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 Magherafelt 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 Magherafelt 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 Magherafelt Courthouse proposes the permanent closure of Magherafelt Courthouse and reallocation of Magherafelt 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 Magherafelt Courthouse will impact on Magherafelt court users from the Magherafelt area in terms of access to justice.

Magherafelt Courthouse was last used for court business in March 2020, when it operated as a Hearing Centre. opening once a week. As pandemic-related health measures could not be accommodated in Magherafelt Courthouse, Magherafelt business was transferred to Londonderry Courthouse, where it continues to be heard once a week.

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

Magherafelt court business relates to 15 geographical wards, some urban, some rural and some mixed urban/rural. 86.6% of the Magherafelt population is considered rural or mixed urban/rural. According to the 2021 NI Census:

2 Urban wards: Town Parks East, Glebe (Combined population 7,383 – 13.4% of total area population)

12 Rural wards: Lower Glenshane, Maghera, Swatragh, Tamlaght O'Crilly, Valley, Ballymaguigan, Bellaghy, Castledawson, Drapestown, Tobermore, Lissan, The Loup (Combined population 43,611 – 79.3% of total area population)

1 mixed urban/rural wards: Coolshinny (Population 4,025 – 7.3% of total area population)

The impact of the proposed policy is:

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

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

For the Magherafelt community, the closure of Magherafelt Courthouse creates an opportunity for disposal through the established NICS process, which has the potential to increase active use of a heritage building in Magherafelt town 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 Magherafelt 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 Magherafelt area will continue to have access to improved facilities at an alternative courthouse.

For the Magherafelt community, the closure of Magherafelt Courthouse creates an opportunity for disposal through the established NICS process, which has the potential to increase active use of a heritage building in Magherafelt town 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 Magherafelt 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 15 Magherafelt wards would be affected by increased drive time, with the increase in drive time from the geographical centre of each ward ranging from 28.25 minutes to 48.59 minutes. The weighted average for the overall area is an increase of 39.95 minutes. The average increased drive time when driving from rural wards would be 37.67 minutes, compared to 47.07 minutes for urban areas and 46.11 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 Loup ward (Rural), requiring an additional 48.59 minute drive time and bringing their total drive time to 57.06 minutes. The greatest drive time for those travelling to Londonderry Courthouse is from a postcode in The Loup ward (Rural), requiring a total drive time of 57.06 minutes, which is 48.59 minutes longer than their 8.47 minute drive time to Magherafelt Courthouse

Although the 2021 NI Census showed that 89% of households within the Magherafelt area have access to at least one private vehicle, NICTS has also considered public transport journeys from each of the 15 wards in the Magherafelt area to both Magherafelt Courthouse and Londonderry 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 Londonderry Courthouse.

Based on this data, the average public transport journey across the Magherafelt area would increase by 1 hour 42 minutes, from 1 hour 7 mins to Magherafelt Courthouse to 2 hours 49 minutes to Londonderry Courthouse. 11 of the 15 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 Tobermore ward (Rural), requiring an additional 2hr 22 minutes journey time and bringing their total journey time to 2 hours 44 minutes. The greatest journey time for those travelling to Londonderry Courthouse is from a postcode in the Bellaghy area (Rural), requiring a total journey time of 4 hours 35 minutes, which is 2 hours 10 minutes longer than their 2 hours 25 minute journey time to Magherafelt 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 (xls):
Website: https://www.psni.police.uk/about-us/our-publications-and-reports/official-

statistics/police-recorded-crime-statistics

Table 5: 85% of burglary, robbery and theft offences from 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026 took place in urban settlements areas, with the remaining 15% in rural settlements.

Table 6: Comparing 2010/11 and 2025/26, burglary, robbery and theft offences in urban settlements has reduced by 61%, in rural settlements by 38%, an overall reduction of 56%.

