

Rural Strategy & Action Plan

Final Progress Report

2016-20



Foreword

Following the end of the fourth and concluding year of the Housing Executive's Rural Strategy and Action Plan "Sustainable Rural Communities", we are pleased to present this Final Progress Report, which provides a summary of our activities over the strategy period and highlights some of the most notable outcomes.

The Strategy was developed in 2016 following in-depth consultations with stakeholders from across the housing and community/voluntary sectors at various meetings, events and workshops. Throughout the duration of the strategy we have strived to maintain this level of engagement through our Strategy Implementation Panel and our Rural Residents' Forum, and also through annual progress reports and our 'Rural Matters' publications.

Perhaps most significantly, on 1st June 2018 the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 came into effect for the Housing Executive as one of the public bodies named in the schedule to the Act. Whilst the Housing Executive has long recognised that there are various housing issues that are specific to people living in rural areas, and that frequently a different approach is required to address these issues, we have taken the introduction of the Act as a positive opportunity to reconfirm our commitment to rural communities and as a chance to review and reinvigorate our approaches to meeting their needs.

This statutory duty sits alongside and reinforces our ongoing commitment to rural communities as set out in our Rural Strategy, which also seeks to contribute to our vision for rural housing:

All the actions included under the 5 objectives in the strategy were developed to support the realisation of that vision and to ensure that an equitable share of available resources is directed to rural areas.



Vibrant, shared, healthy and sustainable rural communities where everyone has access to decent and affordable housing

The Strategy is broad ranging and cross cutting, with key priority areas included from across the work of the Housing Executive. We are proud of the achievements made through the Strategy and hope to maintain the momentum gained through successful partnership working in the next Rural Strategy which will commence in 2021.

Key achievements between 2016/17 and 2019/20 include:

- A total of approximately £204.13 million was invested in our rural communities where just under 18% of our housing stock is located;
- Work commenced on 425 new build social homes in rural areas helping to address social housing need and support the growth of these communities – see pages 7-10;
- We helped rural communities in 36 locations across NI to examine the need for new social and affordable housing in their areas and 11 new housing schemes have been supported as a result. – see page 5;



- Approximately £82.4 million was invested in the maintenance and improvement of our rural housing stock – see page 13;
- Some £26.5 million of Supporting People funding was provided for accommodation-based and floating support services in rural areas - see pages 19-21;
- Rural community groups were supported through a total investment of approximately £1.63 million, which included funding for Social Enterprise projects, Community Grants, Community Cohesion funding and capital funding for regeneration projects – (see pages 26 -35).

We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has been involved in the delivery of our Rural Strategy. With many challenges, particularly in the securing of new build schemes, this has required a massive partnership effort.

We are now focused on developing a new strategic approach, which not only builds on the outcomes achieved through partnership working to date, but also promotes our statutory duty with regards the Rural Needs Act and takes account of the changing context for rural regeneration in NI. We will once again engage with customers and stakeholders to determine the key priorities for the next 4 to 5 years and how we can continue to improve our services in rural areas.

Professor Peter Roberts
Chair

Clark Bailie
Chief Executive

Introduction

The Housing Executive's Rural Strategy & Action Plan 2016-2020, 'Sustainable Rural Communities', was launched in November 2016. The four-year Strategy examined housing needs and issues specific to our rural customers and set out how we planned to work collaboratively with rural stakeholders to address these needs and issues between 2016 and 2020.

We are pleased to say that at the end of the final year, 41 of the 44 actions included in the Rural Strategy have been completed in full, and a further two have been progressed as much as possible during the strategy period. One action (Action 16) to deliver at least 15% of the Housing Executive's Solar Photovoltaic (PV) Scheme in rural areas could not be delivered. Unfortunately, although the evaluation of the first phase demonstrated the benefits of Solar

PV, competing priorities mean it is unlikely that a further programme will be developed at this time.

This Final Progress Report summarises our activities and successes between April 2016 and March 2020, which contributed to the achievement of our five key objectives for rural housing:

- 1 To plan for and enable the provision of affordable homes which meet rural housing needs;
- 2 To improve the condition of rural housing stock and reduce fuel poverty;
- 3 To provide housing support to vulnerable people in rural areas;
- 4 To contribute to the development of safe, cohesive and engaged rural neighbourhoods; and
- 5 To work in partnership with others to assist in rural development.

Between 2016/17 and 2019/20, the Housing Executive invested approximately **£204.12 million** in rural areas. This investment included the maintenance and improvement of our rural stock and estates, funding for supported housing and services, home improvement and energy efficiency grants and also funding support to help develop and empower our rural communities.



Activity Area	Spend (£m)				
	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2016-2020
Planned Maintenance & Capital Improvement Work*	10.3	15	9.14	12.4	46.84
Response Maintenance	8.1	8.4	9.00	10.1	35.6
Grounds Maintenance	0.84	1.4	1.45	1.4	5.09
Private Sector Grants*	15.7	14.3	13.43	13.19	56.62
Supporting People**	7	6.7	6.7	6.1	26.5
Community Development (including Social Enterprise, Community Cohesion and Regeneration funding)	0.5	0.4	0.29	0.44	1.63
Investment in New Build	5.97	11.1	9.82	4.95	31.84
Total	48.41	57.3	49.83	48.58	204.12

*Approximate figure based on (average scheme cost) x (no. of rural completions in year)

**Approximate figure as Floating Support services also cover urban areas.

Objective 1



To plan for and enable the provision of affordable homes which meet rural housing needs

In March 2020, rural applicants made up just over 14% of the total waiting list for social housing and 12.94% of all applicants who are deemed to be in housing stress. These figures have been fairly consistent from quarter to quarter and from year to year since 2016. This highlights the continued need to increase the range of available and affordable housing options in rural areas.

The progress achieved for each of the seven actions under Objective 1, demonstrates our commitment to enabling the provision of new housing in rural areas. This has been driven by engagement with community representatives and through partnership work with housing associations and local councils. Our Rural Residents' Forum has also played an important role in reviewing and refining our process for rural housing need testing and in raising awareness of the need for an increased focus on the delivery of rural homes as an important aspect of sustaining rural communities.



What we have done differently for rural areas:

- **Housing Need Tests to uncover areas of hidden rural housing need.** Of the 36 rural housing need tests completed over the strategy period, 11 new social housing schemes have so far been supported. This will provide a minimum of 132 units of social housing in rural areas. This demonstrates the value of the process and of continued focused engagement with rural communities to better understand housing requirements.
- **Site identification studies to help housing associations to find sites in areas of unmet rural housing need.** Over the strategy period, 17 studies of undeveloped lands in rural areas were completed by our Regional Place Shaping Teams and details of suitable sites were circulated to developing housing associations for their action. It is hoped that this preliminary work will contribute to the future New Build Programme for rural areas.
- **Working with Councils to develop Local Development Plan policies that will support the delivery of sustainable rural housing.**
- **Include a % target for new rural social housing in the Social Housing Development Programme.** Over the strategy period a total of 425 new social homes were commenced in rural areas across Northern Ireland, providing housing solutions for a range of households and contributing to the sustainability of these communities.

Recognising the ongoing challenges in delivering housing in rural areas, we continue to engage with housing associations to stress the need to focus their efforts on rural areas where a lack of affordable housing options is often a particular issue which can have a detrimental impact on rural communities.

Rural Housing Need Testing

In rural areas where there can often be little or no existing social housing, people in need of a home may not register or seek advice from their local Housing Executive office. Without names on the local waiting list, the need for any additional social/affordable housing will not be evident and new housing schemes will not be planned. Over time, this may impact on the sustainability of our rural communities.

In an effort to identify hidden housing need, our Rural & Regeneration Unit undertake **rural housing need tests**. Through these tests we work with rural communities to promote our range of housing services and to encourage those in need of a home to come forward and register on our waiting list.

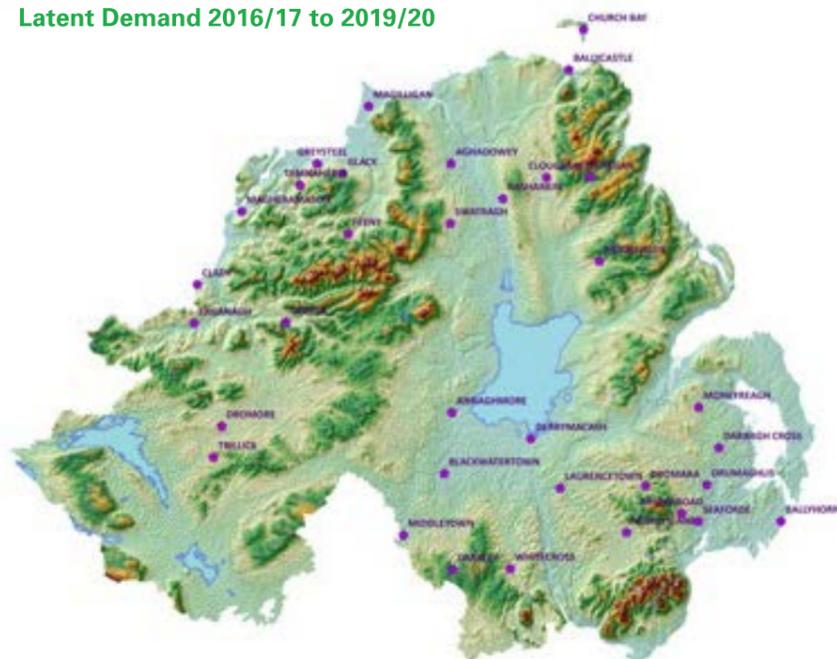
During a review of our testing process with our Rural Residents' Forum in 2016, it became evident that every test should be tailored to suit the individual community and that meaningful communication was vital to achieving a truly representative result.



Each of the 36 tests undertaken since 2016, have been planned in consultation with the local community and have comprised activities such as community meetings, public information events, an art competition in the local primary school as well as newspaper articles, posters, leaflets and newsfeeds on social media. Due to the present covid restrictions, the Housing Executive has focused on social media to reach out to its customer base and promote rural housing need testing.

A test usually lasts for around four weeks to give people a chance to register an interest with us. We will then get in touch with applicants to assess their circumstances and discuss their potential housing options. Anyone interested in and eligible for social housing will be added to the Common Waiting List for their area of choice.

Latent Demand 2016/17 to 2019/20



Ballycastle housing need test 2018/19

In 2018, the Housing Executive was approached by the Northern Health & Social Care Trust with regards to determining the need for a bespoke housing scheme for older people in Ballycastle and the surrounding rural area.

The test was planned in conjunction with Apex Housing Association who had initial plans for a scheme in the area. A range of publicity was undertaken including advertising in local papers, posters and leaflets to encourage people in the over 55 age category to come to a public information event which was held in July 2018. The event was attended by representatives from the Northern Trust, Apex Housing Association (HA) and Housing Executive staff from the Rural Unit and the local office to explain the purpose of the test and the type of accommodation which could be provided as a result.

As a result of the test, the Housing Executive has supported Apex's plans for the development of 28 new build apartments in Ballycastle for social applicants aged 55+. The development, which will have landscaped gardens and a seafront location, is sure to become a very special place to call home.



Swatragh Housing Need Test 2017/18

In January 2018, the Housing Executive was asked by community representatives in Swatragh, (Mid Ulster) to examine the potential for new social/affordable housing in the village. It was stressed that there had been an out-migration of young people from Swatragh to other towns and villages, due to a lack of available affordable housing in the area. There were concerns that the loss of this demographic would impact on schools, clubs and businesses in the area and threaten the future of the village.

It was agreed that an evening community event in March at the local Granaghan Resource Centre would give people the opportunity to come forward and speak to Housing Executive advisors. As well as posters, flyers, newspaper adverts and posts on social media about the event, the Housing Executive also facilitated an art competition for the children of St John's Primary School.

There was an overwhelming response to the test, both on the evening of the community event and during the next four weeks. Based on the response, we have given support to a planning application for a 14 unit housing development (including both social and intermediate homes) which has since been approved. We are now working with Rural Housing Association to take this scheme forward.

