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 (DfC).

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.

The development of a new arts policy. In July 2024 Minister for Communities Gordon Lyons released a statement setting out his intention to provide a collection of culture-related policies, including a policy for arts, under the heading of 'Heritage, Culture & Creativity'.

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.

Heritage, Culture and Creativity Programme – Arts Policy.

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

Policy aims will be based across three broad themes of: People & Communities;

Places; and Partnerships - these reflect the Programme for Government's missions of People, Planet, Prosperity. It will seek to encourage greater participation in the arts; focus on the sector's contribution to place-shaping, cultural spaces and equality of opportunity; explore partnerships to support sustainability and identify opportunities to maximise the value and contribution of the arts to wider policy outcomes. It will also draw on the key priorities identified in the Culture, Arts & Heritage Taskforce 'Investing in Creative Delivery' report of Strengthen, Connect and Innovate.

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.

Not Applicable

Rationale for using alternative definition of 'rural'.

Not Applicable

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

Not Applicable

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.

Key aims of the policy will include supporting accessibility, diversity and inclusion including tackling social isolation and loneliness which can be a particular issue in rural areas; recognising the value and contribution of grassroots community and voluntary organisations, feedback from local councils and the Rural Community Network indicates that this is particularly important in rural areas where community groups and volunteers are key drivers of arts activities; supporting jobs, skills and career pathways, limited job opportunities was identified in a 2018 Princes Countryside Fund report as one of the top 3 rural barriers across the UK; valuing the contribution of the arts in placemaking, quality of life, cultural identity and community cohesion; investing in the arts sector including supporting strategic capital investment, feedback from local councils flagged that more support is needed for rural areas and cited concerns that arts funding is currently imbalanced with too much focus on Belfast. The arts policy will in general seek to improve access and opportunities for all and address any barriers that prevent engagement and participation in the arts including for those in rural areas.

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.

There is no indication that the policy will impact differently in rural areas. The aim is to achieve positive impacts across all communities in Northern Ireland, to promote equality of opportunity, and seek to address any identified barriers that prevent participation/engagement in the arts.

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)

Access to Arts & Culture.

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.

Not applicable

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.

Local Government Engagement - In developing the policy DfC officials engaged with local councils with meetings taking place between 10th Sep and 14th Nov 2024.

NISRA Continuous Household Survey 2024-25

DAERA's Key Rural Issues 2025

Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI) 10-year strategy 2024-34 & associated EQIA, and funding distribution figures by Local Authority Area for 2023-24.

The Prince's Countryside Fund 2018 report Recharging Rural

Meeting with Rural Community Network 17th February 2025.

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

Engagement with local councils identified a need for more financial support/investment for the rural arts. Accessibility and inclusion were also noted as important, with social isolation and loneliness cited as a particular issue for rural areas, and voluntary and community groups identified as key drivers of rural arts activity.

Feedback from engaging with the Rural Community Network also highlighted funding, tackling loneliness and isolation, and transport/connectivity as key issues. They also pointed to voluntary and community groups as central to activity in rural areas and noted that there is a need for workspaces for creative practitioners in rural areas.

Data from the 2024-25 Continuous Household Survey showed minimal differences in engagement or participation in the arts between adults who live in a rural area and those who live in urban areas, though those in rural areas are less likely to have attended an arts event.

DAERA's Key Rural Issues report noted that 'Arts, entertainment, recreation and other services' make up 10% of industry in urban areas but only 3% in rural, and highlighted issues with transport and internet connectivity.

ACNI funding distribution figures by Local Authority areas shows that in 2023-24 84.4% of available exchequer and lottery funding went to Belfast and Derry City & Strabane council areas. ACNI acknowledged in their strategy that rural areas are underrepresented and committed to ringfenced funding specifically to address this.

Needs around transport, connectivity and jobs were reflected in the Princes Countryside Fund 'Recharging Rural' report which identified the top three barriers across rural UK as poor broadband and mobile phone coverage, poor road and transport networks and a poor variety of employment opportunities.

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?

Not applicable

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.

