

## Consultation Responses: Nos. 61 - 70

	<b>Page</b>
61 RNIB NI	2
62 Ards and North Down Rural Partnership	10
63 University of Ulster	19
64 UFU	25
65 Equality Commission for Northern Ireland	29
66 Mid Ulster District Council	41
67 Easilink Community Transport	52
68 Volunteer Now	63
69 Rural Support	72
70 Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals	83

*Please note that some respondents submitted identical responses*

***RNIB NI's Response to the Department of Agriculture and Rural  
Development's consultation paper setting out proposals for a  
successor to its Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI)  
Framework 2011-15***

RNIB Northern Ireland (RNIB NI) supports blind and partially sighted people to live independently and to campaign for their full inclusion in society. The Royal National Institute of Blind People is a registered charity and we have three clear priority areas:

1. Everyone in the UK looks after their eyes and their sight
2. Everyone with an eye condition receives timely treatment and, if permanent sight loss occurs, early and appropriate services and support are available and accessible to all
3. A society in which people with sight loss can fully participate

We provide a range of services for people living with sight loss including a benefits advice service and practical support to people who have recently been diagnosed with sight loss, specialised IT support and activity programmes. In addition to our services we campaign for the promotion and improvement of the rights of blind and partially sighted people. We have 72 staff working for blind and partially sighted people across Northern Ireland and 272 volunteers engaged in supporting our work.

The 2011 Census reports that of the 1.8 million population of Northern Ireland, just over one in five of the usually resident population (21 per cent) had a long-term health problem or disability which limited their day-to-day activities. Furthermore, a total of 30 862 experience some type of long-term condition relating to blindness or partial sight loss, representing 1.7% of the population.

The age profile of blind and partially sighted people in Northern Ireland differs from that of the resident population as a whole. In general terms, they tend to

be older than the general population. For example, while 21% of the resident population are aged 0-15 years, only 4.1% of blind or partially sighted persons are in this age category. In contrast, 59% of the blind or partially sighted population are aged 65 or over, compared with 15 per cent of usual residents.

Statistics also reveal an ageing population. From 2001-2011, the population aged over 65 years has increased by 40,400 (18%). Furthermore, those aged over 85 years have seen the greatest proportional increase; in 2001 there were 23,300 people aged over 85 years, which has now increased to 31,400 (an increase of 35% over the decade).

RNIB NI welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the Department's consultation paper setting out proposals for a successor to its Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) Framework 2011-15

RNIB NI welcomes the ethos of the TRPSI Framework aimed at tackling rural poverty and social isolation through a package of measures, in partnership with other statutory bodies, designed to target the effects of poverty and social isolation among vulnerable rural dwellers.

### **Priority 1: Access Poverty**

RNIB NI agrees that living in a rural area can exacerbate the effects of poverty and social isolation for certain groups including disabled people. For example, people with a visual impairment experience greater difficulties accessing transport services in rural areas than in urban settings.

Accessible transport is a core campaigning area for RNIB NI, as barriers to travel are the most commonly reported challenge for people with sight loss. Over the last year, RNIB NI commissioned a piece of research to understand the public transport needs of blind and partially sighted people. We engaged with approximately 140 people with sight loss across Northern Ireland through focus groups, telephone surveys and the gathering of detailed case study evidence. Our report acknowledges that progress has been made, from investment to improve the physical infrastructure to travel information being more widely available in various formats. However, the findings from our research have uncovered four key areas where barriers still exist. They

include accessibility, availability, affordability and awareness. A snapshot of some of the findings of the research is provided below. More detail can be found in the two RNIB NI research reports attached to this response.

**Accessibility** - In terms of accessibility, the most commonly raised issue was the lack of audio announcements on buses. Many interviewees expressed extremely positive views of the audio announcement services currently being implemented on the Metro buses in Belfast. However, the general lack of audio provision right across Northern Ireland remains the biggest single barrier to blind and partially sighted people using buses. As one interviewee stated "if we had audio on buses we would use them a lot more." We have called on DRD to extend this audio system across all Translink bus services.

**Affordability** - Affordability of community transport was raised as a concern, with costs of longer journeys being particularly off-putting for users; for instance, one delegate had to pay £25 for a single journey. Participants reported that community transport can often cost as much as taxi journeys for shorter trips, while other participants simply wanted clearer information about journey fares to be available in their preferred format.

**Availability** - The availability of public transport services is fundamental when discussing how people access education, employment, health services as well as social activities. Availability is a central theme emulating from our research. In terms of public transport, rural dwellers and even those living just outside city centres communicated that the lack of evening and weekend services due to budgetary cuts caused problems for them.

The main difference between transport for urban and rural dwellers is clearly the frequency and availability of public transport, which is less for those living outside of city centres. The most common issue concerning transport for rural dwellers was availability of public buses at weekends and in the evenings. Others expressed the desire for rural transport services to "be available for longer and at a similar level to urban areas." All of this evidence shows that people with no private transport who live in rural areas – and especially those with a disability such as sight loss are disproportionately isolated in relation to accessing transport.

**Awareness** - The customer experience of blind and partially sighted travellers was addressed in our research. We recommend that visual awareness training programmes would provide staff with an understanding of the specific issues blind and partially sighted passengers face when making their end to end journey.

Increasing the accessibility of public transport in rural areas – by meeting the needs of disabled passengers – would be one very significant measure that Northern Ireland government could effectively and successfully target the effects of poverty and social isolation among rural dwellers with a visual impairment.

## Priority 2: Financial Poverty

RNIB NI welcomes the aim to reduce living costs associated with transport among vulnerable rural dwellers. The above comments in Priority 1 are equally relevant to this section.

In addition, RNIB NI made the below recommendations to DRD in relation to its draft Accessible Transport Strategy. We submit them to this consultation as making public transport more accessible for people with sight loss in rural areas is of direct relevance to achieving the DARD's aims through these proposals.

Summary of issue	Recommendation
<p><b>Eligibility for concessionary passes:</b> Currently partially sighted people are limited to a Half Fare SmartPass, whereas the Blind SmartPass allows free bus travel</p>	<p><b>Recommendation 1:</b> We recommend that the <b>eligibility criteria for free travel should be extended to people who are partially sighted</b>, taking into account that transport options for partially sighted people and blind people are equally limited.</p>
<p><b>Concessionary passes for</b></p>	<p><b>Recommendation 2:</b></p>

<p><b>companions:</b> Many blind and partially sighted people find it too difficult or dangerous to travel alone, but companions or carers of disabled people are not currently entitled to concessionary travel in Northern Ireland.</p>	<p>We recommend <b>free travel for companions/carers of blind and partially sighted passengers</b>, therefore encouraging blind and partially sighted people who do not wish to travel alone to get out and about.</p>
<p><b>Cost of rural and community transport:</b> Cuts in funding to rural and community transport have forced some providers to raise fares and introduce cancellation charges.</p>	<p><b>Recommendation 3:</b> <b>Adequate government funding for community transport must be maintained.</b> It is vital that these services remain cheaper than or competitive with taxi fares from rural areas, and are able to demonstrate their added value for individuals with disabilities.</p> <p><b>Recommendation 4:</b> <b>The cancellation fee introduced by some community transport services should be abolished,</b> taking into account the unpredictable health of many community transport users. Instead, steps can be taken to implement a method of filling cancelled spaces from a passenger waiting list.</p>

Affordability is a key barrier to making our public transport system accessible to all, including people with sight loss.

Within the wider context, recent RNIB research (My Voice: The views and experiences of registered blind and partially sighted people in the UK) reports



---

that blind and partially sighted people of working age struggle financially – 39% of blind and partially sighted people of working age said they have some or great difficulty in making ends meet.

Each year, our employment and welfare services support local people with a visual impairment. More than 100 blind and partially sighted people gain or retain employment with RNIB assistance. In addition, RNIB Welfare Rights service supports hundreds of local people to maximise their benefit entitlement – resulting in an increase in total personal income of nearly £1 million each year. These services are vital in supporting people with sight loss to live independently and with dignity.

### **Priority 3: Social Isolation**

We welcome the aim to provide support to groups at risk of social isolation including people with disabilities and to increase opportunities for social engagement amongst vulnerable rural dwellers.

Recent RNIB research (My Voice: The views and experiences of registered blind and partially sighted people in the UK) aims to better understand the circumstances, views and experiences of blind and partially sighted people. We recommend this research to you.

