

Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA)

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

1A. Name of Public Authority.

DEPARTMENT FOR INFRASTRUCTURE (NI)

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.

Consideration of the Department's 2024-25 Budget outcome, for both resource and capital spending

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

Developing a	Policy <input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input checked="" 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"/>		
Delivering a Public Service	<input checked="" 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.

Dfi Budget 2024-25

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

The Department's 2024-25 Budget, at a strategic level, aims to allocate funding across the Department, its Non Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs); and Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs) to maintain essential services. Following Ministerial allocation decisions these will be implemented by business areas, NDPBs and other ALBs.

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.

Resource Budget

It is clear that under the Resource Budget allocation provided, the Department will be required to continue to deliver limited level of services, not provide the full level of funding needed for other essential services such as road safety, reduce progress on actions for climate change and will not be able to respond to emergency response, over and above normal expected levels, such as flooding, infrastructure collapse and major weather events without additional funding or impacting directly on its other essential services. With the reductions to both Translink and NI Water proposed there is a real risk that this will impact directly on the level of services provided, water and wastewater and public transport.

The General Consumer Council (NI) research paper 'The Transport Trap – How transport disadvantages poorer people' has illustrated how 'transport poverty' makes the lives of those on low income difficult. The paper has highlighted how the lack of investment to maintain and enhance public transport services has been limited while the travel costs for those reliant on public transport are high, irrespective of S75 group, particularly for those who are living in rural areas and/or socially isolated. It also detailed the negative impact on the economy and society in general as people can't access job opportunities, impacting on the economy, society in general including people who live in rural areas.

The Anti-Poverty Strategy and the Gender Strategy Expert Advisory Panel Report highlights the impact of access to services for people who live in rural areas, for example public transport, which leads to social and economic isolation.

The DfI Audit of Inequalities highlighted that LGBTQI+ people living in a rural area were three times as likely not to access services they are aware of because it is too far to travel compared to those living in an urban area. Seven in every eight LGBTQI+ people living in a rural area feel that it is important to have access to an LGBTQI+ support service in their local area.

The NI Rural Women's Network notes that "Women are much less likely to have access to their own private transport than men. This means that women depend much more on public transport and are at an economic disadvantage to men. The accessibility of education, training, work and childcare provision, and the cost of public transport, are factors in determining women's participation, especially in rural areas. The economic disadvantages of lack of access to transport are compounded by the impeded ability to access basic services and social isolation".

The Disability Strategy Expert Advisory Panel Report outlines how access to transport is a long-standing issue which can have a direct impact on the ability of d/Deaf and disabled people to exercise their rights to, for example, independent living, education, employment, health, and access to culture, arts and leisure. The Report also outlines that the physical inaccessibility of public transport has been recognised by the CRPD Committee as a major factor in the ongoing marginalisation and exclusion of both disabled children and adults. While there have been improvements to public transport, many of the improvements have benefitted people travelling in the Greater Belfast area the most, with travel by public transport more challenging for people living in other areas. By way of mitigation the Community Transport Schemes for example the Dial-a-Lift service.

The Western Health and Social Care Trust of Sensory Support Services (2010) showed that access to transport is particularly important for people with disabilities who live in rural areas, as they are less likely to have access to a car than other households.

Capital Budget

The capital budget outcome will enable some key schemes to progress, for example the A5; A4; Phase 3 Derry to Coleraine track improvements essential rail and bus safety works; and some structural maintenance of our road network. It will not however facilitate the level of investment initially identified and therefore will likely result in the delay on progress for some schemes.

A recent report by the Institute of Engineers (ICE) examining the resilience of infrastructure in Northern Ireland along with recommendations on how to resolve the issues. It draws from examples from across infrastructure systems, local and global networks, and stakeholders. In recognising that infrastructure underpins most of what society needs to function, it is important to prioritise investment and the disconnect that underinvestment in infrastructure can create. The Roads Recovery Fund was set up to address areas of immediate concern across the road network. Investment in roads has tended to mainly focus on urban road schemes as they are more densely used than on rural roads. The Roads Recovery Fund mainly targets rural roads. The Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) in its recent report on funding water infrastructure has pointed out the inadequate investment in water infrastructure as a long-term issue in Northern Ireland. When deciding how best to use the available resources, statutory responsibility to ensure the water delivered to consumers is safe is at the forefront. This means that projects related to safe water delivery have tended to be prioritised over investment in the sewerage and wastewater infrastructure. This has the potential to restrict society in general in broad economic terms, environmentally and socially. As a result of underfunding to the Department over the years some difficult decisions and prioritisation of spending has had to be taken. This has impacted on services and projects taken forward for example the impact of the prioritisation of water quality over investment in sewerage and wastewater infrastructure. As such this is likely to have an impact on people from different political opinions related to economically deprived areas if social housing development is restricted.

