# Consultation Responses: Nos. 1 - 10

*Please note that some respondents submitted identical responses*

# RESPONDENT INFORMATION

**Please Note** this form **must** be returned with your response to ensure that we handle your response appropriately.

## 1. Name / Organisation

**Organisation Name (If applicable).**

| Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council |
| --- |

**Title  Mr X   Ms ☐   Mrs ☐   Miss ☐   Dr ☐      Please tick as appropriate**

**Surname**

| Murphy |
| --- |

**Forename**

| Padraic |
| --- |

## 2. Postal Address

| Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council |
| --- |
| Island Civic Centre |
| The Island |
| Antrim |

| **Postcode** BT27 4RL | **Phone** 02892509419 | **Email** padraic.murphy@lisburncastlereagh.gov.uk |
| --- | --- | --- |

**Consultation Questions**

**1) Do you agree that the proposed Aim, Objectives and Intended Outcomes (see Section 6) for the TRPSI Framework are appropriate?**

**X     Yes**

☐     **No**

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

The Council agrees with all aims, objectives and intended outcomes for the TRPSI Framework.  This process comes at an opportune time given the Council's role in supporting Lagan Rural Partnership Local Action Group's (LAGs) delivery of NIRDP 2014 – 2020 and the development of the Council's Community Plan.  It also complements our current exploration of opportunities for both Council/LAG led pilot programmes which will be funded under the Rural Basic Services Scheme and the Rural Village Renewal Scheme.

**2) Do you agree that the 3 Priority Areas – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation (see Section 6) – should continue to be the main priorities for the TRPSI Framework?**

**X     Yes**

☐     **No**

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

The Council agrees that the 3 priority areas as detailed in section 4.4 to 4.14 of the proposal should continue to be the main priority areas for the TRPSI Framework.  The Council would particularly highlight the continuing need for improved access to basic services and to increased provision of affordable childcare provision under the access priority.  Actions taken in addressing these issues will alleviate the relatively higher cost of living experienced in rural areas and the social isolation which is a feature of rural life for some rural residents,  especially for rural women and lone farmers as identified in the remaining priority areas.

**3) Do you agree that the 12 Key Principles (see Section 6) are appropriate for the TRPSI Framework?**

**X     Yes**

☐     **No**

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

> The Council agrees that the 12 key principles identified are appropriate for the framework but would make the following amendments.
> - The Council has not been referenced as a 'key animator' in particular. The Council's role as facilitator of the LAG and as the organisation responsible for developing opportunities through community planning should be acknowledged.
> - The value of Sub Regional Rural Support Networks such as TADA in taking principles forward to the required outcomes should also be recognised.
> - Similarly regional rural policy and research support focussed organisations such as the Rural Community Network, Rural Development Council and Rural Support have also been omitted as 'key animators'.

**4) Do you agree that the list of Target Groups (see Section 6) is appropriate in relation to providing support to vulnerable groups under the successor TRPSI Framework?**

**X     Yes**

☐     **No**

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

> The Council is content that the list of target groups is widened as outlined in Section 6 and endorses the decision that the successor framework will also retain the flexibility to target other groups which have been identified through need's analysis as being at risk but which have not hitherto been included in specific target group lists.

**5) (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing _Access Poverty_ among vulnerable people in rural areas**

The Council is content to endorse the suggestions made in the draft action plan particularly with reference to improved access to key services.

The Council will work in partnership with the  LAG to explore complementarities and identify match funding opportunities particularly with a view to improving access to basic rural services including:

- Developing facilities to provide better access to local services
- Developing the potential for community enterprises to provide basic services such as childcare, eldercare, training etc

**(b) Please provide details on any further measures which you think should be considered to help address _Access Poverty_ among vulnerable people in rural areas**

The Council agrees with the core measures that have been identified as a consequence of the evidence of need that has been provided by DARD.

The Council also recommends that there is a need to prioritise cross departmental resources and funding for social economy models of delivery of services in particular, in order to ensure better sustainability.

**6) (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing _Financial Poverty_ among vulnerable people in rural areas**

The Council endorses the measures contained in the draft Action Plan aimed at addressing financial poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas and would recommend that DARD continues to work in partnership with LAG's to improve employability, employment and entrepreneurship opportunities in rural areas particularly through measures such as the Rural Business Investment Scheme.

A Key target area identified by Lagan rural Partnership LAG is Youth Unemployment with 26.5% of 18-24 year olds in the Lisburn Castlereagh City Council area registered as unemployed.  (source: Oxford Economics)

**(b) Please provide details on any other measures which you think should be considered to help address _Financial Poverty_ among vulnerable people in rural areas**

Accessibility and solutions for rural areas in terms of rural transport needs to be identified as a key priority in particular. Despite recognition of this issue as a priority at Council Community Planning Engagement events, mobile infrastructure  (cars, vans, buses etc) remain ineligible under the new programme rules for NIRDP 2014- 2020.  This funding could make a significant impact in this area if this type of spend was deemed eligible.

**7) (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing _Social Isolation_ among vulnerable people in rural areas**

The Council endorses the suggestions made in the draft action plan particularly with reference to addressing social isolation.  These actions complement the Rural Basic Services Measure being delivered by Lagan Rural Partnership LAG which will aim to deliver better access to local services with community and social economy agencies acting as the key drivers in the delivery of childcare, eldercare or recreational, cultural and leisure activities.
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**(b) Please provide details on any other measures which you think should be considered to help address _Social Isolation_ among vulnerable people in rural areas**

The Council welcomes an increased focus on integrated delivery of actions. This approach should also include the following community stakeholders and community development functions.

- Council (Responsible for Community Planning)
- LAGs responsible for Basic Services and Village Renewal Funding
- Sub Regional Support Networks e.g. TADA Network
- Regional bodies including Rural Community Network responsible for policy development, Rural Development Council responsible for Research and Rural Support which is responsible for providing listening and signposting support to farm families and rural dwellers.

**8) How might the successor TRPSI Framework contribute towards the development of more effective rural community support structures?**

Please provide comments in the box below

The Council recommends that DARD explores further investment in community led social economy models to deliver the rural community support structures needed in our rural areas to include in particular:
- Local Government led initiatives
- Public / Private pilot delivery models
- Sub Regional Support Networks e.g. TADA Network
- Regional bodies including Rural Community Network responsible for policy development, Rural Development Council responsible for Research and Rural Support which is responsible for providing listening and signposting support to farm families and rural dwellers.

**9) How might a successor TRPSI Framework support the delivery of local councils Community Plans?**

Please provide comments in the box below

The Council recommends that partnership working with local Councils should commence soon with a view to integrating relevant actions with emerging community planning themes in relation to economic development, regeneration, building safer communities, rural transport, community development and community relations. Activities should also include exploring resources within Local Government in terms of the provision of officer resource and potential capital support within the Council, through the LAG or other levered Council led funds e.g Other EU funding such as Eurasmus + etc.

10) **Do you have any views on the conclusions reached by DARD (see Section 9) in relation to the proposals for a successor TRPSI Framework in respect of:**

(i) **The Equality and Human Rights Template**

Please provide comments in the box below

The Council agrees that based on the evidence considered in the screening exercises referenced, further assessments of impacts are not required.

The Council further agrees that equality screening should be undertaken in respect of each individual programme delivered under the successor TRPSI framework and where appropriate full EQIAs should be carried out by the Lead Authority.

The Council concurs that equality monitoring should be undertaken in respect of each individual programme at the earliest opportunity in line with the evaluation report of the current TRPSI framework.

(ii) **The Rural Issues Statement**

Please provide comments in the box below

The Council recommends that a 'rural proofing' ethos should be enshrined in community planning at Local Government level in line with policy proposals which state that DARD will work with Local Government and other Government Departments to ensure a collaborative and joined up approach.

It is the Council's opinion that successful delivery will be dependent on Government Departments to produce appropriate legislation, policy and strategy and to that end it will be crucial to ensure cross departmental compliance with any proposed 'rural proofing' duty so that there is a smooth and swift transition of implementation from Government Department level to Local Government level.

**11) Is there any other aspect of the proposals that you wish to comment on?**

Please provide comments in the box below

None

# NI Farm Groups

56 Cashel Road, Macosquin, Coleraine, Co L'derry, N Ireland, BT51 4NU
Tel/Fax 028 703 43419 Email taylor.w@btconnect.com

## Non optional Blue Print for Rural NI

Farming families and therefore rural merchants and traders in Northern Ireland by enlarge have hit the financial buffers – farmers find themselves in the position where the sale price for the majority of commodities they produce does not even cover the input costs. Banks are finding it increasing difficult to justify lending money to increasingly non-profitable farmers, instead rural merchants, vets etc are being forced into the position of secondary bankers to (many) farmers. With 1 in 4 UK family farms living below the poverty line (2012 figures), all in all a disastrous situation with no future is now with us. Meanwhile, large processors, large corporate food wholesalers and corporate retailers continue to maintain their enormous unsustainable profits.

Rural NI must have its share of the financial food cake. The Farm Groups would make it clear that there is no need for consumers to pay more other than normal inflationary increases, instead we want our fair share of the money, currently going into the corporate food sector profits and it will take legislation to obtain it.

Currently individual family farmers are too weak in the market place to command a decent price for their produce and unfortunately to date even with attempts by farm organisations across Europe, it has been impossible to bring farmers together in sufficient numbers and strength to overcome the power and influence of the corporates and they know this and abuse the fact every hour of every day to their profitable advantage. Indeed, the EU has admitted publicly that a) food security is now top of the agenda and b) this is about agriculture not just any old industry and c) farmers need a safety net.

The time has come where Northern Ireland Government has no choice but provide that safety net for Northern Ireland's family farmers if NI Plc is to succeed in lieu of the deficit to date from Westminster and Brussels.

The Groups proposal is timely in that the Agri Food Strategy Board report Going For Growth announced earlier, cannot and will not succeed without profitable farmers in NI. So what is the Groups proposal? Quite simple, almost exactly the same as that submitted by Fairness for Farmers in Europe as a stakeholder to the 2010/11 CAP review, that of NI legislation being put in place stating that NI farmers must be paid a minimum of the cost of production plus a margin inflation linked for their produce and if the 'free' market

moves up then fine the farmer will get the benefit, however, when it falls the legislation is there to provide the safety net limit of drop.

Where is the evidence for the success of this proposal? There is that age old saying, "When the farmer is doing well then everyone else is doing well" but sounder evidence is the fact that during the 30's depression in the US, President Roosevelt could not get the US economy to move until he put money in farmers pockets. NI farmers with money in their pockets would purchase products and services from an average of 123 different types of businesses from plastics, to machinery, to veterinary to accountants, to oil and lubricant suppliers, to building supplies, the list goes on. Indeed there are only two types of wealthy countries in the world or a combination of both, ie those who are energy rich (ie oil and gas) or those with a good agricultural base, Zimbabwe a disastrous case in point.

How would legislation on NI farm gate prices work? – In recent years the Livestock and Meat Commission employed McKinsey's International Consultants to professionally work out the cost of production including money for re-investment of beef and lamb production in Northern Ireland. McKinsey's did so very successfully by gleaning the information from the top 10% of farmers across NI. They were totally independent of processor or retailer or even farmer influence, all of these factors a must. These results could easily be done for all the food related commodities produced by NI farmers and adjusted for inflation or deflation every 6 months. On a European scale this proposal would require flexible supply control, ie quotas, on all commodities but quotas without value. However, in NI because we are small in comparison to the whole of the EU influence this would not be required. The results of such legislation would in fact have a useful quota effect in itself. It would create balance in the countryside creating good change in farming practices such as :-

a) A reduction in available conacre as owners decide farming is now a profitable option and farm it themselves
b) One sector for example could not expand over and above any other sector, due to lack of land because the balanced requirement for land would come from all commodity sectors
c) Pressure on land would once again help farmers to increase good farming practices and invest in new technology and good farming methods such as instead of cutting and spraying rushes, lime would be applied due to money available; hedges would be brought under control, fences would be mended and replaced, drainage would be carried out. All this in harmony with nature as profitable farmers can easily produce more food in Northern Ireland whilst abiding by commonsense environmental laws.
d) There would be a certain amount of musical chairs of farming practises. In recent years many farmers eg moved into dairying or chickens because of the then perceived regular income which has since been eroded, eg many farmers may be perhaps beef, vegetables or other minded, they would therefore switch enterprise due to profitable options, thereby creating a balanced agriculture in NI. It would in effect be a new dawn in NI agriculture, a land mark where farmers could afford to embrace new technology, they could afford to repair their sheds or build new

more efficient ones, they could afford to purchase much needed new efficient safety equipment, they could afford to pay staff, to cut the current slavery hours currently being worked by farming families and their staff. In fact the Groups can confirm that if this legislation is introduced it could create a minimum of 30,000 new professional on-farm jobs followed by approx 120,000 related jobs. Without exception, every farmer we have put the question to – 'If legislation was in place to provide you with a minimum of the cost of production inflation linked plus a margin for your produce would you employ a member of staff or members of staff, the answer is always a loud - of course I would!'

Furthermore, approx 60% of NI farmers are part time – many of those would go full time if agriculture was profitable thereby creating a vacancy for others – by now you will have got the scale of this proposal for Northern Ireland.

Down to legislation – due to the current rural financial crisis and after the experience of 2012's Spring where many NI farmers were faced with atrocious weather conditions and no spare money in their pockets, in fact many currently unable to feed their families, a welfare president was established, ie the corporates are growing fatter by the day while rural NI has been drained dry of finance and therefore resources, this is backed up by an ongoing increase in calls to farm crisis centres by farmers at the end of their tethers.

The legislation must go through on a welfare issue, for the sake of farming families being protected from corporate ravages for endless profit.

Again presidents are already being set with regard to the EU "free market" a) by the Scottish Government on minimum priced alcohol proposal in supermarkets on a welfare issue and b) for the second time in recent years the EU itself has intervened in the free market by capping EU roaming charges by mobile phone companies.

In short on the plus side if Stormont were to legislate on NI farm gate prices as proposed by the NI Farm Groups, then virtually overnight a minimum of 30,000 initial jobs plus over the next 5 years would be the additional x 4 multiplier of jobs that follow every job on the farm, in addition to the 15,000 processing industry jobs the Agri Food Strategy Board report proposals suggests, creating a total of 165,000 NI jobs minimum = an exceptional result which would allow NI Plc to firmly turn the prosperity corner and not look back.

NI family farmers badly need your help in protecting their incomes from the corporates, just as you need them every meal time!

To conclude, the Farm Groups hereby request that Stormont puts forward a Bill for Legislation on Northern Ireland farm gate prices as a matter of urgency under a rural welfare crisis, stating that a minimum of the cost of production plus a margin inflation linked must be paid at the farm gate for all the food produced in Northern Ireland.

**Northern Ireland**

**Assembly**

## COMMITTEE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Room 430
Parliament Buildings
BELFAST
BT4 3XX
Email: kevin.pelan@niassembly.gov.uk
Tel:    028 9052 1864

11 December 2015

Our Ref: CSD/008/2015/SK

Mr Niall Heaney
Head of Sustainable Rural Communities Branch
DARD
Room 404 Dundonald House
Upper Newtownards Road
Ballymiscaw
Belfast
BT4 3SB

Dear Niall,

At its meeting on the 3 December 2015, the Committee for Social Development noted the Department for Agriculture and Rural Development's consultation paper setting out proposals to its Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework 2011-15.

At its meeting on 10 December 2015, the Committee agreed that it did not have any comments to make on the consultation and I am therefore writing to advise you of a nil response.

Yours sincerely

*Kevin Pelan*

**Dr Kevin Pelan, Clerk, Committee for Social Development**

18 December 2015

DARD Equality Branch
Room 509
Dundonald House
Upper Newtownards Road
BELFAST
BT4 3SB

Dear Sir/Madam

**Re: DARD's Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Inclusion Framework and Rural Issues Statement**

Regarding the Department Agriculture and Rural Development's proposals for a successor to DARD's Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Inclusion Framework and Rural Issues Statement Disability Action would make the following comments:-

- Disability Action strongly recommends that this Framework be subjected to a full EQIA to ascertain DARD's assumption that the proposals for the successor Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Inclusion Framework is considered to have a potential positive impact on disabled people as a targeted group.