One of the key headlines of the research is that four in every ten blind and partially sighted people feel cut off from people and things around them. Low incomes, inaccessible information, difficulties getting around, digital exclusion, all contribute to feelings of isolation.

The research also reports that feelings of wellbeing are lower when compared to the rest of the population – 31% of people were rarely or never optimistic about the future. In addition, four out of every 10 blind and partially sighted people felt moderately or completely cut off from the people and things around them.

It should also be noted that there are barriers to getting the most out of technology – less than one in three blind and partially sighted people felt able to make the most of new technology.

Please also note that the accessible transport research report comments above and attached in relation to Priority 1 and 2 is again relevant to decreasing the social isolation of people with sight loss.

### **Target Groups**

We recommend that the needs of blind and partially sighted people are included as a specific category within the target group addressing disabled people.

### **Accessible Information**

Any effective service needs effective communication. People with sight loss face obvious barriers to accessing information, which for most of the general public, is already easily accessible. Ill-thought out communication can hamstring what could otherwise be a good service. Initiatives – such as this – that provide fantastic opportunities for people with sight loss are therefore at risk of failure and not realising the spirit of their aims. Any scheme will only ever work as well as the way it is communicated to those who can benefit. Being able to stay informed, in the most general sense, is a key pillar of personal independence.

We are happy to provide further information to the Department and would recommend RNIB Visual Awareness Training to the Department, and in particular, to those officials responsible for the outworking of the actions of this Framework. This will ensure that communication allied to this Framework is accessible to people with sight loss and therefore, they are able to benefit.

We tailor our two and a half hour OCN accredited Visual Awareness Training course to best meet the needs of your organisation, whether from the public, private or voluntary sector. Our training aims to:

- Dispel the myths and stereotypes surrounding sight loss.
- Give practical advice on how you can ensure blind and partially sighted people get the best possible service from your organisation.
- Enable you to support a blind or partially sighted customer or colleague, for example, greeting and guiding techniques.
- Advise on making your organisation information accessible to everyone.



- Awareness of other services available to blind and partially sighted people.

The training is suitable for front-line staff, managers and anyone who would like to offer services which are valued by blind and partially sighted people. We have recently provided training to another government department.

Should you wish to find out more, please contact Michael Law at [michawl.law@rnib.org.uk](mailto:michawl.law@rnib.org.uk)

Please do not hesitate to get in touch should we be able to provide anything further including further research as well as information on RNIB services in Northern Ireland.

Thank you for considering this response.

Yours sincerely,

Rebecca Davis  
Campaigns Officer  
RNIB NI

Encl.

1. RNIB NI Accessible Transport Research report
2. RNIB NI Accessible Transport summary report, *Get on Board!*
3. RNIB NI Manifesto
4. My Voice: The views and experiences of registered blind and partially sighted people in the 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).**

Ards and North Down Rural Partnership

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

**Surname**

Osborne

**Forename**

Marguerite

### 2. Postal Address

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Signal Centre

2 Innotec Drive

Balloo Road, Bangor

**Postcode** BT19 7PD

**Phone** 02891473788

**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

Ards and North Down Rural Partnership (Partnership) endorses the aims of the framework as it supports their Local Rural Development Strategy for the Ards and North Down Borough area in terms of improving the quality of life for those residing in local rural areas. The Partnership welcomes that better targeted resources will be made available through a cocktail of funding which may bridge the gap between ineligible project expenditure and compliment the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 (NIRDP) schemes for the benefit of the rural community.

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

Yes, the Partnership in principle supports these three priority areas. As part of the consultation process for the development of a Local Rural Development Strategy the following local needs were highlighted as impacting on residents' quality of life across the Borough of Ards and North Down;

- Poor public transport provision, which isolates the rural community from larger centres of population, and the facilities and activities available in such areas;
- Lack of services in rural areas, especially health and social care and leisure and recreational provision;



- The lack of facilities and provision for young people, which is impacting upon anti-social behaviour within rural communities;
- The demise of rural villages in terms of dereliction and poor aesthetic appeal, which results in reduced community spirit and a lack of community pride in local areas;
- Poor broadband coverage, which particularly disadvantages rural businesses and young people.

This analysis of need has informed the development of the Local Interim Strategy in its vision, aims and objectives. However, the funding available under the NIRDP schemes is limited in terms of ongoing support / resource costs and TRPSI Framework could assist to maximise resources to address these issues.

**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

Yes, in principle the Partnership supports these key principles and would add that there is a need for a more collaborative partnership approach across Government departments, local councils, LAGs and communities, in order to combine services to create a more effective delivery model. Note: support is also available through local Council grant initiatives.

There is no detailed reference to the proposed delivery model and structure in the documentation.

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

**Yes**

**No**

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

Yes, the Partnership supports these target groups in line with their Local Rural Development Strategy.

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

It is unclear from the table provided if the support available is towards capital or resource expenditure. Therefore, there will need to be a clear distinction on eligible expenditure between funds to avoid duplication as opposed to the intended cocktail approach.

The priority areas of TRPSI Framework are relevant to the RDP and there is a need to continue to support rural communities to combat poverty and reduce social isolation.

Locally, there are major issues re service provision in the more isolated and remote rural areas, which has been highlighted in completed village plans undertaken as part of the previous Rural Development Programme (2007-13). There is a need to provide continued support to improve services and access to these services in future schemes that have been identified as part of the local planning process.

- (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 TRPSI fund could address gaps under this measure such as rural transport, which is ineligible under the NIRDP, but was highlighted recently as a key issue for rural dwellers throughout the strategy development consultation process in the Ards and North Down area.

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





In order to comment, more detailed information on the initiatives outlined would need to be provided.

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

In order to comment, more detailed information on the initiatives outlined would need to be provided.

- 6) (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

In order to comment, more detailed information on the initiatives outlined would need to be provided.

- (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

In order to comment, more detailed information on the initiatives outlined would need to be provided.

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

There is a need for a more collaborative partnership approach across Government departments, local councils, LAGs and communities, in order to combine services to create a more effective delivery model.

Please provide comments in the box below

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

Please provide comments in the box below

9) 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

A Partnership Board member made the following comments;

“The words ‘or working’ should be added in here, i.e. The Rural Issues Statement – to assess the potential impacts of a policy on people living or working in rural areas.

In the past DARD initiatives have been seen to impact negatively on existing services that affected not only people living in the area but people who worked in it too. An example of this provided is Extended Schools. Not every school benefited, and there was no consultation with early years providers so many community afterschool services closed as a result of the ‘free’ services offered in some schools. Skills were lost and many parents were left with no childcare as a result”.

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

Please provide comments in the box below

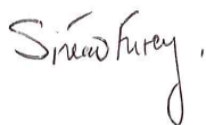
Sustainable Rural Communities Branch  
Department of Agriculture and Rural Development  
Room 406 Dundonald House  
Upper Newtownards Road  
Ballymiscaw  
BELFAST BT4 3SB

19 January 2016

Dear Sir

**Public Consultation on Proposals for a Successor to DARD's *Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework 2011-15***

The Consumer Management and Food Innovation team at Ulster University welcomes the opportunity to respond to this important successor to the 2011-2015 *Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework* that represents an action plan for reducing rural poverty and social exclusion. Our comments are attached and we hope you find them useful.



**Dr Sinéad Furey & Dr Lynsey Hollywood  
Consumer Management and Food Innovation, Ulster University**

ENC

## **About our response**

Our response focuses largely on food poverty within and across the three priority areas of the proposed Framework. However, we make general comment on all areas considered by the consultation via the template provided and reproduced below.

## **Consultation Questions**

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

Yes

*Please provide supporting comments below*

The issues of rural poverty and social exclusion are significant in Northern Ireland where 21% of households live in poverty, with children, older people and working age adult particularly at risk of poverty (DSD Poverty Bulletin, 2013/14). The consultation document refers to the 37% of Northern Ireland who live in rural populations; this is a significant minority and it is entirely appropriate that their experiences of poverty and social exclusion are ameliorated. It is our position that Northern Ireland must not typify a two-tier system whereby householders and consumers are disadvantaged by consequences of their rurality.

