

Written Ministerial Statement

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Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

RURAL NEEDS ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT 1 APRIL 2024 – 31 MARCH 2025

Published at 12noon on Friday 29 May 2026

Mr Andrew Muir (The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs): In accordance with Section 3(2) of the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 (the Act), I have laid before the Assembly, on Friday 3 April 2026, the Eighth Rural Needs Annual Monitoring Report. The report covers the reporting period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 and is available to [download from the DAERA website](#).

The Act places a duty on public authorities to have due regard to rural needs when developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans, and when designing or delivering public services. This Report provides an overview of how government departments, district councils, and other listed public authorities have fulfilled that duty during the reporting period.

During 1 April 2024 - 31 March 2025, a total of 666 activities, as defined by the Act, were subject to a rural needs impact assessment. This represents a significant increase from 157 assessments at the commencement of the Act and demonstrates continued progress in embedding rural considerations across government decision-making.

My Department continues to support listed public authorities through training, guidance and regular Rural Needs Network events, promoting consistency and shared learning.

Rural communities make a vital contribution to Northern Ireland's social, economic and environmental wellbeing. While these communities are increasingly diverse, they also face distinct challenges. My Department will continue to work collectively with partners to ensure that rural needs are recognised and addressed effectively.

I thank all public authorities for their cooperation in contributing to this report.