- Disability Action would query this considered assumption without the evidence to substantiate it as many policies on paper look to have a positive impact, however their practical implementations may highlight an adverse impact throughout.

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2

- Disability Action believes that consultation with disabled people
  and their representative organisations are required to ensure that
  any adverse impacts are identified before implementation of the
  Framework.

Disability Action would advise DARD that in future we will only respond
to your screening consultations when we have specific commentary to
make on any given policy/ies.

We request that you continue to inform us, by letter or email, when your
screening forms are posted on your website and to forward us hard
copies of your screening documents and where relevant we will respond.

Disability Action recognises the time and effort that have gone into
producing this document for consultation and thanks DARD
for the opportunity to respond and looks forward to continued
dialogue.

Yours sincerely

Patricia Bray
Statutory Duty & Policy Officer

# RESPONDENT INFORMATION

**Please Note** this form **must** be returned with your response to ensure that we handle your response appropriately.

**1. Name / Organisation**

**CLOUGH AND DISTRICT COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION**

**Organisation Name (If applicable).**

|  |
|  |

Title  Mr #☐  Ms ☐  Mrs ☐  Miss ☐  Dr ☐    **Please tick as appropriate**

**Surname**

| DUMIGAN |

**Forename**

| ALAN |

**2. Postal Address**

| 8 THE SQUARE, CLOUGH, DOWNPATRICK |
|  |
|  |
|  |

| **Postcode** BT30 8RB | **Phone** 02844811955 | **Email** alandumigan0512@gmail.com |

## Consultation Questions

**1) Do you agree that the proposed Aim, Objectives and Intended Outcomes (see Section 6) for the TRPSI Framework are appropriate?**

☒     **Yes**

☐     **No**

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

As a local group supported by County Down Rural Community Network and whose local community have benefited from the services offered under the TRPSI programme, we strongly agree that the Aims, Objectives and Intended Outcomes for the TRPSI Framework are appropriate, taking into consideration the points noted below:

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs) of which CDRCN is one,  have a proven track record of working with DARD (as partner organisations) to develop and implement new and innovative pilot measures in hundreds of rural villages and communities to Target Rural Poverty and reduce Social Isolation. Although not clearly highlighted in some of the TRPSI consultation papers, it has been acknowledged by all stakeholders (from The Minister and the ARD Committee to local groups) that all the other TRPSI measures in the current programme were dependent on a solid and responsive rural community infrastructure across NI. The LRSNs have worked closely with DARD for over 20 years to put that infrastructure in place and that is the reason so many of the TRPSI measures have been so successful.

For example, in recent months County Down Rural Community Network (CDRCN) has managed the Rural Capital Micro Grant Programme for DARD and 2 phases have been rolled out to small rural groups in every part of rural NI. In County Down 89 groups have been successful and every one of them have been able to buy equipment and make improvements to the benefit of thousands of rural dwellers. The

programme has been oversubscribed and highly effective in targeting small grants at the most needy groups, helping them to deliver a wide range of local rural services. The MARA programme, Farm Families Health Checks and the promotion of Library services have all exceeded their targets thanks in large part to the promotional and organisational abilities and reach of the LRSNs. A local presence and knowledge of the area is to key to successful delivery.

This experience linked to the hundreds of rural groups and thousands of individuals associated with the LRSNs means that the Networks can help DARD to meet the objectives set in section 6 "Proposals for a successor Framework post 2016". Together with other rural stakeholders, we can "promote the development of new and innovative pilot approaches to TRPSI AND encourage effective partnership working AND effectively target financial poverty, access poverty and social isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas".

2) **Do you agree that the 3 Priority Areas – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation (see Section 6) – should continue to be the main priorities for the TRPSI Framework?**

☒ **Yes**

☐ **No**

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

County Down Rural Community Network has been key to the success of the delivery and implementation of the services offered under the TRPSI programme in our rural community. We feel that the 3 priority areas that have been identified – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation – have enabled the successful targeting of resources to the most vulnerable and needy in our community, and therefore we support the continuation of these themes as the main priorities for the TRPSI Framework. We would like to emphasise that local knowledge and community development approach through the community infrastructure in our area (County Down Rural Community Network) is key to the success of any such programme.

The Local Rural Support Networks believe that the 3 Priority Areas – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation should continue to be the main priorities for the TRPSI Framework as they are still relevant in 2016, encapsulate the varying needs of the rural community and encompass a service deliverability which can be most effectively demonstrated through a local or sub regional level approach.

The identification and successful delivery of various projects and programmes within these priorities would continue to bring greatest positive impact to the needs of those experiencing rural poverty and isolation. The priorities allow for a bottom-up community development approach in not only identifying relevant needs but also in delivering upon them using a cascade approach. It is our view that the most effective TRPSI programmes delivered to date have had a strong community ethos and process coupled with local knowledge access to where rural, social and economic needs are most prevalent. Invariably, there will be different levels of need in different geographical areas, however, as the nature of community sector delivery is designed sub regionally and is based on pertinent local needs then those most in poverty or experiencing isolation have less probability in remaining outside the reach of these priorities and programmes.

The Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation framework and it's priorities to date has been an excellent package of funding aimed at supporting vulnerable people and targeting the root causes of social isolation. As programmes take effect and outputs deliver meaningful change there are indeed necessary modifications within the themes or priorities which are required to continue to make most impact on the frameworks aims whilst external factors such as austerity and public budget finance availability will also determine and prioritize future considerations.

It is our view that the 3 Priority Areas – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation should continue to be the main priorities for the TRPSI Framework since programmes can emerge from these themes which meet best the local community needs.

TRPSI and the priorities has now gained substantial traction and is now recognised as an essential brand which has made a huge difference to rural communities and which is complementary to the NIRDP. Many of the issues these priorities have

tackled to date were previously hidden and would fall outside the remit of other mainstream funding programmes. There remains, however, continued challenges, needs and rural TRPSI issues which require on-going support at various levels of intervention and which would still come under these 3 priorities.

The Rural Community Development Support Service currently delivered by the Local Rural Support Networks, as a model of support to TRPSI, is most certainly envied throughout communities in Europe as a model leader in balancing appropriate and measured interventions to social, economic and access poverty issues at a community level. Promoting Community development at a local/sub regional ensures that Regional programmes are delivered effectively at the local level and access to the real needs and issues of communities is provided for. Supporting access to good governance, to economic and social poverty in communities; the service as provided by these local community based networks has proved an invaluable resource to the delivery of the TRPSI framework.

These experienced local stakeholders have good working relationships with all other TRPSI delivery agents and indeed share a direct role in elements of their success making essential and valuable linkages and connections at sub regional and local levels. The key management role of DARD in direct delivery of this programme has proved to be most effective in ensuring that the networks could assist DARD to manage Regional programmes at local levels and to balance approaches necessary to ensuring programme priority themes reached the community sector using bottom up approaches.

The local access support provided to DARDs Modernisation programme and its Rural Micro Capital Grants programmes, as and when required by DARD, evidence how this infrastructure can react and respond to changing rural needs and requirements. Their modus operandi for the delivery of programmes such as MARA are a testament to the Community Development approach which ensures participation and access to hidden and real needs at a local level across all 3 main priorities.

The networking function plays an invaluable role in achieving key community participation at all necessary levels from village planning facilitation to rural proofing consultation. With the reform of local Government, Community Planning, and the mandatory Charities registration requirements; these networks provide local

mentoring support and guidance, technical support and facilitation at grassroots level to those rural communities most in need under the programme priorities of Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation. Most importantly, they can identify what local pertinent needs fit the programme.

We believe that it the approaches taken under the overlying programme priorities which provide the appropriate lynchpins to ensure leverage of many other programmes and projects into rural areas and which have included such as community mental health awareness, capital build infrastructural programmes, rural tourism, lifelong learning, social investment, migrant support etc. These programmes operate in a time of decentralisation and digitization of services, the closing of rural banks, post offices, schools and other services and thus during a time when the greatest need for local people to provide adequate solutions to their own issues and problems within a community development approach. The 3 themes adequately allow for local communities, sub regional and innovative approach making to meeting rural TRPI needs.

**3) Do you agree that the 12 Key Principles (see Section 6) are appropriate for the TRPSI Framework?**

☒ **Yes**

☐ **No**

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

We agree with the 12 key principles.  We strongly feel that it is imperative that the Rural Support Networks are recognised and supported to act as a lynch pin between ourselves as local community groups and statutory organisations and the public sector, also taking into account the points listed below:

The rural support organisations delivering the DARD Rural Support programme agree with the key TRPSI principles as outlined in the framework document.

Historically Local Rural Support Networks successfully delivered pilot, innovative projects and interventions collaboratively and in partnership with statutory and other community and voluntary organisations and are widely perceived as the link between grass roots community groups operating at a local level with regional statutory bodies.

Positive outcomes of a collaborative approach to the delivery of services aimed at addressing rural poverty and isolation issues include:

- Ensures the socially isolated and those with financial related issues have access and opportunities to avail of support services
- Increases the capacity of designated rural support organisations and grass roots community groups to collectively and with greater efficiency deliver both services and support interventions that may not be possible if delivered in isolation.

A negative outcome of delivering a successful pilot or innovative project is the lack of funding to effectively mainstream the service or project. Increased opportunities to continue or mainstream projects that have demonstrated effectiveness should be a key objective of a future TRPSI framework both for addressing poverty and social isolation issues and having to avoid dealing with the expectation when a service or project ceases.

Local Rural Support Networks will continue to be a conduit to disseminate information on key government strategies to the community voluntary sector through their established communication channels and will continue to lobby and be the 'voice' of the rural community sector during discussions with statutory and governmental organisations e.g. Rural Development Programme and Community Planning.

**4) Do you agree that the list of Target Groups (see Section 6) is appropriate in relation to providing support to vulnerable groups under the successor TRPSI Framework?**

☒ **Yes**

☐ **No**

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

We fully support the flexibility of the proposed programme in relation to targeting the most vulnerable in our rural community, as this more fully recognises the range and diversity of our local community, without restricting the definition of need to a specific target group.

As an infrastructure providing community development support to the rural community across Northern Ireland for many years, Rural Support Networks have, almost without exception, worked with all these vulnerable groups, and have encouraged and enabled us as a local group to do the same.

We particularly welcome the introduction of the working poor and the under employed. The continuing economic uncertainty has left many families in difficult financial circumstances. One or both parents are working however income levels fall below what they need to have a meaningful quality of life. A sudden change in circumstances, such as marital breakup or ill health, can have further detrimental consequences and lead to social exclusion and poverty.

Mental health still retains a significant stigma, particularly in rural areas, and many of the LRSN's run programmes which directly tackle mental ill health in their communities. Statistics show that one in four run the risk of mental ill health thus their inclusion in this framework is essential.

The inclusion of the LGBT community in the framework is also welcome. Whilst members of the LGBT community live in rural areas they tend to meet and socialise in their nearest town. However LRSN's have a role to play in supporting them to remain in their community and in ensuring statutory organisations and the wider public are aware of the issues affecting them.

Perhaps one omission from the list of vulnerable groups is men. Whilst accepted that most farmers are men there may be male rural dwellers who are not farmers. Globally, the gap between male and female life expectancy and healthy life expectancy has widened in the last 40 years and is expected to get even bigger by 2030. Research commissioned by the Priory Group of 1,000 men found that: 77% of men polled have suffered with anxiety / stress / depression; the biggest pressures in men's life are work (32%), finance (31%) and health (23%); the majority of men claim their mental health is having a negative impact on their work performance, parenting ability and relationships; 40% of men polled said it would take thoughts of suicide or self-harm to compel them to seek professional help.
([www.priorygroup.com/blog/mentalhealth/-i-ve-learnt-to-deal-with-it---40-of-men-won-t-talk-to-anyone-about-their-mentalhealth](www.priorygroup.com/blog/mentalhealth/-i-ve-learnt-to-deal-with-it---40-of-men-won-t-talk-to-anyone-about-their-mentalhealth))

5) (a) **Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing _Access Poverty_ among vulnerable people in rural areas**

We are pleased to welcome the measures in the draft Framework. Many of the proposed measures will go a long way to tackle issues that blight so many rural dwellers. We appreciate that the list of groups is not exhausted. Women, Farmers, People on work on low incomes (the working poor), children and young people, older people and Ethnic Minorities and immigrants, People with low skills or low levels of education et al. Our experience shows that some of the groups need to be broken down into subgroups.

For example there are sections of the farming industry that have seen their incomes severely cut in the last two years (dairy Farmers). Future prices in this industry predict another 10% drop in the next three months. Mental health in this area gives us great cause for concern. This is evidenced by the increase calls to help lines, up by 30% in the last year.

Many Ethnic Minorities are finding it difficult to assimilate, especially those living in the rural community. There are a number of factors that drive this. Some Ethnic groups neither have English as their first or second language; this communication barrier reinforces isolation and is a contributing factor in poor mental health. Those who have a strong grasp of the English language find it easier to "fit in". This also is a factor in this section being "excepted". In conclusion we think this group of Ethnic minorities should be broken down into sections not exclusively into language sections. I.e. short to medium dwellers who may seasonal workers.

We are pleased with the other target groups and we welcome that people with low skills and low levels of education might have a chance to enhance their employability. The training involved to up skill this group will act as a medium to tackle social isolation. Many who suffer from social isolation either don't recognise their plight or only recognise it when their horizons broaden due to intervention from an un-proscribed source.  I.e. further education either social education or accredited.

The "Outcomes based pilot programmes" is also most welcome. This allows delivery agents latitude to make informed researched based decisions that will go to the hart rural poverty and social isolation.

Under 6.8 (V) we strongly concur with the mainstreaming of successful pilot projects. The Department launch the Rural Community Micro Grants 2015-2016. We in the Rural Support Networks found this reached parts of the rural community that that had gone under the radar in the past. This has opened a pathway for community development that goes to the core of TRPSI policy. This merges into 6VII "sustainability". Some groups for the first time now see a pathway using community a development approach with the support of the Networks. 6.8 X The sharing of information and best practice learning between organisations has the potential that prevents groups trying to "reinventing the wheel" and will avoid duplication between organisations.

6.8 (XI) The community planning and the consultation process will be key, both in a strategic and a complementary role.  It is imperative that at all stages of the community planning that the rural voice is heard and well represented. The Networks

will play an enabling role to ensure events are well attended and the TRPSI policy principles are promoted.

6.8 (VII)I Good Relations being promoted. There will be many opportunities to develop innovative partnerships, PEACEIV et al.  One should not underestimate the incidental "good relations" through the Rural Development programme.  The carrot and stick approach for single identity group has been proven to open halls to a wider diaspora. Not only does this lead to better community relations but adds to the sustainability of the halls.

**(b) Please provide details on any further measures which you think should be considered to help address _Access Poverty_ among vulnerable people in rural areas**

The Rural Community Micro Grants opened many new doors because it gave an incentive for tangible assets to be acquired for the benefit of a particular group. For many this has been the first time in making a funding application. The benefits not only include the asset but their governance has now been under the spotlight and sharpened to enable their participation.  We would propose an extension of this innovative idea.  The structure used to deliver the grants is now well established, this same structure could deliver small capital grants say up to £40,000 for basic needs that so many halls throughout the country need.

Community transport should be reviewed to widen its scope. Longer journeys should be considered that travel between a number of service providers.

We have a continued need for access to training, particularly in the area of IT, Internet & Computers in our area.  We feel that this is best delivered at local

community level in partnership with the statutory groups and with our local Rural Support Network.  It is important as it is about improving employability, as well as reducing social isolation, building social cohesion, improving mental health and many other benefits.

6) **(a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing _Financial Poverty_ among vulnerable people in rural areas**

Financial poverty refers to the measure of the degree to which people face the risk of serious deprivation in terms of their standard of living or to which they fall below a specified minimum level of resources.

Through the measures in the draft action plan there is the opportunity to raise the standard of living for those people living in rural areas. Particularly in regard to addressing issues such as rural transport which is currently a major issue which prohibits many rural dwellers from accessing essential basic services.  In addition measures targeted at supporting household energy efficiency improvement & the introduction of new employability and entrepreneurship opportunities are also to be welcomed.

We would like to ensure that measures currently in place which help to reduce household expenditure and living costs of people in our rural community, ie Oil Clubs, Food Banks, continue to receive the support that they need from our local Rural Support Network.

