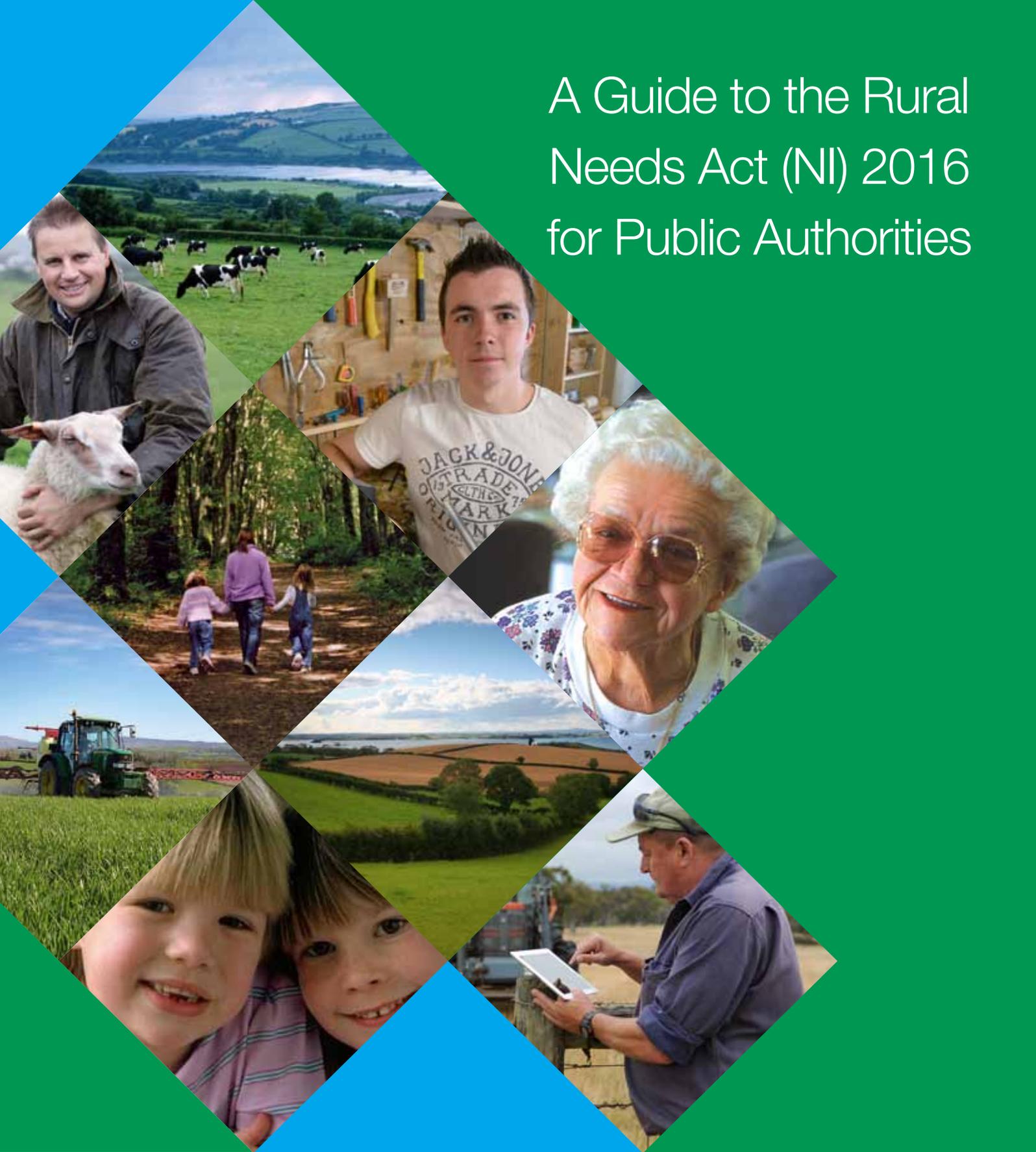


A Guide to the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 for Public Authorities



Department of
**Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs**

www.daera-ni.gov.uk



**INVESTORS
IN PEOPLE**

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- Large print
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To get a copy of this document in another format contact:

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Section 1: Introduction and Background

- 1.1 Rural proofing is the process by which policies, strategies and plans are assessed to determine whether they have a differential impact on rural areas and, where appropriate, adjustments are made to take account of particular rural circumstances.
- 1.2 Rural Proofing has been a requirement for all Government Departments in Northern Ireland since 2002 and has been an integral part of the policy development process. In 2016, this commitment to rural proofing was strengthened with the introduction of the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016¹ ('the Act').
- 1.3 This guide is designed to assist public authorities in understanding their statutory responsibilities under the Act and to provide advice on rural proofing as a mechanism for ensuring rural needs are appropriately taken into account. The guide sets out the steps required for completing a Rural Needs Impact Assessment and the associated monitoring and reporting requirements. An e-learning course ('Rural Proofing') has been produced to supplement this guidance and is available from the Centre for Applied Learning's course catalogue on HR Connect for NICS Departments or from the Rural Development Council for other public authorities.
- 1.4 Each public authority is responsible for ensuring it fulfils its duties under the Rural Needs Act. This guidance sets out a framework which can help support this and which can be incorporated into existing policy development and impact assessment structures and processes.

¹<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2016/19/contents>

Section 2: The Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016

Application of the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016

2.1 The Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 received Royal Assent on 9 May 2016 and comes into operation for Government Departments and District Councils on 1 June 2017 and for the public authorities listed below on 1 June 2018:

- The Police Service of Northern Ireland;
- The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools;
- The Education Authority;
- The Health and Social Care Trusts;
- Invest Northern Ireland;
- The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service;
- The Northern Ireland Housing Executive;
- Libraries NI;
- Tourism NI;
- The Public Health Agency;
- The Regional Health and Social Care Board; and
- Sport NI.

Responsibilities of public authorities under the Act

2.2 There are three main areas of responsibility for public authorities under the Act and these relate to the consideration of rural needs; monitoring and reporting on how the public authority has complied with this requirement; and co-operation and sharing of information with other public authorities.

2.3 Section 1 of the Act places a statutory duty on public authorities to:

“have due regard to rural needs when

- developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans, and;
- designing and delivering public services.”

