

Consultation Responses: Nos. 31 - 40

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Please note that some respondents submitted identical responses

Name – Robert John Hamilton

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I attended the Public Consultation meeting on the Proposals for a Successor to TRPSI held in Loughrey on the

10th December, 2015. I found this a useful meeting.

I was particularly interested in the aspect of Social Isolation caused by zero mobile phone signal in the area of my farm and I believe many others in the area. This problem brings with it a very serious Health and Safety issue.

Health and Safety advice is to always carry a mobile phone especially when working alone.

Obviously this is useless when there is zero mobile signal to any of the networks, as I have thoroughly tested.

Please see attachment email of my correspondence with UFU on the subject.

I feel that Social Isolation particularly with regard to Health and Safety is a very serious problem on many farms in Northern Ireland and the problem could hopefully be given attention within any successor to the 2011 – 2015 programme of TRPSI.

Robert Hamilton

Public Consultation on 'Proposals for a Successor to DARD's Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework 2011 - 2015'.

[Department for Agriculture and Rural Development]

Consultation Response from Fermanagh and Omagh District Council.

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council (Council) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Department for Agriculture and Rural Development's (DARD) public consultation on the 'Proposals for a Successor to DARD's Tackling Poverty and Social Isolation Framework 2011 – 2015'.

Brief Background for Fermanagh and Omagh District Council

The District Council area is home to 114,992 people (as of 30 June 2014). The District Council area is Northern Ireland's largest region in terms of land mass - approximately 3,000km², or 20% of NI - and the smallest in terms of population. As a result, the population density of approximately 41 people per km² is the sparsest in NI. This is a feature of the region which also provides challenges to service delivery.

Consultation Feedback

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council (Council) welcomes this consultation and in general the aim of DARD (along with other Government Departments and Public Bodies/Organisations) to improve the lives and fortunes of people who live in rural areas.

The Fermanagh and Omagh District Council area is predominantly rural, with many areas within the district being classed as significantly rural and isolated. For example, 14 Wards within the District appear within the 'Top 50' most deprived areas within Northern Ireland with regards to 'Proximity to Services', including 5 in the 'Top 10' [all statistics provided by NISRA]. The District should be able to benefit from the DARD's successor Framework to Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI).

Many rural areas experience negative impacts along with having to pay additional 'rural premium costs' associated with living in isolated rural communities. Other issues which those living in rural communities face include:

- Accessibility issues.
- Financial issues.
- Social isolation issues.
- Educational barriers, and employability issues.

As mentioned in the Framework for Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation, one of DARD's key objectives is to:

'... strengthen the social and economic infrastructure of rural areas.'

The Council believes that it is vital for the Department to build upon the good measures which were developed previously in order for experience, knowledge and resources not to

be wasted. The Council are aware of the work supported under the previous framework through the actions such as: the Maximising Access in Rural Areas (MARA) project; Rural Community Development Support Service provided by Fermanagh Rural Community Network and Omagh Forum for Rural Associations; Assisted Rural Travel Scheme operated by Fermanagh Community Transport and Easilink. Any new proposals should aim to strengthen the social, economic and community infrastructure within rural areas, especially those which are feeling the effects of the increased pressures on the agricultural sector and physical/social isolation.

Briefing Paper Number 7096 (House of Commons library), issued on Friday, 6 November 2015 demonstrates some shocking statistics for Northern Ireland. It states that the proportion of individuals in 'relative low income' is estimated at 20% of its population. This is the highest percentage (as a proportion of individuals) in the UK. When we compare it with the lowest UK area percentage in 'relative low income', found (the South East of England), which is estimated at 12% of the population, the difference is stark. Clearly, low income, poverty and associated difficulties are issues which affect people in Northern Ireland on a daily basis. These issues are a particular concern for those living in rural areas, such as in the Fermanagh and Omagh District, who traditionally face more difficulties and barriers than their urban-based counterparts.

Definitions of 'Poverty' and 'Rural'

In order for this document to be fully assessed and understood, the Council believes that it is vital that two definitions are included within the Consultation Document, namely **'Poverty'** and **'Rural'**.

Within this consultation the Council believes that poverty should be an all-encompassing term that not only relates to income, but to an individual's complete standard of life, including their social, cultural, material and emotional deprivation. It should not only be concerned with the economic status of an individual/community, but also their possible exclusions from 'ordinary' living patterns. This would be particularly significant when we consider the impact, and levels, of poverty for rural communities in the Fermanagh and Omagh District - some of which are quite remote and geographically spread out.

The Council also stresses the need for the Department, as part of its proposals, to outline what it sees as a **'Rural Area'**.

In the previous Framework for Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation, a rural area was defined as: '...a settlement of 4,500 or less.'

It is not clear whether the Department will be using the same criteria for the successor proposals going forward. It is also worth noting that a number of towns, for example Omagh and Enniskillen within the Fermanagh and Omagh District Council area, although exceeding the numbers which define a rural area, still suffer from many of the same issues experienced by rural areas. For example, larger towns within the Fermanagh and Omagh District still suffer from access issues – e.g. public transport cuts, a lack of a

motorway/dual carriageway, removal of community transport links. Connectivity between rural areas and economic centres including market towns, larger towns and cities is essential to the long term sustainability of rural areas.