By virtue of our rural dispersed population, Northern Ireland consumers already experience high costs in relation to fuel and transport expenses which, in turn, increase their potential to experience poverty and social exclusion compared to their urban counterparts. For this reason, we welcome the collaborative effort to reduce health inequalities; food, fuel, financial and transport poverty; and social exclusion. We at Ulster are particularly concerned about food poverty among the Northern Ireland cohort and believe there should be every effort made to recognise the health inequalities caused by food poverty. Northern Ireland consumers are emphatically concerned about the cost of living and rising food prices (Consumer Council, 2013). We know that food is considered to be the flexible item of the household budget and other competing expenses, including transport costs, may be prioritised over food which may result in decreased food expenditure with associated implications for nutritional quality and health.

We welcome the scope of the Framework and in particular the intention to adopt a multi-partner approach to its implementation. We consider that it is imperative to have the relevant departments, agencies and organisations represented within and across the Framework for reasons of optimal efficiency and effectiveness in respect of participation and contributing to a debate in which their specialisms are paramount. The represented bodies should share ownership of and responsibility for the delivery of the Framework, where appropriate. However, there should be one lead stakeholder (DARD) who is responsible for co-ordinating and driving the Framework with the relevant rural stakeholder reference groups to assist, support and advise where necessary and appropriate. We welcome particularly the inherent co-ordinated and joined-up approach to government policy in the respective areas of anti-poverty and social inclusion which such an approach engenders.



We support the published outcomes of the Framework, notably the intention to increase stakeholder engagement, support targeted pilot initiatives and effective partnership working. We recommend that any proposed “positive and effective engagement by rural communities in seeking to address poverty and social isolation issues within their areas” should include the voice of rural dwellers and their representatives and advocates since consumers and their representatives should be inclusively consulted from the outset on decisions that ultimately impact upon them. This should be made explicit in the outcomes.

**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

*Please provide supporting comments below*

We welcome the three foci of the Framework:

*Access Poverty:* We welcome the focus on access poverty. The recognition within the Framework to promote access and desirability of delivering integration of function are worthy. In our work on food poverty we devised a *6As model* whereby food policy must consider the accessibility (physical, economic and informational), affordability; availability; adequacy; awareness and appropriateness of food to and by consumers. To this end, we agree that access to basic services and choice – including food, socio-cultural activities, and informational access – must not be depleted for our rural dwellers. Furthermore, physical access is compounded for rural dwellers where they may experience the double disincentive of car-lessness and/or problematic access to purposive public transport amenities.

*Financial Poverty:* We welcome the focus on financial poverty given Northern Ireland’s current efforts to recover from recessionary times. Any efforts here should appropriately address the structural causes of economic poverty. Importantly, we recognise and welcome the specific mention of *food poverty* within this discrete focus of the Framework. We consider it important to include food poverty on as many agenda and fora as possible given its status as a public health emergency in 21<sup>st</sup> Century UK and the lack of a dedicated policy for food poverty (beyond its citation in *A Fitter Future for All: Framework for Preventing and Addressing Overweight and Obesity in Northern Ireland 2012-2022*). Importantly, we believe there should be adequate funding of community and statutory initiatives to address this issue.

*Social Isolation:* We welcome the focus on social isolation. We at Ulster are concerned about food access and the older consumer and the potential for, particularly, older consumers to be remote from socio-cultural participation and the digital age. We note that the Framework rightly includes action planning around Internet access, which is an important contributory solution to our concerns around consumers’ disparate informational access.

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

Yes

*Please provide supporting comments below*

We welcome the principles approach adopted by the Framework but we recommend that it needs to be made more explicit that empowerment will be deliverable through active participation and engagement with rural dwellers themselves and their representative and advocated. We must not presume to know the solutions to issues that we have surmised rather than collated through experiential evidence and first-hand accounts from our rural poor.

**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

*Please provide supporting comments below*

We welcome the non-exhaustive list of targeted vulnerable groups. We particularly welcome the intention that the list is not considered to be prescriptive; and that other innovative pilot approaches to other and wider vulnerable groups will be given due consideration.

**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**

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

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

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

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

**(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**

Associated action planning should be reviewed regularly as an evolving and working document with robust monitoring and evaluation activities attached and planned for from the outset. We recommend that evaluation is built in from the outset of the successor Framework in order to measure success effectively and permit timely review and amendment. In this way, targeted interventions that have been formatively identified as effective are prioritised and more likely to achieve success.

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

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

*Please provide supporting comments below*

We welcome the step-wise approach to programme planning for tackling rural poverty and social exclusion. Such an approach should allow for consolidation of developing contributory frameworks and changing landscapes, for example rural development programmes, government funding and community planning powers arising from the Review of Public Administration and its super councils. We believe there is particular scope of super councils to assume some responsibility for monitoring food poverty and targeting effective interventions where evidence identifies constituents to be experiencing/at risk of food poverty. Localised community planning powers should also consider retail planning proposals on a case-by-case basis to prevent potential for *food deserts* to realise in town centres.

**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**

**(ii) The Rural Issues Statement**

*Please provide supporting comments below*

Food is a basic right. According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights everyone has a fundamental right to be free from hunger and have access to safe and nutritious food. We endorse the Belfast Food Network's rights-based approach to food poverty eradication and believe this approach should be regionalised across urban and rural Northern Ireland. Our rural dwellers are Northern Ireland's environmental custodians and primary food producers and merit special case treatment, where appropriate and possible.

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

We consider it necessary that the Framework is supported by secured, dedicated and ring-fenced funding for the duration of the programme. This is important for reasons of sustainability of the Framework initiatives and the human resource attached to its implementation and delivery. As the Framework approaches completion it will similarly be necessary to plan for transition to mainstream government funding or alternative funding sources to assist those pilot initiatives evaluated as effective to source long-term funding and/or become self-sustaining so that learning from successful initiatives is not lost.

We believe that dedicated and secure funding must be made available to facilitate and support associated pilot activities under this proposed Framework. We agree that the Framework is appropriately focused on innovative pilot initiatives. We recommend that public funding must not be unduly preoccupied with routine or standard issue programmes; instead, it will be necessary for the public sector to have the courage to fund creative, previously un-tested pilot programmes which may deliver beyond their promise.

As part of the Ulster University, Ulster University Business School is research active in the area of social exclusion and food poverty. Ulster University Business School has bid successfully on a wide variety of food-related government projects which address the issues of access, affordability and appropriateness of food availability (*safefood*-funded research on cooking skills on the island of Ireland; *safefood*-funded research on the balance of health among food retail promotions in the public of Ireland; Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland-funded research into the balance of health among food retail promotions in Northern Ireland). Dr Sinéad Furey and Dr Lynsey Hollywood have established excellent working relationships with the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland; *safefood*; Food Standards Agency in NI; Public Health Agency; Centre for Agriculture Food and Rural Enterprise; and the Northern Ireland Food Chain Certification Committee. Both Dr Sinead Furey and Dr Lynsey Hollywood are members of the Belfast Food Network Food Poverty Working Group.

We propose that Ulster University Business School can play a key role in supporting the *Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework* in the following ways:

- (1) Research - We have experience in securing government funding on a number of food related projects;
- (2) Graduate Research – We have a team of PhD and Post-doctoral researchers undertaking various projects focused on agri-food and consumer-related issues (for example, food poverty); and
- (3) Special Interest Groups/working groups – We are keen to be involved in an advisory capacity on any special interest/working groups resulting from the Framework.

Through our extensive network of public/private companies within the food industry we believe that Ulster University Business School could be a key stakeholder in contributing to the success of the *Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework*.



475 Antrim Road T: 02890370222  
Belfast F: 02890371231  
BT153DA E: [info@ufuhi.com](mailto:info@ufuhi.com)  
W: [www.ufuni.org](http://www.ufuni.org)

18<sup>th</sup> January 2016

## FROM THE DEPUTY PRESIDENT

Sustainable Rural Communities Branch,  
Department of Agriculture and Rural Development,  
Room 406 Dundonald House,  
Upper Newtownards Road,  
Ballymiscaw,  
Belfast,  
BT4 3SB

Dear Sir/Madam,

### **Public Consultation on Proposals for a Successor to DARD's Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Inclusion Framework 2011-15**

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the above consultation. The Ulster Farmers' Union (UFU) is the largest farming organisation in Northern Ireland representing nearly 12,000 farming families. The UFU represents farmers from all areas of Northern Ireland and across all sectors.

We will respond to this consultation using the questions outlined in the consultation response template.

#### **1. Do you agree that the proposed Aim, Objectives and Intended Outcomes for the TRPSI Framework are appropriate?**

Yes. The UFU feel that the previous Framework worked exceptionally well in this regard particularly in areas such as Rural Support and the Health Van. Going forward, we believe that measures like these could benefit the success of any future Framework.

