



Department of

**Agriculture and
Rural Development**

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AN ROINN

**Talmhaíochta agus
Forbartha Tuaithe**

MÄNNYSTRIE O

**Fairms an
Kintra Fordèrin**

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

18 NOVEMBER 2015

CLOSING DATE FOR RESPONSES:

WEDNESDAY 20th JANUARY 2016, 5PM

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1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Introduction

- 1.1 This consultation document sets out the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's proposals for a successor to its Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) Framework 2011-15. Its purpose is to inform stakeholders and to seek their views on the proposals.

The TRPSI Framework

- 1.2 The TRPSI Framework is a DARD-led initiative 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.
- 1.3 The TRPSI Framework is one of a number of complementary rural initiatives led by DARD which are designed to help ensure that the needs of rural communities are addressed by government. It is the mechanism through which DARD has delivered the commitment in the Programme for Government 2011-15 to bring forward a £13 million package to tackle rural poverty and social and economic isolation. The current TRPSI Framework 2011-15 has built on DARD's previous anti-poverty programme delivered through its Rural Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Framework 2008-11. It was originally scheduled to operate during the period 2011-15 but was subsequently extended by one year to March 2016.
- 1.4 The TRPSI Framework uniquely focuses on the needs of the most vulnerable groups in rural areas. It allows DARD to combine the tools it has available to help tackle poverty and social isolation in rural areas (e.g. financial resources, staff resources, legislation, experience etc) with the financial resources and expertise of other public sector bodies and the local knowledge and skills provided by the rural community sector. It provides the flexibility necessary to address a range of poverty and social isolation issues and to target a broad

range of vulnerable groups. The TRPSI Framework also promotes the development of new and innovative approaches to address rural issues and encourages the mainstreaming of successful projects by government organisations. The TRPSI Framework provides a mechanism for DARD to work in partnership with other government Departments and other public sector organisations in seeking to tackle poverty and social isolation in rural areas more effectively.

The Proposals

- 1.5 The current TRPSI Framework ends in March 2016. DARD has developed proposals for a successor TRPSI Framework to operate in the period post-2016, subject to availability of funding. These proposals are set out in Sections 6 and 7 of the consultation document and include revised Aims, Objectives, Intended Outcomes and Key Principles for the Framework. They also include a draft outline Action Plan which proposes the types of measures which might be supported under the successor TRPSI Framework.
- 1.6 The proposals for a successor TRPSI Framework will be delivered beyond 2016 in the context of challenging budgetary pressures and a changing landscape that includes the proposed restructuring of the public sector with the planned establishment of new Departments and the implementation of community planning in the new local councils. It will also be delivered within the context of the new Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 including the local development strategies being developed under LEADER and the proposed Rural Needs Bill, which is being brought forward by DARD during 2015/16 to help ensure a greater focus by both central and local government on the needs of people in rural areas. Given the extent of the changes that are likely to impact on rural policy over the coming period, the focus of the draft outline Action Plan is the 2016/17 financial year, which will allow for the Plan to be updated as the various changes embed in preparation for the next budget period.

- 1.7 While it is proposed that the Action Plan would be supported by a budget similar to that available under the previous Framework, no budget has yet been secured for the post-2016 period. A key feature of the proposed successor TRPSI Framework is that it will support the operation and testing of pilot projects. It will also aim to maximise financial resources and expertise by aiming to bring together a cocktail of funding to support Actions.
- 1.8 In preparing these proposals DARD has taken into consideration the Strategic Investment Board's Report on the Evaluation of the current TRPSI Framework 2011-15 and the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee's Position Paper on DARD's Anti-Poverty and Social Isolation Programme. DARD has also held discussions with a range of stakeholder organisations.

The Consultation

- 1.9 The purpose of this consultation is to seek your views on the proposals for the successor TRPSI Framework as set out in Sections 6 and 7 of the consultation document. DARD is interested in the views of rural stakeholders and therefore would encourage you to respond to the consultation. Details of how to respond to the consultation are set out in Section 10 of this document. Please note that the consultation closes on **Wednesday 20th January** at **5pm**.

2. POLICY CONTEXT

- 2.1 The NI Executive acknowledges that no single Department has exclusive responsibility for rural areas and it is important that all government Departments acknowledge their responsibilities in rural areas. Most strategies and policies developed and implemented across government have a rural dimension or impact upon people living in rural areas.

Programme for Government 2011-15

2.2 The Programme for Government 2011-15 included a commitment for DARD to bring forward a £13 million package of measures to tackle poverty and social isolation in rural areas. This PfG commitment was delivered through DARD's current Tackling Poverty and Social Isolation Framework 2011-15. The proposed successor Framework will seek to build on this commitment by providing a framework to support a further package of pilot measures aimed at tackling poverty and social isolation in rural areas during the period of the next Programme for Government. The aim will be to test new models/approaches designed to address the rural aspects of poverty and social isolation, which could ultimately be mainstreamed by government organisations.