Accessibility within Rural Areas

One of the main challenges that people living in rural areas face is that of 'Access'. Accessibility is widely accepted, amongst rural communities, as being one of the major causes of social isolation. This not only covers 'Access to Services', but it can be looked upon more widely as classifying 'Access to Employment' and 'Access to Social Gatherings/Opportunities'.

Access also involves transport issues such as the high unit costs for transport provision in rural areas and the reduction in/removal of services due to budget cuts and other restricting factors. For individuals who may be reliant on the availability of key services, Access can be the difference between leading a fulfilling life and a mere existence, between poverty and a decent standard of living.

The west of Northern Ireland, in particular rural areas, continues to face hardships in relation to access to public transport. Continued budget cuts have resulted in reduced services with many places experiencing a cut in public transport services altogether. Vulnerable people living in rural areas, for example older people, people with disabilities and young people rely on these types of services to assist them in leading a fulfilling life - for example in accessing other key services

Research from other areas of the UK, indicates that there is a substantial difference in the percentages of people who find public transport services convenient. This shows that the provision of services (not only transport) and access to services in rural areas is not just a problem facing Northern Ireland, but is rather found wider afield - i.e. Scotland, England and Wales. With this in mind it would be extremely beneficial for the Department to look at what is taking place in other areas in order to address accessibility issues in rural areas. This shared learning approach could help the Department immensely with regards to drafting its future Action Plans, setting targets/goals.

Accessing various services is crucial for both urban and rural dwellers and businesses; however traditionally it can be significantly more difficult for those based in rural areas.

Various pieces of research (including SVCO, the Office for National Statistic, the UK's Department for Communities and Local government and the UK's Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) demonstrate that both the availability and the cost of services in rural areas (particularly transport/accessibility) is crucial in terms of accessing/sustaining long-term employment, accessing healthcare and encouraging social interaction.

At present, there are a substantial number of households who do not have access to either a car or van. This figure also equates to 45% of 'one person households' and 53% of 'one person households aged 65 years and over'. Whilst within an urban setting, this can be

countered by walking, cycling, public transport and/or a taxi, within rural locations this can cause greater problems due to the increased distances to travels, alongside the fewer options to getting there.

The Council believes that the successor Framework, and subsequent Action Plan, should include reference to Rural and Community Transport. This is a service which many people within rural areas rely upon to go about their daily activities.

Other aspects which should be referenced include:

- Working with other Departments to secure investment in the rural transport infrastructure (including roads, development, and so forth).
- Working with other Departments to secure funding to ensure future provision of essential services within the rural areas (for example healthcare, education, training, leisure and childcare, amongst others.)

Rural Broadband and Telephone Issues

Another key issue faced in rural communities, particularly within the District, relates to that of poor telephone, mobile and broadband coverage and/or service. Access to these services are essential to support of economic development and job creation, enabling rural businesses to become/remain competitive as well as providing a key service to individual rural dwellers and households.. This was one of the core principles that was outlined within the former Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework (2011-2015).

However, within the successor framework (which states on page 16: ‘...would continue to focus on three Priority Areas specified in the 20011-2015 TRPSI Framework i.e. Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation.’), the provision of broadband services is not mentioned as a standalone aim, despite its importance within the previous Framework. Furthermore, telephone/mobile services and/or coverage are not mentioned within the ‘Areas for Intervention’ for the successor Framework.

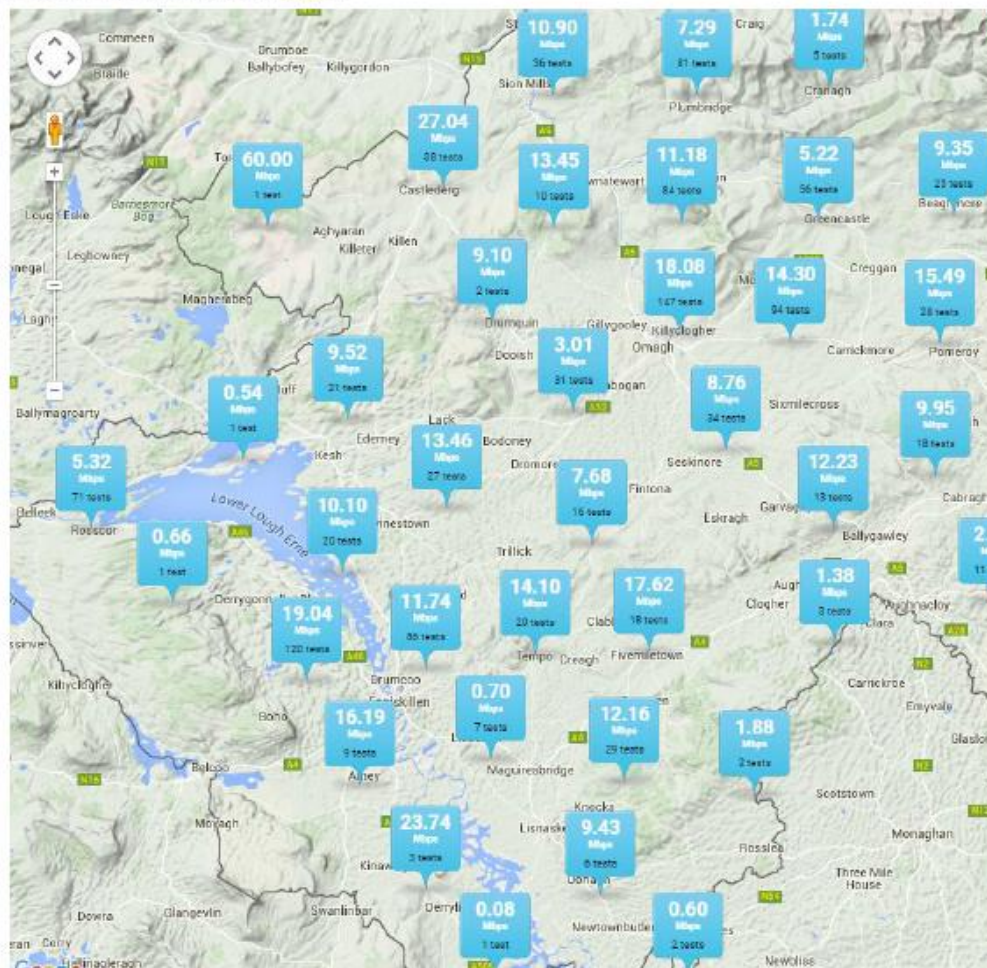
Currently, the inadequacy of broadband and mobile coverage within the Fermanagh and Omagh District Council area is a huge issue and one that both the legacy and the new Councils lobbied on for a number of years. The rural parts of the district have been severely disadvantaged and hampered because of little, or even no, broadband and/or mobile coverage.

