NI Budget - Rural Needs Act
Assessment

Background

The Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 has placed a statutory obligation on public authorities with three main areas of responsibility, the consideration of rural needs; monitoring and reporting on how the public authority has complied with this requirement; and co-operation and sharing of information with other public authorities.

As well as the responsibilities of public authorities, DAERA has a number of additional responsibilities under the Act. These relate to regularly reviewing the bodies to which the Act applies, providing advice, commissioning of research, collating and publishing an annual monitoring report, a Ministerial statement to the Assembly and making arrangements to secure co-operation and exchange of information between public authorities.

Rural Needs Act – Budget Considerations

Departments have confirmed that they are committed to ensuring that they fulfil their rural proofing duties and take rural needs into account as appropriate.

DAERA has highlighted that Resource reductions in the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation and Rural Development Programme schemes would have a significant detrimental impact on rural dwellers.

DfI has indicated that a range of proposed reductions to roads, water and transport would have a disproportionate impact on rural areas.

DoH has indicated that changes to Non-Emergency Patient Transport policy may have a greater impact in rural areas.

DoJ has indicated that reductions to the PSNI budget are likely to have an impact on rural areas.

Departments will continue to fulfil their obligations under the Rural Needs Act and will finalise any considerations, including mitigations, as part of a final Budget outcome.

Conclusion

Ministers may wish to note that departments are committed to implementing the Rural Needs Act.

Ministers may also wish to note that there may be significant impact to rural dwellers from reductions in DAERA and DfI in particular and may wish to take this into account in formulating Budgets. Ministers may also wish to examine options for mitigation as appropriate.