Delivering Social Change

2.3 Delivering Social Change is an Executive initiative which aims to deliver a sustained reduction in poverty and associated issues across all age groups and also seeks to secure an improvement in children and young people's health, well being and life opportunities with a view to breaking the long term cycle of multi-generational problems. It seeks to deliver its aims through Ministers and Departments working effectively together to implement a series of key actions across a range of social policy areas which have an impact on the ground. The TRPSI Framework aims to complement the Delivering Social Change initiative by tackling poverty in rural areas through a suite of measures aimed at addressing the needs of the vulnerable groups including the older people, children and young people.

DARD-led Rural Initiatives

Rural White Paper Action Plan

2.4 The Rural White Paper Action Plan is an Executive initiative which aims to provide a framework for the Executive to work effectively together in seeking

to address the main issues and challenges facing rural areas. The Rural White Paper Action Plan sets out both the Executive's vision and policy priorities for rural areas and includes over 90 actions from across all Departments covering a wide range of rural issues including rural broadband, healthcare, rural tourism, poverty and social inclusion, housing, rural transport and planning. A key policy priority is to seek to minimise, where it exists, disadvantage, poverty, social exclusion and inequality in rural areas particularly among vulnerable groups.

- 2.5 The TRPSI Framework is an important tool for the Executive in delivering this policy priority by providing a mechanism for Departments to work collaboratively to help alleviate the effects of poverty and social isolation among vulnerable rural dwellers.

Rural Proofing / Rural Champion

- 2.6 Rural proofing is a DARD-led initiative which aims to ensure the fair and equitable treatment of rural dwellers by seeking to ensure that rural needs and circumstances are considered as an integral part of the government policy making process. It requires Departments to evaluate the impact of government policy and public service delivery on rural communities and where appropriate to take action to mitigate against any detrimental impacts. It builds on the Rural Champion initiative which is aimed at addressing the specific needs of rural communities primarily through the championing of rural issues inside and outside government.

- 2.7 In order to enhance the existing rural proofing process, the Minister introduced the Rural Needs Bill into the Assembly on 9th November 2015. When enacted, the Bill will introduce a statutory duty on all Departments and local councils to consider the needs of rural dwellers when developing and implementing government policies and strategies and delivering public services. The Bill will also require departments and councils to compile, and make available in an open and transparent manner, information on how they have met that duty.

Rural Development Programme 2014-2020

2.8 The Rural Development Programme 2014-20 is supported through the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy. The European Union has three objectives for the development of our rural areas:

- improving competitiveness in the agriculture, food and forestry sectors;
- safeguarding and enhancing the rural environment; and
- fostering competitive and sustainable rural businesses and thriving rural communities.

2.9 Each region, within a Member State, can design their rural development programmes from a selection of the measures set out in the EU Rural Development Regulation. The North of Ireland has secured the EU Commission's approval for a programme of support taking into account the problems and needs identified for our rural areas.

3. OTHER GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT INITIATIVES

Making Life Better

3.1 Making Life Better led by (DHSSPS) is the strategic framework for public health. It is designed to provide direction for policies and actions to improve the health and wellbeing of people in the North of Ireland and to reduce inequalities in health. The framework builds on the former public health strategy 'Investing for Health' and retains a focus on the broad range of social, economic and environmental factors which influence health and wellbeing. The framework is not just about actions and programmes at government level – it also provides direction for work at both regional and local levels with public agencies, including local government, local communities and others working in partnership

Sport Matters

3.2 Sport Matters, the NI Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2009-2019, is a cross Departmental strategy led by DCAL which provides the policy context for sport and also seeks to deliver DCAL's wider priorities in the areas of equality and addressing poverty and social exclusion. Sport Matters, which was approved by the Executive in December 2009, contains twenty six high level targets to be achieved over the life of the strategy specifically aimed at improving Participation, Performance and Places for sport and so realising a wider strategic vision of '...a culture of lifelong enjoyment and success in sport...'. The Strategy sets out targets to support and work in partnership with other key stakeholders including other Government Departments, local authorities, other public bodies, sports governing bodies and local communities.

4. RATIONALE FOR THE FRAMEWORK

Why does DARD have a TRPSI Framework?

4.1 While poverty and social isolation exist in both urban areas and rural areas it is recognised that those living in rural areas often experience poverty and social isolation differently due to issues relating to geographical isolation, lower population density and the dispersed nature of many rural settlements. Living in a rural area can also exacerbate the effects of poverty and social isolation for certain groups. For example additional costs of living in a rural area such as higher fuel or transport costs can have a greater impact on people on low incomes while some groups such as young people or people with disabilities may experience greater difficulties accessing transport services in rural areas than in urban settings.

4.2 DARD recognises that no one single Department has responsibility for rural issues and that all Departments have functions which can contribute to

alleviating the impact of poverty and social isolation. The TRPSI Framework has been developed to provide a broad framework within which all Departments can work in collaboration to test new and innovative approaches to contribute to reducing poverty and social isolation in rural areas, particularly among vulnerable groups.