Darragh Cross Housing Need Test 2019/20

The housing need test in Darragh Cross was initiated by Ark Housing Association who identified a potential off-the-shelf scheme in this County Down village. Because there was no existing social housing in Darragh Cross, there was no waiting list specific to the area and therefore the Housing Executive could not determine the need for a new scheme. However, it was recognised that because there was high demand for social housing in neighbouring settlements, Darragh Cross could be a popular location for new housing, but a test would be required to confirm this.

It was agreed that the test would comprise of both a letter to existing applicants on the waiting lists for the wider area and also some publicity to invite anyone else in need of a home to come forward and register an interest.

As a result of the test, the Housing Executive was able to support Ark Housing Association in the purchase of this 10 unit scheme. 'The Willows', a quaint cul-de-sac development, is now completed and fully allocated. Susan Gibson, Development Manager for Ark stated, 'The purchase of this scheme will provide much needed social housing for families in this rural area and is a beautiful addition to the village of Darragh Cross'.



'The Willows', Darragh Cross, Ark HA

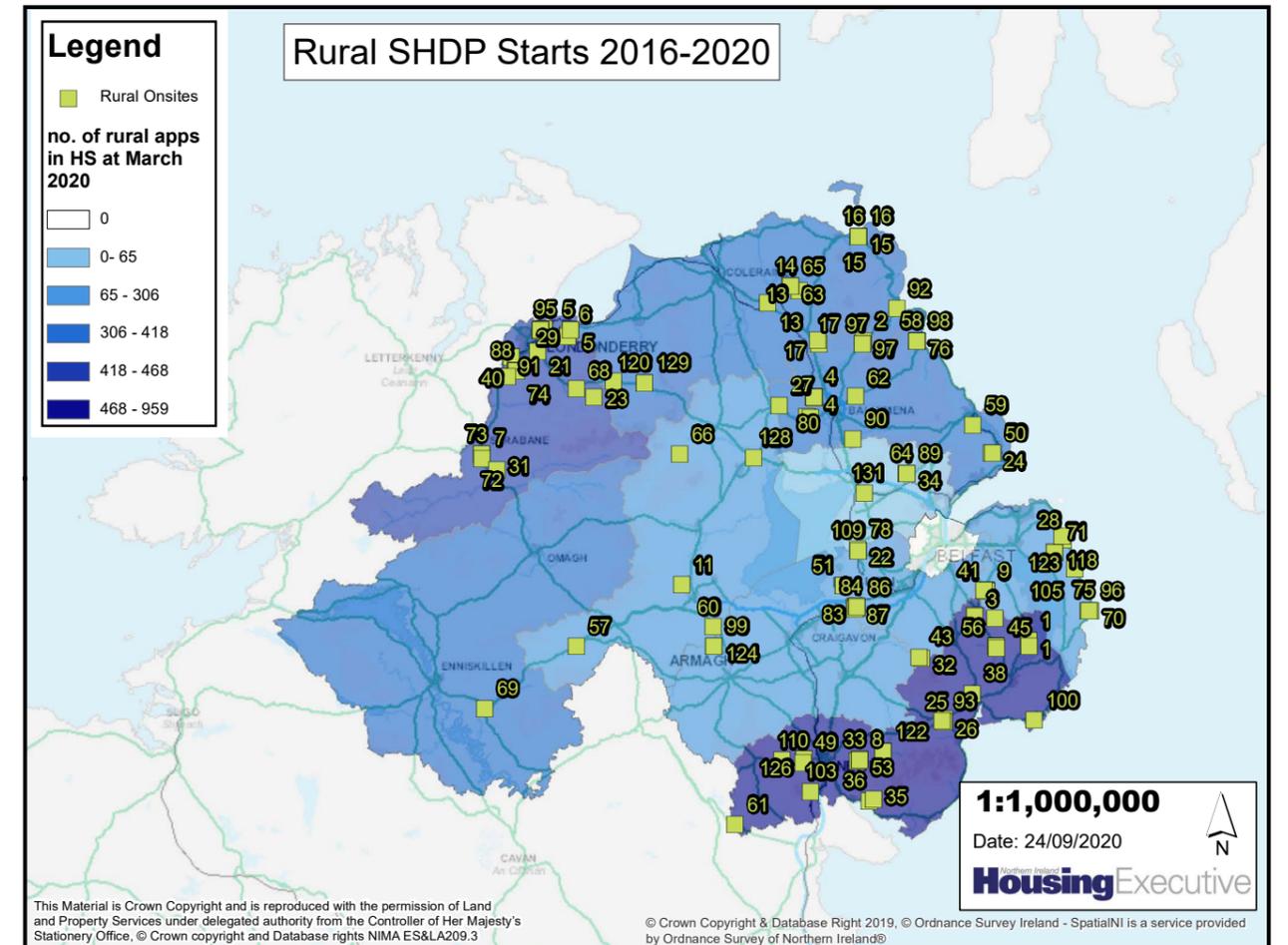


Portglenone Housing Need Test 2014/15



'Housing for All' units provided by Apex Housing Association at Gortaheron Drive in Portglenone following a rural housing need test in 2014/15

Rural SHDP Starts 2016-2020



Community Engagement Event in Swatragh, March 2018



Primary School Art Competition, Swatragh, March 2018

No. on Map	Onsite Year	Housing Association	Scheme Name	Location	Local Government District	Scheme Type	No. of Units
1	2016/17	Rural	23 Castleview	Killyleagh	Ards & North Down	ES	1
2	2016/17	Triangle	1-6 Rockfield Row, Glenravel Road	Cargan	Mid & East Antrim	OS	6
3	2016/17	Rural	11 Queens Park North	Saintfield	Newry, Mourne & Down	ES	1
4	2016/17	Rural	11 Tobar Park	Cullybackey	Mid & East Antrim	ES	1
5	2016/17	Rural	11 Ballycanice Close	Eglinton	Derry/Strabane	ES	1
6	2016/17	Rural	41 Woodvale Mews	Eglinton	Derry/Strabane	ES	1
7	2016/17	Rural	69 Parkside Gardens	Sion Mills	Derry/Strabane	ES	1
8	2016/17	Helm Housing	16 & 36 Owen Roe	Mayobridge	Newry, Mourne & Down	OS	2
9	2016/17	South Ulster	4 & 5 Alexander Cottages	Ballygowan	Newry, Mourne & Down	OS	2
10	2016/17	Clanmil	Station Road	Dunloy	Causeway, Coast & Glens	NB (T)	10
11	2016/17	Rural	3 Brewery Court	Donaghmore	Mid Ulster	ES	1
12	2016/17	Rural	168 Gortin Meadows	Newbuildings	Derry/Strabane	ES	1
13	2016/17	Triangle	6A Wallace Crescent	Stranocum	Causeway, Coast & Glens	ES	1
14	2016/17	Triangle	12 Mill Cottage Lane	Stranocum	Causeway, Coast & Glens	ES	1
15	2016/17	Triangle	6 Blackpark Cottages	Ballyvoy	Causeway, Coast & Glens	ES	1
16	2016/17	Triangle	19 Blackpark Cottages	Ballyvoy	Causeway, Coast & Glens	ES	1
17	2016/17	Triangle	7 Churchill Avenue	Cloughmills	Causeway, Coast & Glens	ES	1
18	2016/17	Helm Housing	1 & 3 Carraig Crossan	Mayobridge	Newry, Mourne & Down	OS	2
19	2016/17	Choice	Braehead Road, Nixons Corner	Londonderry	Derry/Strabane	NB (T)	8
20	2016/17	Triangle	6 Otterbank Road	Strathfoyle	Derry/Strabane	ES	1
21	2016/17	Triangle	104 Old Fort	Strathfoyle	Derry/Strabane	ES	1
22	2016/17	Choice	52-58 Main Street	Glenavy	Lisburn/Castlereagh	NB	16
23	2016/17	Triangle	Clanna Rury	Claudy	Derry/Strabane	OS	3
24	2016/17	Rural	73 Lislayan	Ballycarry	Causeway, Coast & Glens	ES	1
25	2017/18	Apex Housing	Mountain View	Castlewellan	Newry, Mourne & Down	CD&B	29
26	2017/18	Apex Housing	Mountain View	Castlewellan	Newry, Mourne & Down	CD&B	5
27	2016/17	Apex Housing	Garvaghy Avenue Phase 2	Portlengone	Mid & East Antrim	NB (T)	10
28	2016/17	Connswater	17 Drumfad Mill	Millisle	Ards & North Down	ES	1
29	2017/18	Apex Housing	Eglinton Competitive Design & Build	Eglinton	Derry/Strabane	CD&B	13
30	2017/18	Apex Housing	Eglinton Competitive Design & Build	Eglinton	Derry/Strabane	CD&B	1
31	2016/17	Triangle	Douglas Bridge OTS	Douglas Bridge	Derry/Strabane	OS	4
32	2016/17	Connswater	2 & 3 Drum Manor	Dromara	Lisburn/Castlereagh	OS	2
33	2016/17	Helm Housing	Sites 28 & 29 Owen Roe	Mayobridge	Newry, Mourne & Down	OS	2
34	2017/18	Rural	5 Crescentburn	Doagh	Antrim/Newtownabbey	ES	1
35	2017/18	Radius	39 Gleann Si	Rostrevor	Newry, Mourne & Down	ES	1
36	2017/18	Choice	1 St Bronagh's Church Street	Rostrevor	Newry, Mourne & Down	ES	1
37	2017/18	Rural	41 Cranny View	Carnlough	Mid & East Antrim	ES	1
38	2017/18	Radius	Lands bounding Manse Rd & adjacent to 1 & 11 Forde Close	Seaforde	Newry, Mourne & Down	NB	10
39	2017/18	Rural	5-9 Woodvale Manor	Eglinton	Derry/Strabane	ES	5
40	2017/18	Rural	16A, 85 & 199 Gortin Meadows	Newbuildings	Derry/Strabane	ES	3
41	2017/18	Triangle	18 Brae Grove	Ballygowan	Newry, Mourne & Down	RH	1
42	2017/18	Rural	95 Tobar Park	Cullybackey	Mid & East Antrim	ES	1
43	2017/18	Connswater	4 Moybrick Road	Dromara	Lisburn/Castlereagh	ES	1
44	2017/18	Rural	42 Ard-na-Maine	Cullybackey	Mid & East Antrim	ES	1
45	2017/18	Rural	48 Westlands	Crossgar	Newry, Mourne & Down	ES	1
46	2017/18	Choice	Castle Grove / Place	Castlecaulfield	Mid Ulster	NB (T)	5
47	2017/18	Rural	1-4 Woodvale Manor	Eglinton	Derry/Strabane	ES	4
48	2017/18	Rural	10 Lockkeepers Lodge	Aghalee	Lisburn/Castlereagh	ES	1
49	2017/18	Radius	17-21 Cloughan Court	Camalough	Newry, Mourne & Down	OS	5
50	2017/18	Rural	7 West Street	Ballycarry	Causeway, Coast & Glens	ES	1

