



Reaching Rural 2021-2025

Final Progress Report



**Housing
Executive**

Foreword

I am delighted to present this Final Progress Report for our Rural Strategy and Action Plan, “Reaching Rural”, which spanned 2021-2025. This report summarises our extensive activities and highlights some of the most notable outcomes achieved during this transformative time for rural communities in Northern Ireland.

The Strategy itself was shaped by the growing demand for and changing policy context surrounding new rural homes, the needs of an ageing population, and the increasing imperative for carbon-neutral, energy-efficient housing, alongside the challenges and opportunities these factors present. Our core ambition throughout has been to address the continuing and emerging needs of our rural customers, ensuring we are truly ‘reaching rural’ communities with the housing and related support essential for stable and fulfilled lives. We have adopted and maintained a localised approach, prioritising community involvement and collaborative partnerships, understanding that a tailored approach is often necessary to provide fair services and support, regardless of location.

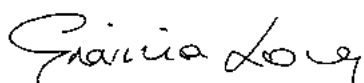
We are immensely proud of the collective achievements made through this Strategy, particularly the enhanced focus on communication, including leveraging digital platforms and adapting to lessons learned during the pandemic, which has enabled us to broaden our reach and engagement with rural stakeholders.

Key achievements between 2021/22 and 2024/25 include:

- A total of approximately £243.47m was invested in our rural communities.
- The allocation of over 3,200 properties in rural, providing much-needed homes for rural applicants.
- The continued delivery of a programme of rural housing need tests, with 44 completed during the timeframe of the strategy.
- Over £110million was invested in the maintenance and enhancement of our rural housing stock.
- Continued substantial investment of £30m in Supporting People funding for services in rural areas providing support through accommodation-based and floating support services.
- Strong promotion of community-based funding and support programmes within rural communities, with a total investment of £750k, which included funding for Social Enterprise projects, Community Grants, Community Cohesion funding and capital funding for regeneration projects.
- The continued success and growth of our Rural Community Awards Competition, celebrating the invaluable work of rural groups and individuals, with £27,500 prize money awarded during this strategy period.

We wish to express our appreciation to all those who have contributed to the implementation of our Rural Strategy. Despite the significant challenges faced by the housing sector, we remain committed to continuing our adaptive and responsive approach to meeting the evolving needs of our rural communities, which will require a substantial and sustained partnership effort.

Our focus now shifts to the development of a refreshed strategic approach, one that builds upon the outcomes achieved through collaborative working to date, reinforces our statutory responsibilities under the Rural Needs Act, and reflects the evolving context of rural regeneration in Northern Ireland. As part of this process, we will once again engage with our customers and key stakeholders to identify the strategic priorities for the next five years and to explore how we can continue to enhance the delivery of our services in rural areas.



Grainia Long

Chief Executive

Introduction

The "Reaching Rural: Rural Strategy 2021-2025" is a four-year strategic plan developed by the Housing Executive. It outlines detailed plans to contribute to the sustainable and inclusive growth of rural communities across Northern Ireland.

Within our Rural Strategy progress was made against 26 of the 27 actions in the Action Plan. Similarly to Years 2 & 3, there was less opportunity to progress action 27 regarding collaborative investment and support in the final year of our strategy. This was due to no new Village Catalyst projects being able to receive funding for capital works during 2024/25.

The strategy's development was influenced by several key factors, including the increasing demand and evolving policy context for new rural homes, the housing needs of an ageing population, and the growing importance of carbon-neutral, energy-efficient rural homes. At its core, the strategy aims to address the continuing and emerging needs of rural customers.

The Housing Executive recognizes the value of a localised approach, incorporating community engagement and partnership working, asserting that a "different approach" is often necessary to ensure equitable service and support for rural areas, a principle consistent since the first Rural Strategy in 1991.

Developed amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, the strategy has integrated lessons learned during this period, particularly regarding the enhanced use of digital communication channels such as video conferencing and social media. It also explicitly acknowledges the Housing Executive's statutory duty under the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016, mandating due consideration for rural community needs in policy and service delivery. The strategy is designed to build upon the achievements of the preceding 2016-2020 Rural Strategy, which saw significant investment and new social housing starts in rural areas.

The "Reaching Rural" strategy is structured around three cross-cutting themes, each with high-level outcomes, priorities, and proposed actions which closely aligns with the Housing Executive's broader corporate strategic themes of 'People', 'Property', and 'Place and Planet'.

