

# 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.

Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS) - An agency of the Department of Justice

### 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.

Development of NICTS policy on the future of Limavady Courthouse

### 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.

NICTS policy on the future of Limavady Courthouse.

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

This policy is linked to the implementation of the NICTS Estate Strategy 2023-2030 'Making the Place for Justice'.

Website: <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/nicts-estates-strategy-23-30.pdf>

The overarching objective of the NICTS Estate Strategy is to provide an evidence-based framework for the strategic management of the NICTS estate. The Strategy is structured around 4 Aims and 12 Strategic Outcomes that, if realised, will result in a courts and tribunals estate that provides modernised and improved facilities for all citizens of Northern Ireland.

The draft NICTS policy on the future of Limavady Courthouse proposes the permanent closure of Limavady Courthouse and reallocation of Limavady Adult Magistrates Court business to an alternative courthouse in the NICTS estate, in support of the 4 Aims of the NICTS Estate Strategy to deliver improved User Experience, Resilience, Value for Money and Sustainability.

**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 on the future of Limavady Courthouse will impact on Adult Magistrates Court users from the Limavady area in terms of access to justice.

Limavady Courthouse was last used for court business in March 2020, when it operated as a Hearing Centre for Adult Magistrates Court once a week. As pandemic-related health measures could not be accommodated in Limavady Courthouse, Limavady business was transferred to Ballymena Courthouse, then to Coleraine Courthouse, where it continues to be heard once a week.

This proposal for permanent closure means that it would no longer be possible for Adult Magistrates Court business, or any other court business, to be heard at Limavady Courthouse. Limavady court business would therefore continue to be heard at an alternative courthouse.

Limavady court business relates to 10 geographical wards, some urban, some rural and some mixed urban/rural. 78% of the Limavady population is considered rural or mixed urban/rural. According to the 2021 NI Census:

3 Urban wards: Greystone, Coolessan, Roeside (Combined population 9,042)

5 Rural wards: Ballykelly, Dungiven, Feeny, Greysteel, Magilligan (Combined population 18,151)

2 mixed urban/rural wards: Altahullion, Drumsurn (Combined population 6,856)

The impact of the proposed policy is:

In terms of access to justice, court users from the Limavady area will continue to have access to improved facilities at an alternative courthouse

In terms of access to justice, court users from the Limavady area will continue to experience increased travel if they need to attend an alternative courthouse

For the Limavady community, the closure of Limavady Courthouse creates an opportunity for disposal through the established NICS process, which has the

potential to increase active use of a heritage building in Limavady town centre for the benefit of its citizens across both rural and urban 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.**

The proposed policy on the future of Limavady Courthouse is not intended to directly or indirectly disadvantage people in rural areas compared to people in urban areas, however the characteristics of rural areas have been considered during its development.

The following impacts are expected to have the same impact on people in rural areas and people in urban areas:

In terms of access to justice, court users from the Limavady area will continue to have access to improved facilities at an alternative courthouse.

For the Limavady community, the closure of Limavady Courthouse creates an opportunity for disposal through the established NICS process, which has the potential to increase active use of a heritage building in Limavady town centre for the benefit of its citizens across both rural and urban areas.

The following impact is expected to have a different impact on people in rural areas and people in urban areas:

In terms of access to justice, court users from the Limavady area will continue to experience increased travel if they need to attend an alternative courthouse

NICTS have worked with Ordnance Survey NI (OSNI) to produce a Geographical Information System mapping interface to analyse travel times and distances between geographical wards and courthouses.

Analysis shows that court users in all 10 Limavady wards would be affected by increased drive time, with the increase in drive time from the geographical centre of each ward ranging from 10.36 minutes to 18.47 minutes. The weighted average for the overall area is an increase of 15.13 minutes. The average increased drive time when driving from rural wards would be 14.2 minutes, compared to 16.8 minutes for urban areas and 14.5 minutes for mixed urban/rural areas.

Further analysis was carried out based on the drive time and travel distance from the postcode within each ward which has the longest travel time in minutes from Coleraine Courthouse to both Limavady Courthouse and Coleraine Courthouse. The average increased drive time when driving from rural wards would be 16.7 minutes, compared to 17.05 minutes for urban areas and 16.8 minutes for mixed urban/rural areas.

Based on this data, the most significant increase in drive time is for those travelling from a postcode within the Ballykelly ward (Rural), requiring an additional 18.67

minute drive time and bringing their total drive time to 27.82 minutes. The greatest drive time for those travelling to Coleraine Courthouse is from a postcode in the Feeny area (Rural), requiring a total drive time of 32.12 minutes, which is 17.14 minutes longer than their 14.17 minute drive time to Limavady Courthouse

Although the 2021 NI Census showed that 84% of households within the Limavady area have access to at least one private vehicle, NICTS has also considered public transport journeys from each of the 10 wards in the Limavady area to both Limavady Courthouse and Coleraine Courthouse. For consistency with the drive time analysis, the starting point assigned to each public transport journey is the postcode associated with the greatest travel distance, or the longest drive time, from Coleraine Courthouse.