The Council believes that the issue of broadband should be included as a standalone aim within any successor framework. Also included within this aim should be telephone/mobile coverage and service.

Northern Ireland has a significantly high proportion of rural based and agricultural based businesses, compared to any other area of the UK. Unfortunately, many of these businesses operate in areas which are subject to limited mobile coverage and WiFi ‘not spots’ (as opposed to ‘hot spots’). This has a detrimental impact on contact with customers (in NI and the rest of the world), suppliers, or tender applications.

The Council urges the Department, through the successor Framework to TRPSI, to work with other Departments, Community Organisations and Private Companies to improve mobile/telephone coverage, as well as working towards 100% superfast broadband coverage, not only for homes but also for businesses in both urban and rural areas of Northern Ireland.

Included in the image below (Image 1) is a map which shows the current average broadband speeds across the District. The UK's national average broadband speeds, estimated by OFCOM in February of 2015, was: **22.8Mbps**. Although this is a substantial rise from 18.7 Mbps (estimated by OFCOM in May 2014), it is clear from the below image that the majority of rural areas in Northern Ireland are receiving nowhere close to that level of service. This is an issue of concern for Northern Ireland and in particular much of the Fermanagh and Omagh District.



(Image 1 – Average Broadband Speeds)
[Source: Think Broadband]

Rural areas of the Fermanagh and Omagh District are extremely disadvantaged when it comes to broadband provision and speed, with some areas of the Erne West, Erne North and Erne East Wards having almost no broadband coverage whatsoever.

The Council urges the Department for Agriculture and Rural Development to continue to work in partnership to progress Rural Broadband provision in order to address this deficiency.

Social Isolation

One of the key issues raised under social isolation is to ‘...promote mental health and well-being’. The Council feels strongly that within this document there should also be some reference made to general health and well-being in order to include other aspects of health which are sometimes neglected by those who reside in rural areas. It is proven that accessing key health services i.e. GPs, hospitals and pharmacies can be more difficult in rural areas.

Specialist health care services are being re-located into hospitals within the larger more urban areas, leaving it more difficult for people in rural areas to access the necessary service. At the same time, Residential and Day Care facilities which serve rural populations are have been selected for closure. Council is concerned that the physical and emotional upheaval of relocating residents from their current locations where they are settled, to an alternative facility would also prove difficult for family members. In addition, some families may be required to travel further distances in order to visit their loved ones, thereby placing additional time and cost pressures on these families.

The council would welcome actions that will support the rural population to improve their health and well-being particularly those activities that are operated and provided at local facilities and venues.

The Department should therefore work in close partnership with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in order to make sure that those living in rural areas do not face additional disadvantage in relation to health services, mental health services/provisions or other health and well-being initiatives and/or programmes.

The Council welcome the priority areas for intervention under social inclusion of *‘increase opportunities for social engagement’* and *‘provide support to groups at risk of social isolation’* and agree with the examples of initiatives that could be supported as listed on page 21 of *‘Support health and well being activities’* and *‘Support for community capacity, rural hubs and social inclusion activities.’*

The council would welcome actions that support community capacity as our local community infrastructure is of vital importance to the fabric of life within our district and those involved in community associations and organisations 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 undertake

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

Financial Poverty

The Council believes that the inclusion of Financial Poverty as a 'focus' for the successor Framework is extremely positive. Indeed, it is positive that many issues are covered, such as:

- Reducing household expenditure and living costs.
- Increasing household incomes.
- Addressing the additional costs faced by those living in rural areas.
- Addressing barriers to escaping financial poverty.