- **Supporting our rural customers**
To ensure our Tenants and customers in our rural communities feel secure in their environment and can access additional housing support when it is required.
- **Enabling the provision of affordable rural homes**
Enable the provision of affordable homes to contribute to balanced, inclusive and sustainable rural communities.

- **Securing the future of our rural communities**

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

Between 2021/22 and 2024/25 the Housing Executive invested approximately £243.47m in rural areas. This investment encompassed a range of initiatives, including the maintenance and enhancement of rural housing stock and estates, funding for supported housing and related services and support for programmes aimed at developing and empowering rural communities.

Rural Spend

Activity Area	2021/22 Rural Spend (£m)	2022/23 Rural Spend (£m)	2023/24 Rural Spend (£m)	2024/25 Rural Spend (£m)	Total Spend
Planned Maintenance & Capital Improvement Work*	15.8	12.2	8.7	17.97	54.67
Response Maintenance	10.2	12.3	15.1	18.2	55.8
Grounds Maintenance	1.7	1.7	1.69	1.3	6.39
Private Sector Grants*	10.3	13.2	11.62	9	44.12
Supporting People	6	8	8	8	30
Community Development (including, Community Cohesion and Community Involvement)	0.01	0.14	0.24	0.36	0.75
Investment in New Build	11.4	7.56	12.54	20.24	51.74
Total	55.41	55.1	57.89	75.07	
Overall Total	243.47				

*Approximate figure based on (average scheme cost) x (no. of rural completions in 24/25)

Themes & Priorities

Theme 1: Supporting Our Rural Customers

The Housing Executive's Rural Strategy 2021-2025, "Supporting our rural customers," aims to ensure that customers in rural communities feel secure and can access necessary housing support. This theme is addressed through five key priorities.

Priority 1: Consider the needs of our rural customers in the delivery of our housing solutions and support service.

The Housing Executive promoted tenancy sustainment advice and funding support through the Rural Residents' Forum, rural publications, and rural housing information events. From 2021/22 to 2024/25, the Rural Residents' Forum was updated monthly on new and existing services, covering various relevant topics like financial inclusion, tenancy succession policies, strategy updates, and funding opportunities. Due to limited face to face meetings and contact, key information was shared online during Covid-19 restrictions. Several local office staff provided tenancy advice at Housing Needs Test events, providing personally tailored housing advice and assistance across a range of queries. Awareness among surveyed tenants that the Housing Executive works in rural as well as urban areas increased from 71.7% in 2023 to 87.0% in 2024. The Housing Executive also planned a pilot of rural "housing health-checks" as part of rural housing need test events to provide wrap around advice on issues such as tenancy sustainment and homelessness prevention.

Priority 2: Continue to review and improve our housing support services to meet the needs of an ageing rural population.

The Supporting People Strategy continues to pay due regard to the needs of rural customers, with consideration given when developing the Supporting People Strategy. A public consultation was undertaken, and rural representation was sought to provide critical feedback. Supporting People expenditure in rural areas was approximately £8 million in both 2022/23 and 2023/24, providing 2,480 units of support in over 100 rural areas, with information on Supporting People services being shared with rural stakeholders. Supporting People team regularly attend the

Rural Residents Forum to raise awareness of their services and receive essential feedback from rural residents. The Housing Executive developed a 'Dementia Friendly Homes' Service, adapting support workshops for online delivery. Over 140 Dementia Friends are in the organisation, and 185 Dementia Packs have been distributed to our tenants to support independent living. Dementia support has been a regular feature in rural publications over the 4 year period. While the Alzheimer's Society has changed its branding and roles, internal guidance has been updated to reflect this, ensuring continuity in support, particularly in front line housing and homeless services. The initiative remains under active review to maintain relevance and effectiveness. An Assisted Technology pilot is planned and underway to support older people to remain living independently. 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. This scheme is on track for completion for December 2025.

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.

Priority 3: Invest in accessible housing solutions in rural areas.