2.4 Section 3 of the Act requires public authorities to:

“(a) compile information on the exercise of its functions under section 1;

(b) include that information in its annual report; and

(c) send that information to the Department.”

2.5 Section 4 of the Act requires DAERA to:

“make arrangements with public authorities with a view to securing co-operation and exchange of information between public authorities.”

2.6 Section 3 of this guide, “Steps in Rural Proofing - Completing a Rural Needs Impact Assessment”, provides further information and advice on how public authorities can fulfil their duties under the Act and gives details of the information that public authorities are required to collect and send to DAERA annually.

Responsibilities of DAERA under the Act

2.7 As well as the responsibilities of public authorities set out above, DAERA has a number of additional responsibilities under the Act. These relate to regularly reviewing the bodies to which the Act applies, providing advice, commissioning of research, collating and publishing an annual monitoring report, a Ministerial statement to the Assembly and making arrangements to secure co-operation and exchange of information between public authorities.

2.8 Section 1 of the Act requires DAERA to, at least every 3 years:

“review the list of bodies and persons set out in the Schedule and, if it thinks it appropriate, by order amend the Schedule to:

- a) add a body or person to the Schedule;
- b) remove a body or person to the Schedule; or
- c) modify any entry in the Schedule.”

2.9 Section 2 of the Act provides DAERA with the power to:

“take such steps as appear to it to be appropriate to -

- (a) provide any person with guidance, advice and information about issues connected with rural needs or ways of meeting those needs;
- (b) undertake, commission or support (by financial means or otherwise) research into any matter relating to rural needs.”

2.10 Section 3 of the Act requires DAERA to publish an annual monitoring report containing the information sent to it by public authorities on how they have paid due regard to rural needs and information of the exercise by DAERA of its functions under the Act. It must lay a copy of this report before the Assembly.

2.11 Section 3 of the Act also requires the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, on or after the day on which the report is laid to “make a statement to the Assembly about the content of the report.”

2.12 Section 4 of the Act requires DAERA to:

“make arrangements with public authorities with a view to securing co-operation and exchange of information between public authorities.”

Interpretation

'Due regard'

- 2.13 In relation to the Act, to 'have due regard' means that a public authority must consciously consider the needs of people in rural areas when developing or revising policies, strategies and plans and when designing and delivering public services. The level of 'regard' that is 'due' will depend on the circumstances and, in particular, on the relevance of rural needs to the decision or function in question. The greater the relevance and potential impact for people in rural needs, the greater the regard required by the duty.

'Rural needs'

- 2.14 The Act defines 'rural needs' as "the social and economic needs of rural areas". It is important to be clear what this means and to be able to distinguish between a need and something that is desirable. In general terms, a need can be considered to be something that is essential to achieve a standard of living comparable with that of the population in general. For example, it can relate to the ability to access key public services such as health and education, the ability to access suitable employment opportunities, and the ability to enjoy a healthy and active lifestyle.

'Rural'

- 2.15 In order to identify and analyse 'rural needs', a public authority must have a clear understanding of how it classifies whether an area is urban or rural.
- 2.16 The default definition of "rural" used in Northern Ireland is that developed by the Inter-Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group. Initially proposed in 2005 and amended in 2015, this definition classifies those settlements with fewer than 5,000 residents together with the open countryside as rural. Settlements have been classified into a number of bands (see Table 1), with bands A-E classified as urban and bands F-H classified as rural.
- 2.17 Whilst a default definition is provided, the review also recommended that a prescriptive urban-rural definition should not be given. Rather, it was advised that users should consider defining urban and rural areas in ways which are appropriate for different projects and programmes. In instances that public authorities apply an alternative definition or modified version of this definition, it may be helpful to clearly set out the rationale for doing so as part of the Rural Needs Impact Assessment for the relevant policy, strategy, plan or service.

2.18 The full report of the 2015 review is available on the NISRA website at www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/settlement-2015-documentation.

Table 1: Settlement Development Limit Classification

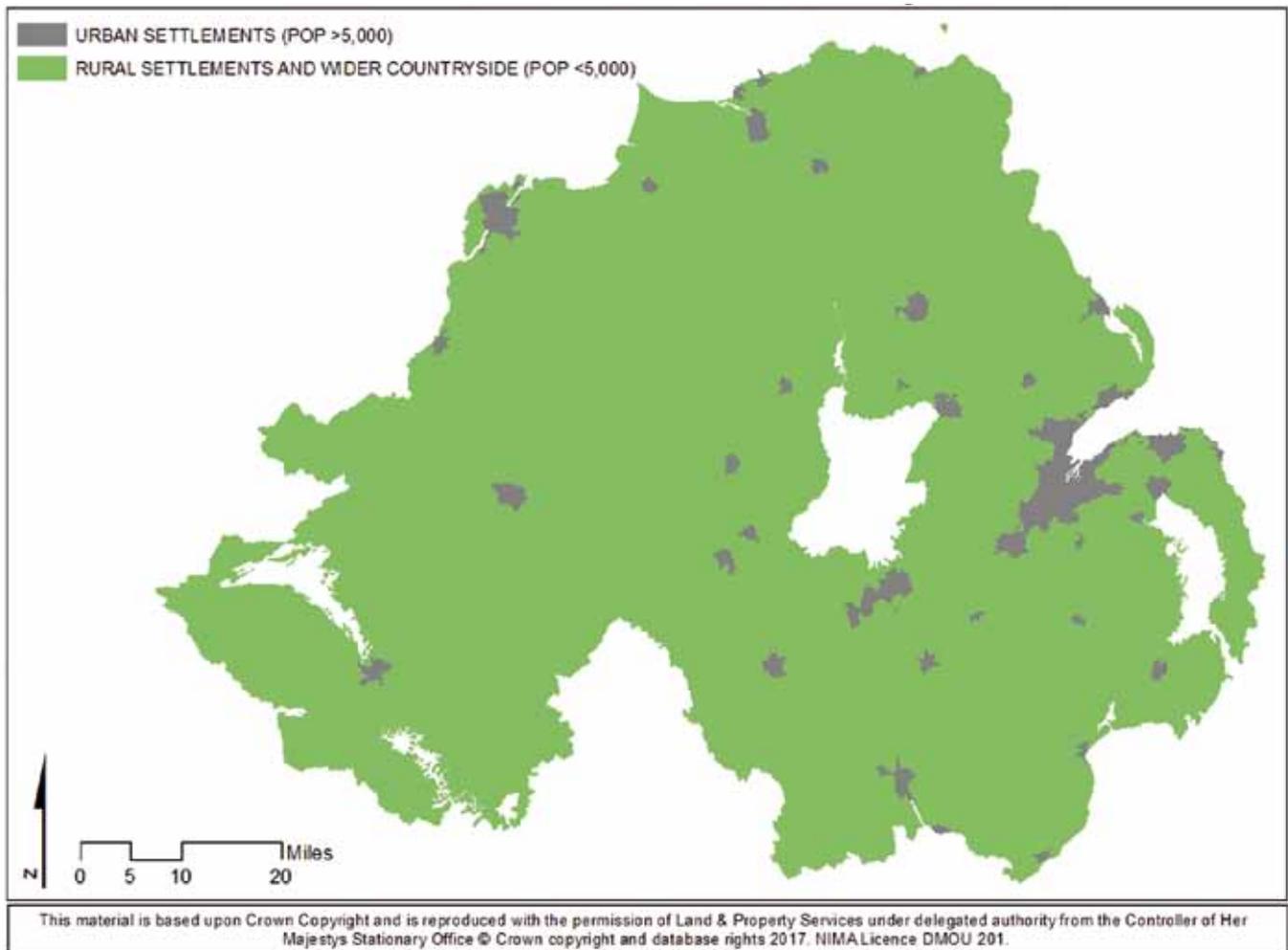
Classification	Population
Band A - Belfast	280,211 (2011 census)
Band B - Derry City	83,125 (2011 census)
Band C - Large Town	>18,000
Band D - Medium Town	10,000 - 17,999
Band E - Small Town	5,000 - 9,999
DEFAULT URBAN-RURAL SPLIT	
Band F - Intermediate Settlements	2,500 - 4,999
Band G - Village	1,000 - 2,499
Band H - Open Countryside	<1,000 and open countryside

