic vision for the future which aims to improve wellbeing for all. People living in rural areas have the same economic and social needs as other people, but sometimes those needs have to be met in a different way in rural areas due to rurality, low population density, distance from urban service centres and the different economic structure of rural areas.

2C. If the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently from people in urban areas, please explain how it is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently.

As described in 1e, the aims of the PfG are wide-ranging - for example from the economy and childcare to tackling environmental issues at Lough Neagh, to investing in infrastructure and introducing social inclusion strategies. People in rural areas have the potential to be impacted differently as these various projects and programmes are progressed, with industries such as fishing and agriculture being inherently more rural and access to jobs, services, transport options, isolation and healthcare all requiring solutions that consider rural needs. People from different section 75 categories, and those in deprived areas, may also have needs which have to be met in different ways in rural areas. These assessments and considerations will need to be taken forward for relevant individual policies, though it is hoped that people in both rural and urban settings will be impacted positively.

2D. Please indicate which of the following rural policy areas the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to primarily impact on.

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| Rural Businesses | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Rural Tourism | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Rural Housing | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Jobs or Employment in Rural Areas | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Education or Training in Rural Areas | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Broadband or Mobile Communications in Rural Areas | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Transport Services or Infrastructure in Rural Areas | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Health or Social Care Services in Rural Areas | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Poverty in Rural Areas | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Deprivation in Rural Areas | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Rural Crime or Community Safety | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Rural Development | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Agri-Environment | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

Other (Please state) _____

If the response to Section 2A was YES GO TO Section 3A.

2E. Please explain why the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is NOT likely to impact on people in rural areas.

SECTION 3 - Identifying the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas

3A. Has the Public Authority taken steps to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas that are relevant to the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?

Yes ☒

No ☐ If the response is NO GO TO Section 3E.

3B. Please indicate which of the following methods or information sources were used by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

Consultation with Rural Stakeholders ☒

Consultation with Other Organisations ☒

Surveys or Questionnaires ☒

Published Statistics ☒

Research Papers ☐

Other Publications ☐

Other Methods or Information Sources (include details in Question 3C below). ☐

3C. Please provide details of the methods and information sources used to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas including relevant dates, names of organisations, titles of publications, website references, details of surveys or consultations undertaken etc.

On 9 September 2024, the draft PfG and three draft impact assessments were published for public consultation. The survey for the draft impact assessments included questions with regards to potential impacts on the needs of people living in rural areas.

Responses to the impact assessment consultation were invited until 11.59pm on 2 December 2024. Support and alternative formats were available through contact with the PfG Team.

Post: PFG Team
Room E4.15

Castle Buildings
Stormont Estate
BT4 3SL
Telephone: 02890523466
Email: pfgconsultation@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk

During the consultation process over 70 events were held involving in-person and online discussions. TEO Officials, with support from Ministers, Junior Ministers, departmental colleagues and the Head of the Civil Service, engaged with individuals, interest groups, community, voluntary and social enterprise sector, public sector and private sector. We welcomed feedback on how the Programme might impact upon the needs of people in rural areas.

Census data 2021 showed the breakdown of data based on those living in both urban and non-urban areas and, as noted in the draft EQIA,

- There are no differences between people living in urban and non-urban areas in relation to the percentage in employment who worked 30 hours or less worked per week, the percentage of people who were economically inactive, and percentage of people who had no qualifications.
- People living in urban areas were less likely to live in a household that has renewable energy systems.
- People living in non-urban areas were less likely to live in social or private rented accommodation
- People living in non-urban areas were less likely to have one or more health conditions

Through the Call for Views and extensive engagement with key stakeholders, the Ending Violence against Women and Girls strategic framework identified a higher risk of violence against women and girls for women living in rural areas.

• National Rural Crime Network in UK - highlights the issue on a UK scale in the report [Captive & Controlled - Domestic Abuse in Rural Areas - National Rural Crime Network](#). This report has been used by [Women's Aid NI to highlight impact of domestic violence on women rural areas in NI Domestic violence risk 'higher in rural areas' says Women's Aid - BBC News](#).

The [Department for Infrastructure Budget 2024-25 RNIA](#) notes, the impact of access to travel upon social and economic isolation, particularly in rural areas. It notes that LGBTQI+ people living in a rural area were three times as likely not to access services, women and those with disabilities are less likely to have their own form of transport, impacting – particularly in rural areas - on access to services including childcare and healthcare. It also notes ‘the impact of restricted funding to provide wastewater and sewage services is constraining social housing developments which may impact on people living in rural areas who are on social housing waiting lists.’

The RNIA for [A Strategic Framework to Prevent the Harm caused by Obesity, and Improve Diets and Levels of Physical Activity](#), October 2023, noted broadly similar levels of people living with overweight or obesity in urban and rural areas, similar levels of physical activity, and similar levels of food poverty. A higher proportion of those in rural areas were meeting the 5 a day fruit and vegetable guidelines.

Specific to [Ending Violence Against Women and Girls](#), the RNIA notes ‘violence against women and girls is not any less prevalent, but that the lack of services in rural areas and issues of isolation and accessibility of services to women living rurally were highlighted as increasing the vulnerability of those suffering violence and creating additional obstacles to support’.

