



Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016

2016 CHAPTER 19

An Act to impose a duty on public authorities to have due regard to rural needs; and for connected purposes. [9th May 2016]

BE IT ENACTED by being passed by the Northern Ireland Assembly and assented to by Her Majesty as follows:

Duty of public authorities to have due regard to rural needs

- 1.—(1) A public authority must have due regard to rural needs when—
 - (a) developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans, and
 - (b) designing and delivering public services.
- (2) For the purposes of this Act, “public authority” means any body or person listed in the Schedule.
- (3) The Department must, at least every three years from the coming into operation of this section, review the list of bodies and persons set out in the Schedule and, if it thinks it appropriate, by order amend the Schedule to—
 - (a) add a body or person to the Schedule;
 - (b) remove a body or person from the Schedule; or
 - (c) modify any entry in the Schedule.
- (4) An order under subsection (3) may provide for a body or person to be a public authority for all or any of the purposes of this Act.

(5) The Department must not exercise the power conferred by subsection (3) so that a body or person becomes a public authority for any of the purposes of this Act unless the body or person is a body or person appearing to the Department to exercise functions of a public nature.

(6) An order under subsection (3) may contain such transitional provision as the Department thinks appropriate.

(7) An order under subsection (3) must not be made unless a draft of the order has been laid before, and approved by a resolution of, the Assembly.

Guidance, advice and information, etc.

2. The Department may take such steps as appear to it to be appropriate to—
 - (a) provide any person with guidance, advice and information about issues connected with rural needs or ways of meeting those needs;
 - (b) undertake, commission or support (by financial means or otherwise) research into any matter relating to rural needs.

Monitoring and reporting

3.—(1) A public authority must, in such manner as may be directed by the Department—

- (a) compile information on the exercise of its functions under section 1;
- (b) include that information in its annual report; and
- (c) send that information to the Department.

(2) The Department must publish an annual report containing—

- (a) the information sent to it under subsection (1)(c); and
- (b) information on the exercise by the Department of its functions under this Act,

and lay a copy of the report before the Assembly.

(3) The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development must, on or after the day on which the report is laid before the Assembly, make a statement to the Assembly about the content of the report.

Co-operation with other bodies

4. The Department must make arrangements with public authorities with a view to securing co-operation and the exchange of information between public authorities.

Commencement

5. Sections 1 to 4 come into operation on such day or days (not being later than 1 June 2018) as the Department may by order appoint.

Interpretation

6. In this Act—

“the Department” means the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development;

“rural needs” means the social and economic needs of persons in rural areas.

Short title

7. This Act may be cited as the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016.

SCHEDULE

Section 1(2).

PUBLIC AUTHORITIES

A Northern Ireland department

A district council

The Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland

The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools

The Education Authority

A Health and Social Care Trust

Invest Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service Board

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive

The Northern Ireland Library Authority

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board

The Regional Agency for Public Health and Social Well-Being

The Regional Health and Social Care Board

The Sports Council for Northern Ireland