



Rural White Paper Action Plan

Annual Progress Report 2015



Department of
**Agriculture and
Rural Development**

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AN ROINN
**Talmhaíochta agus
Forbartha Tuaithe**

MÁNNYSTRIE O
**Fairms an
Kintra Fordèrin**

30 June 2015

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Foreword by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development



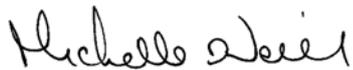
I am pleased to present the 2015 Annual Progress Report on the Rural White Paper Action Plan. The Annual Progress Report details the progress made by Departments on implementing a broad range of initiatives in rural areas within the framework of the Rural White Paper Action Plan. This is the third annual progress published since I launched the Action Plan back in 2012 and it demonstrates that good progress continues to be made by all departments in delivering their commitments.

The Rural White Paper Action Plan was developed to provide a framework for the Executive to work together in seeking to address key issues and challenges facing our rural communities. I am pleased therefore to note the number of cross Departmental initiatives referenced in the report. My Department has continued to work in partnership with the Public Health Agency in rolling out both the 'Maximising Access Rural Areas' initiative and the 'Farm Family Health Checks' programme and the case studies included in the DHSSPS review highlight the benefits these have provided for rural dwellers. DARD has also been working closely with DCAL on promoting positive mental health in rural areas through its 'Health in Mind' project and in helping to improve access to library services in rural areas. DARD has also been engaging with DSD to ensure that the regional support structures for the Voluntary and Community Sector continue to have a strong rural component.

The Rural White Paper Action Plan is one of a number of rural initiatives which I am leading on which aim to help deliver better outcomes for rural dwellers. I am currently developing a successor to the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework 2011-15 which will build on the work that has already been done to help reduce the effects of poverty and social isolation on vulnerable rural dwellers, particularly in the context of the current economic climate. Under the Rural Development Programme there will be opportunities to help support rural dwellers, particularly through Leader where support will be targeted at the needs identified by local action groups and linked to the wider community planning process being brought forward by councils. I have also been working to help strengthen rural proofing and have introduced a Rural Needs Bill to the Assembly which, if passed, would make it a statutory requirement for Departments and local

councils to consider rural needs in the development of policy and the delivery of public services.

I would like to thank all those who have contributed to the success of the Rural White Paper Action Plan since it was first launched. Our rural communities are facing even greater challenges due to the impact of reduced budgets on the delivery of public services and changes to the welfare system and it is therefore important that Departments continue to focus on the needs of rural areas. I remain committed to working with my Executive colleagues within the framework of the Rural White Paper Action Plan to bring forward new actions which will help improve the quality of life for rural dwellers.



Michelle O'Neill MLA
Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development

Réamhrá An Aire Talmhaíochta Agus Forbartha Tuaithe



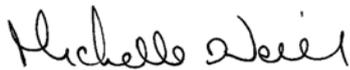
Tá áthas orm Tuarascáil Bhliantúil ar Dhul Chun Cinn Phlean Gnímh Tuaithe an Pháipéir Bháin 2015 a chur i láthair. Tugann an Tuarascáil Bhliantúil ar Dhul Chun Cinn eolas faoin dul chun cinn atá déanta ag na Ranna ar réimse leathan tionscnamh a chur i bhfeidhm i gceantair tuaithe laistigh de chreatlach Phlean Gnímh Tuaithe an Phaipéir Bháin. Seo an tríú tuarascáil bhliantúil ar dhul chun cinn atá foilsithe ó sheol mé an Plean Gnímh sa bhliain 2012 agus léiríonn sí go bhfuil dul chun cinn maith á dhéanamh go fóill ag gach Roinn i gcomhlíonadh a gcoimíntí.

Forbraíodh Plean Gnímh Tuaithe an Pháipéir Bháin le creatlach a chur a fáil don Fheidhmeannas comhoibriú le chéile agus iad ag iarraidh tabhairt faoi na príomhcheisteanna agus na príomhdhúshláin atá ag ár bpobail tuaithe. Mar sin de, tá áthas orm an méid tionscnamh trasrannach a ndéantar tagairt dóibh sa tuarascáil a nótaíl. Leanann mo Roinn ar aghaidh obair a dhéanamh i gcomhar leis an Ghníomhaireacht Sláinte Poiblí an tionscnamh ‘Maximising Access Rural Areas’ agus an clár ‘Farm Family Health Checks’ a sheoladh agus cuireann na cás-staidéir in athbhreithniú RSSSSP béim ar na tairbhí a bhí acu seo do chónaitheoirí tuaithe. Bhí RTFT ag obair go dlúth le RCEF fosta sláinte meabhrach dhearfach a chur chun cinn i gceantair tuaithe trína tionscadal ‘Health in Mind’ agus an rochtain ar sheirbhísí leabharlainne i gceantair tuaithe a fheabhsú. Bhí RTFT ag obair le RFS chun cinntiú go bhfuil míreanna láidre tuaithe i struchtúir tacaíochta réigiúnaí na hEarnála Deonaí agus Pobail go fóill.

Tá Plean Gnímh Tuaithe an Pháipéir Bháin ar cheann den roinnt tionscnamh tuaithe lena bhfuil mé ag plé chun tosaigh a bhfuil aidhm aige cuidiú le torthaí níos fearr do chónaitheoirí tuaithe a bhaint amach. Tá mé ag forbairt an tionscnaimh a bheidh mar chomharba ar ‘Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework 2011-15’, a fhorbróidh an obair atá déanta cheana féin le héifeachtaí na bochtaineachta agus an uaignis shóisialta ar chónaitheoirí tuaithe leochaileacha a laghdú, go háirithe i gcomhthéacs na gcúrsaí eacnamaíochta reatha. Faoin Chlár Forbairt Tuaithe, beidh deiseanna ann chun tacú le cónaitheoirí tuaithe, go háirithe tríd Leader mar a ndíreofar an tacaíocht ar na riachtanais aitheanta ag grúpaí gnímh áitiúla agus ceangailte le próiseas pleanála don ghnáthphobal i gcoitinne atá á dtabhairt chun cinn ag na comhairlí. Bhí mé ag obair ar phrofú tuaithe a neartú fosta agus thug mé Bille Riachtanais Tuaithe isteach

sa Tionól, ina mbeadh sé ina riachtanas reachtúil do Ranna agus do chomhairlí áitiúla machnamh a dhéanamh ar riachtanais tuaithe i bhforbairt polasaí agus i soláthar seirbhísí poiblí, dá rithfí é.

Ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghabháil leo go léir a chuidigh le rath Phlean Gnímh Tuaithe an Pháipéir Bháin óna chéad seoladh. Tá níos mó dúshlán ag ár bpobail tuaithe de dheasca thionchar na mbuiséad laghdaithe ar sholáthar seirbhísí poiblí agus ar na hathruithe ar an chóras leasa shóisialaigh. Mar sin de, tá sé tábhachtach go ndírionn na Ranna ar riachtanais cheantair tuaithe go fóill. Tá mé tiomanta don chomhoibriú fós idir mo chomhghleacaithe Feidhmeannais laistigh de chreatlach Phlean Gnímh Tuaithe an Pháipéir Bháin, gníomhartha nua a chur i láthair a chuideoidh le caighdeán saoil chónaitheoirí tuaithe a fheabhsú.



Michelle O'Neill CTR
Aire Talmhaíochta agus Forbartha Tuaithe

Forethocht Frae Tha Männystèr O Fairms An Kintra Fordèrin



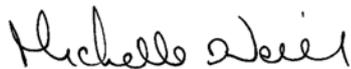
A'm fain tae pit forrit tha 20an15 Towmond Oncum Fynnin anent tha Lannwart White Paiper Jeein Rede. Tha Towmond Oncum Fynnin gies wut o tha oncum o tha Männystries adae wi implimentin a hale clattèr o ingangs in lannwart airts athin tha set o tha Lannwart White Paiper Jeein Rede. This wad be tha thurd towmond oncum fynnin ootset frae A blezzint tha Jeein Rede bak in 20an12 an it maks it plain 'at aa tha männystries is haudin tae guid fordèrin in throchin thair thirlins.

Tha Lannwart White Paiper Jeein Rede wus graithed furtae gie wisin fur tha Heich Cooncil tae neibor wi ither tae leuk tae yokk til heid maittèrs an hobbles oor lannwart resydentèr curns is rinnin agane. Syne A'm hert-gled tae remark tha wheen o athort-Männystrie ingangs mintit at in tha fynnin. Ma Männystrie haes hauden tae neiborin wi tha Apen Poust Agentrie in trinnlin oot baith tha 'Eikin til Ingang Lannwart Airts' innin an tha 'Fairm Femlie Poust Bakspeirs' ontak, an tha preein learins taen intil tha MPRHFS scance gies a rowth o wut o tha guid o thaim fur yins leevin in lannwart airts. Forbye, MFKF haes bin neiborin pack wi MFAA oan priggin fowks' evenliness o mine in lannwart pairts throch its 'Poust in Mine' ploy an in giein a hize wi fordèrin ingang til bibliothek fennin in lannwart airts. Forbye, MFKF haes bin trokin wi MRH furtae mak siccar 'at tha kintra-pairt fennin steidins fur tha Free-warkin an Resydentèr Shaidin hauds tae haein a namelie lannwart pairt.

Tha Lannwart White Paiper Jeein Rede bes yin o a wheen o lannwart ingangs 'at A'm wisin, 'at mints at giein a hize wi throchin bettèr ootcums fur yins leevin in lannwart pairts. Thenoo, A'm graithin a ploy 'at's haed ootower frae tha Yokkin til Lanwart Puirtith an Resydentèr Misslieness Ontak 20an11 tae 15 which wull bigg oan tha wark 'at's daen aareadie furtae gie a hize wi brìngin doon tha fecks o puirtith an misslieness oan aisie smit crettèrs leevin in lannwart pairts, maist o aa in tha set o things thenoo adae wi siller. Unnèr tha Lannwart Oncum Ontak thair wull be inlats tae gie a hize wi fennin yins leevin in lannwart airts, maist o aa throch 'Leader' whar fennin wull be mintit at tha waants ootwalit wi jeein curns in ilka airt an claught wi tha braider resydentèr etlin patent tha cooncils is fordèrin. Forbye, A hae bin warkin tae gie a hize wi makking lannwart happin mair stieve an hae brocht in a Lannwart Waants B'ill tae tha Semmlie which, gin it's homologatit, wud

mak it a maun-dae unnèr tha laa fur Männystries an cooncils in ilka airt tae hae mine o lannwart waants in graithin ontaks an thochin apen fennin.

A'm ableeged til aa tha yins 'at haes inpit til cummin speed wi tha Lannwart White Paiper Jeein Rede frae it wus blezzint at tha furst. Oor lannwart resydentèr curns is rinnin agane mair muckle hobbles yit, oan accoont o tha feck o inlaikit siller-ploys oan tha ootpit o apen fennin an cheynges til tha gates o weelfarity an syne it recks gyely 'at Männystries hauds tae takkin richt tent o tha waants o lannwart airts. A'm thirlt yit tae warkin wi ma Heich Cooncil billies athin tha set o tha Lannwart White Paiper Jeein Rede, furtae tak forrit new daeins 'at wull gie a hize wi fordèrin tha kine o leevin fur lannwart resydentèrs.



Michelle O'Neill MLS
Männystèr o Fairms an Kintra Fordèrin

Introduction

This is the third Annual Progress Report on the implementation of the Rural White Paper Action Plan which was launched in June 2012. This report covers the period up to 30th June 2015 and provides an update on the progress by Departments in implementing the actions contained in the Action Plan. The second Annual Progress Report was published on the DARD website in December 2014.

The Annual Progress Report is an important part of the monitoring process for the Rural White Paper Action Plan and provides the formal record of progress made by each Department in implementing its commitments in the Action Plan. It also includes a short narrative report by each Department outlining the benefits which the implementation of the Action Plan has had for our rural communities and our rural areas.

This Annual Progress Report 2015 should be read in conjunction with the Rural White Paper Action Plan¹.

Background

The Rural White Paper Action Plan is the outcome of an Executive initiative led by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development which aims to identify and seek to address the key challenges facing rural communities. It was developed in close consultation with the Rural White Paper Stakeholder Advisory Group, comprising of a range of rural stakeholders including representatives from the agricultural, environmental, local government, equality and rural community sectors. The Interdepartmental Committee on Rural Policy also played a key role in the development of the Action Plan.

The Rural White Paper Action Plan was formally approved by the Executive in May 2012 and launched by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development on 28th June 2012. The document sets out the Executive's commitments in rural areas and is the first rural initiative here to include commitments by all government departments. These commitments cover a wide range of rural issues across five broad themes namely, urban-rural linkages, rural communities, rural economies, access to services and the countryside.

The Rural White Paper Action Plan also sets out the Executive's vision for rural areas and a number of key policy priorities. These policy priorities include minimising disadvantage, poverty and social exclusion where they exist in rural areas, promoting fair and equitable access to key services for all rural dwellers, supporting the development of an efficient transport and infrastructure system that facilitates effective urban rural linkages and providing rural businesses with appropriate support to ensure the development of dynamic and innovative rural businesses.

¹ <https://www.dardni.gov.uk/publications/rural-white-paper-action-plan-and-progress-reports>

Each department is committed to implementing its respective actions within the timeframes specified in the Action Plan and within existing budgets. The monitoring arrangements agreed by the Executive provide for the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to undertake routine monitoring of the implementation of the Action Plan and to report back to the Executive by means of an Annual Progress Report. The second Annual Progress Report was published on the DARD website in December 2014.

Review of Progress by Departments

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

DARD's vision is *a thriving and sustainable rural economy, community and environment to promote social and economic equality*. To meet this vision the Department aims to work with stakeholders, build partnerships, tackle disadvantage and value its staff; strive to work efficiently, respond quickly to change and focus on achieving sustainable outcomes. This involves helping the agri-food industry prepare for future market opportunities and economic challenges; improving the lives of farmers and other rural dwellers targeting resources where they are most needed; enhancing animal, fish and plant health and animal welfare on an all Ireland basis; helping to deliver improved sustainable environmental outcomes; and managing our business and delivering services to our customers in a cost effective way.

Key policy issues for DARD in 2014-15 included:

- Successfully progressing our case with the European Commission to achieve Officially Brucellosis Free (OBF) status thereby enabling us to progressively relax our brucellosis controls and secure substantial savings to both taxpayers and the industry.
- Assisting the fishing and aquaculture industries prepare for future market opportunities and economic, environmental and social challenges presented by the reformed Common Fisheries Policy.
- Continuing roll-out of the NI Rural Development Programme (NIRDP) 2007-2013, including significant investment in economic, environmental, social and industry competitiveness measures.
- Continuing development and formal submission to the European Commission of the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 with an Executive approved budget of up to £623m in line with the Europe 2020 strategic objectives of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.
- Finalising Pillar 1 policy decisions arising from the reforms agreed in 2013 to the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and providing close policy support for the implementation of the CAP Direct Payments support regime implemented in 2015.
- Working closely with DETI and other relevant Government partners to implement the actions outlined in the Executive Response to Going for Growth which was published in October 2014.
- Continuing to work with the Agri-Food Strategy Board and industry partners to progress actions to support the development of a sustainable, profitable and integrated supply chain.

- Working with the industry and political stakeholders at home, in the south, Britain and in Brussels to address the impact of difficult market conditions across a range of agri-food sectors, including the beef, lamb and dairy sectors.
- Establishing a Government / Industry TB Strategic Partnership Group (TBSPG) to develop a long term strategy to eradicate TB from the cattle population.

Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation

A key priority for DARD in the Rural White Paper Action Plan is to tackle poverty and social isolation in rural areas, particularly amongst vulnerable groups. DARD's Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) Framework supports a package of measures worth up to £20 million to support vulnerable people in rural communities and to target the root causes of social isolation. A total of £17.5 million has been spent in the period up to June 2015 under a diverse range of measures. These measures are delivered in partnership with other organisations and aim to complement other poverty and isolation initiatives and actions undertaken by government. The following initiatives are supported under the TRPSI Framework.

Maximising Access Rural Areas (MARA) Project

DARD supports the delivery of the Maximising Access Rural Areas (MARA) Project in conjunction with the Public Health Agency (PHA). The MARA Project aims to improve the health and wellbeing of people living in rural areas 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 isolation. The initiative provides for trained MARA enablers to visit vulnerable households to assist them in obtaining a range of benefits, grants and services of which they may be eligible for but not otherwise be aware. More details on the operation of this project are provided in the Review of Progress by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

Farm Family Health Checks Programme

DARD operates a Farm Family Health Checks Programme in conjunction with the PHA and the Northern Health and Social Services Trust. This innovative project offers a means for farmers and their families to access health checks through a mobile unit which is available at local markets and community events. It offers on-the-spot health checks consisting of blood pressure monitoring, BMI, cholesterol check and diabetic screening. The project has been instrumental in improving the health and social wellbeing of rural farmers and farm families by increasing local access to health screening services, by providing health related advice and information and through signposting to existing services for further advice and support. More details on the operation of this project are provided in the Review of Progress by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

Assisted Rural Travel Scheme

The Assisted Rural Travel Scheme (ARTS) is a joint initiative between DARD and the Department for Regional Development (DRD) which aims to address the issue of access to transport services in rural areas. The Scheme is delivered by the Rural Community Transport Partnerships (RCTPs) which cover all rural areas. Under the ARTS initiative, 'SmartPass holders' (over 60s and disabled people) in rural areas can avail of free and concessionary (half fare) transport via the Rural Community Transport Partnership services. The popularity in this Scheme has been huge and has enabled any passengers with a valid SmartPass to travel free or half fare on the Dial-a-Lift services provided by the Rural Community Transport Partnerships. To date 771,602 trips have been funded under the ARTS Scheme.

