

2024 Review of the List of Bodies and Persons set out in the Schedule to the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 Report



Department of
**Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs**

An Roinn

**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe**

Depairtment o'

**Fairmin, Environment
an' Kintra Matthers**

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Introduction

1. This report sets out the outcome of the statutory review of the bodies and persons included in the Schedule to the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 (the Act), undertaken in accordance with Section 1(3) of the Act.
2. It also presents the recommendations of the Review Group established by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (the Department) to inform an Order amending the Schedule.

Legislative Context

3. Section 1(3) provides DAERA with the power to review the Schedule to the Act (the Schedule) at least once every three years and, if considered appropriate, to amend the Schedule by Order to add, remove or modify bodies or persons.
4. Section 1(5) provides that a body or person may only be added to the Schedule where it appears to the Department to exercise functions of a public nature.
5. An Order made under Section 1(3) is subject to affirmative resolution of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Purpose of the Review

6. The purpose of the review is to fulfil the Department's statutory obligation under Section 1(3) and ensure that the Schedule remains current by identifying bodies and persons exercising functions of a public nature whose activities may have the potential to affect rural communities.
7. The review supports effective implementation of the Act by ensuring that relevant public authorities are subject to the statutory duty to have due regard to rural needs when developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans, and designing and delivering public services.

Approach and Methodology

8. On 10 July 2024, Minister Muir commissioned a review of the Schedule under Section 1(3) and wrote to Ministerial colleagues to notify them of the review and seek views on potential amendments to the Schedule. This included four public authorities identified during the previous review conducted in 2020-2021.
9. The Department undertook an eight-week public consultation via Citizen Space between 22 July 2024 and 13 September 2024. This process generated 100 proposals for additions to the Schedule.
10. The responses of the consultation were shared with the AERA Committee on 14 November 2024, at which time the Committee proposed a further body for consideration.
11. In the absence of a single statutory definition of 'public authority'¹ applicable across all legislation, the Review Group adopted a consistent working definition and assessment criteria to support a transparent and legally robust evaluation of each body considered.
12. In assessing proposals against the criteria for inclusion, the Review Group considered if bodies:
 - were already listed on the Schedule;
 - were either dissolved, already subject to the provisions of the Act or whose functions have transferred to the responsibility of a NICS department;
 - met the agreed definition of a public authority; and
 - were covered by a separate proposal relating to its holding company.
13. In May 2025, the consultation responses, alongside other relevant information, were shared with permanent secretaries to seek views on public authorities for which their departments held accountability.
14. Following a further update to the AERA Committee in July 2025, the Minister wrote to ministerial colleagues in October 2025 providing a list of public authorities under consideration.

¹ The Review Group adopted the definition that a public authority operates under duties and powers conferred by statute or Royal Charter.

15. In addition to the proposals received through the public consultation, further proposals were identified through engagement with Executive Ministers, permanent secretaries, the AERA Committee and other relevant information. This resulted in 108 bodies and persons being identified for assessment against the agreed criteria (Table 1).

Assessment of Proposals

16. Following detailed assessment of the 108 proposed additions:

- 16 were bodies already listed on the Schedule so there was no need to take further action;
- 19 were either dissolved, already subject to the provisions of the Act or whose functions have transferred to the responsibility of a NICS department (Table 2);
- 2 did not meet the agreed definition of a public authority (Table 3);
- 1 was covered by a separate proposal relating to its holding company (Table 4); and
- 9 were excluded following consideration of the department's rationale (Table 5).

17. Seven bodies were identified as requiring further consideration due to the complexity of their governance arrangements, functions or statutory position (Table 6).

18. In addition, three further bodies were proposed following conclusion of the Review Group's work and require consideration as part of the next statutory review of the Schedule. (Table 7).

Recommendations

19. The Review Group recommends that:

- 54 public authorities are added to the Schedule to the Act (Table 8);
- no bodies are removed from the existing Schedule;
- no modifications are made to existing entries; and
- Ten bodies will be considered as part of the next statutory review of the Schedule (Tables 6 & 7).

20. These recommendations have been discussed with sponsoring departments, and all are content that there are no barriers to inclusion of the proposed bodies within the Schedule.

21. The Review Group is satisfied that the recommended additions satisfy the statutory requirement in Section 1(5) and that the review has been conducted on a consistent and evidence-based basis.

