

Title: Amendment to the list of bodies and persons set out in the Schedule to the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016.	Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA)
	Date: 19 July 2026
	Type of measure: Secondary Legislation
Lead department or agency: Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA)	Stage: Initial
	Source of intervention: Domestic NI
Other departments or agencies:	Contact details: Rural Legislation Advisory Branch
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Summary Intervention and Options

What is the problem under consideration? Why is government intervention necessary? Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 (the Act) places a statutory duty on 37 listed public authorities to have due regard to rural needs when carrying out activities under section 1(1) of the Act. Following a statutory review of the Schedule to the Act (the Schedule), DAERA concluded that it is appropriate to add 54 additional public authorities, increasing the number listed from 37 to 91. Without legislative amendment, those additional public authorities would remain outside the scope of the statutory duty and would not be required to have due regard to rural needs when carrying out the activities specified in the Act. Government intervention is necessary because the Schedule may only be amended through secondary legislation made under section 1(3) of the Act.	
What are the policy objectives and the intended effects? The objective is to implement the Minister's policy objective and the Department's recommendations arising from the statutory review of the Schedule by making a Statutory Rule (SR) to add 54 additional public authorities to the Schedule. The intended effect is to extend the existing statutory duty to have due regard to rural needs to those additional public authorities when carrying out activities under section 1(1) of the Act, supporting more consistent consideration of rural needs across a wider range of public authorities in policy development, service design and delivery, and other relevant public functions.	
What policy options have been considered, including any alternatives to regulation? Publicity campaigns, training and guidance can support awareness of rural needs, but they are not a suitable alternative to legislation in this case. The recommendations arising from the Department's statutory review of the Schedule can only be implemented through a SR to amend the Schedule. The proposed SR would add 54 additional public authorities to the Schedule and extend the existing statutory duty to have due regard to rural needs to those additional public authorities. Option 1 - Do nothing: Retain the existing Schedule with 37 listed public authorities. This would not implement the recommendations of the statutory review and would leave the 54 identified public authorities outside the scope of the statutory duty. Option 2 - Partial Implementation: Make a Statutory Rule to amend the Schedule however only a subset of the public authorities identified through the statutory review would be added to the Schedule, resulting in the incomplete implementation of the recommendations of the statutory review. Option 3 - Preferred option: Make a Statutory Rule to amend the Schedule by adding 54 additional public authorities. This is the only effective mechanism for implementing the recommendations of the statutory review and extending the existing statutory duty to those public authorities.	
Will the policy be reviewed? Yes - It will be reviewed.	If applicable, set review date: This will be reviewed every 3 years, as required by the Act.

Cost of Preferred (or more likely) Option		
Total outlay cost for business £m	Total net cost to business per year £m	Annual cost for implementation by Regulator £m
0	0	0.23m

Does Implementation go beyond minimum EU requirements?		YES ☐	NO ☒
Is this measure likely to impact on trade and investment?		YES ☐	NO ☒
Are any of these organisations in scope?	Micro Yes ☒ No ☐	Small Yes ☒ No ☐	Medium Yes ☒ No ☐
			Large Yes ☒ No ☐

The final RIA supporting legislation must be attached to the Explanatory Memorandum and published with it.

Approved by: Andrea McCart Date: 28 September 2026

ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT (Option 1: Do Nothing)

Costs (£m)	Total Transitional (Policy)		Average Annual (recurring)	Total Cost
	(constant price)	Years	(excl. transitional) (constant price)	(Present Value)
Low	0		0	0
High	0		0	0
Best Estimate	No transitional costs		No average annual recurring costs	No total costs

Description and scale of key monetised costs by 'main affected groups'

No monetised costs have been identified. Under this option, no legislative amendment would be made to the Schedule, and no additional public authorities would be brought within the scope of the Act. Consequently, there would be no additional implementation, training, monitoring, reporting or administrative costs for DAERA or for the 54 public authorities identified through the statutory review.

Other key non-monetised costs by 'main affected groups'

There would be no change for the 37 public authorities currently listed in the Schedule. The 54 additional public authorities identified through the statutory review would remain outside the scope of the Act and would not be subject to the statutory duty to have due regard to rural needs when carrying out activities under section 1(1) of the Act. This may limit the consistent consideration of rural needs across the public sector and would not implement the recommendations arising from the statutory review.

