

Rural Needs Impact Assessment



Title of Strategy, Policy, Plan or Public Service:

Name of Organisation:

Department of Justice

Title of Strategy, Policy, Plan or Public Service:

Review of the law on child sexual exploitation (CSE) and sexual offences against children

Step 1: Define the Issue

Key questions to consider:

- *What are the objectives of the strategy, policy plan or service?*
- *What impact do you intend it to have in rural areas?*
- *How is 'rural' defined for the purposes of this policy/strategy/service/plan?*
- *What would constitute a fair rural outcome in this case?*

The Department has carried out a review of the law in relation to child sexual exploitation (CSE) and sexual offences against children. The purpose of this review was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of the current law, and to consider if there are any changes that could be made to strengthen the law to protect children from this type of abuse. The review has resulted in a number of proposals for legislative change which are now subject to public consultation.

The review came about in response to the Report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation in Northern Ireland ('the Marshall Report') and the Justice Committee's Report on Justice in the 21st Century ('the Justice Committee Report'). The review also looks at the law on CSE and sexual offences against children in neighbouring jurisdictions to see if there are any initiatives which could be adopted here to maximise our efforts to protect children. The review considers a number of other emerging issues relating to CSE which could require changes to the criminal law.

The policy proposals include changes to the existing criminal law which applies to everyone, regardless of location. Any child, regardless of age, gender, socio-economic background, location or other factors can be a victim of exploitation and abuse. Child sexual exploitation and child sexual abuse occur across Northern Ireland and there is a clear need to ensure that the criminal law is robust, effective and up to date to prevent and stop this type of abuse. Particular consideration is given to changes to the law required as a result of the rise in online and technology-based abuse, which means that perpetrators can target children regardless of location.

We do not consider that the policy will impact in rural areas.

Step 2: Understand the situation

Key questions to consider:

- *What is the current situation in rural areas?*
- *What evidence (statistics, data, research, stakeholder advice) do you have about the position in rural areas?*
- *If the relevant evidence is not available, can this be sourced?*
- *Do you have access to the views of rural stakeholders about the likely impact of the policy?*
- *Are there existing design features or mitigations already in place to take account of rural needs?*

The criminal law applies to everyone, regardless of location. We are not aware of any evidence suggest that CSE and sexual abuse of children, which this policy is designed to target, manifests any differently or more/less frequently in rural areas compared with urban areas.

We do not believe that there will be any specific impact on rural needs.

Step 3: Develop and appraise options

Key questions to consider:

- *Are there barriers to delivery in rural areas?*
- *If so, how can these be overcome or mitigated?*
- *Will it cost more to deliver in rural areas?*
- *What steps can be taken to achieve fair rural outcomes?*

Not relevant as the policy will be delivered by the PSNI, Public Prosecution Service and the independent judiciary.

Step 4: Prepare for Delivery

Key questions to consider:

- *Do the necessary delivery mechanisms exist in rural areas?*
- *Have you considered alternative delivery mechanisms?*
- *What action has been taken to ensure fair rural outcomes?*
- *Is there flexibility for local delivery bodies to find local solutions?*
- *Are different solutions required in different areas?*

It is not anticipated that there will be any impact on rural areas.

Step 5: Implementation & Monitoring

Key questions to consider:

- *Have you set any rural specific indicators or targets to monitor?*
- *How will the outcomes be measured in rural areas?*
- *Are there any statistics or data that you will collect to monitor rural needs and impacts?*

It is not anticipated that there will be any impact on rural areas.

Step 6: Evaluation & Review

Key questions to consider:

- *What processes are in place to evaluate and review the implementation of the policy, strategy, plan or service?*
- *Have rural needs been factored into the evaluation process?*
- *How will lessons learned in relation to rural outcomes be used to inform future policy making and delivery?*

The policy is currently subject to public consultation. Any proposals for legislative change arising from the review will be subject to the view of an incoming Justice Minister and can only be taken forward once the Executive and Assembly have been restored.

The impact of the policy will be monitored through PSNI reported crime and PPS prosecution/case outcome statistics, as well as engagement with the relevant agencies to see how any new offences or changes to existing offences are working in practice. It is likely that any changes would take time to 'bed in' and that it may therefore be 2-3 years before any quantitative assessment of the impact can be made.

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