

Appendix I - Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA) Template

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

1A. Name of Public Authority.

Sport Northern Ireland (Sport NI)

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.

Commonwealth Games NI Investment (23-27)

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.

Commonwealth Games NI Investment (23-27)

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

The proposed investment in Commonwealth Games Northern Ireland (CGNI) aims to support the preparation, delivery and performance of Team Northern Ireland at the Commonwealth Games and Commonwealth Youth Games, while strengthening the wider high-performance sport system. The investment will support athletes, coaches and support personnel through enhanced planning, development and partnership working, helping to improve international performance outcomes, promote inclusion and wellbeing, and build a sustainable pipeline of talent and expertise for future Games cycles

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 Commonwealth Games Northern Ireland (CGNI) Investment is expected to have a positive impact on people living in rural areas by increasing access to high-performance sport opportunities and support services. ([Sport NI Strategic Context](#)).

Athletes, coaches, volunteers and support personnel from rural communities are represented across many of the sports that contribute to Team Northern Ireland, but can face additional challenges in accessing specialist facilities, coaching expertise, competition opportunities and performance support due to their geographic location. The investment will support the preparation and development of athletes and the wider performance workforce, helping to reduce some of the barriers associated with living in rural areas.

Through investment in athlete preparation, support services, people development and support for sports with Commonwealth Games potential, the programme will provide opportunities for individuals from rural communities to progress within the performance pathway and access experiences that may not otherwise be available. This includes support for athletes preparing to compete at Commonwealth Games and Commonwealth Youth Games level, as well as development opportunities for coaches, practitioners and volunteers.

The programme is also expected to increase visibility and representation of rural communities within high-performance sport. Athletes and coaches from rural areas who achieve selection to Team Northern Ireland can act as role models within their local communities, helping to inspire participation, raise aspirations and demonstrate progression opportunities within sport. The investment recognises that sporting talent exists across all parts of Northern Ireland and seeks to ensure that opportunities are not limited by where an individual lives.

Overall, the investment is expected to benefit rural communities by supporting fairer access to performance sport opportunities, reducing barriers associated with geography, strengthening the performance sport workforce and enabling athletes from across Northern Ireland to compete and succeed on the international stage.

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 proposed investment in Commonwealth Games Northern Ireland (CGNI) is likely to impact people in rural areas differently from those in urban areas due to differences in proximity to training facilities, coaching expertise, competition opportunities and performance support services. Athletes, coaches and volunteers in rural areas often need to travel greater distances to access high-performance environments and may incur higher costs associated with participation, training and competition.

The investment is therefore likely to have a proportionately greater benefit for individuals in rural areas, as it will support access to development opportunities, support services and performance programmes that might otherwise be more difficult to access. Through initiatives such as athlete preparation, people development, support services and targeted assistance for sports and athletes with Commonwealth Games potential, the programme can help reduce some of the geographic barriers experienced by those living in rural communities.

The programme may also have a greater impact on sports that are more prevalent in rural areas or where athletes and coaches are dispersed across Northern Ireland. By supporting a wider range of sports and investing in workforce development, the programme can help ensure that talented individuals are able to progress within the performance pathway regardless of where they live. This can contribute to more equitable access to high-performance sport opportunities and reduce the disadvantage associated with distance from major population centres.

Overall, while the investment is intended to benefit participants across Northern Ireland, it is likely to have a more significant impact on those in rural areas by helping to address challenges relating to accessibility, travel and connection to performance sport opportunities, thereby supporting greater representation and progression within Team Northern Ireland and the wider performance sport system.

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)	Sport participation/development opportunities and retention within performance pathways

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.

Sport NI has considered the following information on rural needs:

Sport Northern Ireland has drawn on a range of quantitative data sources, qualitative evidence, and stakeholder consultation to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas relevant to the System Partners Investment – NGB Programme (2026–2031). Through analysis of research, survey data, programme monitoring returns, consultation feedback, and policy analysis, Sport NI has developed a robust evidence base on rural needs. This ensures that the programme is informed not only by statistical trends but also by the lived experiences of rural communities and the organisations that serve them. The key methods and sources include: Rural Related Research, Publications and Other Information; [Urban-Rural Health Inequalities in NI](#) (November 2022); [Equality-Impact-Assessment-Sport-NI-Corporate-Plan.pdf](#); DAERA - [Key Rural Issues 2024](#); DAERA - [Key Rural Issues 2023](#); Continuous Household Survey 2023/24: Rural v Urban Participation: [experience-of-sport-by-adults-in-northern-ireland-202324.xlsx](#); Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland (DAERA, 2022): Identified access to services, transport, digital connectivity, and community sustainability as key cross-cutting priorities, which were factored into this RNIA ([DAERA Rural Policy Framework](#)).