The Housing Executive has engaged with local council planning teams to influence policies, requiring all new homes to be designed to the Lifetime Homes standard and a proportion of wheelchair accessible homes, of general housing stock, in rural areas, with consultation responses having been submitted on this matter. Between 2016 and 2020, 1,452 Disabled Facilities Grants were completed for homes in rural areas, representing a significant investment in improving the accessibility of private sector rural homes. The Housing Executive is also monitoring the increasing number of rural applicants on the waiting list who require accessible properties, as this will provide a key insight into the specific provision of property type in future new build schemes. Progress continued with the Accessible Housing Register (AHR), with over 22,000 Housing Executive properties classified by March 2025. Engagement with housing associations has been strengthened, and work continues refining classifications to better match rural housing needs. Although full implementation is scheduled for 2027, foundations have been effectively laid to support future accessible housing provision.

Priority 4: Support those who are faced with homelessness in rural areas.

Work has been ongoing to examine options for scaling up the "Housing First" model, including exploring a multi-departmental approach. A Task and Finish Group has been working to develop an interdepartmental approach with a feasibility study on the expansion of Housing First in Northern Ireland procured and is progressing, with research supporting the development of a business case. The Homelessness Projects Team has been exploring using Housing Executive tenancies for Housing First, liaising with partners in the Department for Communities. The Housing Executive chairs seven Homelessness Local Area Groups which meet quarterly and discuss matters relevant to rural homelessness, working to raise awareness and share information on support services. These groups have facilitated targeted responses to rural homelessness and prevention. Furthermore, homelessness prevention advice and funding support have been communicated through the Rural Residents' Forum, rural publications, and at rural housing information events. The Rural Residents Forum contributed to the development of the Homelessness Strategy.

Priority 5: Facilitate the delivery of community-based support programmes which promote inclusion, cohesion and create opportunities for those living in our rural communities.

The Housing Executive has worked with the Rural Community Network to develop and promote the role of the Rural Residents' Forum (RRF), holding monthly meetings to discuss rural community issues. The RRF is advised of Housing Executive policies and strategies for consultation, provides critical feedback and is promoted as a key consultee under the Rural Needs Act. The Forum has engaged on various relevant topics including community-led housing and funding opportunities. Community-based funding and support programmes have been promoted within rural communities through the Rural Unit, Good Relations Officers, the RRF, community events, and rural publications. Community Involvement Grants and Community Cohesion funding have supported numerous rural projects between 2021/22 and 2024/25.

Rural Community Awards – Strategic Commitment and Impact

As part of its Rural Strategy 2021–2025, the Housing Executive reaffirmed its commitment to the ongoing development and delivery of the Rural Community Awards Competition. A total of £27,500 has been allocated for prize funding over the course of the strategy period.

Since its inception in 2014, the Rural Community Awards have attracted significant interest from rural community groups. The competition serves as a platform to highlight and celebrate initiatives aimed at enhancing quality of life, and fostering cleaner, safer, and more vibrant rural communities. Over the past nine years, 308 applications have been submitted, reflecting the sustained engagement and enthusiasm from local groups.

The Awards continue to recognise the invaluable contribution of volunteers across Northern Ireland—individuals who often work tirelessly and without recognition to promote health and well-being, foster social inclusion, and support both individual and community development.

The Housing Executive-sponsored competition offers three award categories:

- **Rural Community Spirit Award**
- **Cleaner and Greener Award**
- **Community Champion Award**

To enhance inclusivity and recognition, runner-up prizes were introduced across all categories in 2024.

To ensure regional representation, each award is presented across two geographic divisions: North and South. The prize structure is as follows:

- **Village Category Winners (North and South):** £1,000 each
- **Village Category Runners-up:** £500 each
- **Community Champion Winners:** £500 donation to the associated community group
- **Community Champion Runners-up:** £250 donation to the associated community group
- All winners and runners-up also receive commemorative plaques in recognition of their achievement.

This initiative continues to play a vital role in acknowledging and supporting the positive impact of rural communities across Northern Ireland.



Case Study detail from the Mid and East Antrim Agewell Partnership

The Mid & East Antrim Agewell Partnership, is an award-winning charity dedicated to enhancing the well-being of older adults. From a small committee, they have grown into a trusted organisation with 13 staff members, supporting over 6,500 older individuals and securing over £3 million in charitable income over the past six years.



