

Consultation Responses: Nos. 51 - 60

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Please note that some respondents submitted identical responses

RESPONDENT INFORMATION

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

1. Name / Organisation

Organisation Name (If applicable).

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council

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

Surname

Hughes

Forename

Rosemary

2. Postal Address

The Palace Demesne

Armagh

Postcode BT60 4EL

Phone02837529618

Email rosemary.hughes@armaghbanbridgecraigavon.gov.uk

Consultation Questions

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

Proposed aim “To provide a flexible mechanism for DARD to work effectively with other statutory bodies and partnership organisations to bring together a cocktail of funding to develop and implement new and innovative piolet measures which help tackle poverty and social isolation among vulnerable people living in rural areas.”

- ✓ **Yes**
 No

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council values the opportunity to respond to the Public Consultation on Proposal for Successor to DARD’s Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation 2011-2015

- The Council fully understands the increasingly changing rural environment, decline in farm sizes, income and employment, changing market conditions for rural produce, cuts in services and potential threats from future EU enlargement and competition. All these influences are the key drivers for the need for change and action to support the rural economy.
- The aims and objectives of the framework have identified the key issues which are affecting the rural community at the moment, however in the current economic climate a balanced emphasis and action must be placed on increasing job opportunities for rural areas. While the New Rural Development Programme will create new jobs and sustain existing jobs

additional support is required.

- We agree that the priorities which have been identified are those which are most pressing in rural areas at the moment. However it would be an opportunity missed if local Councils were not actively involved in delivering some of the actions in partnership with local rural networks, agencies, gov departments and community lead organisations to ensure the benefits are delivered at grass roots.
- Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council welcomes DARDs commitment to work in partnership across departments, agencies and community/voluntary organisations. It is only through this partnership approach that measures to tackle poverty and social isolation among vulnerable people living in rural areas can be effective in its delivery on the ground to the groups targeted by DARD.
- The priorities identified in the TRPSI framework, are consistent with those identified in the new interim rural strategy 2015-2017 by the SOAR (ABC) LAG. There is an opportunity to work in close partnership with the LAG.
- The consistent sharing of information and learning from within the TRPSI programme is essential. It is also vital that DARDs wider programmes such as Rural Development Programme 2014-2021 is collaborated with as this programme will support the provision of basic services, village renewal, businesses and broadband.
- TRPSI should be using innovative approaches to tackle poverty and social isolation and take the opportunity to invest in pilot programmes.
- Flexibility in the programme should be maintained to allow for innovation and risk taking.
- It is important to plan for sustaining and mainstreaming services and this

needs to be addressed.

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

Access poverty, financial poverty and social isolation should continue to be the main priorities for the TRPSI framework. Through extensive consultation carried out by Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council Rural Development team they have ascertained that -

- Access poverty – lack of access to transportation is an overarching issue for the whole demographic range across the council area. Affordable transportation to work, doctors' appointments, hospital appointments, school (if within the permitted area for free transport) and training is essential for a functioning healthy community. Public transport routes have been cut and the time table can be at inconvenient times especially for those who work. There is also an issue for older people who cannot get to bus stops and train stops in order to access the free transportation they are entitled to. Support measures which address the issue of affordable transportation at realistic times including after 6pm, especially for younger people. Initiatives to how to address poverty levels through education and training need to be developed in partnership with other agencies and statutory bodies.
- Financial poverty – Many rural families live outside the benefit band

they are commonly classed as “asset rich” but they do not have excessive disposable income and are currently struggling to address the problem of household bills including fuelling their homes. It is essential that support measures are introduced that target the energy efficiency of all rural homes.

- Social isolation – There is a considerable issue with social isolation in rural area. This affects the BME community – family structures and support have been left behind and in cases there is a problem with language to stop integration. Older people who cannot get access to transport, Farmers who do not see many visitors. Social isolation should be addressed by supporting measures which encourages participation in society.

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

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council accepts the 12 key principles which will be applied to the successor framework.

We welcome the Department offers of working in partnership with key stakeholders to achieve sustainable projects which can be identified as models of best practise and can be replicated throughout NI.

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?

The target groups include women, farmers, people in work on low incomes (working poor), children and young people, ethnic minorities and immigrants, people with low skills and/or low levels of education, lone parents, people with mental ill health, people with disabilities, LGBT community, people with caring responsibilities and people who are unemployed or on benefits.

- ✓ **Yes**
 No

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council recognises that the TRPSI Framework does not want to be too prescriptive and may restrict the successor Framework's ability to target new groups however DARD need to be careful that the group is so large and its impact is reduced.

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

Access Poverty DARD Proposal

- *Improve urban-rural linkages through the provision of better transport and broadband services*
- *Improve access to key services*

- **Rural transport and access**

The lack of accessible rural transport has been identified as a key cause of social isolation in the countryside.

A flexible service should be introduced to complement the traditional scheduled bus service but this should not be used as a vehicle to abolish the traditional service in rural areas.

Due to the nature of the rural service, random collections can be expensive their needs to be a mechanism to ensure fares remain affordable in rural areas.

The service needs to look at providing a service after 6pm

An equal spread of services should be available across the district and restrictions of crossing areas should be removed.

Better utilisation of existing transport resources ie school buses

There should also be consideration given to looking at local needs, as a one size fits all approach may not be appropriate.

A better joined up approach with key government departments include DOE, DRD, Translink, Education Authority , Public Health Agency, Councils Community Plan to look at how the needs of rural dwellers can be served.

- **Broadband**

We are aware that Broadband provision can be patchy with “not spots” identified in rural areas. The Rural Development Programme is actively encouraging business development in rural areas however the broadband provision in areas may not be providing the speed required to help those business grow their export potential to enter new

markets.

Investment maybe required in broadband provision and tackling “not spots.” However there is limited research in this area, in order to make an informed decision on how we meet those needs. This research needs to be developed.

We need to look to areas of best practices across the UK and Europe
We need to work closely with DETI and BT to ensure that the rural needs of residents and business are met.

(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

Further measures to help address Access Poverty – Access to key services

- **Rural Child care**

Rural areas face a particular challenge in the delivery and access of rural child care services.

Additional wrap around child care services- currently schools provide these at their own discretion these need to be provided on a more targeted basis – the promotion of breakfast clubs and afterschool clubs up to 5.30 to give affordable childcare for rural families.

Additional all day child care places are required to help support working families. This will help young families’ access new employment opportunities, helping them to address poverty issues.

Support for working families through reduced child care fees is needed.

This is particularly important for those just above the benefits band with little disposable income.

Free preschool places should be extended with more spaces available for 3 year olds – especially for those children with late birthdays and would benefit from two years at play group.

Child care facilities could utilize the school transport system to transport children to these facilities.

A mobile outreach service should be visible in isolated areas.

Support should be given for social economy projects to provide child care services, through revenue grants.

- **Sustaining basic services which are in place**

There is a range of basic services already in place in rural areas which are struggling to be sustainable but are providing an invaluable service e.g. older peoples clubs help the social isolation. There needs to be networking across groups to avoid duplication and provide a joined up approach to service delivery.

Utilise existing facilities which are already in place e.g. schools, libraries and existing community facilities, etc.