Implementation and Next Steps

22. Subject to approval, DAERA will make an Order under Section 1(3) to amend the Schedule and will work with sponsoring departments to support implementation through guidance, engagement and training for public authorities added to the Schedule.

23. The Department will undertake future statutory reviews of the Schedule in accordance with Section 1(3).

Annex A: Tables Contained within Report

Table 1: List of bodies and persons proposed to be added to the Schedule².

Number	Body or Person Proposed
1	Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute
2	Armagh Observatory
3	Armagh Planetarium
4	Arts Council of Northern Ireland
5	Attorney General for Northern Ireland
6	Belfast Health and Social Care Trust
7	Belfast Metropolitan College
8	Business Services Organisation
9	Charity Commission for Northern Ireland
10	CITB – Construction Skills NI (formerly Construction Industry Training Board)
11	Citybus, Ulsterbus and Northern Ireland Railways
12	Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta
13	Commissioner for Children and Young People for Northern Ireland
14	Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland
15	Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland
16	Commissioner for Survivors of Institutional Childhood Abuse
17	Commissioner for Victims and Survivors
18	Community Relations Council
19	Community and Voluntary Sector
20	Compensation Agency
21	Consumer Council for Northern Ireland
22	Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
23	Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment
24	Criminal Justice Inspectorate
25	Driver and Vehicle Agency
26	Education Authority for Northern Ireland
27	Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

² Bodies are listed using the names provided by respondents as part of the public consultation process and do not necessarily reflect current organisational titles.

28	Exceptional Circumstances Body
29	Forensic Science Northern Ireland
30	Forest Service
31	General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland
32	Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland
33	Health and Social Care Board
34	ILEX Urban Regeneration Company Limited
35	Invest Northern Ireland
36	Labour Relations Agency
37	Land and Property Services
38	Legal Services Oversight Commissioner
39	Local Government Staff Commission
40	Livestock and Meat Commission for Northern Ireland
41	Maze Long Kesh Development Corporation
42	Members of the Legislative Assembly
43	Middletown Centre for Autism
44	Northern Health and Social Care Trust
45	Northern Ireland Ambulance Service
46	Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation
47	Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Service
48	Northern Ireland Building Regulations Advisory Committee
49	Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education
50	Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service
51	Northern Ireland Environment Agency
52	Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service
53	Northern Ireland Fishery Harbour Authority
54	Northern Ireland Guardian Ad Litem Agency
55	Northern Ireland Housing Executive
56	Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission
57	Northern Ireland Law Commission
58	Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission
59	Northern Ireland Local Government Officers' Superannuation Committee
60	Northern Ireland Library Authority

61	Northern Ireland Medical and Dental Training Agency
62	Northern Ireland Memorial Fund
63	Northern Ireland Museums Council
64	Northern Ireland Policing Board
65	Northern Ireland Policing Fund
66	Northern Ireland Practice and Education Council
67	Northern Ireland Prisoner Ombudsman
68	Northern Ireland Prison Service
69	Northern Ireland Screen
70	Northern Ireland Social Care Council
71	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
72	Northern Ireland Tourist Board
73	Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company / Translink incorporating
74	Northern Ireland Water
75	National Museums Northern Ireland
76	Northern Regional College
77	North West Regional College
78	Patient and Client Council
79	Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland
80	Planning and Water Appeals Commission
81	Police Ombudsman Northern Ireland
82	Police Retraining and Rehabilitation Trust
83	Police Service of Northern Ireland
84	Probation Board Northern Ireland
85	Queen's University Belfast
86	Regional Agency for Public Health and Social Well Being
87	Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority
88	Rivers Agency
89	RUC George Cross Foundation
90	St. Mary's University College
91	Social Security Agency
92	South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust
93	South Eastern Regional College

94	Southern Health and Social Care Trust
95	Southern Regional College
96	South West College
97	Sport NI
98	Staff Commission for Education and Library Boards
99	Strategic Investment Board
100	Statistics Advisory Committee
101	Stranmillis University College
102	Ulster Supported Employment Limited
103	Ulster University
104	Victims and Survivors Service Ltd
105	Western Health and Social Care Trust
106	Youth Council for Northern Ireland
107	Youth Justice Agency
108	2013 World Police and Fire Games

Table 2: Bodies dissolved/non-operational/Bodies subject to the provisions of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 or whose functions have transferred to the responsibility of a NICS department³.