Rural Support

DARD provides funding for 'Rural Support', a charitable organisation that provides a listening and signposting service for farmers and rural dwellers. Rural Support has 36 trained volunteers who provide support through a confidential helpline. This service helps farmers and rural dwellers access information and advice on a wide range of issues including personal and business finance, farm finance and debt, inheritance and succession issues, family relationships, isolation and healthcare matters.

Rural Community Development

DARD funds the Rural Support Networks for the purpose of helping to build capacity of community and voluntary groups in rural areas and to assist such groups in benefitting from various funding opportunities such as the Rural Development Programme and Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation initiatives. The membership of the Networks is predominately rural and includes a wide range of community and voluntary sector organisations including community groups, the social economy sector, play groups, farmers, women, young people, people with disabilities and older people etc. Over 850 community and voluntary groups are affiliated to the various Rural Support Networks.

Connecting Elderly Rural Isolated (CERI)

Connecting Elderly Rural Isolated (CERI) is a programme funded by DARD to address social isolation for elderly rural dwellers in the Western Trust area. The programme is operated in conjunction with the WHSCT/PHA and has a focus on health promotion, healthy lifestyles and supporting independent living. CERI has facilitated a range of activities including attendance at health awareness and improvement events, ICT classes, luncheon clubs and various other group activities which help to reduce social isolation for vulnerable older people in rural areas. Over 85,000 contacts have been made under the programme to date.

Youth Employability and Entrepreneurship Programmes

DARD funded a Youth Employability Programme (BOOST) in conjunction with DEL. This Programme helped to reduce economic inactivity among young people in rural areas by addressing barriers to employment. The BOOST Youth Employability Programme worked 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. A total of 1,355 participants have been supported by BOOST and have received Federation of Small Businesses certificates in recognition of the skills developed through the Programme. This Programme closed on 31 March 2015.

DARD also supports the Rural Youth Entrepreneurship (RYE) Programme which has been designed to contribute to local, regional and national rural economic growth by developing business creation potential among young people across the north. Through upskilling, networking, mentoring and sharing ideas, RYE creates the foundations for the development of future rural businesses. To date over 700 young people have been engaged in the RYE Programme.

Fuel Poverty

DARD has worked in partnership with other government departments and energy stakeholders to help alleviate rural fuel poverty. To achieve this, DARD provided supplementary funding support to the DSD Warm Homes Schemes (including Affordable Warmth) enabling the provision of whole house energy efficiency solutions for additional low income rural households. DARD also provided supplementary ring-fenced rural funding to the Power NI Free Cavity and Loft Insulation Schemes which were managed by Power NI targeting low income households. These schemes were approved and were also supported under the NI Sustainable Energy Programme (NISEP) which the Utility Regulator co-ordinates. A total of 2,125 additional vulnerable rural households have been provided with energy efficiency improvements thus creating warmer more comfortable homes. Both these programmes are now closed.

Rural Borewells Scheme

The Rural Borewells Scheme was developed in partnership between DARD and DRD. The Scheme provides financial assistance towards the cost of borewell installation and water treatment to enable owner occupiers or landlords of domestic rural properties that are not currently served by a public water mains supply to obtain a wholesome water supply. Drilling has been completed at 73 borewell sites. This Programme is now closed.

Rural Challenge Programme (2012-2014)

The Rural Challenge Programme was designed to encourage rural community and voluntary groups to identify poverty or social isolation issues within their community and to propose initiatives to address these issues through the provision of a small grant (up to £10,000). A total of 41 projects were funded, delivering a range of activities including luncheon clubs for the elderly, suicide awareness initiatives, setting up “Mens Sheds”,

debt management and advice for the unemployed, summer schemes, after school clubs and the development of play parks for children. Over 6,800 individuals benefited from projects funded through this Programme which has now closed.

Rural Libraries

A Memorandum of Understanding between DARD and Libraries NI has been signed for the purposes of developing new projects which will help to sustain rural libraries and communities. This will help to ensure that libraries contribute to the sustainability of rural communities and help rural dwellers to access and benefit from library services. The pilot project 'Library in a Box' which aims to improve access to books and reading in rural areas has been implemented in three villages in Counties Tyrone and Armagh. This pilot will be evaluated and will inform how library services are delivered in the future. Steps have been undertaken to ensure that Local Rural Support Networks and local libraries work together effectively and a number of health initiative are under way.

Health in Mind

DARD continues to work in partnership with a range of organisations including Libraries NI to extend the 'Health in Mind' initiative in rural areas. 'Health in Mind' is a library programme which aims to raise awareness of positive mental health and to increase understanding of mental health issues through reading, learning and information. By the end of March 2015, 'Health in Mind' had been delivered in 8 rural libraries with over 500 people participating in the range of activities on offer. These activities focused on subjects including mindfulness, personal resilience and Healthy eating. In June 2015, Rural 'Health in Mind' was highly commended in the 'Community' category of DCAL's Learning and Innovation Awards.

Rural Micro Capital Grant Programme 2015

The Rural Micro Capital Grant Programme offers grants of between £200 and £1,500 to community-led, voluntary organisations based in rural areas towards the cost of capital equipment, improvement of a capital asset or extending the useable life of a capital asset.

Funding is intended to encourage rural community and voluntary groups to improve or develop their facilities or assets, which in turn will contribute to improved community engagement within the local area. Projects selected for funding must fit within the overall objective of the Programme and align to one of the following themes:

- Modernisation (of existing premises / assets),
- Information & Communications Technology, and
- Health and Wellbeing.

Phase 1 of this pilot Programme was launched in April 2015 and attracted a high level of interest with a total of 454 applications received of which 146 organisations were awarded funding. Phase 2 of the Programme will be launched during October 2015.

Rural Proofing

DARD continues to promote and support the implementation of rural proofing across all NICS Departments to ensure that all major policies and strategies are assessed to determine whether they have a differential impact on rural areas and, where appropriate, to make adjustments to take account of particular rural circumstances. DARD provides support to Departments on rural proofing through the provision of advice, guidance and training. The Department has also been working to develop new proposals to strengthen rural proofing to help ensure that rural needs and circumstances are routinely considered by government. These proposals include proposals for a Rural Needs Bill which would make it a statutory requirement for government to consider rural needs in the development of policy and the delivery of services.

North South Co-Operation

DARD meets with the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government (DECLG) in Dublin, regularly on a range of rural issues including the Rural Enablers Project, the INTERREG IVA Programme and rural proofing. Officials from both Departments have continued to work together on their respective new Rural Development Programmes (2014-2020) and in particular the LEADER element of the Programme.

Research and Evidence

Under the Evidence and Innovation Strategy, DARD has commissioned AFBI to undertake a number of rural research projects to help inform the future development of rural policy. Current research includes projects relating to the impact of the recession in rural labour markets, identifying the impact of low-income and poverty has on the well being of rural households, identifying the contribution that key basic services make to rural dwellers' quality of life and quantifying the contribution that rural areas make to the wider economy.

The DARD rural statistician has been working on a range of rural policy issues including the collation of statistics from across government in order to enhance the evidence base used to support rural development policy. These include east/west as well as rural/urban comparisons which are now available on the DARD website.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Museums and Libraries

Branch Libraries

Libraries NI continued to provide services through its network of branch libraries including 28 libraries in rural areas (i.e. libraries serving settlements in bands F, G and H in NISRA's classification of settlements). A new library was recently opened in Lisnaskea and a comprehensive refurbishment of Moira library is due to be completed in the coming months. The roll out of a replacement IT programme (E2) was successfully completed in December 2014.

Mobile Libraries

Libraries NI procured four new mobile libraries which have been deployed in rural areas in order to provide a more reliable and a more attractive service to the user. A pilot project is underway to explore the possibility of incorporating E2 in to the mobile library fleet. A revised timetable was successfully introduced and a subsequent DCAL analysis shows that 89% of households are now within 2 miles of a branch library or mobile library stop compared with 81% previously.

Partnership with DARD

Libraries NI is part of a joint working group with DARD and DCAL. So far this has resulted in:

- DARD contributing to the extension of the “Heath in Mind” programme to rural libraries by contributing £10,000 in 2014/15 and £20,000 in 2015/16. (June 2015).
- DARD contributing £16,000 towards an alternative model of “Library in a Box”. This involved a pilot programme involving the placement of small self-service library facilities in community buildings in a number of rural areas. The concept was welcomed by the Rural Support Networks.
- An increased understanding of DARD, its services and programmes, amongst library staff along with training in the ICT skills which will enable them to support customers in rural areas in using the DARD Direct site.

Stadiums Team

DCAL secured funding of £4.5m within the current CSR period towards a programme for promoting equality, tackling poverty and social exclusion through sport. This funding was distributed equally between UCGAA, UBIRFU and IFA over a three year period and up until 31st March 2015. A number of elements of this programme are being rolled out across rural areas. The programme includes £0.5m to Tyrone GAA's ‘Centre of Participation’ at Garvaghey with the planned facilities providing outdoor pitches, skills wall, trim trail and gym equipment for community activities. These facilities will help to tackle poverty and social exclusion throughout a rural area in Co. Tyrone.

Below is progress against a couple of High level objectives for the 'Centre of Participation' at Garvaghey;

Objective	Progress to date
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing pitch-based sporting and development opportunities for some 9,500 users. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To date participation numbers at the centre are in excess of 20,000.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To develop female participation at Garvaghey from a baseline of 0 to 3,525 over 5 years. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To date participation number of females at the centre is in excess of 5,000.

Arts Council NI

Building Peace through the Arts - Now in its final year of funding, this programme has pro-actively targeted rural areas where take-up has been traditionally low. The programme's strategic objectives and associated measurement framework was also refined to reflect the specific physical and physiological legacy of division in rural areas.

Arts and Older People Programme - Specific emphasis in activity during this reporting period has focused on improving access to arts participation for older people (in particular older men) living in rural areas. A number of Arts and Older People projects have successfully addressed the negative consequences of rural isolation and loneliness, enhancing personal wellbeing and creating sustainable links with local communities.

NI Screen

NI Screen funded Creative Learning Centres have been working with schools in rural areas across NI in providing free at-point-of-access training for teachers and young people in the use of creative digital technologies.

The NI Screen Digital Film Archive (DFA) outreach programme provides free community presentations to rural and isolated community groups. In the first half of 2015, two activities have been delivered in rural areas with populations of under 3,000. A further four events were delivered in small towns/intermediate settlements.

The NI Screen After School Film Club initiative provides regular free screenings and film making opportunities for school children aged 5-18 in rural schools. By the end of 2013-14 94 schools in rural areas were involved in the Into Film Club scheme. Currently (April-June 2015) there are 77 schools involved, with recruitment starting again in September 2015.

Líofa

In September 2014, Líofa organised a series of intensive Irish Language courses to mark the third anniversary of Líofa. Intensive courses were held in eleven different council areas including the rural areas of Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Tyrone and Derry.

Líofa also rolled out an Irish language workshop for schools across the North in November and December 2014. Líofa Officers delivered the workshops in the areas of Antrim, Armagh, Derry, Down and Tyrone. The aim of the workshops was to detail the work of Líofa and to provide information to young people in year 10 on possible career opportunities within the Irish language sector.

Sport NI

The Sport Matters Progress Report from October 2013 - September 2014 records a number of activities for example:-

- In March 2014, the outdoor recreation action plan for NI 'Our Great Outdoors' was published. DCAL/Sport NI contributes to this plan which highlights the importance of making the outdoors accessible to everyone, including rural areas communities.
- The Active Communities programme, funded by Sport NI and delivered by local councils, commenced in 2010 and will be extended until 2015/16. Through this programme, Sport NI has invested in projects such as National Trails Day, and new Mountain Bike Trails; and has provided Active Community coaches in communities throughout all district council areas in NI.
- There is ongoing work with district councils, through the Chief Leisure Officers Association, to deliver sporting and leisure opportunities across NI, including in rural communities. Eg through the Active Communities programme, Nordic walking, over 50's clubs.
- A number of initiatives raised awareness of Mental Health issues, including suicide awareness, and to promote good health and wellbeing using local sporting clubs. DCAL/Sport NI worked with PHA, Governing Bodies and sports clubs to deliver the message across the north, including in rural areas.

Department of Education

Curriculum

Key Achievements

The current statutory curriculum has been taught to all pupils of compulsory school age in grant-aided schools since 2009/10 hence all pupils have access to a broad and balanced curriculum.

ICT is an important tool for assisting in delivery of the curriculum and the Department of Education is investing just under £170m over five years for delivery of the current C2k contract. C2k provides a managed ICT service for all grant-aided schools and the first stage of the contract, transformation of all schools to the new cloud-based services, including improved broadband, has now been completed. Further investment of £7m by the Department of Education has facilitated the purchase of new Library Management Software and 15,400 Portable Devices for teachers. The library software is being deployed during 2015 and the portable devices were issued to all schools prior to the end of the June 2015 term.

Benefits

All schools, whether rural or urban, now receive a comparable ICT service irrespective of the school's physical location.

Entitlement Framework

Key achievements

The phased implementation of the Entitlement Framework is now statutory. Young people should be able to access a minimum number and range of courses at Key Stage 4 and post-16, regardless of the school they attend or where they live.

Benefits

The Entitlement Framework is broadening access to courses for all pupils in Key Stage 4 and post-16: courses that are relevant to young people, engaging and motivating for them, and with clear, relevant progression pathways to continue in education or move into training or employment.

Young people who see their time in education as relevant are more likely to stay motivated and engaged with their learning. This is further improved when supported by high-quality, timely careers advice taking into account local and global labour market information. Making an informed choice at this stage ensures that options are kept open for young people as they progress through education into the world of work.

Collaborative working within Area Learning Communities is central to the delivery of the Entitlement Framework, and this collaborative model of delivering education is particularly important in ensuring that pupils in rural areas have access to a broad and relevant range of courses.

Extended Schools Programme

Key Achievements

The Extended Schools (ES) programme is a key vehicle in delivering the Department's core priorities of addressing educational inequalities and disadvantage. In 2014/15, £12.6 million of additional ES resources were made available to schools serving our most deprived communities to enable the provision of additional learning opportunities and a range of support and interventions aimed at tackling barriers to learning and improving the educational attainment and longer term life chances of disadvantaged children and young people and their families. In recognition of the vital role played by parents in their children's learning and in promoting and instilling the value of education across communities, an additional strand of funding was introduced in 2012-13 through the ES programme aimed specifically at involving parents in the life of the school. These resources enable Extended Schools Clusters (neighbouring schools working together) to deliver a co-ordinated approach to providing parenting programmes and activities which help parents support their children at home including dealing with a range of social, emotional and behavioural issues and in the development of literacy and numeracy key skills.

Almost 140 schools located in rural areas were allocated ES resources totalling £2.5m in 2014/15.

Benefits

Through annual reports submitted by schools the following benefits have been reported:-

Pupils:

- Improved learning and achievement;
- Increased motivation and self-esteem;
- Improved access to specialist support;
- Improvement in attitude towards learning;
- Enhanced opportunities to learn new skills.

Parents:

- Improvements in child behaviour;
- Greater parental involvement in children's learning and development;
- Opportunities to develop parenting skills through adult education and family learning;
- Closer relationships with schools;
- Improved supervision of children outside school hours.

Community Use of Schools

Key Achievements

The Department is committed to identifying and disseminating good practice with a particular focus on community use of schools to help schools build stronger links with parents and local communities. A Working Group was established to develop a Guidance document to help develop and disseminate good practice and offer schools advice on how to open school facilities for wider community use. The Guidance issued to all schools in January 2014.

The 2013 and 2014 School Omnibus Surveys recorded that over 80% of schools made their premises available as a community facility.

Benefits

The benefits achieved for those schools, including rural schools, which already open their facilities to their communities, as highlighted in the Case Studies within the Guidance document, include:

- improved learning and achievement;
- improved access to specialist support services;
- partnership working across statutory and voluntary bodies;
- opportunities for adult education and family learning;
- improved access to sports, arts and other agreed facilities; and
- healthier and fitter communities.

Area Planning and Shared Education Campuses

Key Achievements

The newly established area planning governance structures aim to improve the area planning process in order to provide strategic direction and operational consistency across all Education Authority regions along with an opportunity for increased engagement by all key stakeholder bodies during the process. The local planning groups have been reactivated. All sectors are represented in the local groups at which local stakeholders engage to discuss reviews or revisions to an existing area plan; assist in the implementation process for area plans and have an opportunity to comment on current area planning processes.

The purpose of refreshing the structures is to ensure that the area planning process is transparent; consistent and clearly communicated. The area plans for both primary and post primary schools are to be reviewed, consulted on and published together in all regions for the first time by July 2016. They will then be reviewed on a three year cycle.

An annual action plan will also accompany the area plan. The action plan will reflect how the needs of all sectors will be provided for. It will highlight those schools exhibiting stress and indicate how they will be supported and their sustainability issues addressed. The first annual action plans are due to be submitted to the Department in September 2015.

The commencement of 10 new shared education campuses by 2018 is a key commitment in the Executive's *Together: Building a United Community strategy*. The delivery of the projects is being taken forward by the Department under the Shared Education Campuses Programme which complements the other work underway within DE on shared education and area planning.

The first 3 shared campus projects approved to proceed in planning are for schools in Moy, Limavady and Ballycastle. Feasibility studies and economic appraisals for these projects are underway. The second call for applications to the Programme closed earlier this year and the selection process for potential new projects is ongoing.