There is a need for revenue grants to support outreach facilities to deliver much needed basic services

The new RDP programme Priority 6, will be delivering capital grant to help organisations deliver much need basic services, and however cannot offer revenue grants to help volunteers to deliver services. There is a requirement for a jointed up approach to both funds to maximise results.

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 DARD Proposal

- *Reduce household expenditure or other living costs*
- *Increase household income*
- *Address issues relating to the additional cost faced by people living in rural areas.*
- *Address the barriers to escape financial poverty*
- *Help alleviate the effects of financial poverty*

- Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council recognise the high costs of living in a rural area. Higher transport costs and fuel costs restricted choice in the type of fuel which can be used to heat a house as well as type of housing stock which can be old and poorly insulated.
- The down turn in the economy has put substantial pressures on the rural community in particular the farming community with declining profit margins.
- Households in poverty in rural areas exist alongside households that are comparatively affluent. It is, therefore, and is more difficult to identify these groups..
- People in rural communities are less likely to identify that they are in poverty
- Rural poverty has a clear association with the remote rural areas
- Projects which elevate financial poverty and address the barriers to escape financial poverty is welcomed

- The continuation of the MARA project would be welcomed and other innovation information services on how to help address financial poverty issues.

(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

Further measures to help address Financial Poverty

- **Fuel Poverty**

Many rural families live outside the benefit band they are commonly classed as “asset rich” but they do not have excessive disposable income and are currently struggling to address the problem of fuelling their homes. It is essential that support measures are introduced that target the energy efficiency of all rural homes – this could be through a proportion grant with an upper limit.

Grants should also take into account the different energy efficiency needs of rural homes. It could be as simple as energy efficiency light bulbs.

- **Recognise non formal qualifications**

There is a high proportion of farmers who do not have formal qualifications, this is especially pertinent with the down turn in farm profits and an increasing number of rural dwellers working off farm. Farmers are highly skilled however their skills are not recognised. It is

essential that support measures are introduced that target formalising skills and providing additional training to access work. This is an issue which is pertinent for older farmers as well as young farmers. There maybe a requirement to develop confidence levels within the farming community to access these services.

- **Advice**

Better sign posting to service provision is required.

Need for targeted debt advice services which goes into the community.

Continuation of the MARA project and an extension of this service.

1 to 1 face to face debt advice services – promoted in a non-stigmatised manner in existing venues.

Provide better signposting also to Further Education opportunities, so skill development can be encouraged to help develop employment opportunities.

Rural Hubs are a one stop shop for offering integrated service delivery which might better target advice services support in rurally isolated areas. This will also have an empowering effect on the community and help develop rural champions. Existing venues in the community should be used and developed including schools, libraries, community centres etc.

- **Financial services**

Encourage community based solutions with the growth and development of Credit Unions

- **Rural Business Support**

Government tendering process tend to be complicated there is a need to better equip businesses to be more competitive in this area. Business Development needs to be targeted to rural areas, so businesses can avail of these services through their Local Councils and Local Enterprise Agency Network.

(7) 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

Social Isolation DARD Proposal

- *Promote positive mental health and well being*
- *Increase opportunities for social engagement*
- *Provide support to groups at risk of social isolation*

- People can feel isolated at any age and are often most vulnerable if they are going through change such as job loss, retirement, caregiving, moving house or illness to name a few. During these times, social connections can break, resulting in isolation.
- Older adults in particular are more susceptible to isolation for a variety of reasons. Many retire from work and lose connections with colleagues. Some older adults no longer drive and if public transportation is not available, they don't tend to get out much.
- The BME community can experience isolation due to limited family networks and issues with language.
- Services need to be developed to reflect these identified needs to help people to access services locally and participate in their communities.
- Services need to be coordinated through local networks, faith based and community lead organisations to help promote their existence and extend.
- Local Council's in partnership with community networks and other organisations could work together to raise awareness through e-zines and community magazines of local services so people can avail of them.

(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

Further measures to help address Social Isolation

Health and Well Being Initiatives

Focus on prevention measures in terms of promoting health and well-being and better sign post services available. Encourage people to get involved in running and waling clubs. Provide information to access to gyms and personal training sessions or small group sessions. Exercise offers the ability to increase everyone's awareness of their health and how they can positively contribute to improving it and setting an example of younger generations.

- **Make Transportation Available**

Lack of adequate transportation is a primary cause of a social isolation. Because many seniors do not drive, this is a big issue for them, so anything that helps seniors get around and make independent choices about travel promotes their social health.

- **Programmes to Promote a Sense of Purpose**

Seniors with a sense of purpose or hobbies that really interest them are less likely to succumb to the negative effects of social isolation – older peoples clubs are a good outlet for this.

- **Programmes to Make Adaptive Technologies more available**

There can be a stigma with adaptive technologies, ranging from walkers to hearing aids these help seniors to compensate for age related deficits and deficiencies that can impede social interaction.

- **Early identification of Socially Isolated by Public Health Professionals**

Not all members of society have the benefit of loved ones who live nearby and can check on their well-being. For this reason, public health professionals should be on the lookout for signs of social isolation problems. Appropriate interventions can be arranged.

Information sharing across Departments/Agencies – a need for information sharing protocols of sensitive information around health.

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

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council has been working in the local community for many years have built strong valued relationships with local communities as well as developing models of best practice which has been duplicated in other areas.

Previously the department would have provided support via a number of Sub Regional Rural Networks, and where there was a specific need e.g. PUL; funding would have been targeted to provide specific intervention. Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council feels it is important to ensure this continues as it contributes directly to more effective rural community support structures.

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council recommend that funding should be in line with the new Council areas and boundaries. It should also complement other funding especially the funding being delivered through Priority 6 of the new rural development programme 2014-2020.

In order for this programme to be successful and targeted at areas of need it should be managed in partnership with local council.

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

Please provide comments in the box below

The Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 established the functions of the 11 new Local Government Districts which became fully operational in April 2015. The new councils have been given responsibility for Community Planning. Which includes the social, economic and environmental well-being of the district contributing to the sustainable development of the area.

By DARD working in partnership with the Council it will ensure the identified actions relating to the plan are successful and targeted at areas of need with the rural voice being heard.

It is envisaged that Councils Community Plan will be in place before 2017.

To date early preparatory work has been carried out and baseline evidence and identification of priority areas for community planning has been identified.

Initial work has highlighted that rural isolation amongst others, which fit with your indicative programme as areas which warrant further investigation into

local needs within the local community planning process.

Findings from the TRSPI consultation would be welcomed research in the further identification of local needs through the community planning process along with an ongoing relationship on monitoring of results and learning from initiatives.

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

In commenting on the equality impacts, the Council believes that this Programme offers the opportunity to address some of the inequalities that impact in rural areas of Northern Ireland. The Council acknowledges that each Measure flowing from this Programme will be required to be 'Screened' and issued for consultation and possible EQIA. The Department should also consider the collation of relevant statistics of the S75 Groups to fully assess the various impacts of the Measures proposed. This should be done by consulting fully with those most directly affected and should specifically include S75 Groups. It is also essential that the Department reconsiders how it makes information available. As a minimum, documents should have an executive summary with glossary of terms included.

The Council believes DARD must consider how “Good Relations” will be developed in delivering the Measures. 52.81% of dwellings were classified as urban in 2009 leaving 47.19% rural a high proportion are living in with segregated communities and this needs to be recognised and addressed.