- 4.3 Tackling rural poverty and social isolation is a commitment in the current Programme for Government while minimising, where it exists, disadvantage, poverty, social exclusion and inequality in rural areas particularly among vulnerable groups is a key policy priority for the Executive in its Rural White Paper Action Plan. The evaluation of the TRPSI Framework 2011-15 undertaken by SIB concluded that the TRPSI Framework has been successful in supporting measures which help tackle access poverty, financial poverty and social isolation in rural areas and has resulted in real and tangible benefits for rural dwellers.

Access Poverty in Rural Areas

- 4.4 Many rural dwellers, particularly those living in more isolated rural areas, do not have the same level of access to services as those living in urban areas. Rural dwellers are therefore often required to travel longer distances to access basic services and this can be problematic for those who do not have access to transport provision. Poor or limited access to basic services disadvantages rural dwellers and increases the risk of social exclusion and isolation for some. Many vulnerable people have to rely on the help and support offered by family, friends, neighbours and community and voluntary organisations to avail of the most basic of services.
- 4.5 Lack of access to suitable transport can impact on rural dwellers' ability to access employment opportunities and can therefore be a barrier to escaping poverty. It can also contribute to social isolation among some rural dwellers by restricting access to social, cultural and leisure opportunities. Certain categories of people such as older people, young people and people with

disabilities can experience particular difficulties in relation to accessing transport due to an inability to drive or lack of access to a car.

- 4.6 Access to quality broadband is also essential for rural communities to maintain a good quality of life. It enables rural dwellers to access key services such as online banking and government information and online services available through NI Direct as well as training and employment opportunities. Access to good quality broadband can also help address social isolation and improve social interaction for rural dwellers.
- 4.7 The single most significant issue reported by stakeholders in a survey¹ in relation to doing business in rural areas relates to poor telephone and broadband coverage and service. Access to quality mobile phone and broadband services are therefore essential to enable rural businesses to be competitive, support economic development and create jobs in rural areas.
- 4.8 Access to flexible and affordable childcare is also important for rural dwellers, particularly for women, to allow them to access employment, education and training opportunities. Lack of access to flexible and affordable childcare can therefore act as a barrier to finding a way out of poverty, particularly to women living in rural areas, while closer integration between childcare and education/employment can assist women in re-entering the labour market and helping to sustain rural communities.

Financial Poverty in Rural Areas

- 4.9 Anecdotal evidence has suggested that the cost of living is more expensive in rural areas. Research² shows that the cost of a minimum essential standard of living was higher for rural households compared with their urban counterparts. The higher costs were linked to transport (and in particular to

¹ Jack and Patten, A Summary of key findings from a Rural Stakeholder Consultation on rural services in Northern Ireland (2013), Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute, 2013

² The Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice (2010) *Minimum Essential Budgets for Six Household Types in Rural Areas*.

the costs associated with running and maintaining a car, considered a necessity in rural areas where there is insufficient public transport) and to food with many rural households unable to readily access larger shops and avail of the comprehensive range of non branded items which are considerably less expensive than branded items. As a result, many rural dwellers pay more for food driving up their overall costs³. Fuel costs can also be higher in some rural areas because of older, less energy efficient housing and restricted options as regards choice of fuels.

4.10 According to the “Family Resources Survey Urban/Rural Report 2012/13” published by the Department of Social Development⁴ almost one in five individuals (19%) live in poor households, i.e. households with an income less than 60% of the 2012/13 UK median (340,300 individuals). When the DSD figures were broken down further it was found that after housing costs have been taken into account;

- 22% of children live in poor households;
- 19% of working age adults live in poor households;
- 14% of pensioners live in poor households.⁵

4.11 When the 2005 urban/rural classification is applied, it was found that for individuals, (after meeting housing costs), there is an east/west dimension to the risk of poverty, with the rural west having the highest risk of poverty⁶.

4.12 Almost a third (29%) of all people in poverty in the North of Ireland (before housing costs) live in the rural west. The rural west has the highest percentage of individuals living in relative poverty (before housing costs) at 24%, compared to 16% of people in the Belfast Metropolitan Urban Area and

³ Rural Poverty and Social Exclusion on the Island of Ireland – Context, Policies and Challenges , Dr. Kathy Walsh, 2010

⁴ Family Resources Survey Urban/rural Report 2012/13” , 2015 -, Department of Social Development available at http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/official_publication_draft_1213.pdf

⁵ Households Below Average Income Northern Ireland 2012-13, DSD, 2014 available at http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/hbai_1213.pdf

⁶ Risk of poverty is defined as the percentage of people that live in households experiencing relative income poverty. A household is in relative income property if the income is less than 60% of the UK median.

in the rural east, and a North of Ireland average of 19%. Households in the rural west have the lowest disposable incomes both before and after housing costs and although all areas have seen an overall decrease in median income since 2002/03, the greatest fall has been in rural areas⁷. Rural areas are also more likely to have bigger families (3 or more children). The rural west has the highest proportion of people with post office card accounts.