No. on Map	Onsite Year	Housing Association	Scheme Name	Location	Local Government District	Scheme Type	No. of Units
51	2017/18	Rural	2 Lockkeepers Lodge	Aghalee	Lisburn/Castlereagh	ES	1
52	2017/18	Rural	51 The Old Fort	Strathfoyle	Derry/Strabane	ES	1
53	2017/18	Radius	45 & 49 Owen Roe	Mayobridge	Newry, Mourne & Down	OS	2
54	2017/18	Connswater	26 Rawdon Place	Moira	Lisburn/Castlereagh	ES	1
55	2017/18	Clanmil	37-45 Downpatrick Street	Crossgar	Newry, Mourne & Down	NB	18
56	2017/18	Clanmil	37-45 Downpatrick Street	Crossgar	Newry, Mourne & Down	NB	2
57	2017/18	Choice	16 Mullaghtinney Park	Clogher	Mid Ulster	RH	1
58	2017/18	Rural	26 Cranny View	Carnlough	Mid & East Antrim	ES	1
59	2017/18	Rural	48 Glenvale Park	Glynn	Mid & East Antrim	ES	1
60	2017/18	Rural	3 Ardean Manor	Moy	Mid Ulster	ES	1
61	2017/18	Triangle	St Brigids Park	Culloville	Newry, Mourne & Down	NB (T)	5
62	2017/18	Triangle	PSNI Site Broughshane	Broughshane	Mid & East Antrim	NB	8
63	2017/18	Triangle	Mill Water Mews, Phase 2	Stranocum	Causeway, Coast & Glens	OS	2
64	2017/18	Triangle	Ballymena Road	Doagh	Antrim/Newtownabbey	OS	4
65	2017/18	Triangle	Mill Water Mews	Stranocum	Causeway, Coast & Glens	OS	4
66	2017/18	Rural	42 The Orchard	Draperstown	Mid Ulster	ES	1
67	2018/19	Rural	127 The Old Fort	Strathfoyle	Derry/Strabane	ES	1
68	2018/19	Rural	29 Cregglea	Claudy	Derry/Strabane	ES	1
69	2018/19	Rural	2,3 & 4 Railway Manor	Maguiresbridge	Fermanagh/Omagh	OS	3
70	2018/19	Choice	12 Tides Turn	Portavogie	Ards & North Down	ES	1
71	2018/19	Rural	12 Castle Cottages	Carrowdore	Ards & North Down	ES	1
72	2018/19	Rural	Site at Lismore Park	Sion Mills	Derry/Strabane	NB	12
73	2018/19	Rural	Site at Lismore Park	Sion Mills	Derry/Strabane	NB	2
74	2018/19	Rural	169 Gortin Meadows	Newbuildings	Derry/Strabane	ES	1
75	2018/19	Choice	12 Princetoon Avenue	Portavogie	Ards & North Down	ES	1
76	2018/19	Rural	24 Cranny View	Carnlough	Mid & East Antrim	ES	1
77	2018/19	Rural	41 The Old Fort	Strathfoyle	Derry/Strabane	ES	1
78	2018/19	Rural	20 Old Forge	Glenavy	Lisburn/Castlereagh	ES	1
79	2018/19	Triangle	1, 2 and 3 Quarry Hill	Ahoghill	Mid & East Antrim	OS	3
80	2018/19	Rural	58 Tobar Park	Cullybackey	Mid & East Antrim	ES	1
81	2018/19	Triangle	Quarry Hill Phase 2	Ahoghill	Mid & East Antrim	OS	2
82	2018/19	Rural	81 Tobar Park	Cullybackey	Mid & East Antrim	ES	1
83	2018/19	Ark	53 Claremont Avenue	Moira	Lisburn/Castlereagh	ES	1
84	2018/19	Ark	10 Tanners Court	Moira	Lisburn/Castlereagh	ES	1
85	2018/19	Ark	14 Village Court	Moira	Lisburn/Castlereagh	ES	1
86	2018/19	Ark	3 McCartney Place	Moira	Lisburn/Castlereagh	ES	1
87	2018/19	Ark	5 Glebe Crescent	Moira	Lisburn/Castlereagh	ES	1
88	2018/19	Rural	167 Gortin Meadows	Newbuildings	Derry/Strabane	ES	1
89	2018/19	Triangle	19 Riverside	Doagh	Antrim/Newtownabbey	ES	1
90	2018/19	Choice	8-10 Main Street	Kells	Mid & East Antrim	NB	7
91	2018/19	Rural	47 Brook Manor	Magheramason	Derry/Strabane	ES	1
92	2018/19	Rural	50 Carn-Neil Park	Waterfoot	Causeway, Coast & Glens	ES	1
93	2018/19	Ark	29 O' Donnell Heights	Castlewellan	Newry, Mourne & Down	ES	1
94	2018/19	Choice	20-24 Main Street	Ahoghill	Mid & East Antrim	NB	16
95	2018/19	Rural	49 The Old Fort	Strathfoyle	Derry/Strabane	ES	1
96	2018/19	Rural	6 Seahaven Drive	Portavogie	Ards & North Down	ES	1
97	2018/19	Rural	7 Gortnageeragh Glen	Cargan	Mid & East Antrim	ES	1
98	2018/19	Rural	25 Cranny View	Carnlough	Mid & East Antrim	ES	1
99	2018/19	Rural	1,3,5,7 Culowen Quay	Blackwatertown	Mid Ulster	OS	4
100	2018/19	Choice	30 Seaview	Killough	Newry, Mourne & Down	ES	1

No. on Map	Onsite Year	Housing Association	Scheme Name	Location	Local Government District	Scheme Type	No. of Units
101	2018/19	Clanmil	1-6 Carquillan Court	Hilltown	Newry, Mourne & Down	OS	6
102	2018/19	North Belfast HA	Baytree Lane	Ballygowan	Newry, Mourne & Down	OS	5
103	2018/19	Choice	49 Bearna Park	Killeavy	Newry, Mourne & Down	ES	1
104	2018/19	Rural	3,4 & 5 Railway Court	Maguiresbridge	Fermanagh/Omagh	OS	3
105	2018/19	Clanmil	10 Saltwater Close	Ballywater	Ards & North Down	ES	1
106	2018/19	Ark	Sites 47,48,49 & 50 Cairn Grove	Kilcoo	Newry, Mourne & Down	OS	4
107	2018/19	Ark	Site 50, Church Street	Castlewellan	Newry, Mourne & Down	OS	1
108	2018/19	Rural	17 & 58 The Moorings	Killyleagh	Ards & North Down	ES	2
109	2018/19	South Ulster	2&4 Glen Road	Glenavy	Lisburn/Castlereagh	CD&B	23
110	2018/19	Triangle	1-5 Carrickananny Close	Belleeks	Fermanagh/Omagh	OS	5
111	2018/19	Triangle	59 & 60 Gortin Meadows	Londonderry	Derry/Strabane	OS	2
112	2018/19	Rural	20 Listooder Park	Saintfield	Newry, Mourne & Down	ES	1
113	2019/20	Triangle	55 & 56 Gortin Meadows	Londonderry	Derry/Strabane	OS	2
114	2019/20	Rural	15 Coneyburrow	Strathfoyle	Derry/Strabane	ES	1
115	2019/20	Rural	34 Coneyburrow	Strathfoyle	Derry/Strabane	ES	1
116	2019/20	Rural	42 Coneyburrow	Strathfoyle	Derry/Strabane	ES	1
117	2019/20	Rural	Site adjacent to 299 Foreglen Road	Foreglen	Causeway, Coast & Glens	NB	3
118	2019/20	Rural	35 Castle Cottage Close	Carrowdore	Ards & North Down	ES	1
119	2019/20	Rural	30 & 32 Moyola Avenue	Castledawson	Mid Ulster	ES	2
120	2019/20	Triangle	1-5 Castlecroft Drive, Main Street	Dungiven	Causeway, Coast & Glens	OS	5
121	2019/20	Clanmil	Carquillan Court Phase 2	Hilltown	Newry, Mourne & Down	OS	5
122	2019/20	Clanmil	Carquillan Court Phase 2	Hilltown	Newry, Mourne & Down	OS	1
123	2019/20	Ark	18 Ballywalter Road	Millisle	Ards & North Down	CD&B	11
124	2019/20	Rural	2,4,6,8, Culowen Quay	Dungannon	Mid Ulster	OS	4
125	2019/20	Ark	Bessbrook / Camlough ESPs	Bessbrook	Newry, Mourne & Down	ES	1
126	2019/20	Ark	Bessbrook / Camlough ESPs	Camlough	Newry, Mourne & Down	ES	2
127	2019/20	Rural	44 Brook Manor	Magheramason	Derry/Strabane	ES	1
128	2019/20	Rural	33&37 Station Road	Castledawson	Mid Ulster	ES	2
129	2019/20	Triangle	Castlecroft Drive, Phase 2	Dungiven	Causeway, Coast & Glens	OS	6
130	2019/20	Ark	Darragh Cross	Saintfield	Newry, Mourne & Down	OS	10
131	2019/20	Triangle	Oldstone Manor	Muckamore	Antrim/Newtownabbey	OS	7
132	2019/20	Triangle	47a & 47b Castlevue Park	Moir	Lisburn/Castlereagh	OS	2

Objective 1: Action 1-7



'Sustainable Rural Communities' – Implementation Plan 2016-2020

Objective 1: To plan for and enable the provision of affordable homes which meet rural housing needs.

Action 1 Review the current policy and procedures for examining rural housing need during 2016 and thereafter undertake an annual programme of rural housing needs surveys in approximately five rural locations.

Progress **Update**

2016/17 Following a review of the rural housing needs survey process, pilot tests in Rathlin and Ballyhornan and consultation with local and regional housing services managers, a revised policy/procedure for rural housing need testing was drafted and approved.

In 2016/17 housing need tests were completed in **Rathlin, Ballyhornan** and **Seaforde**. All three tests delivered positive results.

2017/18 In 2017/18, housing need tests were completed in Dromara, Trillick, Aghadowey and **Swatragh** and postal surveys were commenced for Cargan, Derrymacash/**Derrytrasna**, Annaghmore/Eglis, Erganagh, Moorfields, Ballyhornan and **Blackwatertown**.

2018/19 In 2018/19 housing need tests were completed in **Cloughmills**, Moneyreagh, **Ballycastle**, Derrymacash/Derrytrasna, **Tamnaherin**, Clady, Drumaghlis, **Whitecross** and Tullylish/Lawrencetown.

2019/20 In 2019/20 housing need tests were completed in Magheramason, Moneyslane, Rasharkin, Drumaroad, Darkley, Glack, Dromore, Drumquin, Greysteel, Gortin, Magilligan, Feeny, Middletown and **Darragh Cross**.

We were unable to complete a further four planned tests due to the Covid-19 lockdown. These will be revisited in the 2020/21 programme. **(tests in bold resulted in a housing scheme)**

Action 2 Examine the potential to capture information from rural housing applicants which may help determine where housing shortages exist in rural areas.

Progress **Update**

2016-2020 Information on where customers want to live is captured through their initial interview in order to help them to make choices about which housing option is best for them. We have developed a proposal for how this information could be reported on to help to determine where housing shortages may exist in rural areas, and are investigating an IT system change to allow this.

Action 3 Ensure rural need for social and affordable housing is highlighted to local councils in the annual Housing Needs Assessment and in the Housing Market Analysis.

Progress **Update**

2016-2020 Every year we prepare the five-year Housing Need Assessment figures to guide the preparation of the Social Housing Development Programme and we ensure that any rural areas of unmet housing need are highlighted in the updated Commissioning Prospectus for housing associations.

Housing need figures have been provided to each of the 11 councils to inform the ongoing preparation of the Local Developments Plans. We have also been engaged with each of the Plan Teams to provide input to their plan strategies in order to promote the inclusion of housing policies that support the needs of rural communities. We have a continued focus on promoting sustainable development.

Action 4		Based on levels of rural housing need, set and monitor a % target for delivery of the Social Housing Development Programme in rural areas and ensure sufficient rural schemes are included to meet this target.
Progress	Update	
2016/17	In 2016/17, a total of 84 social units were started in rural areas. The annual rural target was 10.8% (166 units). 40 of the units started were Existing Satisfactory Purchases/Off The Shelf purchases demonstrating the difficulty in delivering rural new build schemes.	
2017/18	In 2017/18 the rural target of the Social Housing Development Programme was 11.4% (199 units). The target was not met, with 144 units starting on site by 31st March. However this was a 71% uplift on delivery compared to 2016/17. 96 of these units were provided in new build schemes and 48 were Existing Satisfactory Purchases/Off The Shelf/Rehabilitations.	
2018/19	In 2018/19, 129 units of social housing started on site in rural areas, three of which were wheelchair units. This was 7.2% of overall delivery (1,786), which fell short of the target of 11.5% of 1,850 units (213 units) that was set at the start of the year. 60 of these units were provided in new build schemes, 31 were Existing Satisfactory Purchases and 38 were Off The Shelf purchases.	
2019/20	In 2019/20, 68 units of social housing went on site in rural areas which represented 9% of the total (761 units). This included 12 Existing Satisfactory Purchases, 42 Off the Shelf purchases and 14 new build dwellings. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, a significant number of Social Housing Development Programme starts were not able to be confirmed in March 2020. If the anticipated level of starts activity had been achieved, we would have expected an overall out-turn of 1,903 units. Of these 1,903 units, 150 would have been in rural areas.	

