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 of Justice (DoJ) Northern Ireland.

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.

Reducing Offending and Reoffending in Northern Ireland Strategic Framework (2026 – 2027)

1C. Please indicate which category the activity specified in Section 1B above relates to. (Please select only ONE option)

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.

Reducing Offending and Reoffending in Northern Ireland - Strategic Framework (2026 – 2027): Building strong foundations and empowering change

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

In line with the Programme for Government (PfG) 2024-2027, DoJ is leading the development of a cross-government Strategic Framework (in parallel with the development of a longer-term strategy) to reduce offending and reoffending in Northern Ireland.

The Strategic Framework sets a shared cross-government direction for reducing offending and reoffending in Northern Ireland over the period 2026-2027. It provides an interim strategic framework while the Department leads development of a longer-term cross-Executive strategy.

The Framework is strategic in nature and is intended to align collective effort across government and partners around prevention, early intervention, rehabilitation, resettlement, public protection, community safety and better long-term outcomes for individuals, families, victims and communities. It recognises that offending and reoffending are influenced by a combination of individual, social, economic, health, housing, educational, employment and community factors.

The Framework aligns collective effort around four strategic outcomes: Health and Wellbeing; Community and Inclusion; Education and Employability; and Justice and Rehabilitation. These outcomes reflect the cross-cutting factors that can influence offending, reoffending, victimisation and desistance.

1F. What definition of 'rural' is the Public Authority using in respect of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service? (Please select only ONE option)

☒ 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.

For the purpose of this RNIA, the Department applies the standard Northern Ireland definition of rurality: settlements with fewer than 5,000 residents together with the open countryside, as set out in the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) Urban-Rural Settlement Classification (2015).

In applying this definition, the Department also recognises that rurality is often experienced through practical factors such as longer travel distances to services, greater reliance on private or limited public transport, variable digital connectivity, reduced local service availability and reduced anonymity in smaller communities. These factors may affect how people living in rural areas experience and engage with justice-related services and wider supports.

Rationale for using alternative definition of 'rural'.

This section is not applicable.

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

This section is 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? (Please select only ONE option)

☒ 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 Strategic Framework applies across Northern Ireland and is intended to improve outcomes for individuals, families, victims and communities, regardless of where they live. Its strategic aims are not limited to, or targeted at, rural areas.

At strategic level, the Framework does not create direct rural impacts because it does not set service locations, delivery models or access arrangements. However, the Department acknowledges that rural circumstances are relevant to how people may experience future delivery under the Framework. Rural residents may face practical barriers linked to distance, travel time, transport availability and cost, digital connectivity, and reduced anonymity in smaller communities. These barriers may affect victims, people at risk of offending, people subject to justice requirements, families, carers and communities.

These issues have been considered at strategic level to ensure rural needs inform the development of the Framework. The Strategic Framework is intended to establish a shared direction and does not itself design, fund or deliver services. RNIA and EQIA processes remain the responsibility of the relevant department at the appropriate stage.

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 Framework does not set different objectives for rural and urban areas and does not create different entitlements or obligations based on where a person lives. However, the practical experience of implementation may differ in rural areas because access to justice-related services and wider supports can be affected by travel, transport, cost, availability of local services, digital connectivity and privacy concerns.

People living in rural areas may experience longer journeys to courts, probation appointments, custody-related visits, treatment and support services, employment or training opportunities, specialist victim services and other relevant supports. Limited public transport, higher travel costs or caring responsibilities may affect attendance, compliance and sustained engagement. Variable broadband or mobile connectivity may also affect access to online or blended provision. Reduced anonymity in smaller communities may make it harder for some people to seek help for sensitive matters, including offending, victimisation, trauma, mental health, substance use or family issues.

The Strategic Framework is intended to establish a shared direction and does not itself design, fund or deliver services.

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.

This section is 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? (Please select only ONE option)

☒ 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.