Financial poverty within rural areas is a particular issue for many. In some cases, there may be some linkages between Financial Poverty and Social Isolation. Those individuals or families living in Financial Poverty can find themselves inadvertently being socially isolated, as they are unable to afford to take part in other activities in the local community.

NISRA statistics for the Fermanagh and Omagh District state that there are approximately 27,500 people who are 'income deprived'. This equates to just over 24% of the local population. Additionally, the last Census demonstrates that whilst 22.26% of the local District population had a degree qualification (or higher), over 43% of the District's residents had no, or low (level 1), qualifications. This figure for those with no/low qualifications is quite startling and equates to approximately 49,000 people in the Fermanagh and Omagh District alone.

Clearly, there is a substantial amount of work that needs to be done, not only from an employment perspective, but also from an upskilling perspective - allowing individuals the opportunity to gain, or increase, their skill levels and allowing them to gain employment or to specialise.

This is something that the Council believes that the Department for Agriculture should pay particular attention to, particularly when implementing or planning any successor Frameworks to TRPSI.

Target Audience / Targeting of Specific Groups of People

The Council would agree with the inclusion of all of the Targeted Groups of people mentioned on pages 18 and 19 of the Consultation Document. The Council also agrees that the successor Framework should have a degree of 'openness' whereby, if deemed appropriate, the Department may look at providing measures (or test measures) for other groups in need at a particular time.

The Council would recommend that the Department include a further group to the list i.e. 'Older people living alone'.

The Council feels that older people who happen to live on their own should be a 'key' group which is targeted by any successor Framework to TRPSI. Older people who live on their own may be more likely:

- To be less well off, having to pay all household costs by themselves.
- To suffer from loneliness or isolation.
- To eat less well than others (eating for some is seen as a social activity and therefore people on their own may be less likely to prepare full and balanced meals - thereby, increasing the chances of malnutrition).
- To suffer from health issues. Those living on their own may be more likely to have health issues going unnoticed if they have no one to inform them of certain symptoms or to assist with the correct directions or use of prescribed treatments.

To counter such issues the Department may wish to provide funding or opportunities which older people who live alone may wish to take advantage of, for example:

- Volunteering positions within the local community which could benefit other individuals/organisations.
- Classes within local communities for example 'educational' or 'skill development' classes (i.e. painting, computing).
- Extra hobbies/past-times (i.e. fitness activities, games).

Draft Action Plan

Whilst acknowledging that the detail of the Framework will be finalised following consultation, Council is supportive of the SIB recommendation that "Some common measurement framework should be established for any future TRPSI Framework. Appropriate and measurable targets should be identified which reflect the aims, objectives and outcomes of the TRPSI Framework. This could incorporate a matrix of measures reflecting some of the domain measures of the NIMDM. Where possible, impacts should be geographically mapped to provide a clearer understanding of TRPSI's impact at a local and regional level."

Council also stresses the need to define ownership of the necessary actions and to provide clear governance structures to enable a robust review and monitoring of the Framework as it evolves.

Budgetary provision.

The Council notes that £1.7 million of the TRPSI budget will move from resource to capital, with a proviso that this is spent within one year. Council strongly recommends that engagement with stakeholders is essential to ensure the identification of suitable capital projects which can be delivered within the framework.

Conclusion

To conclude, the Council believes that any successor Framework to TRPSI should ultimately revolve around the aim of 'making life better for rural dwellers, particularly those living in isolated/deprived areas.'

The Council feels strongly that the Department should look to build upon the successes of the previous Framework, work in partnership with the grass roots organisations which currently operate within rural communities, as well as taking the comments contained within this Consultation Response on board in developing any future Framework aimed at tackling Rural Poverty and or Social Isolation.

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).

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

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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

It is our view that the aims and objectives of the framework have identified the key issues impacting upon the rural community. However for the actions which must flow from this to be most effective it is essential that community network organisations which retain the confidence of the community are involved in the delivery.

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

It is our opinion that these areas remain as priority issues for the rural community.

Social isolation remains a major issue in rural areas which is compounded by lack of access to services and community organisations have an important role to play in providing opportunities to tackle social isolation. In appreciating the impact of rural poverty it is essential to appreciate the difficulties facing the working poor and included in this are people who may be deemed to be asset rich but who have limited disposable income.

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

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

There is a danger that any listing may prove to be prescriptive and this must be managed carefully with the basic criteria being one of need.

Notwithstanding that it is wrong in our opinion that the specific targeting of the PUL community in the previous programme has not been included in the current proposed list of Target Groups. Evaluation has shown that much good work has been done in this area but that much more needs to be done. If this does not and there is a real danger that failure to continue will have a negative impact upon the individuals and communities who have been engaged.

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 measures contained in the draft Action Plan could be extremely effective in addressing Access Poverty but as always it will be maximised if rural people are comfortable with those helping to deliver initiatives and have confidence/trust in those engaging them.

