Disability Action Plan 2025/26



A Guide to the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 for Public Authorities

*(Revised) April 2018*

Appendix 1 - Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA)

Template

Sport Northern Ireland’s (Sport NI) Disability Action Plan 2024-2026 sets out how we intend to meet our statutory obligations and how disability issues will be more effectively mainstreamed by making sure they are central to policy and decision making within Sport NI. This Disability Action Plan is a statement of Sport NI’s commitment to meeting its statutory obligations to have regard to the need to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and to encourage participation by disabled people in public life.

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

n/a

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.

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

x

X

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

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.

Sport NI

1A. Name of Public Authority.

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

A Guide to the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 for Public Authorities

*(Revised) April 2018*

N/A

*Reasons why a definition of ‘rural’ is not applicable.*

N/A

*Rationale for using alternative definition of ‘rural’.*

N/A

*Details of alternative definition of ‘rural’ used.*

Population Settlements of less than 5,000 (Default definition). Other Definition (Provide details and the rationale below).

A definition of ‘rural’ is not applicable.

X

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

The plan will impact disabled people in Northern Ireland, including disabled people from rural areas. Outcomes that will impact disabled people in rural areas includes:

* Improved policy, programme and project implementation to improve participation by disabled people in public life, proxy measured by GB Board and/or applicant board and volunteer memberships.
* Sport NI, and DfC, to demonstrate that the Board is reflective of society as a whole and the sports sector – and to take actions to address.
* Number of governing body Board members with a disability to be known. This will enable Sport NI to consider whether its invested governing bodies’ Boards are reflective of society as a whole – and to take consider actions to address within its influence.
* Highlighting to the sector any issues identified with regard to under-representation and promoting positive work around disabled inclusivity with partners.

The investments provided within this plan will benefit people with a disability all over Northern Ireland. Including those who live in rural areas, including schedule of events and projects in rural areas including the successful ‘All Out Trekking project’ in Gosford Forest Park. Events and opportunities in rural areas are also advertised in the Active Living No Limits website. Over the next 4 years our partners will lobby and advocate for local councils and governing bodies of sport to increase the provision of disability all over sport and in particularly in areas west of the province where there us a greater number of rural dwellers. The plan projects will also support over 100 member clubs all over Northern Ireland providing a range of participation programmes, events, training courses and education projects all designed to improve the health and wellbeing of disabled people. Rural member clubs include Richhill Disability Services and Maghera Adult Centre. Other members groups in regional areas will also serve people living in rural areas especially those in regional towns such as Omagh, Enniskillen, Magherafelt and Cookstown.

The plan will also provide volunteering opportunities for those in rural areas through training courses and support will be given to sporting venues on how to make their facilities more inclusive ensuring people with a disability have equal opportunities to participate in sport and physical activity.

A Guide to the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 for Public Authorities

*(Revised) April 2018*

The programmes and investment within this plan covers all Northern Ireland, therefore will benefit both rural areas and urban areas. There are 100 Disability Sport NI member clubs/groups in Northern Ireland offering a range of sports and physical activities. The majority of theses may be in urban areas where there is more demand but there are clubs/groups in rural areas and people with a disability living in those rural areas also can avail of services in rural or neighboring urban settings. Disability Sport NI will also support and provide opportunities for non member groups through working with partners including local councils and governing bodies of sport. We and delivery partners are cognisant of the needs of all people with a disability particularly around barriers to participation e.g. travel and cost, as a result they will ensure there are opportunities, events and competitions in areas of high social need including rural areas.

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.

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

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

X

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

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

A Guide to the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 for Public Authorities

*(Revised) April 2018*

N/A

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

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

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)

Social Inclusion in rural areas

X

x

X

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

In the development of the Sport NI Corporate Plan 2020-25, an extensive consultation exercise was carried out, which captured feedback from all stakeholders and partners including the general public.

The methodology for the engagement and public consultation phase of the development of the Sport NI Draft Corporate Plan 2020-2025 was to engage extensively, particularly with S75 and under-represented groups, new partners, non-sporting partners, as well as with traditional stakeholders, and to take a collaborative co-design and problem solving approach; to progress Sport NI’s strategic approach to investment. Sport Ni specifically consulted with DAERA, rural Councils, governing bodies, rural community and sporting group and S75 groups.

An EQIA on the corporate plan was completed: [Equality-Impact-Assessment-Sport-NI-Corporate-Plan.pdf](https://www.sportni.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Equality-Impact-Assessment-Sport-NI-Corporate-Plan.pdf) which considered rural needs. DAERA’s Key Rural Issues Northern Ireland 2023 was also considered and

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/poverty-and-income-inequality-report-urban-rural-statistics>.

Specifically regarding disabled people in rural areas needs identified were:

[Rural Disability and Community Participation | Frontiers Research Topic](https://www.frontiersin.org/research-topics/26251/rural-disability-and-community-participation/magazine)

[Disability in rural areas: A matter of perception](https://www.ifad.org/en/w/opinions/disability-in-rural-areas-a-matter-of-perception)

[On making disability in rural places more visible: Challenges and opportunities [Introduction to a special issue] - ScienceDirect](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0743016717301663)

[Intersectionality, childhood disability and rurality: What does rural life mean for disabled children and their families? - Flynn - 2025 - Sociologia Ruralis - Wiley Online Library](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/soru.12471?msockid=3df967a9ab376a37364a72c4aa8c6bf1)

A Guide to the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 for Public Authorities

*(Revised) April 2018*

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.

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).

x

x

x

x

x

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.

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

x

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?