Through engagement with local councils, concerns were raised that arts funding is currently imbalanced with too much focus on urban areas, especially Belfast, and that consideration should be given to revising current funding models and the distribution of funding. As key drivers of arts activity in rural areas it was noted that more support is needed for voluntary and community groups, in particular to ensure succession planning and capacity building. Accessibility and inclusion were also highlighted, and council feedback was that rural initiatives and programmes to address social isolation and loneliness would be welcomed.

Feedback from engaging with the Rural Community Network (RCN) also highlighted funding issues, and they suggested that small, ring-fenced pots of funding for rural areas would be particularly welcomed. They also raised accessibility as an issue and suggested that programmes to target social isolation, help with transport, and more outreach initiatives are all required to aid engagement in rural areas. RCN pointed to voluntary and community groups as central to activity in rural areas and that more support is needed for them in terms of advice, capacity building and succession planning. RCN also highlighted a lack for workspaces for creative practitioners in rural areas.

The data from the 2024-25 Continuous Household Survey showed minimal differences in terms of engagement and participation in the arts between adults who live in rural areas and their respective counterparts in urban areas with 88% engagement recorded for those in rural areas against 89% in urban, and 30% participation for rural areas with 31% recorded for urban. Those living in rural areas are however less likely to attend an arts event (77% rural compared to 80% urban). It is likely that transport is an issue with those living in rural areas more likely to have to travel further to an arts activity/event. Connectivity may also have an impact in terms of accessing online information/tickets etc.

Whilst the data from DAERA's Key Rural Issues report shows that access to full-fibre broadband connections has increased rapidly for both urban and rural areas, rural households (91%) does still lag behind urban residential properties (97%). The DAERA data also notes that access to public transport in rural areas is often considerably more difficult when compared with towns and cities with the Travel Survey NI 2023 data showing that just 16% of rural dwellers live within a 3-minute walk of a bus stop compared with 37% of those living in urban areas. Access to jobs is also an issue, with information from DAERA's report showing that 'Arts, entertainment, recreation and other services' only makes up 3% of industry in rural areas as compared with 10% in urban.

ACNI are an arm's length body of DfC and the main funding and development agency for the arts. Whilst their funding programmes are all open regionally and are

not place-based, data does show that the majority of funding currently goes to urban based organisations, and they note that it is important that activities are monitored by location to ensure reach beyond urban centres. They have acknowledged a need to increase access and participation in the arts in rural areas, and to that end have established a Rural Arts Deliberative Forum to provide a voice for the rural arts community and help to inform their strategy/policy, and a dedicated Rural Engagement Arts funding programme which seeks to tackle isolation and loneliness and promote social inclusion and wellbeing through participation in the arts in rural areas. In their most recent 10-year strategy ACNI acknowledge that rural areas are underrepresented, and they commit to ringfenced funding specifically to address this and to refresh their Rural Deliberative Forum.

The Princes Countryside Fund report from 2018 ‘Recharging Rural’ identified the main barriers across rural UK as relating to issues with internet/mobile coverage, transport and employment opportunities, and in looking at successful community-led projects that aim to remove barriers in remote rural communities, arts projects featured strongly.

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.

The policy is intended to promote equality of opportunity and to remove any barriers to engagement with the arts.

The development of the policy has been influenced both by the research and statistics available and by engagement across sectoral and public bodies including the Rural Community Network. Consideration will also be given any feedback received or issues identified through public consultation.

Draft aims have been developed for the policy, and those which particularly relate to rural communities and the issues identified include:

Supporting accessibility, diversity and inclusion and promoting equality of opportunity

Recognising and valuing the contribution of grassroots community and voluntary organisations

Supporting jobs, skills, capacity building and resilience

Investing in the arts sector and its people

Supporting strategic capital investment across the sector

Valuing the contribution of the arts in placemaking and quality of life

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.

Not applicable

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:

Oonagh McDonald

Position/Grade:

Staff Officer

Division/Branch:

Culture Policy Branch

Signature:

Oonagh McDonald

Date:

15/06/26

Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:

Richard Patrick

Position/Grade:

Grade 7

Division/Branch:

Culture Policy Branch

Signature:

Richard Patrick

Date:

15/06/2026