Action 5		Highlight to housing providers in the Housing Executive's Commissioning Prospectus those rural locations where social/affordable housing is required.
Progress	Update	
2016-20	The latest 2020/21 - 2022/23 Commissioning Prospectus was published in January 2020. The Commissioning Prospectus provides a strategic overview of housing need and demand in Northern Ireland (NI). It also provides housing associations and other stakeholders with the information they require to make informed decisions about where to search for land and property to deliver new affordable social and intermediate housing. Each year, the commissioning prospectus highlights the need for a specific focus on rural housing and details the rural target for each council area as well as a breakdown of the settlements which should be targeted.	

Action 6		Undertake a programme of site identification studies to support and encourage the provision of housing in rural areas where unmet need has been identified.
Progress	Update	
2016-20	We undertake a rolling programme of rural site identification studies to assist and encourage housing associations to source development sites in areas of consistent unmet rural housing need. Over the Strategy period, 17 studies of undeveloped lands in rural areas were completed by our Regional Place Shaping Teams and details of suitable sites were circulated to developing housing associations for their action. It is hoped that this preliminary work will contribute to the future New Build Programme for rural areas.	

Action 7		Examine the potential to pilot a rural mixed tenure scheme based on other examples of best practice including community self-build.
Progress	Update	
2016-20	Swatragh was identified as a rural location for a mixed tenure scheme following a strong response to the housing need test in 2018, which included significant levels of expressed interest in affordable housing. Based on this response, we have given support to a planning application for 14 units (including both social and intermediate homes) which has since been approved. We are now working with Rural Housing Associations to bring this scheme forward.	

Objective 2



To improve the condition of rural housing stock and reduce fuel poverty

The 10 actions which supported Objective 2 were aimed at promoting energy efficiency and facilitating the improvement of rural housing stock. This included the provision of home improvement grants for private sector home owners and landlords in rural areas, as well as the cyclical maintenance of our own rural housing stock. As the Home Energy Conservation Authority for Northern Ireland we also provide energy saving advice and support to people in rural areas.

Between 2016/17 and 2019/20, approximately £82.4m was invested in the maintenance of our rural housing stock. A further £56.6m was invested in Private Sector Grant funding, contributing to the improvement and increased energy efficiency of rural homes. In 2018/19, we launched an exciting new energy efficiency research project "HandiHeat" which will investigate sustainable energy solutions for homes in dispersed rural locations.

At March 2020, all but one of the 10 actions were completed or progressed as much as possible during the strategy period. Action 16 (the Solar PV Programme) was not completed due to competing projects and priorities at this time.

 **£82.4m** invested in maintenance of our rural homes

What we did differently for rural areas:

Promoted available private sector improvement and energy efficiency grants at community engagement events.

Both energy efficiency and mandatory grants (Disabled Facilities) were promoted at all rural housing events including rural housing need tests, community conferences and community award presentations. Grants staff were also available at the Housing Executive stand at the Balmoral Show and information was regularly included in our Rural Matters publications.

Between 2016/17 and 2019/20, a total of **2,216** private sector grants were approved for homes located in rural areas. This will have improved the fabric of these rural homes and ensured that they were suitable to meet the accessibility needs of the occupant helping to support independent living.

Over the strategy period a total of **2,790** rural properties also received financial support to replace an old boiler and **6,862** rural properties were improved through the Affordable Warmth Scheme. These grant schemes have made a significant impact on the energy efficiency of many rural homes and helped to reduce fuel poverty.

Delivered the Oil Buying Clubs Initiative in partnership with Bryson Energy.

There are 27 Housing Executive/ Bryson Energy Oil buying clubs across Northern Ireland with over 4,000 members. Over 80% of the Oil Buying Clubs which were set up through the initiative serve rural areas across Northern Ireland.

Handi-Heat project

What we did differently for rural areas:

- Launched the Handi-Heat Project which investigates energy efficiency measures appropriate for rural areas.

In October 2018, the Housing Executive launched its new energy efficiency research project "Handi-Heat". The project aims to identify innovative solutions to tackle energy problems for rural communities and includes a demonstration pilot involving six Housing Executive homes located in Lisnaskea, Co. Fermanagh. The project is exploring how homes and businesses can store renewable energy effectively, allowing very high levels of renewable energy to be integrated into power grids globally, at the same time as maximising the benefits to consumers.



Energy schools poster competition 2018/19



Private Sector Improvement Services

Our Grants Team administers grant-aid on behalf of the Department for Communities for properties in the private sector. The Team's work in 2019-20 saw nearly £30m directly invested in Northern Ireland's economy of which 44% was for properties in rural areas.

This resulted in:

- people being able to live independently in their homes for longer;
- improved property fitness;
- fuel poverty being robustly addressed; and
- the promotion of good health and well-being.

Home Improvement Grants

Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) | Repair | Renovation | Replacement | Home Repair

In rural areas through Home Improvement Grants 577 grant applications were completed during 2019-20 with an estimated £7.7m investment in the economy.

Disabled Facilities Grants (adaptations) are one of two mandatory grants offered by the Housing Executive. They are delivered in partnership with Health Trusts and during 2019-20 nearly 50% of all DFGs completed were for properties in rural areas at an estimated investment of £5.3m.

We also paid out £195k for mandatory Repair Grants on the issue of certain statutory notices from local councils. This resulted in vital improvements to 91 rural properties in the private rented sector.

Currently discretionary grants (renovation, replacement and home repair assistance) are only available in exceptional circumstances. We estimate that in 2019-20 we paid £2.2m in grant-aid for completed work on rural properties improving the health and well-being of households as well as supporting the local economy. This was 74% of the total amount the Housing Executive spent on discretionary grants for the year.

Energy Efficiency Grants

Affordable Warmth Scheme | Boiler Replacement Scheme

The Affordable Warmth Scheme is targeted at those areas where levels of fuel poverty are highest. It is directed at low income households who experience the effects of fuel poverty and energy inefficiency. The Housing Executive works in partnership with local Councils to deliver the scheme to households in need.

In 2019-20, the Housing Executive spent approximately £5.2m on work completed in 1,089 homes located in rural areas. This represented nearly 42% of the total number of properties which had work completed under the Affordable Warmth Scheme. Home owners are now benefitting from energy efficiency measures including insulation, ventilation, draught-proofing, heating, window replacement and solid wall insulation.

For the Boiler Replacement Scheme, rural properties represented 21% of completed applications in 2019-20 with an estimated investment of £299k. This represents 454 rural home owners who replaced central heating boilers which were over 15 years old with a new high efficiency 'A' rated condensing type boiler.

The work of both schemes will result in reduced fuel costs for householders and are a huge investment in the local economy.

Type of Grant	No of rural properties completed	% of total 'completions' which were in a rural area	Estimated Spend in rural areas
Disabled Facilities Grants	368	49%	£5.3m
Repairs Grants (Public Health Notice)	91	23%	£0.19m
Discretionary Grants	486	52%	£2.2m
Affordable Warmth Scheme	1,089	42%	£5.2m
Boiler Replacement Scheme	454	21%	£0.3m
Estimated Investment in rural areas			£13.19m

Grant-Aid Completions and Investment 2019-20

While delivery in 2020/21 will prove challenging due to the impact of Covid-19, the Grants Team remains committed to again delivering improvements to housing in the private sector across Northern Ireland.

Handi-Heat

The 'Handi-Heat' Project is a three year, £2m project that will research how we can deliver renewable energy solutions and improve energy efficiency in rural homes across Northern Europe.

It is being led by the Housing Executive, with support from the Northern Periphery & Arctic Programme (NPA) and the European Regional Development Fund. The project aims to:

- document current home energy policy and practice across Northern Europe;
- develop viable business models, with innovative solutions to tackle energy problems in rural areas; and
- identify opportunities for rural communities to access renewable energy sources and reduce their reliance on fossil fuels.

Through the project, we will also be carrying out a pilot study that provides six of our rural homes with a renewable energy supply, so we can find out how these measures could benefit our rural tenants.

Help to adapt your home

Grants are available to make the home of a person with a disability more suitable

Work may include:

- creating downstairs bathroom/bedroom facilities
- replacing a bath with a level access shower
- installing access ramps and handrails
- improving access to rooms in the home

Housing Executive

For further information: Tel 03448 920 900 www.nihe.gov.uk

Up to £25,000

is available for owner occupiers. Contact your local Housing Executive office.


2,216
private sector grants approved in rural areas



Kitchen refurb in Co. Armagh, 2018.

Objective 2: Action 8-14



'Sustainable Rural Communities' – Implementation Plan 2016-2020

Objective 2: To improve the condition of rural housing stock and reduce fuel poverty

Action 8 Ensure that the Housing Executive planned maintenance programmes deliver investment to rural housing stock in accordance with the new Asset Management Strategy.

Progress Update

2016/17	During 2016/17, planned maintenance was completed on 2,512 rural homes, representing 16.9% of all starts (14,859). This mainly comprised external cyclical maintenance, heating installations and kitchen/bathroom repairs and replacements.
2017/18	By the end of 2017/18, we had commenced planned maintenance on 3,256 rural homes, representing 19.1% of all our planned maintenance starts (17,031). This mainly comprised external cyclical maintenance, heating installations and kitchen/bathroom repairs and replacements.
2018/19	By the end of 2018/19 we had completed planned maintenance on 3,720 rural homes, representing 28% of all our planned maintenance completions (13,252). This mainly comprised external cyclical maintenance, double glazing, heating installations and kitchen/bathroom repairs and replacements.
2019/20	By the end of 2018/19, we had completed planned maintenance on 3,720 rural homes, representing 28% of all our planned maintenance completions (13,252). This mainly comprised external cyclical maintenance, double glazing, heating installations and kitchen/bathroom repairs and replacements. 17.7% of all Housing Executive stock is located in rural areas. Over the strategy period, 21% of our planned maintenance programme was completed on rural homes, helping to improve the fabric of this stock and ensuring it is maintained to the Decent Homes Standard. Scheme work mainly comprised of external cyclical maintenance, heating installations and kitchen/bathroom repairs and replacements.

Action 9 Monitor the uptake of Private Sector Improvement Grants in rural areas to ensure that rural homeowners receive an appropriate share of grant aid.

Progress Update

2016/17	During 2016/17, a total of 560 grants were started in rural areas (41.4% of total) and 538 grants were completed (33.5% of total). Rural starts included 404 Disabled Facilities Grants, 45 Home Repairs Assistance Grants, 106 Renovation Grants and 5 Replacement Grants. Rural completions included 339 Disabled Facilities Grants, 44 Home Repairs Assistance Grants, 104 Repairs Grants, 48 Renovation Grants and 3 Replacement Grants.
2017/18	In 2017/18, a total of 531 private sector grants were approved in rural areas (42% of total) and 524 grants were completed (34% of total). This included 391 Disabled Facilities Grant approvals, 43 Home Repairs Assistance Grant approvals, 93 Renovation Grant approvals and 4 Replacement Grant approvals.
2018/19	In 2018/19, we approved a total of 509 private sector grants in rural areas (45% of total) and 561 grants were completed (40% of total). Approvals included 382 Disabled Facilities Grants, 30 Home Repairs Assistance Grants, 90 Renovation Grants and 7 Replacement Grants. Completions included 354 Disabled Facilities Grants, 38 Home Repairs Assistance Grants, 85 Renovation Grants, 82 Public Health Notice Grants and 2 Replacement Grants.
2019/20	In 2019/20, a total of 616 private sector grants were approved in rural areas (41% of total) and 709 grants were completed (41% of total). Approvals included 448 Disabled Facilities Grants, 61 Home Repairs Assistance Grants 70 Renovation Grants and 2 Replacement Grants. Rural completions included 368 Disabled Facilities Grants, 59 Home Repairs Assistance Grants, 139 Public Health Notice Grants and 143 Renovation Grants.