(ii) The Rural Issues Statement

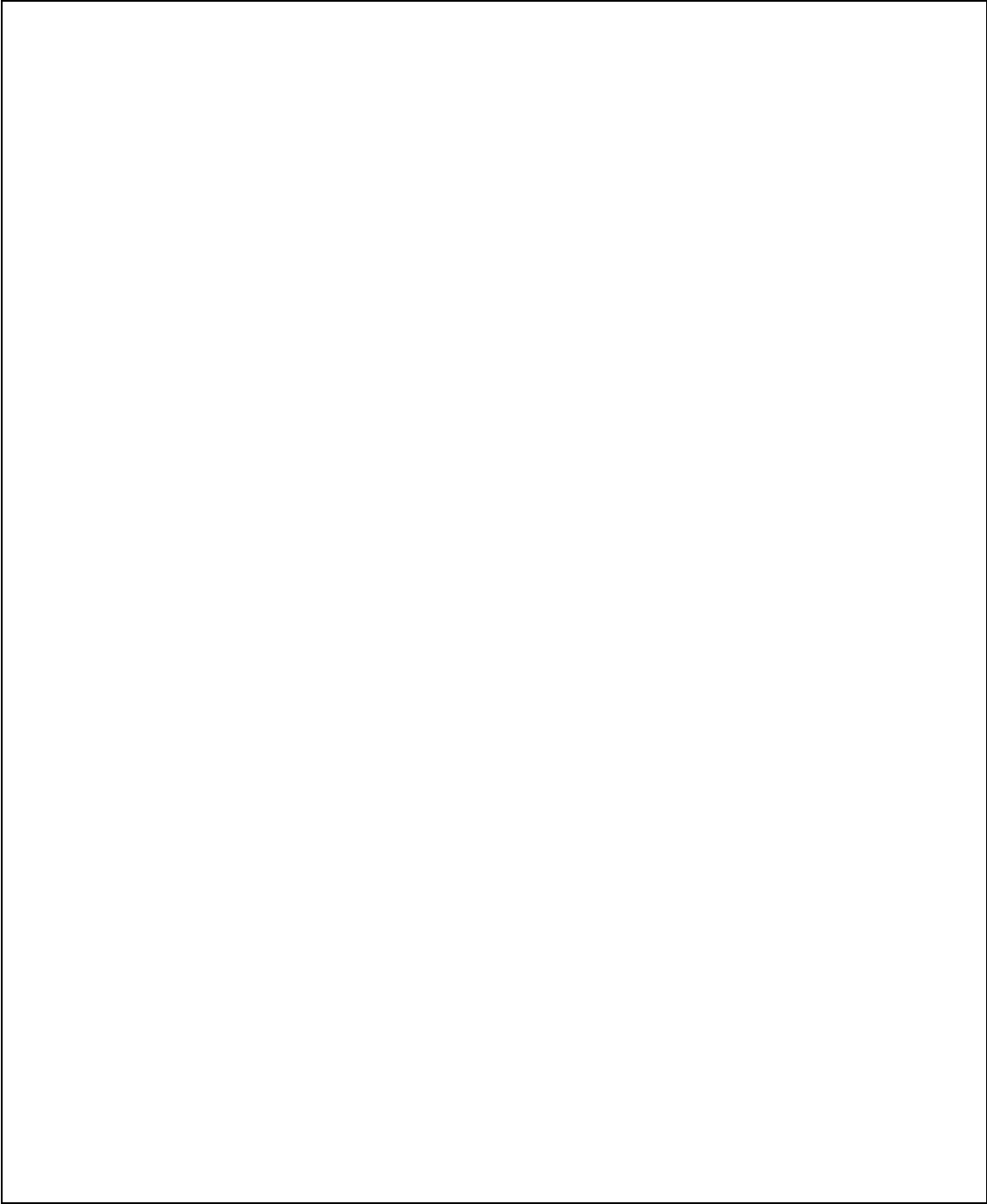
Please provide comments in the box below

Rural needs and circumstances are very different to urban areas. To ensure impartial and equitable treatment of rural areas the unique needs and circumstances must be taken into account.

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

Please provide comments in the box below

- It is essential to stress the importance of a cohesive and co-ordinated approach in delivering rural programmes. We would suggest that an appropriate information sharing mechanism is created to avoid duplication of resources and so that funding spent can have maximum impact.
- The Council welcomes the fact the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has initiated a leadership role in taking forward a more joined-up approach to supporting rural developments through DARDs successor to Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework 2011-2015.
- Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council are keen to work in partnership and take a local leadership role with a range of Government Departments, rural community networks, organisations to help address these issues.
- The Council have concerns that the budget has not been agreed for this initiative, this should be done as soon as possible.
- The implementation of the Rural Needs Bill is essential to hold the other government departments to account in terms of supporting anti-poverty and social inclusion programmes.
- Grant assistance should consider small to medium sized grants up to £20,000 for both capital and revenue costs.
- There should be clear communication plan on how any rural services that are funded by DARD or any funder are marketed to the wider rural community, so there is a clear awareness arising protocols to promote the existence of the services, raising participation levels and reducing rural isolation, rural poverty levels.



RESPONDENT INFORMATION

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

1. Name

Sally Mc Carney

Organisation Name (If applicable).

Fintona Senior Citizens Club

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

Surname

Mc Carney

Forename

Sally

2. Postal Address

5 Garvallah Rd.
Seskinore
Omagh

Postcode BT782QW

Phone 07849841292

Email:sallymccarney@live.co.uk

Consultation Questions

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

Yes No

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

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

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

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

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

Yes

No

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

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

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

TRPSI and these priorities are now recognised as an essential brand which has made a huge difference to rural communities and which is complementary to the 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 and needs which require on-going support at various levels of intervention and which would still come under these 3 priorities.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Yes

No

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

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

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

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

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

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

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

Yes

No

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

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

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

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

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

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

self-harm to compel them to seek professional help.

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

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

To our group access poverty means that because of our location in a rural area people are not able to access services that our urban counterparts may take for granted. We believe the priority areas for intervention in the action plan and the measures outlined will be effective in addressing access poverty

- * Innovative Health Solutions can encompass MARA and other initiatives to improve emotional well being.

- * Broadband solutions are vital in the area we live in however whether TRPSI can adequately address this is questionable. There needs to be major infrastructure investment for rural areas to have adequate broadband

- * Rural hub facilities – It is very important in our rural villages, hamlets and open countryside to have community venues that can deliver services and programmes to benefit local people

- * Social economy models for delivery of services – as above

We believe that, in order to adequately support access poverty, LRSN's are a vital support service to community groups like ours who wish to develop measures to address access poverty. Likewise community transport is an integral part of this priority area and needs to be included so that rural isolated people can avail of these services.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Fintona Senior Citizens 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 agree that these are valid and worthwhile Priority Areas for Intervention.

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

The farming community are known to have poor mental health as they are facing increasing stresses of managing their businesses mostly working alone with limited opportunities to engage with others.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Please provide comments in the box below

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Please provide comments in the box below

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

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

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

- Strong partnership & links with the rural community already in place
- Added value from funding leverage from other programmes
- Already working closely with DARD to deliver services including the development of the NI Rural Development Programme (2014-2020)

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

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

(iii) The Equality and Human Rights Template

Please provide comments in the box below

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

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

(iv) The Rural Issues Statement

Please provide comments in the box below

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

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

Please provide comments in the box below

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council's response to Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's consultation - Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework.