Source: Adapted from Table 2 of the Review of the Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements.



2.19 Map 1 shows the proportion of land mass in Northern Ireland which is categorised as ‘rural’ under the default definition.

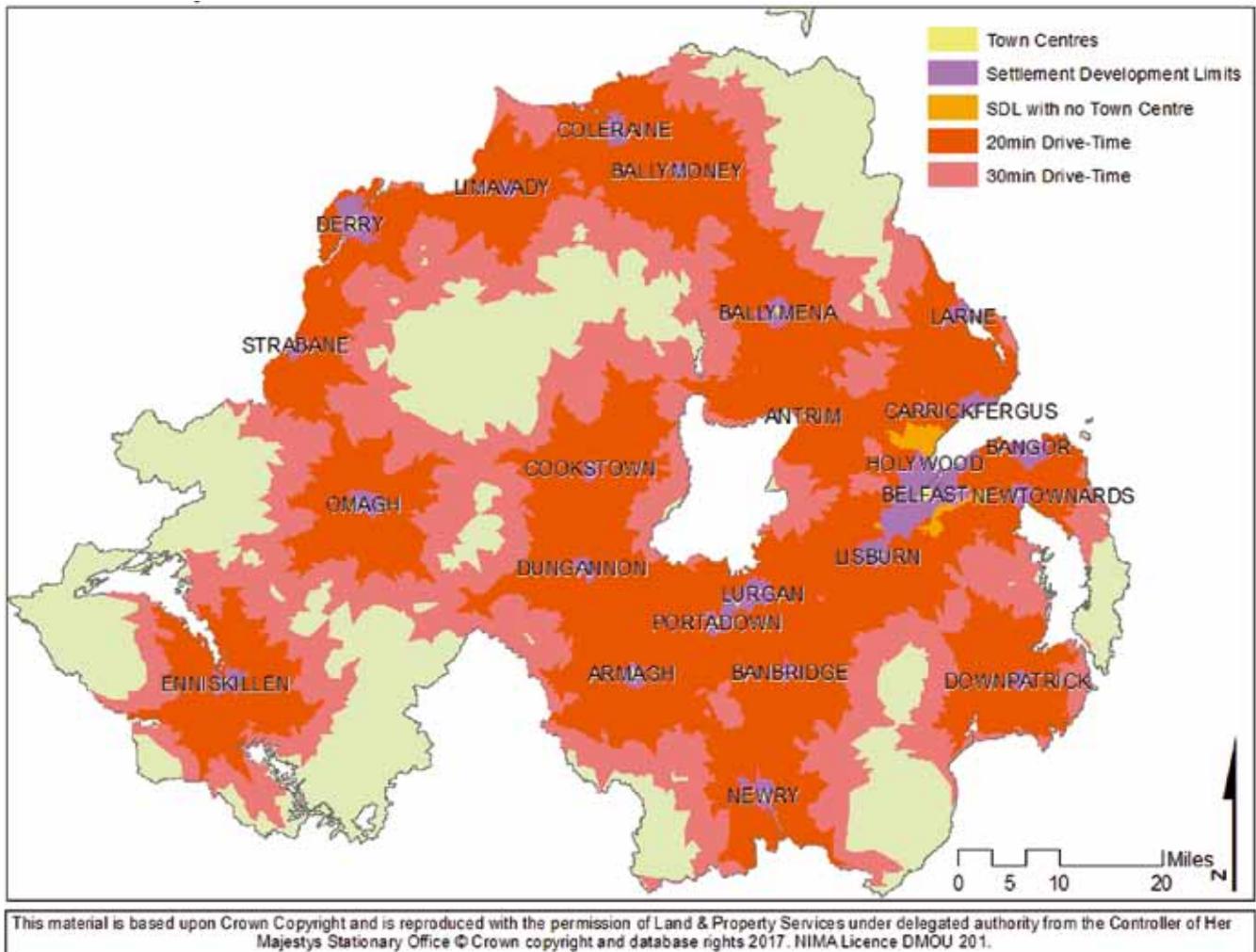
Map 1: Rural settlements and wider countryside



2.20 The 2015 review expanded the classification to include a service provision element by categorising rural areas based on their drive time from a town centre of a settlement with a population of 10,000 or more (a large service centre). Using this approach, areas have been classified as being either “within” or “outside” of 20-minute or 30-minute drive times of their nearest town centre. Approximately 93% of Northern Ireland’s population live within 30 minutes drive-time of the town centre of a settlement containing a population of at least 10,000. Map 2 shows a comparison of 20-minute and 30-minute drive times from those settlements containing a population of at least 10,000.