In 2021, a RNIA was conducted prior to a public [consultation exercise on DAERA's draft Food Strategy Framework](#) which noted ‘Reducing social isolation and improving local employment opportunities are two key areas of particular social and economic need for people in rural areas. ... it is important that there are employment opportunities in rural areas. Agriculture, food and drink, horticulture and sea fishing industries are largely rural based industries. It also notes, ‘within rural communities there can be wider social determinants to health and wellbeing including the risks of isolation, loneliness and rural poverty’.

The RNIA for [The Engage III Programme](#), August 2022 noted approximately 26% of 93,000 pupils across all pre-primary settings, EOTAS, primary, post-primary and special schools in Northern Ireland were in rural settings.

The RNIA for [T:BUC Camps 2019](#) noted that the need for a 50:50 split of participants from Catholic and Protestant communities had to be mitigated with relaxed geographic constraints in rural settings because ‘many rural towns are predominantly one community and therefore groups had struggled to recruit the required numbers from both communities’.

3D. Please provide details of the social and economic needs of people in rural areas which have been identified by the Public Authority?

The consultation report, the three revised impact assessments and the revised PfG can be found at <http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/pfg>. The consultation report deliberately combines the findings from responses to the draft PfG itself, and responses to the draft impact assessments. There were fewer responses dedicated to the impact assessments but there were overlapping findings including an appetite from stakeholders for the voices and needs of those living in rural areas to be adequately reflected. A full list of stakeholder events is also provided in a separate document available on the TEO website.

Survey responses were mixed; eight respondents felt the draft PfG would have a positive impact on the needs of people living in rural areas, seven felt it would have a negative impact, and five felt there would be no impact.

Among written responses comments included a desire to see:

- the needs of rural citizens incorporated into all priorities
- a more thorough understanding in the RNIA of rural communities’ needs around housing, poverty, employment, tourism, transport, environmental pollution, service provision, and especially around healthcare
- due regard for rurality including Rural Proofing, and consideration of issues

- around regional balance
- recognition of the community, voluntary and social enterprise sector
- more detail on proposed policies and commitments

If the response to Section 3A was YES GO TO Section 4A.

3E. Please explain why no steps were taken by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas?

SECTION 4 - Considering the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas

4A. Please provide details of the issues considered in relation to the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

The Executive is committed to developing a Programme based on the meaningful changes the Executives hopes to drive forward this year and for the rest of the mandate, commitments to taking forward infrastructure projects, and setting direction for the remainder of the mandate with a long-term focus on Missions.

It aims to improve wellbeing for all, including the needs of people living in rural areas. This is a high-level strategic programme and therefore, individual policy areas will also work along with their stakeholders and delivery partners to address the social and economic needs of their target groups, e.g. the specific needs of those living in rural areas, through separate EQIAs and Rural Needs Impact Assessments.

The consultation report, the three revised impact assessments and the revised PfG can be found at <http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/pfg>. The consultation report deliberately combines the findings from responses to the draft PfG itself, and responses to the draft impact assessments. There were fewer responses dedicated to the impact assessments but there were overlapping findings including an appetite from stakeholders for the voices and needs of those living in rural areas to be adequately reflected.

SECTION 5 - Influencing the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

5A. Has the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, been influenced by the rural needs identified?

Yes ☒

No ☐ If the response is NO GO TO Section 5C.

5B. Please explain how the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, has been influenced by the rural needs identified.

We reached out to rural groups/stakeholders as part of the public consultation.

The consultation report, the three revised impact assessments and the revised PfG can be found at <http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/pfg>. The consultation report deliberately combines the findings from responses to the draft PfG itself, and responses to the draft impact assessments. There were fewer responses dedicated to the impact assessments but there were overlapping findings including an appetite from stakeholders for the voices and needs of those living in rural areas to be adequately reflected.

Revisions to the Programme following consultation include the addition of the Executive's commitment to deliver a new Rural Policy Framework, an updated commitment on the Western Transport Corridor, acknowledgement of the regional benefits from Further Education colleges, ongoing support for agri-food and fishing sectors, and more detail on the forthcoming draft Climate Action Plan.

Individual policy areas will also work along with their stakeholders and delivery partners to address the social and economic needs of their target groups, e.g. the specific needs of those living in rural areas, through separate EQIAs and Rural Needs Impact Assessments.

If the response to Section 5A was YES GO TO Section 6A.

5C. Please explain why the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or the delivery of the Public Service, has NOT been influenced by the rural needs identified.

SECTION 6 - Documenting and Recording

6A. Please tick below to confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained by the Public Authority and relevant information on the Section 1 activity compiled in accordance with paragraph 6.7 of the guidance.

I confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained and relevant information compiled.



Rural Needs Impact Assessment undertaken by:	Christine Harper
Position/Grade:	Grade 7
Division/Branch	Programme for Government
Signature:	Christine Harper
Date:	27 February 2025
Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:	Michael Kennedy
Position/Grade:	Grade 5
Division/Branch	Programme for Government
Signature:	Michael Kennedy
Date:	27 February 2025