The agricultural industry is currently struggling with low producer prices across all sectors so this is a particularly welcome Framework at this time.

However, we would suggest that there is an absence of sound evidence to quantify the problem and indeed successes. We feel that a future Framework could benefit hugely from research being carried out into the reality of the situation on the ground. We would suggest this could be done through joined-up work with QUB or UU to fund some research into the issues of rural poverty and social isolation in Northern Ireland. This research would not only benefit us now, but would have great importance in the long-term vision for our rural society.

Stakeholder engagement is also very important in the targeting and delivery of these initiatives and projects. Due to a variety of factors, it is often difficult to get information from rural communities as to what their needs actually are and what difficulties they may be in. Very often they will approach organisations such as us before they would go to a government body.

Established 1918

---

Sending out a clear message that this is something we are very much agreed upon will hopefully help to break down these barriers. As well as ourselves, there are many other community organisations, such as churches and sports clubs which help play a role in both identifying and solving issues.

- 2. Do you agree that the 3 Priority Areas- Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Inclusion- should continue to be the main priorities for the TRPSI Framework?**

Yes

- 3. Do you agree that the 12 Key Principles are appropriate for the TRPSI Framework?**

Yes and we would like to make reference to our points raised in our response to question 1.

- 4. Do you agree that the list of Target Groups is appropriate in relation to providing support to vulnerable groups under the successor TRPSI Framework?**

Yes, we would agree that farmers have been successfully targeted through certain measures in the previous Framework however, we would like to make three points;

1. Farmers are the largest rural stakeholder so will be by default the most targeted group.
2. Previous measures have successfully targeted farmers which we would suggest illustrates the critical need for these types of initiatives. However, it is our opinion that these only cover certain priority areas and more needs to be done, in addition to the successful measures.
3. Farming is a very volatile industry and currently, as mentioned above, producer margins are very poor. Therefore there is probably more of a need to target such an affected group.

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

We would also suggest better provision of mobile phone coverage in certain areas.

With the policies of centralisation in Northern Ireland, many people in rural areas have been left with a lack of access to both services and opportunities, and we are deeply concerned with what lies in store for the future with ever increasing budgetary pressures on Departments. We have frequently seen that services in rural areas are first to be seen as “unviable” or “sustainable”- these seem to us to be based on the number of people using them rather than the geographic area that they serve.

Whilst we fully support the provision of better transport services in rural areas, we wish to highlight that not everyone can access current arrangements. E.g. it is our understanding that if someone is discharged from hospital but is required to attend a nursing home for respite care; they cannot avail of rural transport schemes. It is also worth noting that different transport schemes don't bridge boundaries with other such schemes. This is a growing issue given the centralisation of services and the need to travel longer distances.



---

**(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.**

- Improved broadband and mobile phone coverage.
- Improved rural childcare provisions especially wrap-around care.
- Women on farms are often left with the responsibility of caring for their parents and parents-in-law. More support is needed for these carers in the form of respite centers and other forms of help.

We would note that community planning is key to delivering most of these initiatives effectively.

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

We agree that these are important measures to include however we would also like to highlight that while farmers may be asset-rich, they are increasingly cash-poor, with cash flow being a great burden for many farmers. Very often farmers cannot avail of financial help due to asset wealth so we would hope that this is taken into consideration

**(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.**

Rural Support runs a scheme whereby they provide financial mentors to those who are in difficulty. While this is wholly commendable and we hope to see it continuing, it is treating the symptom rather than the cause. If we can do something to make farmer's incomes more secure, it will go a long way to providing peace of mind.

In addition to this the introduction of Living Wage and Universal Credits will have a disproportionately negative effect on farmers and the self-employed, further compounding financial poverty.

We would also suggest that farm succession is also an issue that needs to be examined. In the absence of pensions, farmers are unable to retire which inhibits employment and entrepreneurship opportunities.

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

The issue of social isolation is one which we are becoming increasingly concerned with. We believe that there are three issues which require priority in this area: That of older farmers, lone workers and those with disabilities.

**(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.**

---

- 
- Improve computer literacy.
  - Farming tends to be a lonely occupation. Tasks which in other sectors may be split among several people must be performed by one. This kind of pressure leads to stress and stress leads to accidents. Ever-tightening margins only exacerbate this issue. Against this background, we would suggest that farmsafety and the work of the Farm Safety Partnership is also included.
  - Given the amount of paperwork now required in agriculture, we would like to request that research is carried out to ascertain how big a problem lexical disability is in rural Northern Ireland- and that something should be done to ensure that those who are disabled in this way are not disproportionately disadvantaged.
  - Rural Support is a vital lifeline to rural and farming communities.
  - Those living in rural areas feel more vulnerable as a result of their isolation. This is compounded by the closure of many rural police stations and the perception that rural crime is ever increasing. Living on your own, possibly far away from another dwelling, on a farm where there are valuable equipment makes you feel like a sitting duck for thieves and criminals. We believe more needs to be done to help rural dwellers feel safe and secure.

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

The UFU would suggest greater stakeholder engagement and collaborative working.

We would also again highlight the need for research to fully understand and quantify the situation.

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

There needs to be close interdepartmental working in conjunction with local councils. Councils also need to engage locally with relevant stakeholders and there needs to be greater representation of farmers on council groupings. Community Planning is an opportunity to really deliver change for rural communities but this can only be done through an active and genuine partnership approach.

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

The UFU would take issue with how rural areas are defined 'rural'. Whilst we recognise that there are varying degrees of 'rurality' and that a 'one size fits all' approach will not sufficiently capture those in most need, we do feel that anyone with a Farm Business ID number must automatically be classed as rural.

---

Finally, we feel that DARD needs to be working with stakeholders to encourage greater uptake of available help.

I trust our comments will be given full consideration.

Yours sincerely,



Barclay Bell

## 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).**

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

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

**Surname**

Roberts

**Forename**

Naomi

### 2. Postal Address

Equality House

7/9 Shaftesbury Square

BELFAST

**Postcode** BT22 2SE

**Phone** 02890500645

**Email**  
nroberts@equalityni.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

The Commission seeks clarification as to why a pilot approach is being adopted to a successor framework. Further, we suggest inclusion of engagement and participation of the relevant Section 75 groups in the design and implementation of the project.

**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

**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 suggest the inclusion of a requirement for reports to be produced and published to demonstrate how the duty has been met, in advance of the implementation of the Rural Needs Bill.

Further, we suggest inclusion of engagement and participation of the relevant Section 75 groups in the design and implementation of the project.

**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

Based on the statement at 6.9 that the current Framework shows that it has been less successful in targeting some of these groups than other, we suggest that targeted action is required to address specific issues to relevant Section 75 groups. A generic pilot approach may not meet these needs.

**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**



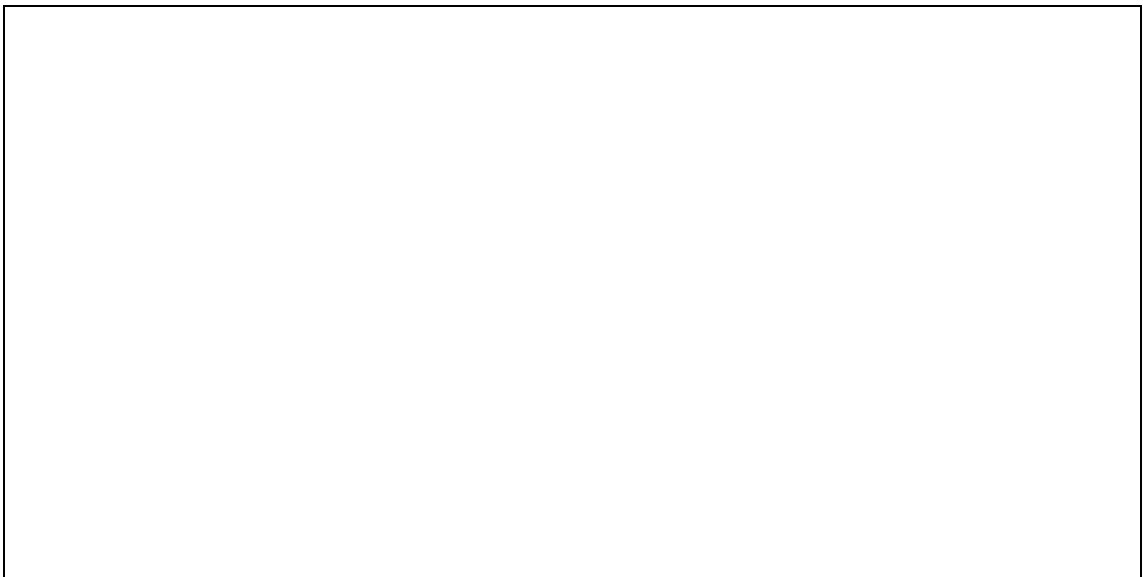
**(b) Please provide details on any further measures which you think should be considered to help address Access Poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas**