Map 2 shows a comparison of 20-minute and 30-minute drive times from those settlements containing a population of at least 10,000.

Map 2: Comparison of 20-minute and 30-minute drive-time boundaries



Section 3: Steps in Rural Proofing - Completing a Rural Needs Impact Assessment

What is rural proofing?

- 3.1 The Rural Needs Act does not explicitly refer to rural proofing or prescribe any specific process to be used by public authorities in having 'due regard to rural needs'. However, rural proofing is a process which is well established in Northern Ireland as a means of identifying rural needs and impacts, based on analysis of evidence; considering the scale and significance of those impacts; and considering potential adjustments or mitigation to address those impacts.

Rural Needs Impact Assessment

- 3.2 This guidance recommends a step-by-step process to follow in order to effectively take rural needs into account. A Rural Needs Impact Assessment is the document produced when rural proofing is carried out. A template for the impact assessment is attached at Appendix A. There are six steps involved in completing a Rural Needs Impact Assessment. The level of analysis undertaken in the impact assessment should be proportionate to both the scale of the potential impact and significance to rural areas.

Step 1: Define the issue

- 3.3 The first stage in completing a Rural Needs Impact Assessment is to develop a clear understanding of the objectives and/or intended outcomes of the proposed policy, strategy, plan or service and then, more specifically, to identify if there are specific rural needs or potential direct or indirect impacts for rural areas.
- 3.4 Where a policy, strategy, plan or service is a regional/area-based one or intended to have the same impact across the region or area, consideration should be given to whether there are potential local impacts which differ from the regional impact or whether there are any barriers in rural areas which may unfairly disadvantage rural dwellers.
- 3.5 For policies, strategies, plans and services which are wholly or mainly aimed at rural communities, consideration should be given to whether there is a need to adapt the policy, strategy, plan or service to account for variations across rural communities. It should be borne in mind that rural areas are not homogenous. There can be a large

degree of variation which will be affected by a number of factors, including proximity to services, transport links and infrastructure.

- 3.6 Where a policy, strategy, plan or service is urban-focused, an analysis should be undertaken to identify if there is a corresponding need in rural areas and how this has been otherwise taken into account or catered for.

Step 2: Understand the Situation

- 3.7 This section of the Rural Needs Impact Assessment is an analysis of the current scenario in rural areas as it relates to the relevant policy, strategy, plan or service. Any available evidence should be considered to identify any differences in how the issue is experienced or provided for in rural areas in contrast to urban areas.
- 3.8 This evidence can include statistics, stakeholder views and other data. Your organisation may have an in-house statistician or a GIS Officer who can conduct analyses and prepare comparative reports to inform your analysis. Your organisation may also hold data relevant to your policy, strategy, plan or service which can be utilised.
- 3.9 DAERA's Rural Statistics pages (<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/topics/statistics/rural-statistics>) contain rural/urban comparisons across a range of social and economic issues. These pages host information collected from the census, and from surveys and administrative databases across Government with a rural/urban classification applied to the data. In addition, detailed profiles for specific geographic areas can be accessed using NISRA's Neighbourhood Information Service (NINIS) at www.ninis2.nisra.gov.uk. The website is continually updated and provides valuable information on a range of key public statistics.
- 3.10 These analyses should also be supplemented through direct engagement with rural stakeholders. The most appropriate stakeholders to engage with will vary from case to case but can act as a vital source of information on the likely impact of any policy, strategy, plan or service, as well as adding wider context to available data, e.g. relating to specific issues in certain areas, or affecting certain sections of the community such as older people, young people, or farming families. Such engagement may not only identify and clarify issues, but can offer an opportunity to discuss ideas and options to improve delivery and mitigate against negative impacts.

Step 3: Develop and Appraise Options

- 3.11 Having carried out a detailed analysis of the available evidence, the needs of rural dwellers and the potential impacts of the policy, strategy, plan or service on rural areas should be identified in this section.
- 3.12 It is important to consider what the potential barriers or wider impacts might be given the characteristics presented and to consider options to address, overcome or mitigate these barriers and impacts when developing policies, strategies or plans, and in designing service delivery, whether at a regional level, or specifically in a local area.
- 3.13 Figure 1 below sets out some of the potential barriers to delivering a policy, strategy, plan or service in rural areas.

Figure 1: Potential barriers to delivery in rural areas

Access to services

The dispersed settlement pattern in rural areas can mean that rural dwellers have to travel further to access key services such as health and social care, education, and welfare services. This combined with more infrequent public transport services and reliance on private vehicles for transport can make it more difficult and expensive for rural dwellers to access key services.

Service Infrastructure

Lack of access to broadband and low broadband speeds are becoming an increasing issue both as more and more public services are being delivered online, and as many businesses rely on broadband as a key medium for trading. This is particularly important point for government as we continue to move more and more towards online and digital interaction with citizens. Making services available online does not mean it is universally accessible and does not necessarily mean you are providing for rural citizens.

As with broadband, access to mobile phone services can be variable and limited in areas. This similarly has issues for both personal and business use as more and more day to day activity assumes a level of access to both services.

Demographics

With rural areas exhibiting much higher population growth than urban areas in recent years, this may result in significant variance in future demands on services such as education, health and social care when compared with current provision and capacity.

Economic structure & employment

Businesses in rural areas tend to be small to medium sized, with higher proportions of self-employed people and sole traders. Employment opportunities can be more limited in rural areas and rural dwellers may have to commute longer distances to access employment.

