

APPENDIX 3

SECTION 1

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

1A. Name of Public Authority

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council on behalf of Mid South West Region.
Mid South West is a collaboration between Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council and Mid Ulster District Council.

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

Development of a Regional Economic Strategy (RES)

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

Developing a	Policy		Strategy	X	Plan	
Adopting a	Policy		Strategy		Plan	
Implementing a	Policy		Strategy		Plan	
Revising a	Policy		Strategy		Plan	
Designing a Public Service						
Designing 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

Mid South West Regional Economic Strategy

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

Approximately two thirds of all residents in Mid South West region, live within rural areas. Therefore, the Regional Economic Strategy seeks to allow for appropriate development opportunities in urban and rural areas, whilst at the same time, protecting our sensitive environmental areas from inappropriate development. This is important if we are to maintain the vibrancy of the rural area and ensure it continues to be a place where

people live and work and also be somewhere which fosters the entrepreneurial spirit, which is a distinct characteristic of the region. Having said that we are custodians of some of the most unique landscapes and internationally important nature conservation sites which must be protected from inappropriate and over dominant development.

The headline ambition of the Mid South West Regional Economic Strategy is to raise productivity levels across the region and in so doing create better paid jobs for residents and close the productivity gap between MSW and the rest of NI. Closing sectoral productivity gaps in MSW has the potential to be equivalent to a 4.3% uplift of the NI economy. This growth will be facilitated via a range of appropriate interventions across the region including the countryside and in the rural settlements, as well as through appropriate rural economic development opportunities.

The strategy outlines the growth and development vision for the Mid South West region. It focuses on strengths, challenges, specific and targeted economic interventions and investments to drive productivity in the region over the longer term. The ambition is to ‘supercharge’ the growth of the collective economy and ensure inclusive prosperity in MSW.

MSW RES demonstrates that a range of funding sources and policy changes will be required to realise the benefits of the strategy. It will build on the region’s economic strengths and contribute to improving the competitiveness of Northern Ireland overall. This means:

- boosting productivity
- delivering more and better jobs
- tackling inequalities
- greater investment in the area
- supporting our businesses to innovate and grow
- improving skills
- ensuring future skills to meet the needs of our growing economy and the resilience of the place.

The MSW Region has significant strengths in the following sectors:

- Advanced manufacturing, materials and engineering
- Agri-food
- Life and Health Sciences
- Digital and creative technologies
- Tourism
- Construction

The strategy addresses the regional economic balance and outlines the key areas of economic, infrastructure and development activity that the MSW region will commit to in developing a regional economic agenda to transform economic performance in both urban and rural areas.

Action/implementation plan for interventions to be developed at a later stage.

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).	X
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	X	No		If the response is NO GO TO Section 2E .
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2B. Please explain how the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas.

The default definition of "rural" used in Northern Ireland is those settlements with a population of 5,000 or less together with the open countryside. Therefore, everywhere in the Mid South West region outside of the hub settlements is classed as being rural. This means that Mid South West region is a predominantly rural region with approximately 478,317 residents of which two thirds are classed as rural dwellers and therefore, this strategy will clearly have an impact on what is defined as the rural area.

The strategy sets out the 'direction of travel' in relation to our vision and ambition for the region; it identifies the opportunities and challenges we face; and sets out the four priority 'pillars' around which future investment and actions to realise our ambitions should be framed. Priority pillars include enabling infrastructure, boosting innovation and digital activity, building a high-performing visitor/tourist economy, and 'future proofing' the skills base. Furthermore, it provides an early, high level indication of potential specific projects/interventions that may sit under each of these 'pillars' - which will be the subject to ongoing development and delivered through the subsequent action/implementation plan.

The focus of MSW Regional Economic Strategy is about making the entire region a better place to live and work for all citizens in both urban and rural areas. Its primary aims are to support MSW businesses to be innovative, create jobs and grow in local and international markets, improve physical infrastructure and connectivity to harder to reach areas, enhance tourism performance, and upskill our people to enable an economy that works for everyone.

To achieve the headline ambition of the strategy, investment in infrastructure is a critical enabler to realising growth ambitions, given the significant deficits that exist in several aspects of the basic economic infrastructure for competitiveness in MSW. The RES highlights the serious gaps in our basic infrastructure and the data that shows a high proportion (40%) of

Super Output Area's are ranked amongst the most deprived in NI for access to services. This indicator covers travel time by private and public transport to a range of services and the proportion of properties with slow broadband. The access to services deprivation referenced also reflects the fact that much of the MSW region has relatively poor access to higher speed broadband connections. The largely rural nature of the region requires almost positive investment in this respect.

