



REACHING RURAL

Rural Strategy & Action Plan
Annual Progress Report
2022-2023

Introduction

The Housing Executive's 'Reaching Rural' Rural Strategy 2021 - 2025 & Action Plan (The Rural Strategy) was launched in 2021. The purpose of this report is to advise on progress made during Year 2 (2022/23).

The Rural Strategy encapsulates the significant investment which the Housing Executive contributes to support tenants and customers in rural areas and demonstrates our ongoing commitment to pay due regard to the needs of our rural communities in line with the duty set out in the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016.

The Rural Strategy sets out three high level outcomes and twelve priorities under the three cross cutting themes of:

- a. Supporting rural customers;**
- b. Enabling the provision of affordable rural homes; and**
- c. Securing the future of our rural communities.**

The Year 2 Rural Action Plan contained 27 high-level actions under the three key themes. At the end of 2022/23, progress was demonstrated against all actions.

In 2022/23, through the various areas of our business activity, the Housing Executive invested approximately £55.1m in rural areas. This includes a wide range of housing and support services as well as funding to help to create and maintain vibrant and sustainable communities.

Activity Area	2022/23 Rural Spend (£m)
Planned Maintenance & Capital Improvement Work* -	12.2
Response Maintenance –	12.3
Grounds Maintenance –	1.7
Private Sector Grants* -	13.2
Supporting People –	8.0
Community Development (including, Community Cohesion and Community Involvement) –	0.14
Investment in New Build -	7.56
Total	55.1

*Approximate figure based on (average scheme cost) x (no. of rural completions in 2022/23)

Themes, Outcomes, Priorities



We ensure that our tenants and customers within our rural communities feel secure in their environment and can access additional housing support when it is required.

We enable the provision of affordable homes to contribute to balanced, inclusive and sustainable rural communities.

We contribute to the inclusive and sustainable growth and increased climate resilience of our rural communities.

People

We will consider the particular needs of our rural customers in the delivery of our housing solutions and support service;

We will continue to review and improve our housing support services to meet the needs of an ageing rural population;

We will invest in accessible housing solutions in rural areas;

We will support those who are faced with homelessness in rural areas;

We will facilitate the delivery of community-based support programmes which promote inclusion, cohesion and create opportunities for those living in our rural communities.

Property

We will enable the provision of affordable homes which address rural housing needs;

We will work with local councils to help shape planning policies which will deliver affordable homes and contribute to balanced and inclusive rural communities;

We will examine the potential to support the development of models of community-led housing in rural areas.

Place & Planet

We will invest in the improved energy efficiency of our rural housing stock and consider solutions for the future de-carbonisation of rural household heating systems;

We will support and encourage the improved energy efficiency of private sector homes in rural areas;

We will support and encourage the inclusion of planning policies in Local Development Plans which aim to promote climate change resilience within our rural communities;

We will work with partners to maximise the use of existing land and property assets in rural areas.

‘Reaching Rural’ Rural Action Plan 2021-2025 - Year 2

Theme 1: Supporting our rural customers

High level outcome: We ensure that our tenants and customers within our rural communities feel secure in their environment and can access additional housing support when it is required.

Our tenants and customers are at the heart of everything we do in the Housing Executive. In line with our corporate mission statement, our aim is to ensure that “everyone is able to live in an affordable and decent home, appropriate to their needs, in a safe and attractive place”. We recognise that the journey to achieve this will be different for every customer that we encounter.

Throughout the Rural Strategy we consider the particular journey of a rural customer, how it may differ and what we can change or improve to ensure that we can provide the same level of customer service regardless of location.

This theme examines how we can promote tenancy sustainment, independent living and reduce homelessness in rural areas. Key achievements during Year 2 include:

- The Housing Executive updated the Rural Residents’ Forum on new and existing services on a monthly basis. Topics of engagement included the Rural Strategy, Supporting People Strategy, Travellers Strategy, Corporate Plan and the work of Financial Inclusion Managers. The Forum scrutinises housing related strategies, policies and services from a rural perspective and provides an invaluable insight into the particular housing-related issues that are faced within their communities;
- The summer 2022 edition of Rural Matters showcased projects which have been successfully actioned as a result of the Strategy and promoted the numerous Housing Executive services discussed throughout the Strategy which can benefit our rural customers and wider rural communities. This edition included articles on homelessness support, energy saving, budgeting, oil buying clubs, grants, floating support and dementia support;

- The 2022 Rural Community Awards highlighted the invaluable work being undertaken by community groups and volunteers in rural areas, in the categories of Rural Community Spirit, Cleaner and Greener and Rural Community Champion. 6 prizes were awarded at an awards event held in Dungannon, showcasing the invaluable contribution volunteers are making in rural areas; and
- In August 2022, the Housing Executive again worked in partnership with Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations and Rural Community Network to deliver a successful rural housing campaign #RuralHomesWeek, in order to raise awareness of the role of social/affordable housing in sustaining rural communities. It demonstrated how we take a specific approach to addressing housing needs in rural areas.