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



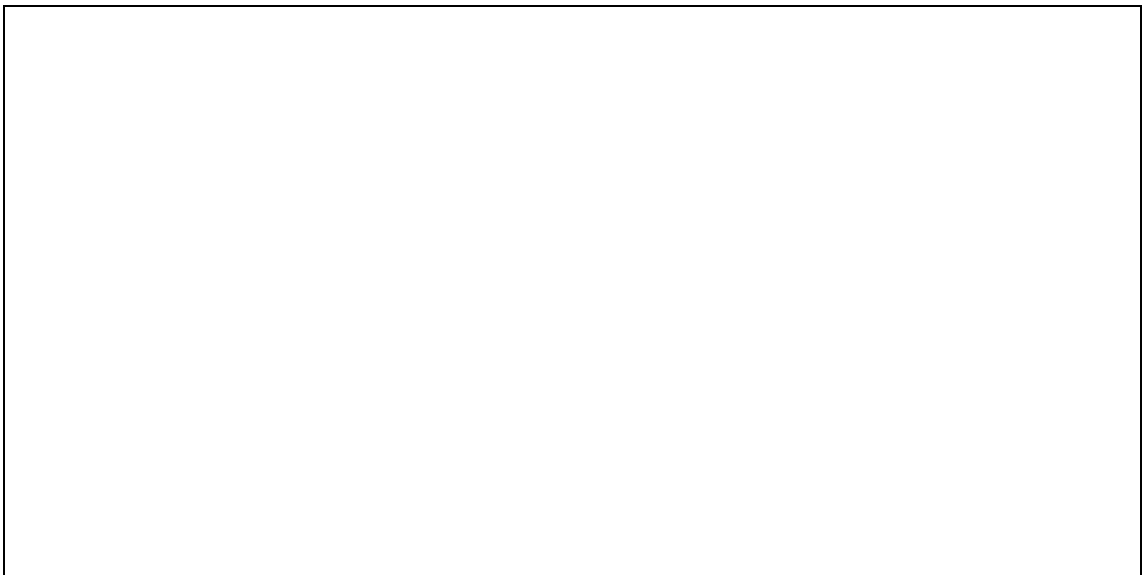
(b) Please provide details on any other measures which you think should be considered to help address Financial Poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas



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



(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

To ensure the Framework contributes towards the development of a more effective rural community support structure, the ability of Section 75 groups to benefit from rural community support programmes requires a responsive transport infrastructure to be in place.

Further, we suggest inclusion of engagement and participation of the relevant Section 75 groups in the design and implementation of the project.

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

Please provide comments in the box below

We recommend effective engagement and active participation of affected rural dwellers during the planning and development of policies.

The Commission emphasises the importance of public authorities consulting with, engaging with and fostering the active participation of children and young people in the policy development process. For further information, please see '*Let's Talk, Let's Listen – Guidance for Public Authorities on consulting and involving children and young people*'. Available at:

<http://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Employers%20and%20Service%20Providers/LetsTalkLetsListenGuideforPAsconsultingchildren2008.pdf?ext=.pdf>

**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

**Equality Commission - Advice & Compliance Division**

**Advice on DARD's Section 75 equality screening of the Proposals for a successor to the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework 2011-2015.**

**Summary of ECNI Section 75 advice**

The Commission welcomes that the Framework refers to a number of horizontal principles including: *'Equality - promoting equality and good community relations through Section 75 and the Human Rights Act 1998'*.

The Commission notes that the Department has identified a number of minor equality impacts and has screened this policy out, without mitigation. We advise that this screening is reviewed to ensure that it is clear what available evidence has been considered; what potential mitigation measures may be appropriate and how this policy could seek opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity and good relations. The screening should also set out clear monitoring arrangements and whether there are any further opportunities to promote the 'disability duties'.

It was also our understanding that this policy was screened in for equality impact assessment (EQIA) in 2012, as part of the Department's Corporate Plan screening exercise. The Commission recommends reviewing this previous screening exercise to clarify what commitments were made at that time.

**Screening advice points:**

**Screening decision**

While we note that screening and EQIAs will be considered at programme/ implementation stage, this screening exercise identifies a range of minor impacts and determines that the policy be screened out without mitigation or EQIA.

In relation to this decision, the Commission understood that this policy was screened within Goal 2 of the Department's Corporate Plan development in 2012 and a commitment to undertake an EQIA on this policy determined, as part of that process. The Commission would advise DARD to review its Corporate Plan screening to clarify commitments made at that time.

### **Assessment of impacts and available evidence**

The screening document notes a range of information considered. As very little of this evidence has been presented within the document, it is not clear how this information has been considered and how impacts were determined.

In addition, it is noted that the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) Evaluation of TRPSI Framework: Final Report - November 2015 concludes that: *'Some concerns have been noted over the 'match' of the target groups under the Framework with those outlined under Section 75.*

The Commission advises:

- the Department to set out the detail of the evidence considered within the screening document and
- provide a clearer rationale for the 'minor' impacts identified.
- that the Department 'seeks out' the opportunities, within this policy framework, to more effectively promote equality of opportunity and good relations.

### **Mitigation**

DARD commits at paragraph 4.10 of its equality scheme to considering mitigating measures and/or alternative policies if a screening exercise concludes that the likely impact of the policy is *minor*. The Commission recommends that specific consideration of mitigation or alternative policies are clearly set out within the Department's equality assessment of the policy (whether screening or EQIA)

### **Monitoring**

The Department states that monitoring across the Section 75 categories *'will be carried out'* on all the programmes funded under the successor TRPSI Framework. The SIB evaluation report on the TRPSI 2011-2015 however states: *'...., there is no formal process for monitoring the impact of TRPSI on Section 75 groups'*. The

Department should set out in the screening document or any subsequent EQIA, what monitoring arrangements will be put in place to gather this data.

### **Budget Allocation**

The Commission advises that when the budget allocation is clarified, that the policy and budget proposals should be screened (with appropriate consideration of conducting an EQIA) to assess the likely impacts of the policy on the Section 75 groups and to inform how the funding should be allocated.

This will assist the Department to ensure that the budget is allocated in such a way that it best addresses need, and that it targets those experiencing the most significant inequalities. One of the Commission's recommended criteria for undertaking an EQIA is if a policy has a '*significant expenditure*' and this should be taken into consideration when screening budget allocations.

### **Consideration of Disability Duties**

The Department states in the screening template that the policy does not provide an opportunity to better promote positive attitudes towards disabled people.

However, the screening form states that the policy proposals specify people with a disability as a 'vulnerable group' to be targeted under the Framework, by addressing barriers to participation in public life, such as difficulties in accessing transport, low incomes and social isolation. ECNI advises that it appears that there may be some opportunities within this policy to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and participation in public life.

The Commission is happy to discuss any of the comments or advice that we have set out above. If a Departmental representative(s) would like to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact Brenda Hodkinson, Equality Officer at email : [bhodkinson@equalityni.org](mailto:bhodkinson@equalityni.org) or telephone 02890 890854

## 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).**

Mid Ulster District Council

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

**Surname**

Donnelly

**Forename**

Oliver

### 2. Postal Address

Council Offices

Circular Road

Dungannon

Co Tyrone

**Postcode** BT71 6DT

**Phone** 03000 132  
132

**Email**  
oliver.donnelly@midulstercouncil.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

In general Council are supportive of the aim of the TRPSI Successor Framework particular the flexible mechanism that DARD are proposing in working with other stakeholders and linking with other streams and sources of funding to develop new and innovative measures to tackle poverty/social inclusion among vulnerable people in rural areas. The framework also needs to be implemented in conjunction with other policies and not to be delivered in isolation.