Operating across health and community development sectors, they have identified a need for tailored home support for older people. To meet this need, they developed the Delivering Options through Tailored Support (DOT's) Home Care and DOT's Home Care Plus. A new service available to NIHE residents which will contribute towards sustainability of tenancies and will also curate a sense of belonging within the community resulting in improved health and wellbeing. Following a full benefits check, to ensure economic viability, including the potential of securing additional benefits and budgeting resources, residents will be able to avail of either DOTS Home Care for cleaning services or DOTS Home Care Plus for tailored personal support within the home.

Rural Matters

“Rural Matters” is the Northern Ireland Housing Executive’s (NIHE) annual magazine designed for those living in rural communities. Aimed at addressing unique housing, community, energy efficiency, and financial challenges in villages and remote areas, the magazine spans news, tips, NIHE initiatives, funding opportunities, and case studies.

Theme 2: Enabling the provision of affordable rural homes

The Housing Executive's Rural Strategy 2021-2025, "Enabling the provision of affordable rural homes," is focused on the strategic aim of enabling the provision of affordable homes to contribute to balanced, inclusive, and sustainable rural communities. This theme is addressed through three key priorities and the Housing Executive has reported progress across these priorities between 2021/22 and 2024/25.

Priority 1: We will enable the provision of affordable homes which address rural housing needs.

Significant effort has been directed towards understanding and responding to rural housing need and facilitating increased supply:

A cyclical analysis of rural waiting lists is undertaken, with areas of unmet need highlighted in the Annual Commissioning Prospectus.

- o At the end of March 2022, there were 6,630 applicants on the waiting list for a home in a rural area, representing 14.9% of the total waiting list. Of these, 4,243 were in housing stress (64% of rural applicants), and 2,967 had Full Duty Applicant (FDA) status (44.8% of rural applicants).
 - o By the end of March 2025, the rural waiting list increased to 7,366 applicants. Rural applicants in housing stress rose to 5,211, and those with FDA status increased to 4,137.
 - o The Commissioning Prospectus were published annually providing a strategic overview of housing need and demand and detailing rural targets and target settlements for housing associations.
- Property allocations in rural areas indicate the level of turnover in rural areas.
 - o Between March 2021 and March 2022, 786 properties were allocated in rural areas.
 - o Between March 2022 and March 2023, 790 properties were allocated in rural areas.
 - o Between March 2023 and March 2024, 810 properties were allocated in rural areas.
 - o Between March 2024 and March 2025, 801 properties were allocated in rural areas.

- New Rural social housing unit starts contributing directly to increasing supply.
 - o There were 128 new social housing unit starts in rural areas during 2021/22
 - o There were 71 new social housing unit starts in rural areas during 2022/23
 - o There were 117 new social housing unit starts in rural areas during 2023/24
 - o There were 188 new social housing unit starts in rural areas during 2024/25
- Construction commenced on 504 new social housing unit starts in rural areas during the life of the Strategy. An annual programme of Rural housing need tests continues to uncover hidden rural need. Meaningful engagement with community representatives and groups are key to the success of the tests:
 - o In 2021/22, 15 housing need tests were completed including Gortnahey, Ballyvoy, Artikelly, Dunloy, Rasharkin, Ballyhalbert, Straw, Cappagh, Darragh Cross, Maghery, Rathfriland, Beragh, Annahilt, Kesk and Galbally.
 - o In 2022/23, 11 housing needs tests were completed including Moneydig, Kilrea, Garvagh, Ballerin, Glenullin, Carnaldonagh, Mountfield, Draperstown, Leitrim, Newtownbutler and Clabby.
 - o In 2023/24, 9 housing needs tests were completed including Burnfoot, Lislagan, Moneyglass, Tamnaherin, Ardboe, Ballinderry, Moortown, Gulladuff and Spa.
 - o In 2024/25, again 9 housing needs tests were completed including Loughgeil, Dervock, Cashell, Garrison, The Rock, Swatragh, Dundrum, Clough and Seaforde.
 - o All tests are being promoted through Community Planning.

Throughout the implementation of the Rural Strategy, a series of Housing Needs Tests have identified increasing levels of housing demand in rural areas. These assessments have informed and supported the development of new build housing schemes facilitated by the Housing Executive in partnership with Housing Associations across Northern Ireland.

- In 2021/22, a Housing Needs Test in Darragh Cross identified a requirement that led to the delivery of a 10-unit new build scheme by Ark Housing Association.
- In 2022/23, Housing Needs Tests supported the initiation of new build schemes in Kilrea, Garvagh, Draperstown, and Clabby.
- In 2023/24, a Housing Needs Test in Tamnaherin resulted in the development of a 6-unit new build scheme.