What we do differently for rural areas:

- Advise on available support at rural housing information events.
- Work 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.
- Ensure that rural areas receive an equitable share of our funding/support programmes.
- Provide Rural Community Awards to recognise and reward the valuable work of rural community groups.



6

Rural Community
Awards



£24.5m

invested in
maintenance of our
rural homes



28

Community Cohesion
support for
28 projects



35

Community
Involvement support
for 35 projects



£8m

Supporting People
funding to
rural areas

	Action	Year 2 Update
1.	We will promote the availability of tenancy sustainment advice and funding support through our Rural Residents' Forum, our rural publications and at rural housing information events.	<p>The Housing Executive updated the Rural Residents' Forum on new and existing services on a monthly basis. Topics of engagement during 2022/23 included the Travellers Strategy, the Supporting People Strategy, Financial Inclusion Managers, and the Housing Executive's Corporate Plan.</p> <p>The summer 2022 edition of Rural Matters included a range of articles with useful information for rural tenants and customers including details on homelessness support, saving energy, budgeting, oil buying clubs, grants, floating support, dementia support and HomeSwapper.</p> <p>Local office staff provided tenancy related advice at four Housing Needs Test events during 2022/23 at Kilrea, Garvagh, Newtownbutler and Draperstown.</p>
2.	We will pilot rural "housing health-checks" as part of a rural housing need test event, where we can provide advice on a range of services related to tenancy sustainment and homelessness prevention.	<p>A cluster of rural Housing Need Tests for the Causeway District took place in June 2022, and included two in-person events. This was a pilot for the 'housing health-check' approach and was attended by staff representing the Area Office, Rural Unit, Financial Inclusion, Grants, and Place Shaping. Support was received from the Energy Unit and Homeless team.</p> <p>Feedback received was positive towards the approach of broader events.</p>
3.	Throughout the promotion an implementation of the Supporting People Strategy 2022-2025, we will pay due regard to the particular needs of customers living in rural areas.	<p>The Supporting People Three Year Strategic Plan and COVID Recovery Plan 2022-2025 was published during 2022/23 and promoted with rural stakeholders.</p> <p>Supporting People have been progressing the implementation of the strategy action plan, which addresses the needs of both rural and urban customers.</p> <p>The Supporting People expenditure in rural areas for 22/23 period was approximately £8 million. This provided 2,480 units of support through Accommodation based and Floating Support services in over 100 rural areas.</p>
4.	Work with Rural Community Network (RCN) / Rural Residents' Forum and the Rural Unit to promote Supporting People services to increase awareness in rural areas.	<p>Information on Supporting People services was shared with rural stakeholders to increase awareness in rural areas.</p> <p>The Supporting People 2021/22 Annual Report included information on service provision.</p> <p>Supporting People have developed videos to promote and showcase the projects funded by the Supporting People Innovation Fund, which have been uploaded to social media and include rural promotion.</p>