Benefits (£m)	Total Transitional (Policy)		Average Annual (recurring)	Total Benefit
	(constant price)	Years	(excl. transitional) (constant price)	(Present Value)
Low	0		0	0
High	0		0	0
Best Estimate	No monetised benefits identified			0

Description and scale of key monetised benefits by 'main affected groups'

No monetised benefits have been identified. Under this option, the Schedule would remain unchanged, and the recommendations of the statutory review would not be implemented. Accordingly, no quantifiable economic benefits have been identified.

Other key non-monetised benefits by 'main affected groups'

The 54 additional public authorities identified through the statutory review, and DAERA, would avoid any additional implementation, training, monitoring, reporting and administrative requirements associated with extending the statutory duty. Existing arrangements under the Act would remain unchanged and no additional public authorities would be brought within its scope. Rural dwellers would not experience any direct change as a result of this option.

Key Assumptions, Sensitivities, Risks

The Act requires DAERA to review the list of bodies and persons set out in the Schedule and, where it considers it appropriate, to amend the Schedule by Order. Under this option, the 54 additional public authorities identified through the statutory review would remain outside the scope of the statutory duty. This would result in the recommendations of the statutory review not being implemented and could reduce assurance that rural needs are being considered consistently across the full range of relevant public authorities.

BUSINESS ASSESSMENT (Option 1: Do Nothing)

Direct Impact on business (Equivalent Annual) £m				
Costs:0	Benefits:0	Net:0		

The proposal applies only to public authorities and imposes no direct obligations on businesses.

Cross Border Issues (Option 1: Do Nothing)

How does this option compare to other UK regions and to other EU Member States (particularly Republic of Ireland)
No specific cross-border economic or trade issues have been identified. Under this option, no legislative change would be made, and the existing statutory arrangements would remain unchanged. The option would not introduce requirements on businesses or affect trade arrangements within Northern Ireland, the rest of the United Kingdom or the Republic of Ireland.

Summary: Analysis and Evidence

Policy Option 2

Description: Partial Implementation

ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT (Option 2: Partial Implementation)

Costs (£m)	Total Transitional (Policy)		Average Annual (recurring)	Total Cost
	(constant price)	Years	(excl. transitional) (constant price)	(Present Value)
Low	0		0	0
High	0		0	0
Best Estimate	Not quantified		Not quantified	Not quantified

Description and scale of key monetised costs by 'main affected groups'

Monetised costs have not been quantified. Partial implementation would result in implementation, familiarisation, training, monitoring and reporting costs for DAERA and those public authorities selected for inclusion. However, as this option does not identify which authorities would be included, it is not possible to estimate these costs reliably.

Other key non-monetised costs by 'main affected groups'

A subset of the additional public authorities identified through the statutory review would incur implementation, training, monitoring and reporting costs associated with the statutory duty. DAERA would also be required to provide support, guidance and oversight for those authorities. However, as other authorities identified through the review would remain outside the scope of the Act, the benefits of a consistent approach to the consideration of rural needs across the public sector would be only partially realised.

Benefits (£m)	Total Transitional (Policy)		Average Annual (recurring)	Total Benefit
	(constant price)	Years	(excl. transitional) (constant price)	(Present Value)
Low	0		0	0
High	0		0	0
Best Estimate	Not quantified		Not quantified	Not quantified

Description and scale of key monetised benefits by 'main affected groups'

Monetised benefits have not been quantified. Partial implementation would extend the statutory duty to a subset of the public authorities identified through the statutory review. While this may result in some benefits through increased consideration of rural needs in decision-making, the nature and scale of any resulting impacts cannot be reliably quantified.

Other key non-monetised benefits by ‘main affected groups’

The additional public authorities selected for inclusion would become subject to the statutory duty to have due regard to rural needs when carrying out activities under section 1(1) of the Act. This would support greater consideration of rural needs across those authorities and contribute to more consistent decision-making than under Option 1. However, as other public authorities identified through the statutory review would remain outside the scope of the Act, the benefits would be more limited than under the preferred option and the recommendations of the statutory review would not be fully implemented.