Benefits

The Department's vision of ensuring that every learner achieves his or her full potential at each stage of his or her development is supported through the Sustainable Schools Policy and the area planning process. Both promote the need for a viable and sustainable education system and put pupils at the centre of considerations.

Children attending rural schools deserve access to the full range of the curriculum in the same way as those who attend urban schools. The Area Planning process requires the School managing authorities to actively consider how best to provide access to a broad and balanced curriculum for all children and should ensure those in rural areas are not disadvantaged.

Provision in rural communities is being retained through the area planning and development proposal process for the benefit of the whole community. Strategically important small schools will not be closed simply because they are small.

The Shared Education Campuses Programme provides capital build projects aimed at improving or facilitating shared education initiatives in schools which have a solid foundation of existing sharing. It encourages new and creative proposals to the delivery of education provision. While educational benefits to children and young people remain the overarching priority of the Programme, shared campuses can provide other benefits including the protection of local provision; help in the stabilisation of enrolment numbers; and enable a wider choice of curriculum subjects to be sustained - all of which are particularly important for schools in rural areas.

All schools involved in projects approved to proceed in planning under the Programme must fit within the relevant Area Plan and be part of the School Planning Authorities' long-term plans for delivery of sustainable provision in the area.

Department for Employment and Learning

FE Regional Colleges

The Department for Employment and Learning reviews and, where necessary, reallocates full-time higher education places across the FE Regional Colleges each year. These reviews of the maximum student number (MaSN) allocations are carried out in order to ensure an equitable distribution of full-time higher education places in the FE Colleges across Northern Ireland and particularly to ensure a redistribution of HE opportunities to more rural locations. Despite budgetary reductions the Department has been able to maintain the same level of full-time higher education provision in each regional college in academic year 2015/16.

Access to Success

The reallocation of MaSN is just one of the Department's policy initiatives to widen participation in higher education by students from disadvantaged backgrounds. DEL has been implementing **Access to Success** its regional strategy to widen participation in higher education. The strategy has a strong focus on the creation of a more accessible sector in which the people who are **most able** but **least likely** to participate are given every encouragement and support to apply to, and to benefit from, higher education regardless of their social background or location.

During the year significant progress has been made on a range of measures in the strategy. These include:

- the continuation of "Reach Higher", a single, centralised and co-ordinated higher education awareness and aspiration raising campaign, to communicate better the benefits of higher education to under-represented sections of the community;
- the introduction of the "Reach" programme under which the Department has made funding available to support the expansion of the range of aspiration and educational attainment raising programmes in schools, colleges, under-represented communities and workplaces throughout Northern Ireland.

Lantra

DEL has been taking forward work, through the Food Skills Group, with Lantra and employers from across the food and drink industry, to identify the key skills issues facing the agri-food sector. DARD and CAFRE are also represented on this Group and all stakeholders work collaboratively to address the skills challenges.

Connected Programme

In the arena of encouraging greater engagement between businesses and the local research base, DEL is continuing to support the important work of the Connected programme which provides a highly effective "one-stop-shop" for companies wishing to access the research and knowledge base within Northern Ireland's universities and colleges. Under the latest round of Connected, the universities and colleges are actively

building meaningful linkages with the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) and the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE). In particular, five ‘sector specific projects’ in the agri-food arena have been progressed in the last year. Of these projects, two are led by the Higher Education sector (‘Innovation for Life and Health Sciences’ led by Ulster University and ‘Competence Centre for Sustainable Energy’ led by Queen’s University) and three by the Further Education sector (‘Food Innovation’ led by Southern Regional College; ‘Food Development, Business Generation & Support’ led by North West Regional College; and ‘Environmental Skills’ led by the South Eastern Regional College). A notable highlight has been the work of the North West Regional College (NWRC) in assisting a new start-up company, “Baba’s Foods”, to develop a range of authentic Indian sauces, launching their first sauce in January 2015 with sales over 20% above projections. This successful work has led to the NWRC jointly delivering on an Invest NI Innovation Voucher with CAFRE, focusing on the calorific value of the company’s products and also on packaging solutions (for more information, please see <http://www.connected.ni.org/nwrc-babas-foods>).

The Department also recognises the vital role which further education provision can play, particularly in enabling older learners to gain new skills and increase their knowledge which contributes to the sustainability of rural communities.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Telecommunications

Over the period of this report DETI, working with the telecommunications industry and other stakeholders, has continued to implement the £23.7m NI Broadband Improvement Project which seeks to provide improvements in access to basic and superfast fixed-line broadband services to over 45,000 premises by the end of 2015.

By 30 June 2015, five of the project's eight phases had been delivered, realising benefits for some 32,000 premises across Northern Ireland. Details of the areas where improvement work has been completed can be found at:

<http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/index/information-and-services/leisure-home-and-community/technology-and-online-services/broadband-improvement-project.htm>

In February 2015, DETI signed a further contract with BT for delivery of the Superfast Roll-out Programme Phase 2, which aims to bring broadband services with speeds of at least 24 Megabits per second to an additional 39,000 premises across Northern Ireland by 31 December 2017. This £17.1m project has commenced with an extensive survey and design process which will take several months to complete. Initial project details can be found on the DETI website at <https://www.detini.gov.uk/articles/superfast-rollout-programme-phase-2> and further information will be made available via NI Direct as it becomes available.

DETI officials have also continued to work with their colleagues in the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) as they roll-out a number of UK-wide projects that will also deliver benefits for Northern Ireland. These include the Mobile Infrastructure Project which seeks to address voice and basic data not-spots; an expansion of the broadband connection voucher scheme that provides support to eligible SMEs, charities and social enterprises across Northern Ireland towards the cost of installing a high speed broadband service; and, a satellite broadband market test pilot which forms part of a programme to identify solutions for delivering superfast broadband services to the hardest to reach areas.

Looking forward, DETI has also completed a full public consultation on a two- year telecoms strategy ('Continuing To Connect -2015-2017') which includes commitments to maximise funding for further infrastructure improvements and to undertake an educational programme for business and the community to best exploit the benefits of the telecommunications infrastructure. It is anticipated that the outcomes of the consultation will be published in Autumn 2015.

Tourism

A key recommendation from the John Hunter Review, an independent review of the NI Tourist Board and wider tourism structures commissioned in 2014, was that the NI Executive should publish an updated Strategy for Tourism at an early date.

The Hunter Review indicates that a new strategy would aid the development of collaborative partnerships across the industry, in government and beyond, which are the building blocks for future progress. An updated overarching tourism strategy would help tourism partners to work together and understand their role in the achievement of common goals and in the realisation of important synergies. It would also set stretching targets and identify key priorities for action taking account of the emergence of new developments, initiatives and trends in tourism.

DETI Tourism Policy Branch has been working with Tourism NI in developing the framework for the tourism strategy. A research exercise is being finalised to bring together findings from various new policies, reviews and studies since draft Tourism Strategy produced in 2010.

In parallel Tourism NI is working with local authorities and the industry to develop a strategic vision for tourism which will be incorporated into the strategy. Wide stakeholder engagement will be carried out during the developmental process in the form of regional road shows which will be held across Northern Ireland.

Invest NI and Tourism NI continue to work with DARD and others on an ongoing basis to support and develop rural businesses. Tourism NI works with sector bodies in rural tourism to encourage the development of 'clustered' products and services that will deliver a complete rural experience for visitors.

Tourism NI continues to liaise with DARD on developing programme criteria aligned with strategic tourism priorities for the next Rural Development Programme (2014-2020). Pending launch of the RDP schemes, funding has been allocated to rural economic development that will offer the opportunity for funding streams to be targeted at tourism infrastructure, small business development and with additional potential scope for tourism related projects through village renewal schemes.

Department of the Environment

The Planning Bill / Planning Reform

The Planning Act (NI) 2015 was commenced on 01 April and transferred responsibility for the majority of planning functions to the 11 newly formed councils. Each Council must prepare and publish a statement of community involvement. The statement must set out the Council's policy for involving the community in the exercise of its local development plan and planning control functions.

The Act also places a statutory requirement on developers to carry out pre-application community consultation on major development proposals before submitting a planning application to the Council or Department.

Under the Act the 11 councils will be responsible for preparing their own local development plans (LDP) which will set out the councils' vision for the future development in their districts. Before preparing their LDP councils must prepare a preferred options paper setting out a number of options for the future development in the district and the paper will be subjected to public consultation. Local communities will also be engaged at further key stages in the LDP process including the preparation of the Plan Strategy and Local Policies Plan. The councils must take into account any representations received when preparing their LDP.

A Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) is also under development. Published in February 2014 the consultation draft SPPS introduces new overarching core planning principles, explains the new Local Development Plan and Development Management system requirements, and brings forward new strategic retail and town centres planning policy. In addition, it consolidates existing subject planning policies into a single document.

The Department received a total of 726 responses during the 12 week consultation exercise, which closed on 29 April 2014. The final draft of the SPPS was completed in March 2015 following a period of extensive engagement with key planning stakeholders. The Department aims to publish the SPPS in final form in the near future following Executive committee consideration.

Planning and Rural Development Policy

In relation to the policy development process Planning Policy Division (PPD) will continue to carry out Rural Proofing Screening and liaise with DARD at the earliest opportunity to take advice on whether any further actions or mitigation measures are required.

In addition, following the publication of the SPPS in final form the Environment Minister has confirmed that a review of strategic policy on 'Development in the Countryside' will be undertaken.

This will offer rural stakeholders and interested parties, including the general public, an opportunity to influence the future direction of this strategic planning policy.

Road Safety

The Department of the Environment is responsible for co-ordinating a strategic approach to improving road safety in Northern Ireland, primarily through delivery of the Road Safety Strategy to 2020. A number of the measures contained in the Strategy specifically target road safety in rural areas. These reflect the partnership approach to delivering improved road safety through education, engineering and enforcement measures.

As well as measures focusing specifically on improving rural road safety, many general measures in the Strategy will help address the behaviours that contribute to the high level of death and serious injury in rural areas.

Through the Strategy the Department monitors progress towards a number of casualty reduction targets and related key performance indicators include tracking the number of people killed in collisions on rural roads (*defined as roads with a speed limit greater than 40 miles per hour with the exception of motorways and dual carriageways*).

In 2014 there were 55 deaths on rural roads, a reduction of 40% compared with the 2004/2008 baseline. There were two child deaths in 2014 on rural roads, a reduction of three compared with the 2004-2008 baseline of five child deaths. In total there were 79 deaths on our roads during 2014.

During the first 6 months of 2015, there were 24 fatalities on rural roads - which is 20% less than last year when there were 29 fatalities in the same period, however this is still almost double the 13 recorded for the same period in 2013. *Please note that 2015 figures are provisional and subject to minor amendment.*

The Department has established a road safety research programme, involving road safety partners, to help identify emerging trends and provide a sound knowledge base for developing future policies. From looking at road casualty data we know that collisions on rural roads tend to be severe and randomly distributed, making specific measures difficult. Much of the road safety research carried out will, therefore, have a rural element. Research specifically on rural road collisions involving children and young people up to 24 years old has been completed in partnership with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

As a result of this research an additional two action measures were added to the Road Safety Strategy in May 2012. The first of these was for providers of school bus services to conduct regular audits to ensure that the services provided meet the appropriate levels of safety, including overcrowding. This measure has been reported as embedded as business as usual by both Translink and the Department of Education. The second measure, planned for delivery by 2017, was to consider a targeted publicity and education campaign to tackle the reluctance of 12-15 year olds to wear a seatbelt and generally adhere to good road safety practice. In October 2013, DOE launched a seatbelt wearing campaign which helps to address this issue. Although aimed at all drivers and passengers, the campaign message was specifically targeted at young people. While the vast majority of people wear seatbelts in Northern Ireland, DOE research indicates

that there are lapses, particularly among young people, who unbuckle for a short while to engage with their friends or on short trips or often at night. This message depicts both urban and rural scenarios but with a hard-hitting end scene in a rural setting. The core message is: "One trip can kill."

Other campaigns launched by the Department which contribute to improving rural road safety include the following:

The campaign 'Just Because' addresses pedestrian vulnerability and highlights both pedestrian and driver fault. It includes aspects to help address rural pedestrian safety. Launched in May 2012, this campaign has been on air regularly since.

DOE has developed an anti speeding campaign which launched in June 2014. Entitled "Classroom", this campaign depicts the fact that the equivalent of a classroom of children has lost their lives as a result of speeding since 2000. Those most at risk of causing speed-related deaths and serious injuries are 17-24 year old males, followed by males 25-34 years old. Research also revealed that the thought of hurting a child is a major influential factor on driving behaviour. Hence the campaign dramatises, in a rural setting, the devastating consequences of child deaths due to speeding since 2000 and carries the strapline "You can never control the consequences if you speed."

The Department launched new motorcyclist safety campaigns in March 2015. Motorcyclists are the most overrepresented road user group in terms of risk of fatalities and serious injuries. Responsibility for motorcyclists' deaths and serious injuries is fairly evenly split between motorcyclists themselves and other road users, mostly drivers. Two campaigns were developed highlighting motorcyclist vulnerability, addressing both biker fault and driver fault respectively.

Entitled "Bike Speed" and "Bike Aware", the first campaign is aimed at the motorcyclist and the second is aimed at the driver. The ads both focus on the vulnerability of motorcyclists and the responsibility both riders and drivers have on their respective journeys. Both the campaigns focus on the rural environment. Although motorcyclists killed and seriously injured are as likely to occur on an urban road (48%) as a rural road (47%), evidence also shows that almost eight (78%) in every ten motorcyclist fatalities occurred on a rural road during the period 2004 to 2013.

The television campaigns mentioned above are supported by a mix of online, press, outdoor and radio activities.

Rural Tourism

The Department's Historic Environment Division (HED) has continued to support rural communities in Northern Ireland with over 2 million people visiting our main properties in the 2014 calendar year. Detailed site survey and excavations were undertaken at Tullaghoge Fort, Co Tyrone ahead of a planned enhancement of the visitor facilities there. Planning permission was also gained for these rural visitor facilities, which are planned to

be built during 2015-16.

HED is also developing proposals for a new access lane and interpretive centre for Dundrum Castle, Co Down. Work continues on the archaeological remains and objects recovered from the Drumclay crannóg, Co Fermanagh and HED partnered Fermanagh County Museum in a highly successful exhibition about the site. As part of its work on the Second Survey, HED designated a further 82 listed buildings in 2014/15 and 731 listed buildings were reviewed in detail and maintained on the list. HED designated a further 23 scheduled monuments this year and added 16 features to the NI Sites and Monuments Record, many of them rural in nature.

Eight conservation projects were completed at State Care monuments during 2014/15, including works at the rural sites of Old Castle Archdale, Benburb Castle and Greencastle Royal Castle. HED has funded Fermanagh District Council to undertake large-scale conservation works to part of the Enniskillen Castle Barracks complex. This will help enable the Heritage Gateway project to provide a heritage hub for the rural district and signpost visitors, to the rich heritage assets in the west of Northern Ireland, many of which are in HED Care.

Conservation schemes at rural scheduled historic monuments were also successfully completed at Templecorran Church, Co Antrim, and Prehen Bawn and Enagh Church in Co Derry. Works at Ballywalter's White Church in Co Down, and St Aidan's Church, St Breacan's Church and Movanager Bawn in Co Derry were also commenced.

HED continued to manage grant schemes for listed buildings throughout Northern Ireland to encourage and support owners and communities to undertake appropriate repairs. Over £4m of such grant aid was provided, assisting with the repair and maintenance of many listed buildings, including major rural examples at Mountstewart, Co Down and Killymoon Castle, Co Tyrone.

The vulnerability of thatch buildings, a high percentage of which are rural, was highlighted at a HED seminar held in January 2015. HED also supported partner organisation the Ulster Architectural Heritage Society to publish a revised and updated Directory of Traditional Skills in June 2014, providing an on line resource for rural owners to source appropriately skilled professionals to assist with conservation works. European Heritage Open Day (EHOD) 2014, which includes many rural buildings, attracted a record number of 75,610 people who visited over 400 properties and events.

The 'Northern Ireland Tourism Statistics 2013' report estimates that the average public spend on a tourism day trip within Northern Ireland is £28 per person. This figure would suggest that EHOD 2014 contributed £2,117,080 to the Northern Ireland economy, an increase of 24% on the previous year's figures. Plans for developing new visitor facilities at Dunluce Castle, as part of an exciting proposal to excavate and conserve the 17th-century "Lost Town of Dunluce", have also been well progressed. Public consultation days held at the castle in May 2014 generated significant local interest and feedback.

NIEA continued to encourage the sustainable use of our natural environment for outdoor recreation through the provision of grant aid to environmental charities and councils. This included support for a number of Landscape Partnership Schemes in the Mourne, Antrim Glens, Ring of Gullion, Belfast Hills and the Sperrins and support for Outdoor Recreation NI to manage a suite of websites promoting the sustainable use of our natural and built heritage including WalkNI.com. NIEA continued to deliver on objectives and targets in the Outdoor Recreation Action Plan for Northern Ireland in partnership with other public bodies, Outdoor Recreation NI and other third party groups. This seven year action plan identifies the key activities required to continue to develop “a culture of dynamic, sustainable outdoor recreation in Northern Ireland”.

Climate Change

Through the Mitigation, Adaptation and Analysts Subs Group of the Cross Departmental Working Group (CDWGCC) the Department has monitored and progressed climate change mitigation and adaptation actions and initiatives in the agriculture sector for the period up to 30th June 2015.