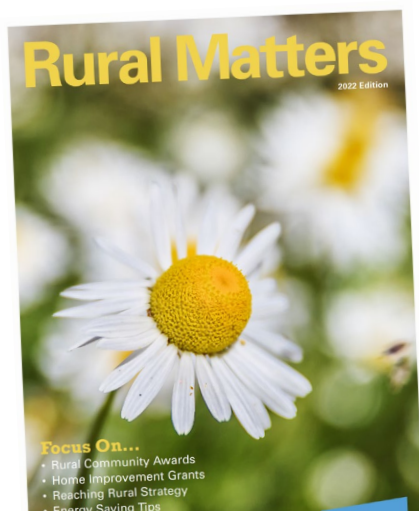
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	Action	Year 2 Update
5.	We will commence on site with an Assisted Technology pilot and review it with a view to applications in future schemes.	<p>Progress was made on working towards a scheme start for an Assisted Technology pilot. Applications for statutory approvals were submitted.</p> <p>A 'plug and play' installation is proposed using an Artificial Intelligence device set-up, along with a degree of hard-wired landlord components. We envisage the tenants will be able to control their lighting, heating, and video door entry (communal and flat) with the ability to contact friends and family free of charge (to promote independent living). This platform will allow them to view and control their internal environment and temperature.</p> <p>As a Landlord, we anticipate that this technology will enable us to remotely test the smoke alarms, adjust communal lighting, and diagnose heating and ventilation issues along with obtaining usage data. We propose installing air and ground source heat pumps to this block with solar thermal panels, as an aim towards greener technology and to alleviate fuel poverty to our customers.</p>
6.	We will continue to further develop the 'Dementia Friendly' approach and increase awareness and our understanding of dementia across our network of local offices to support independence and dignity for tenants who are impacted by dementia.	<p>The summer 2022 edition of Rural Matters included information for rural tenants and customers on dementia support.</p> <p>We continued to liaise with staff in the Alzheimer's Society regarding further training for staff on the Dementia Friendly Approach.</p> <p>We funded a Virtual Dementia Tour (VDT) in South Down, in conjunction with the Southern Health and Social Care Trust, to help increase awareness of dementia. The VDT is a mobile dementia simulator (bus) which helps attendees to understand the challenges experienced by individuals living with dementia. Feedback from the local office described a very beneficial and worthwhile experience for all attendees.</p> <p>Momentum of the Dementia Friendly Homes Service has been maintained by adapting the Dementia Friendly Communities workshops to suit online delivery. We currently created over 140 Dementia Friends throughout the organisation since the roll out of this service. To date, 175 Dementia Packs have been distributed across all of our offices which will help support customers to remain living independently in their home.</p>
7.	When it is fully established, we will analyse information from the Accessible Housing Register to help determine the need for increased accessible housing within new affordable housing schemes in rural areas.	<p>Training for Accessible Housing Register surveyors was completed.</p> <p>The collection of Accessible Housing Register data is an ongoing process for both the Housing Executive and Housing Associations. We are working with the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations to build the pool of Housing Association accessible stock.</p>

Table continues

	Action	Year 2 Update
8.	We will continue to influence local councils to incorporate within their Local development Plan a policy requiring all homes to be designed to Lifetime Homes standard and a proportion of wheelchair accessible homes in general housing stock in rural areas.	<p>Engagement with each of the local council planning teams is ongoing. Consultation responses are agreed and submitted as required, requesting that all homes be designed to Lifetime Homes standard and a proportion of wheelchair accessible homes be provided within the general housing stock in rural areas.</p> <p>Accessible housing policies and wheelchair housing are included in the adopted Plan Strategies for Belfast, and Fermanagh and Omagh.</p>
9.	Considering the learning from the coordinated response to Covid-19, we will consider how on an ongoing basis, we can adopt a flexible approach to accommodate the emergency needs of those who are faced with homelessness in rural areas.	<p>The Housing Executive chairs seven Homelessness Local Area Groups, which meet quarterly with representation from local statutory, community and voluntary services. All groups discuss and address current challenges, including matters relevant to rural homelessness. The groups work together to raise awareness of homelessness, share information on support services available, with the overall aim to prevent homelessness in the local urban and rural areas.</p> <p>The Homelessness Local Area Action Plans and Terms of Reference have been updated. The actions and objectives within the Action Plans are reflective of ongoing challenges in the area and the issues that affect both clients and service providers across the homelessness sector. Some of the issues listed include recognising the impact of the cost-of-living crisis, the increasingly complex needs of service users and challenges that exist due to a lack of housing supply and affordability.</p> <p>The Local Area Action Plans are based on collaboration, sharing information on services, raising awareness of homelessness in the local area and homelessness prevention.</p>
10.	We will consider the expansion of the “Housing First” model into rural areas where suitable accommodation is available and a need has been identified.	<p>Over the course of 2022/23, work on delivery of this action has broadened to include work coordinated by a Task and Finish Group which aims to develop an interdepartmental approach to scaling up the provision of the Housing First model in Northern Ireland for those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.</p> <p>Further to this collaborative work outlined, the Housing Executive issued a procurement exercise in March 2023 that sought to establish a feasibility study on the expansion of Housing First in Northern Ireland. This work will support the development of a business case on the wider expansion of Housing First in Northern Ireland.</p>
11.	We will communicate homelessness prevention advice and funding support through our Rural Residents’ Forum, our rural publications and at rural housing information events.	<p>The summer 2022 edition of Rural Matters included a range of articles with useful information for rural tenants and customers, including an article on homelessness.</p> <p>In anticipation that Homelessness Prevention funding may become available during 2023/24, the Homelessness Prevention Team issued invitations welcoming applications in March 2023.</p>

