

The Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016

Rural Needs Impact Assessment Template

(March 2025)



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

1A. Name of Public Authority - Department of Health

1B. Please provide the official title/ description of the Strategy, Policy, Plan or Public Service document or initiative:

Northern Ireland Fostering Services Minimum Standards.

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

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

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

The Department of Health (DoH) has developed new Northern Ireland Fostering Services Minimum Standards (MS), which together with the Foster Placement and Fostering Agencies Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025 (when made), relevant to the placement of children in foster care, will form the basis of the regulatory framework for the conduct of fostering services.

The Minimum Standards have been designed to be applicable to the wide variety of different types of fostering services ensuring a parity of accountability and inspection, and to reflect the Northern Ireland Framework for Integrated Therapeutic Care (NIFITC), which introduces a single regional approach to the provision of trauma informed and rights-based care to care experienced children in all settings across Northern Ireland. They will be used by all providers to set a benchmark of quality care and will apply to all services registered with the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) as a fostering agency under the regulations. While the RQIA does not currently have powers to register HSC Trust fostering services, it does have the power to assess the quality of their services. This means that all fostering services will be consistently providing high quality care to children and young people, and foster



parents, irrespective of the status of their organisation.

1E. Which 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 applicable¹ ☐

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 ☒

Please explain:

The proposed Minimum Standards for Fostering Services in Northern Ireland will not have a material impact on the social or economic needs of the people in rural areas. It is anticipated that the introduction of both the Minimum Standards and The Foster Placement & Fostering Agencies Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025 will impact positively on [all](#) children and prospective foster parents by providing the best care possible for the children for whom they are responsible for across all geographical areas of Northern Ireland, regardless of whether they are located in a rural or urban area. They apply equally to fostering placements when a child is fostered by an individual close to them (also known as 'kinship care' or 'kinship fostering') or by someone that they do not know.

If the response is **NO** after entering explanation **GO TO Section 3**

2B. 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 will impact people in rural areas differently:

¹If a definition of 'rural' is not applicable, the policy is unlikely to fall under the scope of the Act and you should be able to screen out at this stage



N/A

2C. Please indicate the rural policy areas the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on (see list at note 1):

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

☒

Please explain:

For the children where geographical information was available² in 2023 (latest statistics available), some 81% were living in a predominantly urban area before entering care, with 19% originating from rural areas³. The Northern Ireland Fostering Services Minimum Standards apply to fostering services across all geographical areas in Northern Ireland regardless of whether the foster services are in a rural or urban location, or regardless of the social and economic needs of people within these areas.

If the response is **NO** please explain above and **GO TO Section 4**

3B. Please indicate which methods or information sources were used to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas (see note 2 for examples) and provide details including relevant dates, names of organisations, titles of publications, website references, details of surveys or consultations undertaken etc:

N/A

3C. Please provide details of the social and economic needs of people in rural areas which have been identified:

N/A

² [Children in Care in Northern Ireland 2022/23](#)

³ [Children in Care in Northern Ireland 2022/23](#)



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 identified by the Public Authority:

Due regard has been given to the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016, however it is not considered that the introduction of Minimum Standards applicable to the provision of fostering services in Northern Ireland to registering and/or assessing fostering services will not have a material impact on the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

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

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

Yes

☐

No

☒

Please explain:

No specific rural needs/impacts have been identified in undertaking this assessment and therefore there are no rural needs to influence the development of the policy.

SECTION 6 – Documenting and Recording

6A. I confirm that details of the Rural Needs Impact Assessment will be recorded on the Public Authority's Annual Monitoring Return and the RNIA Template retained by the Public Authority (please check box)

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Rural Needs Impact Assessment undertaken by:	Joanne Hullock/ Karen Brown
Position / Grade:	SO
Division/Branch	Looked After Children & Adoption Policy
Date:	14/03/2025
Rural Needs Impact Assessment checked by:	Ursula Mills
Position / Grade:	DP
Division/Branch	Looked After Children & Adoption



	Policy
Date:	19/04/2025
Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:	Stefani Millar
Position / Grade:	G7
Division / Branch	Looked After Children and Adoption Policy
Signature:	<i>S. A. Millar</i>
Date:	22/05/2025

Note 1**Rural Policy Areas (relates to question 2C):**

- Rural Businesses
- Rural Tourism
- Rural Housing
- Jobs or Employment in Rural Areas
- Education or Training in Rural Areas
- Broadband or Mobile Communications in Rural Areas
- Transport Services or Infrastructure in Rural Areas
- Health or Social Care Services in Rural Areas
- Poverty in Rural Areas
- Deprivation in Rural Areas
- Rural Crime or Community Safety
- Rural Development
- Other (Please specify)

Note 2**Examples of methods or information sources used (relates to question 3B):**

- Consultation with Rural Stakeholders
- Consultation with Other Organisations
- Surveys or Questionnaires
- Other Methods or Information Sources (include details)
- Published Statistics
- Research Papers
- Other Publications