We welcome the development of new and innovative pilots however these should not be thematic only but area based incorporating all of the themes interlinked. There are large areas of rural poverty particularly the top 20% in relation to disadvantage that similar to Neighbourhood Renewal need an integrated area based approach for action.

Also innovative should not mean new it is important to take on board good practice that is taking place and develop and build on this through adding value.

The outcomes need prioritised as number one is critical that interventions need to be long term, through integrated planning and targeted at those most vulnerable and in poverty.

Welcome the flexibility to being a part of a wider element of funding and this will allow for maximisation of limited resources.



**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

Council would agree with the 3 identified priority areas but feels this need not be too prescriptive to allow flexibility to be responsive to changing circumstances as they arise:-

**Access Poverty** – Possible amendment of this priority to improve access and provision of key services----

It is important that rural dwellers have access to key services that are the norm in urban areas especially around transport and broadband. Council's village planning sessions have reaffirmed these as important priorities right across the Mid Ulster District which has 75% of its population resident in rural areas. Also the shrinkage of service provision in rural areas has been highlighted as significantly impacting on the quality of life for rural dwellers. Centralisation of services both by statutory and private providers are a real concern and had have a significant impact in disadvantaging rural communities. E.g. withdrawal of banking services in rural villages. People are being directed to online services but in many cases have poor broadband provision. Some services may be delivered through a community partnership in local areas.

**Financial Poverty** – all of the issues identified in the consultation paper are all important issues to address. It was raised at the consultation event in Loughry that a proven cross cutting solution to addressing many of these could be through the re-establishment of locally based ACE (Action for Community Employment) projects which were firmly rooted in the community they served and produced significant social and economic impacts which this priority attempts to address. Creating these as social enterprises is a potential option

with DARD start-up support for 5 year lead in time allowing a move to a more self-sustaining operation. It is important that any proposed options are tailored to suit areas rather than a thematic wide approach to all.

It is also important for example that benefit uptake etc. links to current planning and provision and economies of scale can be provided.

**Social Isolation** – again all of the issues in the consultation paper are important and have a natural solution and strategy for addressing through locally based rural projects that are in-tune and responsive to their local communities.

There are very good projects and programmes currently in place and it is how these can be added value to, there is also community provision that with value added support can seek to help provide local solutions. Eg. Local community and sporting groups are currently providing this within their areas maximising volunteering and it is how such groups can be supported and maintained and extended further.

Again as before local solutions are important and not just generic thematic.

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

**Yes**

**No**

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

The Framework paper relies heavily on partnership working and it is vital that these partnerships are forged and strong from the outset. There are many local community groups who are embedded in rural communities and these organisations are crucial to the implementation of the framework. There is also a need for buy-in from the other government Departments. This is particularly relevant with the new government departmental structures being rolled out April 2016. This is crucial with linking the framework to council community planning and also for the mainstreaming of project initiatives that arise out of the document. This provides for a community planning approach.

Local solutions for local people, it is important that any projects or initiatives are flexible and tailored to suit the area of need.

The delivery of programmes need to allow for an adequate timeframe to really see change, for example the Neighbourhood Renewal Programme has been concentrated for 10 years and the real impact is only becoming evident now in relation to managing the level of deprivation from falling and raising quality of life.

There needs to be a mechanism whereby if the pilot projects are successful then there needs to be a method of ensuring these are sustained and not by the community by support and investment in areas and communities.

**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, broad agreement of the list of target groups.

**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**

All the measures listed in the draft action plan will be effective in addressing the priority area. The initiatives are broad and are centred on the key areas of what is being identified in Community planning Broadband, Access to mobile, transport to services or alternative service outreach, e.g. great examples as referenced later in document where there could be rural hubs linked to community e.g. sports and recreation where they could become service and wellbeing centres.

Again the buy in from the partner organisations and community is key to the delivery of these initiatives and it is important that these organisations invest in the initiatives e.g. DETI in broadband.

Research by the New Policy Institute published in March 2014 highlighted that between 2007-2012 the average income in NI fell by almost 10% compared with 7% for the UK as a whole. This same report detailed that there was “substantial poverty in some rural areas”. In relation to Mid Ulster it was determined that 23% of people in the rural west of NI are living in poverty.

**(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 delivery structure of the initiatives is crucial to the success of the framework document. It is important that the correct delivery structure and appropriate partnership structures are in place before any initiatives are rolled out and that organisations don't merely pay lip-services to this work.

Agreement that there is an initiative centred on Household energy efficiency improvement. OFMDFM commissioned research detailed that 42% of households in NI are determined as fuel poor in 2011

**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**

Access to employability, employment and entrepreneurship programmes is key to reducing poverty in rural areas. There are many programmes currently being delivered in rural areas to tackle these areas but there needs to be a streamlined approach. There also remains a gap in how the programmes are communicated with many within the rural community unaware that there are programmes being delivered.

Supportive of the initiatives that are centred on transport and access to IT as access remains poor in many rural areas. For example with many banks now moving to online systems this puts many people and businesses in rural areas at a disadvantage with limited IT access through Broadband

**(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**

As mentioned above, employment is one of the main facets affecting poverty. Barriers to employment, be it tangible or not, are perhaps more prevalent in rural areas. Access to innovative approaches to support rural people into employment can only be welcomed. There are models that currently exist – ACE Schemes – that could be rolled out. Buy in and support from government departments and other statutory bodies is key to this and it is important that they are involved at all stages of delivery

Childcare is also critical and can be linked to employability programmes. Another initiative that could be looked at is the re skilling of those within rural communities. With the decline of farming in recent years there is a skills deficit that should be filled with initiatives arising from the framework document.

**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**

Broad agreement with measures listed in the Framework Document. There are various programmes currently being delivered that address mental health and by a number of different organisations. Support for rural hubs has to be welcomed and there should be investment in creating and sustaining these hubs across rural areas. In relation to proximity to services, rural areas are more deprived than urban areas and this puts rural dwellers at a disadvantage. This needs to be addressed as part of an over-arching government strategy or framework.

**(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 streamlining of those initiatives that currently are successful is key. There is a patchwork of organisations delivering initiatives and there should be a concerted effort to streamline these. Rural hubs are the key to this and should be invested in to ensure the effective delivery of the programmes. Access to the appropriate emergency healthcare provision is also vital. Many rural people have further to travel to emergency health provision and this poses many challenges that needs to be addressed as part of a framework strategy to alleviate social exclusion.

**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 framework will provide a blueprint for all key stakeholders in moving forward to tackle rural poverty and isolation. The framework needs buy in from such organisations to deliver the initiatives listed. The partnership structure set up as a delivery mechanism is crucial to supporting the framework with a focus on tailored local solutions rather than general to make fit.

The support structures need to be reflective of the new government departmental structure and all government departments all need to buy in to the framework and ensure that resources are allocated accordingly.

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

Please provide comments in the box below

The Framework document needs to be fully integrated with the various council community plans. The Framework can't work in isolation with all these plans – Community support, good relations, PCSP, arts and culture etc. The community planning process in Mid Ulster has highlighted a number of issues pertinent to rural areas. Issues still persist around rural planning particularly for rural businesses. Healthcare and childcare provision remain an issue in rural area.

An issue in relation to accessing funding was raised with many local community groups having difficulty accessing funding with little hands on support. There was also an issue highlighted around sustainability of youth and other programmes. There needs to be a long term approach to initiatives delivered in rural areas.

There are different issues in different areas and there are different levels of poverty and this relies in different solutions that are targeted.

**9) 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

Concur that it is important that equality and human rights are at the forefront of the document. The framework needs to assess the impact of section 75 and good relations and tailor the initiatives accordingly.

**(iv) The Rural Issues Statement**

Please provide comments in the box below

No issues with the conclusions and agree that evidenced base policy making should be a standard among all government departments.



**10) 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).**

Easilink Community Transport

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

**Surname**

McEldowney

**Forename**

Paddy

### 2. Postal Address

Unit 12, Strabane Enterprise Agency

Orchard Road Industrial Estate

Strabane

Co. Tyrone

**Postcode** BT82 9FR

**Phone** 028 71883282

**Email**

[paddy@easilink.org](mailto:paddy@easilink.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

Easilink Community Transport has considered the proposals for a successor TRPSI Framework and would recognise, as a key delivery agent for demand responsive rural transport services in Omagh, Strabane & Derry that the current TRPSI Framework has led to significant improvement in combating Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation for rural dwellers through the ARTS and MARA projects. We also work closely with the Local Rural Support Network (Omagh Forum for Rural Associations) as a very effective way of engaging with rural communities in our local area.