	Action	Year 2 Update
12.	We will continue to develop and enhance the role of the Rural Residents' Forum, ensuring that they remain relevant and representative of our rural housing communities and that they provide a mainstream consultation service for all Housing Executive strategies and policies.	<p>During 2022/23, we worked with the Rural Community Network to develop and promote the role of the Rural Residents' Forum with regular meetings to discuss issues faced by rural communities and how they can be addressed. The Rural Residents' Forum is advised of any Housing Executive policies/strategies that are out for consultation and to compile a response where appropriate.</p> <p>The Forum engaged on topics including research into the barriers and solutions to rural social housing delivery, the draft Housing Executive corporate plan, Co-Ownership and Affordable Housing, Community Led Housing, Cost of Living and Welfare Reform.</p> <p>The Forum worked with Housing Executive's Rural Unit to identify hidden need, strengthen & support the delivery of housing needs tests in rural communities.</p> <p>The Forum are also promoted throughout the Housing Executive as a key consultee for policy owners when fulfilling our duty of due regards to rural needs under the Rural Needs Act. One member of the Rural Residents' Forum also sits on the Disability Forum, which helps ensure that the particular challenges facing people with disabilities in rural areas are considered when scrutinising new policies and services.</p>
13.	We will promote our community-based funding and support programmes within rural communities through our dedicated Rural Unit, our area-based Good Relations Officers, our Rural Residents' Forum, community events and through rural publications and digital communications.	<p>Throughout 2022/23, Community Involvement Grants supported 35 rural projects totalling £60,064.83. and Community Cohesion supported 28 rural projects totalling £80,026.70.</p> <p>The summer 2022 edition of Rural Matters included a range of articles with useful information for rural tenants and customers including information on the Housing Community Network, the availability of community grants, and a case study of a community involvement funded project at Cloughmills.</p>
14.	We will continue to develop and deliver the Housing Executive Rural Community Awards Competition, using the annual presentation events as an opportunity to promote a range of community-based services with rural communities.	<p>The 2022 Rural Community Awards highlighted the invaluable work being undertaken by community groups and volunteers in rural areas, in the categories of Rural Community Spirit, Cleaner and Greener and Rural Community Champion. 6 prizes were awarded at an awards event held in Dungannon, showcasing the invaluable contribution volunteers are making in rural areas. The competition and winners were publicised on the Housing Executive's website, social media, newspapers, and Rural Matters.</p>



Front cover
of 2022 Rural
Matters



Staff from our Newry office at the Dementia Bus training experience

2022 Rural Community Awards



Cullybackey Community Partnership -
Cleaner and Greener Award, North Region



Trillick Community Group - Cleaner and
Greener Award, South Region



Carnlough Community Association - Rural
Community Spirit Award, North Region



Moneydarragh Community Hub - Rural
Community Spirit Award, South Region



Roy McDowell, Ahoghill in Bloom - Rural
Community Champion Award, North Region



Sammy Wilson, Donaghmore Horticultural
Community - Rural Community Champion
Award, South Region



Granaghan and District Women's Group in Swatragh, received
Community Involvement funding.



Members of the Rural Residents' Forum

Theme 2: Enabling the provision of affordable rural homes

High level outcome: We enable the provision of affordable homes to contribute to balanced, inclusive and sustainable rural communities.

As Strategic Housing Authority, landlord of 14,700 homes across rural NI, and statutory partners in the delivery of each of the local council Community Plans, the Housing Executive has a strategic role in shaping the growth and development of rural settlements that focuses on, but is not limited to, enabling new housing in these areas.

The provision of social and intermediate housing is a vital element in ensuring that everyone has access to a home that they can afford and in helping communities to grow and thrive. The two main issues which often impact on the provision of affordable housing in rural areas are the availability of sites which are suitable for housing development and identifying sufficient demand for this type of housing. The Housing Executive has developed specific rural policies in relation to the identification of housing need and the delivery of the Social Housing Development Programme.

This theme sets out how we can enable the increased offer of housing in rural areas that is affordable and accessible. Key achievements in Year 2 include:

- An investment of £7.56m resulted in 71 new social housing unit starts in rural areas. This represented 3.6% of the overall SHDP out-turn of 1,956 Starts, against the strategic rural target of 12.9%;
- In the context of the significant challenges of delivering social housing in rural areas, a Rural Housing Steering Group was established to explore the barriers to rural housing development by implementing an Action Plan. This links to the aims of the Rural Strategy to increase social housing in rural areas. The Steering Group includes representatives from the Housing Executive, the Department for Communities, the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, and Land & Property Services. A research piece is being commissioned to scope out reasons why schemes have failed in rural areas and identify potential solutions for increased delivery. Work is also being undertaken to examine the potential of government lands to facilitate additional social housing;