We have coordinated agriculture input into the annual CDWGCC Action Plan which was laid in the Assembly in May 2015. Updates were provided on the agriculture sectors progress in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and on the implementation of Phase 2 of the Efficient Farming Cuts Greenhouse Gases Strategy. Progress on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in the agriculture sector was highlighted and reported on to, internal and external stakeholders, at the Prosperity Panel meeting in June 2015

It is recognised that climate change adaptation is a complex concept, which will take time to embed into policy and practice and that it is essentially a long term process, however we have continued to monitor and evaluate agriculture actions and activities committed to in the NI Climate Change Adaptation Programme. Updates have highlighted progress in research and identification of climate resilient grasses and crops, and increased climate change adaptation and best practices for land managers.

We have fully involved agriculture representatives in workshops and meetings which will help develop the second UK Climate Change Risk Assessment. This independent assessment will provide an update on the latest climate change risks and opportunities to the agriculture sector.

Waste Management

The Department allocated over £4 million capital funding for 23 projects in 2014-15 for initiatives which will enable local councils to boost waste recycling and reuse.

In addition six successful projects from the Third Sector received capital funding for waste prevention and recycling projects, totalling approximately £180k. Nine projects also received £225K in revenue funding for waste prevention, reuse and recycling activities under the Rethink Waste Revenue Fund.

The Department's funding and support, in conjunction with stakeholders, has provided a network of activity across Northern Ireland. Funding has allowed for kerbside services for recycling to be extended into rural areas, and for rural household recycling centres to be upgraded.

Renewable Energy

Renewable energy is a key economic driver for Northern Ireland, particularly in rural areas. These types of applications include single wind turbines, wind farms, hydro-electric schemes, solar panels and biomass/anaerobic digesters.

Planning policy for all types of renewable energy development in Northern Ireland is currently set out in Planning Policy Statement 18 'Renewable Energy' (PPS 18). The draft Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) consolidates and improves the existing suite of planning policy statements, including PPS 18, to provide a strategic planning policy framework appropriate for the new two-tier planning system which has been operational since 1 April 2015.

The final draft of the SPPS was completed in March 2015 following a period of extensive engagement with key planning stakeholders. The SPPS largely brings forward the PPS 18 approach. The Department aims to publish the SPPS in final form in the near future following Executive committee consideration.

Following the publication of the SPPS in final form the Minister for the Environment has confirmed that a review of strategic policy on Renewable Energy will be undertaken.

This review will involve detailed research of current planning policy and practices in the other jurisdictions of the UK and Ireland, and will offer stakeholders and interested parties an opportunity to influence the future strategic planning policy direction for renewable energy development in the North. *The review will also take into account the report of a recent Environment Committee Wind Energy Inquiry and appropriate recommendations.*

In addition, Departmental officials have prepared internal guidance notes for processing renewable energy applications (including wind farms / solar farms) which will provide useful advice and guidance to planning staff.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Enterprise Shared Services (ESS)

The Digital Inclusion team within DFP Digital Transformation Service continues to take forward the Go ON NI initiative within Northern Ireland. One of the key objectives of this programme, in partnership with both public and private sectors, is to address the barriers of digital exclusion and promote the benefits of being online.

Silver Surfers Day 2015 delivered IT awareness sessions to over 600 citizens in 55 locations including Clady, Dungannon, Dungiven, Kells & Connor and Lisnaskea. Supporting Communities NI (SCNI), in partnership with Go ON NI trained an additional 208 citizens in computer essentials with 42% of the training taking place in rural areas. Go ON NI also facilitated 24 roadshows with 1080 citizens attending the stand. A quarter of these roadshows were in rural areas.

Since Go ON NI's creation in 2011, the number of citizens that have access to the internet has increased by 13% to 80% of the population. The NISRA 2015 statistics indicated that 78% of the rural population now makes use of the internet.

Digital Transformation Service has worked with departments to provide on-line access to government products and services. These on-line services enable rural dwellers to access the services at a time and place of their choosing as an alternative to them having to travel to a particular location and/or having to carry out the transaction during normal office hours.

To date, the following services have been made available on-line through the NI Direct '16 by 16' Digital Transformation Programme: Rate Collection payments; Access NI; Visitor Attraction Booking; Waste Carrier Registration; OSNI Mapshop; Planning Appeals; Ordering of a birth, death or marriage certificate; and landlord registration.

A further number of on-line services are due to go live by 31 March 2016.

NISRA

The NI Neighbourhood Information Service (NINIS) website www.nisra.gov.uk/ninis continues to allow rural (and urban) communities across Northern Ireland to freely access high quality official statistics on their local area. The website currently hosts over 2,500 datasets and is the home of the 2011 Census results. The website contains a series of Frequently Asked Questions on Urban/Rural issues (e.g. how are areas classed as urban or rural?) and includes information on the Review of the Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements which was published by NISRA in March 2015. As part of this dissemination, a helpline and training are available. Training has been provided to a number of rural organisations and community groups on the use of official statistics (e.g. the DARD Research Discussion Forum and the Rural Community Network). Finally an e-zine or on-line newsletter is available to keep users aware of new/updated statistics and this is circulated widely to DARD staff and representatives of rural community networks.

A new Classification of Settlements, including guidance on classifying areas as urban or rural, was published by NISRA in March 2015:

<http://www.nisra.gov.uk/archive/geography/review-of-the-statistical-classification-and-delineation-of-settlements-march-2015.pdf>

The report was agreed across departments through the Statistics Co-ordinating Group.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Maximising Access in Rural Areas (MARA) Project

The MARA project, originally launched in March 2012, is now in its final year. MARA aims to improve the health and wellbeing of rural dwellers living in poverty and social isolation across Northern Ireland. The MARA Project has fostered extensive partnership working with other key organisations including DSD (Social Security Agency and Fuel Poverty Unit), DRD, NIHE, DHSSPS and local Community and Voluntary Organisations as well as the 13 community Lead organisations who have employed and trained enablers to undertake the MARA home visits.

The MARA Project has now been extended until March 2016. Thirteen Lead Organisations are delivering the MARA project. For the period July 2014 to 30th June 2015 MARA Extended has conducted a total of 2,335 First Household Visits and 1,438 Follow Up Visits. The first visits have generated a total of 5,805 onward referrals for services, grants and benefits. An evaluation of the core MARA project funded from May 2012 - December 2015 (12,085 household visits) has now been completed.

At the end of June 2014, the MARA project reached an important stage in that 8 of the 13 Lead organisations finished 1st and 2nd visits and their focus moved to concentrating on outcome management of all open referrals to ensure they are brought to closure with successful outcomes where possible.

MARA - Case Studies

The following are a few examples of case studies/good news stories that have emerged from the MARA Project. As other lead Organisations move towards finalisation of visits and outcome management it is envisaged that further good news stories will arise from other geographical areas across the province.

Case Study One

A female client with learning difficulties, who lives alone with her daughter as her main carer, Positive outcomes resulting from engagement with the MARA programmes are outlined below:

- Benefit Entitlement Checks (BECs) - advised to 'make the call'.
- Home Safety Check - Received equipment and advice.
- Rural Community Transport - Now registered member - using service frequently.
- Local Services - Provided with information re. Arts and crafts - now attending classes.
- Warm Home Scheme - Received loft insulation and hot water tank cover.

Client is delighted with MARA service and submitted letter of appreciation. She has referred MARA service to friends/neighbours. Has reported improved mental health as social isolation has reduced.

Case study Two

Daughter of a client wanted to thank the MARA project for the Lead Orgs kindness to her mother. Her mother benefitted from loft insulation and a replacement boiler. Two years ago her mother ended up in hospital with pneumonia which resulted in heart failure as the house was so cold. They had been trying to insulate the loft by buying 1 roll at a time. The boiler that was replaced was 40 years old and was guzzling fuel. The daughter also wanted to convey her appreciation to those who had visited her mother by correspondence by phone or letter. The whole process was made very easy and the sense of support immeasurable. "Convey a heartfelt appreciation to your funders and all who helped make my mother's home a warmer place to live."

Case Study Three

Client who lives at home has mobility problems and was having problems getting a diagnosis. The Lead Org contacted the client who decided to have a visit before this she had not heard of the MARA project. She asked to be referred for BECs, Occupational Therapy (OT), Home Safety and Levy. Upon last speaking to the client she was in the process of being assessed for attendance allowance. She had been in touch with the OT dept. that had referred her on to a Physiotherapist. This in turn led to a diagnosis for her condition which was affecting her mobility. The Levy process was completed and she got her roof space insulated. Home Safety issued her advice and equipment. The lady could not be happier and was so pleased she had taken the visit and was quoted as saying 'you have done more for me in the last three months than has been done before'. The impact this has had on her life has been immense.

Case Study Four

Client was overwhelmed when her husband went in for an operation. She was really worried about coping with him coming home to convalesce. This was further compounded with the discovery of Lymphoma when operating. Client was worried this would mean her husband would not be able to come home as she would be unable to care for him. With a MARA enabler on-board she was able to voice all her concerns to one person and that she didn't have to repeat herself and talk to people she wasn't comfortable with.

Case Study Five

Client has been caring for her brother for a very long time with no help or support. They do have a social worker, though they were not made aware of their entitlements. Thanks to MARA, she has now been awarded £133 per week in carers allowance and her brother has also received £81 in attendance allowance. Home Safety have been out, given them advice and provided equipment. (They have been allowed) an £800 grant towards loft insulation although the council are looking into this to see if a full grant can be awarded. The client is now attending coffee mornings and having monthly outings. She cannot thank MARA enough.

Case Study Six

This is a low income household with one adult and two children both in full-time education. Client has come through a divorce and is now suffering from depression as a result. Gross income less than £7000. The only referral was for BEC but was very successful and resulted in her being awarded back dated tax credits which is understood to be a substantial amount. The client is extremely grateful for the assistance received through MARA. During the visit the enabler was very sympathetic to the situation, listening as well as giving advice.

Farm Families Health Check Programme

The Farm Family Health Check Programme (FFHCP) continues to be an effective mechanism for engaging the rural community and particular male farmers over the age of 45. In the reporting period from 30th June 2014 until 30th June 2015 there were 2,725 clients who attended for a health check; 1,355 clients were advised to see their GP; 102 clients referred to the MARA programme and 322 clients to a farm safety course. Clients who were advised to see their GP received a review telephone call approximately eight weeks following the health check.

The programme is currently in its final year of confirmed funding. It is currently being evaluated with the report due in September 2015. It is envisaged that the report will help determine future funding and delivery of the programme. Below are some comments that were highlighted during the reviews:

Farm Families Health Check Programme - Case studies:

Case Study 1

A 46 year old male farmer attended the Farm Families Health Check Van in Omagh mart. His blood pressure was 140/100 and a BMI of 28.34. After receiving advice from the nurse, he lost 12lb in six weeks by changing his lifestyle through diet and exercise. His blood pressure is returning to normal. He stated he was delighted with the service.

Case Study 2

A 75 year old farmer attended for a health check. He had high cholesterol 6.8, blood pressure was alarmingly high at 200/105 his BMI was 31.98 and his diabetic risk score was 25 (high risk). He was advised to see his GP and was subsequently commenced on medication. GP has also advised a strict diet for him to lose weight. The gentleman really appreciated the health check service as he was unaware that he had any problems and felt well. He stated that the service was accessible and handy and would encourage other men to attend.

Case Study 3

56 year old female attended the Farm Families Health Check van. Her blood pressure was very high at 170/100 and her cholesterol was 6.4. When she subsequently attended her GP her blood pressure was actually higher. She has been prescribed several medications

to treat her high Blood pressure and it is now under control. She was feeling unwell but was unaware she had high blood pressure. She is also on a low fat diet to treat her cholesterol and this is also improving. She stated to the nurse at review that she feels much better now and her energy levels have improved. She said she is now telling everyone how great the Farm Families health check service is.

Case Study 4

55 year old lady had her cholesterol checked in van was high. She was advised to see her GP who then discovered she had abnormal liver function tests. She is now being investigated. The lady states she would not have gone to her doctor had it not been for the health check. She stated that farm families health checks is an absolutely 'brilliant service'.

Case Study 5

A 55 year old attended the FFHCP van diabetic risk score was 33 (very high risk). His cholesterol was also high at 5.6. He was advised to attend GP to get his fasting blood sugars checked. After attending his GP surgery he was diagnosed with diabetes and was commenced on a diabetic diet and medication. He was also commenced on statins for his cholesterol. All this was as a result of attending for a health check at the Farm Families Health Check Van.

Case Study 6

A 69 year old man attended the van. He had a BMI of 30.42. On review he had lost a stone and a half thanks to the advice and guidance the nurses gave him in the van. He stated that the nurse gave him the encouragement to do something about his weight.

Case Study 7

39 year old has decreased his smoking cigarettes to 8 per day from 11-20 per day. His alcohol was high and he has also stopped alcohol completely after speaking to the nurses who told him the harm he is doing to his health. He and his partner are on a diet and he has lost a stone in weight by changing his lifestyle.

Department of Justice

Community Safety - Tackling Rural Crime

Tackling rural crime is an important strand of the Department of Justice's work on community safety.

Following the launch of the Community Safety Strategy in July 2012, delivery groups were established for each of the eight key strands of the strategy, including one for business and rural crime. The Rural Crime Partnership, which comprises membership from the Department of Justice, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, NFU Mutual, and the PSNI have been responsible for taking forward the delivery of the rural crime aspects of the business and rural crime action plan.

Updates on delivery of the action plans are provided to the Justice Committee on an annual basis. The second annual update was considered by the Justice committee on 16 April 2015. This update included actions taken at a strategic and local level to support safer rural communities, and prevent and reduce crime. This work has included the following:

Theft of farm machinery

Roll out of a regional initiative which allowed farmers to access a discount when purchasing a TRACKER device to be fitted to farm machinery. This initiative was designed to deter the theft of farm machinery, or in the event that machinery was stolen, to assist in its recovery. This initiative resulted in over £3 million worth of farm equipment being fitted with security devices.

Rural Crime Conference

Supporting the delivery of the Ulster Farmers' Union first official rural crime conference entitled "Tackling Rural Crime in Northern Ireland - Working Together". The conference highlighted the issue of crime in rural areas and was designed to raise awareness about rural crime, in particular agri-crime, to share examples of best practice in dealing with rural crime, and enhance working relationships across all stakeholders.

The Ulster Farmers' Union post conference feedback was generally positive, with increased awareness of rural crime issues and the farming sector being more informed of measures they can take to protect their property. There was also an acknowledgement of the need to continue to build strong working relationships to tackle rural crime and the impact it has on rural communities

Organised Crime Taskforce (OCTF)

The Organised Crime Taskforce has a cross border sub group dedicated to fuel fraud, an excise evasion offence which generally takes place in rural areas and which impacts on the environment through the associated dumping of laundering waste. The group provides a cross border forum for the sharing of information, the planning of operational work and also the development of policy initiatives. In April 2015 a new fuel marker

was introduced - this was the result of a cross border project and will be a valuable tool against fuel laundering moving forward.

There is a general recognition that organised crime groups can and will diversify where they spot a potentially profitable area - this has included, in some instances, a move into areas including illegal waste disposal, plant theft and livestock theft. The OCTF is monitoring these trends.

Policing and Community Safety Partnerships

Policing and Community Safety Partnerships are delivering a significant number of initiatives to tackle community safety issues in rural communities across Northern Ireland. General examples of their work during 2014/15 include the provision of information, advice and security equipment to the elderly and vulnerable in rural areas; events to provide farming and rural crime prevention information and advice; free trailer marking; promoting a subsidy for "Tracker" devices for farmers; Neighbourhood watch and Farm Watch schemes; a rural text alert service to farmers; road safety education and awareness events for agricultural contractors and farmers, particularly for young tractor drivers.

Specific examples include; the **Ballymena PCSP** Farmwatch scheme which 50 farmers signed up to, post project evaluation indicated a 20% reduction in fear of crime among scheme participants. Also within the District the overall recorded theft of farm machinery was reduced by 10% in 2014-15 compared to the previous year. **Banbridge PCSP** has delivered events in partnership with rural community groups, the PSNI, the NIFRS Large Animal Rescue Unit, Ulster Farmers Union and the Young Farmers. These events have provided rural communities the opportunity to discuss specific issues which impact on their fear of crime and established engagement increasing confidence to report crime. **Down PCSP** undertook a Down Secured Scheme, which fitted locks, bolts sensor lights etc. in both rural and urban areas within the Down District. Post project evaluation indicated that 98% of respondents felt safer as a result of their engagement with the project. There was also a recorded reduction in domestic burglaries of 18.66% in 2014-15.

Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister

Together: Building a United Community

The Executive's good relations strategy, Together: Building a United Community, was published on 23 May 2013. The Strategy represents a key building block in the implementation of the Programme for Government and reflects the Executive's commitment to improving community relations and building a united and shared society. The Strategy includes a range of commitments that, over the longer term, will lead to sustainable improvements in community relations.

As with all other departments, DARD is represented on the Ministerial Panel and the Good Relations Programme Board. The Ministerial Panel ultimately oversees the delivery and implementation of the actions and commitments given within the Strategy. The Good Relations Programme Board operates under the strategic direction of the Ministerial Panel and reports to the Panel on progress.

The Strategy commits to working with rural community organisations to encourage increasing openness and accessibility and to reduce chill factors and fears that prevent open access. Contracts for the delivery of a rural community development support service have been in place with 8 lead service providers since April 2012 and these have now been extended until 31 March 16.