Key Assumptions, Sensitivities, Risks

The Act requires DAERA to review the list of bodies and persons set out in the Schedule and, where it considers it appropriate, to amend the Schedule by Order. Under this option, the statutory review recommendations would only be partially implemented, with some public authorities becoming subject to the statutory duty and others remaining outside its scope. This could result in inconsistent consideration of rural needs across the public sector and reduce assurance that rural needs are being considered by all relevant public authorities identified through the review.

BUSINESS ASSESSMENT (Option 2: Partial Implementation)

Direct Impact on business (Equivalent Annual) £m				
Costs:0	Benefits:0	Net:0		

The proposal applies only to public authorities and imposes no direct obligations on businesses. Partial implementation would extend the existing statutory duty under the Act to a subset of public authorities only and would not introduce any direct costs, benefits or regulatory requirements for businesses.

Cross Border Issues (Option 2: Partial Implementation)**How does this option compare to other UK regions and to other EU Member States (particularly Republic of Ireland)**

No specific cross-border economic or trade issues have been identified. Partial implementation would extend the existing statutory duty under section 1(1) of the Act to a subset of public authorities within Northern Ireland. The option would not introduce requirements on businesses or affect trade arrangements within Northern Ireland, the rest of the United Kingdom or the Republic of Ireland.

Summary: Analysis and Evidence

Policy Option 3

Description: Preferred Option - Option 3: Make a SR to amend the Schedule by adding an additional 54 authorities.

ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT Preferred Option, option 3: make a SR to amend the Schedule by adding an additional 54 authorities.

Costs (£m)	Total Transitional (Policy)		Average Annual (recurring)	Total Cost
	(constant price)	Years	(excl. transitional) (constant price)	(Present Value)
Low	Not quantified		Not quantified	Not quantified
High	Not quantified		Not quantified	Not quantified
Best Estimate	Not quantified		0.23m	Not quantified

Description and scale of key monetised costs by ‘main affected groups’

The estimated monetised cost is approximately £0.23m per annum, reflecting the anticipated staffing costs of one Deputy Principal, two Staff Officers and one Executive Officer. This reflects the anticipated staffing resource required by DAERA to support implementation, provide guidance and advice to the additional listed public authorities, maintain reporting arrangements and fulfil its statutory functions under the Act. This is based on projected staffing requirements and represents the Department's current best estimate at this stage.

Other key non-monetised costs by ‘main affected groups’

The additional 54 public authorities would need to become familiar with the requirements of the Act and associated guidance. They may need to establish appropriate processes to ensure staff are able to comply with the statutory duty to have due regard to rural needs when carrying out activities under section 1(1) of the Act. They may also incur limited administrative costs associated with gathering information, maintaining records and supporting reporting requirements. DAERA would also incur resource requirements in providing advice, guidance and implementation support to the additional public authorities as they implement the Act.

Benefits (£m)	Total Transitional (Policy)		Average Annual (recurring)	Total Benefit
	(constant price)	Years	(excl. transitional) (constant price)	(Present Value)
Low	0		0	0
High	0		0	0
Best Estimate	0		0	0

Description and scale of key monetised benefits by ‘main affected groups’

No monetised benefits have been identified. While the preferred option is expected to support more consistent consideration of rural needs across a wider range of public authorities, the resulting benefits cannot be reliably quantified.

Other key non-monetised benefits by ‘main affected groups’

The additional 54 public authorities would become subject to the statutory duty to have due regard to rural needs when carrying out activities under section 1(1) of the Act and would be required to become familiar with the Act and associated guidance. This should support more informed and transparent decision-making and more consistent consideration of rural needs across those public authorities. Any substantive impacts for rural communities would arise through future policies, strategies, plans and public services developed or delivered by those authorities, rather than through the legislative amendment itself.

Key Assumptions, Sensitivities, Risks

It is assumed that DAERA will provide guidance, advice and implementation support to the additional 54 public authorities. Failure to provide appropriate support may result in inconsistent application of the statutory duty and reduce the effectiveness of implementation across those authorities.

BUSINESS ASSESSMENT (Preferred Option, option 3: make a SR to amend the Schedule by adding an additional 54 authorities.)

