

Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA)

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

1A. Name of Public Authority.

Northern Ireland Water Limited

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.

Consultation on Proposed Article 161 Sewer Bond Incentivisation and Surety Policy

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.

Article 161 Sewer Bond Incentivisation and Surety Policy Consultation

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

The policy aims to introduce a risk-based, tiered bond incentivisation framework to encourage timely adoption of sewer infrastructure, reduce the number of long-term unadopted developments, protect customers, and support housing delivery across Northern Ireland. By establishing clearer technical standards and facilitating the adoption of developments into long-term management arrangements, the policy seeks to reduce systemic risk, improve service reliability, and ensure better outcomes for communities as a whole.

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.

N/A

Rationale for using alternative definition of 'rural'.

N/A

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

N/A

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 proposed policy is expected to have a positive impact in rural and urban areas by supporting increased housing delivery, improving adoption of sewer infrastructure, and aims to reduce reliance on septic tanks. This may reduce environmental risks and maintenance burdens commonly associated with rural wastewater arrangements.

The consultation is intended to gather views to further inform the nature and extent of any impacts including on those living or working 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.

It is not envisaged that the policy will impact people in rural areas differently from people in urban areas. The policy aims to introduce an improved framework for the adoption of sewer infrastructure which will aim to reduce the number of long-term unadopted developments across both urban and rural areas. Rural areas and urban areas will both benefit from improved infrastructure planning and increased development viability.

However, increasing NI Water's wastewater capacity across the region could reduce the use of septic tanks which are more prevalent in rural areas which, in turn, could reduce the potential for detrimental environmental damage in these areas and reduce the costs associated with septic tank ownership and maintenance.

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)	

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.

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	☐	Published Statistics	☒
Consultation with Other Organisations	☒	Research Papers	☐
Surveys or Questionnaires	☐	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.

NI Water has taken a proportionate and evidence-based approach to identifying the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

This has included:

- Use of published evidence including the DAERA 'Key Rural Issue 2024' report (ref. Section 3D).
- Review of internal NI Water operational and asset data relating to unadopted sewer infrastructure and capacity constraints (ref. Section 4A prompt).
- Consideration of public consultation on the proposed policy to gather stakeholder views across rural and urban areas (ref. Section 2B and 2C).
- Engagement with local councils and stakeholders in relation to development viability and infrastructure planning.

These combined sources inform an evidence-based understanding of rural needs in line with the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016.

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

According to “the Key Rural Issue 2024” report by DAERA, rural areas experience higher cost of living, higher home ownership levels, and increased reliance on effective wastewater infrastructure. Housing need in rural areas remains significant, particularly for social and affordable housing. The ability of NI Water to agree better standards and conditions in Article 161 agreements will lead benefits from improved infrastructure planning and increased development viability.

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?

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 policy will have a positive impact by supporting improved housing delivery and infrastructure reliability in rural areas. By enabling more efficient development and adoption processes, it contributes to better housing availability and environmental protection.

The following issues have been considered in relation to the social and economic needs of people in rural areas:

- Housing need in rural areas, particularly for social and affordable housing (ref. Section 3D).
- Reliance on effective wastewater infrastructure to enable housing development (ref. Section 3D).
- Prevalence of unadopted sewer developments and associated risks (ref. Section 1E and 4A).
- Capacity constraints within wastewater infrastructure impacting development viability (ref. Section 2B).
- Reliance on septic tanks in rural areas, with associated environmental and maintenance impacts (ref. Section 2C).
- Potential increased development costs which may affect affordability (ref. Section 4A).

These issues have been identified through a combination of published evidence and NI Water operational knowledge.

Potential impacts include increased development costs, which may affect affordability. These impacts will be explored further through consultation but impact society as a whole, rather than specific rural impacts.

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.

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.

The policy is in early development and has not been directly influenced by rural needs. However, it is hoped the policy will impact people in rural areas in a similar way as urban areas. The policy aims to introduce an improved framework for the adoption of sewer infrastructure which will aim to reduce the number of long-term unadopted developments across both urban and rural areas. Rural areas and urban areas will both benefit from improved infrastructure planning and increased development viability.

Rural considerations will be further assessed through consultation feedback and subsequent policy refinement. Any adverse impacts identified will be mitigated where possible.

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.

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Rural Needs Impact Assessment undertaken by:	
Position/Grade:	
Division/Branch	Northern Ireland Water
Signature:	
Date:	29/06/2026
Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:	
Position/Grade:	
Division/Branch:	Northern Ireland Water
Signature:	
Date:	14/07/2026