**(b) Please provide details on any other measures which you think should be considered to help address _Financial Poverty_ among vulnerable people in rural areas**

Members of our group have benefited from the MARA programme and we would like to see a continuation of this important programme which helps address financial poverty faced by many of our vulnerable members.

Other measures which may alleviate financial poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas include the creation of jobs through investment in infrastructure such as investment in rural hubs, renovating abandoned housing and broadband infrastructure development, therefore increasing the chances of the young people of rural areas to stay, therefore building a stronger rural economy. With added investment in high quality and affordable childcare and early intervention this will create increased opportunities for jobs.

**7) (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing _Social Isolation_ among vulnerable people in rural areas**

Our community group welcomes the continued recognition by DARD of the problems caused within the rural population due to Social Isolation. We acknowledge the priority areas for intervention listed within the Draft Action Plan under Social Isolation of promoting tolerance, health, well-being and inclusion for rural dwellers and through our long established work within rural communities agree that these are valid and worthwhile Priority Areas for Intervention.

Poor Mental Health and well-being is an issue that has major impacts within rural communities given the fact that many people are living in isolated circumstances often on their own or with limited family and / or community connections.

The farming community is also a grouping who have been shown to have poor mental health as they are facing increasing stresses of managing their businesses mostly working on an individual basis with limited opportunities to engage with others. Any new pilot programmes delivered under the new framework need to take into consideration the knowledge and learning of previous programmes evaluations.

One concern we would have that by naming the priority as _'promote positive mental health and wellbeing'_ rather than '_promoting positive health and wellbeing';_ interventions could be limited in their scope to secure engagement by rural dwellers. There is still a stigma around mental health in rural areas and people would be more likely to engage with activities that are seen to be about general health and wellbeing, people in many instances would not want to be identified through participating in activities as someone who has mental health issue. If people are at least attracted to an activity the issue of mental health can then be addressed.

Therefore we do welcome the example initiatives listed as they list 'Support for health

and wellbeing activities' as well as 'Support the promotion of mental health awareness and actions' and we ask that the learning and evidence from positive work that has been undertaken with rural communities through the LRSN's, Healthy Living Centres, other Community, Voluntary and Statutory bodies on these actions and activities are used when drawing up plans for initiatives to support under the new TRPSI framework.

Our group welcomes actions that will support the rural population to improve health and wellbeing particularly those activities that are operated and provided at local facilities and venues. Many venues within rural communities require some level of work to ensure that they are fit for purpose, and are accessible and suitable to be used to provide activities that address social isolation.

Our group welcomes that *'increase opportunities for social engagement'* is listed as a priority area of intervention as the value of people of all ages within rural communities being given the opportunity to engage with others on a social basis cannot be underestimated.  It is through these social activities that the aim of "promote tolerance, health, wellbeing and inclusion' can be best achieved within rural communities as by bringing people together they are getting to know each other. This is needed within communities as in many instances during their working and education lives many members of rural communities are away from the community during the day and thus have limited opportunities to engage with others.  It is only though actual engagement in the same physical space that tolerance can be promoted and this is especially important in rural communities as due to low numbers of people activities are best organised to attract as many members of the population as possible so that a sufficient number of people attend to make an activity viable. Therefore anything that can be done to encourage use of community facilities that have been traditionally associated as belonging to one section of the community would be welcome.  Such venues can become hubs for social inclusion activities within rural communities.

We welcome the inclusion of *'support community capacity'* as an example initiative as a capable and effective local community infrastructure is of vital importance to the

fabric of life within rural communities and those involved in organisations within local communities are largely undertaking this role on a voluntary basis. These organisations require ongoing community development support to continue their operations on an effective and efficient basis and become involved in projects that will address poverty and social isolation at a local level within rural communities.

As a beneficiary organisation, our experience is that the community development support work delivered by the Local Rural Support Networks resourced under the previous TRPSI Framework has been very effective in ensuring the survival and continued operation of local community infrastructure. This community infrastructure of the LRSN's working in partnership with organisations located within local communities has also ensured that many of the other initiatives supported under TRPSI have been effective at reaching into rural communities and tackling poverty and social isolation.

**(b) Please provide details on any other measures which you think should be considered to help address _Social Isolation_ among vulnerable people in rural areas**

Our community group welcomes the resourcing of actions to plan and coordinate the effective operation of activities that would address social isolation. This would involve a resource of a person to co-ordinate activities and associated resource budget to cover some of the costs of operating activities particularly training new and innovative activities on a pilot basis. This would ensure that activities are operated on a coordinated and effective basis, securing sufficient numbers, building linkages within and between communities, duplication is avoided, gaps in provision of social inclusion activities are identified and tackled.

The ongoing work within the LRSN's and their delivery of the MARA project has clearly demonstrated that there is a significant issue around mental health problems

in homes, particularly depression and loneliness.  The framework would provide an excellent opportunity to design a pilot project that would take advantage of the excellent community development model that we have that could be harnessed to deliver a programme to enable rural dwellers to avail of resources to assist them to overcome loneliness and seek help with other mental health conditions.  The programme could be designed to ensure a rural community response is adopted to encourage self-help and self-care.

8) **How might the successor TRPSI Framework contribute towards the development of more effective rural community support structures?**

Please provide comments in the box below

The TRPSI Framework has been a key success factor for our group through the Rural Community Development Support Service Contract, by supporting County Down Rural Community Network this has ensured that we as a local community group have access to information, advice, support, signposting, training, development, providing a rural voice, levering in vital resources to our area, and enabling the effective implementation of the TRPSI Framework in our area.

Making Strategic Facilitation a reality:  the TRPSI Framework is vital to ensuring that rural needs are addressed by the government in a localised and joined-up way that reaches the most vulnerable and those most in need.

The successor TRPSI Framework would not only enable much greater utilisation of financial resources, but also would combine the expertise of public sector bodies, and the private, voluntary and community sectors to create greater economies of scale in terms utilising all available knowledge, skills and capacity.  This in turn maximises innovation and enables increased access to those most in need and those who are most difficult to reach (e.g. the MARA Project has reached out to

almost 15,000 households).

TRPSI has been vital in ensuring that *rural* gets its fair share in terms of community development via a high quality networking infrastructure and CD Support Service (9 Rural Support Networks) that are run by grass roots representatives right across the region.

The DARD Rural Micro-Capital Grants Programme (Phases 1 & 2) delivered on-the-ground by the 9 Local Rural Support Networks, have been essential to ensuring capital investment reaches the smallest and lowest capacity rural groups throughout the entire region.

The additional financial leverage from the Local Rural Support Networks alone in terms of additional programmes, projects and grant schemes (promoting health, peace, equality, skills, employability, capacity etc) is £56 Million

The LRSNs have been central to the role of assisting the set-up of the new local Action Groups (NIRDP) and ensuring grass roots community representation.

9) **How might a successor TRPSI Framework support the delivery of local councils Community Plans?**

Please provide comments in the box below

The TRPSI Framework could play a key role in the delivery of local Council Community Plans via the TRPSI funded Rural Community Development Support Service which can facilitate the ongoing involvement of the Local Rural Support Networks (LRSN's) in the community planning process. The foundations for the delivery of Community Planning already exist within the local Council areas through the LRSN's and their vast network of community based organisations – Community Planning should build upon these existing structures. The delivery of Community Planning within the local Council areas will require the engagement of existing and emerging partnerships working collaboratively. The well-established and proven track record of the LRSN's could well be effective resources in such a delivery process. It is imperative that the development of Community Planning includes the continuing engagement of such current resources so as agreed delivery structures for Community Planning are adopted that act as wider collaborative forums for the benefit of the communities that they will ultimately serve.

During the past 4 years the LRSN's have delivered, under the current TRPSI Framework, a Rural Community Development Support Service to a wide range of rural organisation & groups. This has proven to be an effective model and partnership for the delivery of such services and the LRSN's, with continued support from the TRPSI programme, are therefore well placed to assist local Councils in the delivery of community planning over the next number of years due to the following factors:

• Strong partnership & links with the rural community already in place

• Added value from funding leverage from other programmes

• Already working closely with DARD to deliver services including the development of the NI Rural Development Programme (2014-2020)

The delivery structures for the Community Planning process within local Councils must therefore take account of existing rural structures & delivery organisations so as to ensure there is less fragmentation of implementation groups and integration of the various locally focused Action Plans. This will ensure that the Community Planning process will effectively serve the priority needs of the rural community, the ongoing support of DARD for the rural community development sector at grass roots level through the TRPSI framework is crucial to this.

10) **Do you have any views on the conclusions reached by DARD (see Section 9) in relation to the proposals for a successor TRPSI Framework in respect of:**

**(i) The Equality and Human Rights Template**
Please provide comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs)/Rural Community Development Support Service contract holders have a proven track record of working with DARD (as partner organisations) to contribute, develop and implement new and innovative pilot measures to Target Rural Poverty and reduce Social Isolation. The LRSNs welcome a localised approach to the design and delivery of measures which effectively target financial poverty, access poverty and social isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas in line with the key principles of the Framework. The LRSNs are advantageously neutral to central and local government ensuring that all rural communities can access resources, services and programmes in a timely manner regardless of religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status, sexual orientation or disability; adhering to Section 75 requirments.

## (ii) The Rural Issues Statement
Please provide comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs)/Rural Community Development Support Service contract holders have a proven track record of working with DARD (as partner organisations) to ensure the TRPSI Framework has been a key success factor ensuring rural proofing and enabling effective implementation positive direct impact on the vulnerable in rural communities through a localised infrastructure. . In the last four years we have empowered some 15,000 individuals, including the hardest to reach, socially isolated and most vulnerable of the population in Northern Ireland. Delivering capacity building programmes within rural areas to encourage and ensure participation in the Rural Development Programme.  Undertaking the delivery of the MARA Project has reached out to almost 15,000 households directly impacting on their quality of life. The LRSNs have also been successful in additional leverage which has had positive indirect impacts. For example we have rolled out projects and grant schemes (promoting health, peace, equality, skills, employability) equating to over £56million in the last four years.


All of these measures support the delivery of key services for rural dwellers to avail of and have indirectly helped to tackle social isolation and the related mental health connotations that come with this. The central and neutral role that the LRSNs deliver; give local services for local people and ensure grass roots community representation in rolling out TRPSI Framework.

**Is there any other aspect of the proposals that you wish to comment on?**

Please provide comments in the box below

# RESPONDENT INFORMATION

**Please Note** this form **must** be returned with your response to ensure that we handle your response appropriately.

## 1. Name / Organisation

**Organisation Name (If applicable).**

South West Age Partnership

**Title  Mr ☐   Ms ☐   Mrs x☐   Miss ☐   Dr ☐      Please tick as appropriate**

**Surname**

Forbes

**Forename**

Allison

## 2. Postal Address

| 54 Gortview Close |
| Omagh |
| |
| |

| **Postcode**<br>**BT79 7WU** | **Phone**<br>**02882251824** | **Email**<br>**aforbes@southwestagepartnership.co.uk** |

**Consultation Questions**

1) **Do you agree that the proposed Aim, Objectives and Intended Outcomes (see Section 6) for the TRPSI Framework are appropriate?**

☒ **Yes**

☐ **No**

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

South West Age Partnership has considered the proposals for a successor TRPSI framework and recognises that the current TRPSI framework has led to significant improvement in combatting Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation particularly through MARA and the ARTS programme as well as the support provided by the Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs – of which Omagh Forum is one).  The LRSN's have a proven track record of working with DARD to develop and implement new and innovative pilot measures in hundreds of rural villages and communities to Target Rural Poverty and reduce Social Isolation. We believe that many of the TRPSI measures in the current programme were dependent on a solid and responsive rural community infrastructure across NI. The LRSNs have worked closely with DARD for over 20 years to put that infrastructure in place and that is the reason so many of the TRPSI measures have been so successful.

For example, our group benefitted from the Rural Micro Capital Grant Programme which was promoted for DARD by the LRSNs.  This was an important small grant for our group and we valued the help given by Omagh Forum in applying. The grant has enabled us to purchase items necessary to deliver a wide range of local rural services. Our group was also involved in supporting the MARA programme, which was rolled out by the LRSN's and Omagh Forum are proactive in giving us information about Farm Families Health Checks and the promotion of Library services and countless other useful information.  A local presence and knowledge of the area is to key to successful delivery.

This experience linked to the hundreds of rural groups and thousands of individuals associated with the LRSNs across N Ireland means that the Networks can help DARD to meet the objectives set in section 6 "Proposals for a successor Framework post 2016". Together with other rural stakeholders, we can "promote the development of new and innovative pilot approaches to TRPSI AND encourage effective

partnership working AND effectively target financial poverty, access poverty and social isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas".

2) **Do you agree that the 3 Priority Areas – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation (see Section 6) – should continue to be the main priorities for the TRPSI Framework?**

☒     **Yes**

☐     **No**

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

Our group believes that the 3 Priority Areas – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation should continue to be the main priorities for the TRPSI Framework as they are still relevant in 2016, and can be delivered or supported locally or at sub regional level approach. The priorities allow for a bottom-up community development approach in not only identifying relevant needs but also in delivering upon them using a cascade approach.

It is our view that the most effective TRPSI programmes delivered to date have had a strong community ethos and process coupled with local knowledge as to where rural, social and economic needs are most prevalent. Invariably, there will be different levels of need in different geographical areas, however, as the nature of community development support, through the LRSN's, is designed sub regionally and is based on pertinent local needs then those most in poverty or experiencing isolation are targeted.

TRPSI and these priorities are now recognised as an essential brand which has made a huge difference to rural communities and which is complementary to the NIRDP. Many of the issues these priorities have tackled to date were previously hidden and would fall outside the remit of other mainstream funding programmes. There remains, however, continued challenges and needs which require on-going support at various levels of intervention and which would still come under these 3 priorities.

Promoting community development at a local/sub regional level ensures that Regional programmes are delivered effectively at the local level meeting local needs. Promoting good governance, giving access to economic and social support in

communities - the service provided by these local community based networks has proved an invaluable resource to the delivery of the TRPSI framework.

These experienced local stakeholders have good working relationships with all other TRPSI delivery agents and indeed share a direct role in elements of their success making essential and valuable linkages and connections at sub regional and local levels. The key management role of DARD in direct delivery of this programme has proved to be most effective in ensuring that the networks could assist DARD to manage Regional programmes at local levels and to balance approaches necessary to ensuring programme priority themes reached the community sector using bottom up approaches.

The local access support provided to DARDs Modernisation programme and its Rural Micro Capital Grants programmes, as and when required by DARD, evidence how this infrastructure can react and respond to changing rural needs and requirements. The delivery of programmes such as MARA are a testament to the Community Development approach which ensures participation and access to hidden and real needs at a local level across all 3 main priorities.

The networking function plays an invaluable role in achieving key community participation at all necessary levels from village planning facilitation to rural proofing consultation. With the reform of local Government, Community Planning, and the mandatory Charities registration requirements; these networks provide local mentoring support and guidance, technical support and facilitation at grassroots level to those rural communities most in need under the programme priorities of Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation. Most importantly, they can identify what local pertinent needs fit the programme.

At a time of decentralisation and digitization of services, the closing of rural banks, post offices, schools and other services, this gives an opportunity for local people to devise solutions to their own issues and problems within a community development approach. The 3 themes adequately allow for local communities, sub regional and innovative approach making to meeting rural TRPSI needs.

3) **Do you agree that the 12 Key Principles (see Section 6) are appropriate for the TRPSI Framework?**

☒ **Yes**

☐ **No**

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

South West Age Partnership agrees with the key TRPSI principles as outlined in the framework document. We endorse that historically Local Rural Support Networks successfully delivered pilot, innovative projects and interventions collaboratively and in partnership with statutory and other community and voluntary organisations and are widely perceived as the link between grass roots community groups operating at a local level and regional statutory bodies.

Positive outcomes of a collaborative approach to the delivery of services aimed at addressing rural poverty and isolation issues include:
- Ensures the socially isolated and those with financial related issues have access and opportunities to avail of support services
- Increases the capacity of LRSN's and grass roots community groups to collectively and with greater efficiency deliver both services and support interventions that may not be possible if delivered in isolation.