- During 2022/23, the Rural Unit completed 11 housing need tests to uncover hidden rural need. Four tests were undertaken to support the delivery of proposed housing association schemes. We engaged with the Causeway Community Planning team to organise joint promotion of a cluster of tests in their area, which included two in-person events. This was a pilot for the 'housing health-check' approach and was attended by range of Housing Executive staff, offering advice and support. The response to each of the housing need tests completed during 2022/23 was encouraging with housing need being identified at Kilrea, Garvagh, Leitrim, Draperstown, Clabby, Newtownbutler and Mountfield. The Place Shaping teams are engaging with Housing Associations to bring forward proposals at these locations;
- A Site Identification Policy and Procedure was developed, that is facilitating work to support developing partners in delivering affordable housing schemes in rural areas of unmet need;
- Engagement continued with each of the local council planning teams to highlight the need for both social and intermediate housing in rural areas to each of the local Planning Authorities and the requirement for planning policies and land zonings that will facilitate the development of affordable housing within mixed-tenure environments; and
- Research was completed that examined how community-led housing can help to address housing supply issues faced by our rural communities. .

What we do differently for rural areas:

- Housing Need Tests to uncover areas of hidden rural housing need.
- Site identification studies to help housing associations to find sites in areas of unmet rural housing need.
- Work 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.