Social Isolation in Rural Areas

- 4.13 Some groups living in rural areas are at risk of social isolation due to various factors including the lack of access to transport, lack of disposable income, lack of accessible peer support networks⁸. Groups identified as being at risk include young people, older people, farmers, women, lone parents, disabled people, travellers, migrant workers, refugees and asylum seekers, victims of domestic violence as well as members of the gay, lesbian and transgender community. Research⁹ has found a clear link between isolation, stress, self harm and suicide in rural areas.
- 4.14 Caring responsibilities often isolate women, particularly those in rural areas who may become excluded from fully participating in social, economic and community-based activities. Farmers may also be at risk due to the increasing nature of long hours and lone working in farming as a result of the mechanisation of farming.

5. INFORMING THE SUCCESSOR FRAMEWORK

- 5.1 In preparing the proposals for the successor TRPSI Framework, DARD has taken into consideration the factors outlined below.

⁷ Family Resources Survey Urban/rural Report 2012/13", 2015 -, Department of Social Development available at http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/official_publication_draft_1213.pdf

⁸ Rural Poverty and Social Exclusion on the Island of Ireland – Context, Policies and Challenges , Dr. Kathy Walsh, 2010

⁹ Rural Community Network (2008) Poverty and Place: Defining Rural Poverty: An issues based approach, RCN, Northern Ireland.

ARD Committee Position Paper

5.2 The Agriculture and Rural Development (ARD) Committee published a Position Paper earlier this year following its 'review of the Department's Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Programme' (the TRPSI Framework) which makes a number of recommendations in relation to the successor TRPSI Framework. In its paper the Committee indicated that it is content with the current TRPSI Framework in terms of the approach taken to date. It also recognised the contribution which the voluntary and community sector has made to the success of TRPSI and recommends that the Department builds on the successes of the current TRPSI Framework drawing on the knowledge of rural community organisations to help inform and shape the new Framework. A copy of the Position Paper is available on the DARD website and can be accessed at www.dardni.gov.uk/consultations.

Evaluation of TRPSI Framework 2011-15

5.3 The Strategic Investment Board (SIB) was commissioned by DARD to undertake an independent evaluation of the TRPSI Framework 2011-15 which took place during the period April - July 2015. The Evaluation Report sets out a number of lessons learned which should be applied to any successor Framework together with a number of recommendations. These include the need for any future framework to have a greater focus on targeting the needs of rural dwellers, the need for the establishment of a wider forum for discussing rural poverty and social isolation issues and for more consideration to be given to how to ensure that successful projects are mainstreamed by other government organisations. A copy of the Evaluation Report is available on the DARD website and can be accessed at www.dardni.gov.uk/consultations.

Consultation with Key Stakeholders

5.4 The Department has engaged with a range of key stakeholders to help inform its thinking regarding a successor Framework. SIB has also engaged with a range of rural stakeholders as part of its evaluation of the current TRPSI Framework and these discussions have helped inform the lessons learned section in its Evaluation Report. Stakeholder organisations have reaffirmed their support for the TRPSI Framework stressing the important role it plays in tackling rural poverty and social isolation and the positive difference it has made to the lives of vulnerable rural dwellers through the wide range of measures funded under it.

6. PROPOSALS FOR A SUCCESSOR FRAMEWORK POST-2016

Aim of the Framework

6.1 It is proposed that the aim of the successor Framework would be:

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

Objectives of the Framework

6.2 It is proposed that the objectives of the successor Framework would be:

- To promote the development of new and innovative pilot approaches to tackling poverty and social isolation in rural areas;
- To encourage effective partnership working between DARD, other statutory bodies and public sector organisations and the rural community

sector in seeking to tackle poverty and social isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas;

- To encourage the design and delivery of pilot measures which effectively target financial poverty, access poverty and social isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas in line with the key principles of the Framework;
- To support pilot interventions which better target the funding and/or other resources available to target poverty and social isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas.

Intended Outcomes of the Framework

6.3 It is proposed that the intended outcomes for the successor Framework should be:

- A measurable improvement in the quality of life of vulnerable rural dwellers;
- Through pilot interventions, the availability of new models/approaches designed to address the rural aspects of poverty and social isolation which can be mainstreamed by government organisations;
- Better targeted resources available through a cocktail of funding to target poverty and social isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas;
- An increase in levels of knowledge, information and understanding in relation to the rural aspects of poverty and social isolation across government;
- Positive and effective engagement by rural communities in seeking to address poverty and social isolation issues within their areas.

Priority Areas for Intervention

6.4 It is proposed that the successor Framework would continue to focus on three Priority Areas for Intervention specified in the 2011-2015 TRPSI Framework, i.e. **Access Poverty**, **Financial Poverty** and **Social Isolation**, and will aim to support measures designed to address these priorities in rural areas.

6.5 **Access Poverty** - this priority aims to improve access to key services for vulnerable rural dwellers by supporting pilot interventions which;

- Improve urban-rural linkages eg through the provision of better transport and broadband services;
- improve access to key services (e.g. healthcare, education and training, leisure facilities, library services, childcare etc).