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

**Yes**

**No**

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

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

This bottom up approach is critical to effective delivery of services to meet the needs of vulnerable and isolated people in rural areas.

Easilink Community Transport works closely with the Local Rural Support Network (Omagh Forum for Rural Associations) to ensure we are identifying and meeting the needs of these individuals.

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

**Yes**

**No**

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

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

An important point to note and ensure it is included in the new TRPSI Framework is the key role played by the LRSNs in identifying and engaging with the hard to reach rural dwellers.

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

**Yes**

**No**

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

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

Easilink CT currently offer services to **“all”** under the proposed target grouping and would draw attention that **anyone** from a rural area who doesn't have access to transport can qualify to be a member of their local Rural Community Transport provider and avail of the heavily subsidised Dial-A-Lift Service which is available Monday to Friday 8am - 6pm.

We have worked closely with a number of other agencies including the

LRSNs to promote and develop our Community Transport services across all the Target Groups listed.

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

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

*Example; New pilot projects are set up to support rural hubs and inclusion activities, how do individuals get to these projects if they do not have access to transport?*

Easilink CT welcome the opportunity to work in partnership with organisations at development stage as transport is a key element to the success of any project, which again, will address **all three priority areas**.

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

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

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

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

Easilink CT are supportive of the measure to address Financial Poverty.

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

Again we work in partnership with a number of agencies including Omagh Forum for Rural Associations to promote and develop our Group Hire services.

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

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

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

Easilink CT are supportive of the measure to address Social Isolation.

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

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

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



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

Please provide comments in the box below

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

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

Continue to support the LRSNs so we have a very experienced partner with likes to many community groups across the Omagh area – helping us meet our objectives of providing affordable and accessible transport to those in rural areas who don't have any other transport options.

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

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

Please provide comments in the box below

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

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

We are working with our local LRSN (Omagh Forum) to engage in the Community Planning process and in the development of the local areas plans. Continued support by DARD for the LRSNs is vital to ensure this rural community infrastructure and expertise remains intact.

**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

Easilink is supportive of the Departments commitment to ensure Equality and Human Rights.

**(vi) The Rural Issues Statement**

Please provide comments in the box below

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

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

Please provide comments in the box below

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

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

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

## RESPONDENT INFORMATION

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

### 1. Name / Organisation

**Organisation Name (If applicable).**

Volunteer Now

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

**Surname**

Dinsmore

**Forename**

Paul

### 2. Postal Address

Broughshane House

70 Main Street

Broughshane

**Postcode** BT42 4JW

**Phone** 07850851823

**Email**

paul.dinsmore@volunteernow.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

Volunteer Now considers that volunteering plays a vital role in reducing social isolation and poverty in rural areas and considers that effective partnership working should be encouraged and not viewed as the remit of a single department or sector.

**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

Volunteer Now considers that volunteering plays a key role in enabling people living in rural communities to engage actively within their communities. Volunteering is cross-cutting of the priorities of the TRPSI framework given that volunteers are involved in providing community transport; running community activities and events; serving on committees and trustee boards; befriending those socially isolated; delivering life-saving services; and coaching sports. Volunteer Now also considers that by engaging in volunteering rural dwellers can enhance their opportunities for employment and maintain positive mental health and well-being.

**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

Volunteer Now considers that volunteering should be available to all and welcomes priority support being given to those groupings listed in the framework, mainly of which are considered under-represented in volunteering.

**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**

In 2014/15 over 7,500 volunteers registered their interest in volunteering online. It is vital that access to online information on volunteering is made available to those living in rural areas and Volunteer Now welcomes the provision of better broadband services for rural dwellers.

Equally Volunteer Now welcomes improved transport provision as relevant opportunities to volunteer may not always be available locally for those living in rural communities and lack of transport can prove to be a barrier to accessing volunteering opportunities outside of their local community.

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



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

Volunteering plays a key role in enhancing opportunities for employment providing experience and a range of skills to complement formal qualifications and training. Skills such as teamworking and leadership in addition to showing employers reliability, dedication and commitment.

Volunteer Now considers that everyone should be able to participate in volunteering and that financial limitations should not be seen as a barrier to volunteering, ie it should not cost an individual to volunteer their time.

Volunteer Now considers that to make volunteering accessible to all provision should be made to adequately resource volunteering in rural areas.

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

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

Volunteering plays a key role in maintaining positive mental health in that it keeps people involved and active within their community. Projects such as befriending and community transport are often seen as a lifeline for vulnerable groupings in rural areas and Volunteer Now welcomes that priority is being given to promoting health, well-being and inclusion for rural dwellers.

**(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

Volunteer Now considers that the TRPSI Framework should contribute towards enhancing the participation of those living in rural communities in volunteering and unlocking the potential that this would bring. Volunteer Now considers that the TRPSI framework should explore a number of pilot projects that would bring together a range of voluntary, community and statutory organisations in partnership to deliver an innovative approach to enhancing rural volunteering.

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

Please provide comments in the box below

Volunteer Now considers that a successor TRPSI Framework should complement Community Planning to ensure that effective engagement with all stakeholders living and working in rural communities across all council areas is achieved.

**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

**(viii) 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).

Rural Support

Title Mr  Ms  Mrs  Miss  Dr  Please tick as appropriate

Surname

McCann

Forename

Jude

### 2. Postal Address

The Lodge

Loughry College

Dungannon

**Postcode** BT80 9AA

**Phone** 02886760040

**Email**  
jude@ruralsupport.org.uk

Access Poverty. Suggestion - include the need for more appropriate and sustainable service delivery models in rural areas.

Financial Poverty. Suggestion -need to understand the link between business and household incomes in rural areas as there are many small businesses and self-employed.

Links between low income and poor mental health should be understood and engaged. Again, there needs to be close working with industry bodies.

Social Isolation – suggestion -need for measures to both prevent Social Isolation and tackle the effects of it. These are different goals and should be understood accordingly.

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

i) Change "communities" to "dwellers".

iii) Include rural business

Suggestion -include a key principle to identify and encourage best practice.

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

Many of these target groups overlap. This should be more fully explained. Different measures will be aimed at different groups so it is important not to have duplication.

Suggestions - Include victims of crime.

- Include victims of domestic violence
- Include those experiencing debt issues.
- Include those experiencing physical health problems.

- 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

There is limited detail in this to make an informed comment, particularly on the idea regarding improved linkages between urban and rural areas. This is good in so far as it goes, but may miss the point by not dealing with the needs of the rural population as a rural population. In particular, vulnerable people are unlikely to be able to travel to urban areas to access the services they need.

"Better transport" will include that transport being more affordable. More detail is needed before this can be commented on as to whether or not this is workable.

- (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

---

Need for better, more appropriate service delivery models for rural areas and those living in them. In many cases, the service exists, but people are unable to access it easily. A good example of how this has been countered is the Farm Family Health Checks van, simply because it fits into the rural way of life and fits around the schedule of rural dwellers.

- 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

Unclear how household expenditure will be reduced, aside from the measures identified concerning fuel poverty and heating costs, which are well-established.

Suggestion -needs to be clearer distinction between measures to drive down costs and those to boost income.

- (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

Again, working to boost income will require working closely with rural and farming businesses to deal with policy reform, economic/ market challenges so as to increase capacity and sustainability.

A “rural business first” could be adopted and encouraged to support thriving rural economies and communities. Encouraging employment opportunities within the rural business world and prospective entrepreneurs to set up in rural areas is important.

The issue of debt in rural areas needs to be understood and addressed.

A support mechanism for advice provision regarding welfare reform should be considered.

Suggestion- include support initiatives targeted specifically at vulnerable rural and farming businesses

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

The difficulty with this section lies in that it is often difficult to reach rural dwellers with messages to promote positive mental health or other such initiatives.

In terms of tackling social isolation, it is best to work within the framework of what already exists in order to bring people together within the current social structures. This makes for more long-lasting and effective social change.

(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

There is no mention in this draft of dealing with victims of crime- e.g. theft, intimidation or domestic violence. There needs to be good multi-disciplinary engagement with the PSNI and other services to ensure that victims of crime get the support they need to live safely and enjoy a good quality of life in rural areas. The specific rural risk factor for crime of all kind is not fully understood, and this is particularly so for domestic abuse.