Through investment in our basic infrastructure including: roads, rail, broadband and mobile phone coverage, enhanced electricity supply and site development; this will lead to social benefits for rural areas which are the result of increased wealth and economic prosperity.

Consequently, actions that we will take through the RES to improve our physical infrastructure and connectivity will have an immediate impact on our productivity and potential for growth, making the MSW a more attractive region to higher skilled individuals and for business investment

Whilst at this stage the RES is a strategic framework, it is anticipated that the subsequent action / implementation plan is likely to have a significant positive impact on rural people by supporting the development of interventions that will 'supercharge' the growth of our collective economy and ensure inclusive prosperity.

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 Regional Economic Strategy aims to target both individuals and businesses across the district in both rural and urban areas, and does recognise the circumstances of 'rural' in terms of the issues that they face. It takes account of access to training and employment and acquirement of skills opportunities as well as looking at infrastructural support for rural areas (broadband, mobile phone coverage, roads network, utilities etc). It will also consider access to services and the ability of rural dwellers to continue to access essential services.

'Future Proofing' the skills base is one of the four intervention areas in the strategy. There are potential actions/project concepts for further development that will impact equally on people living in both urban and rural areas. Extending the range of higher-level apprenticeships and degree apprenticeships and the promotion of these will have a positive impact on younger people and their parents/families of these young people. Initiatives to promote career attractiveness include the development of productive, inclusive and engaging workplaces. As well as the workforce environment itself, businesses will be encouraged to increasingly offer different employment models, flexi-working, contract and portfolio working-all of which have the potential to significantly change the way they attract, invest and develop skills in future. This approach will benefit many people living in rural areas.

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	X
Rural Tourism	X
Rural Housing	X

Jobs or Employment in Rural Areas	X
Education or Training in Rural Areas	X
Broadband or Mobile Communications in Rural Areas	X
Transport Services or Infrastructure in Rural Areas	X
Health or Social Care Services in Rural Areas	
Poverty in Rural Areas	
Deprivation in Rural Areas	
Rural Crime or Community Safety	
Rural Development	X
Agri-Environment	X
Other (Please state)	

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	X	No		If the Response is NO GO TO Section 3E.
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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	X
Consultation with Other Organisations	X	Research Papers	X
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.

In developing the RES and in other work to date, we have led an extensive engagement process across the region. In effect this RES has been extensively shaped and directed by the industry/business base within MSW, aligned to the fact that it is their commitment, drive and ambition that have contributed to the growth and success of our region to date and will be instrumental to realising our future potential. Recognising the distinctiveness of MSW as a private-sector led economy, we prioritised engagement with businesses and membership bodies to understand the opportunities and challenges facing them and the interventions needed to unlock further growth in GVA and productivity for our region. Many of the businesses with whom we engaged are based in rural locations.

In addition, we have consulted with elected officials, Government departments/ agencies, Invest NI, Skills Bodies, Higher and Further Education Institutions, and Universities to ensure buy in and input from key stakeholders across MSW and Northern Ireland.

Data produced as part of developing Community Plans, Local Development Plans and Corporate Plans across the three Mid South West Region Councils, has also been used to identify the social and economic needs of people in the region.

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

Mid South West region is a predominantly rural district with approximately two thirds of its population living in the rural area.

Mid South West region has a vibrant rural area consisting of active communities, a strong entrepreneurial spirit which contributes to the overall employment base and rural villages with considerable character and heritage importance. This vibrant rural area needs to be supported and sustained if it is to remain as a vitally important part of our region. This means that the Rural Economic Strategy needs to deliver a suite of project interventions and policy changes which can allow adequate flexibility to provide for infrastructure, innovation, digital activity, enhanced tourism economy and employment opportunities in rural areas, whilst still protecting the character and heritage of the countryside and rural villages.

