

Rural Needs Impact Assessment

Name of Policy/ strategy/ plan /service	Community Involvement strategy
Department	Community Cohesion
Responsible Officer	Deirdre Crawford
Stage 1: Define the Issue	
Key questions to consider	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the objectives of the strategy, policy, plan or service? - What impact do you intend it to have in rural areas? - What would constitute a fair rural outcome in this case?

In the Community Involvement Strategy 2018/2023 there are two specific objectives. These are;

- **To promote community involvement across all our communities**

And

- **To enable our communities to challenge, influence and shape our services**

In order to achieve the objective of promoting 'community involvement across all our communities' we will conduct research to establish a baseline of current participation levels. This will be done in partnership with the Housing Community Network and Supporting Communities. This will be done through a survey. An outcome we hope to achieve by doing this research is to discover which of our areas are underrepresented, including any rural areas, and then establish a way of connecting with the community in those areas. Also from this information and insight it would be hoped that in those areas which may be underrepresented we are able to identify, encourage and support easy to ignore groups. We will also continue to develop new groups in underrepresented locations. We also plan to review the effectiveness of the existing community grants scheme and ensure resources are targeted to the most effective activities. Part of this will be ensuring that there is an awareness made about community grants, for those who might not be aware that the scheme is available.

In order to achieve the objective of enabling 'our communities to challenge, influence and shape our services' we will strengthen the Housing Community Network (HCN) structure to maximise its input into service delivery. We aim to achieve this by refocusing HCN meetings to regularly review all housing services. We aim to increase representation of rural residents in the community involvement framework by reintroducing a Regional tier within the network to allow for a broader reach across all of our communities and particularly those in rural areas. We will enhance the role of the Central Housing Forum, a forum which Chair of the Rural Forum, Patricia McQuillan sits on to ensure that the rural voice is being represented. We will also promote digital inclusion by launching a website to enhance the provision of online services for our customers whilst also understanding that Broadband connectivity may be an issue for some of our customers in the more isolated rural areas, we are working to identify community hubs, in which customers with no great broadband connection can come to avail of internet services here. We aim to continue to develop the capacity of community groups by continuing to fund Supporting Communities to work with groups so they can effectively engage with the HCN. We will improve networking and sharing best practice by supporting our Annual Community Conference, publishing a HCN annual report which highlights all the successes over the year and to consider developing a Central Housing Forum Website.

It is our intention that the rural voice can be heard and is alive throughout the delivery of the entire strategy.

Stage 2: Understand the Situation

Key questions to consider

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

We understand that the needs of those in rural areas are not always the same as those in urban areas and in order to make sure that we are providing the same services to both and give equal opportunity of access to services, then some things need tailored to the needs of the customer.

At present there are approximately 14,700 Housing Executive homes in rural areas. This works out at around 17% of total stock. The rural satisfaction rate is currently at 92%. Hopefully throughout the life of this strategy we will be able to increase that percentage by the work we are aiming to do through our two objectives which aim to promote and enable our communities.

Currently in rural areas there are rural community groups set up specifically to identify and promote the needs of rural communities. We connect with these community groups through direct engagement and through attendance at the Rural Community Network. To make sure we are connecting with our 'easy to ignore' groups such as those living in rural areas we promote the use of the existing Rural Residents Forum Structure which has representatives from different areas across Northern Ireland. The Rural Residents Forum is currently meeting once a month, this is soon changing to meet every six weeks.

The chair of the Rural Residents Forum sits on the Central Housing Forum, ensuring that there is representation from the rural community at that broader forum, discussing issues related to housing matters there.

The needs of the rural community are always considered and views wanted on large community involvement events such as the Community Conference, which the second biggest conference on the Housing Executive's Calendar. The chair of the Rural Residents Forum sits on the conference working group as a representation of the rural voice and feeds back any information through the Rural Residents Forum to keep customers/residents updated in any decisions that will likely impact or be of interest to people within rural communities.

Another existing design feature for the Housing Executive to gain the views of residents in rural areas is through the CTOS. This gives an opportunity to those customers/residents who may not want to get involved with Housing Community Networks Structures to get involved via other means; this could be through mystery shopping exercises etc.

In order to revise the community involvement strategy 14/17, which was coming to the end, we had to undertake a strategic review process. As part of this we sought out the views of stakeholders about the likely impacts of the policy. A series of consultation events were held all across Northern Ireland both for customers & residents as well as internal Housing Executive Staff.

During this consultation process rural needs were always in mind. We recognised that events in relation to this strategy needed to be brought into rural areas so that the voices of those representing members from the rural community were valued and heard. Therefore one of these events took place in a rural area in Omagh. This rural consultation event was attended by community members, tenants and residents as well as staff members from the Housing Executive and Supporting Communities. This consultation day allowed customers and residents in rural areas to give their feedback as to what they felt needed to be included in the new strategy and what they felt worked well with the old strategy. These comments were then brought forward to management to ensure that they were reflected in the structure of the new community involvement strategy.

Residents, tenants and customers from rural areas will continue to have involvement at every stage of the process in the community involvement strategy.