- 3.14 Having analysed the potential barriers and impacts, consideration should be given to whether additional actions are required in order to ensure fair rural outcomes. A range of options should be assessed to identify if the specific rural needs, barriers and impacts can be addressed, overcome or mitigated.
- 3.15 Such an analysis could look at the possible cost implications of associated actions, assessing if the necessary delivery mechanism infrastructure exists or if there are alternative methods of delivery that could be applied.
- 3.16 Engaging stakeholder organisations or beneficiaries may help you in this process, by getting direct input on how differing options for the policy, plan or service might be experienced.
- 3.17 At the district council level, local community planning structures may offer a valuable mechanism to support engagement with local stakeholders and develop potential new methods of delivery by working with those organisations that form the Community Planning Partnership in a local area.

Step 4: Preparing for Delivery

- 3.18 This section of the Rural Needs Impact Assessment should document how the proposed delivery of the policy, strategy, plan or service will ensure that fair rural outcomes are delivered.
- 3.19 It should clearly identify any specific amendments or mitigating actions that have been proposed as a result of the assessment.
- 3.20 Examples of possible delivery mechanisms that could be considered are shown in Figure 2 below. These mitigating actions and delivery mechanisms can be combined as often a 'one size fits all' approach is not appropriate. This list is not exhaustive and in some cases allowing local delivery bodies the flexibility to find the best local solution can work well.

Figure 2: Examples of delivery mechanisms in rural areas

Exemptions or reductions for rural areas: To continue to provide a minimum level of service in rural areas it might be necessary to introduce an exemption or reduction on levies charged e.g. rates relief for rural ATMs.

Mobile, outreach and to the home services: For example, mobile libraries.

Transport timetables: Aligning provision with existing public transport timetables or providing support for community transport.

Joint delivery to achieve economies of scale: Joint delivery with other service providers (shared services) to achieve economies of scale or joint delivery of two different services to achieve economies of scope.

Virtual delivery: This can be more accessible and cost effective especially if the service is the provision of information. However, bear in mind that due to broadband limitations, making services available online does not mean it is universally accessible and does not necessarily mean you are providing for rural citizens.

Local delivery: Working with already established outlets for delivery e.g. post offices/schools.

Step 5: Public Consultation on Preferred Option

3.21 There is no specific requirement within the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 to consult in relation to rural needs. However, if a public consultation is being undertaken on the overall policy, strategy, plan or service, in line with best practice, then the Rural Needs Impact Assessment should be included within the consultation documentation. If the policy, strategy, plan or service is amended following the public consultation as a result of the responses received, the Rural Needs Impact Assessment should be revisited to ensure that rural needs are fully taken into account in the revised proposals.

Step 6: Monitoring and Reporting

- 3.22 The appraisal should also set out a mechanism to monitor the rural outcomes of the policy/service delivery that have been identified as part of the process.
- 3.23 This may be achieved by ongoing monitoring and review of the rural - urban breakdown of the proposed outcomes of the policy or in some cases, may involve setting a rural specific target.
- 3.24 This should be incorporated within the wider monitoring and evaluation framework for the overall policy or plan and should set out in detail the process and timeframe for review and for making adjustment as necessary, should the outcomes or targets not be achieved as intended.



Section 4: Annual monitoring and reporting requirements

- 4.1 As set out in Section 2, the Rural Needs Act requires each public authority to compile information on how it has paid due regard to rural needs; to include that information in its annual report; and to send that information to DAERA.
- 4.2 An Annual Monitoring Return (see Appendix 2) should be completed by each public authority and included in its annual report. It should then be submitted to DAERA for inclusion in the Rural Needs Act Monitoring Report which will be laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly. This report should include a breakdown of all policies, strategies, plans or services that have been developed, adopted, implemented or revised throughout the reporting period.
- 4.3 A Rural Needs Impact Assessment (or other evidence that rural needs have been taken into account) should be prepared and retained for each policy, strategy, plan or service as evidence that due regard has been paid to rural needs. These documents should be retained in line with the public authority's records management policy.
- 4.4 It is anticipated that the first reporting period will cover 1 June 2017 - 31 March 2018 and that subsequent reporting periods would align with the financial year.
- 4.5 Public authorities are responsible for establishing their own internal system for monitoring and collating relevant information on an ongoing basis. This could take the form of regular returns from business areas across the organisation or collating Rural Needs Impact Assessments as they are completed.
- 4.6 Public authorities are responsible for providing a single annual monitoring return to DAERA for inclusion in the Rural Needs Act Annual Monitoring Report. Public authorities may, therefore, wish to establish a single point of contact in relation to monitoring and reporting on the Rural Needs Act.

Section 5: Additional guidance and support

For additional guidance and support in relation to the rural proofing process, please contact:

Rural Needs Branch
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
Dundonald House
Upper Newtownards Road
Ballymiscaw
Belfast
BT4 3SB

Tel: 028 9052 4107

Website: www.daera-ni.gov.uk

Email: rural.proofing@daera-ni.gov.uk

For help on statistics and evidence please contact:

Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA)
Colby House
Stranmillis Court
Belfast
BT9 5RR

Tel: 028 9038 8400

Website: www.nisra.gov.uk

Email: info@nisra.gov.uk

For access to the ‘Rural Proofing’ e-learning package for your organisation, please contact:

Rural Development Council
17 Loy Street
Cookstown
Co Tyrone
BT80 8PZ

Tel: 028 8676 6980

Website: www.rdc.org.uk

Email: info@rdc.org.uk



Appendix 1

Rural Needs Impact Assessment Template

Name of Organisation:

Title of Strategy, Policy, Plan or Public Service:

Step 1: Define the Issue

Key questions to consider:

- *What are the objectives of the strategy, policy plan or service?*
- *What impact do you intend it to have in rural areas?*
- *How is 'rural' defined for the purposes of this policy/strategy/service/plan?*
- *What would constitute a fair rural outcome in this case?*

Step 2: Understand the situation

Key questions to consider:

- *What is the current situation in rural areas?*
- *What evidence (statistics, data, research, stakeholder advice) do you have about the position in rural areas?*
- *If the relevant evidence is not available, can this be sourced?*
- *Do you have access to the views of rural stakeholders about the likely impact of the policy?*
- *Are there existing design features or mitigations already in place to take account of rural needs?*

Step 3: Develop and appraise options

Key questions to consider:

- *Are there barriers to delivery in rural areas?*
- *If so, how can these be overcome or mitigated?*
- *Will it cost more to deliver in rural areas?*
- *What steps can be taken to achieve fair rural outcomes?*