As well as the need to sustain the rural area and consolidate its current situation, there are also various elements of rural life which have been identified as needing to be improved. The rural area in Mid South West region suffers from some of the poorest broadband speeds and worst mobile data coverage in Northern Ireland. In addition, parts of the rural area also experience some of the longest journey times to acute hospital services when compared against the rest of Northern Ireland. These issues contribute to social isolation and feelings of exclusion by reducing the levels of connectivity between the rural area and the main urban centres. The Rural Economic Strategy must therefore endeavour to address these needs in order to help reduce the feelings of social isolation and exclusion which are being experienced by many in rural areas.

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.

Councils representing the Mid South West region have considered the need for providing enabling infrastructure, enhancing local employment opportunities within the area, diversifying the economy with a particular focus on 'future proofing' the skills base and creating opportunities within all sectors including new and emerging sectors.

In terms of providing infrastructure in order to tackle some of the problems which contribute to rural isolation and social exclusion across the region, the RES must be capable of protecting existing and building new key transport corridors which link the main hub towns in the District to each other and to the wider rural area as well.

Despite the MSW region being recognised as the 'economic engine' of NI, and a highly entrepreneurial economy with favorable survival rates, there is evidence that too many of our indigenous businesses fail to grow. Over 86% of local businesses have less than 10 employees compared to 83.9% in NI. In addition, over a third of MSW businesses have a turnover of less than £50,000 compared to a quarter across NI. The need for continued support for SMEs in both urban and rural areas has been acknowledged.

Underinvestment in transport infrastructure; shortfalls in digital connectivity; the lack of incubator, office and light industrial facilities; as well as shortage of labour / skills in more recent years – are contributing factors to the fact that too many of our indigenous businesses fail to grow. There were also suggestions that insufficient technology adoption was hindering productivity, competitiveness and business growth more generally in the SME economy. Therefore, a key ambition within the RES will be to enhance the leadership skills of our existing business owners and workforce, as well as provide support to our businesses with technology adoption for growth and development. Given the scale of our small business base in MSW the potential for growth in rural areas is enormous.

The strategy recognises that issues of poverty and social isolation exist within the region, and in particular rural areas. Our economy is near or at full employment, with high levels of resident employment and relatively low levels of inactivity and unemployment. Broadly speaking, our region does not suffer from excessive concentrations of deprivation, albeit that there are 'deep pockets' of deprivation in some localities, which would be within the top 10

percent of most deprived Super Output Areas (SOAs) in NI. As two thirds of the MSW region is located in rural areas, deprivation has higher prevalence among rural dwellers.

As previously stated, a key issue for many rural dwellers is that of access to services, health and employment and their associated need for appropriate infrastructure in all areas, those living in rural areas often experience these more acutely due to their geographical isolation, lower density and the dispersed rural nature of many rural settlements across the MSE region. This is further compounded by the limited availability of public transport infrastructure and the blackspots of poor or no broadband provision in the rural areas. The strategy stipulates the need for mitigations to ensure that all dwellers, irrespective of their rurality, have access to good broadband and mobile phone connectivity.

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	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No		If the response is NO GO TO Section 5C .
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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 aims, objectives, interventions and operational subject policies of the MSW Regional Economic Strategy will encourage sustaining rural communities and ‘supercharging’ the growth of the collective economy to ensure inclusive prosperity for all.

In terms of interventions, policy changes and economic development opportunities the strategy sets out opportunity for all businesses, and in particular SME sector to grow and be more productive. The strategy also seeks to protect and consolidate major areas of existing rural industry by enhancing their capabilities in crucial enabling technologies such as data analytics, robotics, automation, artificial intelligence, augmented reality, advanced materials and production techniques, and exploiting the growth opportunities these technologies provide.

The strategy highlights the major utility infrastructure deficits in relation to the prevailing wastewater network capacity and state electricity supply across the region. The deficit in relation to wastewater network capacity is a major constraint on housing development in rural settlements and on the development of serviced industrial land, to enable business expansion. In addition, it highlights the need for research on a policy agenda change in respect of the regeneration of our rural areas.

Actions that we take through the implementation of the RES to improve our infrastructure, enhance innovation and digital activity, build our tourism economy and ‘future proof’ the skills base will have an immediate impact on our productivity and potential growth, making our rural areas more attractive to higher skilled individuals and for business investment.

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.

Rural Needs Impact Assessment undertaken by:	Helen Gormley
Position/Grade:	Mid South West Region Project Officer
Department/Directorate	Place
Signature:	
Date:	9 February 2020
Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:	Olga Murtagh
Department/Directorate:	Place
Division/Branch	
Signature:	
Date:	10 February 2020