The Department identified relevant rural social and economic needs through a proportionate desk-based review of publicly available NI evidence, in line with DAERA RNIA guidance and the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 (revised April 2018).

Key sources included:

DAERA Rural Data Hub (integrating NISRA Census 2021 data for rural analysis)
DAERA Rural statistics portal (urban/rural definitions, data tables and publications)
NISRA Urban–Rural Settlement Classification (2015)
DAERA Key Rural Issues (latest publication page)
DAERA Travel and Transport: Urban-Rural Statistics
DAERA Poverty and Income Inequality Report: Urban-Rural Statistics
DAERA Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey: Urban-Rural Statistics
DAERA Access to Broadband in NI – Rural/Urban Comparison

Rural Community Network (RCN)
Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN)

Rural needs will be revisited as the longer-term strategy and any specific delivery proposals are developed, including through public consultation and programme-level assessments.

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

The Department has identified a number of inter-related rural social and economic needs relevant to reducing offending, reoffending, victimisation and engagement with justice-related services and wider supports. These include:

• poverty, financial hardship and higher travel or fuel costs, which may compound vulnerability and undermine stability;

• digital connectivity and digital exclusion, which may limit access to information, online services, blended support, training and employment opportunities;

• reduced anonymity and privacy concerns in smaller communities, which may discourage help-seeking for sensitive issues;

• social isolation, limited local service availability and reduced access to specialist provision;

• rural labour market characteristics, including fewer local employment or training opportunities in some areas;

• caring responsibilities, disability, health conditions and ageing population factors, which may compound access barriers;

• rural crime and community safety issues, including the impact of harm on close-knit rural communities.

These needs are cumulative and may interact with Section 75 characteristics, including age, disability, gender, dependants and racial group. For this reason, the RNIA should be read alongside the Department's Section 75 screening. The Strategic Framework is intended to establish a shared direction and does not itself design, fund or deliver services. RNIA and EQIA processes remain the responsibility of the relevant department at the appropriate stage.

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.

In line with section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016, the Department has had due regard, at a proportionate strategic level, to rural social and economic needs relevant to the Strategic Framework.

Rural circumstances may affect the social and economic needs of individuals, families and communities by influencing access to employment, education, training, healthcare, transport and support services. They may also affect participation in rehabilitation, preventative interventions, victim support and other services that contribute to reducing offending and reoffending.

The Department recognises that these issues can be more pronounced in rural areas and may influence the extent to which individuals, families and communities are able to access and engage with support provided through policies and interventions aligned to the Strategic Framework. The Framework therefore recognises the importance of understanding and responding to rural needs through implementation, monitoring, evaluation and the ongoing development of future policy and delivery arrangements.

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? (Please select only ONE option)

☒ 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 findings of this RNIA informed the development of the Strategic Framework by ensuring that rural circumstances were taken into account when setting strategic direction, outcomes and principles. Given the Framework's strategic nature, this has not resulted in specific delivery commitments, service configurations or resource decisions. Where actions are taken forward under the Framework, the relevant Department, public authority or delivery body will be responsible for considering rural needs at programme or project level.

The Framework recognises that equitable outcomes for rural residents may require attention to practical barriers such as transport, digital access and reduced anonymity when actions are designed and implemented. The RNIA will be kept under review as implementation progresses, so that emerging evidence and learning can inform future programme development and the longer-term Strategy.

As a strategic framework, the document is intended to provide an overarching direction for collective action rather than determine the detailed design or operation of individual services. Responsibility for assessing the impacts of specific policies, programmes, projects and delivery arrangements remains with the relevant Department, public authority or delivery body. This includes responsibility for undertaking proportionate Rural Needs Impact Assessments, equality screening and Equality Impact Assessments, where required.

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 approved by:

Veronica Holland

Position/Grade:

Grade 6

Division/Branch:

Reducing Offending Directorate, Department of Justice

Signature:

Veronica Holland

Date:

22/07/26