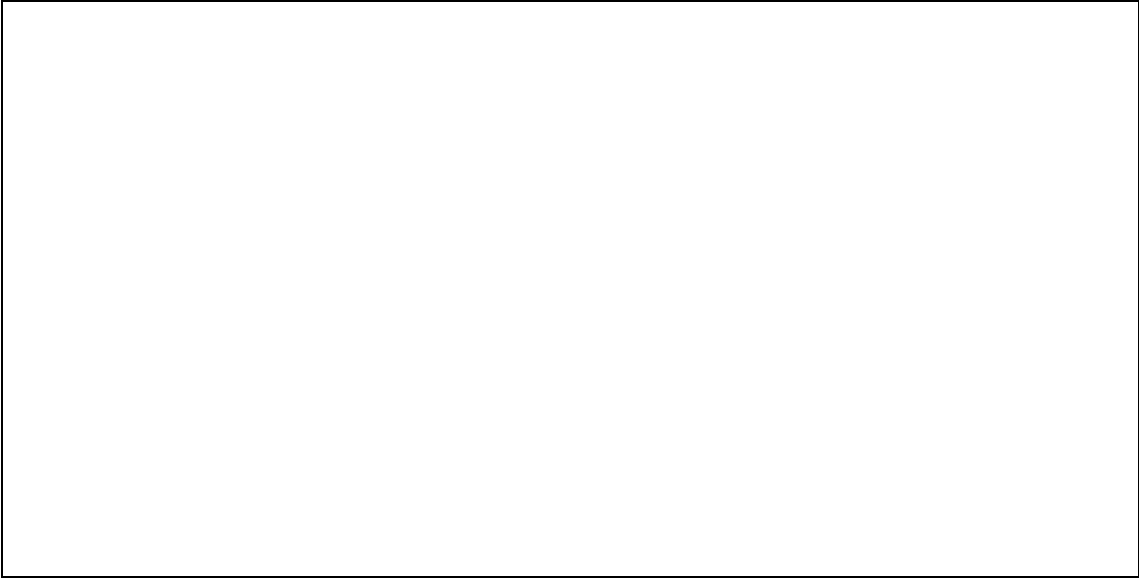
It will also require meaningful engagement in partnership working with a range of statutory authorities

(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

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 measures contained in the draft Action Plan could be extremely effective in addressing Financial Poverty but as always it will be maximised if rural people are comfortable with those helping to deliver initiatives and have confidence/trust in those engaging them

(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



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 measures contained in the draft Action Plan could be extremely effective in addressing Social Isolation but as always it will be maximised if rural people are comfortable with those helping to deliver initiatives and have confidence/trust in those engaging them.
It will be essential that there is partnership with local networks, faith based and community organisations.

(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

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

It would be important that the specific programme of support to the PUL community where a very real need remains.

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

Please provide comments in the box below

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

(ii) The Rural Issues Statement

Please provide comments in the box below

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

Please provide comments in the box below

We very much appreciate the opportunity to be involved in this consultation as we believe that the potential the programme has to develop the rural community is immense.

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).

Ballywalter Community Action Group

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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

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) 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

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

- 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.

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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 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 £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.

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 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. 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 through 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). The LRSNs have been central to the role of assisting the set-up of the new local Action Groups (NIRDG) 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:

(iii) 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 requirements.

(iv) 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. We have effectively engaged in the last 4 years with community organisations equating to **h**ardest 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). 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).

Portaferry Regeneration Limited

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

Surname

Dumigan

Forename

John

2. Postal Address

30 The Square

Portaferry

Co Down

Postcode BT22 1LR

Phone 07803832488

Email
john.dumigan65@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) 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

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 its 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.

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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-prescribed 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 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 £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.

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 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. 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 through 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). The LRSNs have been central to the role of assisting the set-up of the new local Action Groups (NIRDG) 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:

(v) 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 requirements.

(vi) 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. We have effectively engaged in the last 4 years with community organisations equating to **h**ardest 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). 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

Gerry Ford

Organisation Name (If applicable).

Advantage

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

Surname

Ford

Forename

Gerry

2. Postal Address

Sloefield Business Park

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Postcode BT388GX

Phone 02893356730

Email

gerry@advantage-
ni.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

We support the proposed aim, objectives and intended outcomes in section 6. We would encourage DARD to consider playing an advocacy and 'brokering' role with other statutory bodies in respect of interventions that tackle rural poverty and social isolation. We believe that a more co-ordinated, partnership approach among statutory bodies would be a great benefit to delivery agents on the ground and ultimately lead to a more efficient and effective delivery of services to those who need them most. We welcome and support a call for 'new and innovative approaches' but would also urge consideration of the maintenance of proven successful interventions.

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

We believe it is right to continue to focus on the priority areas specified in the 2011-2015 TRPSI Framework and that the three priority areas for intervention, and the subsequent examples of objectives set out for each in sections 6.5, 6.6 and 6.7, provide a clear and comprehensive framework within which to design and deliver measures that will have a targeted and measureable impact.

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 would strongly encourage DARD to consider enhancing point v. *'The Framework will encourage the mainstreaming of successfully piloted projects and the development of suitable exit strategies'* by including that the Framework will provide a mechanism for the consideration of mainstreaming successful pilot interventions.

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 inclusion of target groups identified on evidence of need. We believe the spectrum of need covered in the aim of this framework is extensive and that the flexibility referred to in point 6.11 allows specific, evidence-based needs to be represented.