**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

In order to deliver lasting change to rural communities, it is important to begin with what is already there, and work together to improve the lives of all in rural areas. It is also important to work closely with other jurisdictions to ensure effective referral mechanisms, consistency and best practice.

It is important that a collaborative approach is taken across government departments and stakeholders in relation to the design, promotion and implementation of measures.

There is also a need for research to be carried out on an ongoing basis in order to identify new needs as they arise and understand more fully the social dynamics of rural communities. This could involve working closely with our universities.

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

Please provide comments in the box below

The TRPSI successor programme will be useful for local councils in ensuring adequate coverage of service provision. Rural areas will often run along council boundaries and having TRPSI services will ensure that there is no postcode lottery of difference in treatment due to your location.

Having TRPSI services means that councils will be able to plan more specifically for issues likely to arise in their own area as the general issues should be covered by TRPSI. This will involve working closely with bodies set up under the programme to ensure that duplication is minimized and that resources are targeted most effectively.

**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

No.
-----

**(ii) The Rural Issues Statement**

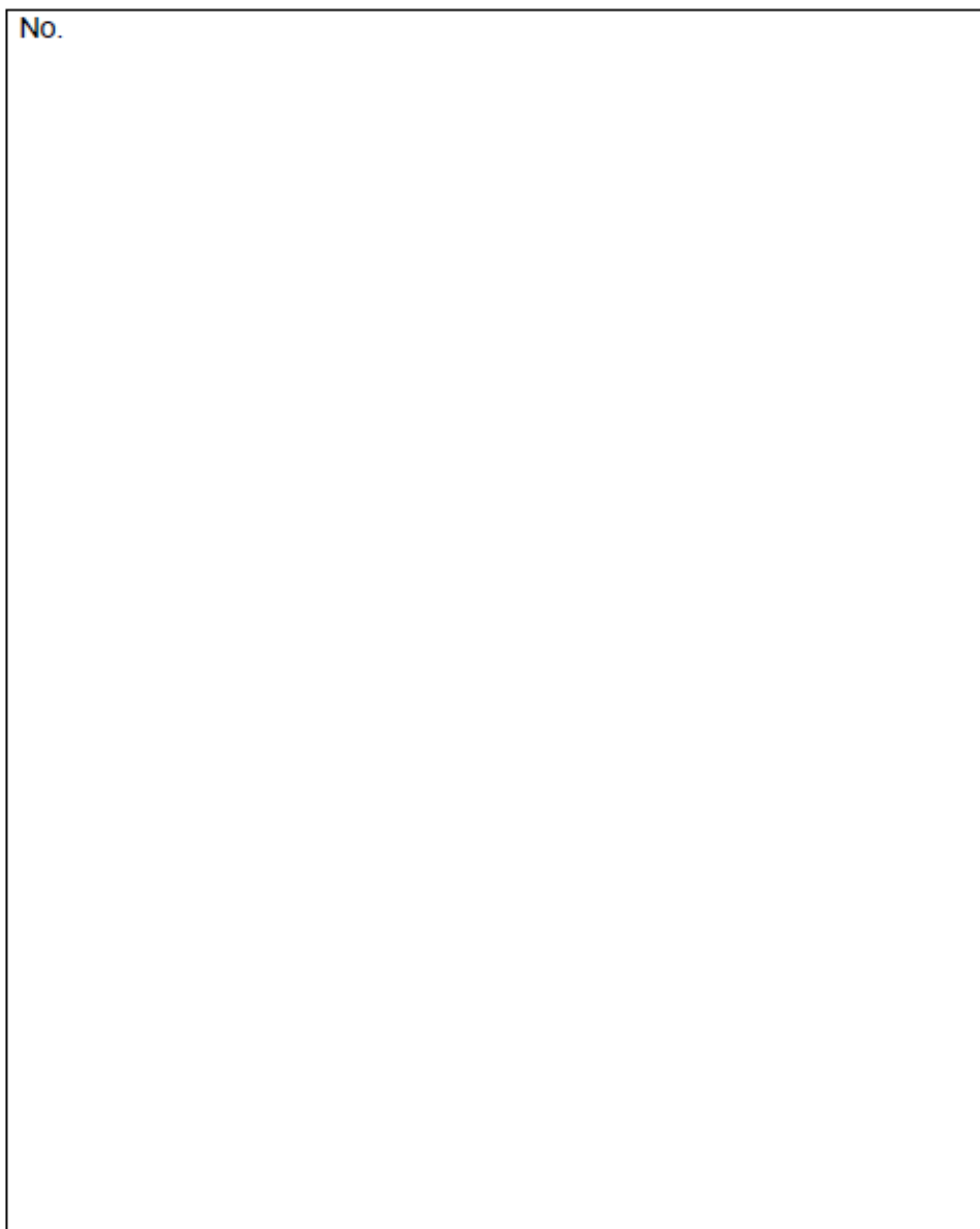
Please provide comments in the box below

In accounting for rural need, it is important to consider the needs of the rural economy and rural business.

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

Please provide comments in the box below

No.





CILIP Ireland  
Shantallow Library  
92 Racecourse Road  
Derry/Londonderry  
BT48 8DA

20<sup>th</sup> January 2016

Sustainable Rural Communities Branch  
Department of Agriculture and Rural Development  
Room 406 Dundonald House  
Upper Newtownards Road  
Ballymiscaw  
Belfast  
BT4 3SB

BY EMAIL ONLY: [ruralpolicy.branch@dardni.gov.uk](mailto:ruralpolicy.branch@dardni.gov.uk)

Dear Sir/Madam,

**Re: Public Consultation on Proposals for a Successor to DARD's Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework 2011-15**

We refer to the above matter and write to convey our support for the recently circulated proposals to address rural poverty and social isolation for the forthcoming five year period.

By way of background information CILIP Ireland represents members of CILIP (the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals) in Northern Ireland. It is the leading professional body for librarians, information specialists and knowledge managers within this jurisdiction. CILIP's vision is a fair and economically prosperous society underpinned by literacy, access to information and the transfer of knowledge.

As our funding comes from member subscriptions and our own commercial activity we are able to act as an independent voice of the profession reflecting the knowledge and expertise within our membership. CILIP is a registered charity, no. 313014 and more information about us can be found at <http://www.cilip.org.uk/about/devolved-nations/cilip-ireland>.

In our opinion it is crucial that the importance of the role played by libraries in enabling rural dwellers to fully engage with and participate in the democratic process in this jurisdiction is safeguarded. Furthermore it should be recognised that libraries enable the public in general to access a plethora of resources which may otherwise be beyond their reach and this in turn can improve the circumstances of their everyday lives. Clearly against this backdrop we consider it to be of primary importance to continue and indeed enhance the funding of rural libraries in the years ahead.

We believe that libraries in general and specifically in rural areas contribute to tackling social isolation and financial poverty through access to books, information, computers (digital inclusion) and trained professional staff.

They provision of a wide array of enrichment programmes covering a range of topics as diverse as ICT, mental health and Culture and Heritage and facilitate people in coming together to learn, gain knowledge and have an opportunity to socialise.

Additionally libraries in rural areas are viewed as:

- neutral, trusted spaces;
- social spaces and community hubs; and
- providers of better broadband access.

Libraries already provide access to a wide range of public services and CILIP Ireland recommends that public libraries are best placed to continue to deliver access to broadband services. This infrastructure is already established and must be complemented by digital skills training which supports rural dwellers to access these services.

We consider it important to highlight that in many cases such libraries are open when other facilities are either permanently closed or are incapable of offering a comparable range of opening hours to suit the community.

We strongly endorse the proposed aim of working together in partnership with key stakeholders to help tackle poverty and social isolation among vulnerable people living in rural areas. A collaborative approach will ensure measures of sufficient range and scope as to make a real difference can be delivered, especially in an environment of reduced funding in the public sector.

Clearly, as set out above, libraries are in a unique position to assist in the promotion of fair and equitable access to key services for all residents in rural areas which can help address access poverty in a meaningful and tangible fashion. Additionally libraries are currently heavily involved in initiatives championing health, well-being and inclusion for rural dwellers which is crucial in bridging the gap created by social isolation.

We are happy to discuss these matters in further detail. If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours Faithfully  
Gerardine Blee  
CILIP Ireland Development Officer  
[Gerardine.blee@cilip.org.uk](mailto:Gerardine.blee@cilip.org.uk)