1. Mid and East Antrim Borough Council are pleased to have the opportunity to respond to this important consultation document.
2. We welcome this new (TRPSI) Framework which aims to build on the current framework, in order to improve the quality of life for vulnerable people in rural areas.
3. We note the relative success of the present framework which included a package of measures worth over £16m covering a wide range of rural issues including transport, healthcare, broadband, libraries, youth entrepreneurship, fuel poverty and community development.
4. We look forward to working with DARD, our other statutory partners and our rural communities, through the community planning process, to roll out a new package of measures designed to address issues around rural poverty and social isolation in rural areas.
5. We concur with the three key priority areas of Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation which need to be addressed and supported.
6. We also support the key principles contained within the Framework especially the commitment, to work within a Community Planning Framework. Through local Community Planning, public services are now able to take a truly joined up approach to service delivery, focussing on the specific social needs of an area, as in this case - the rural community.
7. In conclusion Council welcomes the TRPSI Framework which uniquely focuses on the needs of the most vulnerable groups in rural areas. Council feel it provides the flexibility that is necessary to address a range of poverty and social isolation issues and to target a broad range of vulnerable groups. The TRPSI Framework also promotes the development of a Community Planning approach to address rural issues and encourages the mainstreaming of successful projects throughout the region and maximizing outputs. It is our view that this Community Planning approach allows DARD to work in partnership with other Government Departments, other public sector organisations and the local rural communities in seeking to tackle poverty and social isolation in local rural areas much more effectively.

Prepared by:
Approved:
Contact Officer:

Chief Executive
12 January 2016
Greg Dornan
greg.dornan@midandeantrim.gov.uk

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).

Gilford Community Club

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

Surname

Conlon

Forename

Noel

2. Postal Address

110 Castlevew

Gilford

Co Armagh

Postcode BT63 6JS

Phone 028 3883 1665

Email N/A

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

Gilford Community Club works closely with the local Rural Support Network – TADA – and supports the work that TADA and its fellow RSNs contribute to tackling rural poverty and social isolation. Even though the RSNs have done invaluable work in recent years, there is still a lot to do and therefore, Gilford Community Club agrees with the proposed aim, objectives and intended outcomes. It is apparent that the RSNs have a proven track record of working with DARD (as partner organisations) and will continue to develop and implement new and innovative pilot measures. These have been a valuable asset in hundreds of rural villages and communities to target rural poverty and reduce social isolation.

Recently the Rural Capital Micro Grant Programme has been promoted for DARD by TADA Rural Support Network for our area and 2 phases have been rolled out to small rural groups across Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon rural areas. There is a continued need for funding through this programme because I am led to believe that previous phases of the programme have been oversubscribed with applications. The funding is highly effective in providing small grants at the most needy groups, helping them to deliver a wide range of local rural services. We have worked with TADA help individuals in our local area through the MARA Project and Farm Families Health Checks. TADA has a local knowledge of the areas in which they work and know what is most needed in those areas.

As one of its member groups, Gilford Community Club is in a position to help TADA and DARD to meet the objectives as detailed in section 6. I am sure all member groups would welcome to be in the same situation.

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

After consulting with TADA, Gilford Community Club believes that the 3 Priority Areas – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation - should continue to be the main priorities for the TRPSI Framework as they are still needed in 2016 and beyond. Better access to the services readily available in urban areas are essential to alleviating isolation. Increased transport services are essential to those individuals who are unable to drive themselves from A to B to access services such as medical appointments. Many people are unable to travel to work due to the running times of public transport and either cannot work or spend an extortionate amount on taxi services which leads to financial poverty. Financial poverty will significantly reduce the possibility of partaking in social activities and lead to poor mental health and well-being. All of the aforesaid relates to the people of Gilford and I can assume for all rural areas.

I feel TADA and the other RSNs are a key element in serving to meet the needs of local communities in tackling the three priority areas.

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

Gilford Community Club agrees that the twelve key principles outlined in section 6 are appropriate for the framework as they address the issues in rural communities.

I feel TADA and its fellow RSNs are still needed to be a conduit to disseminate information on key government strategies to the community voluntary sector through their established communication channels. Rural communities need their RSNs to 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

Gilford Community Group agrees with the list of Target Groups listed in section 6 as the population of Gilford and surrounding areas is made up of these groups. It is warming to see the inclusion of people in work on low incomes, ethnic minorities, people with low skills and/or low levels of education and the LGBT community. We are now in 2016 and the numbers of people in these groups is getting more and more.

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.

As a community club, we spoke to TADA. With that in mind, we welcome the measures in the draft Framework. Many of the proposed measures will go a long way to tackle issues that so many rural dwellers face. We support the following views of TADA.

Accredited courses for adults and mature citizens should be a consideration. Many rural adults have known only farming as a way of making a living and 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.

Many ethnic minorities are finding it difficult to fit into society especially those living in the rural community. We would welcome ESOL courses made available to rural areas so everyone who needs them can avail of the service. Those who do not have English as a first or second language face a communication barrier. This 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”. 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, 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-prescribed source i.e. further education either social education or accredited.

(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

After meeting with TADA, Gilford Community Club supports the views of the RSNs:

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 a continuation of this innovative idea with more funding made available for each area. 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.

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.

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**

The measures in the draft action plan provide an 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 and gaining employment. Improvement and the introduction of new employability and entrepreneurship opportunities would also 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. This would increase 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. There also needs to be a better public transport service that will enable rural people to travel to work and to seek work.

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

From discussions with TADA, Gilford Community Club 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. Many of the RSNs have been 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 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.

We 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 RSNs, 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.

We 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.

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.

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

Gilford Community Club concurs with TADA's views: We 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

Gilford Community Club conferred with TADA and shares its views: 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, 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 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) equates to a lot of money.

The LRSNs have been central to the role of assisting the set-up of the new local

Action Groups (NIRD) 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

Gilford Community Club discussed the above question with TADA: 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 (RSNs) in the community planning process. The foundations for the delivery of Community Planning already exist within the local Council areas through the RSNs 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 and 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

Following discussions with TADA, 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.

(vi) The Rural Issues Statement

Please provide comments in the box below

The Club supports the views of TADA that the Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs)/Rural Community Development Support Service contract holders have a proven track record of working with DARD (as partner organisations) to ensure the TRPSI Framework has been a key success factor ensuring rural proofing and enabling effective implementation positive direct impact on the vulnerable in rural communities through a localised infrastructure. They have effectively engaged in the last 4 years with a lot of community organisations including some of 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 they have rolled out projects and grant schemes (promoting health, peace, equality, skills, employability) equating to a substantial amount of money. 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



Action for Warm Homes

**National Energy Action's Northern Ireland
response to Tackling Rural Poverty and
Social Isolation Framework 2011 -15**

Jan 2016

National Energy Action Northern Ireland (NEA NI), the leading national fuel poverty charity, works to ensure energy is affordable for disadvantaged energy consumers. As such we welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD).