Action 10 Promote any new and existing Private Sector Improvement Grants which could improve the fabric of housing in rural locations.

Progress Update

2016-20	Both energy efficiency and mandatory grants (Disabled Facilities) were promoted at all rural housing events including rural housing need tests, community conferences and community award presentations. Grants staff were also available at the Housing Executive stand at the Balmoral Show in 2017, 2018 and 2019 and relevant information was included in the Balmoral Show edition of Rural Matters. Unfortunately the show was cancelled in May 2020 due to Covid-19, therefore in our summer edition of Rural Matters we provided information on all available grants, as well as an update on how our grants services were operating under the circumstances.
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Action 11 Monitor the uptake of the Affordable Warmth and Boiler Replacement schemes in rural areas.

Progress Update

2016/17	During 2017/18, a total of 673 rural properties benefitted from the Housing Executive's Boiler Replacement Scheme, 22% of the total. 1,908 rural properties benefitted from the Housing Executive/Council-led Affordable Warmth Scheme, 46% of the total. 2640 rural properties benefitted from the Housing Executive/Council-led Affordable Warmth Scheme, 47% of the total.
2017/18	During 2018/19, a total of 807 rural properties benefitted from the Housing Executive's Boiler Replacement Scheme, 30% of the overall total. 1,442 rural properties benefitted from the Housing Executive/Council led Affordable Warmth Scheme, 45% of the overall total.
2018/19	During 2018/19, a total of 807 rural properties benefitted from the Housing Executive's Boiler Replacement Scheme, 30% of the overall total. 1,442 rural properties benefitted from the Housing Executive/Council led Affordable Warmth Scheme, 45% of the overall total.
2019/20	During 2019/20, a total of 454 rural properties benefitted from the Housing Executive's Boiler Replacement Scheme, 21% of the overall total. 872 rural properties benefitted from the Housing Executive/Council led Affordable Warmth Scheme, 41% of the overall total.

Action 12 Contribute to the Department for Communities (DfC) policy review on support for repair and improvement in the private sector and any revised scheme of assistance which emerges from the review.

Progress Update

2016-20	The Department for Communities review of the policy on support for repair and improvement in the private sector has not progressed since 2018. However, the Housing Executive remains committed to contributing meaningfully to the review when it recommences and implementing any revised scheme of assistance which emerges as a result of the review.
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Action 13 Register and renew registrations of Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO) identified in rural areas as required.

Progress Update

Action completed 2018/19	The number of registered HMOs located in rural areas was monitored on a quarterly basis up until April 2019 when responsibility for HMO registration was transferred to local councils.
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Action 14 Monitor uptake of the Housing Executive/Bryson Energy Oil Buying Clubs scheme in rural areas.

Progress Update

Action completed 2017/18	There are 27 Housing Executive/Bryson Energy Oil Buying Clubs across Northern Ireland with over 4,000 members. Over 80% of these serve rural areas, for example Bannvale, which serves Ahoghill, Bellaghy, Lavy and Portglenone, and Mournderg Partnership which serves Castlederg, Churchtown and Killiter.
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'Sustainable Rural Communities' – Implementation Plan 2016-2020

Objective 2: To improve the condition of rural housing stock and reduce fuel poverty

Action 15 Ensure that rural areas are included in the Housing Executive's energy efficiency promotional activities including a target of 35% of the School's Programme in rural schools.

Progress	Update
2016/17	39% of the schools included in the Primary School Energy Programme were located in rural areas.
2017/18	In 2017/18, the primary school energy programme visited 160 schools across Northern Ireland. 72% of these schools were in rural areas. 16 schools entered the Sustainable Development Unit's Schools Energy Competition launched in February 2018. Of these, 12 were in rural areas.
2018/19	In 2018/19, the Primary School Energy Programme visited 135 schools across Northern Ireland. 68% of these schools were in rural areas.
2019/20	In 2019/20, the Primary School Energy Programme visited 82 schools across Northern Ireland. 29 of these schools (35.4%) were in rural areas.

Action 16 Target at least 15% of the Housing Executive's Solar Photovoltaic (PV) programme in rural areas.

Progress	Update
2016-20	The Housing Executive has evaluated the initial phase of the Solar PV Programme and, notwithstanding the benefits that Solar PV provides, due to competing priorities we are not in a position to roll out a 2nd phase at present.

Action 17 Consider alternative sources of energy and innovative technologies which could improve the energy efficiency of housing executive stock in rural areas.

Progress	Update
2016-20	<p>The Housing Executive launched its new Energy Efficiency Research Project "Handi-Heat" in October 2018. The project aims to identify innovative solutions to tackle energy problems for rural communities and includes a demonstration pilot involving six Housing Executive homes located in Lisnaskea, Co. Fermanagh. This pilot will evaluate a combination of hybrid and low carbon heating solutions and energy efficiency measures. Within the demonstration properties hybrid boilers, heat pumps, solar photovoltaic and energy storage systems will be installed, with value for money insulation measures also installed.</p> <p>Climote (Associate Partner) installed monitors for six houses at the pilot demonstration site during February 2020 and are currently collecting data with the aim of having one year's data collected by March 2021. The monitors will capture oil use and temperature of thermostats for one year. Hybrid boilers are currently in storage and will be installed once the current Covid-19 restrictions are lifted.</p> <p>The project is exploring how homes and businesses can store renewable energy effectively, allowing very high levels of renewable energy to be integrated into power grids globally, at the same time as maximising the benefits to consumers. A PhD student of the <i>Belfast School of Architecture in the Built Environment at Ulster University</i> has been appointed to present the research data from the pilot site and will conduct research on consumer behaviour.</p>



To provide housing support to vulnerable people in rural areas.

We recognise that living in a rural area may make it more challenging for people who need additional support or have specific care needs to access key services to meet their needs.

The nine actions included under Objective 3 are focused on identifying rural homelessness and housing support needs and providing relevant housing support.

Between 2016/17 and 2019/20, approximately £26.5m of Supporting People funding was invested in accommodation based services and Floating Support Services which benefitted our rural customers.



Online access in local offices for UC applications

What we did differently for rural areas:

- Delivered training to reinforce the need for front end staff to take account of issues specific to rural customers.

Following the introduction of the statutory duty in June 2018, bespoke training was delivered to our Housing Services policy staff. This focused on how the needs of our rural customers can differ from our urban customers and the need to take account of these differences in our policies and strategies. It also emphasised the role front end staff can play in identifying rural areas where there may be housing shortages or a gap in services.

- Provided online access in our local offices to ensure that rural customers affected by a lack of internet coverage/ access could manage their Universal Credit claim.

- Undertook research on customer experiences of Welfare Reform to identify rural specific issues.

Future rural specific Universal Credit research is also included in the Research Programme for 2020/21.

- Ensured cross-representation between the Rural Residents' Forum and the Disability Forum to make sure that the particular challenges facing people with disabilities in rural areas are considered.

- Provide homelessness advice and support at rural housing information events.

Over the strategy period, homelessness information and advice has also been provided and discussed at the Balmoral Show and at events associated with our rural housing need tests. Information has also been published in at least one edition of Rural Matters annually.



Homelessness Awareness Week 2018

Homelessness Awareness Week took place in December 2018. During this week, four of the Local Area Groups arranged events in their areas, bringing together a range of speakers from agencies and organisations to share information and forge new partnerships to improve services to clients that may find themselves faced with homelessness.

Supporting People in rural areas

The Supporting People Programme is administered by the Housing Executive on behalf of the Department for Communities (DfC) and provides housing support services to assist people to live independently. Over 850 housing support services are currently provided through 86 organisations, supporting up to 19,000 service users. A GIS map can be accessed via our searchable [Supporting People Service Directory](#) detailing the spread of these services across Northern Ireland.

New Floating Support provision in Rural Areas

Through our Supporting People Strategic Plan in 2019/20 we identified the need for additional floating support services for Young and Older People. Using trend analyses, GIS mapping and waiting list data we pin pointed localities and identified numbers of places required. As seen below, these new services span across several rural areas of Northern Ireland.

Four new floating support services, totalling 200 additional units of support for older people and three new floating support services, with a total of 80 additional units of support for young people, were successfully awarded to service providers in 2019/20.

New Supporting People Floating Support Services for Older People in 2019/20:

Area	Provider	Units
Newry	Belfast Central Mission	40
Lisburn/Downpatrick/Ards	The Cedar Foundation	60
Moyle	The Cedar Foundation	40
Limavady/L'Derry/Strabane	First Housing	60

New Supporting People Floating Support Services for Young People in 2019/20:

Area	Provider	Units
Newry	MACS	25
Lisburn	MACS	30
Magherafelt	Belfast Central Mission	25



Antrim Event



Causeway Event



Mid Ulster Event



South West Event

Floating Support services funded through the Supporting People programme provide support delivered into people's own homes. These services work with individuals and other relevant agencies to identify and respond to housing support needs.

Housing Support can include help in setting up and maintaining tenancies, claiming and maximising benefits, developing key life skills, accessing training/employment, establishing community links and maintaining emotional and physical wellbeing.

Floating support services for older people can also have a significant impact in delivering successful outcomes linked to health, support through hospital discharge and the prevention of hospital readmissions and longer term institutional care.

Supporting People - Provider Innovation Fund

In 2019/20 we launched the Supporting People (SP) Provider Innovation Fund (PIF) in partnership with DfC, to support improvements to the delivery of the SP Programme. Approximately £0.5m has been made available by DfC for each year of the fund which is anticipated to run until 2021/22, subject to the annual budget process.

Grants through the PIF included two tiers:

Tier 1 has a maximum individual provider grant of £150k while Tier 2 has a maximum provider grant of £20k. Funding applications awarded spanned across various types of projects that embraced working in new ways and innovation. Some examples of PIF projects awarded in rural areas are detailed in the paragraphs below.

A Transport Service Project was successfully introduced by Loughiel Community Association who received £33,670 through the fund. This Community Association focus on the provision of housing related support services that improve the quality of life for elderly and vulnerable people. With an aging population in a very rural area, where transit is poor, this project enabled vital access to support services through the purchased of a mini-van.

The **Fermanagh Women's Aid** Maintaining Tenancies through Empowerment project, received £7,510 of funding to deliver personal development programmes for women who have experienced Domestic Violence. This project enabled the delivery of peer group support for women, who have shared experiences, to improve their life skills, maintaining physical health, mental wellbeing and their own tenancies.

The remodelling of an Older People Floating Support Service provided by Radius Housing Association which operates across Mid & East Antrim, North Antrim, Mid Ulster and the Causeway, received £22,370 from the fund to introduce mobile working and digital access which improved the quality and range of services offered to clients. The service was developed to respond to demographic trends of an aging population who wish to remain in their own home and maintain their independence.



Reach out, contact:

- Fermanagh Women's Aid
028 6632 8898
(Mon-Fri 9am - 5pm)
- The Freephone 24hr Domestic and Sexual Abuse Helpline
Tel: 0808 802 1414 (Managed by Nexus NI) is open 24/7
- In an emergency call the PSNI on 999



'Sustainable Rural Communities' – Implementation Plan 2016-2020

Objective 3: To provide housing support to vulnerable people in rural areas

Action 18 Measure and monitor the extent of homeless applicants who wish to be housed in a rural location, in order to inform the review of the Homelessness Strategy and to assist in ongoing strategic planning of services.

Progress	Update
2016/17	At the end of March 2017, 1,954 of the 16,356 applicants registered as Full Duty Applicants (FDA) were on the waiting list for a rural area, (12% of the total registered as homeless). Between 01/04/2016 and 31/03/2017 there were 1,093 allocations in rural areas, 14.25% of the total (7672). Of these, 736 to applicants registered as FDAs (homeless).
2017/18	At the end of March 2018, 2,056 of the 17,520 applicants registered as FDA were on the waiting list for a rural area, (11.7% of the total registered as homeless). Between 01/04/2017 and 31/3/2018 there were 1,001 allocations in rural areas, 13.58% of the total (7,373). Of these, 699 to applicants registered as FDAs (homeless).
2018/19	At the end of March 2019, 2,236 of the 19,629 applicants registered as Full Duty Applicant were on the waiting list for a rural area (11.4% of the total registered as homeless). Between 01/04/2018 and 31/03/2019 there were 1,129 allocations in rural areas, 14.7% of the total (7,696). Of these, 855 to applicants registered as FDAs (homeless).
2019/20	At the end of March 2020, 2,431 of 20,951 applicants registered as FDA were on the waiting list for a rural area (11.6% of total registered as homeless). Between 01/04/2019 and 31/03/2020 there were 960 allocations in rural areas, 14.43% of the total (6,654). Of these, 725 to applicants registered as FDAs (homeless).