Based on this data, the average journey across the Limavady area would increase by 49 minutes, from 1 hour 20mins to Limavady Courthouse to 2 hours 9 minutes to Coleraine Courthouse. 8 of the 10 sample journeys assessed would be more complex, involving additional transfers within the overall journey.

The most significant increase in public transport journey time is for those travelling from a postcode within the Drumsurn ward (Mixed Urban/Rural), requiring an additional 1hr 54 minutes journey time and bringing their total journey time to 2 hours 28 minutes. The greatest journey time for those travelling to Coleraine Courthouse is from a postcode in the Altahullion area (Mixed Urban/Rural), requiring a total journey time of 2 hours 56 minutes, which is 3 minutes longer than their 2 hours 53 minute journey time to Limavady Courthouse.

**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 Justice

**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.**

N/A

## 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.**

Consideration: Quality of courthouse facilities

The Consultation Paper provides details on qualitative assessments of courthouse buildings and facilities in terms of the needs of courthouse users. These considerations apply equally to people in rural areas and people in urban areas.

Consideration: Crime rates

PSNI Agriculture and Rural Crime Tables:

Website: <https://www.psni.police.uk/about-us/our-publications-and-reports/official->

statistics/police-recorded-crime-statistics

Table 6: 85% of burglary, robbery and theft offences in 2024/25 took place in urban settlements areas, with the remaining 15% in rural settlements.

Table 6: Comparing 2010/11 and 2024/25, burglary, robbery and theft offences in urban settlements has reduced by 35%, in rural settlements by 62%, an overall reduction of 41%.

Table 2: 98% of agricultural crime (burglary, robbery and theft offences for agricultural-based activity) in 2024/25 took place in rural settlements. Comparing 2010/11 and 2024/25, overall agricultural crime has reduced by 79%..

Consideration: Limavady Court Business

The Consultation Paper provides details on an NICTS ICOS report on court business received at Limavady.

Court business received in Limavady is reducing over time, a 24% reduction from 2014 to 2024 (741 cases to 561 cases), and a 7% reduction from 2019 to 2024 (603 cases to 561 cases).

Based on provisional 2025 data, this trend is continuing to reduce with a 46% reduction from 2014 to 2025 (741 cases to 401 cases), and a 33% reduction from 2019 to 2025 (603 cases to 401 cases).

The majority of court business in Limavady relates to motoring offences. Data for 2024 showed that 44% of all Limavady court disposals related to motoring offences. Provisional data for 2025 shows a slight decrease to 42% of all disposals.

Consideration: Travelling to attend the courthouse (set out in Consultation Paper)

The Consultation Paper provides details on data from Ordnance Survey NI (OSNI) produced through a Geographical Information System mapping interface to illustrate the travel times and distances to courthouses. The 4 longest drive time/distances between the centre of a geographical ward and its Magistrates Court:

Lurigethan to Coleraine Courthouse – 38.57 minutes / 30.67 miles

Islandmagee to Ballymena Courthouse – 36.31 minutes / 30.13 miles

Whitehead South to Ballymena Courthouse – 33.89 minutes / 28.53 miles

Annalong to Newry Courthouse – 31.47 minutes / 24.19 miles

Consideration: Access to vehicles

The NI Census 2021 indicates that 80% of households in the Limavady District Area have access to 1 or more cars or vans (5,257 out of 6,580 households)

Website: <https://build.nisra.gov.uk/en/custom/data?d=HOUSEHOLD&v=DEA14&v=H>

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Consideration: Key rural issues

Website: <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/key-rural-issues>

DAERA Research on key rural issues :

Average Commute (miles) 2021: 11.7 miles rural and 5.8 miles urban.

Coverage of superfast broadband 2024: 95% rural, 98% urban

Public Transport (2021): 3 minute or less walk to nearest bus stop: 17% rural, 38% urban

Public Transport (2021): Bus at least once an hour: 18% rural, 66% urban

Median Annual Salary 2023: £28,009 rural, £28,875 urban

Working age people in absolute poverty: 11% rural, 16% urban

Consideration: Travel and transport

Website: <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/travel-and-transport-urban-rural-statistics>

Travel Survey NI 2021 :

Average miles travelled per person per year all travel modes: 3,967 urban and 6,292 rural

Average miles travelled per person per year by car, 80.2% urban and 86.6% rural

Average miles travelled per person per year by public transport, 3.4% urban and 3.0% rural

Average journey length (miles): 8.6 car and 10.2 public transport (rural); 5.8 car and 6.6 public transport (urban)

Average journey length (miles) for commuting and business: 12.7 rural and 7.1 urban

Full driving licence holders: 91% rural, 76% urban

Consideration: Stakeholder Engagement

NICTS invited local stakeholders and Rural Community Network NI to participate in pre-consultation engagement.

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

The social and economic needs relevant to this policy relate to access to justice through services provided by NICTS, either through NICTS online services or through attendance at a courthouse.

**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?**

N/A

## 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 social and economic needs relevant to this policy relate to access to justice through courts and tribunal services. The proposed policy on the future of Limavady Courthouse is not intended to directly or indirectly disadvantage people in rural areas compared to people in urban areas, however the characteristics of rural areas have been considered during its development.