6.6 **Financial Poverty** – this priority aims to address financial poverty among vulnerable rural dwellers by supporting pilot interventions which:

- reduce household expenditure or other living costs (e.g. transport costs etc);
- increase household incomes; (e.g. through improved employability, employment opportunities, entrepreneurship, increased benefit uptake etc);
- address issues relating to the additional costs faced by people living in rural areas (e.g. fuel costs);
- address the barriers to escaping financial poverty (e.g. low qualifications, low skills, lack of access to affordable childcare, lack of access to quality jobs, disengagement, poor health etc);
- help alleviate the effects of financial poverty (e.g. food poverty, health problems, obesity among children, debt etc).

6.7 **Social Isolation** – this priority aims to address social isolation among vulnerable rural dwellers by supporting pilot interventions which:

- promote positive mental health and wellbeing;
- increase opportunities for social engagement (e.g. social activities, sport and leisure activities, cultural activities etc);
- provide support to groups at risk of social isolation (e.g. farmers, older people, people with disabilities, disengaged youth, etc).

Key Principles for the Framework

6.8 It is proposed that the following key principles will apply to the successor Framework:

- i. The Framework will focus on addressing the needs of rural communities through the delivery of outcomes based pilot programmes;
- ii. The Framework will promote the piloting of new and innovative approaches to tackling rural poverty and social isolation;
- iii. The Framework will encourage partnership working between Departments, other public sector organisations and the rural community sector;
- iv. The Framework will recognise the important role played by the rural community sector and the need to encourage rural community empowerment;
- v. The Framework will encourage the mainstreaming of successfully piloted projects and the development of suitable exit strategies;
- vi. The Framework will complement the Rural Proofing, Rural White Paper Action Plan and DARD's Rural Development Programme initiatives;
- vii. The Framework will promote sustainability through support for pilot projects which deliver long term benefits for rural communities;
- viii. The Framework will seek to promote equality and good relations in line with the Department's duties under Section 75;
- ix. The Framework will seek to complement the aims and objectives of other key government strategies relating to poverty and social isolation;
- x. The Framework will promote the sharing of information, learning and best practice between organisations;

- xi. The Framework will seek to complement the community planning process.

Target Groups

- 6.9 The current TRPSI Framework aims to target certain vulnerable groups, however the evaluation of the Framework indicates that it has been less successful in targeting some of these groups than others. Furthermore the evaluation identifies that some groups such as 'farmers' have been successfully targeted despite not having been specified as a specific target group while some stakeholders have questioned why 'women' were not specifically listed as a separate target group. Discussions with key stakeholders indicate that the list of target groups included in the 2011-15 TRPSI Framework risks being too prescriptive and may restrict the successor Framework's ability to target new groups.
- 6.10 It is proposed therefore that the successor Framework would have the flexibility to develop and test pilot measures aimed at addressing a wider range of target groups based on need rather than be restricted to targeting a specific 'Target Group' list as was the case under the previous Framework.
- 6.11 It is proposed that the vulnerable groups which can be supported by the successor Framework would include the following groups but that this list would not be prescriptive: The target groups listed below have been identified as being at risk of poverty and/or social isolation in rural areas however it is proposed that the successor Framework will retain the flexibility to target other groups which are identified on evidence of need as being at risk but which are not listed.
- Women
 - Farmers
 - People in work on low incomes (the working poor)
 - Children and Young People
 - Older People
 - Ethnic Minorities and Immigrants

- People with low skills and/or low levels of education
- Lone parents
- People with mental ill health
- People with disabilities
- The LGBT community
- People with caring responsibilities
- People who are unemployed or on benefits

Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation

- 6.12 A detailed Action Plan will be drawn up setting out the Department's proposals for implementing the successor Framework including details of the measures to be funded and the budget to be allocated in respect of each initiative during the budgetary period. The Action Plan will be updated to reflect any changes to the measures to be funded under the successor Framework and/or changes to budget allocations made during the period of the successor Framework.
- 6.13 Monitoring arrangements will be put in place in respect of individual pilot programmes funded under the successor Framework and will include regular updates on progress and expenditure. An annual update on the implementation of the successor Framework will be published in the Department's Annual Progress Report on the Rural White Paper Action Plan.
- 6.14 The Terms of Reference for the Interdepartmental Committee on Rural Policy (IDCRP) will be revised to include oversight of the implementation of the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework in line with the ARD Committee's recommendation in its Position Paper to develop an inter-departmental working group. It is proposed that a TRPSI Advisory Forum will also be established to advise on poverty and social isolation issues in rural areas.
- 6.15 Each individual programme funded under the successor Framework will be subject to an evaluation on completion of the programme. An evaluation of the

successor Framework will be undertaken prior to the development of any future Framework.

7. DRAFT ACTION PLAN 2016/17

- 7.1 The following draft Action Plan provides an outline of the types of measures which DARD proposes to support under the successor TRPSI Framework.
- 7.2 Details of measures funded under the current TRPSI Framework 2011-15 can be found at **Annex A**.