Whilst the proportion of rural applicants with FDA status has fluctuated around 12% over the strategy period, the number of individuals has gradually risen from 1,954 to 2,431, in line with overall homelessness trends. Between 01/04/2016 and 31/03/2020, the Housing Executive allocated 3,015 rural properties to applicants registered as homeless, helping to address this need.

The Housing Executive's revised Homelessness Strategy 'Ending Homelessness Together' published in April 2017, provides strategic direction on how homelessness will be addressed from April 2017 to March 2022. Rural homelessness features in Area Action Plans which shape the ongoing strategic planning of services.

Action 19 Ensure that the 'housing options' approach including the new policy, procedures and associated training take account of housing support issues which are specific to rural areas.

Progress	Update
Action completed 2018/19	Following the introduction of the statutory duty in June 2018, bespoke training was delivered to our Housing Services policy staff, highlighting our duty under the Rural Needs Act and in particular the importance of capturing latent demand in rural areas. Training focused on how the needs of our rural customers can differ from our urban customers and emphasised the role of housing services staff in determining rural areas where there may be housing shortages. An advice note was also issued to all staff to explain the importance of identifying and capturing rural housing needs during housing options discussions with our customers.

'Sustainable Rural Communities' – Implementation Plan 2016-2020

Objective 3: To provide housing support to vulnerable people in rural areas

Action 20 Promote the availability of homelessness advice and support services in rural areas.

Progress	Update
2016-20	In line with our Homelessness Strategy, we have implemented a multimedia approach to promoting the availability of homelessness advice and support. This has comprised of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homelessness Local Area Groups have been established across Northern Ireland; • Local Homelessness Service Directories have been produced for each area and are available on the Housing Executive website; • Homelessness information leaflets have been produced specifically for doctor's surgeries across Northern Ireland; • A Young Persons Peer Mentoring project was launched in 2019/20 with the aim of producing web information for young people faced with homelessness; • E-learning has been delivered to all front end staff and all staff have been provided with information cards as a first stage in the roll out of homelessness awareness training to all sectors; and • A range of promotion and awareness activities have been arranged by the Local Area Groups during Homelessness Awareness Week and the introduction of a Homelessness Prevention Fund has provided funding for a further range of awareness raising projects across Northern Ireland.

Over the strategy period, homelessness information and advice has also been provided and discussed at the Balmoral Show and at events associated with our rural housing need tests. Information has also been published in at least one edition of Rural Matters annually.

Action 21 Carry out an exercise to gather information on existing Supporting People services by client group to identify potential gaps in rural areas and examine best practice elsewhere to address these.

Progress	Update
2016-20	GIS mapping indicates that 97 accommodation-based services are located in rural areas and floating support is provided to approximately 1000 people who live in rural areas. (GIS mapping continues to be developed to display services thematically for future planning). The Supporting People Plan for 19/20 identified the need to address gaps in floating support for older people and younger people in a range of locations, some of these have a significant rural element. In response, in August 2019, Supporting People initiated a competitive selection exercise and as a result new Floating Support Services for Older and Younger people are now fully operational. These services will address gaps in service provision, particularly in rural areas, and provide much needed housing support to vulnerable people.

Action 22 Develop Outcomes Framework for all Supporting People services to include an update on rural dwellers where appropriate.

Progress	Update
Action completed 2017/18	These outcomes focus on customer experiences of all long/short term Supporting People funded services. These experiences are captured on a regional basis and so include rural customers. This work will inform the future commissioning of services.

'Sustainable Rural Communities' – Implementation Plan 2016-2020

Objective 3: To provide housing support to vulnerable people in rural areas

Action 23 Examine the potential to fund a rural community-based service aimed at older people.

Progress	Update
2016-20	The Supporting People Team is working with Providers and other key stakeholders in relation to the Supporting People Plan 2019/20, and Strategic Intent 2020-23. A workshop was held with providers of sheltered services and other key stakeholders on the 20th November 2019, to seek their views on the 'hub and spoke' approach which could connect sheltered services with other older people who reside in the community, including rural areas. The initial findings into the feasibility of the model, including feedback from stakeholders, will be sent to members of the Regional Thematic Group for Older People for consideration and will be discussed at the next meeting which will take place once restrictions associated with Covid-19 are relaxed.

Action 24 Monitor assessment and provision of housing for wheelchair needs and provision for complex needs on a rural-urban basis.

Progress	Update
2016/17	At the end of March 2017, there were 96 rural applicants on the waiting list who required wheelchair accommodation, 20.25% of total (474) and 663 rural applicants who have complex needs, 16% of total (4148). Five rural new build social wheelchair accessible units were completed in 2016/17.
2017/18	At the end of March 2018, there were 89 rural applicants on the waiting list who required wheelchair accommodation, 18.5% of total (480) and 7,856 rural applicants who have complex needs, 16.4% of total (4,794). Six rural social new build wheelchair standard units were completed in 2017/18.
2018/19	At the end of March 2019, there were 87 rural applicants on the waiting list who require wheelchair standard accommodation. This is 17.5% of the total (497). There were 1,007 rural applicants who have complex needs, 16.3% of the total (6,183) Two rural social new build wheelchair standard units were completed in 2018/19.
2019/20	At the end of March 2020, there were 82 rural applicants on the waiting list who require wheelchair standard accommodation. (15.3% of the total (536) and 1,217 rural applicants who have complex needs (18.01% of the total (7,146). By the close of Q4 2019/20, one unit of wheelchair standard accommodation had started on site in a rural area. Four of the 106 units completed were wheelchair units.

Accessible housing is a key enabler for people with a disability, allowing them to live in their own homes and communities if they choose to do so. The Housing Executive, in conjunction with the NI Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA), developed an Accessible Housing Register (AHR) for social housing stock in Northern Ireland which was implemented in 2018/19.

Action 25 Ensure cross-representation between the Rural Residents' Forum and the Disability Forum to ensure that the particular challenges facing people with disabilities in rural areas are considered when scrutinising new policies and services.

Progress	Update
2016-20	One member of the Rural Residents' Forum also sits on the Disability Forum and ensures that information from both forums is shared. Members also take part in the central and local housing forums and in inter-agency groups which provides an opportunity for issues to be raised at every level of engagement.

'Sustainable Rural Communities' – Implementation Plan 2016-2020

Objective 4: To contribute to the development of safe, cohesive and engaged rural neighbourhoods.

Action 26 Monitor the development of pending welfare changes and mitigations on Housing Executive activities to determine if any changes are required as a consequence.

Progress	Update
2016-20	Universal Credit (UC) is now live across Northern Ireland and it must be claimed online. It is recognised that tenants in rural areas may be particularly affected by lack of internet access. Therefore computers have been provided in our local offices to give customers internet access to allow them to manage their UC claim. Ongoing communications work and signposting is underway with local offices and community groups, including via the Central Housing Forum which has rural representation. Universal Credit Customer Journey research is now complete and the draft report is being quality assured; the sample is representative of Housing Executive stock rural/urban split. Future rural specific Universal Credit research is also included in the Research Programme for 2020/21.

Objective 4



To contribute to the development of safe, cohesive and engaged neighbourhoods.

We recognise that some of our rural communities have to deal with complex social issues that can impact on quality of life. The Housing Executive is committed to working with these communities to help them to build capacity, build relationships and create safe and inclusive neighbourhoods which improve the outlook for all residents.

The eight actions included to support Objective 4 focused on ensuring that we recognise and address the particular needs of our rural housing communities and that we can help them to address local issues with local solutions.

An intergenerational art project supported by the Housing Executive's Community Cohesion programme has been completed in Cullnady.

99

Community Cohesion support for Rural Groups



What we did differently for rural areas:

- Worked closely with our Rural Residents' Forum to ensure that rural issues and perspectives are considered when developing and reviewing Housing Executive policies, strategies, plans and services.

The Forum has also been promoted throughout the Housing Executive as a key consultee for policy owners when fulfilling our duty of due regard to rural needs under the Rural Needs Act NI 2016.

- Undertake rural research projects with the Rural Residents' Forum and Rural Community Network.

Over the Strategy period, our Rural Residents' Forum has completed research on the effectiveness of our rural housing need testing process and has actively promoted the need for an increase in rural new build schemes on the Social Housing Development Programme.

- Ensure that rural areas receive an equitable share of our funding/support programmes.

Between 2016/17 and 2019/20, the Housing Executive worked with rural communities all across Northern Ireland to promote good relations and to invest in community development projects. The BRIC 2 Programme was delivered to 10 rural groups between 2016 and 2018. Our Community Cohesion Team led by area based Good Relations Officers, worked in partnership with 99 rural community groups between 2016 and 2020 to deliver estate-based projects.

The Rural Residents' Forum

The Rural Residents' Forum (RRF) was developed by the Rural Community Network to support rural tenants. It was established in 2009 as part of the Housing Executive's Rural Homes and People Strategy and is now part of the Housing Community Network (HCN) focusing specifically on scrutinising housing issues from a rural perspective.

The Forum represents residents from rural housing estates across Northern Ireland and membership is drawn from representatives across all six counties. It is supported by the Housing Executive's Rural & Regeneration Unit, the Rural Community Network, and is attended by Supporting Communities.

The group has actively engaged with Housing Executive staff over key issues such as DfC's Social Housing Reform Programme consultation, housing needs tests and the Housing Executive's Community Involvement Strategy.

The Forum is a place for residents to share good practice, share experiences of their representation of their areas on various committees and to discuss issues common to rural residents across the region. The residents have a keen interest in working to ensure all rural residents have access to information, advice and support.

Focus on Community Cohesion

Engaging, enabling and empowering our communities is at the core of what we do. Through our Community Cohesion Funding Programme we actively encourage communities to make improvements in their areas. Community Cohesion funding has been awarded for a range of projects and initiatives in rural areas and the examples below show the variety of excellent work undertaken by dedicated community groups to deliver real benefits in their local community.

Community Festival in Killyleagh

We provided Community Cohesion funding for Killyleagh Community Association's Summer Festival in August 2018, which was attended by over 5,000 people.

During the event, residents had the chance to learn about exotic animals in the reptile display, try out archery and take part in tribal dancing. Children and young people also enjoyed getting their faces painted, jumping on the bouncy castle and meeting the inhabitants of the petting zoo.

The festival, at the historic Killyleagh Castle, was a great way to showcase why living in the village is so special and allowed people of different backgrounds to come together to share their culture, to have new experiences and to have some fun.

The event generated a great sense of pride in the village, instilled a sense of community spirit and encouraged people of all ages to play an active and positive role within their community.



Rural Residents Forum



Community Festival in Killyleagh



Community Garden in Fox Park, Omagh

New landscaping brightened up a rural housing estate outside Omagh, thanks to the joint efforts of the Housing Executive and the Fox Park Residents Group.

The Housing Executive invested nearly £15,000 in Fox Park by creating a new community garden and meeting space. The garden offers people living in this rural area a warm welcome, a place to relax and de-stress and a chance to socialise with neighbours and make new friends.

Fox Park Residents Group worked with the Housing Executive's Grounds Maintenance staff to create raised beds, plant flowers and shrubs, and install a picnic area. They also secured funding through the Community Cohesion Programme to assist with the project.

The project brought people together and enhanced feelings of pride in the area. It also transformed a piece of unused land into a real asset that the entire community can enjoy.

Armoey Intergenerational Project

Armoey residents, young and old, came together to cut turf in The Moss.

This Community Cohesion funded intergenerational project involved bringing people in the village together to teach the younger generation about the work and skills involved in cutting and preparing turf, a tradition from days gone by. This interesting project, that recalled local history for a new generation, was delivered by Armoey Community Association.

