

Executive
Summary

Reaching Rural

Draft Rural Strategy

2021-2025

Housing
Executive

50 YEARS

Executive Summary

The need for a Rural Strategy:

In accordance with the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016, the Housing Executive has a statutory duty to pay due regard to the needs of rural communities in the development of our policies, strategies and plans and in the delivery of our services.

We also have a range of statutory duties in relation to the provision of a housing service to those living in both urban and rural areas across Northern Ireland. Our first Rural Policy developed in 1991 recognised the need to identify housing need which was often hidden or 'latent' in rural areas and the requirement for targeted investment and support to increase housing supply and address unfitness.

Background:

The Housing Executive understands that a specific rural approach is required to ensure an equitable delivery of our housing related services in rural communities, to address the housing issues faced within these areas and to contribute to sustainable rural communities.

The sixth Housing Executive Rural Strategy has been developed in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic as the long-term impacts are beginning to be considered. The draft Strategy considers the changing policy context with the development of the new Local Development Plans, the plans emerging in relation to the Climate Change emergency and also identifies how we will contribute to the draft Programme for Government outcomes and indicators.

The aim of this strategy:

The draft Rural Strategy considers the various ways in which the Housing Executive can contribute to our overarching vision for rural communities:

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

The proposals have been shaped by the growing demand and changing policy context for the development of new rural homes, the need to consider the housing requirements of an ageing population, the growing recognition of the requirement for carbon neutral, energy efficient rural homes and the challenges and opportunities that all of these factors will present.

At the heart of the draft Strategy is an ambition to address the continuing and emerging needs of our rural customers.

We seek to build on what we currently do well and to identify what we need to do differently to ensure that we are 'reaching rural' communities with the housing and related support that our customers require to enjoy stable and fulfilled lives.

Over the next four years we will focus on the delivery of high level outcomes, priorities and actions which are set out under the three cross cutting themes of:

Theme 1: Supporting our rural customers

Our tenants and customers are at the heart of everything we do in the Housing Executive. Throughout this draft Rural Strategy we have considered the particular journey of the 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.

Customers very often come to us to discuss social housing and the options available to them within their area(s) of choice. This could result in the allocation of a home, the individual being added to the waiting list to wait for the appropriate social property becoming available or advice could be given in relation to a private rental tenancy.

However, for many people, the journey will not end there. There are those who will require additional support including those with health issues or disabilities who require assistance to live independently and those who are faced with homelessness and require an emergency housing solution. These challenges may be exacerbated for people living in rural locations, particularly the more remote areas from which services may be less accessible, the referral route for support services may be less visible and social isolation and loneliness can be more prevalent.

Outcome 1:

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.

Priorities:

- 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.

Theme 2: Enabling the provision of affordable rural homes

The Housing Executive has a strategic role in shaping the growth and development of rural settlements which 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 evidence that there is 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.

As we begin to emerge from a time of unprecedented change during the Covid-19 pandemic, it will be important for us to identify both the challenges and opportunities which may face rural communities and to ensure that we support and enable the provision of homes in areas where they are needed.

Outcome:

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

Priorities:

- 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.

Theme 3: Securing the future of our rural communities

The UK Government has set an ambitious target to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emission reductions by 2050. In Northern Ireland, this is reflected in the Programme for Government, New Decade New Approach and is being considered in proposals for a new Climate Change Bill for NI and departmental strategies which will consider how public policy and investment can influence the behavioural changes required to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Rural communities are 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 will require an examination of the investment required to improve our own existing housing stock, the promotion of our role in contributing to policies which promote the green agenda and maximising opportunities for partnership working and community engagement.

Outcome:

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

Priorities:

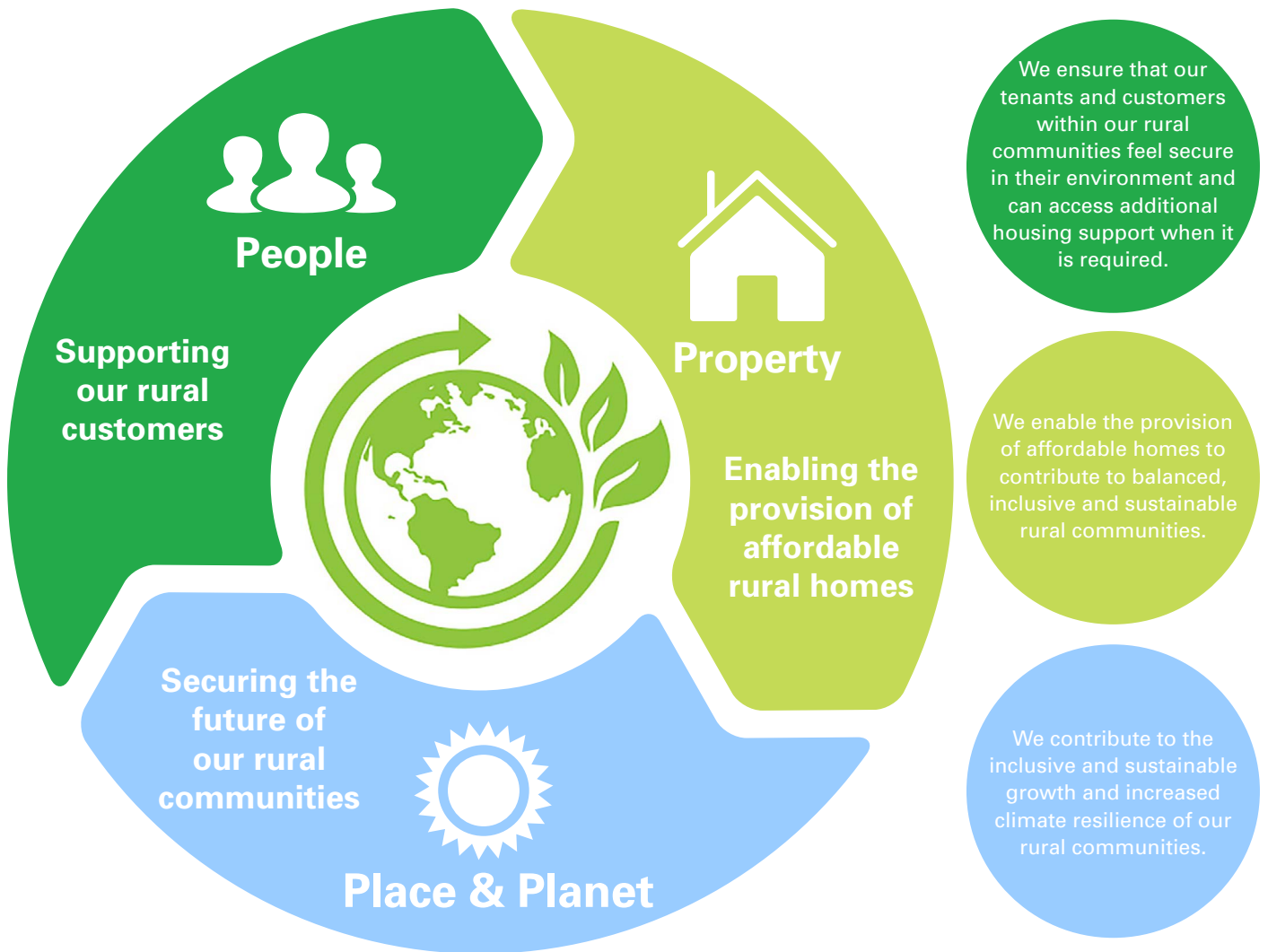
- We will invest in the improved energy efficiency of our rural housing stock and consider solutions for the future de-carbonisation of rural household heating systems;
- We will support and encourage the improved energy efficiency of private sector homes in rural areas;
- We will support and encourage 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.

How the Strategy will be delivered:

The Rural Strategy & associated Action Plan(s) will be delivered by a cross-divisional implementation panel comprised of departmental leads representing key areas of Housing Executive business delivery. The panel will be supported by external partners and rural stakeholders including the Rural Residents' Forum.

Communication is key to the success of this strategy and we aim to continuously improve our levels of engagement with our wide range of customers and stakeholders in rural areas. We will participate in rural housing events and seminars and also promote our housing services through local housing information events as part of our rural housing need testing programme. Progress updates will be compiled on a quarterly basis and published in an annual progress report and also through features in our Rural Matters magazine.

Themes, Outcomes, Priorities



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.

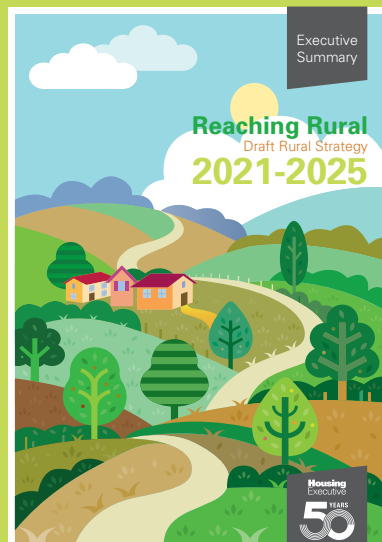
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