DRAFT

DRAFT ACTION PLAN – 2016-17

<p>Priority Area for Intervention</p>	<p>Examples of Initiative(s) that could be supported, subject to evidence of need and commitments from the appropriate partner organisations</p>
<p>Access Poverty – Promote fair and equitable access to key services for all rural dwellers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improve urban-rural linkages through the provision of better transport and broadband services; • improve access to key services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovative Health Solutions • Essential Skills support • Broadband solutions • Rural hub facilities • Social economy models for delivery of services
<p>Financial Poverty – Maximise household incomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reduce household expenditure or other living costs • increase household incomes • address issues relating to the additional costs faced by people living in rural areas • address the barriers to escaping financial poverty • help alleviate the effects of financial poverty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support and promote employability, employment and entrepreneurship opportunities. • Support access to and awareness of benefits and entitlements • Support household energy efficiency improvement • Support transport access and solutions
<p>Social Isolation – Promote tolerance, health, well-being and inclusion for rural dwellers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promote positive mental health and wellbeing; • increase opportunities for social engagement • provide support to groups at risk of social isolation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the promotion of mental health awareness and actions • Support health and well-being activities • Support community capacity, rural hubs and social inclusion activities

8. DEFINITIONS AND TERMINOLOGY

Rural

8.1 There is no single definition of what is meant by the term “rural”, however the NI Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) published a Report¹⁰ by the Inter-Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group in February 2005 that recommended that Government Departments and other users should consider defining urban and rural areas in ways that are appropriate for the specific programmes and projects under consideration. This review was updated in 2015.¹¹ In the absence of a programme-specific definition, the revised classification proposed that settlements with a population of 5,000 or less should be defined as rural. The review also considered service provision and categorised each settlement as within or outside 20 and 30 minute drive times of a medium or larger town with a population of 10,000 or more. On the basis of the revised definition, approximately 63% of the 1.8 million inhabitants live in urban areas and 37% (678,939) in rural areas¹² and 20% of the population live outside a 20 minute drive time of a medium or larger town¹³.

Low-income poverty

8.2 The NI Executive uses two main indicators of low-income poverty¹⁴, as defined in the Child Poverty Act 2010 and reflected in the NI Child Poverty Strategy. These indicators are relative and absolute poverty. These indicators combined with the low income and material deprivation indicator and the persistent poverty indicator provide the basis for measurable targets in the North of Ireland and Britain in relation to the Child Poverty Act 2010.

¹⁰ Report of the Inter-Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group: Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements, NISRA, February 2005

¹¹ Review of the Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements March 2015 <http://www.nisra.gov.uk/archive/geography/review-of-the-statistical-classification-and-delineation-of-settlements-march-2015.pdf>

¹² Derived from Table 2 of the Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements report

¹³ Table 1 of the Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements report

¹⁴ www.dsdni.gov.uk/ni_poverty_bulletin_201213.pdf

Relative poverty

8.3 An individual is considered to be in relative poverty if they are living in a household with an equivalised income below 60% of UK median income in the year in question. This is a measure of whether those in the lowest income households are keeping pace with the growth of incomes in the population as a whole. In 2012/13 the relative poverty threshold for a couple with no children was an income of £264 per week before housing costs (BHC) from all sources. For a couple with children the threshold would be higher and for a single person (without children) the threshold would be lower.

Absolute poverty

8.4 An individual is considered to be in absolute poverty if they are living in a household with an equivalised income below 60% of the (inflation adjusted) median income in 2010/11. This is a measure of whether those in the lowest income households are seeing their incomes rise in real terms. In 2012/13 the absolute poverty threshold for a couple with no children was an income of £272 per week (BHC).

Combined Low Income and Material Deprivation

8.5 A further poverty measure related to child poverty and included in the NI Child Poverty Strategy is the Combined Low Income and Material Deprivation measure. A child is defined as poor on this measure if the household in which they live has an income below 70% of the contemporary UK median household income and has a material deprivation score of 25 or more reflected by enforced lack of adult and child goods and services.

Social Isolation

8.6 Social isolation is characterized by a lack of contact with other people in normal daily living—in the workplace, with friends, and in social activities. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), social isolation is “both a symptom and a cause of social distress.” It

may follow a difficult event in a person's life—the loss of a job, the breakdown of a marriage, illness or financial difficulties.

- 8.7 Feelings of isolation can, in turn, make it difficult for that individual to reintegrate socially and can have serious consequences: “Social isolation can be a downward spiral: feelings of exclusion affect morale, can impact on a person's mental health and lack of contacts with other people may reduce both social and economic opportunities.¹⁵” Research has shown that loneliness and isolation are associated with poor physical as well as mental health¹⁶ and with a significantly increased risk of mortality¹⁷
- 8.8 Feelings of social isolation may be exacerbated by the areas where people live. Individuals may experience poor housing, high unemployment and low incomes. They may also find that there are barriers to them accessing goods and services that are available to others in society such as access to public transport, health services, benefits etc, something that is more prevalent in rural areas. Again this isolation may be as a direct result of poverty/lack of income, the place that they live, or as this framework recognises, a combination of both.