The latest House Condition Survey showed that in 2011, 44 per cent of all rural households in Northern Ireland were in fuel poverty. This is one of the highest rates in Northern Europe and is significantly higher than England, Scotland and Wales. While the recent fall in the price of oil is very welcome we still find families struggling to fill the tank and although predications indicate that oil will continue to fall in 2016 it is still imperative that we do all we can to mitigate other upward pressures on bills.

Improved insulation and heating standards are seen as the most rational and sustainable means of ensuring affordable warmth. Poor housing standards are responsible for the impaired physical and psychological health of millions of UK households. The links between low indoor temperature and poor health have been well understood for many years. Cold homes increase the likelihood, repetition and the severity of respiratory and cardiovascular illnesses. The links between dampness and mould growth on asthma and allergies are also well known and understood. There is also some evidence that a cold home impacts on poor mental health, low self-esteem, educational performance and social isolation.

Below is our response set out as per your template. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require any further clarifications on the points 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).

National Energy Action NI

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

Surname

Austin

Forename

Pat

2. Postal Address

NEA Northern Ireland

66 Upper Church Lane

Belfast

Postcode BT1 4QL

Phone 028 9023 9909

Email

Pat.Austin@nea.org.uk

Consultation Questions

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

Yes

No

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

NEA believe the aims, objectives and outcomes are solid.

It is imperative that the needs of rural communities are met and in particular, we would ask for "warmer homes" as a specific outcome. Without a specific target, many households in rural and dispersed areas are unlikely to benefit from the existing area based energy efficiency scheme. Specific actions will need to take place with Department for Social Development to ensure that current, and the design of future programmes are taking account of the needs of the fuel poor. This includes insulating solid wall properties where appropriate.

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 that the three priority areas are broad enough to ensure that particular issues can be captured. Key issues which we believe need incorporated into the areas are housing needs of rural communities.

- Poorly insulated homes
- Need for investment from across all housing tenures to ensure that all is being done to reduce fabric heat loss and unwanted ventilation
- Growing debt and households falling behind with mortgage payments
- Lack of affordable and social housing

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

Yes however we believe that there is significant unreported poverty in rural communities with a key issue being intermittent employment. This issue is prevalent because of the fact that some people are self-employed, small lone worker business working in farming and construction. They tend to fall through the benefits safety nets despite having unreliable or no work.

A further section of people who may become vulnerable are those impacted by the Welfare Reform agenda. Despite the announcement of the mitigation measures on 19th January 2016 there remains significant uncertainty around this issue. We believe that this is a key area of potential vulnerability for households which needs a watching brief and ability to respond appropriately within the framework.

Additional research is required to understand both issues.

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

It is difficult to comment on this without further information on the initiatives.

What can be said is that the internet is becoming more and more important in facilitating the needs of households for example relating to energy, topping up electricity online can save on transport costs for prepayment customers and some of the best discounted payment options, switching information and advice on a range of issues may only be accessed via the use of the internet.

Information and advice for a range of issues is also vital for empowered communities. Broadband provision is therefore a lifeline for communities and should be a key priority.

A key issue for fuel poverty in Northern Ireland is a reliance on home heating oil and the lack of access to natural gas. The price of oil is currently falling however this may only be a short to medium term position. Now is therefore the time to increase energy efficiency thus reducing household energy costs for the 68% of households who rely on heating oil for their main source of heating; bearing in mind that this rises to almost 100% in rural areas.

We do however have the introduction of Gas to the West and this will need to be factored into any planning in process in the coming years. A partnership should be established with Scotia Gas the new provider and other key strategic stakeholders in the gas roll out.

That said even with maximum connections to the new gas network we could still have circa 50% of households reliant on oil in rural areas. Therefore the importance of promoting oil clubs, switching suppliers, maintaining boilers, improving insulation and upgrading heating systems should be made a specific initiative.

We are also pleased to see the essential skills support incorporated here as we are aware that the education outreach programme has been cut and there is currently limited opportunity to access quality training for quality jobs. This needs to be addressed.

Access to social and affordable housing is also an issue in some rural communities. Is it feasible to work with a Housing Association to look at models of working more locally with communities?

(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

Information and advice on issues such as

- Gas to the West
- Energy Efficiency
- Switching Supplier
- Customer Priority and Critical Services and Registers

Innovative Solutions looking at improving energy efficiency as outlined above.

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 cheapest unit of energy is the one that the household does not need to use and therefore energy efficiency is a key tenet of how we can address financial poverty.

While DSD has the key responsibility for fuel poverty it will be extremely important that DARD and DSD work together to set targets for rural fuel poverty. The new Affordable Warmth (AW) programme is in the main, an area based approach and this may bring challenges for the delivery of the programmes where households are more dispersed as in rural areas.

DARD need to ascertain how many households have been reached and how many measures installed through the AW programme. The prevalence of solid walls is also a significant aspect of rural livings. How many solid walled properties have been tackled under AW? How many need to be tackled?

(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

Evaluate the performance of the AW in rural areas and ensure the eligibility and reach of the programme is meeting the needs of the target groups.

Monitor the provision of advice in the rural sector. Provide advice and information on debt management as this is becoming a key issue with home owners who have fallen behind in their mortgage payments.

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

Fuel poverty permeates all three priority areas set out in the consultation. Cold homes contributed to 870 excess winter deaths in 2014/15 the highest since 2009/10. Most of the deaths (86%) were of people aged 75 and over. Research also exists to highlight the negative impacts of fuel poverty on health including mental health, educational attainment and social inclusion. It is therefore imperative that the new TRPSI framework has specific pilots to tackle this problem that are upfront and central in the action plan.

- (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

- Complement existing programmes by dovetailing their priorities with other revenue funds.
 - Mainstream effective pilots. Pilots often shelved.
 - Encourage cross departmental working.
 - Establish, sustain and maintain working relationships with key stakeholders to ensure that the key issues and indeed any unintended consequence of programmes are monitored and changes required implemented.
 - Highlight unmet need.
 - Provide a central hub which could empower rural communities.
 - Be a useful lever to bring about additional funding from other sources.

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

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).

Mourne Mountain Rescue Team

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

Surname

Goddard

Forename

Dave

2. Postal Address

139 Newcastle Road

Castlewellan

County Down

Postcode BT31 9HF

Phone 07729338478

Email
chairman@mournemrt.org

Consultation Questions

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

Yes

No

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

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

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

For example, in recent months County Down Rural Community Network (CDRCN) has managed the Rural Capital Micro Grant Programme for DARD and 2 phases have been rolled out to small rural groups in every part of rural NI. In County Down 89 groups have been successful and every one of them have been able to buy equipment and make improvements to the benefit of thousands of rural dwellers. The programme has been oversubscribed and highly effective in targeting small grants at the most needy groups, helping them to deliver a wide range of local rural services. The MARA programme, Farm Families Health Checks and the promotion of Library services have all exceeded their targets thanks in large part to the promotional and organisational abilities and reach of the LRSNs. A local presence and knowledge of

the area is to key to successful delivery. In the past the network (funded by TRPSI) has assisted our group to secure major funding from the NIRDP for 2 new all terrain ambulances which have been of huge benefit to the Mourne and wider rural community.

This experience of working with local groups and people linked to the hundreds of rural groups and thousands of individuals associated with the other 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.

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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TRPSI framework.