A negative outcome of delivering a successful pilot or innovative project is the lack of funding to effectively mainstream the service or project. Increased opportunities to continue or mainstream projects that have demonstrated effectiveness should be a key objective of a future TRPSI framework both for addressing poverty and social isolation issues and having to avoid dealing with the expectation when a service or project ceases.  So in recognising that new and innovative pilot projects do work we would strongly recommend that successful projects like MARA, the ARTS and rural community development support be sustained post 2016.

Local Rural Support Networks will continue to be a conduit to disseminate information on key government strategies to our member groups and to the community voluntary sector through our established communication channels and will continue to lobby and be the 'voice' of the rural community sector during discussions with statutory and governmental organisations e.g. Rural Development Programme and Community Planning.

4) **Do you agree that the list of Target Groups (see Section 6) is appropriate in relation to providing support to vulnerable groups under the successor TRPSI Framework?**

☒ **Yes**

☐     **No**

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSN's) welcome the proposal that the successor Framework would be open to a wider range of target groups.  As an infrastructure providing community development support to the rural community across Northern Ireland for many years, we have, almost without exception, worked with all these vulnerable groups.

We particularly welcome the introduction of the working poor and the under employed.  The continuing economic uncertainty has left many families in difficult financial circumstances.  One or both parents are working however income levels fall below what they need to have a meaningful quality of life.  A sudden change in circumstances, such as marital breakup or ill health, can have further detrimental consequences and lead to social exclusion and poverty.

Mental health still retains a significant stigma, particularly in rural areas, and many of the LRSN's run programmes which directly tackle mental ill health in their communities.  Statistics show that one in four run the risk of mental ill health thus their inclusion in this framework is essential.

The inclusion of the LGBT community in the framework is also welcome.  Whilst members of the LGBT community live in rural areas they tend to meet and socialise in their nearest town.  However LRSN's have a role to play in supporting them to remain in their community and in ensuring statutory organisations and the wider public are aware of the issues affecting them.

Perhaps one omission from the list of vulnerable groups is men.  Whilst accepted that most farmers are men there may be male rural dwellers who are not farmers.  Globally, the gap between male and female life expectancy and healthy life expectancy has widened in the last 40 years and is expected to get even bigger by 2030.  Research commissioned by the Priory Group of 1,000 men found that: 77% of men polled have suffered with anxiety / stress / depression; the biggest pressures in men's life are work (32%), finance (31%) and health (23%); the majority of men claim their mental health is having a negative impact on their work performance, parenting ability and relationships; 40% of men polled said it would take thoughts of suicide or

self-harm to compel them to seek professional help.
([www.priorygroup.com/blog/mentalhealth/-i-ve-learnt-to-deal-with-it---40-of-men-won-t-talk-to-anyone-about-their-mentalhealth](www.priorygroup.com/blog/mentalhealth/-i-ve-learnt-to-deal-with-it---40-of-men-won-t-talk-to-anyone-about-their-mentalhealth))

**5)   (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing _Access Poverty_ among vulnerable people in rural areas**

To our group access poverty means that because of our location in a rural area people are not able to access services that our urban counterparts may take for granted.  We believe the priority areas for intervention in the action plan and the measures outlined will be effective in addressing access poverty
* Innovative Health Solutions can encompass MARA and other initiatives to improve emotional well being.
* Broadband solutions are vital in the area we live in however whether TRPSI can adequately address this is questionable.  There needs to be major infrastructure investment for rural areas to have adequate broadband
* Rural hub facilities – It is very important in our rural villages, hamlets and open countryside to have community venues that can deliver services and programmes to benefit local people
* Social economy models for delivery of services – as above
We believe that, in order to adequately support access poverty, LRSN's are a vital support service to community groups like ours who wish to develop measures to address access poverty.  Likewise community transport is an integral part of this priority area and needs to be included so that rural isolated people can avail of these services.

**(b) Please provide details on any further measures which you think should be considered to help address _Access Poverty_ among vulnerable people in rural areas**

The Rural Micro Capital Grants programme opened many new doors because it gave an incentive for tangible assets to be acquired for the benefit of a particular group. As well as benefitting from the asset our group's governance has been revisited and improved.  We would propose more of this innovative idea.  The structure used to deliver the grants is now well established, this same structure could deliver small capital grants say up to £10,000 for basic needs that so many halls throughout the countryside need.

Community transport should be reviewed to widen its scope. Longer journeys should be considered that travel between a number of service providers.  Our group and many like it need to be able to travel to appointments between Council areas and this is hampered because of lack of resources to the community transport sector.

Evidence indicates that there is an appetite for computer training in rural areas. The LRSNs could deliver this service.  Farmers and rural dwellers want a basic standard of training that may not necessarily be accredited. The end result would be Farmers having the ability to make online returns. Farm families coming together breaking social isolation and have a greater understanding of the world wide web.

Greater use and the promotion of Luncheon Clubs in rural areas could provide a service that; tackles social isolation, helps sustain a target audience, increases the sustainability of rural halls. All this combined adds to the cohesion of rural communities.

Our group believes that continued support of the LRSN infrastructure will assist DARD in achieving initiatives to address access poverty.

**6) (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing _Financial Poverty_ among vulnerable people in rural areas**

Financial poverty refers to the measure of the degree to which people face the risk of serious deprivation in terms of their standard of living or to which they fall below a specified minimum level of resources. Through the measures in the draft action plan there is the opportunity to raise the standard of living for those people living in rural areas. Particularly in regard to addressing issues such as rural transport which is currently a major issue which prohibits many rural dwellers from accessing essential basic services.  In addition measures targeted at supporting household energy efficiency improvement & the introduction of new employability and entrepreneurship opportunities are also to be welcomed.  MARA continues to be very effective in increasing household income and we welcome its retention.

**(b) Please provide details on any other measures which you think should be considered to help address _Financial Poverty_ among vulnerable people in rural areas**

Other measures which may alleviate financial poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas include the creation of jobs through investment in infrastructure such as investment in rural hubs, renovating abandoned housing and broadband infrastructure development, therefore increasing the chances of the young people of rural areas to stay, therefore building a stronger rural economy.

With added investment in high quality and affordable childcare and early intervention this will create increased opportunities for jobs.  Childcare is vital to enable women to fulfil their career potential, get them out of the house, return to education and bring income into the family home.

**7) (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing _Social Isolation_ among vulnerable people in rural areas**

South West Age Partnership welcomes the continued recognition by DARD of the problems caused within the rural population due to Social Isolation. We acknowledge the priority areas for intervention listed within the Draft Action Plan under Social Isolation of promoting tolerance, health, well-being and inclusion for rural dwellers and agree that these are valid and worthwhile Priority Areas for Intervention.

Poor Mental Health and well-being is an issue that has major impacts within rural communities given the fact that many people are living in isolated circumstances often on their own or with limited family and / or community connections.
The farming community are known to have poor mental health as they are facing increasing stresses of managing their businesses mostly working alone with limited opportunities to engage with others.

We are keen to engage people in actions that improve their mental health however we believe the wording may deter some: '_promoting positive health and wellbeing'_ has more positive connotations. There is still a stigma around mental health in rural areas and people would be more likely to engage with activities that are seen to be about general health and wellbeing. We particularly welcome those activities that are operated and provided at local facilities and venues.

We welcome the example initiatives listed: 'Support for health and wellbeing activities' as well as 'Support the promotion of mental health awareness and actions' and we ask that the learning and evidence from positive work that has been undertaken with rural communities through the LRSN's, Healthy Living Centres, other Community, Voluntary and Statutory bodies on these actions and activities are used when drawing up plans for initiatives to support under the new TRPSI framework.

We welcome _'increase opportunities for social engagement'_ as a priority area of intervention as the value of people of all ages within rural communities being given the opportunity to engage with others on a social basis cannot be underestimated. It is through these social activities that the aim of "promote tolerance, health, wellbeing

and inclusion' can be best achieved within rural communities as by bringing people together they are getting to know each other. This is needed within communities as in many instances during their working lives and schooling many members of rural communities are away from the community during the day and thus have limited opportunities to engage with others. It is only through actual engagement in the same physical space that tolerance can be promoted and this is especially important in rural communities. Anything that can be done to encourage more use of community facilities that have been traditionally associated as belonging to one section of the community would be welcome. Such venues can become hubs for social inclusion activities within rural communities.

Many venues within rural communities require some level of work to ensure that they are brought up to a condition that they are accessible and suitable to be used to provide activities that address social isolation.

We welcome the inclusion of *'support community capacity'* as a capable and effective local community infrastructure is so important to the fabric of life within rural communities and those involved in organisations within local communities are largely undertaking this role on a voluntary basis. These organisations require ongoing community development support to continue their operations on an effective and efficient basis and become involved in projects that will address poverty and social isolation at a local level within rural communities.

The community development support work delivered by the Local Rural Support Networks resourced under the previous TRPSI Framework has been very effective in ensuring the survival and continued operation of local community infrastructure. This community infrastructure of the LRSN's working in partnership with organisations located within local communities has also ensured that many of the other initiatives supported under TRPSI have been effective at reaching into rural communities and tackling poverty and social isolation.

**(b) Please provide details on any other measures which you think should be considered to help address _Social Isolation_ among vulnerable people in rural areas**

The ongoing work within the LRSN's and their delivery of the MARA project has clearly demonstrated that there is a significant issue around mental health problems in homes, particularly depression and loneliness.  The framework would provide an excellent opportunity to design a pilot project that would take advantage of the excellent community development model that exists that could be harnessed to deliver a programme to enable rural dwellers to avail of resources to assist them to overcome loneliness and seek help with other mental health conditions.  The programme could be designed to ensure a rural community response is adopted to encourage self-help and self-care.

**8)  How might the successor TRPSI Framework contribute towards the development of more effective rural community support structures?**

Please provide comments in the box below

The TRPSI Framework has been a key success factor for rural organisations (e.g. the 9 Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs) / Rural Community Development Support Service Contract) in terms of ensuring rural proofing, levering-in vital resources to rural areas, and enabling effective implementation of the TRPSI Framework throughout the region.

As a small community group we would like to see the work of the LRSN's supported through a successor TRPSI framework as they link us into a wider network in an attempt to ensure that rural needs are addressed by the government in a localised and joined-up way that reaches the most vulnerable and those most in need.

The successor TRPSI Framework would not only enable much greater utilisation of financial resources, but also would combine the expertise of public sector bodies, and the private, voluntary and community sectors to create greater economies of

scale in terms of utilising all available knowledge, skills and capacity. This in turn maximises innovation and enables increased access to those most in need and those who are most difficult to reach.

The DARD Rural Micro-Capital Grants Programme delivered on-the-ground by the 9 Local Rural Support Networks, have been essential to ensuring capital investment reaches the smallest and lowest capacity rural groups throughout the entire region.

The LRSNs have been central to the role of assisting the set-up of the new local Action Groups (NIRDP) and ensuring grass roots community representation.

9) **How might a successor TRPSI Framework support the delivery of local councils Community Plans?**

Please provide comments in the box below

The TRPSI Framework could play a key role in the delivery of local Council Community Plans via the TRPSI funded Rural Community Development Support Service which can facilitate the ongoing involvement of the Local Rural Support Networks (LRSN's) in the community planning process and ultimately the wider rural community. The foundations for the delivery of Community Planning already exist within the local Council areas through the LRSN's and their vast network of community based organisations – Community Planning should build upon these existing structures. The delivery of Community Planning within the local Council areas will require the engagement of existing and emerging partnerships working collaboratively. The well-established and proven track record of the LRSN's could well be effective resources in such a delivery process. It is imperative that the development of Community Planning includes the continuing engagement of such current resources so as agreed delivery structures for Community Planning are adopted that act as wider collaborative forums for the benefit of the communities that they will ultimately serve.

During the past 4 years the LRSN's have delivered, under the current TRPSI Framework, a Rural Community Development Support Service to a wide range of rural

organisation & groups.  This has proven to be an effective model and partnership for the delivery of such services and the LRSN's, with continued support from the TRPSI programme, are therefore well placed to assist local Councils in the delivery of community planning over the next number of years due to the following factors:

• Strong partnership & links with the rural community already in place

• Added value from funding leverage from other programmes

• Already working closely with DARD to deliver services including the development of the NI Rural Development Programme (2014-2020)

The delivery structures for the Community Planning process within local Councils must therefore take account of existing rural structures & delivery organisations so as to ensure there is less fragmentation of implementation groups and integration of the various locally focused Action Plans.  This will ensure that the Community Planning process will effectively serve the priority needs of the rural community, the ongoing support of DARD for the rural community development sector at grass roots level through the TRPSI framework is crucial to this.

10) **Do you have any views on the conclusions reached by DARD (see Section 9) in relation to the proposals for a successor TRPSI Framework in respect of:**

**(iii) The Equality and Human Rights Template**

Please provide comments in the box below

As a local group we are aware that the Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs)/Rural Community Development Support Service contract holders have a proven track record of working with DARD  to contribute, develop and implement new and innovative pilot measures to Target Rural Poverty and reduce Social Isolation. We welcome a localised approach to the design and delivery of measures which effectively target financial poverty, access poverty and social isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas in line with the key principles of the Framework. The LRSNs are advantageously neutral to central and local government ensuring that all rural communities can access resources, services and programmes in a timely manner regardless of religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status, sexual orientation or disability. We know that the LRSNs ensure Section 75 information is recorded in line with procedures under International Quality Standard

ISO 9001:2008 and kept securely in keeping with Data Protection Legislation.

**(iv) The Rural Issues Statement**

Please provide comments in the box below

As a local group we are also aware that the Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs)/Rural Community Development Support Service contract holders have a proven track record of working with DARD (as partner organisations) to ensure the TRPSI Framework has been a key success factor ensuring rural proofing and enabling direct positive impact on the vulnerable in rural communities through a localised infrastructure. The LRSN's have effectively engaged with us as a local group over many years and we work with the hardest to reach, socially isolated and most vulnerable members of the population in Northern Ireland. We know that they delivering capacity building programmes within rural areas and encourage and ensure participation in the Rural Development Programme. We helped in the roll out of the MARA Project which has reached almost 15,000 households directly impacting on their quality of life. All of these measures support the delivery of key services for rural dwellers to avail of and have indirectly helped to tackle social isolation and the related mental health connotations that come with this. The central and neutral role that the LRSNs deliver give local services for local people and ensure grass roots community representation in rolling out TRPSI Framework.

**11) Is there any other aspect of the proposals that you wish to comment on?**

53

Please provide comments in the box below

# RESPONDENT INFORMATION

**Please Note** this form **must** be returned with your response to ensure that we handle your response appropriately.

## 1. Name / Organisation

**Organisation Name (If applicable).**

Community Transport Network NI (CTNNI)

**Title  Mr ☐  Ms ☐  Mrs ☐  Miss ☐  Dr ☐     Please tick as appropriate**

**Surname**

Keane

**Forename**

Ashley

## 2. Postal Address

| |
|---|
| Chairperson |
| C/O Out and About Community Transport |
| Unit 15 Station Road Industrial Estate |
| Magherafelt, Co Londonderry |

| **Postcode** BT45 5EY | **Phone** 028 79300123 | **Email** akeane@outandaboutct.org |
|---|---|---|

## Consultation Questions

**1) Do you agree that the proposed Aim, Objectives and Intended Outcomes (see Section 6) for the TRPSI Framework are appropriate?**

☒　　**Yes**

☐　　**No**

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

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The CTNNI has considered the proposals for a successor TRPSI Framework and would recognise, as a key delivery agent for demand responsive rural transport services across NI that the current TRPSI Framework has led to significant improvement in combating Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation for rural dwellers through the ARTS and MARA projects.
As a key delivery agent in the transport network, CTNNI welcomes the opportunity to influence the strategic direction of the proposal through the public consultation process.

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**2) Do you agree that the 3 Priority Areas – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation (see Section 6) – should continue to be the main priorities for the TRPSI Framework?**

☒　　**Yes**

☐　　**No**

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

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The 3 Priority Areas are satisfactory as broad measures of strategic intent for post 2016.

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**agree that the 12 Key Principles (see Section 6) are appropriate for the TRPSI Framework?**

☒ **Yes**

☐ **No**

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

It would be important to note that as much as innovative pilot projects can revitalize and give new birth to the successor framework, successful projects like MARA and ARTS have proven to meet need in **all three priority areas**, therefore we would strongly recommend that consideration must be given to sustaining these projects post 2016.

