

Appendix 1 - Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA) Template – Accessible Version

SECTION 1 – Defining the activity subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016

1A. Name of Public Authority.

Department for Communities

1B. Please provide a short title which describes the activity being undertaken by the Public Authority that is subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016.

A prospective Charities Bill to amend certain sections of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008, in line with recommendations from the Independent Review of Charity Regulation and to address issues identified as problematic since the Review was published.

1C. Please indicate which category the activity specified in Section 1B above relates to.

- Developing a ☒ Policy ☐ Strategy ☐ Plan
- Adopting a ☐ Policy ☐ Strategy ☐ Plan
- Implementing a ☐ Policy ☐ Strategy ☐ Plan
- Revising a ☐ Policy ☐ Strategy ☐ Plan
- ☐ Designing a Public Service
- ☐ Delivering a Public Service

1D. Please provide the official title (if any) of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service document or initiative relating to the category indicated in Section 1C above.

Charities Amendment Bill (Northern Ireland) 2026

1E. Please provide details of the aims and/or objectives of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service.

To amend the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 to remove ambiguity, enable enactment of provisions, and implement recommendations requiring primary legislation (addressing 19 of 21 recommendations identified as requiring primary legislation).

1F. What definition of 'rural' is the Public Authority using in respect of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?

- ☒ Population Settlements of less than 5,000 (Default definition).
- ☐ Other definition (Provide details and the rationale below).
- ☐ A definition of 'rural' is not applicable'

Details of alternative definition of 'rural' used.

Click or tap here to enter text.

Rationale for using alternative definition of 'rural'.

Click or tap here to enter text.

Reasons why a definition of 'rural' is not applicable.

Click or tap here to enter text.

SECTION 2 - Understanding the impact of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

2A. Is the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service likely to impact on people in rural areas?

☒ Yes ☐ No

If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **2E**.

2B. Please explain how the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas.

The changes proposed in this Bill will apply equally to all charities across Northern Ireland. However, representations have been made that the Bill may affect rural areas more than urban areas indirectly through its effects on the sustainability, governance and operational capacity of rural charities and community organisations that deliver everyday services. In many rural areas, charities are a primary mechanism through which people access support (e.g., health and wellbeing services, tackling isolation, community transport, youth provision, community spaces and local regeneration). Whilst the Bill is intended to ease the regulatory burden on small charities through the removal of the independent examination requirement and streamlined accounting and reporting, views have been expressed that regulatory changes for the Commission to act for the protection of charities may cause a perception of increased risk to Trustees, officers, agents and employees which could therefore affect service continuity and local resilience in rural communities. It is argued that this may have a disproportionate effect in rural areas due to the reduced pool of those likely to volunteer to take on governance roles in these rural charities.

2C. If the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently from people in urban areas, please explain how it is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently.

Although statutory requirements apply equally across Northern Ireland, views have been expressed that impacts in rural areas may differ due to local context. Rural charities are more likely to be small, volunteer-led organisations with limited administrative and financial capacity and reduced access to professional advice and training. They are therefore more likely to fall within the lower income/asset bands targeted for simplification, meaning the typical rural charity could see a relative compliance benefit compared with larger, staffed urban charities which may encourage volunteering.

Additionally, where paid accountants or independent examiners are harder to source locally (or are costlier due to time/travel), removing the independent examination requirement may represent a larger proportional saving for rural groups. This aligns with the Bill's policy intent to reduce unnecessary burdens for smaller organisations.

However, compliance and governance changes may still be proportionately more demanding for volunteer-led charities than for larger, staffed organisations. In addition, the publication of official warnings may carry heightened reputational risks in close-knit rural communities,

where visibility and trust are central to sustainability. However, conversely, the additional powers will enable the Commission to additionally protect those charities from wrongdoing and thereby protect the people of those rural communities that these vital charities serve.

2D. Please indicate which of the following rural policy areas the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to primarily impact on.