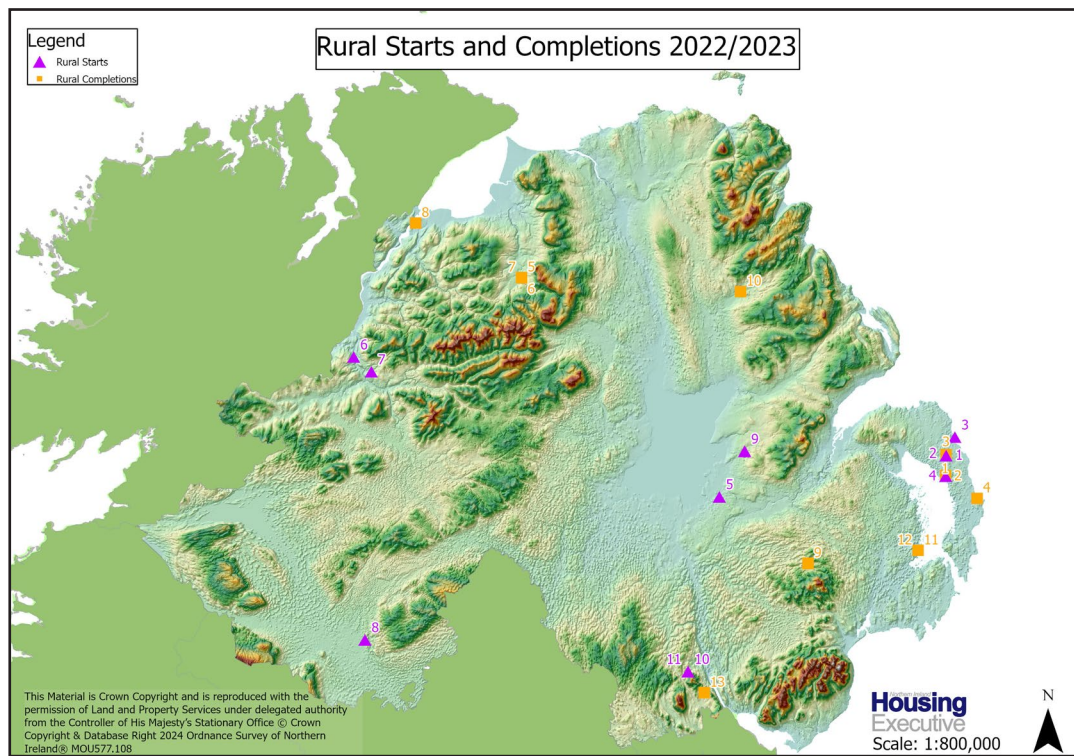
11

Rural Housing
need tests



71

new homes

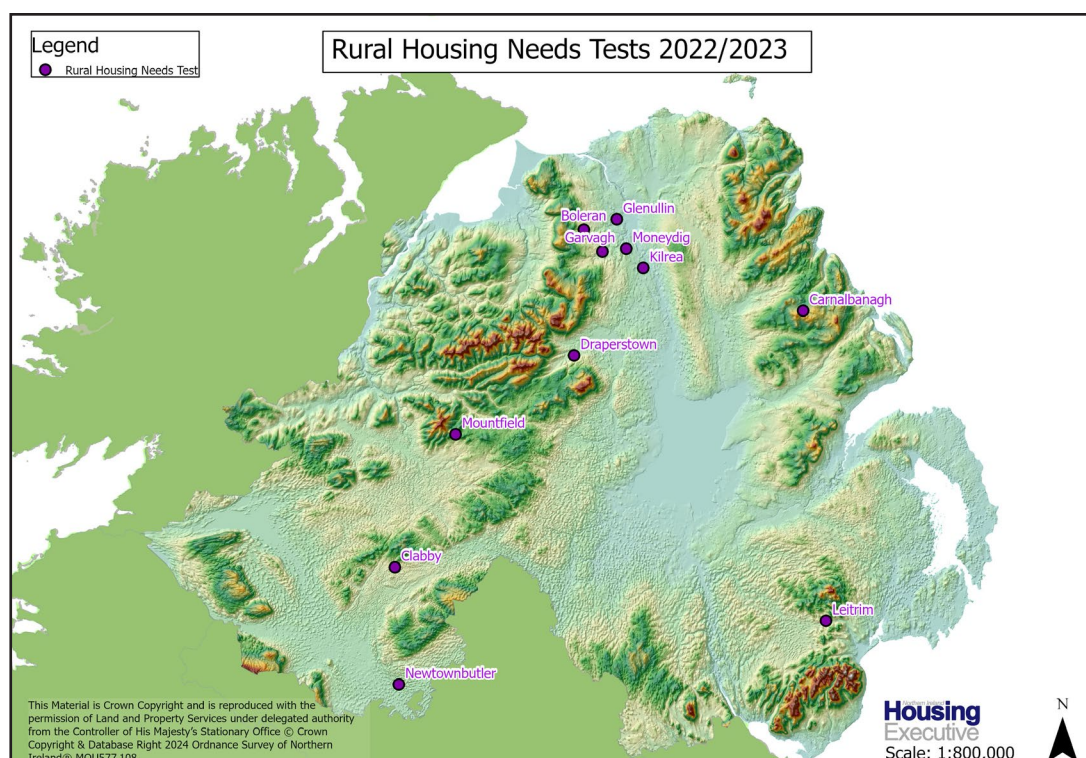


Rural Social Housing Starts 2022/23

Map Reference	Housing Association	Council	Location	Scheme Type	Units
1	North Belfast HA	Ards & North Down	Carrowdore	Off The Shelf	2
2	North Belfast HA	Ards & North Down	Carrowdore	Off The Shelf	6
3	North Belfast HA	Ards & North Down	Millisle	Rehab	1
4	Radius	Ards & North Down	Greyabbey	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	1
5	Arbour Housing	Armagh Banbridge & Craigavon	Aghagallon	Competitive Land Design & Build	5
6	Habinteg	Derry & Strabane	Sion Mills	Competitive Land Design & Build	12
7	Triangle	Derry & Strabane	Douglas Bridge	Off The Shelf	6
8	Rural	Fermanagh & Omagh	Lisnaskea	New Build	9
9	North Belfast HA	Lisburn & Castlereagh	Glenavy	Off The Shelf	20
10	Arbour Housing	Newry Mourne and Down	Camlough	Competitive Land Design & Build	2
11	Arbour Housing	Newry Mourne and Down	Camlough	Competitive Land Design & Build	7

Rural Social Housing Completions 2022/23

Map Reference	Housing Association	Council	Location	Scheme Type	Units
1	North Belfast HA	Ards & North Down	Carrowdore	Off The Shelf	2
2	Radius	Ards & North Down	Greyabbey	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	1
3	Rural	Ards & North Down	Carrowdore	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	1
4	Rural	Ards & North Down	Ballyhalbert	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	1
5	Apex Housing	Causeway Coast & Glens	Dungiven	New Build	18
6	Apex Housing	Causeway Coast & Glens	Dungiven	New Build	4
7	Apex Housing	Causeway Coast & Glens	Dungiven	New Build	1
8	Rural	Derry & Strabane	Strathfoyle	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	1
9	Ark	Lisburn & Castlereagh	Dromara	Off The Shelf	8
10	Alpha	Mid & East Antrim	Broughshane	Competitive Land Design & Build	14
11	Clanmil	Newry Mourne and Down	Killyleagh	New Build	4
12	Clanmil	Newry Mourne and Down	Killyleagh	New Build	1
13	Radius	Newry Mourne and Down	Cloughoge	Off The Shelf	9