9. EQUALITY AND RURAL PROOFING

- 9.1 DARD has carried out the following screening exercises on the proposals for a successor TRSPI Framework:

¹⁵ SOCIETY AT A GLANCE: OECD SOCIAL INDICATORS 2005 EDITION – I 82 SBN 92-64-00712-1 – © OECD 2005

¹⁶ Age UK (2015) *Loneliness and Isolation Evidence Review*, London, Age UK, available at : http://www.ageuk.org.uk/documents/en-gb/for-professionals/evidence_review_loneliness_and_isolation.pdf?dtrk=true

¹⁷ Holt Lundstad, J, Smith, T, Baker, M, Harris, T and Stephenson, D, (2015) *Loneliness and Social Isolation as Risk Factors for Mortality: A Meta-Analytic Review*, Washington, Perspectives on Psychological Science 2015, Vol. 10(2) 227–237 available at: <http://pps.sagepub.com/content/10/2/227.full.pdf+html>

- Equality and Human Rights – to assess the potential impacts on section 75 groups, human rights implications and opportunities for promoting good relations; and
- Rural Issues Statement – to assess the potential impacts of a policy on people living in rural areas.

9.2 The screening documents are available to download at www.dardni.gov.uk/consultations.

9.3 Based on the evidence considered in these screening exercises, DARD has concluded that further assessments of impacts are not required (i.e. the policy has been screened out).

9.4 It is proposed that an Equality Screening will be undertaken in respect of each individual programme delivered under the successor TRPSI Framework and, where appropriate, full EQIAs will be carried out by the lead public authority.

9.5 It is also proposed that Equality Monitoring will be undertaken in respect of each individual programme funded under the successor TRPSI Framework at the earliest opportunity in line with the Report on the evaluation of the current TRPSI Framework.

10. RESPONDING TO THE CONSULTATION

10.1 DARD welcomes any comments you wish to make on the proposals outlined in the consultation.

10.2 Section 11 provides questions which you can use to respond to us. These are included in the Consultation Response Template provided on the DARD website at www.dardni.gov.uk/consultations . You may also provide additional comments you may have on issues mentioned in this document.

10.3 You can respond to the consultation by e-mail to:
ruralpolicy.branch@dardni.gov.uk

or by writing to the address below:

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

- 10.4 To request a hard copy, or an alternative format, of the consultation papers please write or e-mail as detailed above, or telephone **028 9052 4488** or textphone **028 9052 4420**. This consultation document (including the Consultation Response Template) is available on the DARD website at: www.dardni.gov.uk/consultations .
- 10.5 Please note that the deadline for responses to this consultation is **Wednesday 20th January 2016, 5:00pm**. All responses should be received by then to ensure they can be fully considered.

Freedom of Information

- 10.6 In line with the Department's policy of openness at the end of the consultation period, copies of the responses we receive may be made publicly available. The information they contain may also be published in a summary of responses, which will be placed on the internet at www.dardni.gov.uk/index/index/consultations.htm.
- 10.7 This summary will include a list of names of organisations or sectors that responded but not personal names, addresses or other contact details.
- 10.8 If you do not consent to this, you must explicitly request that your response be treated confidentially detailing your reasons for this request. Any

confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system in e-mail responses will not be treated as such a request.

- 10.9 You should also be aware that there might be circumstances in which we will be required to communicate information to third parties on request, in order to comply with our obligations under Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004. For further information about confidentiality of responses, please contact the Information Commissioner's Office, or visit their website at www.ico.org.uk

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11. CONSULTATION RESPONSE TEMPLATE

11.1 DARD welcomes any comments you wish to make on any of the proposals outlined in the consultation. You can respond to this consultation using the template below.

1. Name / Organisation

Organisation Name (If applicable).

Title Mr Ms Mrs Miss Dr Please tick as appropriate

Surname

Forename

2. Postal Address

Postcode

Phone No,

E-mail

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

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

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

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

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the user to provide their comments on the effectiveness of the draft Action Plan measures.

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

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the user to provide details on any further measures to address Access Poverty.

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

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the respondent's answer to question 6(a). A large, light grey watermark reading "DRAFT" is oriented diagonally across the box.

(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

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the respondent's answer to question 6(b). A large, light grey watermark reading "DRAFT" is oriented diagonally across the box.

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

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the user to provide their comments on the effectiveness of the draft Action Plan measures.

(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

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the user to provide details on other measures to address social isolation.

