

## Appendix 2

# Executive Summary

The Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 places a statutory duty on Northern Ireland departments, district councils and certain other public authorities in Northern Ireland to have due regard to the social and economic needs of people in rural areas in the development, implementation, revision and adoption of policies, strategies and plans and in the design and delivery of public services. The Act came into operation for departments and councils in June 2017 and for the other public authorities listed in the Schedule to the Act in June 2018.

In September 2019 DAERA established a working group to undertake a review of the implementation of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 for the purposes of assessing how the legislation was being implemented by public authorities to date and identifying what further support measures might be introduced to help public authorities comply with the legislation. The Terms of Reference for the review set seven specific objectives for the working group to address as part of the review. In undertaking the review the working group collected evidence from a wide range of public authorities and rural stakeholders in order to ensure that the recommendations resulting from the review were evidence based.

The review found that there continues to be a lack of awareness among some decision makers of the need to comply with the due regard duty and a lack of understanding of among some decision makers as to what a public authority is required to do specifically in order to fulfil the due regard duty. It also found that lack of access to the information necessary to inform decision makers of the needs of people in rural areas was a key barrier to implementing the due regard duty. The review also found that not all decision makers were complying with the guidance on the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 in relation to the carrying out of Rural Needs Impact Assessments and that there was evidence that the completion of a Rural Needs Impact Assessment Template was sometimes being viewed as a 'tick box' exercise;

In seeking to address the findings from the review the working group has made 25 recommendations covering all aspects of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016. These include recommendations on increasing awareness of the legislation, new measures to help public authorities comply with the legislation, improving the monitoring and reporting procedures, improving access to statistical information and new measures to facilitate better co-operation between public authorities. A full list of the recommendations is provided at Appendix 1 of the report.

## List of Recommendations

<b>No.</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Public Authority Recommended to Implement</b>
1	It is recommended that DAERA works in partnership with other public authorities to deliver a programme of 'on the ground' and corporate level promotion activities aimed at raising awareness of the due regard duty and of the support and guidance available to decision makers to help them ensure they comply with the due regard duty.	DAERA
2	It is recommended that DAERA develops a suite of new online material specifically on the Rural Need Impact Assessment process and the completion of the RNIA Template and makes this available to all public authorities.	DAERA
3	It is recommended that DAERA develops comprehensive training on the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 and makes this available to those officials within public authorities with responsibility for promoting, supporting and monitoring the implementation of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 based on need.	DAERA
4	It is recommended that DAERA reviews the guidance on the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 with a view to clarifying that where a public authority is satisfied that a Section 1 activity in which it is engaged has no impact, no likely impact and no potential to impact on people in rural areas or their social and economic needs, that public authority may complete its own condensed version of the RNIA Template to document that information and to confirm that it is satisfied that the due regard duty has been fully considered.	DAERA
5	It is recommended that public authorities host regular workshops for decision makers within their organisation (subject to need) for the purposes of increasing awareness	All Public Authorities

	and understanding of the duties on public authorities under the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016.	
6	It is recommended that DAERA creates a dedicated 'Rural Statistics and Information' page on the 'Rural Needs' section of the DAERA website incorporating appropriate links to statistics, research and other useful information (including links to the Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information Service) and contacts for the DAERA rural statistician and other Departmental statisticians groups.	DAERA
7	It is recommended that public authorities review the resources allocated to supporting the implementation of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 with a view to ensuring that rural needs co-ordinators have access to the resources necessary to undertake their role effectively.	All Public Authorities
8	It is recommended that DAERA reviews the structure and content of the 'Rural Needs' section of the DAERA website with a view to making the information more user-friendly and including more information on the Rural Needs Impact Assessment process including, for example, rural statistics, research information, case studies, further guidance and examples of good practice.	DAERA
9	It is recommended that DAERA offers to support one half day workshop on the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 for each public authority annually on request.	DAERA
10	It is recommended that public authorities take steps to seek to embed the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 further within their organisation including, for example, by incorporating compliance with the Act in their Assurance Statements, Submission Templates and Audit and Risk Procedures.	All Public Authorities
11	It is recommended that the DAERA rural statistician participates in the Rural Needs Network.	DAERA

12	It is recommended that research is undertaken to identify examples of rural success stories, positive impacts and lessons learned as a result of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 or rural proofing and that DAERA makes these available on the 'Rural Needs' section of its website.	DAERA
13	It is recommended that public authorities seek to develop effective relationships with rural community organisations and, where appropriate, to seek to engage with the rural community sector in a meaningful and timely manner as part of the Rural Needs Impact Assessment process being undertaken in respect of Section 1 activities.	All Public Authorities
14	It is recommended that public authorities be open to adopting new and innovative approaches to engaging with the rural community sector when seeking to gather information on rural needs including taking measures to engage with people in rural areas who may not normally participate in public consultations or stakeholder engagement.	All Public Authorities
15	It is recommended that DAERA incorporates a rural research hub webpage on the 'Rural Needs' section of its website providing a dedicated space for links to relevant research relating to the needs of people in rural areas to be shared.	DAERA
16	It is recommended that the Agri-food and Bio-Sciences Institute (AFBI) produces a short research briefing document (which provides an overview and summary of the research) as an output of all current and future rural research undertaken by it on behalf of DAERA.	AFBI
17	It is recommended that DAERA shares its 'Rural Needs Database' model with other public authorities following the successful completion of the pilot.	DAERA

18	It is recommended that DAERA offers to provide feedback on the content of annual monitoring returns submitted by public authorities on request.	DAERA
19	It is recommended that DAERA reviews the structure and content of the annual monitoring report with a view to improving its presentation and making the information more meaningful and relevant to stakeholders including through the use of indexing, the use of narrative rather than tabular format, the use of infographics (where appropriate) and the provision of linkages to RNIA Templates on public authorities' own websites (where available).	DAERA
20	It is recommended that public authorities publish their RNIA Templates on their website on a single webpage and that the annual monitoring report includes a link to each public authority's webpage.	All Public Authorities
21	It is recommended that, if a suitable opportunity arises, DAERA should seek to amend Section 3 of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 to remove the requirement to publish the same comprehensive information in both a public authority's Annual Report and Accounts <u>and</u> in the annual monitoring report which is required to be published by DAERA.	DAERA
22	It is recommended that DAERA establishes a Rural Needs Network open to all public authorities listed in the Schedule to the Act for the purposes of facilitating co-operation and the exchange of information between public authorities (including DAERA), promoting best practice across public authorities and providing a forum for Rural Needs Coordinators to raise and discuss issues relating to rural needs, including engagement with the rural community sector.	DAERA
23	It is recommended that the Rural Needs Network meets formally on a biannual basis and that following its establishment, the network would explore options for networking on an ongoing basis outside of the formal process, including options using technology.	DAERA

24	<p>It is recommended that DAERA should consider adding the following organisations to the Schedule to the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 when undertaking its review of the list of bodies and persons set out in the Schedule as required under Section 1(3) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Northern Ireland Water</li> <li>- The Northern Ireland Transport Company</li> <li>- Waterways Ireland</li> </ul>	DAERA
25	<p>It is recommended that DAERA engages with members of the Rural Needs Working Group when undertaking the review of the list of bodies and persons in the Schedule under Section 1(3) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016.</p>	DAERA