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

Our group welcomes that *'increase opportunities for social engagement'* is listed as a priority area of intervention as the value of people of all ages within rural communities being given the opportunity to engage with others on a social basis cannot be underestimated. It is through these social activities that the aim of "promote tolerance, health, wellbeing and inclusion" can be best achieved within rural communities as by bringing people together they are getting to know each other. This is needed within communities as in many instances during their working and education lives many members of rural communities are away from the community during the day and thus have limited opportunities to engage with others. It is only 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) is £56 Million

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:

(vii) 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.

(viii) 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).

Trillick Arts & Cultural Society

Title Mr

Surname

Mc Bride

Forename

James

2. Postal Address

181 Scallon Rd

Trillick , Omagh

Co tyrone

Postcode BT78 3TD

Phone 07864545648

Email
tacs14@outlook.com

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

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

For example, our group benefitted from the Rural Micro Capital Grant Programme which was promoted for DARD by the LRSNs. This was an important small grant for our group and we valued the help given by Omagh Forum in applying. The grant has enabled us to purchase items necessary to deliver a wide range of local rural services. Our group was also involved in supporting the MARA programme, which was rolled out by the LRSN's and Omagh Forum are proactive in giving us information about Farm Families Health Checks and the promotion of Library services and countless other useful information. The 'Library in a Box' in Trillick Post Office received very positive comments and really suits people who haven't got a means of travel.

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

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

Yes

No

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

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

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

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

Promoting community development at a local/sub regional level ensures that

Regional programmes are delivered effectively at the local level meeting local needs. Promoting good governance, giving access to economic and social support in communities - the service provided by these local community based networks has proved an invaluable resource to the delivery of the TRPSI framework.

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

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

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

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

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

Yes

No

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

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

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

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

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

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

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

Yes

No

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

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

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

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

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

Perhaps one omission from the list of vulnerable groups is men. Whilst accepted that most farmers are men there may be male rural dwellers who are not farmers. Globally, the gap between male and female life expectancy and healthy life expectancy has widened in the last 40 years and is expected to get even bigger by 2030. Research commissioned by the Priority 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

To our group access poverty means that because of our location in a rural area people are not able to access services that our urban counterparts may take for granted. We believe the priority areas for intervention in the action plan and the measures outlined will be effective in addressing access poverty

* Innovative Health Solutions can encompass MARA and other initiatives to improve emotional well being.

* Broadband solutions are vital in the area we live in however whether TRPSI can adequately address this is questionable. There needs to be major infrastructure investment for rural areas to have adequate broadband

* Rural hub facilities – It is very important in our rural villages, hamlets and open countryside to have community venues that can deliver services and programmes to benefit local people

* Social economy models for delivery of services – as above

We believe that, in order to adequately support access poverty, LRSN's are a vital support service to community groups like ours who wish to develop measures to address access poverty. Likewise community transport is an integral part of this priority area and needs to be included so that rural isolated people can avail of these services.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The farming community are known to have poor mental health as they are facing increasing stresses of managing their businesses mostly working alone with limited opportunities to engage with others.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Please provide comments in the box below

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Please provide comments in the box below

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

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

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

- Strong partnership & links with the rural community already in place
- Added value from funding leverage from other programmes
- Already working closely with DARD to deliver services including the development of the NI Rural Development Programme (2014-2020)

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

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

(i) The Equality and Human Rights Template

Please provide comments in the box below

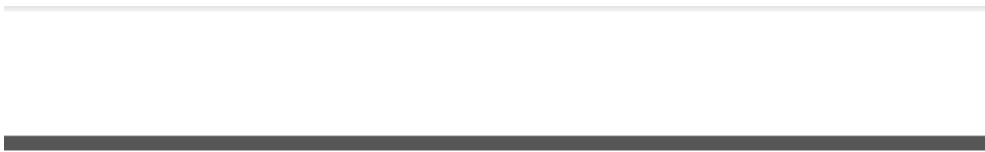
As a local group we are aware that the Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs)/Rural Community Development Support Service contract holders have a proven track record of working with DARD to contribute, develop and implement new and innovative pilot measures to Target Rural Poverty and reduce Social Isolation.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

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

(ii) The Rural Issues Statement

Please provide comments in the box below

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



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

Please provide comments in the box below

1. Name / Organisation.

BT

Organisation Name (If applicable).

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

Allen

Surname

Irwin

Forename

2. Postal Address

Post Point 4.26, Fourth Floor,
Telephone House
45 -75 May Street
Belfast

Postcode: BT1 4NB
Phone No: 02890 214252
E-mail: allen.irwin@bt.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

BT believes that there is an opportunity for a wide ranging Digital Inclusion programme; defined as providing skills, motivation and access to go online... can support DARD in achieving its programme aims of enhancing Access Poverty, reducing Financial Poverty and minimizing Social Isolation.

In the following responses we will outline the benefits of Digital Inclusion across all the key programme deliverables that you outline.

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

BT believes that the three priority areas should remain. There is, however, the opportunity to co-ordinate a number of initiatives under a wider Digital Inclusion initiative² that can align some of the wider NI Executive objectives and create a vehicle to maximise the benefits of the investment that the Executive have made in broadband infrastructure, through the offices of DARD & DETI over the last 7 years.

In addition, the creation of this vehicle under the banner of Digital Inclusion, allows the funding required to be drawn from a host of departments, and reducing the emphasis on DARD leading these programmes.

<http://www.btplc.com/Betterfuture/ConnectedSociety/Creatingpossibilities/Valueofdigitalinclusion/Valuing-Digital-Inclusion.pdf>

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

BT would agree with the Key Principles, and furthermore believe that priority should be given to initiatives that demonstrate a focus on the target groups. BT will provide evidence that shows how the use of broadband and technology solutions reduces costs across all social groups, as well as government, at the same time as improving service delivery.

In addition the provision of Digital Inclusion support programmes can be used to target specific problems identified. One specific example is the application for funding/grants by farmers. Wives take the lead from a bookkeeping perspective in farming households, but a lack of support of this community has led to the growth of a service provider ('agent') community who complete online applications for grants for the farmers. BT believes that a targeted, support programme, teaching/training farmers wives in basic IT skills, online form completion, specifically of the DARD application forms, as well as wider internet use, will reduce costs to farming households. This will be measurable by reducing the costs currently paid direct to agents, as well as providing the skills to use online facilities to reduce household costs such as insurance, utility costs and other general consumables by 'smart' buying online.

Reviews of other digital inclusion programmes, such as the BT Get It Together programme 2011/12 highlight the value of the social benefit created by Digital Inclusion projects. In that specific example, over £1.5 million of benefit was measured for an investment of £420,000. This translates into a ratio of 3.7:1, or for every £1 invested in the programme over three pounds of social value is generated. We have included this report later in this response.

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

BT would agree with the list of target groups, but statistically we believe that the biggest impact of any digital inclusion initiative might be best targeted where it will make the biggest impact. As such, consideration might be given to prioritizing the following groupings (report attached in Annex 1):

- Households with children of a school age
- Unemployed adults of a working age and
- Adults aged 65+

Table 2: Estimated number of digitally and socially excluded adults (2009)

Target group	Digitally excluded adults (millions)	Socially and digitally excluded adults (millions)	Digitally excluded who are also socially excluded (%)
Families with children	2.3	0.76	33%
Unemployed adults	1.3	0.91	70%
65 and over	6.4	1.56	24%

Source: PwC analysis

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

BT believes that there is an opportunity to address a number of the concerns highlighted in the Action Plan, under the umbrella of a single, unified Digital Inclusion programme. This would not only address the social objectives identified in the consultation document, but as a direct, measurable consequence, would see BT apply more funding to extending access technologies further into rural areas.