Direct Impact on business (Equivalent Annual) £m				
Costs:0	Benefits:0	Net:0		

The proposal applies only to public authorities and imposes no direct obligations on businesses. The amendment extends the existing statutory duty under section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 to an additional 54 public authorities and therefore gives rise to no direct costs, benefits or regulatory impacts for businesses.

Cross Border Issues (Preferred Option, option 3: make a SR to amend the Schedule by adding 54 authorities.)

How does this option compare to other UK regions and to other EU Member States (particularly Republic of Ireland) No specific cross-border economic or trade issues have been identified. The proposed Statutory Rule would amend the Schedule and extend the existing statutory duty under section 1(1) of the Act to 54 additional public authorities within Northern Ireland. The proposal does not introduce requirements on businesses, affect cross-border trade, or alter existing arrangements within Northern Ireland, the rest of the United Kingdom or the Republic of Ireland.

Problem under consideration, and rationale for intervention

Section 1(1) of the Act places a statutory duty on public authorities listed in the Schedule to have due regard to rural needs when carrying out activities under section 1(1) of the Act. Following the statutory review of the Schedule, DAERA concluded that an additional 54 authorities should be added to the Schedule, increasing the number listed from 37 to 91. Without legislative amendment, these additional authorities would not be subject to the Act. Government intervention is therefore required, as the Schedule can only be amended through secondary legislation.

Policy Objectives

The Minister's policy objective is to implement the recommendations of the statutory review of the Schedule by making a SR to add an additional 54 authorities to the Schedule.

The intended effect is to extend the existing statutory duty to a wider range of authorities, helping to ensure more consistent consideration of rural needs across Northern Ireland when carrying out activities under section 1(1) of the Act. This should strengthen the extent to which authorities give due regard to rural needs in the exercise of their functions.

Options considered, and their costs and benefits

Option 1 – Do nothing

This option would involve no intervention and leave arrangements unchanged.

The Schedule would remain as it is and the 54 additional authorities identified through the statutory review would not be added. As a result, these authorities would not be subject to the statutory duty to have due regard to rural needs when carrying out activities under section 1(1) of the Act.

This option would not implement the recommendations of the statutory review and would not extend the statutory duty to the additional authorities identified through that process.

Option 2 – Partial Implementation

Only a subset of the public authorities identified through the statutory review would be added to the Schedule, resulting in the incomplete implementation of the recommendations of the statutory review.

All 54 authorities were assessed against the agreed criteria and were found to meet the requirements for inclusion. No objective basis was identified for including some authorities while excluding others. Partial implementation would therefore undermine consistency and could expose the Department to challenge regarding the basis for inclusion decisions.

Option 3 — make a SR to amend the Schedule by adding 54 authorities

This option would implement the recommendations of the statutory review of the Schedule by making a SR to add 54 authorities to the Schedule. This would extend the existing statutory duty to have due regard to rural needs when carrying out activities under section 1(1) of the Act.

This is the preferred option as amendment of the Schedule can only be achieved through legislation. It would ensure that the additional authorities identified through the review become subject to the statutory duty and contribute to more consistent consideration of rural needs across Northern Ireland.

Costs and Benefits assessment

Costs

Public authorities

Administrative costs for individual authorities have not been quantified due to insufficient evidence as the impact will vary significantly depending on organisational size, governance arrangements, policy functions and existing consideration of rural needs. In the absence of reliable evidence, any estimate would be highly speculative and potentially misleading.

The costs are expected to be limited, reflecting the application of an existing statutory duty, the availability of established guidance and processes, and DAERA's experience of supporting the 37 authorities currently listed in the Schedule.

Each of the 54 authorities would need to become familiar with the Act and associated guidance. They may need to establish processes to ensure staff are able to comply with the statutory duty to have due regard to rural needs when carrying out activities under section 1(1) of the Act. They may also incur limited administrative costs associated with maintaining records and supporting reporting requirements.

DAERA intends to provide advice, guidance and implementation support to those additional listed authorities to facilitate compliance with the statutory duty and minimise administrative impacts.

The Department

Under section 2(1) of the Act DAERA intends to provide guidance, advice and implementation support to the additional authorities added to the Schedule. The Department will also require additional staff resources to fulfil its statutory functions under the Act, including the provision of guidance and advice, stakeholder engagement, and the preparation and publication of the Rural Needs Annual Monitoring Report in fulfilment of its monitoring and reporting responsibilities under the Act.

