

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 2025-26 Draft 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.

Department for Infrastructure Draft Budget 2025-26 Considerations

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

The Executive's 2025-26 Draft Budget, at a strategic level, sets out proposed allocations to departments. Departments are required to consider the proposed draft budget outcome, and consult on the equality impacts as required, providing relevant input to the Executive to inform decisions on the Final 2025-26 Budget.

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 Draft Budget

The Draft Resource Budget outcome for the Department for Infrastructure is an increase of £73.8m (13% increase) from the Department's opening 2024-25 resource budget.

This allocation meets the Department's highest priority measures and could allow an increase in the level of service that has been provided in its essential services such as essential road maintenance and flood risk management, which is anticipated to have a minor positive impact on people in rural areas.

Capital Draft Budget

The Department's draft capital budget outcome for 2025-26 of £932.7m is the largest capital budget ever proposed for any NICS Department, and the third highest combined draft capital and resource budget across all departments. This draft capital budget outcome is an increase on last year of £112.6m representing an increase of almost 14%. The draft 2025-26 capital budget for the Department would allow key infrastructure schemes to progress e.g. the A5, A1, the Enniskillen Bypass and Phase 3 Derry to Coleraine track improvements, essential rail and bus safety works; and some structural maintenance of our road network as well as investment in water and wastewater treatment works and the public transport network, all of which service rural communities. As is usually the case, it would not facilitate the total level of investment initially identified and therefore and would result in less investment in e.g. wastewater works, including for new homes, less capital maintenance spend on the road network and street lighting column replacements. However, the schemes would be considered in future years depending on priorities and budget availability, eg Park and Ride sites, Local Transport Safety schemes, reduced replacement of TRAM, Rivers and Translink fleet and reduced safety related works. There would also be a shortfall for NI Water compared to its requirements set out in its Mid Term Review figure, but an increase of £26m compared to the 2024-25 opening budget. NI Water has advised previously that it will prioritise safe drinking water.

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.

Given that the Department's draft 2025-26 budget outcome does not allow it to deliver all it wanted to, there will need to be prioritisation. This could impact people in rural areas differently such as any delay in progressing Park and Ride sites. The key priority is managing within any agreed budget outcome, prioritising essential services along with health and safety, while maximising service delivery within the resources available.

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 2024/25 Consultation Report;
- NISRA 2021 Census data;
- The DfI Audit of Inequalities 2022-26;
- 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; and
- Funding water infrastructure in Northern Ireland – NIAO.

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 above (section 3) have detailed the social and economic needs with regards to the services that the Department provides. For example, public transport is imperative for people living in rural areas to ensure social and economic activity. Public transport is vital for females and young and older people in rural areas to access employment, appointments and shopping and socializing.

Social housing is also important and the impact of any restricted funding to provide wastewater and sewage services is likely to constrain social housing developments which could impact on people living in rural areas who are on social housing waiting lists.

The proposed increase to the draft budget outcome should allow for an improvement in the level of services, i.e. essential road maintenance, and flood risk management. It should also allow Translink and NI Water to receive increases from 2024-25 opening positions. Therefore, in considering the overall position it is anticipated that the improved financial position will have a minor positive equality impact on the social and economic needs for people in rural areas.

The Department's draft capital budget outcome for 2025-26 of £932.7m is the largest capital budget ever proposed for any NICS Department. This draft capital budget outcome is an increase on last year of £112.6m representing an increase of almost 14%, highlighting the important role infrastructure has in our society, as investing in it properly can deliver positive change and can create the foundations for a more productive and prosperous economy; for better rural and urban communities; and for healthier and greener lives. However, it will require prioritisation of schemes and delays for schemes such as Park and Ride sites into future years which could impact on the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

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?

N/A

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 has completed equality screenings on both its draft resource and capital 2025-26 budget outcomes.

The equality screenings anticipate, with an improved financial position, a minor positive impact from the draft resource budget outcome and a positive impact for priority capital schemes progressing this year. A potentially minor negative impact due to capital schemes not able to be progressed this year on S75 Groups is also anticipated. These impacts reflect both urban and rural areas.

Research such as the Report of the Anti-Poverty Strategy Expert Advisory Panel and Rural Voices by the Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network outline the social and economic issues faced by people in Northern Ireland, for example access to transport, particularly for rural women, to access education, childcare, housing and to remove sense of social and economic isolation. Road travel may be more difficult in rural than urban areas due to lack of maintenance on rural roads.

With an improved financial position for 2025-26, the Department anticipates that this funding should allow for improved levels of services to essential road maintenance and flood risk management. It should also allow Translink and NI Water to receive increases from 2024-25 opening positions. Therefore, in considering the overall position it is anticipated that the improved financial position will have an improvement to services for people living in rural areas. In addition, an improved capital position can deliver positive change and can create foundations for a more productive and prosperous economy, therefore anticipating an improvement for people living in rural areas.

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.

With the Department in receipt of greater funding in 2025-26 (based on the draft resource budget outcome), it should allow for an improvement in the level of services, such as essential road maintenance, and flood risk management. It should also allow Translink and NI Water to receive increases from 2024-25 opening positions. Therefore, in considering the overall position it is anticipated that this will have a minor positive impact for people in rural areas.

The Department's draft capital budget outcome for 2025-26 of £932.7m is the largest capital budget ever proposed for any NICS Department, and the Department has received the third highest combined draft capital and resource budget across all departments. This draft capital budget outcome is an increase on last year of £112.6m representing an increase of almost 14%, highlighting the important role infrastructure has in our society, as investing in it properly can deliver positive change and can create the foundations for a more productive and prosperous economy; for better rural and urban communities; and for healthier and greener lives. However, it will require prioritisation of schemes and delays for schemes such as Park and Ride sites into future years which could impact on the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

No decisions have been taken by the Minister on the distribution of the Department's budget, this assessment is based on a scenario following the outcome of the Draft budget. Decisions will be made following agreement on the final budget by the Executive and consideration of this and any further screening.

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:	14.01.25
Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:	Susan Anderson
Position/Grade:	Finance Director
Division/Branch:	Finance
Signature:	
Date:	14.01.25