

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.

Water and Sewerage Charges - Options for Revenue Raising

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

Developing a	Policy <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input 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 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.

- Consultation on Water and Sewerage Charges – Options for Revenue Raising

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

The policy objective is to raise revenue through charging for water and sewerage services. This follows the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (SoSNI) Direction that NI Department's should consult on the range of policy and delivery options that could be reasonably considered to generate income to improve the sustainability of public finances.

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.

High level options for consultation on water and sewerage charges have been developed at this point and early analysis indicates that charges are likely to impact negatively on people in rural areas. The planned consultation is intended to clarify the potential options in support of a conversation on how water and sewerage charges could be introduced in NI. The consultation is also the opportunity for citizens to explain potential impacts this proposal may have.

Options considered are as follows:

- Introduction of domestic water and sewerage charges
- Remove the Domestic Allowance for Non – Domestic Customers
- Charge customers for Domestic Septic Tank Desludging
- Recover the cost of Roads Drainage from all customers.

Following an analysis of consultation responses and a decision by the Secretary of State, an implementation pathway for the preferred option(s) may need to be established. This will be in conjunction with key stakeholders, and will involve developing in greater detail the costs, timelines, relief schemes and impact mitigations inter alia for further consideration and consultation.

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.

As outlined, high level options have been developed at this point. However, initial analysis indicates that charges may impact negatively on people living in rural areas differently from people in urban areas in some respects. For example, Septic Tank systems are common in rural properties and introducing charges for desludging may impact more on people living in rural properties.

The DAERA Key Rural Issues NI 2022 report found that:

- Rural pensioners were substantially more likely to be in relative or absolute poverty than their urban counterparts.
- The cost of living tends to be higher in rural areas.
- As of Quarter 3 in 2022, average house prices are substantially (17%) higher in rural than in urban areas – one of the options considered in calculating the domestic water charge is the capital value of a property.

Following consultation and analysis of consultation responses it is likely that preferred options will require individual and specific consideration in respect of impact on rural populations especially if options in respect of Removal of the Domestic Allowance and charging customers for Domestic Septic Tank Desludging are being progressed.

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Poverty in Rural Areas	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Deprivation in Rural Areas	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Rural Crime or Community Safety	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rural Development	<input type="checkbox"/>
Agri-Environment	<input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/>
Consultation with Other Organisations	<input type="checkbox"/>	Research Papers	<input type="checkbox"/>
Surveys or Questionnaires	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other Publications	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other Methods or Information Sources (include details in Question 3C below).			<input 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.

N/A

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

N/A

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?

At this juncture, given that only broad representative options for the introduction of water and sewerage charges have been set out and policies remain to be developed, it is not possible to fully assess how significant and adverse the impacts of water and sewerage charges will be on rural needs. The planned consultation is intended to clarify the potential options and to encourage the conversation on how water and sewerage charges could be introduced in NI as well as giving citizens an opportunity to highlight potential impacts. Following an analysis of consultation responses and a decision by the Secretary of State, an implementation pathway for the preferred option(s) may need to be established. This will be in conjunction with key stakeholders, and will involve developing in greater detail the costs, timelines, relief schemes and impact mitigations inter alia for further consideration and consultation.

The Department will therefore keep rural needs considerations under review as proposals from the current consultation are worked through. Any water charging proposals progressed will likely require individual Rural Needs Impact Assessments to be completed specific to those 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.

The “[Key Rural Issues 2021](#)” report by the Department of Agriculture, Environment, and Rural Affairs’ (DAERA) identifies a number of key domains in which there are particular impacts for those living in rural areas. The report identifies the following factors impacting across a range of domains:

- Rural pensioners were substantially more likely to be in relative or absolute poverty than their urban counterparts.
- The cost of living also tends to be higher in rural areas. For example, the relative lack of public transport options and greater reliance on private transport also has cost implications for rural dwellers. As noted in the report, 92% of rural households have access to at least one private vehicle as compared to 78% of urban households (figure 47, page 44). The report notes that this higher level of private vehicle ownership (arguably a necessity) represents a larger cumulative impact on living costs for people who live in rural areas.
- As of Quarter 3 in 2022, average house prices are substantially (17%) higher in rural than in urban areas – the capital value of a property could be a means of calculating the domestic water charge.

These factors together with the option to introduce charges for desludging of Septic Tanks, would suggest that the introduction of water charges may have particular impact on people living in rural areas and, as such, are likely to require significant further consultation and assessment in the context of rural needs. As a mitigation action we are considering a relief scheme and the consultation is seeking views on what that should entail.

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.

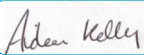

As outlined, only high-level options have been developed at this point. During the development of options post consultation, consideration will be given to how any adverse Rural Needs impacts can be reduced.

Any water charging proposals progressed will require appropriate consultation with stakeholder groups and individual Rural Needs Impact Assessments to be completed specific to those areas. This will ensure that due regard is given to the needs and impacts on rural areas and communities in the development of detailed proposals for Water and Sewerage Charges.

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:	Aideen Kelly
Position/Grade:	Grade 7
Division/Branch	Water Charging Policy Unit
Signature:	
Date:	20 October 2023
Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:	Mark Stranaghan
Position/Grade:	Grade 6
Division/Branch:	Water Charging Policy Unit
Signature:	
Date:	2 November 2023