Reimaging at Mill Park Innisrush

Our Cohesion funding enabled the residents of Mill Park in Innisrush, near Portglenone, to enjoy a stunning new bench and feature art at the entrance at the estate.

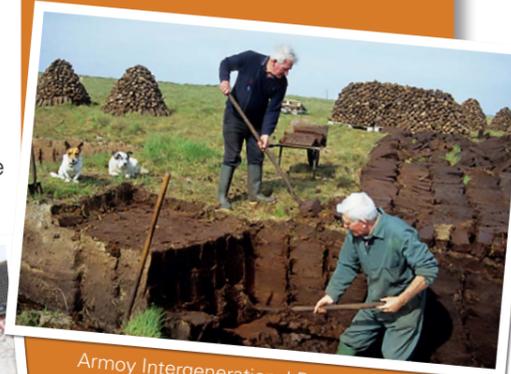
The project was initiated by the Four Towns Rural Regeneration Group. This local community organisation promotes peace and inclusivity within the village. Their pride in their local heritage and environment was evident in the recent re-imagining of the entrance to Mill Park estate to make it more welcoming for everyone. A seating area with planting was provided for local people to enjoy. The addition of the flax wheel acknowledges the origins of the area, and an information board captures interesting historical facts and details. The Group have created a feature that the local community can benefit from and be proud of, and they hope to be able to do more to improve and promote these rural areas in the future.



Case studies



Community Garden in Fox Park, Omagh



Armoey Intergenerational Project

Reimaging at Mill Park Innisrush

'Housing for All' Scheme, Sion Mills, Rural HA

Old Mill Court, Sion Mills is a development which was completed by Rural Housing Association in 2019.

As a 'Housing for All' Scheme Old Mill Court receives funding from the Housing Executive and the Department for Communities to produce a comprehensive five-year good relations plan for the area, which actively encourages more inclusive and connected places to live through the implementation of community focused initiatives. By working in partnership with local stakeholders, Rural Housing Association has developed a sustained programme of activity, aimed at creating more diverse, inclusive, and connected communities within the Sion Mills area. From project inception Rural Housing Association and GM Design Associates prioritised community engagement, as a tool to better understand the needs of the local area.

When considering a name for the new development, Rural Housing Association and GM Design Associates conducted a series of engagement exercises with the local Primary School to reflect the community-led ethos of the development, culminating in a pupil competition to name the new scheme. The result was the name 'Old Mill Court', chosen by a P6 pupil.

The establishment of the Old Mill Court Advisory Group provides an example of good practice in terms of community involvement. The advisory group comprised of local businesses, community organisations, Housing Executive and PSNI, was central to shaping a five-year good relations plan for the area. With expert local knowledge, the advisory group played an integral role in identifying community relations initiatives that would address some of the issues impacting local residents in the area.

To date, community initiatives have included the delivery of a 'Healthy Communities' Project, targeted at over 50s, who are impacted by social isolation, poor mental and/ or physical health or loneliness. This project works in partnership with local health and wellbeing organisations to help improve the cognitive, mental and physical health of older adults living within Old Mill Court and the surrounding community of Sion Mills. The project provides a safe space for participants to talk about positive mental health, engage in health checks and participate in health awareness sessions.

As part of Old Mill Court's five-year Community Relations Plan, tenants of the new scheme also have the opportunity to participate in 'bonding' events to promote the development of positive relationships within the new scheme. Alongside these 'bonding' events a series of 'bridging' projects will support new tenants to engage in community relations activities that promote integration between tenants of the new scheme and the surrounding community of Sion Mills. This proactive approach to building vibrant and connected communities is a tangible example of the impact a comprehensive community plan can have on reconnecting communities and building a sense of belonging in rural areas.

Case studies



Old Mill Court, Sion Mills (Rural HA): Winner of the RTPI Award for Planning Excellence 2020: Smalls Schemes Category



4

Rural "Housing for all" schemes



'Sustainable Rural Communities' – Implementation Plan 2016-2020	
Objective 4: To contribute to the development of safe, cohesive and engaged rural neighbourhoods.	
Action 27	Promote and develop the role of the Rural Residents' Forum in the rural proofing of new and revised Housing Executive policies and strategies.
Progress	Update
2016-20	Over the strategy period, the Rural Residents' Forum has been consulted on all major Housing Executive policies/strategies and has compiled a response in conjunction with Rural Community Network where appropriate. The Forum have also been promoted throughout the Housing Executive as a key consultee for policy owners when fulfilling our duty of due regard to rural needs under the Rural Needs Act NI 2016.
Action 28	Undertake at least one Rural Research Project a year with the Rural Residents' Forum and Rural Community Network.
Progress	Update
2016-20	Over the strategy period, research completed on the effectiveness of the rural housing need testing process fed into the review of this policy which led to increased positive test results. In 2018/19, the Forum went on to produce a bespoke leaflet on latent demand/housing needs tests aimed at promoting the tests to rural residents and community groups. This has been shared in district offices, council offices, at housing need events and will also be distributed at upcoming rural events, such as the Balmoral Show. The Rural Residents' Forum and Rural Community Network have also focused specifically on the shortage of rural new build schemes and prepared a joint discussion paper which highlighted the potential impact of a lack of new social housing in rural areas. This paper was the driver for meetings with housing associations, government departments and elected representatives. Most recently, the Forum has met with the acting Minister for Communities to request a greater strategic focus on the provision of rural housing in Northern Ireland.
Action 29	Ensure that at least one young person from a rural area is included in the Shadow Housing Forum.
Progress	Update
2016-20	Following investigation and preparatory work, the Northern Ireland Youth Forum decided not to progress with the creation of a shadow housing forum but instead to build capacity and form three regional forums instead. Recruitment has taken place and youth forums have been established for the North, South and Belfast Regions. There is rural representation on both the North and South Regional Youth Forums.
Action 30	Ensure that rural areas are considered for funding/support programmes stemming from the Housing Executive's Community Cohesion Strategy including:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least 4 rural estates in the BRIC 2 Programme; • At least 10 rural projects funded as part of an Estate Based Strategy.
Progress	Update
2016-18	Between 2016 and 2018, the BRIC 2 programme included six rural areas in phase 1 and four in phase 2. A total of 18 rural areas received Community Cohesion Funding Programme, including two in Derry/Strabane, two in Causeway Coast & Glens, four in Mid-Ulster, one in Ards & North Down, two in Fermanagh/Omagh, one in Mid & East Antrim and one in Belfast (Hannahstown).

'Sustainable Rural Communities' – Implementation Plan 2016-2020	
Objective 4: To contribute to the development of safe, cohesive and engaged rural neighbourhoods.	
2018/19	The Building Relationships in Communities (BRIC) Programme closed in 2017/18 and the Community Cohesion Team continued to work with the groups who had been in receipt of BRIC funding to offer support through other Cohesion funding streams. A total of 39 rural projects were included on the Community Cohesion funding programme in 2018/19, including seven in Derry/Strabane, four in Causeway Coast & Glens, 14 in Mid-Ulster, one in Ards & North Down, three in Fermanagh/Omagh, one in Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon, seven in Newry, Mourne and Down, one in Mid & East Antrim and one in Belfast (Hannahstown).
2019/20	In 2019/20, 42 Projects were approved for Community Cohesion funding in Rural Areas across NI. This included 11 estate-based projects in Causeway, four in Lisburn & Castlereagh, eight in Fermanagh/Omagh, one in Hannahstown, eight in Mid Ulster, three in Mid & East Antrim, two in North Down & Ards, one in Antrim/Newtownabbey and four in Newry, Mourne & Down. This accounted for a total investment of £74,625.52 in these rural areas. Seven rural groups also participated in the Listen Share Change Project (Armoy, Round Tower, Ballintoy, Claudy, Foreglen, Sion Mills and Roe Valley (Ballykelly)).
Over the Strategy period, the Housing Executive worked with rural communities all across Northern Ireland to promote good relations and to invest in community development projects. The BRIC 2 Programme was delivered to 10 rural groups between 2016 and 2018. Our Community Cohesion Team led by area based Good Relations Officers, worked in partnership with 99 rural community groups between 2016 and 2020 to deliver estate-based projects.	
Action 31	Consider how the Housing Executive can provide support to agencies and departments in the delivery of 'contested space' interventions in a rural context.
Progress	Update
2016-2020	Over the strategy period, the Housing Executive continued to take part in the 'Beyond Belfast' Forum administered by Rural Community Network. This Inter Agency Forum seeks to raise awareness of interface issues in rural areas, to remove barriers and encourage the appropriate use of contested spaces. The Housing Executive's Cohesion Strategy is highlighted as an important intervention in contested spaces in rural areas.
Action 32	Ensure that rural housing schemes are considered for the Together Building United Communities (TBUC) Shared New Build Programme, subject to eligibility criteria.
Progress	Update
2016-2020	Between 2016 and 2018, two of the ten schemes included in the Together Building United Communities Shared New Build Programme were located in rural areas. Choice Housing Association completed a 12 unit scheme at Crossgar Road, Saintfield and Clanmil Housing Association completed a 17 unit scheme at Main Street, Dundrum. In 2017/18, the Shared New Build Programme was renamed 'Housing for All'. Between 2018 and 2020, four rural schemes have been included in the programme, Garvaghy Road, Portglenone (10 units), Coolnafinney, Eglinton (14 units), Downpatrick Street, Crossgar (20 units), Lismore Park Sion Mills (14 units). Lismore Park Sion Mills (14 units) was completed in December 2019 by Rural Housing Association and this scheme has since been shortlisted for the Royal Society of Ulster Architects (RSUA) Design Award, the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) 'Best Housing Development' Award and has won the 2020 Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) 'Small Housing Schemes' Award.

'Sustainable Rural Communities' – Implementation Plan 2016-2020

Objective 4: To contribute to the development of safe, cohesive and engaged rural neighbourhoods.

Action 33 Promote the availability of advice and support services which deal with community safety in rural areas.

Progress	Update
2016-2020 2016-2020	<p>Over the strategy period, Community Safety Projects were funded in Antrim & Newtownabbey, Newry, Mourne and Down, Mid & East Antrim, Causeway Coast and Glens and Mid Ulster council areas. These included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good Morning Down, a telephone befriending and support service for older people across the former Down Council area; • Antrim & Newtownabbey 4 Tier Home Security Scheme, a flexible tailored approach to meet the specific crime prevention and community safety needs of individuals and situations; • Mid and East Antrim Ageing well Partnership provides services for older people; • Mid Ulster Ageing Well Partnership; • Dervock & District Community Association delivered a range of workshops to address ASB; and • Loughgiel Community Association Healthy Living Centre lighting project. <p>Community Safety Warden Schemes supported by the Housing Executive in conjunction with Police and Community Safety Partnerships are also operational in Newry, Mourne & Down, Antrim & Newtownabbey, Mid & East Antrim and Derry & Strabane council areas.</p> <p>Community Safety initiatives and guidance were promoted in various editions of Rural Matters over the Strategy period and at the Housing Executive stand at the Balmoral Show.</p>

Action 34 Ensure that at least one rural community is included in the Pilot Demonstration Project aimed at increasing digital inclusion.

Progress	Update
2016-2020	This Action was completed in 2016/17. Several tenants in Fermanagh/Enniskillen are continuing with the Digital 4 Change Pilot Project to carry on the momentum and to ensure connectivity with each other.



To work in partnership with others to assist in rural development.

The Housing Executive has a long history of working with partners in councils, other funding bodies and community groups to support the regeneration of neighbourhoods. The six actions included under Objective 5 recognise the need for regeneration within rural communities that extends beyond the provision of housing. The Housing Executive also provide funding and support to rural communities to undertake projects that are aimed at improving the social well-being and quality of life of residents, both now and into the future.

Between 2016/17 and 2019/20, approximately £1.63m was invested in the development of our rural communities, this included Social Enterprise, Community Cohesion funding, Community Grants and capital funding.