Number	Body or Person Proposed
1	2013 World Police and Fire Games
2	Compensation Agency
3	Driver and Vehicle Agency
4	Forensic Science Northern Ireland
5	Forest Service
6	Health and Social Care Board
7	ILEX Urban Regeneration Company Limited
8	Land and Property Services
9	Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service
10	Northern Ireland Environment Agency
11	Northern Ireland Law Commission
12	Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission
13	Northern Ireland Memorial Fund
14	Northern Ireland Prison Service
15	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
16	Rivers Agency
17	Social Security Agency
18	Staff Commission for Education and Library Boards
19	Youth Justice Agency

Table 3: Bodies that did not meet the agreed definition of a public authority as part of the review.

Number	Body or Person Proposed
1	Community & Voluntary Sector
2	Members of the Legislative Assembly

³ Bodies are listed using the names provided by respondents as part of the public consultation process and do not necessarily reflect current organisational titles.

Table 4: Bodies included under the relevant holding company⁴.

Number	Body or Person Proposed
1	Citybus, Ulsterbus and NI Railways

Table 5: Bodies reconsidered following additional engagement with the relevant NICS departments and not recommended for inclusion in the Schedule.

Number	Body or Person Proposed
1	Attorney General for Northern Ireland
2	Legal Services Oversight Commissioner
3	Middletown Centre for Autism
4	Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation
5	Northern Ireland Building Regulations Advisory Committee
6	Planning Appeals Commission
7	Statistics Advisory Committee
8	Water Appeals Commission
9	Youth Council for Northern Ireland

Table 6: Bodies reconsidered following additional engagement with the relevant NICS departments and/or recommended for consideration during the next review of the Schedule.

Number	Body or Person Proposed
1	Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
2	Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland
3	Queen's University Belfast
4	Royal Ulster Constabulary George Cross Foundation
5	St Mary's University College
6	Stranmillis University College
7	Ulster University

⁴ Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company

Table 7: Bodies proposed following conclusion of the Review Group's work and therefore recommended for consideration during the next review of the Schedule.

Number	Body or Person Proposed
1	Commissioner for the Ulster Scots and the Ulster British tradition
2	Irish Language Commissioner
3	Office of Identity and Cultural Expression

Table 8: List of 54 public authorities recommended to be added to the Schedule.

Number	Body or Person Proposed
1	Agri-food and Biosciences Institute
2	Arts Council of Northern Ireland
3	Belfast Metropolitan College
4	Charity Commission for Northern Ireland
5	Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice in Northern Ireland
6	Children's Court Guardian Agency for Northern Ireland
7	Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta
8	Commission for Victims and Survivors
9	Commissioner for Children and Young People for Northern Ireland
10	Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland
11	Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland
12	Commissioner for Survivors of Institutional Childhood Abuse
13	Construction Industry Training Board
14	Exceptional Circumstances Body
15	General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland
16	General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland
17	Governors of the Armagh Observatory and Planetarium
18	Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland
19	Health and Social Care Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority
20	Labour Relations Agency
21	Livestock and Meat Commission for Northern Ireland
22	Local Government Staff Commission for Northern Ireland
23	Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation

24	National Museums and Galleries of Northern Ireland
25	North West Regional College
26	Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Service
27	Northern Ireland Community Relations Council
28	Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment
29	Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education
30	Northern Ireland Fishery Harbour Authority
31	Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission
32	Northern Ireland Local Government Officers' Superannuation Committee
33	Northern Ireland Medical and Dental Training Agency
34	Northern Ireland Museums Council
35	Northern Ireland Police Fund
36	Northern Ireland Policing Board
37	Northern Ireland Practice and Education Council for Nursing and Midwifery
38	Northern Ireland Screen Commission
39	Northern Ireland Social Care Council
40	Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company
41	Northern Ireland Water Limited
42	Northern Regional College
43	Patient and Client Council
44	Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland
45	Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust
46	Prisoner Ombudsman for Northern Ireland
47	Probation Board for Northern Ireland
48	Regional Business Services Organisation
49	South Eastern Regional College
50	South West College
51	Southern Regional College
52	Strategic Investment Board Limited
53	Ulster Supported Employment Limited
54	Victims and Survivors Service Limited

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