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



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

Please provide comments in the box below



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

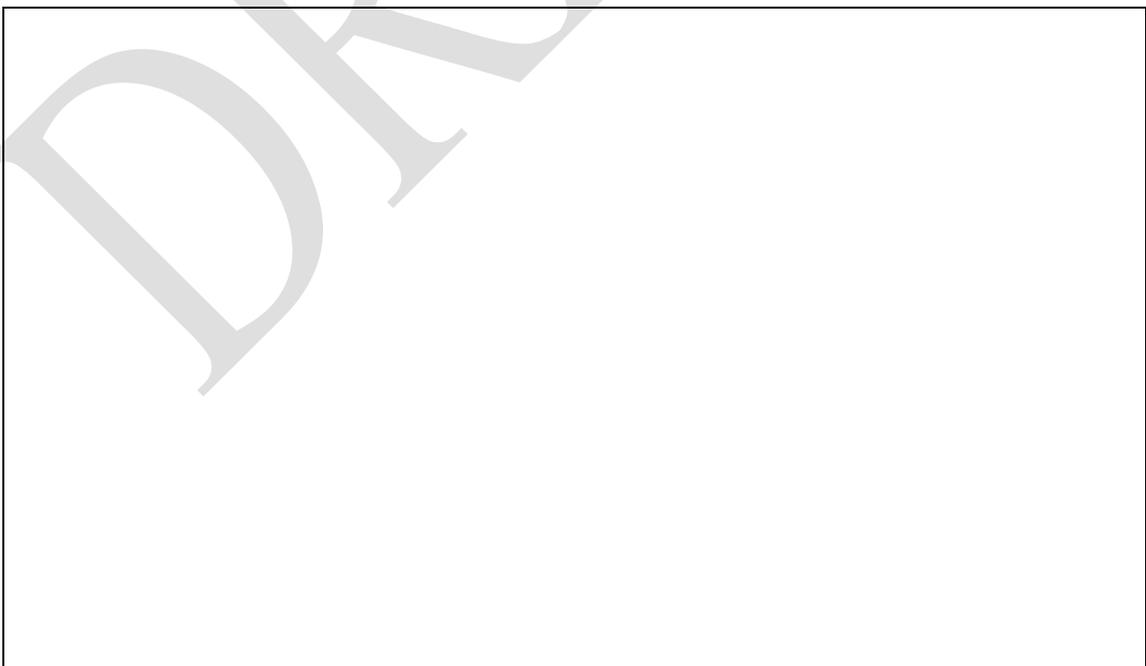
(i) The Equality and Human Rights Template

Please provide comments in the box below



(ii) The Rural Issues Statement

Please provide comments in the box below



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

Please provide comments in the box below

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ANNEX A - SUMMARY OF MEASURES FUNDED UNDER THE TRPSI FRAMEWORK 2011-15

Assisted Rural Travel Scheme (ARTS) – A joint programme by DARD and DRD through which passengers with a valid SmartPass can travel free or half fare on the Dial-a-Lift services provided by the Rural Community Transport Partnerships.

BOOST (Rural Youth Employability) – A joint programme by DARD and DEL which aims to reduce economic inactivity among unemployed rural young people by helping them to gain the core skills needed for employment and by addressing barriers to employment such as the lack of skills/qualifications, lack of self-confidence and lack of employment support.

Rural Borewells Scheme – A joint programme by DARD and DRD to provide financial assistance towards the construction of a private borewell (and installation of appropriate treatment works) to enable applicants to obtain a wholesome water supply in rural areas where accessing the public water mains is not technically or financially possible

Connecting Elderly Rural Isolated (CERI) – A joint programme by DARD and the Western Health and Social Care Trust to address social isolation for vulnerable older people living in rural areas within catchment area, with a focus on health promotion, healthy lifestyles and supporting independent living.

Farm Families Health Checks – A joint programme by DARD and the Public Health Agency (PHA) to improve the health and social wellbeing of farmers and farm families by increasing local access to health screening services, by providing health related advice and information and to signpost to existing services for further advice and support.

Health in Mind – A joint programme between DARD and Libraries NI to promote positive mental health through reading, learning and information activities.

Libraries in a Box – A joint programme between DARD and Libraries NI to trial the idea of a small, self service library facility in community buildings in 3 rural areas which don't have a library building and depend on the mobile library service.

Maximising Access Rural Areas Project (MARA) – A joint programme between DARD and the Public Health Agency to improve the health and well being of rural dwellers in Northern Ireland by increasing access to services, grants and benefits by facilitating a co-ordinated service to support rural dwellers living in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

Fuel Poverty (Power NI) – A joint programme between DARD and DSD to help alleviate rural fuel poverty by supplementing the Power NI Free Loft Insulation scheme, reduce heating costs and create warmer, more comfortable homes for vulnerable rural households in Northern Ireland.

Rural Challenge Programme - A small grants programme run by DARD to provide rural community and voluntary groups with grant aid of up to £5,000 to deliver a wide range of projects which aimed to address local poverty and/or social isolation issues.

Rural Community Development (Rural Support Networks) – A programme to ensure regional coverage and local delivery of rural community development support across Northern Ireland.

Community Development (Rural Enablers) - A programme run by DARD to support individuals and communities in rural areas by improving their economic and social sustainability.

Rural Support - A programme run by DARD to provide a range of support services to rural communities including a telephone helpline service for rural residents.

RYE NI (Rural Youth Enterprise) - A joint programme by DARD and DEL which aims to promote growth by developing business creation potential among vulnerable young people.

Fuel Poverty (Warm Homes) - A joint programme between DARD and DSD which aims to supplement the Warm Homes Plus Scheme by enabling the provision of whole house solutions for rural “Hard to Treat” homes.

Rural Broadband – A programme designed to improve the quality of broadband in rural areas.

LGBT Research - A rural research project aimed at identifying issues around poverty and social isolation affecting the LGBT Community in rural areas.