4) **Do you agree that the list of Target Groups (see Section 6) is appropriate in relation to providing support to vulnerable groups under the successor TRPSI Framework?**

☒ **Yes**

☐ **No**

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

Whilst ARTS has been hugely successful, only those rural dwellers who are registered disabled and the elderly benefit from free or half fare travel by presenting a valid smart pass.

CTNNI members currently offer services to "**all**" under the proposed target grouping and would draw attention that **anyone** from a rural area who doesn't have access to transport can qualify to be a member of their local Rural Community Transport provider and avail of the heavily subsidised Dial-A-Lift Service which is available Monday to Friday 8am - 6pm throughout the province, therefore providing those individuals who fall outside of ARTS with an affordable transport option.

**5)   (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing _Access Poverty_ among vulnerable people in rural areas**

CTNNI are supportive of the measures to address Access Poverty however we would stress that transport is an integral part of each initiative and needs to be given consideration at development stage.

_Example; New pilot projects are set up to support rural hubs and inclusion activities, how do individuals get to these projects if they do not have access to transport?_
CTNNI members welcome the opportunity to work in partnership with organisations at development stage as transport is a key element to the success of any project, which again, will address **all three priority areas**.

**(b) Please provide details on any further measures which you think should be considered to help address _Access Poverty_ among vulnerable people in rural areas**

CTNNI believe that continued support of Rural Community Transport Partnerships through ARTS would assist DARD in achieving new initiatives under **all three priority areas** as a prevalent problem is a lack of affordable transport where rural dwellers have severe difficulty in accessing local basic services, hub facilities, employment and education.

As a further point, Translink have made significant changes to the frequency on rural routes with some services being discontinued completely, intensifying the problem.

**6) (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing _Financial Poverty_ among vulnerable people in rural areas**

CTNNI are supportive of the measure to address Financial Poverty.

Individuals from the rural community can avail of the heavily subsidised Dial-A-Lift Service which is available throughout the province **plus** Community Groups can also access affordable transport for their members under the Self Drive or With Driver Group Hire options that are available throughout all Rural Transport Partnerships

**(b) Please provide details on any other measures which you think should be considered to help address _Financial Poverty_ among vulnerable people in rural areas**

Continuation of free or half fare travel through ARTS which will help alleviate financial poverty for the elderly and the disabled in our rural communities.

**7) (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing _Social Isolation_ among vulnerable people in rural areas**

CTNNI are supportive of the measure to address Social Isolation.

CTNNI members currently offer services to **anyone** from a rural area who doesn't have access to transport, individuals can qualify to be a member of their local Rural Community Transport provider and avail of the heavily subsidised Dial-A-Lift Service which is available Monday to Friday 8am - 6pm throughout the province, therefore providing individuals with an affordable transport option so they can keep their independence and be socially active within their communities.

**(b) Please provide details on any other measures which you think should be considered to help address _Social Isolation_ among vulnerable people in rural areas**

Again, we believe that continued support of Rural Community Transport Partnerships through ARTS would assist DARD in achieving new initiatives under **all three priority areas.**

8) **How might the successor TRPSI Framework contribute towards the development of more effective rural community support structures?**

Please provide comments in the box below

Improved cross departmental working to ensure that Rural issues are kept to the fore for future planning and development.

Build on relationships and continue engagement with grass roots stakeholder groups to ensure that projects are essentially effective and add value to community structures.

CTNNI are keen to be involved with the Department in relation to development of existing transport projects or the implementation of new and innovative projects or pilots which need transport solutions.

9) **How might a successor TRPSI Framework support the delivery of local councils Community Plans?**

Please provide comments in the box below

CTNNI would encourage Departmental collaboration with Councils to ensure that specific needs of a particular area are being addressed and that the successor framework links directly with future community plans.

The Rural Community Transport Partnerships are engaging with the Community Planning process in each of the new Councils at a local level but are also keen to work in partnership with DARD or any new initiatives developed through the new TRPSI Framework on a regional basis.

**10) Do you have any views on the conclusions reached by DARD (see Section 9) in relation to the proposals for a successor TRPSI Framework in respect of:**

**(v) The Equality and Human Rights Template**

Please provide comments in the box below

CTNNI are supportive of the Departments commitment to ensure Equality and Human Rights.

**(vi) The Rural Issues Statement**

Please provide comments in the box below

CTNNI are supportive of the Departments commitment under the Rural Issues Statement to ensure potential impacts of a policy on people living in rural areas are fully considered.

**11) Is there any other aspect of the proposals that you wish to comment on?**

Please provide comments in the box below

The Rural Community Transport Partnerships (RCTPs) have been very happy to be involved in a number of the TRPSI projects to date, in particular the MARA Project and the Assisted Rural Transport Scheme (ARTS). We have seen first-hand and on a daily basis the significant positive impact these schemes have had on the lives of many rural dwellers who previously had no access to affordable transport options.

We would strongly encourage the Department to do all in its power to maintain the ARTS because of the very direct benefits this scheme has in achieving the 3 Priority Areas of the successor TRPSI Framework – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation.

The RCTPs would also like to reiterate our continued commitment to working with DARD in any future projects or initiatives through the successor TRPSI programme to ensure that any transport elements of these new and innovative projects can be delivered to ensure the potential benefits are realised by as many rural dwellers as possible.

# RESPONDENT INFORMATION

**Please Note** this form **must** be returned with your response to ensure that we handle your response appropriately.

## 1. Name / Organisation

**Organisation Name (If applicable).**

Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland

**Title  Mr ☐   Ms ☐   Mrs ☐ x   Miss ☐   Dr ☐      Please tick as appropriate**

**Surname**

Boyle

**Forename**

Emer

## 2. Postal Address

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| | | |
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**Consultation Questions**

1) **Do you agree that the proposed Aim, Objectives and Intended Outcomes (see Section 6) for the TRPSI Framework are appropriate?**

☐　　**Yes**

☐ **x**　**No**

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

COPNI has noted the description of the aim in this successor framework emphasises that the TRPSI will be a "flexible mechanism," that will work through collaboration with other bodies and organisations to "implement new pilot measures" to assist vulnerable people in rural areas, including older people. These objectives reflect an emphasis on pilot measures, partnership working and pilot interventions.

This contrasts with the Aim, Objectives and Intended Outcomes in the last TRPSI framework (2011-2015). This cited the framework would *"provide the necessary tools to help identify the needs of vulnerable people/groups in rural areas"* and *"develop programmes/interventions to help alleviate poverty/social isolation amongst vulnerable people/groups in rural areas."* The commitment in the last plan was stronger, and had more potential to help older people on a longer term basis.

The commitment to programmes in the new plan has been downgraded to pilot measures. While COPNI recognises the value of a flexible approach and working with a variety of other organisations, the commitment is not as firm. It does not allow for developing programmes and interventions, which will

undermine the future effectiveness of measures to alleviate Rural Poverty and Social Isolation. Shifting the focus of the programme towards piloting, whilst potentially effective at identifying new approaches, will be likely to reduce the numbers of older people TRPSI can help. There is a need for a programme like TRPSI – households in rural areas are more likely to contain a person of pensioner age than in urban areas. 55% of those who are a pensionable age fall into the bottom two quintiles of the UK income distribution. [1] Older people are more at risk from social isolation, and this is a trend that is increasing. The numbers of older people living alone are expected to increase by 46.3% in the next two decades[2], while many older people experience mobility issues which restrict their ability to meet others and access services – in 2014/2015 38% of those between 65 and 74 and 58% of those aged 75 and over had mobility difficulties. These are higher rates than other age groups, and demonstrate that older people should be an important target group for a programme like TRPSI. While COPNI recognises many of the aims and objectives have the potential to help older people, they will not do so on a wide scale unless there is commitment to projects beyond piloting.

2) **Do you agree that the 3 Priority Areas – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation (see Section 6) – should continue to be the main priorities for the TRPSI Framework?**

☐ **x    Yes**

☐       **No**

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

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[1] https://www.ofmdfmni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/ofmdfm/a-profile-of-older-people-in-ni-annual-update-2015.pdf

[2] http://www.nisra.gov.uk/archive/demography/publications/annual_reports/2014/Chapter2.pdf

COPNI notes that the Framework has retained the same 3 priority areas as from the previous Framework. As with the aims, COPNI perceives that the scale of commitment has been toned down in the proposed new Framework, with the emphasis on supporting pilot interventions and programmes. While COPNI agrees with much of the justifying principles for these three priority areas, limiting the level of commitment will constrain the ability of a renewed TRPSI to improve outcomes for older people living in rural areas.

3) **Do you agree that the 12 Key Principles (see Section 6) are appropriate for the TRPSI Framework?**

☐ **x    Yes**

☐        **No**

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

COPNI notes again that many of the key principles refer to the delivery and support of pilot programmes and approaches. This again constitutes a downgrading of the ambition of the TRPSI Framework.

COPNI believes it is important that the Framework acts as an impetus for collaborative working and encouraging older people to be more involved in rural communities. A key principle of the proposed successor Framework cites that the Framework will complement the Rural Proofing, Rural White Paper Action Plan and Rural Development Programme initiatives, and that the Framework will encourage partnership working between Departments and the rural community sector, and encourage rural community empowerment. There is not sufficient information provided for COPNI to ascertain how this will happen.

**4) Do you agree that the list of Target Groups (see Section 6) is appropriate in relation to providing support to vulnerable groups under the successor TRPSI Framework?**

☐ x Yes

☐ No

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

COPNI notes that older people, as in the last Framework, are included in the defined target groups. COPNI believes this is the correct approach, as older people are more vulnerable to poverty and social isolation. Many older people in rural areas face significant mobility and income challenges, justifying why older people should be a target group of the successor TRPSI framework.

Older people will also fall into many of the other target groups, and COPNI hopes they are given adequate recognition as part of programmes to assist these groups. Women, farmers (with the average age of farmers being around 57[3]) people in work on low incomes, ethnic minorities and immigrants, people with low skills/low levels of education, lone parents, people with mental ill health, people with disabilities, the LGBT community, people with caring responsibilities, people who are unemployed or on benefits will all include older people.

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[3] COPNI conversations with DARD.

**5) (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing _Access Poverty_ among vulnerable people in rural areas**

A common theme in all the measures in the draft Action Plan, for all three priority areas, is that they are pending a detailed Action Plan being drawn up. This will include *"details of the measures to be funded and the budget to be allocated in respect of each initiative during the budgetary period."* The initiatives are also dependent on "evidence of need and commitments from the appropriate partner organisations." Although none of the suggested measures are without merit for inclusion in a programme such as TRPSI, until more budgetary and technical detail is given, COPNI cannot fully assess the prospective effectiveness of the proposed measures.

**(b) Please provide details on any further measures which you think should be considered to help address _Access Poverty_ among vulnerable people in rural areas**

COPNI believes there needs to be more certainty around resources and implementation of the measures suggested in this Framework, before new measures are considered.

6) **(a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing *Financial Poverty* among vulnerable people in rural areas**

As per the previous priority area, COPNI would require more detailed information about resourcing and implementation to be able to comment fully on the prospective effectiveness of the measures proposed in the draft Action Plan.

**(b) Please provide details on any other measures which you think should be considered to help address *Financial Poverty* among vulnerable people in rural areas**

COPNI believes there needs to be more certainty around resources to be allocated to specific actions, and within detailed plans for implementation before new measures can be usefully considered.

**7) (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing _Social Isolation_ among vulnerable people in rural areas**

Again, COPNI thinks all the initiatives proposed have the potential to tackle financial poverty, but need to be effectively resourced and implemented.

**(b) Please provide details on any other measures which you think should be considered to help address _Social Isolation_ among vulnerable people in rural areas**

COPNI believes there needs to be more certainty around resources to be allocated to specific actions, and within detailed plans for implementation before new measures can be usefully considered.

8) **How might the successor TRPSI Framework contribute towards the development of more effective rural community support structures?**

Please provide comments in the box below

The Social Isolation strand of the Draft Action Plan especially offers potential for contributing to the development of more effective rural community support structures. COPNI believes such support should be for a diverse range of organisations, as older people's needs for support are very diverse. Supporting community capacity, rural hubs and social inclusion activities could make a considerable contribution towards the development of more effective rural community support structures.

However, COPNI would require more detail about resourcing available for such programmes, as this is relevant to whether they can actually make a difference or not.

9) **How might a successor TRPSI Framework support the delivery of local councils Community Plans?**

Please provide comments in the box below

The Framework would have most impact if local authorities were required to give cognisance to TRPSI in the development and delivery of their community planning activities. A successor TRPSI framework can support programmes which facilitate wider and better service delivery to older people in rural areas. An effective Council Community Plan should plan local service delivery in conjunction with local community groups, and TRPSI can act as a mechanism of delivering an effective Plan. In the three priority areas, TRPSI can support Community Plans that integrate community and land use planning, with the aim to improve the efficiency of service delivery, by being one way in which programmes are delivered. Given that Community Planning will encourage Councils to work with government departments, statutory bodies and other agencies, the TRPSI programme can be a vehicle to coordinate the activities of the different parties, which are already involved.

**10) Do you have any views on the conclusions reached by DARD (see Section 9) in relation to the proposals for a successor TRPSI Framework in respect of:**

**(vii)    The Equality and Human Rights Template**

Please provide comments in the box below

COPNI notes that in the Equality and Human Rights screening template, the mention of pilot measures and programmes has been left out of the aims and objectives, making the wording stronger than in the draft version of the framework. Is this a deliberate omission given the changing direction of the Framework?

COPNI notes the citation that older people have benefited directly from the Connecting Elderly Rural Isolated initiative, and the Assisted Rural Travel Scheme. COPNI also notes the statement that the framework has the *"potential to have a minor positive impact on equality of opportunity"* for older people. COPNI recognises the potential the framework has to do this, but without details of forthcoming financing and an implementation plan, this remains only potential, that may not be translated into better outcomes for older people.

### (viii)   The Rural Issues Statement

Please provide comments in the box below

COPNI again notes that reference to the pilot programmes and measures appears to have been omitted from the Rural Issues Statement, and would seek clarification on whether this is the intention of the draft Framework. COPNI would be grateful if this clarification could be provided.

On a theoretical level, COPNI recognises potential beneficial impacts upon rural areas, as the Rural Issues statement outlines, and that there could be direct and indirect impacts which benefit older people in rural areas. COPNI also agree with the statement that, by its nature, this proposed framework is exclusively rural specific.

**11) Is there any other aspect of the proposals that you wish to comment on?**

Please provide comments in the box below

COPNI appreciates that the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has engaged with COPNI previously about the future of the TRPSI programme, and hopes this attitude to proactively engaging with stakeholders is continued through the next draft Framework.

# RESPONDENT INFORMATION

**Please Note** this form **must** be returned with your response to ensure that we handle your response appropriately.

## 1. Name / Organisation

**Organisation Name (If applicable).**

| North Antrim Community Network |
| --- |

**Title  Mr** ☐  **Ms** ☒  **Mrs** ☐  **Miss** ☐  **Dr** ☐     **Please tick as appropriate**

**Surname**

| Conway |
| --- |

**Forename**

| Breige |
| --- |

## 2. Postal Address

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| --- |
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| Cushendall |
| |

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| --- | --- | --- |

## Consultation Questions

**1) Do you agree that the proposed Aim, Objectives and Intended Outcomes (see Section 6) for the TRPSI Framework are appropriate?**

☒ **Yes**

☐ **No**

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs) have a proven track record of working with DARD (as partner organisations) to develop and implement new and innovative pilot measures in hundreds of rural villages and communities to Target Rural Poverty and reduce Social Isolation. Although not clearly highlighted in some of the TRPSI consultation papers, it has been acknowledged by all stakeholders (from The Minister and the ARD Committee to local groups) that all the other TRPSI measures in the current programme were dependent on a solid and responsive rural community infrastructure across NI. The LRSNs have worked closely with DARD for over 20 years to put that infrastructure in place and that is the reason so many of the TRPSI measures have been so successful.

For example, in recent months the Rural Capital Micro Grant Programme has been promoted for DARD by the LRSNs and 2 phases have been rolled out to small rural groups in every part of rural NI. The programme has been oversubscribed and highly effective in targeting small grants at the most needy groups, helping them to deliver a wide range of local rural services. The MARA programme, Farm Families Health Checks and the promotion of Library services have all exceeded their targets thanks in large part to the promotional and organisational abilities and reach of the LRSNs. A local presence and knowledge of the area is to key to successful delivery.