BT sponsored analysis, conducted by Just Economics, identifies that for every £1 invested in Digital Inclusion initiatives it delivers a social benefit at a ratio 3.7 times the initial spend. Attached below:



Digital Inclusion -
Social Return on Inv

The BT Get It Together programme 2011/12 (collected during monitoring by Citizens Online and supported by wider research on digital inclusion) delivered a social benefit across its regional programmes in the UK of over £1.5 million for an investment in excess of £420,000.

(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

None at this time. [Commentary about financial return for Investment Fund?]

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

Research has indicated that the direct financial benefit of the consumption and utilization of the tolls provided by broadband will, on average, deliver a saving of **£70 per month**². The impact is not uniform across all income bands, owing to the total spend across these groups, but for the lowest 10% of homes it still equates to a saving of £23 per month.

With so many homes still not availing of broadband services, as well as those not utilizing the online services to the maximum, these cost savings are not being achieved.

A key strand of the Digital Inclusion programme would be to educate households about the availability of services, to challenge perceptions that the benefits of the services do not represent value for money, as well as supporting individuals to maximise the benefit of broadband to maximise the savings that could be made to household bills.

In Annex I BT has provided evidence that shows on an NI basis, that there is a knowledge gap for householders to understand how and where to check about availability of services, as well as a perception gap about the costs of those services.

We can support households in Financial Poverty under the umbrella of a Digital Inclusion programme to save money on their household bills. Consideration might be given to paying/subsidizing the cost of broadband into homes defined as being in 'absolute' poverty, akin to what some social landlords have done in GB

(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

BT supports the initiatives outlined.

Additionally some thought should be given to the provision of Digital Skills. While this could be viewed as being outside of DARD's remit, basic skills with digital technologies is not necessarily a set ICT course, and neither are rural users always able to attend a physical class in further education locations. A pointed, generic digital skills support programme will increase individual's job opportunities, especially given between 75% and 90% of jobs require some levels of basic ICT skills. For example, a targeted farmers ICT introduction course, could enable part time farmers, or those seeking additional income to their core farming income, would increase their chances of achieving a premium paying, supplementary income stream.

More practically, community based procurement frameworks, supported by a social enterprise apps, for common services might be considered...for example allowing groups of farmers to join together to gain scale to deal with utility providers for example, to drive down electricity costs.

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

Research suggests that there are strong links between social and digital exclusion, with indications that those who are socially excluded are three times more likely to be digitally excluded. The Oxford Internet Survey² found that only 43% of people in the lowest income category in Britain used the internet, compared with 99% of those in the highest income category.

The National Housing Federation's Digital Exclusion and Social Housing Report (2010)⁴ argued that persistent digital exclusion produced serious issues which crossed over with social landlords' wider social welfare role. These issues could exacerbate persistent social immobility, and were based around:

- access to public and commercial services,
- access to information,
- ability to participate in community activities, discussions and decision making.

The Oxford Internet Survey highlighted that those most deprived socially are also most likely to lack access to digital resources such as the internet. Three out of four of people who were 'broadly' socially excluded lacked a meaningful engagement with the internet. In addition to this, people who were severely socially excluded, with no meaningful internet engagement, accounted for 10% of the total UK population.

(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 alignment of a number of the initiatives to maximise impact should be considered.

If there is additional funding made available for services such as the Farm Families Health Check and the Health In Mind, then consideration might be given to coordinating the programme into specified geographical locations.

The age profile in rural areas tends to be older, and twinned with the increased levels of youth migration from rural to urban areas, means there is a lack of digital advocates within families, increasing the barriers to entry for old people to digital inclusion. Focus on learning in older people's homes, potentially lending equipment if necessary, will increase their digital skills and thereby social skills and integration opportunities.

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 initial TRPSI programme initiated a host of successful interventions by DARD...the next iteration of the programme could look to integrate more of the initiatives under a single umbrella programme. A clear and distinct number of the strategic imperatives can be collated into a Digital Inclusion intervention that stimulate, motivates and provides access to people. In doing so, there would be financial benefits to the individuals concerned, to the department itself, social benefits as digital inclusion is a key driver to support social inclusion, and access benefits because locally, as more people consume superfast broadband services under current contractual arrangements, then BT is required to make more capital available to invest in additional coverage in Northern Ireland. A virtuous circle of financial and social benefit to end users, and more coverage being delivered to allow the same benefits to be enjoyed by more rural households is achievable.

These macro benefits would be augmented by some technology based community support initiatives:

- Rural lift sharing apps to build a community of drivers that can aid rural transport
- Aggregated procurement app: facilitating communities to buy together to deliver cost savings
- Digital skills course: available online for people to consume when required i.e. set up local WhatsApp groups to continue 'Knit and Knatter' groups to stay connected between events.

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

Please provide comments in the box below

The issue of digital inclusion crosses all government boundaries, and the alignment of council community plans with the demands and outcomes of any intervention would be critical to maximise impact.

Local council community plans may be used to provide more broadband access in specific 'not spot' areas, but more widely local councils also have the remit now to stimulate economic development. In areas where new infrastructure is built, a coordinated multi organisational approach to support end users to benefit from the deployment of these services, with a particular emphasis of economic development and SME (including farmer) support, would maximise the benefits of any intervention.

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

None at this time.

(ii) The Rural Issues Statement

Please provide comments in the box below

BT's infrastructure builds under the NI Broadband Improvement Programme (NIBIP) are focused on delivering broadband into rural areas, which was defined from the outset of the procurement and contract. There is still, a gap in the last percentage of homes, commonly referred to as the 'final 5%' with regard to the provision of broadband services.

The contractual framework for NIBIP commits BT to providing more capital, via an Investment Fund, when the take-up of the services under the contract reaches certain thresholds i.e. the more households that consume the new broadband services, the more money that BT returns to the devolved administration, to point to providing a solution for more rural households.

BT considers the provision of a Digital Inclusion, as part of your wider TRPSI initiative, programme a zero sum game for DARD, and more widely for NI. Investing in a scheme, reduces social exclusion, increases the skills of individuals and improves employment prospects, at the same time as reducing costs to households...all within a contractual landscape that will see BT return money to government, to support more households receive service, thereby reducing rural access issues and bringing more people into the support framework.

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

Please provide comments in the box below

DARD's three key aims of the TRPSI Framework; Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation, can ALL be addressed by undertaking a province wide, rurally focused Digital Inclusion programme.

Access Poverty can be addressed in several ways:

- 1) An education programme can make more people aware of the availability and benefits of broadband. This will address issues of lack of awareness and cost perception issues identified in Annex 1
- 2) The more people that consume new broadband services under NIBIP, BT will return capital to NI government that should be used to provide more broadband access to households in the 'final 5%' currently with no provision
- 3) Consideration should be given to subsidising households in absolute poverty to have a broadband connection. Programmes in social housing have proven this to reduce household costs as well as improve education outcomes for children and employability chances within the household.