Step 4: Prepare for Delivery

Key questions to consider:

- *Do the necessary delivery mechanisms exist in rural areas?*
- *Have you considered alternative delivery mechanisms?*
- *What action has been taken to ensure fair rural outcomes?*
- *Is there flexibility for local delivery bodies to find local solutions?*
- *Are different solutions required in different areas?*

Step 5: Implementation & Monitoring

Key questions to consider:

- *Have you set any rural specific indicators or targets to monitor?*
- *How will the outcomes be measured in rural areas?*
- *Are there any statistics or data that you will collect to monitor rural needs and impacts?*

Step 6: Evaluation & Review

Key questions to consider:

- *What processes are in place to evaluate and review the implementation of the policy, strategy, plan or service?*
- *Have rural needs been factored into the evaluation process?*
- *How will lessons learned in relation to rural outcomes be used to inform future policy making and delivery?*

Rural Needs Impact Assessment undertaken by:	
Position:	
Signature:	
Date completed:	

Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:	
Position:	
Signature:	
Date completed:	

Appendix 2

Annual Monitoring Return Template

(To be completed and included in relevant public authorities' own annual reports and submitted to DAERA for inclusion in annual report on Rural Needs Act to be laid before the Assembly).

Name of Public Authority:

Reporting Period:

1. Describe how your organisation has had due regard to rural needs when

a. developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans:

b. designing and delivering services:

2. Please provide a list of policies, strategies, plans and/or services for which your organisation has completed a rural needs impact assessment or has otherwise taken rural needs into account:



Appendix 3

Frequently Asked Questions

1. My policy, strategy, plan or service does not have a rural impact; can I 'screen' it out?

The process for completing a Rural Needs Impact Assessment does not include an option to 'screen out'. If you conclude that your policy, strategy, plan or service does not have a rural impact and no specific rural needs are identified, then this should be documented in the Rural Needs Impact Assessment and retained as evidence that rural needs have been considered. The level of detail that should be included in the Rural Needs Impact Assessment should be proportionate to the scale of the policy, strategy, plan or service.

2. My policy, strategy, plan or service has only positive impacts in rural areas; do I need to complete a Rural Needs Impact Assessment?

Yes, if you conclude that your policy, strategy, plan or service has only positive impacts, then this should be documented in the Rural Needs Impact Assessment and retained as evidence that rural needs have been considered. The level of detail that should be included in the Rural Needs Impact Assessment should be proportionate to the scale of the policy, strategy, plan or service.

3. My policy, strategy, plan or service applies throughout Northern Ireland; do I need to complete a Rural Needs Impact Assessment?

Yes, even if your policy, strategy, plan or service is a regional one, then a Rural Needs Impact Assessment should be completed. You may find after you have analysed the evidence that there are differential impacts between urban and rural or that alternative delivery mechanisms in rural areas may better help you to realise your objectives. The level of detail that should be included in the Rural Needs Impact Assessment should be proportionate to the scale of the policy, strategy, plan or service.

4. Delivery of our policy, strategy, plan or service is outsourced, do I need to take account of rural needs?

Yes, the Rural Needs Act places a duty on public authorities. Responsibility for ensuring due regard is paid to rural needs remains with the public authority even where functions are outsourced or contracted out.

5. Can I accept a differential rural impact on rural areas when developing a policy, strategy or plan or designing and delivering a service?

The duty in the Rural Needs Act is to have “due regard to rural needs”. This means that public authorities must consciously consider the needs of people in rural areas. It does not prescribe the outcome of any policy, strategy, plan or service of any public authority. Decisions on policies, strategies, plans and services are for the relevant public authority to take. A Rural Needs Impact Assessment is designed to inform decisions about how services can be delivered in the most appropriate way, within the financial package available.

6. I am developing a cross-cutting strategy involving multiple public authorities; do I need to take account of rural needs?

Yes, each public authority specified in the Act has a duty to have due regard to rural needs. This will apply to any cross-cutting strategy, policy, plan or service your public authority contributes to. If all the participating public authorities are subject to the Act, then a Rural Needs Impact Assessment should be completed for the cross-cutting policy, strategy, plan or service. If not all the participating public authorities are subject to the Act, it is recommended that a Rural Needs Impact Assessment is completed in line with best practice but as a minimum public authorities who are subject to the Act should prepare a Rural Needs Impact Assessment in relation to their contribution.

7. Who is responsible for approving or quality assuring Rural Needs Impact Assessments?

Public authorities are responsible for ensuring they comply with their statutory responsibilities under the Rural Needs Act. This includes ensuring that any Rural Needs Impact Assessments are completed to a satisfactory standard. DAERA does not have an approval or quality assurance role but is happy to provide advice and guidance, as appropriate.

8. Does the Rural Needs Act mean I have to provide the same level of service in rural areas as urban areas?

No, the duty in the Rural Needs Act is to have “due regard to rural needs”. The level of ‘regard’ that is ‘due’ will depend on the circumstances and, in particular, on the relevance of rural needs to the decision or function in question. Rural proofing is aimed at ensuring “equitable” not “equal” treatment of people in rural areas. Levels of service should be proportionate to the level of need.

9. What training is available for staff completing a Rural Needs Impact Assessment?

A 'Rural Proofing' e-learning package has been developed to sit alongside this guidance. For NICS Departments, it is available through the course catalogue on HR Connect. Other public authorities can obtain a copy of the package, at no cost to your organisation, from the Rural Development Council. The package is SCORM compliant and should be able to be integrated into most learning management systems.

10. How detailed does my Rural Needs Impact Assessment need to be?

The Rural Needs Act requires public authorities to have 'due regard' to rural needs. The level of 'regard' that is 'due' will depend on the circumstances and, in particular, on the relevance of rural needs to the decision or function in question. The greater the relevance and potential impact for people in rural needs, the greater the regard required by the duty.

The level of detail that should be included in the Rural Needs Impact Assessment should be proportionate to the scale and potential rural impact of the policy, strategy, plan or service.