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 measures listed in the Draft Action Plan are comprehensive and provide a robust platform for the achievement of the Framework's aim in our opinion. We would encourage DARD to consider being more comprehensive in point 1. by not limiting the measure to '*transport and broadband services*'. This may promote more creative and innovative thinking.

(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

NC

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 measures listed in the Draft Action Plan are comprehensive and provide a robust platform for the achievement of the Framework's aim in our opinion.

(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

NC

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 measures listed in the Draft Action Plan are comprehensive and provide a robust platform for the achievement of the Framework's aim in our opinion.

(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

NC

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

We believe the new TRPSI framework could contribute towards more effective rural community support structures by ensuring that all interventions funded under the Framework ensure there is no overlap in provision and have undertaken to promote the services offered as widely as possible across rural support networks. We also believe that there is the potential for 'mapping' and promoting the continuum of provision on offer under the new Framework, perhaps under a single brand, and that this would add significantly to the efficiency and effectiveness of rural community support structures.

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

Please provide comments in the box below

Similar to above, we believe ensuring all interventions funded under the Framework do not overlap in provision and have undertaken to promote the services offered as widely as possible across rural support networks, that this will complement and support the delivery of local council Community Plans. We also believe opportunity exists for needs-based interventions to span both.

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

NC

(viii) The Rural Issues Statement

Please provide comments in the box below

NC

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

Please provide comments in the box below

We would strongly encourage DARD to keep enterprise and employability of young people at the forefront of considerations for the new Framework. NI still has unacceptable rates of youth unemployment and lags behind every other region in the UK when considering youth entrepreneurship.

We would encourage DARD to make fuller use of the joint funding possibilities available through Europe and other funds that can be triggered by TRPSI Framework funding. These avenues can trigger funds on up to a 3:1 ratio which is an obvious benefit to both DARD, other departments and ultimately the end users of the services being provided. To this end, we would encourage a structured, strategic and coordinated approach, by DARD and other appropriate departments, in partnership with delivery agents such as Advantage and others that have been proficient at securing such funding for the benefit of rural communities in the past.

Thank you for the opportunity to input into the proposals for a successor to DARD's TRPSI Framework 2011-15 and we wish you every success in the work still to be undertaken.

Draft NILGA response to DARD proposals for a Successor to DARD's Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework 2011 - 15

Context

The Minister for Agriculture, Michelle O'Neill has put forward proposals for a successor to DARD's Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework 2011 – 15. The NI Executive acknowledges that no single Department has exclusive responsibility for rural areas and these proposals are put forward as a potential means of strengthen innovative and targeted collaboration across government departments, councils and other public bodies. The Department is keen to ensure that the proposals are developed into appropriate and workable legislation that will have a positive impact for rural communities.

The following paper builds on existing NILGA policy. It is also aligned to evidence given on 25th November 2015 to the NI Assembly's DARD Committee on the Rural Needs Bill - attached as Appendix A for information.

For further information or to discuss any of the issues highlighted, please contact Dr Ken Bishop at the NILGA Offices: Email: k.bishop@nilga.org Tel: 028 9079 8972

Derek McCallan
Chief Executive

7th January 2015

1. Introduction

NILGA, the Northern Ireland Local Government Association, is the representative body for district councils in Northern Ireland. The membership is comprised of the 11 local authorities and the organisation is supported by all political parties.

NILGA is keen to work with DARD and other stakeholders to ensure that central and local government policy and service delivery are appropriate to local communities, both urban and rural. We are particularly keen to ensure that rural communities are not disadvantaged by the introduction of new policy and legislation.

2. Consultation Questions Response

12) 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:

- More coordinated and fully financed approach needs to be adopted to support areas where poverty and social isolation exist.
- The Framework needs to address the core effects of poverty and social isolation (including higher living and transport costs).
- No single NI Department has sole responsibility for rural issues rather all relevant departments, agencies and bodies have a shared role in delivering need
- Local authorities have a strong legislative and collaborative role to play alleviating the impact of poverty and social isolation (any further transfer of Departmental functions must be accompanied with the full finance to deliver the job).

1) 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

Access Poverty

- Finding local solutions to access to transport (particularly those that are disadvantaged) in rural areas needs to be a collective priority, designed within a community planning context.
- Access to broadband of identical quality to that which is in city centres is essential for rural communities and businesses.
- Flexible and affordable childcare is necessary to sustain the rural economy and communities, policy guidance for businesses and social economy organisations would be helpful in this regard.

Financial Poverty in Rural Areas

- Definitive evidence needs to be presented by an independent, objective body, to outline and make recommendations to address the financial disadvantages experienced in rural communities.

Social Isolation in Rural Areas

- Definitive evidence needs to be presented by an independent, objective body, to outline and make recommendations to support those individuals and groups most at risk from isolation, stress, self harm and suicide in rural areas.

2) 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:

- NILGA encourages very dynamic and practical partnership working to enable the rural community to play a more participative role in terms of policy, rural empowerment and sustaining rural micro economies.

3) 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 Framework must have an objective evidence base and the flexibility to target vulnerable groups based on material need.