Table 2: 97% of agricultural crime (burglary, robbery and theft offences for agricultural-based activity) from 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026 took place in rural settlements. Comparing 2010/11 and 2025/26, overall agricultural crime has reduced by 78%.

Consideration: Magherafelt Court Business
The Consultation Paper provides details on an NICTS Integrated Court Operatib=ng System (ICOS) report on court business received at Magherafelt.

Court business received in Magherafelt is moderately increasing over time, from 583 cases disposed in 2020 to 617 cases disposed in 2025.

The majority of court business in Magherafelt relates to criminal business, mainly motoring offences. Data for 2025 showed that 57% of all Magherafelt court criminal disposals related to motoring offences.

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

The Travel Impact Assessment provides details on data from Ordnance Survey NI (OSNI) produced through a Geographical Information System mapping interface to illustrate the drive times to courthouses. The 4 longest drive time/distances between the furthest postcode in the ward to Magherafelt Courthouse are:

Draperstown – 22.79 minutes
Valley – 20.76 minutes
Swatragh – 20.68 minutes
Lissan – 19.41 minutes

The 4 longest drive times between the furthest postcode in the ward to Londonderry Courthouse are:

The Loup - 57.06 minutes
Bellaghy – 52.83 minutes
Lissan – 52.78 minutes
Ballymaguigan – 51.86 minutes

Consideration:Access to vehicles

The NI Census 2021 indicates that 89% of households in the 15 Magherafelt wards

have access to 1 or more cars or vans (17,396 out of 19,560 households)

Website: https://build.nisra.gov.uk/en/

Consideration: Key rural issues

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

DAERA Research on key rural issues :

Average Commute (miles) 2023: 12.7 miles rural and 7.7 miles urban.

Coverage of full-fibre broadband 2025: 91% rural, 97% urban

Public Transport (2023): 3 minute or less walk to nearest bus stop: 16% rural, 37% urban

Public Transport (2023): Bus at least once an hour: 21% rural, 63% urban

Median Annual Salary 2025: £28,278 rural, £31,893 urban

Working age people in absolute poverty 2023/24: 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 Magherafelt 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 Magherafelt 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 Magherafelt Courthouse up to the expected standard. People in rural areas are disproportionately affected by these issues as 86.6% of the population in the Magherafelt area live in rural or mixed rural/urban settlements. After the closure of Magherafelt Courthouse, court users from the Magherafelt area will have continued access to improved facilities at an alternative courthouse.

For online services, access to full-fibre broadband in rural areas is high (91%) but lower than in urban areas (97%). 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 Magherafelt 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 Magherafelt 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. The Travel Survey NI 2021 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. 89% of households across the Magherafelt area have access to a car or van. 57% of Magherafelt 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 15 Magherafelt wards have been affected by increased drive time due to the temporary transfer of business to Londonderry Courthouse. The average increased travel time when driving from rural wards would be 37.67 minutes, compared to 47.07 minutes for urban areas and 46.11 minutes for mixed urban/rural areas. The extended travel time for most court users is expected to be higher than the average journey time for commuting and business for rural areas (12.7 miles @ 30mph = 25.24 minutes).

It is also higher than the 4 longest drive time/distances between the centre of a geographical ward and its Magistrates Court based on the business allocations set out in Practice Direction 5/16:

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 significantly higher than the average journey time for rural areas, of 37 minutes, and this is expected to be among the longest journeys across NI.

Court users from the Magherafelt area are already travelling to other courthouses for other types of court business – with Family Care Centre, Family Proceedings Court, County Court and committals for Crown Court conducted at Londonderry Courthouse for most court users, except for those from Lissan and The Loup wards who atted Dungannon 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 Magherafelt 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 Magherafelt town.

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 Magherafelt 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 Magherafelt 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:

20/10/2026

Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:

Francis Drain

Position/Grade:

Deputy Director, Estates

Division/Branch:

NICTS Vision 2030

Signature:

Francis Drain

Date:

03/11/2026