In addition, the two thematic subgroups, Community Tensions and Housing, both have rural representation on them to ensure rural views and concerns are factored into discussions and decisions.

Social Investment Fund

The Social Investment Fund (SIF) is an £80 million NI Executive Fund designed to deliver social change through reducing poverty, unemployment and physical deterioration. Delivery is managed through nine SIF Investment Zones covering both rural and urban areas, specifically Belfast North, Belfast South, Belfast East, Belfast West, Derry/Londonderry, Northern, South Eastern, Southern and Western Zones.

During the period to 30 June 2015 letters of offer for funding of approximately £53 million issued to 33 projects across all nine Zones. Work was also ongoing to expedite the letters of offer, within SIF's affordability limits, for the remaining projects.

Construction work had started on the Northern Zone's Coleraine Rural and Urban Networks charity hub in Coleraine and was expected to complete in September 2015, and good progress had been made on the Bryson Street Surgery Project in Belfast East. Six revenue projects had appointed, or were about to appoint delivery agents with the intention of starting over the summer period. These included Work Ready West in the Western Zone and the Community Work Programme in the Derry/Londonderry Zone. Both projects are designed to help the employment prospects of the long term unemployed.

Department for Regional Development

Transport NI

The budgetary pressures facing the Department are impacting on the routine maintenance of roads in rural areas. Whilst the Department continues to maintain rural roads, it is at a reduced level commensurate with the budgets available. As a result gully cleaning has been reduced and focused on hot spots only, there has been only one cut of grass in the period April to September and only the most serious potholes have been fixed on rural low trafficked roads - although from 8 September all defects over 100mm deep on rural low trafficked roads will be fixed. In addition, as contractors cannot be employed to fix street lighting outages and significant backlog has built up.

The Department is planning to provide winter service in 2015/16

As a result of successful in year bidding, combined with careful budget management, TransportNI was able to spend some £97.5million on roads structural maintenance during 2014/15. Of this £97.5million, some £56million was spent resurfacing and surface dressing local roads, that is, roads which are not on the Motorway and Trunk Road Network. With this significant level of investment, almost 1,600km of the local road network was either resurfaced or surface dressed.

Structural Maintenance is the collective term for activities which maintain the integrity of the road and footway structure. The main activities include resurfacing and reconstruction, surface dressing, patching and structural drainage. Structural maintenance comprises good value, planned maintenance activities such as resurfacing and surface dressing as well as less efficient, reactive patching.

The evaluation of a cross departmental pilot project operated in the Dungannon area and coordinated by DRD, is now complete. It involved collaboration between Translink, the Education Authority, Southern Health & Social Care Trust and the local community transport provider. The main purpose of the pilot was to trial the integration of publicly funded transport services to improve the travel options available to passengers, particularly in rural areas, and identify opportunities for deploying all of the resources available more efficiently. The evaluation of the pilot project has been used to inform an economic appraisal for the wider roll out of integrated passenger transport arrangements. This has been discussed between Departments involved at a workshop on 30 September 2015, when a follow up action plan was agreed to progress the proposals. This involves two strands of work as follows:

1. The Education Authority and Translink are to examine how their combined fleet of large and medium sized buses could be better integrated to improve efficiency and services.

2. An examination of the viability of using social enterprises to better integrate the following specialist transport services:

- Pupils with special educational needs who have been deemed by the Education Authority to require specialist transport;
- Pupils, who because of the small numbers involved, can be transported to school by minibus;
- Health & Social Care Trust clients who require specialist transport to the Trusts' Day Care or other facilities or to community-based Day Opportunities;
- Demand-responsive services for people living in rural areas who do not have access to public transport services;
- Urban demand-responsive services for people who are not able to use mainstream scheduled public transport services and meet pre-defined eligibility criteria.

Transport Policy, Strategy and Legislation

A Progress Report detailing actions supporting the guidance within the Regional Development Strategy 2035 (RDS), including actions relating to rural communities was issued to the Executive in June 2015. Work is ongoing with the local councils on their responsibilities in relation to the RDS guidance following the transfer of planning to local councils. The Department is procuring new ferries to replace two existing ferries [one for the Ballycastle - Rathlin Island ferry service and one for Portaferry - Strangford ferry service] that are reaching the end of their operational life. The new ferries will enable the Department to continue to provide essential transport services to the rural community. A new harbour is required at Church Bay, Rathlin, to ensure the safe discharge of passengers and freight from the replacement ferry, as well as overnight berthing arrangements. The harbour improvement works is regarded a vital to the economic development and sustainability of the island. DARD has indicated they will provide £500k of funding towards the project (which has an estimated total cost of £1million).

We are currently reviewing the objectives and actions contained within the Rathlin island Action Plan and will seek to ensure the sustainability of island life and the promotion of a vibrant Rathlin Island community.

Water Policy and Share Holder Unit

The Rural Borewells Scheme, funded by the Department, was launched on 6 June 2012 and closed on 31 March 2015. The principle aim of the Scheme is to provide a wholesome water supply for existing properties that have never been served by a public water main. Under this scheme, households where it is financially or technically prohibitive to provide with a mains water supply may be eligible for a grant for a private borewell. The scheme is an extension of the Department's policy of providing

a Reasonable Cost Allowance (RCA) of up to £10,000 per property towards the costs of obtaining a water main. This was increased in £12,000 in 2013/2014. Under the 2012/2013 Scheme, 23 householders who could not access the public main for financial or technical reasons gained access to a wholesome water supply for the first time. Under the 2013/2014 Scheme (including 13 households carried over from 2012/2013 year), 32 householders who could not access the public main for financial or technical reasons were provided with a wholesome water supply for the first time. 25 householders received assistance during the 2014/2015 year. The householders who received a new borewell and/or treatment now have the assurance of a high quality water supply that is safe to drink. The average cost of providing these properties with mains water would have been £94,000 which would have required the average applicant to contribute at £82,000 for a mains supply.

Public Transport Services Division

In conjunction with Translink's role in the Rural Transport Fund, under the auspices of the 2012-2015 Financial Memorandum, during the year to 30th June 2015 marketing and promotional activity was carried out to provide information and promote those Ulsterbus services subsidised under the grant-in-aid arrangements.

This included production and distribution via 'micro marketing' of printed material to stakeholders and passengers, in addition to regionally targeted advertisements and press releases, and collaborative stakeholder engagement. The following is not an exhaustive list but highlights key achievements in this area;

- Outreach to students via attendance at programme of local fresher college events to provide information on public transport options (including attendance at an integrated event in Loughry college with DRD and Community Transport);
- Dissemination of information via programme of local meet the manager events;
- Outreach to senior citizens via attendance at relevant exhibitions/events to promote public transport (e.g. Young at Heart exhibition);
- Participation in Newry & Mourne districts councils Age Friendly Strategic Alliance Partnership;
- Participation in Dungannon Integrated Transport Pilot and production of integrated passenger information to promote the 75a service;
- Focussed promotional campaign and distribution of printed material (30,000 leaflets May 2015) for the portfolio of Rambler bus services and collaboration with local councils and tourist information centres re provision of information. Additionally we provided bus stop departure information, bespoke vehicle liveries, and bus station posters.
- Bespoke rural transport website page/links from main Translink website.

- Targeted advertising and provision of passenger information in media publications with extensive audience reach. This included the following media:
 - Newtownabbey in Touch
 - Crossmaglen Examiner (Observer Newspaper Group)
 - Mourne Observer (Observer Newspaper Group)
 - NI Holiday News
 - NI Visitors Journal (Penton Publications)
 - Coleraine Times (Johnson Publishing)
 - Newry Reporter (Observer Newspaper Group)
 - Mid Ulster Mail (Johnson Mail)
 - Tyrone Democrat (Observer Newspaper Group)
 - Londonderry Today (Johnson Publishing)
 - Derry Journal (Johnson Publishing)
 - Mid Ulster Mail (Johnson Mail)
 - Mid Ulster Mail (Johnson Mail)
 - Dungannon Observer

Department for Social Development

Over the past 12 months, DSD has continued to work positively to achieve its commitments in the Rural White Paper Action Plan and by doing so attempting to address the many challenges faced by rural communities here in conjunction with the work of the other Executive Departments.

DSD's responsibilities in the Rural White Paper Action Plan have focused mainly on the following key areas: community development, social inclusion and rural housing.

Community Development & Social Inclusion

The development of regional support structures (for supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector) which have a strong rural component has contributed to good progress in terms of taking action to support communities in rural areas. All of the new regional support structures, a number of which are delivered in a partnership arrangement involving both DSD and DARD, are now in place and geared to support voluntary and community sector organisations across all of Northern Ireland, to include both rural and urban areas. Many of those voluntary and community organisations which receive support are involved in promoting social inclusion in rural areas.

Rural Housing

Within the OFMdFM Together: Building a United Community Strategy, the Department is committed to creating 10 new shared neighbourhood developments. Among the revised proposed sites for taking forward these developments, 1 rural scheme; Crossgar Road, Saintfield has been identified. Work has commenced on site and the scheme will deliver 12 new homes in 2015/16. The Department continues to seek additional potential sites to develop as shared neighbourhoods across Northern Ireland.

DSD continues to monitor rural developments in other jurisdictions and is currently examining the potential for an affordable housing pilot in the rural area along with opportunities for community self build and community refurbishment of empty stock for rent or purchase.

DSD, working with the Housing Executive and Registered Housing Associations, continues to support housing interventions to improve housing conditions in rural areas. New energy efficient social housing is being provided through the Social Housing Development Programme, with 473 new homes delivered in rural areas over the three year period 2012/13 to 2014/15. This represents 10% of the total Northern Ireland social housing output and a rural capital investment of around £57m. Plans are already in place to increase output by starting up to 200 new houses in rural areas in 2015/16.

Improving the fabric of existing rural housing also continues with 1,658 home improvement grants approved at a cost of £15m during 2012/13 to 2014/15.

Since the launch of the NIHE Rural Action Plan 2013-15 in April 2013, work has commenced on all 58 actions, with encouraging progress made on 56 of the actions.

Key achievements to date include exceeding the 2013/14 target for rural new build housing through the provision of 15 new rural scheme starts which will provide 105 new social homes, helping to address rural housing need and regenerate communities. To improve the energy efficiency of rural housing, the Housing Executive continues to examine and promote energy efficiency measures in rural areas. For example at the end of 2013/14, 40% of Warm Homes installations were in rural areas, meeting the set annual target. The Housing Executive provided match funding to 18 Rural Development Programme projects during 2013/14. This is an example of how different government agencies can work together in partnership with rural communities to promote village renewal.

Key achievements over the last 2 years include the delivery of 36 social housing schemes (224 units) in rural areas, helping to address rural housing need and sustain rural communities.

Since April 2013, under the theme 'Improving People's Homes, 42% of rural private sector improvement grants, approximately 38% of Warm Homes schemes and approximately 31% of boiler replacements have been approved in rural locations.

In Spring 2014 we launched our first 'Rural Community Awards' competition which generated great interest among rural community groups who were rewarded for improving the outlook of their villages and generating community spirit.

Fuel poverty strategy is to be reviewed in 2016/17. Rural dimension will be considered. We continue to support local groups who bulk buy fuel to reduce costs.

Glossary of Terms / Abbreviations

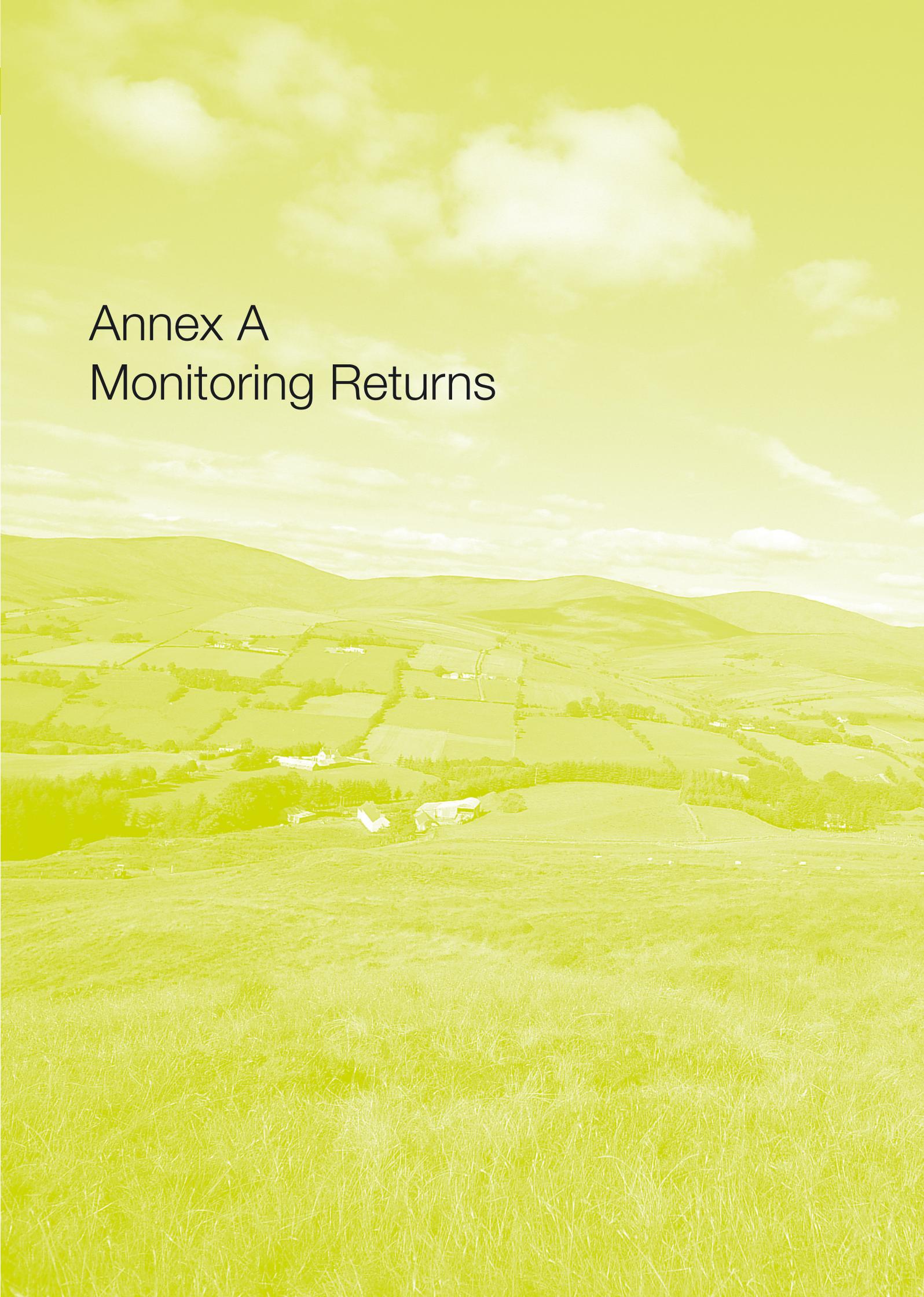
ACNI	Arts Council of Northern Ireland
AFBI	Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute
AFSB	Agri-Food Strategy Board
ALBS	Arms Length Bodies
AOL's	Areas of Learning
ARTS	Assisted Rural Transport Scheme
BEC	Benefit Entitlement Checks
BMI	Body Mass Index
CAFRE	College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CDWGCC	Cross Departmental Working Group on Climate Change
CERI	Connecting Elderly Rural Isolated
COPE	Centres of Procurement Excellence
CPD	Central Procurement Directorate
DARD	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
DCAL	Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure
DCMS	Department of Culture, Media and Sport
DE	Department of Education
DECLG	Department of Environment, Community and Local Government
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DEL	Department for Employment and Learning
DETI	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment
DFA	Digital Film Archive
DFP	Department of Finance and Personnel
DHSSPS	Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety
DOE	Department of Environment
DOJ	Department of Justice
DRD	Department for Regional Development
DSD	Department for Social Development
EHOD	European Heritage Open Days
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund

ES	Extended Schools Programme
EHOD	European Heritage Open Day
EU	European Union
FE	Further Education
FFHCP	Farm Family Health Check Programme
GAA	Gaelic Athletic Association
GHGIP	Greenhouse Gas Implementation Partnership
HE	Higher Education
HED	Historic Environment Division
HSCT	Health and Social Care Trusts
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IFA	Irish Football Association
IRFU	Irish Rugby Football Union
LANTRA	Sector Skills Council for land based and environmental industries
Líofa	Irish for 'fluent' - Irish language project
LDP	Local Development Plans
MARA	Maximising Access in Rural Areas
MaSN	Maximum Student Number
MATRIX	An expert panel formed to advise Government on the Exploitation of R&D and science and technology
NI	Northern Ireland
NICCAP	Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme
NIDIRECT	government services website - http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/
NIEA	Northern Ireland Environment Agency
NIHE	Northern Ireland Housing Executive
NINIS	NI Neighbourhood Information Service
NIRDP	Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme
NIRO	Northern Ireland Renewable Obligation
NISEP	Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy Programme
NISRA	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
NITB	Northern Ireland Tourist Board
NWRC	North West Regional College
OBF	Officially Brucellosis Free
OCTF	Organised Crime Taskforce