- In 2024/25, a Housing Needs Test in Swatragh led to the delivery of a 10-unit new build scheme.

These targeted developments demonstrate the effectiveness of Housing Needs Tests in identifying rural housing demand and delivering appropriate housing solutions in response.

Case Study: Clabby – Addressing Hidden Housing Need in a Rural Community



In February 2022, Rural Housing Association approached the Housing Executive to request the initiation of a Housing Needs Test in the village of Clabby. Due to the absence of a distinct Common Landlord Area (CLA) for Clabby, there was no dedicated waiting list, making it challenging to accurately assess the local housing need.

To address this, the Housing Executive issued correspondence to applicants on the Tempo/Clabby and Fivemiletown waiting lists, asking if they would consider living in Clabby should housing become available. This was complemented by a targeted local engagement campaign in February 2022, which included:

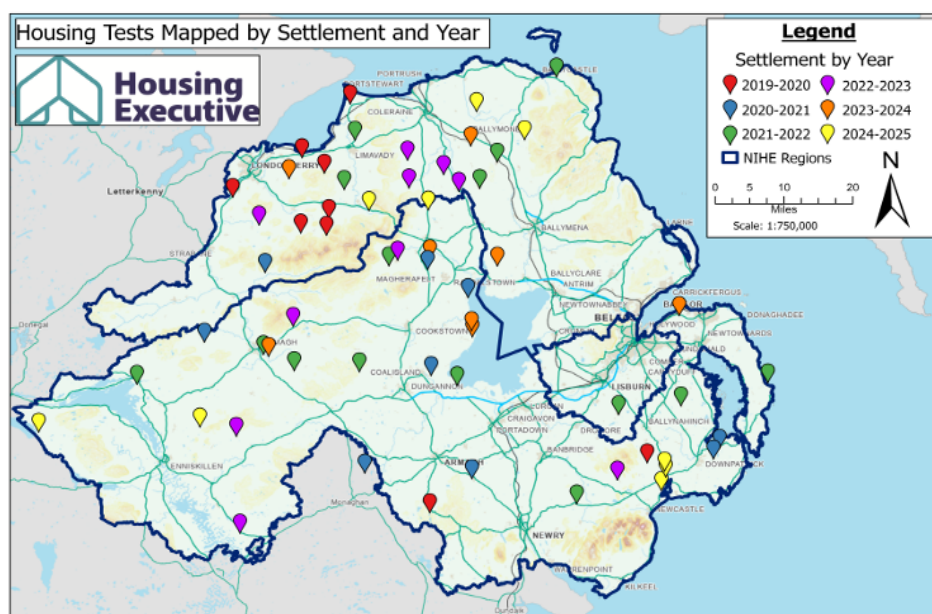
- Promotion of the test by local councillors;
- A social media campaign advertising the Housing Needs Test;
- Advertisements in local newspapers;
- Direct outreach to local community groups;
- Distribution of posters and flyers to local shops and community spaces.

Applicants were invited to express their interest through a dedicated phone line and email address. A number of written responses were also received, indicating a willingness to relocate to Clabby if suitable housing was provided.

The Housing Needs Test concluded at the end of March 2022, resulting in 15 individuals being added to the Tempo/Clabby waiting list. Following analysis by the South Place Shaping Team, a clear housing need was identified in the area.

In response to the findings, Rural Housing Association expressed interest in a suitable site in Clabby and subsequently progressed a new build housing scheme. The development, comprising 8 new homes, was completed in June 2025.

This case highlights how proactive engagement and targeted assessment can uncover hidden housing need in rural communities and lead to tangible outcomes in the form of high-quality, locally appropriate housing provision.



- Site Identification Studies (SIS) have been carried out to assist developing partners.
 - o In 2023/24, 11 SIS's were completed, supporting housing need tests and identifying sites in areas of need.
 - o SIS information continues to be provided which will be reviewed and potentially issued to housing associations. For 2024/25, 4 SIS studies were completed. South Place Shaping for Meigh and Moy and North Place Shaping in Carnlough and Dervock.