4) (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 measures will be effective if they are enforced. General agreement of the current list of measures funded but Framework must have the ability and flexibility to create / support new measures to meet new needs.

(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

- In general agreement with action plan, but illustrations of success and barriers to success must be presented in a multi-agency approach, using social media, you tube, etc.

5) (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

- In general agreement with 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

- In general agreement with action plan, illustrations of successes in neighbouring jurisdictions and within NI should be regularly presented.

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

- Too early to judge.

7 (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

- N/A

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

- This needs to be an underpinning feature in the next Programme for Government.
- If fully adopted by all NI Departments with partners (including councils) the Framework represents an important opportunity for all delivery partners to address head on the causes and effects of rural poverty and social isolation.

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

Please provide comments in the box below

- As councils will have different approaches to the Framework within their individual Community plans, it is paramount that DARD materially engages with the Partnership Panel and councils to integrate full benefits.

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

Please provide comments in the box below

- None.

(x) The Rural Issues Statement

Please provide comments in the box below

- None.

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

Please provide comments in the box below

- NILGA offers material support and involvement at regional level in regard to developing, assessing and improving this new framework. NILGA's Rural Development Working Group provides an appropriate all council vehicle for this.

Disclaimer

The Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) endeavours to ensure that the information contained within our Website, Policies and other communications is up to date and correct.

We do not, however, make any representation that the information will be accurate, current, complete, uninterrupted or error free or that any information or other material accessible from or related to NILGA is free of viruses or other harmful components.

NILGA accepts no responsibility for any erroneous information placed by or on behalf of any user or any loss by any person or user resulting from such information.

APPENDIX A

NILGA views on the Rural Needs Bill

This written piece supplements the work and evidence already submitted by NILGA in February and March this year on the former Rural Proofing, now Rural Needs Bill.

NILGA, the Northern Ireland Local Government Association, is the representative body for district councils in Northern Ireland. The membership is comprised of the 11 local authorities and the organisation is supported by all the main political parties. NILGA notes that the NI Executive acknowledged that no single Department has exclusive responsibility for rural areas, as does our own Association's, which has cross-party representation from all of the new Councils.

It's worth mentioning briefly at the outset that we sought the adoption of the principle of joining-up separate departments, strategies and pieces of legislation when we put our March 2015 evidence to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, when it comes to underpinning legislation of this type, similar to equality. Therefore, we sought assurances simultaneously from the DoE's Minister, the Department and Committee that the development of Statutory Guidance on the role and conduct of Community Planning Partners – further debated on the 12th November 2015 by the DoE Committee – has within its final piece an addendum to the Statutory Guidance for Community Planning in relation to the underpinning requirements of Rural Needs and the Rural Needs Act.

NILGA also wishes to acknowledge the cross referencing by the ARD Committee and the DARD to NILGA's work in the establishment of a Stakeholder Forum – when things of importance to the rural population have partners who debate in advance and joined up outcomes together, they stand a better chance of working, even despite the tight timescales underlining this consultation exercise.

NILGA seeks a proactive role in regard to the implementation of this Bill when it becomes an Act, mindful of the role of local authorities in rural society. NILGA provided a definitive paper to the Department as far back as 2009, detailing key priorities for local government in the development of a Rural White Paper, underpinned by rural community need, preserving the rural way of life, improved local connectivity and fairness in service delivery. Clearly faces of officials and politicians change, a bit, Rural Need never changes, so the Bill is welcomed.

This short written piece is aligned to the clauses in the Bill, as advised, but will also draw upon additional evidence worthy the Committee's scrutiny.

Regarding the first clause, Duty of Public Authorities to consider rural needs, we welcome the comprehensive inclusion of all Departments. This is similar in principle to Sustainable Development, Biodiversity and Children's Services Co-operation, but in practice it needs to be fully implemented and monitored by the Department and its successor Department. You cannot in practice fulfil these laudable shared duties without guidance and resources so the new Programme for Government and the Departmental budget would need to adequately resource this high expectation.

Additionally, and covering also Clause 2, which is Guidance, Advice and Information, Councils in performing their community planning duties look forward to the consistent, clear guidance and enforcement of the Rural Needs requirements underpinning this Bill, since, without same, a key foundation piece to embed Rural Needs policy and legislation will founder. It is imperative that this Guidance is co designed between councils, DARD and DoE, of course drawing on other rural networks and bodies both in terms of preparation and seeing it through, for example in a Community Planning Partnership.

Thirdly, in terms of the Clause related to Monitoring and Reporting, it will be the expectation of councils that monitoring and reporting is placed within an overall template of Performance Indicators, agreed with and between Departments and Councils, led of course by the new Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, with perhaps significant input from the Department of the Communities as the "gatekeeper" department for the local authorities.

What is important to councils is that they are not spending time responding to 9 sets of KPI processes, as well as the Auditor, Ombudsman and others, but are working accountably and innovatively to ensure amongst other things that Rural Need is a statutory requirement, not discretionary, which can only be fulfilled if we all stick to it and don't spend disproportionately large amounts of time ticking everyone's different boxes. That would be a matter, we believe, for the Partnership Panel – to ensure that we are not wading in KPIs but delivering services fairly and in a manner which is directed at those in need within rural communities and the rest of the North of Ireland. Therefore, utilisation of NILGA in association with SOLACE, in the collation of the material required for the Annual Report referred to in Clause 3, is perhaps a means to get clear, time bound, outputs from at least one of the sectors required to apply Rural Needs, namely the local government sector, which will professionally and enthusiastically do its bit.