Appendix 4

Case Study - Sample Rural Needs Impact Assessment Template

(adapted from Libraries NI Opening Hours Policy - Rural Impact Assessment)

Step 1: Define the Issue

Key questions to consider:

- *What are the objectives of the strategy, policy plan or service?*
- *What impact do you intend it to have in rural areas?*
- *How is 'rural' defined for the purposes of this policy/strategy/service/plan?*
- *What would constitute a fair rural outcome in this case?*

As a result of the draft budget 2015/16, Libraries NI is required to make savings of 7.5% (which equates to £2.385 million) compared with the initial budget for 2014/15. One of the measures being put in place in order to achieve this level of savings is a reduction in the opening hours of libraries (to save on staff costs and premises related costs). In order to ensure a consistent approach to determining the opening hours of libraries a draft policy has been devised, setting out the overall approach that will be used.

The draft policy states, that in determining the opening hours of libraries:

- a consistent approach should be applied across all libraries; exceptions may be made for libraries serving areas of substantial social need.
- opening hours should relate to the historic level of use of a library.
- the allocated hours should be used in a way that best meets customer need.
- the allocated hours in every library should be sufficient to provide a range of opening hours to suit different customer groups and to allow a minimum range of programmes to be delivered in line with Libraries NI's priorities.
- the opening hours should be affordable.
- the opening hours should be sustainable i.e. ad hoc closures due to staffing shortages are avoided other than in exceptional circumstances.

In the context of the draft budget 2015/16 it is proposed that:

- libraries will open for 54, 50, 45, 40, 35, 28, 25 or 18 hours depending on the level of use in 2013/14.
- no library should be open for less than 18 hours per week. If a library is open for less time than this, it is difficult to implement the policy of providing a range of opening hours to suit different customer groups and to allow a minimum range of programmes to be delivered in line with Libraries NI's priorities. Many of the libraries which are currently open for 18 hours per week are located in rural communities.
- no library serving areas of substantial deprivation (as listed in the Libraries NI Draft Business Plan 2015/16) should have its hours reduced by more than 10%.



Step 2: Understand the situation

Key questions to consider:

- *What is the current situation in rural areas?*
- *What evidence (statistics, data, research, stakeholder advice) do you have about the position in rural areas?*
- *If the relevant evidence is not available, can this be sourced?*
- *Do you have access to the views of rural stakeholders about the likely impact of the policy?*
- *Are there existing design features or mitigations already in place to take account of rural needs?*

In developing this draft Rural Impact Assessment, various sources of information have been considered in respect of the rural impact of the proposed policy on opening hours, namely:

- Libraries NI data;
- Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries (DCAL, first published 2006, revised 2014);
- Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measures 2010 (NISRA).

It is recognised that all libraries have a number of users who are rural dwellers (as defined in the Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements). This information was confirmed by an analysis undertaken by the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) in conjunction with Libraries NI to map the postcodes of library users to Output Areas . Using this information, an analysis was undertaken of the active borrower details for each of the 96 libraries to determine the percentage of active borrowers in each library who are rural dwellers. The percentage of library users who are rural dwellers ranges from 0.93% in Chichester Library to 99.08% in Draperstown Library. In 31 libraries, 51% or more of the active borrowers live in rural communities.

Rural areas are served by a combination of mobile library services and library branches in some rural towns and villages. The mobile library service is not impacted by the proposed policy.

The Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements defines settlements of less than 4,500 (Bands F, G and H) as rural communities. Using this definition, 28 branch libraries are located in rural communities. In a further three libraries (Ballynahinch, Downpatrick and Magherafelt) 51% or more of the population are rural dwellers.

The Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM) 2010 comprises seven domains

of deprivation, each developed to measure a distinct form or type of deprivation: income, employment, health, education, proximity to services, living environment and crime. The domains can be interpreted individually or combined to assess deprivation in more than one domain.

In considering rural deprivation the research would indicate that consideration should be given not only to the overall Multiple Deprivation Measure, but also to the Proximity to Services domain which is particularly relevant in rural areas.

It is mainly Census Output Areas in the west of the province (constituencies of West Tyrone, Fermanagh and South Tyrone and Mid Ulster) which rank as the most deprived in relation to the Proximity to Services domain. Rural libraries in these areas (Castledearg, Draperstown, Dungiven, Irvinestown and Lisnaskea) have a substantial number of active members who reside in one of the top 10% most deprived OAs as measured by the Proximity to Services domain. However other libraries, such as Carnlough, Castlewellan and Rathfriland also have significant numbers of active members from OAs which have low rankings in relation to Proximity to Services.

Libraries NI has carried out previous consultations in relation to policy decisions regarding a strategic review of library provision in Northern Ireland and a review of opening hours due to budget cuts in the 2011 - 2015 Comprehensive Spending Review. On both occasions Rural Impact Assessments were undertaken and consideration was given by the Board to comments received on the impact on rural communities of the proposals.

A summary of comments which may be relevant to this proposed policy on opening hours is included below:

- the costs associated with public transport and the fact that public transport routes and timetables often make it impossible to access the next nearest library, especially in the evenings.
- the public library is one of the few, if not the last, remaining public services in their community and contributes to the social cohesion of the community.
- the public library provides important shared social space, particularly for young mothers and elderly.
- the important role that the public library plays in supporting children and young people and the fact that the library is seen as a safe place for young people to meet in a constructive, educational and leisure environment.
- the important role that the library played in supporting people who were unemployed and seeking work and who used the library, and in particular, the free access to the internet, to access information, look for jobs and build their skills.

- rural poverty manifests itself very differently from poverty in urban areas: - it is not spatially concentrated - it exists amongst relative affluence - people in rural communities are less likely to identify that they are in poverty and there is a culture of “making do”.
- rural dwellers face significant difficulties accessing employment and basic services that other people take for granted.
- rural households must earn significantly more than their urban counterparts to reach a minimum standard of income due to the need to maintain a car and the higher cost of heating a home in rural areas.



Step 3: Develop and appraise options

Key questions to consider:

- *Are there barriers to delivery in rural areas?*
- *If so, how can these be overcome or mitigated?*
- *Will it cost more to deliver in rural areas?*
- *What steps can be taken to achieve fair rural outcomes?*

Policy Proposal One: A consistent approach should be applied across all libraries; exceptions may be made for libraries serving areas of substantial social need.

