

Appendix 1 - 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.

Firearms & Explosives Branch, Department of Justice

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.

Public consultation exercise seeking views on proposals to amend current firearms licensing fees and the "banded system" which permits one-off-one-on firearms transactions that can be carried out by a registered firearms dealer (RFD).

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

| | | | |
|-----------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Developing a | Policy <input type="checkbox"/> | Strategy <input type="checkbox"/> | Plan <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Adopting a | Policy <input type="checkbox"/> | Strategy <input type="checkbox"/> | Plan <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Implementing a | Policy <input type="checkbox"/> | Strategy <input type="checkbox"/> | Plan <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Revising a | Policy <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Strategy <input type="checkbox"/> | Plan <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Designing a Public Service | <input type="checkbox"/> | | |
| Delivering a Public Service | <input type="checkbox"/> | | |

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.

Consultation on proposed amendments to firearms licensing fees and the "banded system".

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

The primary aim of the proposals detailed in the consultation is to provide PSNI's Firearms & Explosives Branch (PSNI FEB), the firearms licensing authority, with the necessary funds to provide a safe and efficient service that is not subsidised by PSNI mainstream funding and therefore the taxpayer. Also to reduce the administration and cost burden for PSNI and applicants by adding to the calibres of firearms that can be exchanged by a RFD rather than having to submit a variation application.

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 proposed changes to firearms licensing fees and the “banded system” will apply to all current and future firearm certificate (FAC) holders, regardless of their urban/rural status.

The current firearms licensing fees do not reflect the full costs associated with providing the service and for the financial year 2025/2026 the projected shortfall is almost two million pounds. Currently PSNI FEB are only recovering 39% of the costs of providing the service, via licensing receipts. The shortfalls have been subsidised from PSNI mainstream funding, and therefore the taxpayer, for many years and is unsustainable.

The impact of the changes proposed is largely financial as FAC applicants/holders will have to pay more to avail of a FAC. This comes at a time when many households, both urban and rural, are experiencing financial pressures due to the current economic climate. However, when considering these matters, it is important to note that these proposals relate to the licensing of lethal barrelled weapons (firearms) and the licensing authority must be appropriately funded to carry out the necessary due diligence when considering an application and to take the appropriate steps when concerns have been raised.

Adding additional calibres to the current “banded system” will enable FAC users, including rural applicants such as farmers, to exchange additional types of firearms more easily with less costs and less administration.

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 changes to firearms licensing fees and the “banded system” will apply to all current and future FAC holders, independent of their urban/rural status.

Firearms are used for various purposes including sporting purposes, e.g. clay pigeon, target shooting including competitions. FAC holders can also have firearms for personal protection, collection purposes and pest control.

In rural areas, firearms can be used for pest control by farmers and landowners i.e. to reduce pest (i.e. vermin) and protect livestock.

An increase in the cost of firearms licensing will have a financial impact on farmers and landowners who wish to have firearms for pest control only (not sporting purposes).

Applicants must demonstrate fitness and good reason for each firearm applied for.

Farmers and landowners can provide permission to other FAC holders to lawfully shoot over their land for sporting and pest control purposes if they do not wish to possess firearms or if they have been deemed “unfit” to possess a FAC.

FACs operate on a five-year cycle so many FAC holders who have been granted a FAC prior to 2026 will have 2,3,4 or 5 years remaining on their FAC, before they are affected by a fee increase.

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 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Rural Tourism | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Rural Housing | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Jobs or Employment in Rural Areas | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Education or Training in Rural Areas | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Broadband or Mobile Communications in Rural Areas | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Transport Services or Infrastructure in Rural Areas | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Health or Social Care Services in Rural Areas | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Poverty in Rural Areas | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Deprivation in Rural Areas | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Rural Crime or Community Safety | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Rural Development | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agri-Environment | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other (Please state) | <input type="text"/> |

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 | <input type="checkbox"/> | Published Statistics | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Consultation with Other Organisations | <input type="checkbox"/> | Research Papers | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Surveys or Questionnaires | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other Publications | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other Methods or Information Sources (include details in Question 3C below). | | | <input type="checkbox"/> |

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?

The current proposals are to amend existing policy which is applied equally to all. Those affected by the proposals, both rural and urban, will have an opportunity to provide their views during the consultation period.

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.

Firearms ownership is an individual's choice and all applicants must demonstrate fitness and good reason for each firearm applied for regardless of whether they are located in an urban or rural area.

Farmers and landowners can provide permission to other FAC holders to lawfully shoot over their land for sporting and pest control purposes if they do not wish to possess firearms or if they have been deemed "unfit" to possess a FAC.

FACs operate on a five-year cycle so many FAC holders who have been granted a FAC prior to 2026 will have 2,3,4 or 5 years remaining on their FAC, before they are affected by a fee increase.

By adding additional calibres to the current "banded system" it will enable FAC users, including rural applicants such as farmers and landowners who are eligible, to exchange additional types of firearms more easily with less costs and less administration.

By moving to a full cost recovery position, this will enable PSNI to reallocate the yearly shortfalls to other areas of policing, including rural areas.

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.

N/A

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.

The current subsidising of firearms licensing by PSNI mainstream funding i.e. the taxpayer (approximately two million pounds for the financial year 2025/26) cannot continue and does not adhere to either the recommendations of the 2018 Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) report that “PSNI should establish a plan to move towards full cost recovery for firearms licensing in the longer term” or the Department of Finance (DoF) document Managing Public Money Northern Ireland (MPMNI) which states that “charges for services provided by public sector organisations normally pass on the full cost of providing them”.

Firearms ownership is an individual’s choice and all applicants must demonstrate fitness and good reason for each firearm applied for regardless of whether they are located in an urban or rural area.

Farmers and landowners can provide permission to other FAC holders to lawfully shoot over their land for sporting and pest control purposes if they do not wish to possess firearms or if they have been deemed “unfit” to possess a FAC.

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: | Claire Duncan |
| Position/Grade: | Staff Officer |
| Division/Branch | Firearms & Explosives Branch |
| Signature: | <i>Claire Duncan</i> |
| Date: | 12 March 2026 |
| Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by: | Jennifer Stewart |
| Position/Grade: | G7, Head of Branch |
| Division/Branch: | Firearms & Explosives Branch |
| Signature: | <i>Jennifer Stewart</i> |
| Date: | 12 March 2026 |