	Action	Year 2 Update
15.	We will undertake cyclical analysis of rural waiting lists and ensure that rural areas of unmet need are highlighted for our developing partners in the Annual Commissioning Prospectus.	<p>At the end of March 2023, there were 6,679 applicants on the waiting list for a home in a rural area, this accounts for 15% of the total waiting list.</p> <p>4,459 rural applicants were in Housing stress (66% of total rural applicants) and 3,347 applicants had FDA status (49% of all rural applicants). There were 138 Rural Applicants who require Wheelchair Accommodation (20% of the total 698 applicants) and 1,775 Rural Applicants who have Complex Needs (18% of the total 9,764 applicants).</p> <p>Between March 2022 and March 2023, there were 790 properties allocated in rural areas.</p> <p>The latest Commissioning Prospectus for the period 2023/24 – 2025/26 was published in February 2023. The Commissioning Prospectus provides a strategic overview of housing need and demand in Northern Ireland. It also provides housing associations and other stakeholders the information they require to make informed decisions about where to search for land and property to deliver new social and intermediate housing. The 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.</p>
16.	We will continue to deliver an annual programme of at least ten Rural housing need tests which is shaped by requests from rural community representatives, analysis of existing waiting lists and land availability.	<p>11 housing need tests were completed to uncover hidden rural need in Boleran, Carnalbanagh, Clabby, Draperstown, Garvagh, Glenullin, Kilrea, Leitrim, Moneydig, Mountfield and Newtownbutler. The tests in Clabby, Draperstown Leitrim and Mountfield were undertaken to support the delivery of proposed housing association schemes.</p> <p>The response to each of the housing need tests completed during 2022/23 was encouraging with housing need being identified at Kilrea, Garvagh, Leitrim, Draperstown, Clabby, Newtownbutler and Mountfield. The Place Shaping teams are engaging with Housing Associations to bring forward proposals at these locations.</p>
17.	We will examine how we can engage our Community Planning partners in our rural housing need testing process, considering all new channels of communication in order to maximise our reach in rural communities.	<p>We engaged with the Causeway Coast and Glens Community Planning team to organise joint promotion of tests in their area for Boleran, Garvagh, Glenullin, Kilrea and Moneydig. Housing need was identified at Garvagh and Kilrea and our Place Shaping teams are engaging with Housing Associations to bring forward proposals at these locations.</p>
18.	We will carry out site identification work to assist developing partners in delivering affordable housing schemes in rural areas of unmet need.	<p>16 rural site identification studies were completed during 2022/23, to highlight development opportunities. It is hoped that this preliminary work will contribute to the future new build programme for rural areas.</p>

	Action	Year 2 Update
19.	We will continue to identify and assess a range of alternative options to increasing housing supply and addressing housing need in rural areas.	<p>Following approval of a business case for a pilot Modern Method Construction (MMC) low energy new build, we are working towards an Autumn 2023 start on site and completion date of Summer 2024 for 6 new homes in North Belfast.</p> <p>A site has been identified at Hunter's Park, Bellaghy for a rural new build pilot. Pre application discussions with Planning have commenced.</p>
20.	We will highlight the need for both social and intermediate housing in rural areas to each of the local Planning Authorities and the requirement for plan policies and land zonings which will facilitate the development of affordable housing within mixed-tenure environments promoting cohesion and sustainability.	<p>Meetings are ongoing with each of the local council planning teams and consultation responses are agreed and submitted as required, where we are promoting the need for both social and intermediate housing in rural areas.</p> <p>Mixed tenure development management policies have been included in the adopted plans for Belfast and Fermanagh and Omagh.</p>
21.	We will engage with housing authorities and organisations involved in the funding and support of community-led housing across the UK to examine how this approach could help to address housing supply issues faced by our rural communities.	<p>Research completed to examine the opportunities for community-led housing in Northern Ireland and how this approach could help to address housing supply issues faced by our rural communities.</p>



A community 'housing health check' event took place in Kilrea, as part of a cluster of housing need tests in the Causeway Area.

Theme 3: Securing the future of our rural communities

High level outcome: We contribute to the inclusive and sustainable growth and increased climate resilience of our rural communities.

Rural communities are essentially the custodians of our rural environment and their sustainability is intertwined with the sustainability of the rural economy, agriculture and tourism. The right balance has to be found in facilitating the necessary growth of our villages and small settlements without compromising our natural landscape.

Through this strategic theme, we have considered the ways in which the Housing Executive can contribute to the increased resilience and sustainability of our rural communities, whilst also delivering a range of outcomes for individual customers and households.