- The assessment of alternative options to increasing housing supply has progressed.
 - o A business case for a pilot Modern Method Construction (MMC) low energy new build was approved.
 - o A site was identified at Hunter's Park, Bellaghy for a rural new build pilot.
- A Rural Housing Steering Group was established in 2023/24 to explore barriers to rural housing development and implement an Action Plan, including representatives from NIHE, DfC, DAERA, and LP. This links to the aims of the Strategy to increase social housing in rural areas. A research project was recently published (March 2025) which aimed to provide an improved understanding of issues and challenges associated with the development of social and affordable housing in rural areas and to inform policy development and operational processes that may result in more social and affordable housing provision. Work is also being undertaken to examine the potential of Government lands to facilitate additional social housing.
- The report is available here: [The Housing Executive - Social housing research](#)

Priority 2: We will work with local councils to help shape planning policies which will deliver affordable homes and contribute to balanced and inclusive rural communities.

Engagement with local planning authorities is ongoing to influence planning policies:

The Housing Executive has maintained consistent engagement with local planning authorities to influence the development and implementation of planning policies that support the provision of affordable rural housing. A key focus of this engagement has been the ongoing promotion of the need for both social and intermediate housing in rural areas, alongside advocacy for plan policies and land zonings that enable the delivery of affordable homes within mixed-tenure environments. Regular meetings have been held with planning teams across all local councils, with formal consultation responses submitted as required to inform emerging plans. Mixed-tenure development management policies have been successfully incorporated into the adopted local development plans for Belfast, Fermanagh and Omagh. Further support was provided to Derry and Strabane District Council during public hearings in September 2023, with the Housing Executive contributing to the defence of key planning policies which are designed to secure affordable housing provision in rural contexts. In preparation for the next phase of strategic planning, four councils consisting of: Belfast City Council,

Fermanagh and Omagh, Mid and East Antrim and Antrim and Newtownabbey. Work has commenced on their Local Policies Plans where the Housing Executive will play an active role in this process by supplying housing need data and assisting in the identification of appropriate rural sites to help meet recognised demand.

Priority 3: We will examine the potential to support the development of models of community-led housing in rural areas.

Exploration of community-led housing models has been undertaken:

The Housing Executive has actively explored the potential of community-led housing models to address housing supply challenges in rural areas. This work began in 2021/22 with research aimed at examining opportunities for community-led housing in Northern Ireland and assessing how such models could contribute to meeting rural housing needs. This research concluded in 2022/23, providing a foundation for further engagement and strategic development, allowing the Housing Executive to further engage with organisations across the UK involved in the funding and delivery of community-led housing. Representatives attended the Rural Community Ownership Conference in October 2023 and participated in a British & Irish Council meeting in Scotland, where community-led housing formed part of the agenda. The Housing Executive extended its support to a proposed community-led housing scheme in Strangford in 2024/25. This scheme is designed to include 19 social housing units within a mixed-tenure development with an emphasis on sustainability and community engagement. The proposal is listed in the draft Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP) for delivery in 2027/28; however, this will be subject to securing appropriate funding and statutory approvals.

Theme 3 - Securing the future of our rural communities

The Housing Executive is focused on securing the future of rural communities, focusing on the high-level outcome: contributing to the inclusive and sustainable growth and increased climate change resilience of our rural communities. This theme incorporates four key priorities, addressing investment in housing stock, supporting private sector homes, shaping planning policies, and maximising asset use through partnership working.

Priority 1: Investing in the improved energy efficiency of our rural housing stock and considering solutions for future de-carbonisation

Achieving energy efficiency standards in older rural stock presents challenges. The Housing Executive committed to assessing the required investment to improve the energy performance of its rural housing stock. Work is ongoing to assess the necessary measures and costs. In addition, the Department for Communities (DfC) approved a business case in March 2025 for a Stock Condition Survey, with procurement underway and findings expected by the end of 2025/26.

Pilot projects are being developed and monitored to identify alternative energy sources for rural properties and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The **HANDIHEAT pilot** in Lisnaskea, Co. Fermanagh, involves fitting a mix of energy efficiency measures and testing a new lower carbon heating system in six homes, with monitoring completed. HANDIHEAT is a €2m funded project led by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE). It is supported by the Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme (NPA) and the EU European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to support research that will address fuel poverty, identify renewable energy solutions and improve energy efficiency in rural homes. The overall objective of HANDIHEAT is to develop a set of resources, implementation toolkits, decision making guides and a roadmap for the rural community housing sector.