What we did differently for rural areas:

- **Provided a match funding programme to support the delivery of the 2014-2020 NI Rural Development Programme (RDP).** Under the 2014-2020 Rural Development Programme, the Housing Executive were able to provide match funding to a total of 55 rural groups who delivered a range of community based projects under the Basic Services and Village Renewal measures. Projects ranged from small environment improvement schemes to multi-functional community hub buildings. The Housing Executive's total investment of just under £470k enabled each of these groups to draw down on RDP funding and to deliver these capital projects.
- **Provided Rural Community Awards to recognise and reward the valuable work of rural community groups.** The Rural Community Awards competition was launched in 2014 with the aim of rewarding the work of volunteers who come together to improve their areas for residents and visitors. The competition has generated a huge level of interest over the strategy period and the £1,000 prize money has supported the future projects of the 24 rural community groups who were successful.
- **Ensured that rural areas receive an equitable share of funding/support programmes.** Over the strategy period, a total of 71 Community Grants were awarded to community groups based in rural areas and 14 rural Social Enterprises received support through our Social Enterprise Initiative. Our Heritage in Housing scheme also included four rural properties in Portaferry and Richhill. Community and Social Enterprise Grants were promoted through engagement with our Housing Community Network, Rural Residents' Forum, Social Enterprise Hubs, our area and local offices, Rural Matters publications and at the Housing Executive stand at the Balmoral Show.

Rural Community Awards Competition

The Rural Community Awards Competition was launched in 2014 following consultation with young people which highlighted the need to address littering and vandalism in some rural villages across Northern Ireland. The competition was therefore shaped to reward the work of volunteers who come together to improve their areas for residents and visitors. The competition offers three different awards (the Rural Community Spirit Award, Cleaner and Greener Rural Community Award and the Sustainable Village of the Year Award) with two categories for each award. The competition has generated a huge level of interest over the strategy period and the £1,000 prize money has supported the future projects of the 24 rural community groups who were successful.

In order to reach out to rural communities across Northern Ireland, every year the Rural Community Awards Competition has been launched at the Balmoral Show in May. The winners are presented with their awards at a community networking event in alternate council areas. This provides an opportunity for community groups in that area to come together and exchange ideas and experiences and for the Housing Executive to promote our services and relevant funding programmes.

In 2018, we linked our networking event with the International Day of Rural Women. The conference was held in the Mellon Country Inn outside Omagh and was a great opportunity to recognise the invaluable role that women play in community work and in identifying and promoting the needs of families in rural areas. Our awards were presented by Anne Marie McAleese, presenter of the BBC Radio Ulster show 'Your Place and Mine'. Anne Marie took the opportunity to entertain the audience with anecdotes of her visits with rural communities over the years, highlighting the uniqueness of rural Northern Ireland and the importance of celebrating those who quietly sustain and improve community life in rural areas.



Rural Community Award Presentations 2018 & International Day of Rural Women



Clady, 'Cleaner & Greener award winners 2016



Community Award Runners-up 2019

Rural Development Programme (NI RDP) Match Funding Project - Learmount Dementia Friendly Hub

The Housing Executive recognises the importance of supporting rural communities to deliver projects that will enhance their local areas, make them attractive places to live and create thriving rural communities. Through our Rural Development Programme match funding (2015-2018), we offered community groups up to a maximum of 15% of funding (up to £20,000), for projects accepted under the Basic Services and Village Renewal measures of the NI RDP.

In October 2016, Learmount became the first rural area in Northern Ireland to be recognised as a 'Dementia Friendly Community'. The group has worked extensively since then to make their village a place where people with dementia and their families are supported to maintain and enhance their quality of life.

After achieving funding from a range of sources, including the NI RDP and over £3,000 from the Housing Executive, Learmount Community Development Group has now created a Dementia Friendly Hub. This is a safe and welcoming communal space where people with dementia and their families can come to relax, socialise and be signposted to support services, with specific dementia friendly adaptations in place to make the space accessible as possible.

The Hub opened in September 2019 and offers users the opportunity to enjoy the 'memory café', to try a new hobby and to take part in reminiscence therapy. It has also allowed the group to enhance their existing signposting service and support group. When someone has dementia it can have a massive impact on their independence and can limit their social activities. Through this Dementia Friendly Hub, Learmount Community Development Group are helping people with dementia to continue to play an active role in village life.



Learmount Resource Centre



NIHE RDP match funding project: Refurbishment of the Old Courthouse, Kesh, Fermanagh (Before & After)



Portaferry Heritage in Housing Scheme 2018/19



BKN Upcycling, Fermanagh - NIHE Social Enterprise Project 2016/17

'Sustainable Rural Communities' – Implementation Plan 2016-2020

Objective 5: To work in partnership with others to assist in rural development

Action 35 Ensure that the issues facing rural communities are raised to local councils through the Community Planning process.

Progress	Update
2016-2020	As statutory Community Planning partners, we worked closely with each of the local councils to ensure rural housing needs and issues were considered in each community plan and also that our land asset was identified as a potential opportunity for services which will benefit the community. Each council now has an adopted community plan and, as a strategic partner, we are involved in the implementation of relevant actions.

Action 36 Promote and monitor the uptake in rural areas of Housing Executive community funding initiatives including:

- Community Grants;
- Social Enterprise Funding;
- Social Enterprise Agreements.

Progress	Update
2016-2020	Over the strategy period, a total of 71 Community Grants were awarded to community groups based in rural areas and 14 rural Social Enterprises received support through our Social Enterprise Initiative. Community and Social Enterprise Grants were promoted through engagement with our Housing Community Network, Rural Residents' Forum, Social Enterprise Hubs, our area and local offices, Rural Matters publications and at the Housing Executive stand at the Balmoral Show.

Action 37 Develop and implement a match funding programme to support the delivery of the 2014-2020 Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme (NI RDP).

Progress	Update
2016/17	The Housing Executive launched an RDP match funding initiative in May 2017 and received a high volume of applications for support of Basic Services and Village Renewal projects across rural Northern Ireland. Following assessment, £137,000 of funding was provided to 10 community groups.
2017/18	In 2017/18, a total of £202,000 was invested in 18 capital projects, ranging from community hubs to village Environmental Improvement Schemes.
2018/19	During 2018/19, a total of £130,000 was invested in eight capital projects that support the development and regeneration needs of rural communities.
2019/20	By the close of 2019/20 RDP match funding had been provided to 19 capital projects in rural areas across Northern Ireland to the value of £300k. Two projects were unable to proceed due to Covid-19 restrictions but have recommenced in 2020/21.

Action 38 Monitor the delivery of the 'Heritage in Housing' Initiative in rural areas.

Progress	Update
2016-2018	The aim of the 3 year Heritage in Housing scheme (2015-18) was to restore 15 empty properties and at the end of March 2018 we have exceeded that target, contributing to the restoration of 17 properties. The scheme included 4 rural properties in Portaferry and Richhill.

'Sustainable Rural Communities' – Implementation Plan 2016-2020

Objective 5: To work in partnership with others to assist in rural development

Action 39 Promote and administer the annual 'Rural Community Awards' competition.

Progress	Update
2016-2020	The Rural Community Awards Competition was launched in 2014 following consultation with young people which highlighted the need to address littering and vandalism in some rural villages across Northern Ireland. The competition was therefore shaped to reward the work of volunteers who come together to improve their areas for residents and visitors. The competition offers three different awards (the Rural Community Spirit Award, Cleaner and Greener Rural Community Award and the Sustainable Village of the Year Award) with two categories for each award. Each year, the Rural Community Awards Competition has been launched at the Balmoral Show in May and the winners presented with their awards at a community networking event in the autumn. The competition has generated a huge level of interest over the strategy period and the £1,000 prize money has supported the future projects of the 24 rural community groups who were successful.

Action 40 Monitor and promote the use of surplus Housing Executive land and property in rural areas for community-based projects which will promote health and well-being and/or facilitate social enterprise

Progress	Update
2016-2020	Housing Services' Community Lettings Policy will continue to facilitate rural communities' development and local initiatives, where practicable. Currently there are approximately 203 community lets and 46 Housing Executive commercial properties let to community groups across Northern Ireland. 13 of these units are located in rural areas.



What we did differently for rural areas:

- Published biennial editions of 'Rural Matters', our magazine aimed at promoting what we have to offer to people living in rural areas and highlighting our achievements through the Rural Strategy.

Each year, we have produced two editions of Rural Matters, one in spring to coincide with the Balmoral Show and one in winter. The magazine provides updates on new build schemes, rural housing need tests and the Rural Community Awards Competition. The magazine is also used to provide useful information on homelessness, anti-social behaviour (ASB) and available grant funding as well as relevant contact information.

- Coordinated a Housing Executive stand at the annual Royal Ulster Agricultural Society Balmoral Show.

The Balmoral Show gives us an opportunity to reach out to people in rural areas to promote the range of services that we offer and to answer any queries they may have.

- Developed a policy and Staff Training Programme for the introduction of the Rural Needs Act (2016) NI in June 2018.

In 2018/19, we developed and delivered a bespoke face to face training package which was targeted at staff involved in policy writing and service development across the Housing Executive. In accordance with our duty of due regard, we carry out Rural Needs Impact Assessments on all of our policies, strategies, plans and services and record these in a central database on an on-going basis to ensure that we can fulfil our reporting requirements for Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA).

The three actions included under this theme were identified as being necessary to support the monitoring and communication of the Rural Strategy. Communication and awareness-raising is at the heart of this Strategy. Many of the issues faced by people living in rural areas stem from isolation, reduced access to services and poor connectivity. We continuously seek to develop new and improved ways of engaging with rural tenants and residents in order to monitor the effectiveness of our services and support.



Housing Executive stand at the Balmoral Show 2019

'Sustainable Rural Communities' – Implementation Plan 2016-2020

Monitoring & Communication

Action	Publicise the work undertaken by the Housing Executive in rural areas, including publication of 'Rural Matters' twice a year and production of an Annual Progress Report.
Action 41	Publicise the work undertaken by the Housing Executive in rural areas, including publication of 'Rural Matters' twice a year and production of an Annual Progress Report.
Progress	Update
2016-2020	Each year, the Housing Executive's Rural & Regeneration Unit has produced two editions of Rural Matters, one in spring to coincide with the Balmoral Show and one in winter. The magazine provides updates on the progress of the Rural Strategy including new build schemes, rural housing need tests and the Rural Community Awards competition. The magazine is also used to provide useful information on homelessness, ASB and available grant funding as well as relevant contact information. An Annual Progress Report has been produced for each year of the Strategy and launched with partners and stakeholders.
Action 42	Monitor and report on the views of rural tenants on the services provided to them by the Housing Executive.
Progress	Update
2016-2020	The Continuous Tenants Omnibus Survey indicates that overall satisfaction for the Housing Executive in rural areas is 93%, compared to 88% in urban areas.
Action 43	Liaise with DAERA to revise the policy and procedures for rural proofing to reflect the provisions of the Rural Needs Bill.
Progress	Update
2016-2018	The Rural Needs Act came into force for the Housing Executive on 1st June 2018, with the first monitoring report due in September 2019. In 2018/19, we developed and delivered a bespoke face to face training package which was targeted at staff involved in policy writing and service development across the Housing Executive. In accordance with our duty of due regard, we carry out Rural Needs Impact Assessments on all of our policies, strategies, plans and services and record these in a central database on an on-going basis to ensure that we can fulfil our reporting requirements for DAERA.
Action 44	Liaise with other jurisdictions across the UK to share learning/experiences of rural housing/regeneration initiatives.
Progress	Update
2016-2018	Each year, the Rural & Regeneration Unit have hosted or participated in a Community Networking Conference. This Conference has brought together representatives of rural communities and statutory bodies in alternate council areas to share experiences highlight issues and identify possible solutions. Over the strategy period, the Rural and Regeneration Unit have also attended the Co-operation Ireland Rural Conference in Dundalk, participated in the Rural Needs Act Review Working Group hosted by DAERA and engaged with Scottish counterparts to discuss and promote our approach to rural housing need testing. The Rural and Regeneration Unit are currently liaising with Rural Housing Scotland to participate in their first online Annual Conference in 2021.



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