The proposed policy has been applied consistently across all libraries, with the exception of the following:

- In four libraries (Ardoyne, Creggan, Suffolk and Whiterock) serving areas of substantial deprivation, historic levels of use, as measured by issues, renewals, visits, public access computer sessions, participation in activities and active borrowers, would provide that opening hours should reduce by more than 10%. Accordingly it is proposed, as set out above, that these libraries should not have their opening hours reduced by more than 10% because they serve a number of Super Output Areas with significant social deprivation (i.e. in the top 10% as measured by the NIMDM). This means that these libraries would be in a higher band of opening hours than pure levels of use would suggest. It is recognised that these libraries are located in urban areas and that the vast majority of their active members live in an urban setting. Libraries NI is of the view, however, that these exceptions are justified, given that tackling poverty and social exclusion is a key priority of the Programme for 12 Government and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, our sponsoring body. No library serving rural communities has Super Output Areas within the top 10% most deprived.
- Heritage libraries are primarily reference libraries so it would not be appropriate to use the full range of indicators that apply in branch libraries to determine opening hours. Instead, the number of visits has been taken into account. Libraries NI is of the view that these exceptions are justified, given the nature of these libraries.

Policy Proposal Two: The allocated hours should be used in a way that best meets customer need.

Libraries NI intends to engage with customers at an individual library level in May and June 2015, once the policy and approach have been agreed by the Libraries NI Board, in order to

develop a pattern of opening hours that best meets customer needs. This approach will apply across all libraries, therefore there is no differential impact on rural libraries.

Policy Proposal Three: Opening hours should relate to the historic level of use of a library.

Proposed opening hours of all libraries (with the exception of those noted above) have been determined by totalling the number of issues, renewals, visits, public access computer sessions, participation in activities and active members in 2013/14. All libraries were assigned to a Band depending on the total level of use in that year. A consistent approach has been applied to all libraries, based on historic patterns of use, with the exception of the libraries identified above.

Policy Proposal Four: The allocated hours should be sufficient in every library to provide a range of opening hours to suit different customer groups and to allow a minimum range of programmes to be delivered in line with Libraries NI's priorities.

Based on implementation of the proposed policy in 2015/16, of the 28 libraries located in rural areas (as defined by the Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements):

- the opening hours of one library (Moira) would increase.
- the opening hours of six libraries (Dungiven, Irvinestown, Keady, Lisnaskea, Maghera and Whitehead) would decrease.
- the opening hours of the remaining 21 libraries would remain the same as in April 2014.

Libraries NI is of the view that the proposed opening hours of each of these libraries are sufficient to provide a mix of morning, afternoon, evening and weekend hours to suit different customer groups and to allow a minimum range of programmes to be delivered in line with Libraries NI's priorities. Local consultation will be used to determine the best pattern of hours to meet local needs.

Policy Proposal Five: The opening hours should be affordable.

Based on the draft budget 2015/16 the opening hours are deemed to be affordable.

Policy Proposal Six: The opening hours should be sustainable i.e. ad hoc closures due to staffing shortages are avoided other than in exceptional circumstances.

Libraries NI is of the view that the draft policy should have a positive impact for all library users, including those in rural areas, in that the opening hours at each library will become sustainable so that ad hoc closures, due to staffing shortages will be avoided, except in exceptional circumstances. Certainty about opening hours is particularly important in rural areas, where people may have to travel some distance to access their local library.

Step 4: Prepare for Delivery

Key questions to consider:

- *Do the necessary delivery mechanisms exist in rural areas?*
- *Have you considered alternative delivery mechanisms?*
- *What action has been taken to ensure fair rural outcomes?*
- *Is there flexibility for local delivery bodies to find local solutions?*
- *Are different solutions required in different areas?*

Following a public consultation exercise (receiving over 3,500 responses) and completion of a rural impact appraisal, Libraries NI implemented the following revisions to the policy to mitigate the impacts in rural areas.

No library serving rural communities has Super Output Areas within the top 10% most deprived. However, responses received to the draft Rural Impact Assessment recognised the differences between poverty and disadvantage in rural communities, compared to urban communities and a strong case was made for recognition to be given to rural disadvantage. Accordingly it was agreed, in the context of the 2015/16 budget, that no rural library, as identified in the Review of the Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements 16 (2015) should have its opening hours reduced by more than 10%. This would impact on three libraries as identified below.

Library	April 2014 Hours	Proposed hours (per consultation)	% reduction	Proposed revised opening hours
Keady	33	28	15.1%	30
Maghera	40	35	12.5%	38
Strathfoyle	30	25	16.7%	28

Two local MLAs made written submissions arguing that it would be inappropriate to base the opening hours of Lisnaskea Library, which opened on 8 April 2015, on the level of use of the old library which had limited facilities and car parking and was in a much poorer location, away from the town centre and up a steep hill. This view was repeated in a number of the questionnaires returned.

Having considered the responses received in relation to the new library in Lisnaskea, it was agreed that an exception should be made also in this case and that the existing opening hours should be retained during 2015/16 and that usage should be monitored.

The consultation report noted that an exception would be made also for Heritage Libraries which are primarily reference libraries on the basis that it would be inappropriate to use the full range of indicators that apply in branch libraries to determine opening hours. The Board agreed this recommendation and that further consideration should be given to the opening hours of the Mellon Centre for Migration Studies, with a report being brought to it, via the Services Committee in due course.



Step 5: Implementation & Monitoring

Key questions to consider:

- *Have you set any rural specific indicators or targets to monitor?*
- *How will the outcomes be measured in rural areas?*
- *Are there any statistics or data that you will collect to monitor rural needs and impacts?*

The impact on the opening hours of rural libraries was as follows:

- the opening hours of one library (Moirá) increased.
- the opening hours of seven libraries (Dungiven, Irvinestown, Keady, Lisnaskea, Maghera, Strathfoyle and Whitehead) decreased.
- the opening hours of the remaining 21 libraries would remain the same as in April 2014.
- No rural libraries were closed.

Step 6: Evaluation & Review

Key questions to consider:

- *What processes are in place to evaluate and review the implementation of the policy, strategy, plan or service?*
- *Have rural needs been factored into the evaluation process?*
- *How will lessons learned in relation to rural outcomes be used to inform future policy making and delivery?*

The impact of the policy decisions on library use, including in rural areas, will continue to be monitored and will be reviewed on an annual basis.

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