The **RULET (Rural Leading the Energy Transition)** project in Omagh, Co. Tyrone, is testing energy efficiency measures and low carbon heating in ten houses. This project trials different heating systems (hybrid heat pumps with gas or bio-fuel oil boilers, and heat pumps with heat batteries) and includes an agile electricity tariff and an Energy Cloud proposal to exploit curtailed wind energy. Equipment installation was completed in January 2022, and monitoring continues for two years, with the final report currently being drafted.

Case Study RULET Omagh

The Green Heating Pilot details a project aimed at reducing the carbon footprint of ten homes by retrofitting older properties with hybrid heating systems and improved insulation. The initiative sought to demonstrate that green heating technologies, like heat pumps, could be both affordable and effective for tenants, maintaining comfortable heat levels while reducing reliance on fossil fuels. The project successfully installed systems on time and achieved adequate heating at low tenant cost & contributed to reduced carbon footprint of households.

This was accomplished by enhancing the insulation performance of walls and windows, alongside the partial electrification of heating systems, thereby reducing reliance on oil and gas consumption. In instances where electricity costs increased due to the use of heat pumps, tenants experienced corresponding savings in heating oil consumption. When the hybrid heating systems were used as recommended, there was no overall increase in household heating expenses.



Vaillant Heat Pump as Part of Sunamp Installation

Priority 2: Supporting and encouraging the improved energy efficiency of private sector homes in rural areas

To address reliance on oil heating, the Oil Buying Clubs initiative in partnership with Bryson Energy has established 27 clubs benefiting over 4,000 members, many in rural areas, offering lower costs and smaller deliveries. The Housing Executive promotes its Energy Advice Service and efficiency grants through its 'Rural Matters' publication and at rural events and seminars, including attendance at the Balmoral Show. Features on energy saving, the NI Energy Advice Service, and oil buying clubs have been included in 'Rural Matters'. The NI Oil Savings Net work (NIOSN) is open to all homes across Northern Ireland. We can usually find members a price lower than the average heating costs per litre.

Most rural homes rely on oil.

- Through our Oil Savings Network, you could:
Save **£15—£30** on a 200–300L order
- Join for free — no commitment to buy
- Receive weekly discount codes via text or email– no fuss!
- Get support by phone – if you don't use text or email.

Priority 3: Supporting and encouraging the inclusion of planning policies in Local Development Plans which aim to promote climate change resilience within rural communities

As statutory consultees for Local Development Plans (LDPs), the Housing Executive promotes climate change resilience through the planning process. The aim is to ensure sustainable development, integrating environmental considerations into housing provision. Support is given to policies within councils' draft Plan Strategies that:

- Promote solar gain, energy efficiency measures, and the use of renewable energy in residential buildings.
- Promote Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems to manage surface water run-off and mitigate flood risk.
- Support the protection of woodland and tree planting for environmental and climate benefits.
- Promote integrated transport to reduce reliance on private cars.
- Promote the revitalisation of small towns and villages through integrated approaches, improving connectivity and bringing services closer to rural communities.

Engagement with councils on LDPs continues to advocate for policies supporting energy efficiency and renewable energy provision, as well as responding to consultations on revising the Strategic Planning Policy Statement to account for climate change legislation.

Priority 4: Working with partners to maximise the use of existing land and property assets in rural areas

The Housing Executive promotes its Social Enterprise programme in rural areas, recognising its potential benefits. The Social Enterprise Plus Strategy aims to strengthen communities, improve economic circumstances, and find new ways to work in partnership. Advice and support for rural social enterprises are ongoing, and a new round of funding was promoted, committing £200,000 for 2023/2024, supporting groups like Moneydarragh Community Hub and Mid Antrim Agewell. Further support was provided in 2024/25 to Carrowdore Social and Rec Community Interest Company, Mid & East Antrim Agewell and Moneydarragh Community Hub.

Engagement with Community Planning partners helps identify Place Shaping projects and unlock the potential of land and property assets for housing, community infrastructure, social enterprise, and small business growth. Collaborative investment opportunities are maximised to facilitate sustainable growth. Examples include providing match funding for the NI Rural Development Programme, supporting projects like the Kildress Community Hub, and partnering in the Village Catalyst Programme to restore buildings at risk for community use and affordable housing, such as the project in Rathfriland.