NISRA Data ([Census Area Explorer](#); [Northern Ireland Local Statistics Explorer](#); [PfG Wellbeing Framework](#); [Making Life Better | NISRA](#); [Social, Economic and Environment Indicators](#)).

Sport NI has considered the engagement and consultation data: Consultation Workshops with Governing Bodies (July–September 2025): NGB representatives highlighted key challenges in rural delivery, including travel distances, volunteer reliance, and access to suitable facilities. Direct engagement with rural clubs, local authorities, and community organisations provided qualitative insights into barriers such as affordability, facility access, and digital connectivity.

Sport NI Programme Monitoring Data has been considered: Athlete Awards, Nationally Funded Athletes, Pathway data, System Investment in Governing Bodies (SSIGB) Monitoring Data 2024–25 has been considered

Sport NI Insight Reports and Research has also been considered:

Sport NI's funded research has also been considered.

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

- **Participation Inequalities**
Rural participation rates remain lower than urban areas [experience-of-sport-by-adults-in-northern-ireland-202324.xlsx](#)
 - 3% greater participation in urban areas within past year, with a 2% greater participation in urban areas within past four weeks
 - 3% greater participation and walking in urban area within past year, with a 4% greater participation and walking in urban area within past year
- **Reduced Athlete Support from Club Sustainability**
reduced club support for rural athletes. Smaller rural clubs face financial fragility due to limited income streams and reliance on modest fees (<https://www.sportni.net/sports-strategy/>).
- **Travel & Transport Barriers**
Longer distances and higher costs restrict access to training and competition (<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/rural-policy-framework-northern-ireland>).
- **Reduced support from Volunteer Pressures**
Athletes have reduced support in rural areas. Heavy dependence on volunteers, compounded by ageing populations and recruitment challenges (<https://www.sportni.net/volunteering/>).
- **Facilities & Access**
Athletes have limited access to dedicated facilities; reliance on shared spaces reduces quality and availability (<https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/data-zone-boundaries-gis-format>) and the need to travel is greater.
- **Digital Connectivity**
Poor broadband limits online learning and club management (<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/key-rural-issues-2024>).
- **Cost of Participation**
Travel, equipment, and facility hire costs disproportionately impact rural families (<https://www.sportireland.ie/ism-2024>).

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?

N/a.

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.

The proposed investment in Commonwealth Games Northern Ireland (CGNI) considered a number of social and economic issues that can affect people living in rural areas. Athletes, coaches and volunteers in rural communities often face additional costs and challenges associated with accessing training facilities, specialist coaching, support services, competitions and development opportunities due to greater travel distances and fewer locally available services.

The investment seeks to support athletes and the wider performance sport workforce by providing access to athlete preparation programmes, support services, people development opportunities and performance pathway initiatives. These activities can help reduce some of the barriers experienced by individuals living in rural areas and improve opportunities to progress within performance sport regardless of geographic location.

Consideration was also given to the importance of ensuring that talented athletes from all parts of Northern Ireland can access opportunities to develop and compete at the highest level. By supporting a range of sports, workforce development activities and athlete support mechanisms, the investment aims to reduce the impact of rural isolation, improve access to performance opportunities and ensure that location is not a barrier to sporting progression.

Overall, the programme recognises that people in rural areas may face additional social and economic challenges in accessing high-performance sport and seeks to mitigate these through targeted investment, support services and development opportunities across the Commonwealth Games cycle.

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.

The Commonwealth Games Northern Ireland (CGNI) investment financially assists the organisation to deliver support to sports and talented individuals from NI in respect of their preparation, development, training and competition in sporting activities in preparation for the Games. They will support those competitors of proven ability at junior and senior levels whose standing judged against World, British and Irish standards indicate the potential to compete with credit at national level, international, with distinction in British and Irish Championships and at the Commonwealth games. It should be noted that athletes competing for Team NI at the CWG are nominated via their sporting organisation and Sport NI have no input or control over the nomination process for athletes elected for the Games.

Therefore athletes from rural areas will be able to access funding and support for their preparation, development, training and competition costs towards Games qualification if eligible, including the aforementioned rural needs.

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.

N/a

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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