

**From the Office of the  
Minister of Agriculture,  
Environment and Rural Affairs**



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**To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail (i) the expected timeframe for the implementation of the 25 recommendations made by the Rural Needs Working Group; and (ii) any planned initiatives that may directly affect people living in rural areas of East Londonderry.**

My Department has already implemented a number of the recommendations made by the Working Group established to Review the Implementation of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016. Progress on implementation is set out in Annex A. My Department is working to implement the remaining recommendations over the coming months although it recognises that Covid-19 restrictions may have an impact on delivering some of the recommendations.

In relation to those recommendations made by the Rural Needs Working Group which are applicable to other public authorities, the Department has written to each public authority requesting that it implements the recommendations.

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In relation to initiatives in rural areas of East Londonderry, DAERA's ongoing Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) Programme supports a range of initiatives which benefit all rural communities across Northern Ireland.



**GORDON LYONS MLA**  
**Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs**

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## **Annex A**

My Department has reviewed the structure and content of the ‘Rural Needs’ section of the DAERA website and is now in the process of updating the website to make it more user friendly and more informative. The updated website includes new information to support public authorities including a dedicated ‘Rural Statistics and Information’ page incorporating appropriate links to statistics, research and other useful information and a new rural research hub webpage providing a dedicated space for links to relevant research. It also includes a series of new online ‘Help With’ guides to assist public authorities with their responsibilities.

The Department has also reviewed the guidance on the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 (the Act) 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 Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA) Template to document that information and to confirm that it is satisfied that the due regard duty has been fully considered. This clarification is now provided in a new online guide “Help with Completing the Rural Needs Impact Assessment Template” which is available on the updated website.

The Department has also developed a comprehensive classroom based training course on the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 for those officials within public authorities with responsibility for promoting, supporting and monitoring the implementation of the Act. Due to covid-19 restrictions this training has not yet been delivered in a classroom based setting however the Department has shared the training material with public authorities and has offered to undertake online training sessions for Rural Needs Co-ordinators on request.

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The Department has also established 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 and promoting best practice across public authorities. The first Rural Needs Network event took place online in September 2020.

The Department has also shared its 'Rural Needs Database' model with other public authorities to assist them with compiling the information required under Section 3(1) of the Act. It also invited Rural Needs Co-ordinators, including those who were members of the Rural Needs Working Group, to input to the public survey undertaken to inform the review of the list of bodies and persons in the Schedule under Section 1(3) of the Act.

The Department has also written to all public authorities advising them that it has accepted all the recommendations made in the report including the recommendation to support one half day workshop for each public authority annually on request and to provide feedback on the content of annual monitoring returns submitted by public authorities on request.

The Department is working to implement the remaining recommendations over the coming months although it recognises that Covid-19 restrictions may have an impact on delivering some of the recommendations.

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