This experience linked to the hundreds of rural groups and thousands of individuals associated with the LRSNs means that the Networks can help DARD to meet the objectives set in section 6 "Proposals for a successor Framework post 2016". Together with other rural stakeholders, we can "promote the development of new and innovative pilot approaches to TRPSI AND encourage effective partnership working

AND effectively target financial poverty, access poverty and social isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas".

**2) Do you agree that the 3 Priority Areas – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation (see Section 6) – should continue to be the main priorities for the TRPSI Framework?**

☒    **Yes**

☐    **No**

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks believe that the 3 Priority Areas – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation should continue to be the main priorities for the TRPSI Framework as they are still relevant in 2016, encapsulate the varying needs of the rural community and encompass a service deliverability which can be most effectively demonstrated through a local or sub regional level approach.

The identification and successful delivery of various projects and programmes within these priorities would continue to bring greatest positive impact to the needs of those experiencing rural poverty and isolation.  The priorities allow for a bottom-up community development approach in not only identifying relevant needs but also in delivering upon them using a cascade approach. It is our view that the most effective TRPSI programmes delivered to date have had a strong community ethos and process coupled with local knowledge access to where rural, social and economic needs are most prevalent. Invariably, there will be different levels of need in different geographical areas, however, as the nature of community sector delivery is designed sub regionally and is based on pertinent local needs then those most in poverty or experiencing isolation have less probability in remaining outside the reach of these priorities and programmes.

The Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation framework and it's priorities to date has been an excellent package of funding aimed at supporting vulnerable people and targeting the root causes of social isolation. As programmes take effect and outputs deliver meaningful change there are indeed necessary modifications within the themes or priorities which are required to continue to make most impact on the frameworks aims whilst external factors such as austerity and public budget finance availability will also determine and prioritize future considerations.

It is our view that the 3 Priority Areas – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation should continue to be the main priorities for the TRPSI Framework since programmes can emerge from these themes which meet best the local community needs.

TRPSI and the priorities has now gained substantial traction and is now recognised as an essential brand which has made a huge difference to rural communities and which is complementary to the NIRDP. Many of the issues these priorities have tackled to date were previously hidden and would fall outside the remit of other mainstream funding programmes. There remains, however, continued challenges, needs and rural TRPSI issues which require on-going support at various levels of intervention and which would still come under these 3 priorities.

The Rural Community Development Support Service currently delivered by the Local Rural Support Networks, as a model of support to TRPSI, is most certainly envied throughout communities in Europe as a model leader in balancing appropriate and measured interventions to social, economic and access poverty issues at a community level. Promoting Community development at a local/sub regional ensures that Regional programmes are delivered effectively at the local level and access to the real needs and issues of communities is provided for. Supporting access to good governance, to economic and social poverty in communities; the service as provided by these local community based networks has proved an invaluable resource to the delivery of the TRPSI framework.

These experienced local stakeholders have good working relationships with all other TRPSI delivery agents and indeed share a direct role in elements of their success making essential and valuable linkages and connections at sub regional and local levels. The key management role of DARD in direct delivery of this programme has

proved to be most effective in ensuring that the networks could assist DARD to manage Regional programmes at local levels and to balance approaches necessary to ensuring programme priority themes reached the community sector using bottom up approaches.

The local access support provided to DARDs Modernisation programme and its Rural Micro Capital Grants programmes, as and when required by DARD, evidence how this infrastructure can react and respond to changing rural needs and requirements. Their modus operandi for the delivery of programmes such as MARA are a testament to the Community Development approach which ensures participation and access to hidden and real needs at a local level across all 3 main priorities.

The networking function plays an invaluable role in achieving key community participation at all necessary levels from village planning facilitation to rural proofing consultation. With the reform of local Government, Community Planning, and the mandatory Charities registration requirements; these networks provide local mentoring support and guidance, technical support and facilitation at grassroots level to those rural communities most in need under the programme priorities of Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation. Most importantly, they can identify what local pertinent needs fit the programme.

We believe that it the approaches taken under the overlying programme priorities which provide the appropriate lynchpins to ensure leverage of many other programmes and projects into rural areas and which have included such as community mental health awareness, capital build infrastructural programmes, rural tourism, lifelong learning, social investment, migrant support etc. These programmes operate in a time of decentralisation and digitization of services, the closing of rural banks, post offices, schools and other services and thus during a time when the greatest need for local people to provide adequate solutions to their own issues and problems within a community development approach. The 3 themes adequately allow for local communities, sub regional and innovative approach making to meeting rural TRPI needs.

**3) Do you agree that the 12 Key Principles (see Section 6) are appropriate for the TRPSI Framework?**

☒ **Yes**

☐ **No**

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

The rural support organisations delivering the DARD Rural Support programme agree with the key TRPSI principles as outlined in the framework document. Historically Local Rural Support Networks successfully delivered pilot, innovative projects and interventions collaboratively and in partnership with statutory and other community and voluntary organisations and are widely perceived as the link between grass roots community groups operating at a local level with regional statutory bodies.

Positive outcomes of a collaborative approach to the delivery of services aimed at addressing rural poverty and isolation issues include:
- Ensures the socially isolated and those with financial related issues have access and opportunities to avail of support services
- Increases the capacity of designated rural support organisations and grass roots community groups to collectively and with greater efficiency deliver both services and support interventions that may not be possible if delivered in isolation.

A negative outcome of delivering a successful pilot or innovative project is the lack of funding to effectively mainstream the service or project. Increased opportunities to continue or mainstream projects that have demonstrated effectiveness should be a

key objective of a future TRPSI framework both for addressing poverty and social isolation issues and having to avoid dealing with the expectation when a service or project ceases.

Local Rural Support Networks will continue to be a conduit to disseminate information on key government strategies to the community voluntary sector through their established communication channels and will continue to lobby and be the 'voice' of the rural community sector during discussions with statutory and governmental organisations e.g. Rural Development Programme and Community Planning.

4) **Do you agree that the list of Target Groups (see Section 6) is appropriate in relation to providing support to vulnerable groups under the successor TRPSI Framework?**

☒ **Yes**

☐ **No**

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSN's) welcome the proposal that the successor Framework would be open to a wider range of target groups. As an infrastructure providing community development support to the rural community across Northern Ireland for many years, we have, almost without exception, worked with all these vulnerable groups.

We particularly welcome the introduction of the working poor and the under employed. The continuing economic uncertainty has left many families in difficult financial circumstances. One or both parents are working however income levels fall below what they need to have a meaningful quality of life. A sudden change in circumstances, such as marital breakup or ill health, can have further detrimental consequences and lead to social exclusion and poverty.

Mental health still retains a significant stigma, particularly in rural areas, and many of the LRSN's run programmes which directly tackle mental ill health in their communities. Statistics show that one in four run the risk of mental ill health thus their inclusion in this framework is essential.

The inclusion of the LGBT community in the framework is also welcome. Whilst members of the LGBT community live in rural areas they tend to meet and socialise in their nearest town. However LRSN's have a role to play in supporting them to remain in their community and in ensuring statutory organisations and the wider public are aware of the issues affecting them.

Perhaps one omission from the list of vulnerable groups is men. Whilst accepted that most farmers are men there may be male rural dwellers who are not farmers. Globally, the gap between male and female life expectancy and healthy life expectancy has widened in the last 40 years and is expected to get even bigger by 2030. Research commissioned by the Priory Group of 1,000 men found that: 77% of men polled have suffered with anxiety / stress / depression; the biggest pressures in men's life are work (32%), finance (31%) and health (23%); the majority of men claim their mental health is having a negative impact on their work performance, parenting ability and relationships; 40% of men polled said it would take thoughts of suicide or self-harm to compel them to seek professional help.
(www.priorygroup.com/blog/mentalhealth/-i-ve-learnt-to-deal-with-it---40-of-men-won-t-talk-to-anyone-about-their-mentalhealth)

5) (a) **Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing _Access Poverty_ among vulnerable people in rural areas**

We are pleased to welcome the measures in the draft Framework. Many of the proposed measures will go a long way to tackle issues that blight so many rural dwellers.  We appreciate that the list of groups is not exhausted. Women, Farmers, People on work on low incomes (the working poor), children and young people, older people and Ethnic Minorities and immigrants, People with low skills or low levels of education et al. Our experience shows that some of the groups need to be broken down into subgroups.

For example there are sections of the farming industry that have seen their incomes severely cut in the last two years (dairy Farmers). Future prices in this industry predict another 10% drop in the next three months.  Mental health in this area gives us great cause for concern. This is evidenced by the increase calls to help lines, up by 30% in the last year.

Many Ethnic Minorities are finding it difficult to assimilate, especially those living in the rural community. There are a number of factors that drive this. Some Ethnic groups neither have English as their first or second language; this communication barrier reinforces isolation and is a contributing factor in poor mental health. Those who have a strong grasp of the English language find it easier to "fit in". This also is a factor in this section being "excepted". In conclusion we think this group of Ethnic minorities should be broken down into sections not exclusively into language sections. I.e. short to medium dwellers who may seasonal workers.
We are pleased with the other target groups and we welcome that people with low skills and low levels of education might have a chance to enhance their employability. The training involved to up skill this group will act as a medium to tackle social isolation. Many who suffer from social isolation either don't recognise their plight or only recognise it when their horizons broaden due to intervention from an un-proscribed source.  I.e. further education either social education or accredited.

The "Outcomes based pilot programmes" is also most welcome. This allows delivery agents latitude to make informed researched based decisions that will go to the hart rural poverty and social isolation.

Under 6.8 V we strongly concur with the mainstreaming of successful pilot projects. The Department launch the Rural Community Micro Grants 2015-2016. We in the Rural Support Networks found this reached parts of the rural community that that had

gone under the radar in the past. This has opened a pathway for community development that goes to the core of TRPSI policy. This merges into 6VII "sustainability". Some groups for the first time now see a pathway using community a development approach with the support of the Networks. 6.8 X The sharing of information and best practice learning between organisations has the potential that prevents groups trying to "reinventing the wheel" and will avoid duplication between organisations.

6.8 XI The community planning and the consultation process will be key, both in a strategic and a complementary role.  It is imperative that at all stages of the community planning that the rural voice is heard and well represented. The Networks will play an enabling role to ensure events are well attended and the TRPSI policy principles are promoted.

6.8 VIII Good Relations being promoted. There will be many opportunities to develop innovative partnerships, PEACEIV et al.  One should not underestimate the incidental "good relations" through the Rural Development programme.  The carrot and stick approach for single identity group has been proven to open halls to a wider diaspora. Not only does this lead to better community relations but adds to the sustainability of the halls.

**(b) Please provide details on any further measures which you think should be considered to help address _Access Poverty_ among vulnerable people in rural areas**

The Rural Community Micro Grants opened many new doors because it gave an incentive for tangible assets to be acquired for the benefit of a particular group. For many this has been the first time in making a funding application. The benefits not only include the asset but their governance has now been under the spotlight and sharpened to enable their participation. We would propose an extenuation of this innovative idea. The structure used to deliver the grants is now well established, this same structure could deliver small capitol grants say up to £10,000 for basic needs that so many halls throughout the country need.

Community transport should be reviewed to widen its scope. Longer journeys should be considered that travel between a number of service providers.

Evidence indicates that there is an appetite for computer training in rural areas. The LRSNs could deliver this service. There used to be an outreach service from the regional Colleges, we don't advocate for its return. The service that they provided no longer is fit for propose. Farmers and rural dwellers want a basic standard of training that may not necessarily be accredited. The end result would be Farmers having the ability to make online returns. Farm families coming together braking social isolation and have a greater understanding of the world wide web.

Greater use and the promotion of Luncheon Clubs in rural areas could provide a service that; tackles social isolation, helps sustain a target audience, increases the sustainability of rural halls. All this combined adds to the cohesion of rural communities.

6) (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing *Financial Poverty* among vulnerable people in rural areas

Financial poverty refers to the measure of the degree to which people face the risk of serious deprivation in terms of their standard of living or to which they fall below a specified minimum level of resources. Through the measures in the draft action plan there is the opportunity to raise the standard of living for those people living in rural areas. Particularly in regard to addressing issues such as rural transport which is currently a major issue which prohibits many rural dwellers from accessing essential basic services. In addition measures targeted at supporting household energy efficiency improvement & the introduction of new employability and entrepreneurship opportunities are also to be welcomed.

**(b) Please provide details on any other measures which you think should be considered to help address _Financial Poverty_ among vulnerable people in rural areas**

Other measures which may alleviate financial poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas include the creation of jobs through investment in infrastructure such as investment in rural hubs, renovating abandoned housing and broadband infrastructure development, therefore increasing the chances of the young people of rural areas to stay, therefore building a stronger rural economy. With added investment in high quality and affordable childcare and early intervention this will create increased opportunities for jobs.

**7) (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing _Social Isolation_ among vulnerable people in rural areas**

The Local Rural Support Networks welcome the continued recognition by DARD of the problems caused within the rural population due to Social Isolation.  We acknowledge the priority areas for intervention listed within the Draft Action Plan under Social Isolation of promoting tolerance, health, well-being and inclusion for rural dwellers and through our long established work within rural communities agree that these are valid and worthwhile Priority Areas for Intervention.

Poor Mental Health and well-being is an issue that has major impacts within rural communities given the fact that many people are living in isolated circumstances often on their own or with limited family and / or community connections.
The farming community is also a grouping who have been demonstrated to have poor mental health as they are facing increasing stresses of managing their businesses mostly working on an individual basis with limited opportunities to engage with others.  Many of the LRSN's are engaged in delivering mental health and wellbeing programmes over the last ten years, all of these programmes have been externally evaluated and have shown excellent results in improving local mental health and wellbeing. Any new pilot programmes delivered under the new framework need to take into consideration the knowledge and learning of the evaluations.

One concern that the LRSN's would have that by naming the priority as _'promote positive mental health and wellbeing'_ rather than '_promoting positive health and wellbeing';_ interventions could be limited in their scope to secure engagement by rural dwellers.  There is still a stigma around mental health in rural areas and people would be more likely to engage with activities that are seen to be about general health and wellbeing, people in many instances would not want to be identified through participating in activities as someone who has mental health issue.  If people are at least attracted to an activity the issue of mental health can then be addressed.

Therefore as LRSN's we do welcome the example initiatives listed as they list 'Support for health and wellbeing activities' as well as 'Support the promotion of mental health awareness and actions' and we ask that the learning and evidence from positive work that has been undertaken with rural communities through the

LRSN's, Healthy Living Centres, other Community, Voluntary and Statutory bodies on these actions and activities are used when drawing up plans for initiatives to support under the new TRPSI framework.

The Local Rural Support Networks would welcome actions that will support the rural population to improve their health and wellbeing particularly those activities that are operated and provided at local facilities and venues.

The LRSN's welcome that *'increase opportunities for social engagement'* is listed as a priority area of intervention as the value of people of all ages within rural communities being given the opportunity to engage with others on a social basis cannot be underestimated. It is through these social activities that the aim of "promote tolerance, health, wellbeing and inclusion' can be best achieved within rural communities as by bringing people together they are getting to know each other. This is needed within communities as in many instances during their working and education lives many members of rural communities are away from the community during the day and thus have limited opportunities to engage with others. It is only though actual engagement in the same physical space that tolerance can be promoted and this is especially important in rural communities as due to low numbers of people activities are best organised to attract as many members of the population as possible so that a sufficient number of people attend to make an activity viable. Therefore anything that can be done to encourage use of community facilities that have been traditionally associated as belonging to one section of the community would be welcome. Such venues can become hubs for social inclusion activities within rural communities.

Many venues within rural communities require some level of work to ensure that they are brought up to a condition that they are accessible and suitable to be used to provide activities that address social isolation.

The Local Rural Support Networks welcome the inclusion of *'support community capacity'* as an example initiative as a capable and effective local community infrastructure is of vital importance to the fabric of life within rural communities and those involved in organisations within local communities are largely undertaking this role on a voluntary basis. These organisations require ongoing community development support to continue their operations on an effective and efficient basis

and become involved in projects that will address poverty and social isolation at a local level within rural communities.

