

# **The Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016**

## **Rural Needs Impact Assessment Template**

(April 2018)



# 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:**

Consultation on proposals to extend modifications to children’s social care regulations:

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

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

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

The Children’s Social Care (Coronavirus) (Temporary Modification of Children’s Social Care) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 (S.R. 2020/78) made temporary modifications to Statutory Rules to relax legislative requirements and S.R. 2020/235 (Regulation 10) extended these regulations until 07 May 2021.

The relaxation of the legislative requirement was in order to support the HSCB’s contingency arrangements and provide HSC Trusts and independent providers of children’s social care services with the flexibility required to continue to provide essential services to looked after children, children in need and care leavers during the surge phases of the COVID-19 outbreak. The aim is to ensure that, during this pandemic, services to children and young people are carried out in a way which is sufficiently flexible in the circumstances but also in keeping with public health guidelines and carefully managed in terms of risk of harm. Guidance to support the Regulations has been published.

The Department of Health now proposes to make a new Statutory Rule which will provide Trusts with operational flexibility in a smaller number of areas for up to a further six months, until 7 November 2021. If circumstances change before the further 6 months have elapsed, the Regulations may be revoked earlier. The intention is that the relaxation of the statutory requirements are intended to be used only where strictly necessary and will be in place only for as long as required to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.



It is proposed that 5 areas of temporary modifications will be extended for a further period of 6 months. These are as follows:

**Visits to looked after children by Social Workers**

3 sets of Regulations to be modified to remove the prescribed timescales for undertaking visits to:

- i. looked after children placed at home with their parents,
- ii. children in foster care, and
- iii. children who have been placed for adoption or who are awaiting placement for adoption.

Instead, visits will be undertaken in accordance with departmental guidance.

**Visits by Registered Provider to children’s homes**

The Children’s Homes Regulations (NI) 2005 to be modified to set out temporary revised arrangements relating to how monthly monitoring visits by Registered Providers are undertaken.

**Foster Care**

Temporary modifications are proposed to be made to enable more timely approvals of foster carers and to provide greater flexibility in relation to reviews of foster carer approvals.

The modification extends the maximum period for which a child may be placed with an approved foster carer in an emergency from 24 hours to 10 days. The maximum period for which a child may be placed with kinship (relatives/friends) carers who have not been fully approved as foster carers (immediate placements) will also be temporarily extended from 12 weeks to 16 weeks. In addition, the period to undertake reviews of foster carers to be extended from 12 months to 15 months. The extended timescales are set out in guidance.

**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 applicable<sup>1</sup>

**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:**

<sup>1</sup>If 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



The proposed modifications will impact equally on children, parents/carers of children, relevant voluntary organisations and social work staff regardless of where they live in Northern Ireland.

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:**

People living in rural areas may experience difficulties in connecting to broadband/internet therefore the modified arrangements whereby visits/reviews may be undertaken remotely using technology may not be possible or be more challenging. If broadband/internet difficulties are experienced it is very clear in the accompanying guidance to the proposed Regulations that visits/reviews should be undertaken as normal, in person, using appropriate PPE/social distancing measures.

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

Health or Social Care Services in Rural Areas  
Broadband or Mobile Communications 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

Please explain:

These proposals will temporarily modify for a short period how social services and other providers **may** temporarily fulfill their statutory obligations to looked after children and their families/carers during the COVID 19 pandemic. These modifications will provide flexibility during periods of self-isolation/shielding and public health restrictions to make alternative arrangements to carry out activities such as visits. These proposed modifications are required to safeguard and protect children and young people's welfare during these circumstances and these Regulations will apply equally across all communities in Northern Ireland.

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:**

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



## 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:**

One of the modifications is in relation to visits. Such visits take place in the home in which the child or parent/carer lives. Where this is not possible due to COVID-19 restrictions, shielding or self-isolation, accompanying guidance to the Regulations states that alternative arrangements for such visits may be carried out. This can be by electronic means such as Zoom, Facetime, WhatsApp, etc. Where issues around the availability of broadband/internet connections have been identified, the accompanying guidance to the Regulations makes it clear that such visits and reviews should take place as normal in accordance with social distancing requirements and/or using appropriate PPE equipment.

## 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:

These modifications will apply equally to looked after children, their families and carers regardless of where they live in Northern Ireland.

## 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)



Rural Needs Impact Assessment undertaken by:	Elizabeth Kayaalp
Position / Grade:	DP
Division/Branch	Family and Children's Policy Directorate
Signature:	
Date:	02/04/21
Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:	Elaine Lawson
Position / Grade:	7
Division / Branch	Family and Children's Policy Directorate
Signature:	
Date:	06/04/21

### 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