OFCOM	Independent regulator and competition authority for the UK communications industries
OFMDFM	Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister
PCSP	Policing and Community Safety Partnership
PHA	Public Health Authority
PPS	Planning Policy Statement
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland
RAFAEL	Renaissance of Atlantic Food Authenticity and Economic Links
RCA	Reasonable Cost Allowance
RCN	Rural Community Network
RCTP	Rural Community Transport Partnerships
RDS	Regional Development Strategy
RDP	NI Rural Development Programme
RHI	Renewable Heat Incentive,
RHPP	Renewable Heat Premium Payment Scheme
RTS	Regional Transportation Strategy
RWPAP	Rural White Paper Action Plan
RYE	Rural Youth Entrepreneurship
SAG	Stakeholder Advisory Group
SFG	Spatial Framework Guidance
SIF	Social Investment Fund
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
SPG	Supplementary Planning Guidance
SPPS	Strategic Planning Policy Statement
SSP	Sector Specific Project
TBSPG	TB Strategic Partnership Group
Timeframe	S – Short Term (1-3 yrs) M – Medium Term (3-5 yrs) L – Long Term (5-10 yrs) O - Ongoing
TNI	Tourism NI
TRPSI	Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation
UBIRFU	Ulster Branch Irish Rugby Football Union
UCGAA	Ulster Council GAA
WHSCCT	Western Health and Social Care Trust

Annex A

Monitoring Returns



Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
5	We will undertake a review of the current classification of settlements to ensure that appropriate definitions of 'rural' are available to policy makers where circumstances require.	NISRA / DARD		M
Status	Green = Implementation achieved			
<i>Update</i>	The revised settlement classification was published in March 2015 and is available on the NISRA website. The population-based classification is augmented by consideration of service provision for each settlement. Accordingly, each settlement has been classified by whether it is within a 20 or 30 minute drive-time of a settlement of at least 10,000 usual residents. While a default urban / rural definition is provided, as in 2005, departments will be able to use the detailed settlement classification to define urban and rural areas as befits their policy purposes.			<i>Update</i>
32	We will explore the merits of establishing a series of key rural indicators to measure the effectiveness of rural development policy and to help inform future policy.	DARD		S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	A comprehensive set of rural/urban comparators has been collated from across Government in order to enhance the evidence base used to inform rural policy. These include east/west as well as rural/urban comparisons and are available on the DARD website. The statistics will be updated in line with the revised settlement classification and urban/rural definition.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
33	We will support the implementation of an enhanced rural proofing process across all Departments to ensure that all major policies and strategies are assessed to determine whether they have a differential impact on rural areas and, where appropriate, make adjustments to take account of particular rural circumstances.	DARD	ALL	S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	Proposals for legislation on rural proofing are currently being developed with the objective of strengthening rural proofing across local and central government. It is anticipated that this legislation will, subject to Executive approval, commence and complete its passage through the Assembly before the end of this current mandate. DARD also continues to support Departments on an ongoing basis in implementing rural proofing through the provision of advice, guidance and training.			<i>Update</i>
38	We will better identify and tackle the causes of poverty and disadvantage in rural areas and to promote social inclusion.	DSD / DARD	OFMDFM	M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	AFBI has been commissioned to undertake research on the impact of low income and poverty on the wellbeing of rural households and the role and scope of social enterprises in delivering solutions. DARD continues to implement a package of measures under its Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework aimed at tackling poverty and social isolation in rural areas, particularly among vulnerable groups. The TRPSI Framework 2011-15 has been extended by one year to March 2016 and DARD has commissioned a review of the Framework with a view to informing a successor Framework to operate in the period post 2016.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
53	We will engage in joint/comparative research, which in turn will inform our policy and programme approaches and future co-operation opportunities.	DARD & DECLG	Defra and other Devolved Administrations	M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	AFBI has been commissioned to undertake a number of research projects on behalf of DARD including research on access to services in rural areas, research to determine the contribution that rural areas make to the NI economy and research on the contribution of key services to the quality of life of rural dwellers. The outcomes of this research will be used to engage with DECLG on areas of closer working.			<i>Update</i>
54	We will work together to share learning on rural proofing and use this tool effectively for the benefit of our rural communities.	DARD & DECLG	Defra and other Devolved Administrations	M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	DARD continues to work with DECLG on an ongoing basis to share learning on rural proofing. In addition DARD, in conjunction with CAL and RDC, also continues to provide an ongoing programme of learning on rural proofing that is available to both central and local government departments.			<i>Update</i>
55	We will share our experiences on the LEADER approach and facilitate the implementation of cross-border co-operation projects.	DARD & DECLG		S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	The Steering Committee on Cross Border Rural Development is made up of officials from DARD and DECLG and meets regularly to review the performance and output of current north and south rural development initiatives.			<i>Update</i>
56	We will share our experiences on the LEADER approach and facilitate the implementation of cross-border co-operation projects.	DARD & DECLG		S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	DARD has undertaken a review of LEADER and the learning from the review has been shared with DECLG. DARD and its ROI counterparts have agreed to hold a co-operation event in late November 2015 for the LAGs to attend.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
57	We will co-operate through formal and informal fora to share learning in developing policy and programme responses to the challenges faced by our rural areas.	DARD & DECLG	Defra and other Devolved Administrations	M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	There have been regular meetings between DARD and DECLG on a range of rural development issues including the Rural Development Programme, the Rural Enablers Project and the INTERREG IVA Programme. The two Departments have also continued to work together in relation to the development of their respective Rural Development Programme 2014-2020. The Steering Committee on Cross Border Rural Development is due to meet in October 2015.			<i>Update</i>
58	We will work closely together in the implementation of our respective Rural White Papers and in any reviews of them.	DARD		M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	DARD plans to consider a review of its Rural White Paper Action Plan following the restructuring of Departments. DARD continues to engage with DECLG through the Steering Committee for Cross Border Rural Development.			<i>Update</i>
61	We will implement a package of measures to tackle rural poverty and social and economic isolation over the next three years.	DARD	Other Departments	S
Status	Green = Implementation achieved			
<i>Update</i>	DARD continues to implement a package of measures under its Tackling Poverty and Social Isolation Framework in partnership with other statutory bodies. Its PfG target of £16m in the period 2011/12-2014/15 has been met and DARD is on course to meet its £4m 2015/16 target. Details of projects funded under the TRPSI Framework are provided in the Review of Progress Section. DARD has commissioned a review of the TRPSI Framework 2011-15 with a view to informing a successor Framework to operate in the period post 2016.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
64	Working with Defra, the devolved administrations and stakeholders, we will seek to influence the CAP and CFP negotiations to:- > secure a fair and proportionate share of the budget; > ensure that the policies contain sufficient flexibility to allow us to tailor-measures to meet our specific needs; and > simplify the CAP	DARD	Defra and other Devolved Administrations	S
Status	Green = Implementation achieved			
<i>Update</i>	A political agreement was reached on CAP reform in June 2013 and the legal text was adopted by the end of 2013 with implementation taking place in 2015. DARD achieved most of its key asks including a fair and proportionate share of the budget. In the final agreement the mechanism to move towards flat rate per hectare payments and 'greening' were considerably simplified, while full flexibility to tailor measures to meet local needs was also secured. Progress was also made on clarifying that CAP income support payments should go to active farmers. A political agreement has also been reached on the EU Budget and legal text was adopted at the end of 2013. Work on CAP Simplification continues and some progress was made in June 2015 on simplifying Commission guidance on greening. New CFP Regulation was adopted in December 2013. The element with most local impact is the introduction of the landing obligation by 2019. DARD is represented on the UK delegation of the Western Waters Regional Group that is introducing discard plans to implement the landing obligation. The Group has prepared a draft discards plan which has been submitted to the Commission for approval. The plan will impact on Irish Sea Nephrops and Haddock fisheries from 1 January 2016.			<i>Update</i>
65	We will seek to maximise opportunities to access other EU funding streams and seek opportunities to work with rural partners/stakeholders to maximise the impact of funding available.	DARD		L
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	The proposals for the new Rural development Programme were submitted to the European Commission in June 2015. DARD has entered into contract on a Youth Entrepreneurship Project which is supported also by Interreg 5B drawing down additional EU funds for NI.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
72	We will work with industry to develop and implement a strategic action plan for the agri-food sector.	DARD/DETI	InvestNI	S
Status	Green = Implementation achieved			
<i>Update</i>	The AFSB's Strategic Action Plan "Going for Growth" was launched in May 2013. The report has 4 key industry targets to 2020: To grow sales by 60% to £7bn; grow employment by 15% to 115,000; grow sales outside NI by 75% to £4.5bn; and grow value added by 60% to £1bn. To deliver these, the Plan makes over 100 recommendations addressed to Government and industry. The Executive's Response to the Strategy was published in October 2014 (https://www.dardni.gov.uk/publications/going-growth-strategic-action-plan-support-ni-agri-food-industry) and significant progress has been made in delivering that response. In particular, DARD is developing the Farm Business Improvement Scheme to be delivered as part of the 2014-2020 Rural Development Programme, which the Department is planning to roll out in a phased approach starting this year. Continued progress is also being made in securing access to new export markets, supporting innovation, improving animal and plant health and the development of sustainable supply chains.			<i>Update</i>
83	We will work together in facilitating the implementation of cross-border co-operation projects, such as through INTERREG and PEACE Programmes, and in identifying shared priorities for the next round of EU programmes.	DARD & DECLG		S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	The PEACE III funded 'Rural Enablers' initiative has ended as have all six of the projects funded through the Rural Development strand of EU INTERREG IVA. DARD's role as an accountable department will not continue for the INTERREG 2014-2020 Programme. The Steering Committee for Cross Border Rural Development will meet in autumn 2015 where officials from DARD and DECLG will discuss opportunities for cooperation through the new RDP and other relevant programmes.			<i>Update</i>
84	We will advance the relocation of the Headquarters of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to a rural area by 2015.	DARD	DFP	M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	Fisheries Division relocated to Downshire Civic Centre, Downpatrick on 8th June 2015. Forest Service is on target to relocate to Inishkeen House, Enniskillen by end September 2015 and Rivers Agency to a new build on the Loughry Campus by August 2016. Work is ongoing to relocate the remainder of departmental HQ to Ballykelly with 400 workstations available by end of 2017 and a further 200 workstations available by end of 2020.			<i>Update</i>

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
25	We will, with the support of DARD, approve detailed actions plans for the delivery of Sport Matters that will include provision for sport in rural areas and amongst rural dwellers.	DCAL		M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	The Department continues to ensure that the provision of sports and leisure activities are available to all through Sport Matters. As part of the delivery of Sport Matters, DCAL and Sport NI have engaged with the Rural Community Network [RCN] on opportunities for promoting sport in rural areas and how the strategy may help to address issues, such as geographical isolation from facilities, relevant to rural communities. DCAL, through Sport NI, is also in the process of creating a new Sport Matters Action Plan [expected December 2015] that will identify further key steps/actions to be delivered by key partners over the next five years, including rural areas. Sport NI is also working to ensure that many aspects of its work will benefit communities in need of investment, particularly rural areas across the north of Ireland. For example, Sport NI's Active Communities programme is designed to provide under-represented groups in sport: women, people with a disability, older people and people suffering from poverty and social deprivation with better opportunities to participate which includes rural communities. Within the last CSR period, DCAL funded a programme for promoting equality, tackling poverty and social exclusion through sport. Funding of £4.5m was equally distributed between UCGAA, UBIRFU and IFA over a three year period, ending on 31st March 2015. A number of elements of this programme have been rolled out across rural areas, including £0.5m to Tyrone GAA's 'Centre of Participation' at Garvaghey with the facilities providing outdoor pitches, skills wall, trim trail and gym equipment for community activities for use within the Garvaghey and surrounding rural areas.		<i>Update</i>	

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
27	Working with the Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI), we will ensure a geographic spread across its programmes.	DCAL, ACNI	NI Screen	L
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	The Arts and Older People Programme, Intercultural Grants Programme and Small Grants Programmes are all ongoing and continue to ensure a good geographic spread of programming. NI Screen funded Creative Learning Centres have been working with schools in rural areas across NI in providing free at point of delivery training for teachers and young people in the use of creative digital technologies. The NI Screen Digital Film Archive (DFA) outreach programme provides free community presentations to rural and isolated community groups. The NI Screen After School Film Club initiative provides regular free screenings and film making opportunities for school children aged 5-18 in rural schools.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
47	We will enable a broad and diverse range of the population to participate in culture, arts and leisure activities.	DCAL ACNI SportNI LibrariesNI	ALBS	L
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	<p>Libraries NI - has developed a number of initiatives to ensure that those from rural communities are able to engage with culture, arts and leisure activities. These include the provision of 28 libraries in rural areas as well as access to 16 mobile libraries and 11 home call vehicles. Libraries NI has successfully introduced a new timetable which has greatly improved access to its mobile libraries. In addition the range of services provided by the libraries has been enhanced by the introduction of a new IT system (E2). Libraries NI also works closely with DARD through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to provide the rural community with IT training and support which will enable the rural community to access the DARD web-site, as well as information on matters of particular interest to that community. In addition Libraries NI, with DARD funding (£20k), has extended its Health in Mind programme to all of its rural libraries. DARD has provided £16k for the Library in a Box pilot programme which will place small self-service library facilities in community buildings in a number of rural areas. A new library recently opened in Lisnaskea and a extensively refurbished Moira library is due to re-open in a few months.</p> <p>Arts Council NI - The Arts and Older People Programme, Intercultural Grants Programme and Small Grants Programmes are all ongoing and continue to ensure that a broad and diverse range of the population participate in arts and culture. DCAL, through Sport NI, and in partnership with local councils, governing bodies of sport, community and voluntary organisations across the north of Ireland, continues to provide opportunities for people to participate in leisure activities through a broad range of participation orientated programmes/interventions which specifically target underrepresented groups (e.g. Active Communities, Active Awards for Sport, Activ8, Active Clubs, Active Inclusion etc).</p> <p><i>Continued next page.</i></p>	<i>Update</i>		

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
<i>Update</i>	<p><i>47 Continued</i></p> <p>Sport NI is currently, on behalf of the Sport Matters Implementation Groups (SMIGs), working with 25 different partner organisations (including DARD) to create a new Sport Matters Action Plan that will identify further key steps/actions to be addressed over the next 5 years. It is anticipated that many of these key steps/actions will consider and/or be specific to meeting the needs of people living within rural across the north of Ireland. For example, the final draft Action Plan will include a number of key actions relating to Sport NI and how it intends to support the implementation of the Northern Ireland Outdoor Recreation Action Plan 'Our Great Outdoors' [published in 2014]. One specific action will refer to the significant development work that has and will continue to be undertaken by Sport NI and other relevant partners to develop and support Local Outdoor Recreation Fora in many rural areas. These Fora are currently working on the development and implementation of local action plans for creating infrastructure and opportunities for outdoor recreation. A number of initiatives continue to raise awareness of Mental Health issues and to promote good health and wellbeing across sports clubs and Governing Bodies across the north of Ireland.</p>			<i>Update</i>
59	We will work to further disseminate and develop the Líoifa Initiative in rural areas by organising 3 localised Líoifa launches outside of Belfast and Derry and facilitate rural learning where local classes might be unavailable by ensuring that online Irish language courses are signposted on the DCAL website.	DCAL		M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	In September 2014, Líoifa organised a series of intensive Irish Language courses to mark the third anniversary of Líoifa. Intensive courses were held in eleven different council areas including the rural areas of Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Tyrone and Derry. Líoifa also rolled out an Irish language workshop for schools across the north in November and December 2014. Liofa Officers delivered the workshops in the areas of Antrim, Armagh, Derry, Down and Tyrone . The aim of the workshops was to detail the work of Líoifa and to provide information to young people in year 10 on possible career opportunities within the Irish language sector.			<i>Update</i>

Department of Education

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
28	We will ensure that all children, regardless of where they live have access to a broad and balanced curriculum.	DE		S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	The statutory Curriculum prescribes a number of high-level Areas of Learning (AoLs) as the minimum to be taught across each Key Stage, combining skills, knowledge and understanding. Teachers have considerable freedom to decide on the specific content to be taught under each AoL as well as the resources or programmes they use in their delivery of the curriculum. While all AoLs have to be covered, the curriculum does include an access statement which allows teachers to modify/adapt their teaching to meet the needs of individual pupils thus providing equality of opportunity and access for all.			<i>Update</i>
29	We will ensure that post primary school pupils in rural areas have access to a wide range of courses at 14 and 16 and to promote collaborative working amongst schools serving rural areas to achieve full delivery of the Entitlement Framework.	DE		S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	The Entitlement Framework has been introduced on a phased basis and the full statutory requirements apply from September 2015 onwards. It is designed to ensure that all pupils, regardless of the school they attend, have equality of access to a broad range of economically relevant and engaging courses supported by high quality, timely careers advice. The Department continues to provide funding to support schools working in Area Learning Communities to ensure the needs of all pupils in the area are met, and to more easily facilitate collaborative working including in rural areas.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
30	We will continue, through the Extended schools Programme, to support breakfast clubs and after schools clubs in rural communities.	DE		O
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	The Extended Schools (ES) programme continues to target those schools operating in the most socially disadvantaged areas. Almost 500 schools are eligible to avail of ES funding of £10.6m in 2015/16 to provide a range of specialist support programmes as identified by schools to help overcome barriers to learning. These include breakfast clubs, after school study support, health and well-being, sport, drama, music etc. Approximately 30% of schools eligible for ES funding are located in rural areas.			<i>Update</i>
31	We will encourage school owners and promoters, through the publication of a DE guidance document targeted at increasing community use of schools facilities, to seek opportunities to provide “out of hours” opportunities for the use of the wide range of facilities available in schools for the benefit of children and the wider community.	DE		S
Status	Green = Implementation achieved			
<i>Update</i>	The DE Guidance document ‘Community Use of School Premises’ issued to all schools in January 2014. DE is committed to identifying and disseminating good practice with a particular focus on wider community use to help schools build stronger links with parents and local communities. The 2013 and 2014 School Omnibus Surveys recorded that over 80% of schools make their premises available as a community facility.			<i>Update</i>
49	We will ensure, through an area based approach to planning that children and young people have access to high quality education delivered through a network of viable and sustainable schools.	DE		M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	On 1 April 2015, the Education Authority became operational; planning authorities and sector support bodies are engaged in Area Planning governance at a Local Group, Working Group and Steering Group level and are actively engaging with all communities affected by potential change in education provision. The Sustainable Schools Policy takes account of the specific needs of rural communities.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
50	We will engage with key stakeholders in the development of education provision on an area basis.	DE		S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	Area Planning is ongoing and planning authorities are actively engaging with all communities affected by potential change in education provision. An Area Planning Cycle has been agreed and Annual Action Plans and Area Plans will be subject to DE scrutiny.			<i>Update</i>
51	We will explore innovative and creative solutions to the delivery of education provision in rural areas through the area based planning approach.	DE		M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	Area Planning Guidance requires planning and managing authorities to explore all options to secure viable and sustainable solutions for the provision of education in all areas. The Shared Education Campus Programme offers the opportunity for rural schools to come together to secure long term provision in rural areas.			<i>Update</i>

