

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council's response to the Committee Agriculture and Rural Development's request for evidence on the Rural Needs Bill.

Please note this response was approved by Policy and Resources Committee and is submitted subject to ratification by Council on Monday 30 November 2015.

1. Mid and East Antrim Borough Council deeply value our rural communities and the important contribution they make to our Borough; and as the lead partner for Community Planning we are committed to addressing poverty, disadvantage, social exclusion and inequality in rural areas and to aspire to a better quality of life for rural dwellers.
2. However, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council do not believe that placing a statutory duty on all government departments and councils will ensure that the needs of rural dwellers are appropriately considered when policies and public services are being developed.
3. Council note that rural proofing has been part of the central government policy-making process since 2002, however, it has not been widely adopted by local government or other non-departmental bodies and work is required to embed assessment of rural needs within Councils.
4. We believe a process of education and encouragement to introduce formal assessment of rural needs across the local government sector is required, and this must be completed before any decision can be made as to whether there is a requirement to introduce a statutory duty.
5. To support this work, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) has a key role and responsibility in promoting and encouraging rural needs assessment within local government and to provide advice and guidance to policy makers. Council also believe that DARD should take the lead in putting in place effective arrangements for co-operation between public bodies and sharing of best practice and data.

6. Mid and East Antrim Borough Council do not believe, however, that there should be a statutory requirement to produce and publish reports to the Assembly. As a public service provider, Council will focus on positive outcomes for our rural communities, and we will review, monitor and be accountable to our constituents for successful delivery of these outcomes.

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