The community development support work delivered by the Local Rural Support Networks resourced under the previous TRPSI Framework has been very effective in ensuring the survival and continued operation of local community infrastructure. This community infrastructure of the LRSN's working in partnership with organisations located within local communities has also ensured that many of the other initiatives supported under TRPSI have been effective at reaching into rural communities and tackling poverty and social isolation.

**(b) Please provide details on any other measures which you think should be considered to help address _Social Isolation_ among vulnerable people in rural areas**

The Local Rural Support Networks would welcome the resourcing of actions to plan and coordinate the effective operation of activities that would address social isolation. This would involve a resource of a person to co-ordinate activities and associated resource budget to cover some of the costs of operating activities particularly training new and innovative activities on a pilot basis. This would ensure that activities are operated on a coordinated and effective basis, securing sufficient numbers, building linkages within and between communities, duplication is avoided, gaps in provision of social inclusion activities are identified and tackled.

The ongoing work within the LRSN's and their delivery of the MARA project has clearly demonstrated that there is a significant issue around mental health problems in homes, particularly depression and loneliness. The framework would provide an excellent opportunity to design a pilot project that would take advantage of the excellent community development model that we have that could be harnessed to deliver a programme to enable rural dwellers to avail of resources to assist them to overcome loneliness and seek help with other mental health conditions. The programme could be designed to ensure a rural community response is adopted to encourage self-help and self-care.

**8) How might the successor TRPSI Framework contribute towards the development of more effective rural community support structures?**

Please provide comments in the box below

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The TRPSI Framework has been a key success factor for rural organisations (e.g. the 9 Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs) / Rural Community Development Support Service Contract) in terms ensuring rural proofing, levering-in vital resources to rural areas, and enabling effective implementation of the TRPSI Framework throughout the region.

Making Strategic Facilitation a reality: the TRPSI Framework is vital to ensuring that rural needs are addressed by the government in a localised and joined-up way that reaches the most vulnerable and those most in need.

The successor TRPSI Framework would not only enable much greater utilisation of financial resources, but also would combine the expertise of public sector bodies, and the private, voluntary and community sectors to create greater economies of scale in terms utilising all available knowledge, skills and capacity. This in turn maximises innovation and enables increased access to those most in need and those who are most difficult to reach (e.g. the MARA Project has reached out to almost 15,000 households).

TRPSI has been vital in ensuring that *rural* gets its fair share in terms of community development via a high quality networking infrastructure and Community Development Support Service that is run by grass roots representatives right across the region.

The DARD Rural Micro-Capital Grants Programme delivered on-the-ground by the 9 Local Rural Support Networks, have been essential to ensuring capital investment reaches the smallest and lowest capacity rural groups throughout the entire region.

The additional financial leverage over the last four years from the Local Rural Support Networks alone in terms of additional programmes, projects and grant schemes (promoting health, peace, equality, skills, employability, capacity etc) is £56 million.

The LRSNs have been central to the role of assisting the set-up of the new local Action Groups (NIRDP) and ensuring grass roots community representation.

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**9) How might a successor TRPSI Framework support the delivery of local councils Community Plans?**

Please provide comments in the box below

The TRPSI Framework could play a key role in the delivery of local Council Community Plans via the TRPSI funded Rural Community Development Support Service which can facilitate the ongoing involvement of the Local Rural Support Networks (LRSN's) in the community planning process. The foundations for the delivery of Community Planning already exist within the local Council areas through the LRSN's and their vast network of community based organisations – Community Planning should build upon these existing structures. The delivery of Community Planning within the local Council areas will require the engagement of existing and emerging partnerships working collaboratively. The well-established and proven track record of the LRSN's could well be effective resources in such a delivery process. It is imperative that the development of Community Planning includes the continuing engagement of such current resources so as agreed delivery structures for Community Planning are adopted that act as wider collaborative forums for the benefit of the communities that they will ultimately serve.

During the past 4 years the LRSN's have delivered, under the current TRPSI Framework, a Rural Community Development Support Service to a wide range of rural organisation & groups. This has proven to be an effective model and partnership for the delivery of such services and the LRSN's, with continued support from the TRPSI programme, are therefore well placed to assist local Councils in the delivery of community planning over the next number of years due to the following factors:
• Strong partnership & links with the rural community already in place
• Added value from funding leverage from other programmes
• Already working closely with DARD to deliver services including the development of the NI Rural Development Programme (2014-2020)

The delivery structures for the Community Planning process within local Councils must therefore take account of existing rural structures & delivery organisations so as to ensure there is less fragmentation of implementation groups and integration of the various locally focused Action Plans. This will ensure that the Community Planning process will effectively serve the priority needs of the rural community, the ongoing support of DARD for the rural community development sector at grass roots level through the TRPSI framework is crucial to this.

**10) Do you have any views on the conclusions reached by DARD (see Section 9) in relation to the proposals for a successor TRPSI Framework in respect of:**

**(ix) The Equality and Human Rights Template**

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs)/Rural Community Development Support Service contract holders have a proven track record of working with DARD (as partner organisations) to contribute, develop and implement new and innovative pilot measures to Target Rural Poverty and reduce Social Isolation. The LRSNs welcome a localised approach to the design and delivery of measures which effectively target financial poverty, access poverty and social isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas in line with the key principles of the Framework. The LRSNs are advantageously neutral to central and local government ensuring that all rural communities can access resources, services and programmes in a timely manner regardless of religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status, sexual orientation or disability. The LRSNs ensure Section 75 information is recorded in line with procedures under International Quality Standard ISO 9001:2008 and kept securely in keeping with Data Protection Legislation.

**(x) The Rural Issues Statement**

Please provide comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs)/Rural Community Development Support Service contract holders have a proven track record of working with DARD (as partner organisations) to ensure the TRPSI Framework has been a key success factor ensuring rural proofing and enabling effective implementation positive direct impact on the vulnerable in rural communities through a localised infrastructure. In the last four years we have empowered some 15,000 individuals, including the hardest to reach, socially isolated and most vulnerable of the population in Northern Ireland. Delivering capacity building programmes within rural areas to encourage and ensure participation in the Rural Development Programme. Undertaking the delivery of the MARA Project has reached out to almost 15,000 households directly impacting on their quality of life. The LRSNs have also been successful in additional leverage which has had positive indirect impacts. For example we have rolled out projects and grant schemes (promoting health, peace, equality, skills, employability) equating to over £56million in the last four years. All of these measures support the delivery of

key services for rural dwellers to avail of and have indirectly helped to tackle social isolation and the related mental health connotations that come with this. The central and neutral role that the LRSNs deliver; give local services for local people and ensure grass roots community representation in rolling out TRPSI Framework.

**11) Is there any other aspect of the proposals that you wish to comment on?**

Please provide comments in the box below

# RESPONDENT INFORMATION

**Please Note** this form **must** be returned with your response to ensure that we handle your response appropriately.

## 1. Name / Organisation

**Organisation Name (If applicable).**

| |
|---|
| Kilcoo GAC |

**Title  Mr ☐   Ms ☐   Mrs x☐   Miss ☐   Dr ☐      Please tick as appropriate**

**Surname**

| |
|---|
| Kelly |

**Forename**

| |
|---|
| Sheila |

## 2. Postal Address

| |
|---|
| Dublin Road |
| Kilcoo |
| |
| |

| **Postcode BT34 5HS** | **Phone** 07795517503 | **Email** |
|---|---|---|

**Consultation Questions**

**1) Do you agree that the proposed Aim, Objectives and Intended Outcomes (see Section 6) for the TRPSI Framework are appropriate?**

☒ **Yes**

☐ **No**

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

As a local group supported by County Down Rural Community Network and whose local community have benefited from the services offered under the TRPSI programme, we strongly agree that the Aims, Objectives and Intended Outcomes for the TRPSI Framework are appropriate, taking into consideration the points noted below:

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs) of which CDRCN is one, have a proven track record of working with DARD (as partner organisations) to develop and implement new and innovative pilot measures in hundreds of rural villages and communities to Target Rural Poverty and reduce Social Isolation. Although not clearly highlighted in some of the TRPSI consultation papers, it has been acknowledged by all stakeholders (from The Minister and the ARD Committee to local groups) that all the other TRPSI measures in the current programme were dependent on a solid and responsive rural community infrastructure across NI. The LRSNs have worked closely with DARD for over 20 years to put that infrastructure in place and that is the reason so many of the TRPSI measures have been so successful.

For example, in recent months County Down Rural Community Network (CDRCN) has managed the Rural Capital Micro Grant Programme for DARD and 2 phases have been rolled out to small rural groups in every part of rural NI. In County Down 89 groups have been successful and every one of them have been able to buy equipment and make improvements to the benefit of thousands of rural dwellers. The programme has been oversubscribed and highly effective in targeting small grants at the most needy groups, helping them to deliver a wide range of local rural services.

The MARA programme, Farm Families Health Checks and the promotion of Library services have all exceeded their targets thanks in large part to the promotional and organisational abilities and reach of the LRSNs.  A local presence and knowledge of the area is to key to successful delivery.

This experience linked to the hundreds of rural groups and thousands of individuals associated with the LRSNs means that the Networks can help DARD to meet the objectives set in section 6 "Proposals for a successor Framework post 2016". Together with other rural stakeholders, we can "promote the development of new and innovative pilot approaches to TRPSI AND encourage effective partnership working AND effectively target financial poverty, access poverty and social isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas".

2) **Do you agree that the 3 Priority Areas – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation (see Section 6) – should continue to be the main priorities for the TRPSI Framework?**

☒    **Yes**

☐    **No**

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

County Down Rural Community Network has been key to the success of the delivery and implementation of the services offered under the TRPSI programme in our rural community. We feel that the 3 priority areas that have been identified – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation – have enabled the successful targeting of resources to the most vulnerable and needy in our community, and therefore we support the continuation of these themes as the main priorities for the TRPSI Framework.  We would like to emphasise that local knowledge and community development approach through the community infrastructure in our area (County Down Rural Community Network) is key to the success of any such programme.

The Local Rural Support Networks believe that the 3 Priority Areas – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation should continue to be the main priorities for the TRPSI Framework as they are still relevant in 2016, encapsulate the varying needs of the rural community and encompass a service deliverability which can be most effectively demonstrated through a  local or sub regional level approach.

The identification and successful delivery of various projects and programmes within these priorities would continue to bring greatest positive impact to the needs of those experiencing rural poverty and isolation.  The priorities allow for a bottom-up community development approach in not only identifying relevant needs but also in delivering upon them using a cascade approach. It is our view that the most effective TRPSI programmes delivered to date have had a strong community ethos and process coupled with local knowledge access to where rural, social and economic needs are most prevalent. Invariably, there will be different levels of need in different geographical areas, however, as the nature of community sector delivery is designed sub regionally and is based on pertinent local needs then those most in poverty or experiencing isolation have less probability in remaining outside the reach of these priorities and programmes.

The Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation framework and it's priorities to date has been an excellent package of funding aimed at supporting vulnerable people and targeting the root causes of social isolation. As programmes take effect and outputs deliver meaningful change there are indeed necessary modifications within the themes or priorities which are required to continue to make most impact on the frameworks aims whilst external factors such as austerity and public budget finance availability will also determine and prioritize future considerations.

It is our view that the 3 Priority Areas – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation should continue to be the main priorities for the TRPSI Framework since programmes can emerge from these themes which meet best the local community needs.

TRPSI and the priorities has now gained substantial traction and is now recognised as an essential brand which has made a huge difference to rural communities and which is complementary to the NIRDP. Many of the issues these priorities have tackled to date were previously hidden and would fall outside the remit of other mainstream funding programmes. There remains, however, continued challenges, needs and rural TRPSI issues which require on-going support at various levels of intervention and which would still come under these 3 priorities.

The Rural Community Development Support Service currently delivered by the Local Rural Support Networks, as a model of support to TRPSI, is most certainly envied

throughout communities in Europe as a model leader in balancing appropriate and measured interventions to social, economic and access poverty issues at a community level. Promoting Community development at a local/sub regional ensures that Regional programmes are delivered effectively at the local level and access to the real needs and issues of communities is provided for. Supporting access to good governance, to economic and social poverty in communities; the service as provided by these local community based networks has proved an invaluable resource to the delivery of the TRPSI framework.

These experienced local stakeholders have good working relationships with all other TRPSI delivery agents and indeed share a direct role in elements of their success making essential and valuable linkages and connections at sub regional and local levels. The key management role of DARD in direct delivery of this programme has proved to be most effective in ensuring that the networks could assist DARD to manage Regional programmes at local levels and to balance approaches necessary to ensuring programme priority themes reached the community sector using bottom up approaches.

The local access support provided to DARDs Modernisation programme and its Rural Micro Capital Grants programmes, as and when required by DARD, evidence how this infrastructure can react and respond to changing rural needs and requirements. Their modus operandi for the delivery of programmes such as MARA are a testament to the Community Development approach which ensures participation and access to hidden and real needs at a local level across all 3 main priorities.

The networking function plays an invaluable role in achieving key community participation at all necessary levels from village planning facilitation to rural proofing consultation. With the reform of local Government, Community Planning, and the mandatory Charities registration requirements; these networks provide local mentoring support and guidance, technical support and facilitation at grassroots level to those rural communities most in need under the programme priorities of Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation. Most importantly, they can identify what local pertinent needs fit the programme.

We believe that it the approaches taken under the overlying programme priorities which provide the appropriate lynchpins to ensure leverage of many other

programmes and projects into rural areas and which have included such as community mental health awareness, capital build infrastructural programmes, rural tourism, lifelong learning, social investment, migrant support etc. These programmes operate in a time of decentralisation and digitization of services, the closing of rural banks, post offices, schools and other services and thus during a time when the greatest need for local people to provide adequate solutions to their own issues and problems within a community development approach. The 3 themes adequately allow for local communities, sub regional and innovative approach making to meeting rural TRPI needs.

3)  **Do you agree that the 12 Key Principles (see Section 6) are appropriate for the TRPSI Framework?**

☒    **Yes**

☐    **No**

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

We agree with the 12 key principles.  We strongly feel that it is imperative that the Rural Support Networks are recognised and supported to act as a lynch pin between ourselves as local community groups and statutory organisations and the public sector, also taking into account the points listed below:

The rural support organisations delivering the DARD Rural Support programme agree with the key TRPSI principles as outlined in the framework document. Historically Local Rural Support Networks successfully delivered pilot, innovative projects and interventions collaboratively and in partnership with statutory and other community and voluntary organisations and are widely perceived as the link between grass roots community groups operating at a local level with regional statutory bodies.

Positive outcomes of a collaborative approach to the delivery of services aimed at addressing rural poverty and isolation issues include:
-    Ensures the socially isolated and those with financial related issues have access and opportunities to avail of support services

> - Increases the capacity of designated rural support organisations and grass roots community groups to collectively and with greater efficiency deliver both services and support interventions that may not be possible if delivered in isolation.
>
> A negative outcome of delivering a successful pilot or innovative project is the lack of funding to effectively mainstream the service or project. Increased opportunities to continue or mainstream projects that have demonstrated effectiveness should be a key objective of a future TRPSI framework both for addressing poverty and social isolation issues and having to avoid dealing with the expectation when a service or project ceases.
>
> Local Rural Support Networks will continue to be a conduit to disseminate information on key government strategies to the community voluntary sector through their established communication channels and will continue to lobby and be the 'voice' of the rural community sector during discussions with statutory and governmental organisations e.g. Rural Development Programme and Community Planning.

4) **Do you agree that the list of Target Groups (see Section 6) is appropriate in relation to providing support to vulnerable groups under the successor TRPSI Framework?**

☒　　**Yes**

☐　　**No**

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

We fully support the flexibility of the proposed programme in relation to targeting the most vulnerable in our rural community, as this more fully recognises the range and diversity of our local community, without restricting the definition of need to a specific target group.

As an infrastructure providing community development support to the rural community across Northern Ireland for many years, Rural Support Networks have, almost without exception, worked with all these vulnerable groups, and have encouraged and enabled us as a local group to do the same.

We particularly welcome the introduction of the working poor and the under employed.  The continuing economic uncertainty has left many families in difficult financial circumstances.  One or both parents are working however income levels fall below what they need to have a meaningful quality of life.  A sudden change in circumstances, such as marital breakup or ill health, can have further detrimental consequences and lead to social exclusion and poverty.