Department for Employment and Learning

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
6	We will work with Lantra, the Sector Skills Council to identify the skill needs within the land-based, food and rural sectors. We will roll out the 'Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland' and ensure that a flexible skills delivery infrastructure is in place to meet the skill needs of those in rural areas.	DEL		L
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	Lantra, the Sector Skills Council for land based and environmental industries is seeking to deliver on the RWP in terms of training opportunities. This has included the recruitment of additional training providers/new instructors across a range of skills areas, and also the development of training courses and qualifications to meet industry requirements; there are currently 35 Lantra approved centres offering training in NI. Between January and June 2015, 1,260 learners completed a Lantra Awards training course in NI. DEL offer a supporting role to Lantra but do not any have direct responsibility for this work. Since 2011 the Department has been working with the food and drink processing sector through the Food and Drink Manufacturing Skills Action Group, to identify skills challenges facing the industry and to develop and test solutions to the issues. Lantra is represented on this Group as are other relevant stakeholders from government, local industry and education providers.			<i>Update</i>
48	We will encourage the participation of older people in Further Education courses and other community development interventions in order to enable them to contribute to the sustainability of rural communities.	DEL		L
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	FE colleges continue to make their courses available to learners of all ages. In the 2013/14 academic year there were 4,992 regulated enrolments leading to recognised qualifications in respect of those aged 55 and above. Within this, there were 1,975 enrolments in respect of those aged 65 and over. In addition, there were 9,786 and 4,627 enrolments for these two age groups on non-regulated courses in FE colleges. (this is the latest validated college enrolment figures).			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
52	We will seek to secure local access to higher education through an equitable distribution of maximum student number places across all of the Further Education colleges.	DEL		L
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	DEL carried out the 2015 College Development Plan process. Colleges submitted their report on their HE in FE performance in 2014/15 and their plans for HE delivery in 2015/16. Meetings were held with colleges' senior management to discuss the plans and these informed a review of the maximum student number (MaSN) allocations across the colleges. The aim of the review was to ensure an equitable and rational distribution of HE in FE places across NI. Despite budgetary reductions the Department has been able to maintain the same level of full-time higher education provision in each regional college in academic year 2015/16.			<i>Update</i>
79	We will utilise the Connected programme to ensure closer working between the Higher and Further Education sectors and the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) and the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) to meet the knowledge transfer needs of our agri-food and biotechnology industry.	DEL		L
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	Connected continues to link with AFBI and CAFRE across its project work. In particular, five sector specific projects in the agri-food arena are being progressed under Connected 3, two led by HE (Ulster University - 'Innovation for Life and Health Sciences' and Queen's University - 'Competence Centre for Sustainable Energy') and three led by FE (Southern Regional College - 'Food Innovation'; North West Regional College - 'Food Development, Business Generation & Support'; and South Eastern Regional College - 'Environmental Skills'). One case study was published this period involving CAFRE. The case involved NWRC working jointly on an Invest NI Innovation Voucher for Baba's Foods with CAFRE, focusing on the calorific values of the new start-up's products and on packaging solutions.			<i>Update</i>

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
14	We will continue to support innovative ways of improving broadband quality in rural areas through the operation of the Broadband Fund.	DETI		O
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	Due to a decrease in the number of applications being received (exacerbated by a reduction in the EU intervention rates making participation in the Fund less attractive) and a drop in the quality of projects coming forward, the decision was taken to close the NI Broadband Fund in April 2012 with the remaining budget, some £500k, being reallocated in support of a strategic project aimed at providing improvements in access to a basic broadband service for at least 45,000 premises across Northern Ireland by the end of 2015. The contract for this project (The Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement Project) was awarded on 4 February 2014 and is being delivered in eight phases with an overall completion date of 31 December 2015. To 30 June 2015, almost 32,000 premises across Northern Ireland had benefited from the infrastructure improvements delivered by this project.			<i>Update</i>
15	We will complete the rollout of the Next Generation Broadband Project, to extend access to high speed broadband services to 85% of rural and urban businesses.	DETI		S
Status	Green = Implementation achieved			
<i>Update</i>	The Next Generation Broadband Project was completed on time and within budget leading to fibre-based broadband services offering download speeds of up to 40 Mbps (now increased to 80 Mbps) being delivered from 1,265 street cabinets. Prompted by the success of the project, the contractor, BT took the decision to fibre upgrade an additional 1201 cabinets (including those upgraded across Londonderry as part of the City of Culture preparations). The recent OFCOM Infrastructure Report 2014 (December 2014) states that NI continues to have the highest availability of Next Generation Access (NGA) services of any UK nation (at 95%) and a superfast broadband availability at some 77%. The contract with BT will continue to be monitored until 2016 to ensure that services are being delivered in accordance with specifications.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
16	We will continue to work with the telecoms industry, the telecoms regulator and other stakeholders to ensure that we continue to have competitive telecoms services and world class telecoms infrastructure.	DETI		O
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	DETI awarded a contract to BT on 4 February 2014 to deliver the Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement Project (NIBIP) which seeks to improve access to fixed-line broadband services for 45,000 premises by 31 December 2015 (See 14 above). In February 2015, the Department awarded a further contract to BT for delivery of the Superfast Roll-out Programme which aims to extend the reach of broadband services with speeds of at least 24 Megabits per second to a further 39,000 premises across Northern Ireland by 31 December 2017. In developing these projects the Department has worked closely with the telecommunications industry and the regulator and has conducted full public consultations on the intervention areas.			<i>Update</i>
17	We will continue our engagement with the Department for Culture Media and Sports and Broadband Deliver UK to ensure that our perspective is reflected in the Broadband UK Strategy, which aims to deliver, the best superfast broadband network in Europe by 2015; and an appropriate allocation of funding is received under the Strategy to extend the reach of superfast broadband into rural areas currently un-served or likely to be served by private sector investment alone.	DETI		O
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	DETI has secured an allocation of £4.4m under the Broadband UK initiative which is being used, in conjunction with other funding sources, including the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the Northern Ireland Sustainable Competitiveness Programme, to deliver the objectives of the NI Broadband Improvement Project (see 14 above). DETI has also secured just over £7m from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport(DCMS) which, matched with a similar amount from DETI, is being used to deliver the Superfast Roll-out Programme. DETI officials continue to liaise with their DCMS colleagues on these projects and potential opportunities for additional funding that could be used to further upgrade the Northern Ireland telecommunications infrastructure.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
18	We will examine options to maintain 100% access to at least a first generation broadband service across the region on expiry of the existing Remote Broadband Services Contract.	DETI		M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	In January 2012, Onwave Ltd was appointed for a period of three-years ending on to offer a range of satellite broadband products which would meet the needs of consumers who were experiencing difficulties in accessing broadband services via other means. While the Department's contract with Onwave has expired, it is understood that they are continuing to offer products with download speeds of 20Mbps and price differentiation based on the level of data allowance required. In addition, through the NI Broadband Fund, DETI has supported a number of projects which have extended the availability of fixed-wireless broadband networks offering services of between 3Mbps and 100Mbps.			<i>Update</i>
19	We will undertake full impact screening and consultation in respect of key priorities that may be carried forward under any Telecommunications Strategy covering the period 2011 to 2015.	DETI		M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	In March 2011 DETI commenced a full public consultation of its Telecoms Action Plan, for the period 2011-2015, which included seven public meetings in Armagh, Ballymena, Belfast, Enniskillen, Londonderry, Newcastle and Omagh. As part of that process, it also published details of its impact screening, on which comments were also sought. Fifty written responses were received and a formal response to these was published on the Department's website in September 2011, including responses to any impact related comments. In addition, individual responses were issued to a number of stakeholders, who submitted detailed replies, or made representations at the public meeting events. With regard to the NI Broadband Improvement Project, two public consultations were run, in order to obtain views on the proposed intervention area (October 2012 and June 2013). A consultation on the Superfast Broadband Programme Phase 2 was taken forward in August/September 2014. Looking forward, DETI has commenced a public consultation consultation on its proposed telecommunications activities for the period 2015-2017 ('Continuing to Connect - Telecoms 2015-2017').			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
40	We will promote action to address inequalities in accessing alternative cost effective fuel in rural areas.	DSD/DETI		M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	Planned extension of the natural gas network to main towns in the West of NI will provide additional fuel choice for business and domestic consumers, and help with budgeting of energy costs through the option of gas pre-payment meters for domestic consumers. The Utility Regulator awarded licenses to developers Mutual Energy and SGN in February 2015, and subject to planning and other approvals, work to deliver the new gas networks is expected to commence in 2016/17.			<i>Update</i>
66	We will continue to support opportunities for revenue creation from visitors in rural areas, through leading the implementation of the 'Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland 2020'.	DETI		O
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	A key recommendation from the Hunter Review, an independent review of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (now renamed Tourism NI) and wider tourism structures commissioned in 2014, was that the Northern Ireland Executive should publish an updated Strategy for Tourism at an early date. Work on developing a new tourism strategy is underway and DETI and Tourism NI officials are currently drafting an issues paper as the basis for the strategy developmental process. The process will involve extensive engagement with the industry and key stakeholders in the form of participation in the Steering Group and regional road shows which will be held across Northern Ireland.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
67	Invest NI will continue to support investment in tourism accommodation and work closely with other investment stream funders to avoid duplication of public investment.	DETI		O
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	Invest NI continues to offer support for selected tourism accommodation development. While number of applications and approvals remain low, support for development of competitiveness in existing client businesses continues. Invest NI continues to liaise with other funders on a case by case basis to ensure no duplication of public funds. DETI in conjunction with Invest NI and Tourism NI has completed a review of future accommodation needs. Consultation process has concluded and a revised policy for intervention is under consideration			<i>Update</i>
68	We will continue to work with others to encourage rural tourism businesses to become established and sustainable, by helping to improve their capacity and product.	DETI		O
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	Invest NI and Tourism NI continue to work with DARD and others on an ongoing basis to support and develop rural businesses. Tourism NI works with sectoral bodies in rural tourism to encourage the development of 'clustered' products and services that will deliver a complete rural experience for visitors. 'Coasts and lakes' and 'unique outdoors' are two key propositions that offer opportunities to spread the benefits of tourism to rural areas and to encourage farm diversification.			<i>Update</i>
69	We will continue to work with others to ensure a co-ordinated approach to rural tourism development.	DETI		O
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	Tourism NI continues to liaise with DARD on developing programme criteria aligned with strategic tourism priorities for the next Rural Development Programme (2014-2020). Pending launch of the RDP schemes, funding has been allocated to rural economic development that will offer the opportunity for funding streams to be targeted at tourism infrastructure, small business development and with additional potential scope for tourism related projects through village renewal schemes. TNI is represented on the DARD Monitoring Committee for the new programme.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
70	We will continue to support the development of sustainable rural economies by providing a modern economic infrastructure and access to business support tools.	DETI		O
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	Access to business support tools through a physical network of Invest NI Regional Offices, currently with 8 points of presence across NI; and through a multi-channel contact strategy for the NI business base (access through web, telephone, mobile, text etc; examples being nibusinessinfo website and Invest NI's Freefone no. 0800 1814422).			<i>Update</i>
71	We will continue to work with DARD and DFP to explore where Government, as our largest procurer of goods and services, can use innovative procurement techniques such as pre-commercial procurements to support the growth of rural businesses particularly SME's.	DETI	DFP/DARD	O
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	This work is ongoing, including briefings to staff in CPD and COPEs.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
72	We will work with industry to develop and implement a strategic action plan for the agri-food sector.	DARD/DETI	A&AF	S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	The AFSB's Strategic Action Plan "Going for Growth" was launched in May 2013. The report has 4 key industry targets to 2020: To grow sales by 60% to £7bn; grow employment by 15% to 115,000; grow sales outside NI by 75% to £4.5bn; and grow value added by 60% to £1bn. To deliver these, the Plan makes over 100 recommendations addressed to Government and industry, which estimates required public sector funding of £400m to lever in £1.3bn overall investment to the sector. The Executive's Response to the Strategy was published in October 2014 (https://www.dardni.gov.uk/publications/going-growth-strategic-action-plan-support-ni-agri-food-industry) and significant progress has been made by both Government and industry in delivering that response. DETI and Invest NI continue to implement and monitor the 29 Executive actions for which they have been allocated lead responsibility, and jointly working with other Departments on further actions where they have been identified as a delivery partner. Key actions allocated to DETI and Invest NI include supporting the industry in the establishment of a new industry-led agri-food marketing body, the establishment of a £6.7million Northern Ireland Agri-Food Quest Competence Centre (AFQCC), extension of the gas network into the west, and the introduction of a £12 million loan scheme to test new technologies to process poultry litter.			<i>Update</i>
73	We will continue to promote and support innovation in rural businesses and rural communities, through a suite of innovation programmes, available through Invest NI, including the Innovation Voucher Initiative.	DETI		O
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	Innovation vouchers are worth £5000 and allow businesses to access expertise from public sector Knowledge Providers to solve business issues. There are generally four calls for applications per year and these are widely promoted throughout NI. During the period ended 30.6.15 Invest NI received additional funding for a continuation of the programme for a further five years. The first two calls in this new phase took place in April and June, resulting in the award of 109 vouchers (vouchers awarded outside of the period under review).			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
74	Through MATRIX we will continue to provide information and foresight to help rural businesses find new markets and opportunities.	DETI		O
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	MATRIX has recently undertaken two separate (but overlapping) foresight studies to identify future global market opportunities which NI companies, including rural businesses, can exploit. The studies focus on the Life & Health Sciences and the ICT/Digital sectors; the Life and Health Sciences Report was published in February 2015, and the findings of the ICT/Digital Report will be published soon.			<i>Update</i>
75	We will continue to work with the Agri Food and Biosciences Institute and DARD to encourage knowledge and technology transfer to rural businesses and to leverage support under the EU Framework Programme.	DETI	DARD/AFBI	O
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	This work is ongoing using H2020 Contact Point Network.			<i>Update</i>
76	We will continue to work with DARD, rural communities and the Social Economy Network to promote the social economy sector in rural areas.	DETI	DARD	S
Status	Amber = Implementation commenced but progress is slower than anticipated			
<i>Update</i>	Work continues through the Social Economy Policy Group to bring forward proposals to further support the sector as part of the development of the 2014-2020 Rural Development Plan and to provide funding for rural community support delivery bodies to support development of the social economy in rural areas.			<i>Update</i>
77	We will continue to work in partnership to organise events to promote available support to rural Social Economy Enterprises (SEEs) and to raise awareness of the importance economic, environmental and social contribution which SEEs make to rural communities.	DETI		O
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	This work continues through funding Social Enterprise NI as the representative body of the sector. Social Enterprise NI continue to share learning and best practice through events such as showcase days held in rural areas.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
78	This work continues through funding Social Enterprise NI as the representative body of the sector. Social Enterprise NI continue to share learning and best practice through events such as showcase days held in rural areas.	DETI		O
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	Invest NI's Social Entrepreneurship Programme finished on the 3rd July 2015 with 86% of the participating groups from Super Output Areas (9% above target) which includes those located in rural areas; and 52% from Neighbourhood Renewal Areas (7% above target). Responsibility for Social Entrepreneurship delivery formed part of the transfer of functions to Councils from 1st April 2015. Councils now have responsibility for bringing a focus on groups located in disadvantaged areas, including those in rural areas.			<i>Update</i>
88	We will continue to work with others to provide a robust and flexible energy infrastructure to enhance the role of renewable electricity generation and support a sustainable green economy. This will entail strengthening of the electricity grid where necessary to absorb higher levels of renewable generation.	DETI		O
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	Electricity Stakeholder Group established. Identification of potential grid investment options using ERDF funding under 2014-2020 programme currently on hold pending outcome of review of Strategic Energy Framework and assessment of future support for renewable energy. Investment in grid continues under regulatory arrangements. Re-design of all-island Single Electricity Market also being progressed to harmonise trading of electricity across European markets. This work programme also includes a workstream to support higher levels of renewable energy penetration on the grid (DS3).			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
89	We will continue to ensure a joined up approach to achieving the full potential offered by renewable energy solutions.	DETI		0
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	<p>The Renewable Heat Incentive, (RHI), introduced in November 2012 continues to provide support through a 20 year technology based tariff to businesses, converting to renewable heating solutions. In December 2014 the scheme was extended to the domestic sector and this provides a technology based upfront payment plus a 7 year tariff based payment. Domestic customers who had availed of support under the previous interim Renewable Heat Premium Payment Scheme, (RHPP) introduced in May 2012 will be able to transfer across to the RHI. A phase 2 review of the non-domestic scheme is currently being undertaken and will see the extension of support to new technologies and new tariffs. This will be undertaken in two stages, the first being a new CHP tariff from November 2015 to coincide with NIRO changes and tariff banding and tiered tariff changes to biomass to ensure affordability of the scheme going forward. The second stage will be progressed in 2016. To date under the non-domestic scheme there have been 841 applications with 664 accredited installations. On the domestic side some 1300 customers received support under the RHPP most of whom are expected to transfer across to RHI, and there are around 345 new domestic RHI applications to date. We are on target towards achieving the PfG target to have 4% of heat from renewable sources by 2015. The PfG target of 20% renewable electricity consumption by 2015 has been achieved. Renewable electricity consumption was at 22% at the end of August 2015. DETI issued a Response to Adjustments to Reporting Provisions and Sustainability Criteria for Biomass in March 2015 and issued the consultation on Transition from NIRO to Contracts for Difference and Grace Periods in March 2015. The Energy (Amendment) Order (NI) 2015 came into operation in May 2015 which provided the Department with the enabling powers to make a closure order for the NIRO. DETI confirmed that the NIRO will close to non wind renewable technologies in 2017. A further consultation on the closure of the NIRO to wind will issue in due course. DETI continues to progress the development of a cross departmental community energy action plan.</p>	<i>Update</i>		

