

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.

Guidance to the Utility Regulator on the key environmental and social policies and legislation that the Department expects it to consider when regulating Northern Ireland Water (NIW) during the next Price Control period, 2028/29-2032/33.

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

Developing a	Policy ☒	Strategy ☐	Plan ☐
Adopting a	Policy ☐	Strategy ☐	Plan ☐
Implementing a	Policy ☐	Strategy ☐	Plan ☐
Revising a	Policy ☐	Strategy ☐	Plan ☐
Designing a Public Service	☐		
Delivering a Public Service	☐		

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.

Social and Environmental Guidance for Water and Sewerage Services for Price Control 28 (2028/29-2032/33).

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

This document provides the Utility Regulator for Northern Ireland (NI) with guidance on the key social and environmental priorities it expects to be contributed to in carrying out its role in regulating NIW during the 2028/29-2032/33 period.

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.

Not applicable – default definition used.

Rationale for using alternative definition of 'rural'.

Not applicable – default definition used.

Reasons why a definition of 'rural' is not applicable.

Not applicable – default definition used.

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.

The draft Guidance groups relevant policies around three key themes:

1. Environmental Improvement and Compliance;
2. Service Delivery, Improvement and Affordability; and,
3. Sustainability and Climate Change.

Areas of focus in the guidance include clean, safe drinking water, improving wastewater capacity and maintaining environmental standards.

Progress on the policies outlined in the guidance will benefit service users in rural and urban areas. The guidance will help to inform the Utility Regulator's determination (regulatory assessment), which in turn will guide operational decision making by NIW.

Operational improvements during PC28 that will contribute to policies outlined in the guidance may include upgrades to water or wastewater treatment works, or other NIW assets such as combined sewer overflows. These upgrades can improve environmental performance and/or help to facilitate future development.

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.

This document provides the Utility Regulator for NI with guidance on the key social and environmental priorities it expects to be contributed to in carrying out its role in regulating NIW during the 2028/29-2032/33 period.

This guidance is not likely to impact on people in rural areas differently compared to people in urban areas. Progress on the policies outlined in the guidance will benefit service users in both rural and urban areas.

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	☒
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	☒
Agri-Environment	☒
Other (Please state)	

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.

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	☐	Published Statistics	☐
Consultation with Other Organisations	☒	Research Papers	☐
Surveys or Questionnaires	☐	Other Publications	☐
Other Methods or Information Sources (include details in Question 3C below).			☒

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 engaged in pre-consultation with a number of key water stakeholder organisations in advance of a public consultation on the draft Guidance, including with the Utility Regulator and the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland. The public consultation will provide an opportunity to identify any particular rural issues that may need to be considered in finalising the draft Guidance.

In addition, as part of normal operations, NIW works with local councils to ascertain the scale of planned development, to determine if there is sufficient capacity in the water and wastewater networks to facilitate new development; and encourages developers to engage early in their process to ascertain requirements.

NIW also regularly reviews the performance of each treatment works to ensure it remains compliant and unannounced sampling is done by Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA).

Through this regular engagement with local councils and management of its assets, NIW is able to prepare a work programme, setting out which projects it will deliver in the price control period, which will be delivered in both rural and urban areas across NI.

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

The pre-consultation processes outlined above have identified drinking water quality as a particular priority for service users.

The draft Guidance addresses this issue and sets out other specific policies of relevance to people in both rural and urban areas. The public consultation process will provide an opportunity for the Department to gather further information on any particular issues affecting people in rural areas that need to be considered as part of finalising the Guidance.

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.

As outlined above, the draft guidance provides a high-level summary of key policies the Department expects the Utility Regulator to have regard to and does not distinguish between the approach to urban and rural areas.

Pre-consultation engagement has identified drinking water quality as a particular priority for service users.

The draft Guidance addresses this issue and sets out other specific policies of relevance to people in both rural and urban areas. The public consultation process will provide an opportunity for the Department to gather further information on any particular issues affecting people in rural areas that need to be considered as part of finalising the Guidance.

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.

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.

Pre-consultation engagement has identified drinking water quality as a particular priority for service users in general, without distinguishing between urban and rural service users. The draft Guidance addresses this issue and sets out other specific policies of relevance to people in both rural and urban areas. The public consultation process will provide an opportunity for the Department to gather further information on any particular issues affecting people in rural areas that need to be considered as part of finalising the Guidance.

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:	Dean Prescho
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Signature:	Dean Prescho
Date:	27/05/2026
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Date:	21/7/2026