Mental health still retains a significant stigma, particularly in rural areas, and many of the LRSN's run programmes which directly tackle mental ill health in their communities.  Statistics show that one in four run the risk of mental ill health thus their inclusion in this framework is essential.

The inclusion of the LGBT community in the framework is also welcome.  Whilst members of the LGBT community live in rural areas they tend to meet and socialise in their nearest town.  However LRSN's have a role to play in supporting them to remain in their community and in ensuring statutory organisations and the wider public are aware of the issues affecting them.

Perhaps one omission from the list of vulnerable groups is men.  Whilst accepted that most farmers are men there may be male rural dwellers who are not farmers.  Globally, the gap between male and female life expectancy and healthy life expectancy has widened in the last 40 years and is expected to get even bigger by 2030.  Research commissioned by the Priory Group of 1,000 men found that: 77% of men polled have suffered with anxiety / stress / depression; the biggest pressures in men's life are work (32%), finance (31%) and health (23%); the majority of men claim their mental health is having a negative impact on their work performance, parenting

ability and relationships; 40% of men polled said it would take thoughts of suicide or self-harm to compel them to seek professional help.

([www.priorygroup.com/blog/mentalhealth/-i-ve-learnt-to-deal-with-it---40-of-men-won-t-talk-to-anyone-about-their-mentalhealth](www.priorygroup.com/blog/mentalhealth/-i-ve-learnt-to-deal-with-it---40-of-men-won-t-talk-to-anyone-about-their-mentalhealth))

**5) (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing _Access Poverty_ among vulnerable people in rural areas**

We are pleased to welcome the measures in the draft Framework. Many of the proposed measures will go a long way to tackle issues that blight so many rural dwellers. We appreciate that the list of groups is not exhausted. Women, Farmers, People on work on low incomes (the working poor), children and young people, older people and Ethnic Minorities and immigrants, People with low skills or low levels of education et al. Our experience shows that some of the groups need to be broken down into subgroups.

For example there are sections of the farming industry that have seen their incomes severely cut in the last two years (dairy Farmers). Future prices in this industry predict another 10% drop in the next three months. Mental health in this area gives us great cause for concern. This is evidenced by the increase calls to help lines, up by 30% in the last year.

Many Ethnic Minorities are finding it difficult to assimilate, especially those living in the rural community. There are a number of factors that drive this. Some Ethnic groups neither have English as their first or second language; this communication barrier reinforces isolation and is a contributing factor in poor mental health. Those who have a strong grasp of the English language find it easier to "fit in". This also is a factor in this section being "excepted". In conclusion we think this group of Ethnic

minorities should be broken down into sections not exclusively into language sections. I.e. short to medium dwellers who may seasonal workers.

We are pleased with the other target groups and we welcome that people with low skills and low levels of education might have a chance to enhance their employability. The training involved to up skill this group will act as a medium to tackle social isolation. Many who suffer from social isolation either don't recognise their plight or only recognise it when their horizons broaden due to intervention from an un-proscribed source.  I.e. further education either social education or accredited.

The "Outcomes based pilot programmes" is also most welcome. This allows delivery agents latitude to make informed researched based decisions that will go to the hart rural poverty and social isolation.

Under 6.8 (V) we strongly concur with the mainstreaming of successful pilot projects. The Department launch the Rural Community Micro Grants 2015-2016. We in the Rural Support Networks found this reached parts of the rural community that that had gone under the radar in the past. This has opened a pathway for community development that goes to the core of TRPSI policy. This merges into 6VII "sustainability". Some groups for the first time now see a pathway using community a development approach with the support of the Networks. 6.8 X The sharing of information and best practice learning between organisations has the potential that prevents groups trying to "reinventing the wheel" and will avoid duplication between organisations.

6.8 (XI) The community planning and the consultation process will be key, both in a strategic and a complementary role.  It is imperative that at all stages of the community planning that the rural voice is heard and well represented. The Networks will play an enabling role to ensure events are well attended and the TRPSI policy principles are promoted.

6.8 (VII)I Good Relations being promoted. There will be many opportunities to develop innovative partnerships, PEACEIV et al.  One should not underestimate the incidental "good relations" through the Rural Development programme.  The carrot and stick approach for single identity group has been proven to open halls to a wider diaspora. Not only does this lead to better community relations but adds to the sustainability of the halls.

**(b) Please provide details on any further measures which you think should be considered to help address _Access Poverty_ among vulnerable people in rural areas**

The Rural Community Micro Grants opened many new doors because it gave an incentive for tangible assets to be acquired for the benefit of a particular group. For many this has been the first time in making a funding application. The benefits not only include the asset but their governance has now been under the spotlight and sharpened to enable their participation.  We would propose an extension of this innovative idea.  The structure used to deliver the grants is now well established, this same structure could deliver small capital grants say up to £40,000 for basic needs that so many halls throughout the country need.

Community transport should be reviewed to widen its scope. Longer journeys should be considered that travel between a number of service providers.

We have a continued need for access to training, particularly in the area of IT, Internet & Computers in our area.  We feel that this is best delivered at local community level in partnership with the statutory groups and with our local Rural Support Network.  It is important as it is about improving employability, as well as reducing social isolation, building social cohesion, improving mental health and many other benefits.

**6) (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing _Financial Poverty_ among vulnerable people in rural areas**

Financial poverty refers to the measure of the degree to which people face the risk of serious deprivation in terms of their standard of living or to which they fall below a specified minimum level of resources.

Through the measures in the draft action plan there is the opportunity to raise the standard of living for those people living in rural areas. Particularly in regard to addressing issues such as rural transport which is currently a major issue which prohibits many rural dwellers from accessing essential basic services.  In addition measures targeted at supporting household energy efficiency improvement & the introduction of new employability and entrepreneurship opportunities are also to be welcomed.

We would like to ensure that measures currently in place which help to reduce household expenditure and living costs of people in our rural community, ie Oil Clubs, Food Banks, continue to receive the support that they need from our local Rural Support Network.

**(b) Please provide details on any other measures which you think should be considered to help address _Financial Poverty_ among vulnerable people in rural areas**

Members of our group have benefited from the MARA programme and we would like to see a continuation of this important programme which helps address financial poverty faced by many of our vulnerable members.

Other measures which may alleviate financial poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas include the creation of jobs through investment in infrastructure such as investment in rural hubs, renovating abandoned housing and broadband infrastructure development, therefore increasing the chances of the young people of rural areas to stay, therefore building a stronger rural economy.  With added investment in high quality and affordable childcare and early intervention this will create increased opportunities for jobs.

**7) (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing _Social Isolation_ among vulnerable people in rural areas**

Our community group welcomes the continued recognition by DARD of the problems caused within the rural population due to Social Isolation. We acknowledge the priority areas for intervention listed within the Draft Action Plan under Social Isolation of promoting tolerance, health, well-being and inclusion for rural dwellers and through our long established work within rural communities agree that these are valid and worthwhile Priority Areas for Intervention.

Poor Mental Health and well-being is an issue that has major impacts within rural communities given the fact that many people are living in isolated circumstances often on their own or with limited family and / or community connections.
The farming community is also a grouping who have been shown to have poor mental health as they are facing increasing stresses of managing their businesses mostly working on an individual basis with limited opportunities to engage with others. Any new pilot programmes delivered under the new framework need to take into consideration the knowledge and learning of previous programmes evaluations.

One concern we would have that by naming the priority as _'promote positive mental health and wellbeing'_ rather than '_promoting positive health and wellbeing'_; interventions could be limited in their scope to secure engagement by rural dwellers. There is still a stigma around mental health in rural areas and people would be more likely to engage with activities that are seen to be about general health and wellbeing, people in many instances would not want to be identified through participating in activities as someone who has mental health issue. If people are at least attracted to an activity the issue of mental health can then be addressed.

Therefore we do welcome the example initiatives listed as they list 'Support for health and wellbeing activities' as well as 'Support the promotion of mental health awareness and actions' and we ask that the learning and evidence from positive work that has been undertaken with rural communities through the LRSN's, Healthy Living Centres, other Community, Voluntary and Statutory bodies on these actions and activities are used when drawing up plans for initiatives to support under the new

TRPSI framework.

Our group welcomes actions that will support the rural population to improve health and wellbeing particularly those activities that are operated and provided at local facilities and venues. Many venues within rural communities require some level of work to ensure that they are fit for purpose, and are accessible and suitable to be used to provide activities that address social isolation.

Our group welcomes that *'increase opportunities for social engagement'* is listed as a priority area of intervention as the value of people of all ages within rural communities being given the opportunity to engage with others on a social basis cannot be underestimated.  It is through these social activities that the aim of "promote tolerance, health, wellbeing and inclusion' can be best achieved within rural communities as by bringing people together they are getting to know each other. This is needed within communities as in many instances during their working and education lives many members of rural communities are away from the community during the day and thus have limited opportunities to engage with others.  It is only though actual engagement in the same physical space that tolerance can be promoted and this is especially important in rural communities as due to low numbers of people activities are best organised to attract as many members of the population as possible so that a sufficient number of people attend to make an activity viable. Therefore anything that can be done to encourage use of community facilities that have been traditionally associated as belonging to one section of the community would be welcome.  Such venues can become hubs for social inclusion activities within rural communities.

We welcome the inclusion of *'support community capacity'* as an example initiative as a capable and effective local community infrastructure is of vital importance to the fabric of life within rural communities and those involved in organisations within local communities are largely undertaking this role on a voluntary basis.  These organisations require ongoing community development support to continue their operations on an effective and efficient basis and become involved in projects that will address poverty and social isolation at a local level within rural communities.

As a beneficiary organisation, our experience is that the community development support work delivered by the Local Rural Support Networks resourced under the

previous TRPSI Framework has been very effective in ensuring the survival and continued operation of local community infrastructure. This community infrastructure of the LRSN's working in partnership with organisations located within local communities has also ensured that many of the other initiatives supported under TRPSI have been effective at reaching into rural communities and tackling poverty and social isolation.

**(b) Please provide details on any other measures which you think should be considered to help address *Social Isolation* among vulnerable people in rural areas**

Our community group welcomes the resourcing of actions to plan and coordinate the effective operation of activities that would address social isolation.   This would involve a resource of a person to co-ordinate activities and associated resource budget to cover some of the costs of operating activities particularly training new and innovative activities on a pilot basis.  This would ensure that activities are operated on a coordinated and effective basis, securing sufficient numbers, building linkages within and between communities, duplication is avoided, gaps in provision of social inclusion activities are identified and tackled.

The ongoing work within the LRSN's and their delivery of the MARA project has clearly demonstrated that there is a significant issue around mental health problems in homes, particularly depression and loneliness.  The framework would provide an excellent opportunity to design a pilot project that would take advantage of the excellent community development model that we have that could be harnessed to deliver a programme to enable rural dwellers to avail of resources to assist them to overcome loneliness and seek help with other mental health conditions.  The programme could be designed to ensure a rural community response is adopted to encourage self-help and self-care.

**8) How might the successor TRPSI Framework contribute towards the development of more effective rural community support structures?**

Please provide comments in the box below

The TRPSI Framework has been a key success factor for our group through the Rural Community Development Support Service Contract, by supporting County Down Rural Community Network this has ensured that we as a local community group have access to information, advice, support, signposting, training, development, providing a rural voice, levering in vital resources to our area, and enabling the effective implementation of the TRPSI Framework in our area.

Making Strategic Facilitation a reality:  the TRPSI Framework is vital to ensuring that rural needs are addressed by the government in a localised and joined-up way that reaches the most vulnerable and those most in need.

The successor TRPSI Framework would not only enable much greater utilisation of financial resources, but also would combine the expertise of public sector bodies, and the private, voluntary and community sectors to create greater economies of scale in terms utilising all available knowledge, skills and capacity.  This in turn maximises innovation and enables increased access to those most in need and those who are most difficult to reach (e.g. the MARA Project has reached out to almost 15,000 households).

TRPSI has been vital in ensuring that *rural* gets its fair share in terms of community development via a high quality networking infrastructure and CD Support Service (9 Rural Support Networks) that are run by grass roots representatives right across the region.

The DARD Rural Micro-Capital Grants Programme (Phases 1 & 2) delivered on-the-ground by the 9 Local Rural Support Networks, have been essential to ensuring capital investment reaches the smallest and lowest capacity rural groups throughout the entire region.

The additional financial leverage from the Local Rural Support Networks alone in terms of additional programmes, projects and grant schemes (promoting health, peace, equality, skills, employability, capacity etc) is £56 Million

The LRSNs have been central to the role of assisting the set-up of the new local Action Groups (NIRDP) and ensuring grass roots community representation.

**9) How might a successor TRPSI Framework support the delivery of local councils Community Plans?**

Please provide comments in the box below

The TRPSI Framework could play a key role in the delivery of local Council Community Plans via the TRPSI funded Rural Community Development Support Service which can facilitate the ongoing involvement of the Local Rural Support Networks (LRSN's) in the community planning process. The foundations for the delivery of Community Planning already exist within the local Council areas through the LRSN's and their vast network of community based organisations – Community Planning should build upon these existing structures. The delivery of Community Planning within the local Council areas will require the engagement of existing and emerging partnerships working collaboratively. The well-established and proven track record of the LRSN's could well be effective resources in such a delivery process. It is imperative that the development of Community Planning includes the continuing engagement of such current resources so as agreed delivery structures for Community Planning are adopted that act as wider collaborative forums for the benefit of the communities that they will ultimately serve.

During the past 4 years the LRSN's have delivered, under the current TRPSI Framework, a Rural Community Development Support Service to a wide range of rural organisation & groups. This has proven to be an effective model and partnership for the delivery of such services and the LRSN's, with continued support from the TRPSI programme, are therefore well placed to assist local Councils in the delivery of community planning over the next number of years due to the following factors:
• Strong partnership & links with the rural community already in place
• Added value from funding leverage from other programmes
• Already working closely with DARD to deliver services including the development of the NI Rural Development Programme (2014-2020)

The delivery structures for the Community Planning process within local Councils must therefore take account of existing rural structures & delivery organisations so as to ensure there is less fragmentation of implementation groups and integration of the various locally focused Action Plans. This will ensure that the Community Planning process will effectively serve the priority needs of the rural community, the ongoing support of DARD for the rural community development sector at grass roots level through the TRPSI framework is crucial to this.

10) **Do you have any views on the conclusions reached by DARD (see Section 9) in relation to the proposals for a successor TRPSI Framework in respect of:**

**(xi) The Equality and Human Rights Template**

Please provide comments in the box below

> The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs)/Rural Community Development Support Service contract holders have a proven track record of working with DARD (as partner organisations) to contribute, develop and implement new and innovative pilot measures to Target Rural Poverty and reduce Social Isolation. The LRSNs welcome a localised approach to the design and delivery of measures which effectively target financial poverty, access poverty and social isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas in line with the key principles of the Framework. The LRSNs are advantageously neutral to central and local government ensuring that all rural communities can access resources, services and programmes in a timely manner regardless of religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status, sexual orientation or disability; adhering to Section 75 requirments.

**(xii) The Rural Issues Statement**

Please provide comments in the box below

> The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs)/Rural Community Development Support Service contract holders have a proven track record of working with DARD (as partner organisations) to ensure the TRPSI Framework has been a key success factor ensuring rural proofing and enabling effective implementation positive direct impact on the vulnerable in rural communities through a localised infrastructure. . In the last four years we have empowered some 15,000 individuals, including the hardest to reach, socially isolated and most vulnerable of the population in Northern Ireland. Delivering capacity building programmes within rural areas to encourage and ensure participation in the Rural Development Programme.  Undertaking the delivery of the MARA Project has reached out to almost 15,000 households directly impacting on their quality of life. The LRSNs have also been successful in additional leverage which has had positive indirect impacts. For example we have rolled out projects and grant schemes (promoting health, peace, equality, skills, employability) equating to

over £56million in the last four years.

All of these measures support the delivery of key services for rural dwellers to avail of and have indirectly helped to tackle social isolation and the related mental health connotations that come with this. The central and neutral role that the LRSNs deliver; give local services for local people and ensure grass roots community representation in rolling out TRPSI Framework.

**11) Is there any other aspect of the proposals that you wish to comment on?**

Please provide comments in the box below