The estimated annual cost of these additional resources is approximately £230,000. This estimate reflects the anticipated annual staffing costs associated with four posts (one Deputy Principal, two Staff Officers and one Executive Officer I) required to provide implementation support, guidance, training, monitoring and reporting.

The estimate includes staffing-related costs and represents the Department's current best estimate. It will be refined through detailed implementation planning and considered through normal business planning and budgetary processes.

Proportionality

Option 3 is considered proportionate because it extends an existing statutory duty, which has been in operation since 2017, to 54 additional authorities identified through a statutory review conducted in accordance with the Act. It does not introduce new policy obligations, interventions, service changes, eligibility criteria or funding decisions. Rather, it extends the existing legislative framework by requiring those authorities to have due regard to rural needs when carrying out activities under section 1(1) of the Act.

The anticipated costs are expected to be limited and primarily administrative in nature, relating to familiarisation, implementation and reporting activities. The proposal does not directly affect children's rights, personal data processing or the wider business community. However, by extending the statutory duty to additional authorities, it is expected to support more consistent consideration of rural needs across Northern Ireland, including the needs of children and young people, through future policy development and service delivery.

Preferred Option

OPTION 3: make a SR to amend the Schedule by adding 54 authorities

Benefits from preferred option

This option implements the recommendations of the statutory review of the Schedule by extending the existing statutory duty to 54 additional authorities. As a result, those authorities will be required to have due regard to rural needs when carrying out activities under section 1(1) of the Act.

The amendment itself does not directly change policies, services or funding arrangements. Rather, its benefit is in helping to ensure more consistent consideration of rural needs across a wider range of authorities. Any substantive impacts would arise through future policies, strategies, plans and public services developed or delivered by those authorities in fulfilment of their statutory duty.

The amendment is expected to improve the consistency with which rural needs are considered across the public sector. This should increase transparency, strengthen accountability and improve assurance for rural communities that their needs are being considered within public sector decision-making processes.

Wider impacts, from preferred option

By extending the statutory duty to 54 additional authorities, the amendment will help promote more consistent consideration of rural needs across the public sector. As those authorities fulfil their duty to have due regard to rural needs when carrying out activities under section 1(1) of the Act, decision-makers will be better placed to identify and consider the particular circumstances of people living in rural areas.

This may contribute to policies and services that are more responsive to rural needs, improve awareness of the potential impacts of decisions on rural communities, and support fairer access to public services. Bringing additional authorities within the scope of the Act should also help embed consideration of rural needs across a wider range of public functions and encourage a more consistent approach to meeting the needs of rural communities across Northern Ireland.

Any substantive impacts would arise through the future policies, strategies, plans and public services developed or delivered by those authorities, rather than through the legislative amendment itself.

Risks and assumptions

The Act requires DAERA to review the list of bodies and persons listed in the Schedule and, where it considers it appropriate, amend the Schedule by Order to add or remove a body or person, or modify an existing entry. Failure to implement the recommendations arising from the statutory review would mean that the 54 authorities identified through that process would remain outside the scope of the statutory duty and would not be required to give due regard to rural needs in the exercise of their functions.

Failure to implement the outcome of the statutory review may raise questions about the effectiveness of the review process and the Department's commitment to ensuring the Schedule continues to include public authorities whose functions may have implications for people living in rural areas.

It is assumed that the additional authorities will incur costs in becoming familiar with the requirements of the Act and associated guidance, and in embedding consideration of rural needs within existing processes. These costs are expected to be limited, reflecting the application of an existing statutory duty, the experience of the authorities already subject to the statutory duty, and the availability of DAERA guidance and implementation support.

Overall impact

The overall effect of the preferred option is to extend the existing statutory duty to have due regard to rural needs to an additional 54 public authorities, increasing the number of listed authorities from 37 to 91. This will support more consistent consideration of rural needs across a wider range of public authorities when developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies or plans, and when designing and delivering public services.

The amendment itself does not directly change policies, services, funding arrangements, eligibility criteria or statutory entitlements. Any substantive impacts will arise through future policies, strategies, plans and public services developed or delivered by those authorities in fulfilment of their statutory duty.