All court users should expect to have access to high quality, modern and safe courthouse services and facilities. There have been longstanding concerns about the standard of accommodation at Limavady Courthouse and the functional deficiencies that negatively impact the experience of those attending the courthouse, particularly victims and vulnerable witnesses. There are also a number of safety and security risks due to the size and layout of the building.

It is not feasible for these deficiencies to be addressed to bring Limavady Courthouse up to the expected standard. People in rural areas are disproportionately affected by these issues as 78% of the population in the Limavady area live in rural or mixed rural/urban settlements. After the closure of Limavady Courthouse, court users from the Limavady area will have continued access to improved facilities at an alternative courthouse.

For online services, access to broadband in rural areas is high (95%) but lower than in urban areas (98%). As well as internet access, there may be other barriers to online service uptake such as vulnerability or personal preference. NICTS accepts that there will be an ongoing need for the option to attend a courthouse to access NICTS services in both rural and urban areas. After the closure of Limavady Courthouse, access to justice would be maintained through an alternative courthouse.

The likelihood of having to attend court is decreasing as shown in the reducing business volumes and crime rates. Less crime occurs in rural areas compared to urban areas, and crime rates are reducing at a higher rate in rural areas than in urban areas, but NICTS accepts that there will be an ongoing need for the option to attend a courthouse to access NICTS services for those in both rural and urban areas. After the closure of Limavady Courthouse, access to justice would be maintained through an alternative courthouse.

Travel is an unavoidable aspect of courthouse attendance, for both those in rural areas and those in urban areas. Research indicates that those in rural areas generally travel further than those in urban areas, and they are more likely to travel by car than by public transport as 91% in rural areas hold a full driving licence. 80% of households across the Limavady area have access to a car or van. 42% of Limavady court disposals relate to motoring offences. It is therefore likely that the

vast majority of those attending court will do so by car or van.

NICTS has completed a Travel Impact Assessment in relation to this policy proposal (Available on the DoJ website). Analysis shows that court users in all 10 Limavady wards would be affected by increased drive time due to this proposed policy, ranging from 10.4 minutes to 18.5 minutes. The average increased travel time when driving from rural wards would be 14.20 minutes, compared to 16.7 minutes for urban areas and 14.5 minutes for mixed urban/rural areas. Although travel time will increase, the extended travel time is lower than the average journey time for commuting and business for rural areas (12.7 miles @ 30mph = 25.24 minutes).

It is also lower than the 4 longest drive time/distances between the centre of a geographical ward and its Magistrates Court:

Lurigethan to Coleraine Courthouse – 38.57 minutes / 30.67 miles  
Islandmagee to Ballymena Courthouse – 36.31 minutes / 30.13 miles  
Whitehead South to Ballymena Courthouse – 33.89 minutes / 28.53 miles  
Annalong to Newry Courthouse – 31.47 minutes / 24.19 miles.

Those travelling by public transport in both rural and urban areas are expected to experience longer journeys and travel times compared to those travelling by car or van. NICTS accepts that this is higher than the average journey time for rural areas, of 37 minutes, however it is similar to the journey time for some court users in other areas (for example Annalong to Newry Courthouse, 1 hour 27 minutes).

Court users from the Limavady area are already travelling to other courthouses for other types of court business – with domestic proceedings, family proceedings and County Court all conducted at Coleraine Courthouse, and committals for Crown Court taking place at Antrim Courthouse.

NICTS considers this increase in travel time to be reasonable, considering that courthouse attendance for Magistrates' Court is typically an infrequent occurrence.

For those experiencing significant barriers to attendance, there are also a number of mitigations that can be arranged (with approval from the judge) in exceptional circumstances, such as remote attendance or a later start time.

## 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.**

N/A

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 proposed policy on the future of Limavady Courthouse is primarily driven by considerations which are common to those in rural areas and those in urban areas, and deliver benefits to those in rural areas and those in urban areas - namely access to higher quality, safer, more modern and more accessible courthouse facilities and an opportunity to increase active use of a heritage building in Limavady town centre.

NICTS acknowledges the differential impact of increased travel for some groups, particularly those travelling by public transport, but considers this to be justified by the legitimate aim of implementing the NICTS Estate Strategy and providing Limavady court users with access to higher quality, safer, more modern and more accessible courthouse facilities.

NICTS is conducting a public consultation in relation to the policy proposal on the future of Limavady Courthouse. Anyone with an interest in, or views on, the subject is encouraged to consider this proposal and respond to the consultation so that their views can be considered. NICTS will use any evidence provided in the response to the public consultation to inform further, and if necessary review, the Rural Needs Impact Assessment.



## 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:**

Claire Jordan

**Position/Grade:**

Head of Estate Strategy Delivery (Grade 7)

**Division/Branch:**

Vision 2030 / NICTS

**Signature:**

Claire Jordan

**Date:**

30.03.26

**Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:**

Karen Ward

**Position/Grade:**

Director, Modernisation, Digital & Estates (Grade 5)

**Division/Branch:**

Vision 2030 / NICTS

**Signature:**

Karen Ward

**Date:**

20.04.2026