Clause 4, in relation to co-operation with other public bodies: while the performance of Departments and Councils is vital to the successful implementation of the Bill, NILGA would be keen to establish whether the compliance of councils and other public bodies would also feature in terms of reporting on co-operation or a lack of it, reported by the Department, or whether a separate report would be published for them on co-operation. As councils are to be included, would the (currently, Environment) Minister be held accountable for their performance, or would this responsibility fall to the Agriculture and Rural Development Minister? Additionally, it is apparent that no government Departments are specified as statutory Partners in the draft Local Government (Community Planning Partners) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015, referred to earlier, but some agencies and arm's length bodies of departments are. Councils obviously cannot be the sole arbiters of the Rural Needs performance and/ or co-operation – good or otherwise – of these organisations, so it is once again going to be more than a protocol, more than co-operation, and more like enforcement, hopefully with resources, not sanctions. Although that being said, we note that there is no mention of a sanction for non-compliance, Chair, and would be interested in the Committee's views of how something like this is to be measured and how non-compliant organisations are to be punished.

Finally, by way of additional thinking which should be applied in the implementation of this Bill, it's noted well by NILGA that in June 2015 in Scotland the Assembly there passed the Community Empowerment Bill. It gives communities in both urban and rural areas more rights to take over land and have a say on how their services will be delivered. Decentralising decision-making to improve community engagement is a vital step towards sustaining rural communities here in Northern Ireland, so we are moving in the right direction with Community Planning and with the Bill, but we should be more of an enabling state, not a policing one. Central and local government can take steps beyond Acts of legislation to ensure vibrant rural communities, including getting out of the way, giving people permission to take control, give people more rights and invest in disadvantaged communities. In short, you meet the needs of rural communities by empowering them, and it's interesting that the Scottish Rural Parliament will determine what success looks like a few years down the line, in tandem with the Department for Rural Affairs in the Scottish Assembly, COSLA (NILGA's equivalent) and the Councils.

In conclusion, NILGA would affirm that the Bill is a good first chapter. For the Bill to work,

1. Guidance in relation to the expectations of the Department;
2. How the Department intends to monitor and report on compliance;
3. What the sanction will be if there is inadequate compliance, will be key to success, as will ensuring that Councils are part of the design, implementation and delivery, and are properly resourced in regard to the fulfilment of these legislative requirements on behalf of the rural community we are all proud to serve.

Submitted by NILGA with Oral evidence to follow on 25th November 2015

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

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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 extension 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 through 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

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, leveraging-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.

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. 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.

(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

RESPONDENT INFORMATION

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

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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 extension 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 through 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

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, leveraging-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.

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:

(xiii) 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. 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.

(xiv) 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).

Omagh Forum for Rural Associations

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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

Omagh Forum for Rural Associations 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 Rural Community Development Support Service delivered by the Local Rural Support Networks (LRSN's, of which Omagh Forum is one).

The 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 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 can be delivered or supported locally or at 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 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.

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 these priorities are now recognised as an essential brand which has made a huge difference to rural communities and which is complementary to the NIRD. 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 level ensures that Regional programmes are delivered effectively at the local level and access to the real needs and issues of communities is provided for. 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. 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 the approaches taken under the overarching programme priorities will provide the appropriate lynchpins to ensure leverage of many other programmes and projects into rural areas. In the past these have included 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 - 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

Omagh Forum as one of the support organisations delivering the DARD Rural Community Development Support Service agrees 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. 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 or indeed further afield. 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

Omagh Forum understands access poverty to mean that because of a rural location people are unable 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. Certainly the Farm Families Health Checks Programme was an excellent initiative in reaching out to farmers who were unable and/or unwilling to attend a GP. Many farmers were alerted to a condition requiring further treatment and the programme checked back to ensure that follow up took place. This is an example of an innovative approach to meet rural needs and we would encourage a TRPSI successor to be flexible to accommodate emerging issues

* Broadband solutions are vital in our rural areas 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 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 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 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. We are aware of many people who 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 having 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.

We believe 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 and renovating abandoned housing 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. The right 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

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 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. 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.

As LRSN's 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.

Therefore as LRSN's 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.

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 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 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 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

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.

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 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 4 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.

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:

(xv) 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 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.

(xvi) 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 direct positive 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 conditions 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

As a Local Rural Support Network, Omagh Forum have been very happy to be involved in many of the TRPSI programmes to date, in particular MARA, the Farm Families Health Checks Programme, the Assisted Rural Transport Scheme (ARTS) and certainly core to our work of rural community development support. We see on a regular basis the significant positive impact these programmes have on the lives of many rural dwellers.

We would strongly encourage the Department to do all in its power to maintain the rural community development support service as it fits with the three priority areas of TRPSI – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation.

Likewise the LRSN's would like to reiterate our continued support in working with DARD in future initiatives through the successor TRPSI framework to ensure those most in need in our rural areas benefit.