This theme sets out how the Housing Executive will contribute to the sustainable and inclusive growth and increased climate change resilience of our rural communities over the next four years, whilst also delivering a range of outcomes for individual customers and households. Key achievements include:

- Project RULET is being tested in 10 Housing Executive homes in Omagh and is trialling a number of energy efficiency measures and low carbon heating measures. The outcomes of this energy efficiency and renewable energy pilot are being monitored to identify alternative energy sources for our rural properties, which will help reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Monitoring of the HANDIHEAT project is now complete, following a mix of energy efficiency measures being fitted in 6 houses at the pilot site in Lisnaskea, Co Fermanagh. Following on from the HANDIHEAT project, the Housing Executive have been lead partner in the Cluster Project HEATER (Heat and Energy Education and Empowerment for Rural Areas), which delivered a series of webinars featuring industry experts; and
- The Housing Executive are partners in the 'Village Catalyst' grant scheme alongside, the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, the Historic Environment Division of the Department for Communities, and the Architectural Heritage Fund. This partnership initiative focuses on restoring

buildings at risk in rural settlements to provide a range of required community services. The Housing Executive provided funding towards a Village Catalyst project in Rathfriland in 2022/23, which restored a former bank to a community facility and also provided 4 units of accommodation on upper floors to help address housing demand in the village. Opportunities to support other projects are being explored.

What we do differently for rural areas:

- Through energy efficiency and renewable energy pilots, identify alternative energy sources for our rural properties.
- We are a partner in the Village Catalyst grant scheme to facilitate the sustainable growth of rural communities.



£**24.5**m

invested in maintenance and improvement of our rural homes

	Action	Year 2 Update
22.	We will continue to assess the investment required to improve the energy performance of our rural housing stock.	The projection of NIHE's future stock investment needs, undertaken with Savills was published. This exercise indicates that some £2.99 billion will be required to decarbonise and improve the energy efficiency of our total stock. This has informed the ongoing development of an Energy Efficiency Strategy for our stock and as part of this, an analysis will be undertaken to determine the needs of our rural stock.
23.	We will continue to develop and monitor the outcomes of energy efficiency and renewable energy pilots such as the HANDIHEAT and RULET Projects to identify alternative energy sources for our rural properties which will help reduce greenhouse gas emissions in these areas.	<p>A mix of energy efficiency measures were fitted in 6 houses at the HANDIHEAT pilot site in Lisnaskea. Co Fermanagh. Monitoring of the HANDIHEAT project is completed.</p> <p>Project RULET is being tested in 10 Housing Executive homes in Omagh and is trialling a number of energy efficiency measures and low carbon heating measures. The outcomes of this energy efficiency and renewable energy pilot are being monitored to identify alternative energy sources for our rural properties, which will help reduce greenhouse gas emissions in these areas.</p>

Table continues

	Action	Year 2 Update
24.	We will promote our Energy Advice Service and the availability of our Energy Efficiency Grants for private sector homes through our 'Rural Matters' publication and at rural-focused events and seminars.	<p>The Summer edition of Rural Matters included features on energy saving, the NI Energy Advice Service and oil buying clubs.</p> <p>The HEATER (Heat and Energy Empowerment and Education in Rural Areas) final conference took place in June 2022. The achievements of educating and empowering communities in remote and sparsely populated communities to increase the use of energy efficiency in housing and public infrastructure was highlighted.</p>
25.	We will use our role as statutory consultees in the preparation of Local Development Plans to promote the need for planning policies which support sustainable development, increased energy efficiency and a reduction in carbon emissions.	<p>We continued to work with Councils on the preparation of their Local Development Plans in order to promote the inclusion of housing policies that support the needs of rural communities, to help deliver sustainable development.</p>
26.	We will continue to promote our Social Enterprise programme in rural areas recognising the particular benefits to our rural housing communities from supporting and enabling new social enterprises in these areas to realise their full potential.	<p>The Housing Executive continued to provide advice and support to rural communities in relation to Social Enterprise. A new round of Social Enterprise Plus funding opened, and was promoted with rural stakeholders.</p>
27.	We will maximise opportunities to facilitate the sustainable growth of rural communities through collaborative investment and support.	<p>The Housing Executive are partners in the 'Village Catalyst' grant scheme alongside the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, the Historic Environment Division of the Department for Communities, and the Architectural Heritage Fund. This partnership initiative focuses on restoring buildings at risk in rural settlements to provide a range of required community services. The Housing Executive provided funding towards a Village Catalyst project in Rathfriland in 2022/23, which restored a former bank to a community facility and also provided 4 units of accommodation on upper floors to help address housing demand in the village. Opportunities to support other projects are being explored.</p>



The official opening of Chandler's House, Rathfriland, a project supported by Village Catalyst and the Housing Executive.

Housing
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