

Reference Number: DAERA/26-274  
**Food, Farming and Rural Affairs**  
Rural Affairs Division



Department of  
**Agriculture, Environment  
and Rural Affairs**

An Roinn

**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil  
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe**

Department of

**Fairmin, Environment  
an' Kintra Matthers**

[www.daera-ni.gov.uk](http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk)

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13 May 2026

Dear [REDACTED]

### **Freedom of Information Act 2000**

With regard to your request for information received by the Department on 18 April 2026 which sought the following information:

- 1. How much money has been spent to date on the new rural approach (including staff costs, consultation, events, etc)? Include breakdown.**
- 2. If confirmed costs are not available for question 1 provide estimated costs or total costs that are available (including breakdown).**
- 3. What budget does daera have for 2026/7 for the new rural approach? (Including staff costs)**
- 4. What thought was given on consultation event locations given most are cities and not rural.**

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**5. Are social media comments/reactions taken into account with the consultation?**

**6. How much money did daera rural affairs give out in 2025/6 and on what schemes?**

I can advise that the Department has completed its search and can confirm that it holds the information you requested which is attached at Annex 1 below.

If you require any clarification, believe that any part of your request has been overlooked, misunderstood or misinterpreted, please contact me in the first instance to see if it is a matter that can be resolved.

If you are unhappy with the manner in which your request for information has been handled or the decision to release/withhold information, you have the right to request a formal review by the Department. If you wish to do so, please contact The Review Section either by e-mailing [daera.informationmanager@daera-ni.gov.uk](mailto:daera.informationmanager@daera-ni.gov.uk) or by post at The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Data Protection & Information Management Branch, Floor 2, Jubilee House, 111 Ballykelly Road, Ballykelly, Limavady BT49 9HP, within two months from the date of this letter.

If after such an internal review you are still unhappy with the response, you have the right to appeal to the Information Commissioner at Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, CHESHIRE SK9 5AF, who will undertake an independent review of the Department's decision.

Yours sincerely,



**Business Support Branch**

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**1. How much money has been spent to date on the new rural approach (including staff costs, consultation, events, etc)? Include breakdown.**

The Rural Policy Unit within Rural Affairs Division (RAD), established on 1 April 2024, leads on the work relating to Rural NI: Our New Approach 2026–2041. Whilst the Department holds expenditure details for the Rural Policy Unit, it should be noted that the remit of this unit also includes other areas of work. These include aspects such as undertaking the Department’s statutory duties under the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016; coordinating and commissioning rural research; and supporting the development of joint Outline Business Cases (OBC) with other NICS Departments. It is not possible to provide a breakdown relating solely to Rural NI: Our New Approach 2026-2041. However, costs for the Rural Policy Unit have been provided in response to Question 2 and Question 3 below.

**2. If confirmed costs are not available for question 1 provide estimated costs or total costs that are available (including breakdown).**

Expenditure for the Rural Policy Unit (all areas of work including that relating to Rural NI: Our New Approach 2026-2041), have been provided in the table below for 2024/25 and 2025/26. It is not possible to provide a breakdown in any further detail.

**Rural Policy Unit Expenditure**

	<b>2024/25</b>		<b>2025/26</b>
<b>Salary</b>	<b>£1,134,113.06</b>	<b>Salary</b>	<b>£1,712,763.30</b>
<b>General Administrative Expenditure (includes travel expenses / mobile phones / hospitality etc.)</b>	<b>£17,474.27</b>	<b>General Administrative Expenditure (includes travel expenses / mobile phones / hospitality etc.)</b>	<b>£40,818.72</b>
<b>Other Resource (includes Future Rural Network &amp; TRPSI Framework Review etc.)</b>	<b>£71,807.05</b>	<b>Other Resource (includes facilitator costs &amp; rural expert etc.)</b>	<b>£50,207.96</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>£1,223,394.38</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>£1,803,789.98</b>

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### 3. What budget does DAERA have for 2026/27 for the new rural approach? (Including staff costs)

The 2026/27 draft budget for the Rural Policy Unit is indicative and has not yet been agreed by the NI Executive and is therefore subject to change. The figures in the table below forecast expenditure for the Rural Policy Unit (all areas of work including that relating to Rural NI: Our New Approach 2026-2041). It is not possible to provide a breakdown in any further detail.

