

Appendix I – Draft Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA)

SECTION 1 - Defining the activity subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016

1A. Name of Public Authority.

Department of Finance (DoF)

1B. Please provide a short title which describes the activity being undertaken by the Public Authority that is subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016.

Land and Property Services (LPS) are reviewing the current operating hours of the LPS public counter, to ensure that it is fit for purpose. This policy, which is currently under development, proposes to streamline the current service provision.

1C. Please indicate which category the activity specified in Section 1B above relates to.

Developing a	Policy ☒	Strategy ☐	Plan ☐
Adopting a	Policy ☐	Strategy ☐	Plan ☐
Implementing a	Policy ☐	Strategy ☐	Plan ☐
Revising a	Policy ☐	Strategy ☐	Plan ☐
Designing a Public Service	☐		
Delivering a Public Service	☒		

1D. Please provide the official title (if any) of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service document or initiative relating to the category indicated in Section 1C above.

Land & Property Services (LPS) Public Counter Availability Policy

1E. Please provide details of the aims and/or objectives of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service.

The LPS public counter is based in Lanyon Plaza in Belfast. Its current opening hours are Monday to Friday 9.30am to 4.30pm. This policy proposes to reduce the Belfast counter opening hours to Monday to Friday 9.30am to 1pm.

LPS operate four regional offices which currently offer in-person customer support daily from Monday to Friday between 9.30am and 1.00pm. This policy proposes to reduce public counter opening hours in the regional offices to two days per week.

The policy is designed to support the ongoing digital transformation within LPS, particularly through the expansion of online customer portals. While face-to-face services will remain available, they will be reduced in recognition of the anticipated shift toward digital service delivery.

1F. What definition of 'rural' is the Public Authority using in respect of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?

Population Settlements of less than 5,000 (Default definition).

☒

Other Definition (Provide details and the rationale below).

☐

A definition of 'rural' is not applicable.

☐

Details of alternative definition of 'rural' used.

N/A

Rationale for using alternative definition of 'rural'.

N/A

Reasons why a definition of 'rural' is not applicable.

N/A

SECTION 2 - Understanding the impact of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

2A. Is the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service likely to impact on people in rural areas?

Yes ☒ No ☐ If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **2E**.

2B. Please explain how the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas.

The reduction in hours of the Belfast counter will require all LPS customers, including those in rural areas to travel to Belfast during the revised opening hours.

The reduction in hours of LPS regional offices will require customers to access services during the revised opening hours and potentially to travel to alternative sites to avail of the services.

2C. If the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently from people in urban areas, please explain how it is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently.

The reduction in operating hours of the Belfast counter will have some impact all LPS customers as, in order to avail of the services provided at this location, they will be required to visit the counter during the revised operating hours. It is likely that people in rural areas may have some increased impact in comparison to customers in urban areas due to the availability of fewer public transport services in order facilitate travelling to Belfast within the reduced hours.

The reduction in operation hours of the LPS regional offices will impact all LPS customers as, in order to avail of the services provided at these locations, they will be required to visit the offices during the revised operating hours and/or travel to a different location. With only two opening days, there is reduced flexibility, making it harder for individuals to align visits with work or caring responsibilities. It is anticipated that this will have a different impact on people in rural areas as it is assumed that they are more likely to use the regional offices, although data to support this assumption is not currently available.

2D. Please indicate which of the following rural policy areas the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to primarily impact on.

Rural Businesses	☐
Rural Tourism	☐
Rural Housing	☐
Jobs or Employment in Rural Areas	☐
Education or Training in Rural Areas	☐
Broadband or Mobile Communications in Rural Areas	☐
Transport Services or Infrastructure in Rural Areas	☐
Health or Social Care Services in Rural Areas	☐
Poverty in Rural Areas	☐
Deprivation in Rural Areas	☐
Rural Crime or Community Safety	☐
Rural Development	☐
Agri-Environment	☐
Other (Please state)	LPS customers living in rural areas

If the response to Section 2A was YES GO TO Section 3A.

2E. Please explain why the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is NOT likely to impact on people in rural areas.

N/A

SECTION 3 - Identifying the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas

3A. Has the Public Authority taken steps to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas that are relevant to the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?

Yes ☐ No ☒ If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **3E**.

3B. Please indicate which of the following methods or information sources were used by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

Consultation with Rural Stakeholders	☐	Published Statistics	☐
Consultation with Other Organisations	☐	Research Papers	☐
Surveys or Questionnaires	☐	Other Publications	☐
Other Methods or Information Sources (include details in Question 3C below).			☐

3C. Please provide details of the methods and information sources used to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas including relevant dates, names of organisations, titles of publications, website references, details of surveys or consultations undertaken etc.

N/A

3D. Please provide details of the social and economic needs of people in rural areas which have been identified by the Public Authority?

N/A

If the response to Section 3A was YES GO TO Section 4A.

3E. Please explain why no steps were taken by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas?

No specific, additional steps have been taken by the DoF to separately identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas for this proposal.

This proposal relates to the operational delivery of an existing service and in the development of the proposal, LPS has relied on its existing knowledge of customer profiles and service usage, including established understanding of how customers across Northern Ireland access LPS services through a combination of in-person, telephone and online channels. This includes awareness of the differing challenges faced by rural customers (e.g. travel distances, transport availability and digital connectivity), which have been considered as part of the overall assessment.

Given the limited nature and scope of the change, and the availability of alternative service channels, it was not considered proportionate to undertake further targeted research or data-gathering specific to rural communities at this stage.

SECTION 4 - Considering the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas

4A. Please provide details of the issues considered in relation to the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

N/a

SECTION 5 - Influencing the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

5A. Has the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, been influenced by the rural needs identified?

Yes

☒

No

☐

If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **5C**.

5B. Please explain how the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, has been influenced by the rural needs identified.

Although targeted research and data-gathering specific to rural communities has not been carried out, as part of the development of this policy proposal consideration has been given to rural needs which has resulted in the decision to retain reduced face-to-face services in both Belfast and the regional offices. In addition, consideration was given to what reduction in hours would be proportional to the increased offering and roll out of digital services whilst not unduly restricting access to face-to-face service by rural communities.

If the response to Section **5A** was **YES** GO TO Section **6A**.

5C. Please explain why the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or the delivery of the Public Service, has NOT been influenced by the rural needs identified.

SECTION 6 - Documenting and Recording

6A. Please tick below to confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained by the Public Authority and relevant information on the Section 1 activity compiled in accordance with paragraph 6.7 of the guidance.

I confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained and relevant information compiled.

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Rural Needs Impact Assessment undertaken by:	Ciara Coughlin
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Division/Branch	Land Registration Division
Signature:	
Date:	26 Feb 2026
Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:	Christine Farrell (on behalf of Land Registry)/ Colm O'Hagan (on behalf of Revenues & Benefits)
Position/Grade:	G5/G6
Division/Branch:	Land Registration/Revenues & Benefits
Signature:	
Date:	6 October 2026/ 7 October 2026