

Rural Needs Bill

[AS INTRODUCED]

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Impose a duty on public authorities to consider rural needs; and for connected purposes.

BE IT ENACTED by being passed by the Northern Ireland Assembly and assented to by Her Majesty as follows:

Duty of public authorities to consider rural needs

1.—(1) A public authority must consider rural needs when—

(a) developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans, and

5 (b) designing and delivering public services.

(2) For the purposes of this Act, “public authority” means—

(a) a Northern Ireland department;

(b) a district council;

(c) any other person specified in an order made by the Department.

10 (3) An order under subsection (2) may provide for a person to be a public authority for all or any of the purposes of this Act.

(4) The Department must not exercise the power conferred by subsection (2) so that a person becomes a public authority for any of the purposes of this Act unless the person is a person appearing to the Department to exercise functions of a public nature.

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(5) An order under subsection (2) must not be made unless a draft of the order has been laid before, and approved by a resolution of, the Assembly.

Guidance, advice and information, etc.

2. The Department may take such steps as appear to it to be appropriate to—

20 (a) provide any person with guidance, advice and information about issues connected with rural needs or ways of meeting those needs;

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- (b) undertake, commission or support (by financial means or otherwise) research into any matter relating to rural needs.

Monitoring and reporting

- 5 **3.**—(1) A public authority must, in such manner as may be directed by the Department—
- (a) compile information on the exercise of its functions under section 1; and
 - (b) send that information to the Department.
- (2) The Department must prepare an annual report containing—
- 10 (a) the information sent to it under subsection (1); and
 - (b) information on the exercise by the Department of its functions under this Act,
- and lay a copy of the report before the Assembly.

Co-operation with other bodies

- 15 **4.** The Department must make arrangements with public authorities with a view to securing co-operation and the exchange of information between public authorities.

Commencement

- 5.** Sections 1 to 4 come into operation on such day or days as the Department may by order appoint.

20 **Interpretation**

- 6.** In this Act—
- “the Department” means the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development;
 - “rural needs” means the social and economic needs of persons in rural areas.

25 **Short title**

- 7.** This Act may be cited as the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2015.