Stage 3: Develop and Appraise Options

Key questions to consider

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

We understand that rural residents may face a number of barriers when accessing or participating in measures included in the Community Involvement Strategy and mitigation measures have been put in place to ensure a fair rural outcome.

The first of these barriers is access to internet/broadband/ digital inclusion. We have concerns for those customers in rural areas who may have problems when the government agenda of digital by default is fully rolled out with welfare reform and universal credit. Broadband is not always readily available in rural areas, even patch managers attending home visits with tablets may be the best option in certain areas, as they will not be able to connect. In order to overcome this barrier we have started looking into community 'digital hubs' or community lets that will allow communities to access services and have good access to broadband.

In order to reach residents from all over the country, as we know some may not be able to access the new online community hub, we will ensure that anything that is written and put on the online hub will also be distributed in hard copy magazines such as the Streets Ahead magazine or Rural Matters.

An element of the D4C (Digital for Communities) project will be held in a rural area. This is to ensure that there is always a rural element in any services we are delivering to our community.

Geographical dispersion can also be a barrier to delivery in rural areas so the reintroduction of the regional tier to the Housing Community Network will be key means to overcome and mitigate any barriers to engagement for our more physically remote customers.

We will also be identifying the gaps in communication and engagement with communities in rural areas by using GIS mapping of existing groups and then ensuring that the areas which are underrepresented will be specifically targeted for promotion and engagement.

In order to achieve fair rural outcomes there is a standing item on the Central Housing Forum agenda. This allows a link to be made between the local voice and those members sitting at the top tier of the Housing Community Network Structure. Anything that is brought to the attention of Rural Residents Forum by community members is then fed through the structures and back down again to the community.

The new strategy also reflects the changing face of our estate; the new strategy is reaching out to all residents not just tenants. The previous strategy excluded those members of the community who were not tenants; perhaps some were leaseholders and were still accountable to the Housing Executive for Services charges. So many of our estates have changed in terms of the social housing make-up owner i.e. owner occupiers, private tenants, leaseholders and residents since the introduction of the right to buy. This new Community Involvement Strategy aims to be fully inclusive which would achieve a better outcome for all rural residents.

Stage 4: Prepare for Delivery

Key questions to consider

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

The delivery mechanisms that exist in rural areas are the Rural Residents Forum, the re-introduction of the regional tier to the HCN, the existing engagement with the Rural Community Network and Housing Executive publications, Streets Ahead and Rural Matters which have circulation to rural customers, residents and groups. They are a strong means of ensuring that the rural voice can be heard and is being represented.

The reintroduction of the regional tier has specifically been developed in order to strengthen the HCN structure to enable rural residents to be represented and allow the group to reach to its full capacity and achieve maximum impact.

The Rural Residents Forum is a specific existing mechanism that gives rural people the opportunity to scrutinise the Housing Executives services and put their rural view across via various different consultations. Through this forum members can highlight when an alternative solution is required.

These existing mechanisms will, as set out in stage 3, be used to deliver the strategy in a way that achieves fair outcomes for rural people.

Additional work will be carried out during the strategy such as the development of digital/ community hubs and GIS mapping with subsequent targeting of support to underrepresented areas in order to further deliver outcomes for rural people.

Stage 5: Implementation and Monitoring

Key questions to consider

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

In order to monitor the success of the strategy we will;

- Continue to develop new groups in underrepresented areas by reviewing and renewing Service level agreements
- Review the effectiveness of the existing community grants scheme by reviewing the outcomes achieved to date and produce an amended guide for Area Managers
- Strengthen the Housing Community Network structure to maximise its input into service delivery by reintroducing a regional tier within the network comprising representatives from area networks and other community fora and also enable scrutiny panels to scrutinise services and produce 'Service Improvement Plans'
- Continue to 'customer proof' new policies and procedures
- Track progress of Community Involvement Strategy, action plan and review measures of success
- Aim to overcome barriers such as giving our customers their digital wings by providing internet access on a digital platform to all offices affected by universal credit with the hope of developing the online portal where residents can access information. We can then monitor this service to see how many hits its getting, and how many hits its getting from rural areas

The objective to 'promote community involvement across all our communities' by conducting research to establish a baseline of current participation levels and following this up with the GIS Mapping exercise will monitor the uptake in rural areas so that further action can be taken if needed or no change will be made.

Overall implementation of the strategy will be monitored on an ongoing basis as we will ensure that it is a standing item on the agenda of the Rural Residents Forum and the Central Housing Forum.

We will also monitor the strategy yearly and look at the success of what we had outlined in our action plan to ensure that rural needs are being met. We will monitor the overall outcome and rural elements.



Stage 6: Evaluation and Review

Key questions to consider

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

There are processes in place to evaluate and review the implementation of the policy, strategy, plan or service, mainly by ensuring that it is a standing item on the agenda of the Rural Residents Forum which will be brought forward every six weeks and the Central Housing Forum which is once a month.

The strategy will also be subject to annual progress review and, at close of the strategy; a strategic review will be carried out in order to learn lessons for future strategies.

Rural Needs Impact Assessment Undertaken by:	Naoimh McArdleMcFall
Position	Community Engagement Officer
Signature	
Date Completed	20/04/18
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Date Approved	21/04/18

