**RURAL NEEDS NETWORK – TERMS OF REFERENCE**

**Introduction**

1. In the *Report on the Review of the Implementation of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016* it was recommended that DAERA establishes a Rural Needs Network open to all public authorities listed in the Schedule to the Act for the purposes of facilitating co-operation and the exchange of information between public authorities, promoting best practice across public authorities and providing a forum for Rural Needs Co-ordinators to raise and discuss issues relating to rural needs, including engagement with the rural community sector (Recommendation 22).
2. It was also recommended that the Rural Needs Network meets formally on a biannual basis and that following its establishment, the network would explore options for networking on an ongoing basis outside of the formal process, including options using technology (Recommendation 23).
3. DAERA has accepted both these recommendations and has drawn up these draft Terms of Reference for a Rural Needs Network.
4. The establishment of a Rural Needs Network is in line with DAERA’s duty to make arrangements with public authorities with a view to securing co-operation and the exchange of information between public authorities under Section 4 of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016.

**Purpose**

1. The purpose of the Rural Needs Network is:
2. To facilitate co-operation and the exchange of information between public authorities
3. To promote best practice across public authorities
4. To provide a forum for Rural Needs Co-ordinators to raise and discuss issues relating to rural needs, including engagement with the rural community sector.

**Membership**

1. Membership of the Rural Needs Network is open to the following:

* The Rural Needs Co-ordinator in each public authority listed in the Schedule to the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016
* Representatives of DAERA’s Sustainable Rural Communities Branch
* DAERA’s Rural Statistician

**Formal Meetings**

1. The Rural Needs Network will meet formally twice a year, normally once in the autumn period and once in the spring.
2. Only one representative from each Public Authority shall be entitled to attend each formal meeting of the Rural Needs Network. Where a Rural Needs Co-ordinator is unavailable to attend a representative from the same Public Authority may attend in their place.
3. Dates and locations of formal meetings of the Rural Needs Network will be determined by Sustainable Rural Communities Branch. Where it is considered necessary (e.g. due to Covid-19 restrictions) meetings of the Rural Needs Network may take place online.
4. Arranging of formal meetings will be undertaken by Sustainable Rural Communities Branch with the agenda and relevant papers issued in advance of meetings.
5. Representatives of rural stakeholder or other organisations may be invited to attend or present at formal meetings of the Rural Needs Network.
6. Records of formal meetings will be kept in line with good governance requirements.

**Informal Engagement**

1. The Rural Needs Network will explore options for networking on an ongoing basis outside of the formal process, including options using technology.
2. Informal engagement between members of the Rural Needs Network may take place outside of the formal meetings with or without the involvement of DAERA.

**Chairperson and Secretary**

1. The roles of Chairperson and Secretary will be undertaken by Sustainable Rural Communities Branch.

**Agenda**

1. The agenda for each meeting will be drawn up by Sustainable Rural Communities Branch in advance of the meeting in consultation with members of the Rural Needs Network. Members will be given an opportunity to input to the agenda for each meeting in line with the principle that the issues to be discussed at the Rural Needs Network should be determined by its members.

**[Agreed September 2020]**