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

A summary of the social and economic needs are as follows:

• A need to address social isolation.

• Diversity of opportunities in rural areas

• Limited reach in the West of the province

• More strategic engagement between organisations

• Utilisation on the natural environment and coastal areas

• Volunteer capacity in rural areas needs improved.

• Lack of public transport and regularity in rural areas.

• Requirement to have opportunities in rural areas advertised better.

• Need for the availability of health and wellbeing services in rural areas

The information provided highlights the issues facing people living in rural areas. Obviously, better access in relation to public transport would help this project, but creating more sporting opportunities in rural areas will be provided. Disability Sport NI will contribute to this by providing opportunities all over Northen Ireland including rural areas. They will also work with partners to maximise potential for opportunities to address the issues that have been identified in the consultations and research highlighted

A Guide to the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 for Public Authorities

*(Revised) April 2018*

N/A

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

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

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

The issues raised for people residing in rural areas included the following.

• Distance to travel to avail of sporting opportunities.

• Access to public transport (including regularity)

• Availability of physical activity opportunities in rural areas.

Feedback from Sport NI draft corporate plan 2020-25 consultation and in particular in relation to the Cornerstone to target sport in rural communities, in disadvantaged areas and with under-represented groups included the following:

• Rural isolation was a common issue.

• Reach of clubs to potential members in the west of the province

• Governing Bodies reach to councils in the West of the province.

• Limitations on the variety of opportunities available

• Volunteering capacity in rural areas is an issue.

• Utilisation of natural environment and coastal areas is important.

• Lack of knowledge of when and where opportunities are available.

From the Key Rural issues Northern Ireland 2023

* Population growth in rural areas from 2001-20 has outstripped that in urban

areas by a factor of almost 3 to 1 (20% to 7%)

* People in rural areas have to travel on average an extra 2.7 miles more than those in urban areas to participate in sport
* People in rural areas have to travel an additional average of 45 miles per year more than those in urban areas to participate in sport
* Data from the Travel Survey NI 2021 revealed that just 17% of rural dwellers live

within a 3 minute walk of the nearest bus stop, compared with 38% of those living in

urban areas – with 8% of rural dwellers living a 44 minute or longer walk to their

nearest stop

* The frequency of public transport services also differs greatly between urban and

rural areas. More than two thirds (69%) of urban dwellers reported a bus service

frequency of at least once an hour, compared with 19% of those who live in rural

locations

(2019) Sport NI, Active Fit and Sporty Participation Survey.

* Those from rural areas described the challenges they faced such as lack of choice of sports, transport issues and social isolation
* Increased promotion of the sport and physical activity options available in local communities, particularly in rural areas - many participants explained they believed there are opportunities out

there but they were unsure where to look.

Sport NI’s programmes and investment within the plan will focus on providing opportunities to participate in sport for all areas in Northern Ireland, including those in rural areas. Relative work includes.

1) Delivery of the all out trekking project in Gosford Forest Park, providing outdoor opportunities in the natural environment for up to 150 people annually.

2) Working with ABC Council, an Inclusive Sport & Leisure Officer will organise and deliver a range of physical recreation programmes and sessions across the Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon District Council area, including Inclusive cycling, wheelie active, disability sports clubs, inclusive gym, autism & sport, disability water sports & table tennis programmes plus summer schemes.

3) Supporting 25 member clubs, groups and schools annually to effectively deliver participation and competition programmes to the disabled community through the provision of training, education and advice and through the organisation and support of community events.

4) Lobbying and encouraging owners and operators to develop and manage sports facilities, stadia and outdoor places across Northern Ireland which are inclusive of disabled people. This includes advice and guidance on making their facilities more accessible and delivering training on providing sporting opportunities for people with a disability.

5) Advertising and promoting opportunities that are available all over northern Ireland and in particular in rural areas through the Active Living No Limits website.

A Guide to the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 for Public Authorities

*(Revised) April 2018*

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

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

A Guide to the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 for Public Authorities

*(Revised) April 2018*

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

The plan will benefit people with a disability all over Northern Ireland, including those who live in rural areas. The programmes contained within the plan will include events and projects in rural areas including the successful ‘All Out Trekking project’ in Gosford Forest Park. Events and opportunities in rural areas are also advertised in the active living no limits website. Over the next 4 years, we have funded providers to lobby and advocate for local councils and governing bodies of sport to increase the provision of disability all over sport and in particularly in areas west of the province where there us a greater number of rural dwellers. The plan will include support for over 100 member clubs all over Northern Ireland providing a range of participation programmes, events, training courses and education projects all designed to improve the health and wellbeing of disabled people. Rural member clubs include Richhill Disability Services and Maghera Adult Centre. Other members groups in regional areas will also serve people living in rural areas especially those in regional towns such as Omagh, Enniskillen, Magherafelt and Cookstown. The plan will also provide volunteering opportunities for those in rural areas through training courses and support will be given to sporting venues on how to make their facilities more inclusive ensuring people with a disability have equal opportunities to participate in sport and physical activity.

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.

Yes No If the response is NO GO TO Section 5C.

X

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?

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

A Guide to the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 for Public Authorities

*(Revised) April 2018*

Rural Needs Impact Assessment undertaken by:

Ali Campbell

Position/Grade:

Policy and Insights Manager

Division/Branch

Sport NI

Signature:

A Campbell

Date:

03 06 25

Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:

Rebecca Hope

Position/Grade:

Interim Director of Sport / G6

Division/Branch:

Sport NI

Signature:

R Hope

Date:

04/06/25

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

X

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.

**SECTION 6 - Documenting and Recording**

n/a

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.