- ☐ Rural Businesses
- ☐ Rural Tourism
- ☐ Rural Housing
- ☐ Jobs or Employment in Rural Areas
- ☐ Education or Training in Rural Areas
- ☐ Broadband or Mobile Communications in Rural Areas
- ☐ Transport Services or Infrastructure in Rural Areas
- ☐ Health or Social Care Services in Rural Areas
- ☐ Poverty in Rural Areas
- ☐ Deprivation in Rural Areas
- ☐ Rural Crime or Community Safety
- ☐ Rural Development
- ☐ Agri-Environment
- ☒ Other (Please state)

All of these policy areas could be impacted equally.

If the response to Section 2A was YES GO TO Section 3A.

2E. Please explain why the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is NOT likely to impact on people in rural areas.

Click or tap here to enter text.

SECTION 3 - Identifying the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas

3A. Has the Public Authority taken steps to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas that are relevant to the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?

☒ Yes ☐ No

If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **3E**.

3B. Please indicate which of the following methods or information sources were used by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

- ☒ Consultation with Rural Stakeholders
- ☐ Consultation with Other Organisations
- ☐ Surveys or Questionnaires
- ☐ Published Statistics
- ☐ Research Papers
- ☒ Other Publications
- ☒ Other Methods or Information Sources (include details in Question 3C below).

3C. Please provide details of the methods and information sources used to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas including relevant dates, names of organisations, titles of publications, website references, details of surveys or consultations undertaken etc.

This revised RNIA reflects stakeholder evidence on rural service provision and charity capacity constraints as reflected in the consultation on the Charities (Amendment) Bill. Written stakeholder evidence considered: Rural Community Network (RCN) and Women's Resource and Development Agency responses to the consultation on a Bill to amend the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008, highlighting their views on potential differential impacts for small volunteer-led rural organisations (trustee deterrence, administrative burden, reputational risk, and access to support).

3D. Please provide details of the social and economic needs of people in rural areas which have been identified by the Public Authority?

Rural communities often rely on charities to provide or enable access to day-to-day services (wellbeing/mental health support, tackling isolation, community transport, youth provision, and maintaining community hubs).

Rural organisations are frequently volunteer-led and small, with limited administrative/financial resources and a smaller pool of volunteers to undertake compliance tasks.

Rural organisations can have reduced access to professional advice, training and administrative support.

Trust is central to sustainability of rural charities.

If the response to Section 3A was YES GO TO Section 4A.

3E. Please explain why no steps were taken by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas?

NA

SECTION 4 - Considering the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas

4A. Please provide details of the issues considered in relation to the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

The following issues were considered in relation to rural needs: (1) the proportionate effect of increased regulatory/enforcement measures on volunteer-led rural organisations; (2) cumulative administrative burden relative to limited capacity; (3) differential access to professional advice and training; (4) heightened reputational risk from publication of official warnings in close-knit communities; and (5) the potential consequences of reduced trustee participation for rural service continuity, given limited alternative provision in some localities.

SECTION 5 - Influencing the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

5A. Has the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, been influenced by the rural needs identified?

☒ Yes ☐ No

If the response is NO GO TO Section 5C.

5B. Please explain how the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, has been influenced by the rural needs identified.

To mitigate differential rural impacts, the Department will encourage the Commission to emphasise:

- Proportionate, supportive regulation and enforcement (particularly for small, volunteer-led charities).
- Clear, accessible guidance tailored to smaller organisations and trustees, including plain-language materials.
- Outreach and practical support via helper groups to improve access to training and advice for rural organisations (e.g., webinars/clinics/roadshows where feasible).
- Communications that explain escalation pathways and opportunities for remedy before formal enforcement steps where appropriate.

If the response to Section 5A was YES GO TO Section 6A.

5C. Please explain why the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or the delivery of the Public Service, has NOT been influenced by the rural needs identified.

Click or tap here to enter text.

SECTION 6 - Documenting and Recording

6A. Please tick below to confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained by the Public Authority and relevant information on the Section 1 activity compiled in accordance with paragraph 6.7 of the guidance.

☒ I confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained and relevant information compiled.

Rural Needs Impact Assessment undertaken by:

Gerard Reilly

Position/Grade:

DP

Division/Branch:

VCD

Signature:

GERARD REILLY

Date:

27/04/2026

Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:

Colleen Bell

Position/Grade:

Grade 7

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Signature:

COLLEEN BELL

Date:

28/04/2026