#### Rural Policy Unit Indicative Expenditure

	2026/27
Salary	£2,261,946
General Administrative Expenditure (includes travel expenses / mobile phones / hospitality etc.)	£57,500
Other Resource (includes conference, launch of final policy, research / studies, printing etc.)	£111,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>£2,430,446</b>

### 4. What thought was given on consultation event locations given most are cities and not rural.

When selecting venues for consultation events for Rural NI: Our New Approach 2026-2041, the Department sought to achieve broad geographic coverage across Northern Ireland, while taking account of a range of practical considerations. These included venue availability, accessibility requirements, staffing capacity, public transport links, and value for money.

The Department worked closely with local Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) representatives, whose local knowledge helped identify venues within each council area that were suitable, welcoming, and inclusive for public engagement. This input formed part of the overall co-design approach that underpinned the development of Rural NI: Our New Approach 2026-2041.

Venues were required to be available on the relevant dates, capable of safely accommodating the events, and reasonably accessible, including by public transport where possible. The Department recognises, however, that no single location will meet the needs of all participants, and that travel to some venues may remain challenging for some individuals.

While some events were held in towns or cities, these locations were selected primarily as central and accessible points within wider rural catchment areas, rather than to

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focus engagement on urban populations. The Department also recognises that identifying venues that are simultaneously rural, neutral, accessible, and adequately equipped can be challenging in certain locations, and venue selection therefore reflected local availability and practical constraints.

To help address these issues, online events were included as part of the consultation programme to provide an additional means of participation for those unable to attend in person due to distance, transport limitations, or other barriers.

## 5. Are social media comments/reactions taken into account with the consultation?

The Rural NI: Our New Approach 2026-2041 consultation was promoted through a range of channels, including social media, to raise awareness and encourage participation. However, only responses received through the specified consultation channels will be treated as formal consultation responses and included in the analysis. Comments or reactions made on social media platforms are not considered formal consultation responses, as they do not allow for consistent recording, verification, or analysis in line with consultation methodology.

Details of the public consultation, including how to submit a formal response, are set out on the Department's website:

[Public Consultation on Rural NI: Our New Approach 2026-2041 | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs](#) The consultation closes on 01 June 2026.

## 6. How much money did daera rural affairs give out in 2025/6 and on what schemes

The table below outlines scheme funding provided by DAERA Rural Affairs Division in 2025/26.

### Rural Affairs Division Scheme Expenditure

2025/26				
Scheme	Capital	Resource	Budget transferred to another Department	Total
Rural Micro Capital Grants Scheme	£1,643,445	£187,469		£1,830,914
Rural Business Development Grant Scheme	£5,331,377	£557,342		£5,888,719
Whitespots	£193,207			£193,207
PEACEPLUS*	£2,067,716			£2,067,716

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Rural including Farming Service	Support Social Support		£415,382		£415,382
Social Scheme	Farming	£119,994			£119,994
Digital Transformation Flexible Fund				£300,000	£300,000
Community Development (Rural Support Networks) - including Marginalised Minority Communities Support			£935,338		£935,338
Regional Infrastructure Support Programme (RISP)				£444,000	£444,000
Farm Family Health Checks				£187,000	£187,000
<b>Totals</b>		<b>£9,355,739</b>	<b>£2,095,531</b>	<b>£931,000</b>	<b>£12,382,270</b>

\*The PEACEPLUS figures comprise 20% match funding and 80% ERDF funding disbursed in 2025/26. Of the total expenditure, 80% is repayable by the European Commission to SEUPB, which will subsequently transfer the funds to DoF/DAERA.

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