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.

The Department's services are universal in nature and its key priority in managing within the resource and capital budget outcomes is to prioritise essential services along with health and safety, while maximising service delivery within the resources available. That said the evidence in Section 2B does illustrate impacts on rural communities as a result of poor access to our services. A recent report by the Institute of Engineers (ICE) examining the resilience of infrastructure in Northern Ireland along with recommendations on how to resolve the issues. It draws from examples from across infrastructure systems, local and global networks, and stakeholders. In recognising that infrastructure underpins most of what society needs to function, it is important to prioritise investment and the disconnect that underinvestment in infrastructure can create. The Roads Recovery Fund was set up to address areas of immediate concern across the road network. Investment in roads has tended to mainly focus on urban road schemes as they are more densely used than on rural roads. The Roads Recovery Fund mainly targets rural roads.

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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 type="checkbox"/>
Education or Training in Rural Areas	<input 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 type="checkbox"/>
Poverty in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Deprivation in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rural Crime or Community Safety	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rural Development	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Agri-Environment	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (Please state)	<input type="text"/>

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.

N/A

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	<input type="checkbox"/>	Published Statistics	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Consultation with Other Organisations	<input type="checkbox"/>	Research Papers	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Surveys or Questionnaires	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other Publications	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Other Methods or Information Sources (include details in Question 3C below).			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

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.

The Department has used the following sources, (please note this is not an exhaustive list):-

- DfI Budget 2023-24 Consultation Report;
- NISRA 2021 Census data;
- The DfI Audit of Inequalities 2022;
- The Anti-Poverty Strategy Expert Advisory Panel Report;
- The Gender Strategy Expert Advisory Report;
- THE TRANSPORT TRAP – How transport disadvantages poorer people;
- The relationship between transport and loneliness - [Sustrans.org.uk](https://www.sustrans.org.uk);
- The impact of public spending changes in Northern Ireland – NIHRC;
- IMTAC publications;
- AGE NI Lived Experience 2021;
- OUTstanding in your field: Experience of LGBT people in rural areas;
- NI Rural Women’s Network;
- Funding water infrastructure in Northern Ireland – NIAO; and
- Institute of Engineers (ICE).

The Department has launched an Equality Impact Consultation on its budget outcome and this consultation is available to all citizens here and responses received in the first four weeks of the consultation will be used to inform final opening budget decisions.

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

The sources outlined in Section 3C provided the Department with additional details of the social and economic needs with regards to the services that DfI provides. Section 2 outlines specifics of those needs, for example, the importance of public transport to people living in rural areas to ensure social inclusion and economic activity. Public transport is vital for females and young and older people in rural areas to access employment, and appointments.

Social housing is also important and 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.

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.

In addition to the detail outlined in Section 2 the Department is launching an Equality Impact Consultation on its budget outcome. Any additional issues raised during the consultation will be used to inform final opening budget decisions.

As part of indicative allocations, the Department is proposing to protect community transport, which provides an essential service to rural areas, ringfencing funding for Coleraine-Derry phase three rail improvements and will provide funding to allow key schemes such as the A5 and A4 to progress.

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.

Final decisions have not been made, however as part of indicative allocations the Department is proposing to protect community transport, which provides an essential service to rural areas, ringfencing funding for Coleraine-Derry phase three rail improvements and will provide funding to allow key schemes such as the A5 and the A4 to progress.

Further consideration of rural needs will be considered as part of final opening budget decisions, informed by responses to the Department's Equality Impact Assessment Consultation.

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.

N/A

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:	Kerry Mack
Position/Grade:	Acting Deputy Finance Director
Division/Branch	Finance Division
Signature:	
Date:	10 June 2024
Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:	Susan Anderson
Position/Grade:	Finance Director
Division/Branch:	Finance
Signature:	
Date:	11 June 2024