Financial Poverty can be addressed in several ways:

- 1) On average using the tools provided by the internet (price comparison sites/Amazon, etc...) broadband will deliver a saving of £70 per month. The impact is not uniform across all income bands, owing to the total spend across these groups, but for the lowest 10% of homes it still equates to a saving of £23 per month
- 2) Internet use is now a key skill for employers, so the ability to use the internet effectively will improve employability chances. A recent programme with Glasgow Housing Association showed that 66% of users of the provided broadband were actively searching for jobs and 4% have gained employment
- 3) Maximising benefit payments: Universal Credit will be introduced to replace many current benefits, including Housing Benefit and Job Seeker's Allowance. Government targets of 80% of applications for Universal Credit to be online by 2017 currently exist, so internet skills will be critical for low income families

Social Isolation is intrinsically linked with Digital exclusion:

- 1) This evidence is the basis for Scotland's 'Connecting the Unconnected' initiative⁸
- 2) Using technology platforms to support social enterprises to deliver third sector initiatives should be considered: developing an joined up social lift sharing programme that would support the rural transport initiatives might be considered, especially in evenings when there is currently no provision
- 3) Using the Digital Inclusion umbrella to maximise the impact of the programme funded via TRPSI. Picking geographical locations and pushing action and services into the area in a coordinated fashion to maximise impact and uptake. Addressing multiple topics in a confined timeframe, thereby increasing the opportunity for people to find the sessions useful and for skills to stick

There is a unique opportunity, with the financial landscape of contracts in NI (such as NIBIP) to amplify the impact of a Digital Inclusion programme, to, in effect, make it a win win for both DARD, and the wider NI Executive. Driving take-up to new broadband, has the potential to return millions of capital that can be used to deliver more broadband to homes that current receive limited services, and delivering further social benefit to households.

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).

Drumquin Young at Heart Club

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

Surname

Cassidy

Forename

Anne

2. Postal Address

9 Bullockpark Road,

Castleberg

Co Tyrone

Postcode BT81 7RL

Phone 028 82 831765

Email
anne.cassidy@gmx.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

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

Our group was involved in supporting the MARA programme, which was rolled out by the LRSN's and Omagh Forum are proactive in giving us information about Farm Families Health Checks and the promotion of Library services and countless other useful information. A local presence and knowledge of the area is to key to successful delivery.

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

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

Yes

No

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

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

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

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

Promoting community development at a local/sub regional level ensures that Regional programmes are delivered effectively at the local level meeting local needs. Promoting good governance, giving access to economic and social support in communities - the service provided by these local community based networks has proved an invaluable resource to the delivery of the TRPSI framework.

These experienced local stakeholders have good working relationships with all other TRPSI delivery agents and indeed share a direct role in elements of their success

making essential and valuable linkages and connections at sub regional and local levels. The key management role of DARD in direct delivery of this programme has proved to be most effective in ensuring that the networks could assist DARD to manage Regional programmes at local levels and to balance approaches necessary to ensuring programme priority themes reached the community sector using bottom up approaches.

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

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

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

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

Yes

No

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

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

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

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

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

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

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

Yes

No

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

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

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

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

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

Perhaps one omission from the list of vulnerable groups is men. Whilst accepted that most farmers are men there may be male rural dwellers who are not farmers. Globally, the gap between male and female life expectancy and healthy life expectancy has widened in the last 40 years and is expected to get even bigger by 2030. Research commissioned by the Priory Group of 1,000 men found that: 77% of

men polled have suffered with anxiety / stress / depression; the biggest pressures in men's life are work (32%), finance (31%) and health (23%); the majority of men claim their mental health is having a negative impact on their work performance, parenting ability and relationships; 40% of men polled said it would take thoughts of suicide or self-harm to compel them to seek professional help.

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

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

To our group access poverty means that because of our location in a rural area people are not able to access services that our urban counterparts may take for granted. We believe the priority areas for intervention in the action plan and the measures outlined will be effective in addressing access poverty

- * Innovative Health Solutions can encompass MARA and other initiatives to improve emotional well being.

- * Broadband solutions are vital in the area we live in however whether TRPSI can adequately address this is questionable. There needs to be major infrastructure investment for rural areas to have adequate broadband

- * Rural hub facilities – It is very important in our rural villages, hamlets and open countryside to have community venues that can deliver services and programmes to benefit local people

- * Social economy models for delivery of services – as above

We believe that, in order to adequately support access poverty, LRSN's are a vital support service to community groups like ours who wish to develop measures to address access poverty. Likewise community transport is an integral part of this priority area and needs to be included so that rural isolated people can avail of these services.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The farming community are known to have poor mental health as they are facing increasing stresses of managing their businesses mostly working alone with limited opportunities to engage with others.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Please provide comments in the box below

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Please provide comments in the box below

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

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

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

- Strong partnership & links with the rural community already in place
- Added value from funding leverage from other programmes
- Already working closely with DARD to deliver services including the development of the NI Rural Development Programme (2014-2020)

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

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

(ix) The Equality and Human Rights Template

Please provide comments in the box below

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

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

(x) The Rural Issues Statement

Please provide comments in the box below

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

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

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).

Drumlough Community Association

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

Surname

Stanfield

Forename

Maureen

2. Postal Address

55 Clougher

Hillsborough

Antrim

BT26 6PJ

02892683277

Postcode

Phone

Email

Consultation Questions

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

Yes

No

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

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

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

For example, in recent months County Down Rural Community Network (CDRCN) has managed the Rural Capital Micro Grant Programme for DARD and 2 phases have been rolled out to small rural groups in every part of rural NI. In County Down 89 groups have been successful and every one of them have been able to buy equipment and make improvements to the benefit of thousands of rural dwellers. The programme has been oversubscribed and highly effective in targeting small grants at the most needy groups, helping them to deliver a wide range of local rural services. The MARA programme, Farm Families Health Checks and the promotion of Library services have all exceeded their targets thanks in large part to the promotional and organisational abilities and reach of the LRSNs. A local presence and knowledge of

the area is to key to successful delivery.

This experience linked to the hundreds of rural groups and thousands of individuals associated with the LRSNs means that the Networks can help DARD to meet the objectives set in section 6 “Proposals for a successor Framework post 2016”.

Together with other rural stakeholders, we can “promote the development of new and innovative pilot approaches to TRPSI AND encourage effective partnership working AND effectively target financial poverty, access poverty and social isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas”.

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

Yes

No

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

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

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

The identification and successful delivery of various projects and programmes within these priorities would continue to bring greatest positive impact to the needs of those experiencing rural poverty and isolation. The priorities allow for a bottom-up

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

The Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation framework and 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.

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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TRPSI framework.

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

Our group welcomes that *'increase opportunities for social engagement'* is listed as a priority area of intervention as the value of people of all ages within rural communities being given the opportunity to engage with others on a social basis cannot be underestimated. It is through these social activities that the aim of "promote tolerance, health, wellbeing and inclusion" can be best achieved within rural communities as by bringing people together they are getting to know each other. This is needed within communities as in many instances during their working and education lives many members of rural communities are away from the community during the day and thus have limited opportunities to engage with others. It is only 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) is £56 Million

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:

(xi) The Equality and Human Rights Template

Please provide comments in the box below

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

(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