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
90	We will work towards extending the natural gas network to main towns in the West and to East Down to offer energy consumers additional fuel choice, along with the cost and efficiency benefits associated with natural gas.	DETI		S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	Following a competition by the Utility Regulator for licenses to extend gas infrastructure to Dungannon, Coalisland, Cookstown, Magherafelt, Omagh, Strabane and Enniskillen along with Derrylin, licenses were awarded to developers Mutual Energy and SGN in February 2015. The European Commission confirmed State Aid approval in July 2014 for the NI Executive grant assistance of up to £32.5m towards construction of the high pressure gas infrastructure. Subject to planning consent and other approvals, works to deliver the new gas networks is expected to commence in 2016/17.			<i>Update</i>

Department of the Environment

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
42	We will implement changes to the planning system to provide for improved engagement with local communities in the planning and development of rural areas. These changes will include new requirements under the Planning Act (NI) 2011 for councils to prepare statements of community involvement and for the undertaking of pre-application community consultation in respect of major developments.	DOE		L
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	<p>The Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 was commenced on 1st April 2015 and transferred responsibility for the majority of planning functions to the 11 newly formed councils. Each of the 11 councils must prepare and publish a statement of community involvement. The statement must set out the council's policy for involving the community in the exercise of its local development plan and planning control functions. The Act also placed a statutory requirement on developers to carry out pre-application community consultation on major development proposals before submitting the application to the council or Department.</p> <p>Under the Act the 11 councils will be responsible for preparing their own local development plans (LDP) which will set out the councils' vision for the future development in their districts. Before preparing their LDP councils must prepare a preferred options paper setting out a number of options for the future development in the district and the paper will be subjected to public consultation. Local communities will also be engaged at further key stages in the LDP process including the preparation of the Plan Strategy and Local Policies Plan. The councils must take into account any representations received when preparing their LDP.</p> <p><i>Continued on next page.</i></p>			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
<i>Update</i>	<p><i>42 continued</i></p> <p>A Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) is also under development. Published in February 2014 the consultation draft SPPS introduces new overarching core planning principles, explains the new Local Development Plan and Development Management system requirements, and brings forward new strategic retail and town centres planning policy. In addition, it consolidates existing subject planning policies into a single document. The Department received a total of 726 responses during the 12 week consultation exercise, which closed on 29 April 2014. The final draft of the SPPS was completed in March 2015 following a period of extensive engagement with key planning stakeholders. The Department aims to publish the SPPS in final form in the near future following Executive committee consideration.</p>			<i>Update</i>
43	We will ensure planning policy and rural development policy is joined up and find ways to reduce the time taken to consider rural development programme planning applications.	DOE		M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	Now that planning has transferred to councils, the majority of these planning applications and forthcoming local planning policies will be brought forward by councils. In relation to the strategic policy development process Planning Policy Division (PPD) will continue to carry out Rural Proofing Screening and liaise with DARD at the earliest opportunity to take advice on whether any further actions or mitigation measures are required. In addition, following the publication of the SPPS in final form the Minister for the Environment has confirmed that a review of strategic policy on Development in the Countryside. This will offer rural stakeholders and interested parties, including the general public, an opportunity to influence the future direction of this strategic planning policy.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
81	We will take a range of actions to better understand the cause of, and to reduce the number of, collisions on rural roads which will include carrying out research and investigations into road safety in rural areas, improving the quality of data and evidence used to understand and address road safety problems and undertaking new targeted public information campaigns.	DOE		S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	<p>A Road Safety Research Co-ordination Group, involving road safety partners, has been established to help identify emerging trends and provide a sound knowledge base for developing future policies. Research specifically on rural road collisions involving children and young people has been completed and new public information campaigns, which include rural scenarios, continue to be developed and launched.</p> <p>Performance indicators, including the number of people and the number of children killed in collisions on rural roads, have also been developed to help support better understanding of road safety issues and these are monitored by the Road Safety Strategy to 2020 Delivery Board. A Road Safety Strategy Annual Report is published at the end of each calendar year on the DOE website and includes an analysis of Strategy related performance indicators.</p>			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
85	We will seek to increase the contribution made by rural tourism by promoting the sustainable use of our natural and built heritage. We will also seek to increase the number of visits to historic monuments located in the countryside by improving access for visitors and undertaking more effective marketing.	DOE	DETI	M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	<p>The Historic Environment Division (HED) undertakes a range of functions relating to the rural area of NI including: processing of statutory consents and licences; provision of Grant Aid; conduct of conservation and presentation works at Historic Monuments; outreach and community involvement in the Historic Environment. Examples include: 100% of the 84 Scheduled Monument Consent decisions issued on time; 100% of the 256 requests for licences to carry out archaeological excavations issued on time; In 2013-14 business year HED responded to some 3,500 planning applications, many of which were rural in nature; In the 2014 calendar year, visits to historic monuments at 296,786 were down overall by 2.3% on 2013, though numbers at Carrickfergus Castle rose to 70,905, up 6.5% and numbers at Dunluce Castle also rose to 61,395, up by 11.5%; HED designated a further 23 scheduled monuments this year and added 16 sites to the Northern Ireland Sites and Monuments Record; HED funding enabled Fermanagh District Council to undertake large-scale conservation works to part of the Enniskillen Castle Barracks complex, work which is integral to the delivery of the Heritage Gateway project funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, Tourism NI and Fermanagh District Council. It will provide a heritage hub for the district and signpost visitors to the rich heritage assets in the west of Northern Ireland, many of which are in State Care; Conservation schemes at scheduled historic monuments were successfully completed at sites such as Templecorran Church, Co Antrim, and Prehen Bawn and Enagh Church in Co Londonderry. Conservation works were commenced at rural sites such as White Church in Ballywalter Co Down, and St Aidan's Church, St Breacan's Church and Movanagher Bawn in Co Londonderry.</p> <p>The 'Northern Ireland Tourism Statistics 2013' report estimated that the average public spend on a tourism day trip within Northern Ireland is £28 per person. This figure would suggest that EHOD 2014, which included many rural sites, contributed £2,117,080 to the Northern Ireland economy. This is an increase of 24% on the previous year's figures.</p> <p>Continued on next page.</p>		<i>Update</i>	

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
<i>Update</i>	<p>85 Continued</p> <p>The 2014 spend by DOE on EHOD (excluding staff costs), was approximately £47,000, which suggests that we have achieved a figure of £45 return on investment per £1 spent for EHOD 2014. This suggests that the event is helping to grow a sustainable economy in Northern Ireland.</p> <p>NIEA continued to encourage the sustainable use of our natural environment for outdoor recreation through the provision of grant aid to environmental charities and councils. This included support for a number of Landscape Partnership Schemes in the Mourne, Antrim Glens, Ring of Gullion, Belfast Hills and the Sperrins and support for Outdoor Recreation NI to manage a suite of websites promoting the sustainable use of our natural and built heritage including WalkNI.com. NIEA continued to deliver on objectives and targets in the Outdoor Recreation Action Plan for Northern Ireland in partnership with other public bodies, Outdoor Recreation NI and other third party groups. This seven year action plan identifies the key activities required to continue to develop “a culture of dynamic, sustainable outdoor recreation in Northern Ireland”.</p>			<i>Update</i>
86	As part of the overall approach, we will maximise opportunities for rural areas to play their part in climate change mitigation and adaptation. We will continue to support DARD in developing climate change policies for rural areas through the Cross Departmental Working Group on Climate Change. This will help ensure that rural areas contribute to the Northern Ireland Executive target to help deliver the on greenhouse gas emissions reductions and to the delivery of its adaptation programme target.	DOE		L
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	DOE continued to support DARD in developing climate change policies for rural areas through actions taken in the Cross Departmental Working Group on climate change and through the Greenhouse Gas Implementation Partnership (GHGIP). Phase Two “Efficient Farming” Action Plan was agreed, this phase will outline a direction of travel for the rest of this decade. Work continued on the agricultural actions undertaken in the first Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme (NICCAP). Activities undertaken included increased awareness of climate change adaptation and development of best practice for land managers, and research and identification of climate resilient crops and grasses. Work commenced on the development of a second UK Climate Change Risk Assessment, input was sought and received from the agriculture sector on the natural environment and rural economy chapter of the assessment.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
87	We will help Councils, rural communities and rural businesses to contribute to meeting waste management targets through the Department's Rethink Waste Fund. We will also continue to support the Waste and Resources Action Programme which aims to help businesses and individuals reap the benefits of reducing waste, develop sustainable products and use resources in a more efficient way.	DOE		L
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	The Rethink Waste Fund has £1M to allocate for grants in 2015/16 for resource efficiency projects diverting waste from landfill. Projects will be allocated to councils and other organisations from across Northern Ireland.			<i>Update</i>
91	We will help facilitate the increased deployment of renewable energy production in rural areas by providing a supportive planning policy framework and guidance on renewable technologies.	DOE		S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	The final draft of the SPPS was completed in March 2015 following a period of extensive engagement with key planning stakeholders. The SPPS largely brings forward the policy approach of PPS 18. The Department aims to publish the SPPS in final form in the near future following Executive committee consideration. Following the publication of the SPPS in final form the Environment Minister has confirmed that a review of strategic policy on Renewable Energy will be undertaken. In addition, Departmental officials have prepared internal guidance notes for processing renewable energy applications (including wind farms) which will provide useful advice and guidance to planning staff.			<i>Update</i>

Department of Finance and Personnel

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
20	We will work with other government Departments to explore better opportunities for <i>nidirect</i> to support rural dwellers.	DFP		S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	NI Direct Digital Transformation Programme is working with a number of Departments to develop on-line access to government services allowing rural dwellers to complete transactional processes at a place and time of their choosing.			<i>6 services live by 1 Mar 2016</i>
21	We will reduce barriers to access online services.	DFP		S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	Silver Surfers Day activity to be carried out in rural locations as well as urban. Go ON NI roadshows to be set up in rural locations to educate citizens on online use and address the barriers of digital exclusion and promote the benefits of being online.			<i>Update</i>
82	We will work closely with DARD to ensure our statistics are disseminated in a format which supports effective rural policy making.	DFP/NISRA	DARD	S
Status	Green = Implementation achieved			
<i>Update</i>	NI Neighbourhood Information Service (NINIS) www.nisra.gov.uk/ninis continues to allow rural (and urban) communities across NI free access to high quality official statistics on their local area. The website contains a series of Frequently Asked Questions on Urban/Rural issues (e.g. how are areas classed as urban or rural?) and includes information on the Review of the Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements which was published by NISRA in March 2015. As part of this dissemination, a helpline and training are available. Training has been provided to a number of rural organisations and community groups on the use of official statistics (e.g. the DARD Research Discussion Forum and the Rural Community Network). Finally an e-zine or on-line newsletter is available to keep users aware of new/updated statistics and this is circulated widely to DARD staff and representatives of rural community networks. NISRA staff have previously liaised with DARD Farm Surveys Branch regarding the hosting of urban/rural data and 2005 urban/rural classifications were subsequently added to NINIS Area Profiles.			<i>Update</i>

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
22	We will work with DARD to roll out a programme of community based health checks and information targeting farm families across all HSC Trust areas.	DHSSPS	DARD	S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	The Farm Family Health Check Programme (FFHCP) continues to be an effective mechanism for engaging the rural community and particular male farmers over the age of 45. In the reporting period from 30th June 2014 until 30th June 2015, 2725 clients attended for a health check, 1355 clients were advised to see their GP, 102 clients referred to the MARA programme and 322 clients to a farm safety course.			<i>Update</i>
23	We will work in partnership with DARD to support rolling out the 'Maximising Access to and uptake of Grants Benefits and Services Project'.	DHSSPS	DARD	S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	The MARA Project has now been extended until March 2016. Thirteen Lead Organisations are delivering the MARA project. For the period July 1st 2014 to June 30th 2015 MARA Extended has conducted a total of 2,335 First Household Visits and 1,438 Follow Up Visits .The first visits have generated a total of 5,805 onward referrals for services, grants and benefits. An evaluation of the core MARA project funded from May 2012 - December 2015 (12,085 household visits) has now been completed.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
24	In seeking to improve services at local level, local commissioners will ensure that the planning, commissioning and delivery of health and social care services is informed by the view and opinions of people living in rural communities.	DHSSPS		L
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	The Public Health Agency continues to consult with residents across all rural areas in the planning and design of service specifications for its new services. Consultations have been facilitated on drugs and alcohol and Protect Life Services and attended/responded to by residents across all HSCT areas. For example, current consultation on the future of the Lifeline service will be facilitated in venues throughout Northern Ireland including rural areas to enable all residents to attend and provide their views.			<i>Update</i>
44	In taking forward the development and implementation of the range of health improvement and promotion strategies appropriate protocols/and or structures will be developed to ensure the needs of rural communities are met.	DHSSPS		S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	Partnership structures exist in all 5 HSCT areas to enable inclusion of the views of both urban and rural communities in the development and implementation of health improvement and promotion strategies.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
45	Health and Social Care Agencies will be expected to incorporate a community development approach to their programmes as appropriate in order to support capacity and resilience building in rural communities.	DHSSPS	DARD	S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	The PHA has adopted a community development strategy to strategically influence the way in which it's work is developed and implemented.			<i>Update</i>
46	We will work with DARD to explore the impact of rurality, isolation and deprivation on health inequalities.	DHSSPS	DARD	M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	The PHA continues to work with DARD staff to explore the impact of rurality, isolation and deprivation in rural communities through the flagship programmes of MARA and Farm Families Screening Programme. PHA has dedicated resource from its Health Intelligence Unit to evaluating the impact of both of these programmes on the rural community.			<i>Update</i>
80	We will engage with DARD, farm families and the agri-food sector to find opportunities to increase the procurement of fresh, local sustainable food into Health and Social Care facilities e.g. through the RAFAEL project.	DHSSPS		L
Status	Red = Implementation not achieved and/or not expected to be achieved			
<i>Update</i>	Programme stopped until further notice.			<i>Update</i>

Department of Justice

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
7	We are developing a new Community Safety Strategy which will ensure that the needs of rural communities are taken into account.	DOJ		S
Status	Green = Implementation achieved			
<i>Update</i>	The Community Safety Strategy was agreed by the Justice Committee and the Executive in June 2012, and published on 26 July 2012. Subsequently action plans for each of the 8 strands of activity detailed in the Strategy, including business and rural crime, were developed and agreed by the Justice Committee on 17 January 2013. Updates on delivery of the action plans are provided to the Justice Committee on an annual basis. The second annual update was considered by the Justice committee on 16 April 2015. This update included actions taken at a strategic level to support safer rural communities, and prevent and reduce crime. This work has included the funding of a regional initiative to help tackle the theft of farm machinery, the delivery of a rural crime conference and the work of the Organised Crime Taskforce (OCTF) in addressing organised crimes affecting rural locations such as fuel laundering.			<i>Update</i>
8	At a local level, partnerships such as Policing and Community Safety Partnerships will ensure that the needs of rural communities are reflected in policing and community safety action plans.	DOJ		L
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	The Department of Justice and the Northern Ireland Policing Board jointly fund Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs), which are established by each Council in Northern Ireland, to make a positive difference to communities in the area, contribute to a reduction in crime and enhance community safety in the district. Each partnership is required to identify local priorities following consultation and engagement with the local community, the statutory and the voluntary sectors and other relevant organisations and to submit an annual Action Plan, setting out its proposals for dealing with the issues that have been identified, to the Department of Justice and the Policing Board. These arrangements enable PCSPs, and District PCSPs in Belfast, to respond to the specific needs of their area including where rural crimes are a priority.			<i>Update</i>

Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
60	We will publish the Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy to build a united community and improve community relations; including in our rural areas.	OFMDFM		S
Status	Green = Implementation achieved			
<i>Update</i>	The New Good Relations Strategy, Together Building a United Community was published on 23 May 2013.			<i>Update</i>
62	We will work with relevant rural communities to encourage them to engage in the strategic area planning process, where appropriate, under the Social Investment Fund to tackle issues associated with poverty and deprivation.	OFMDFM		S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	By 30 June 2015 funding of approximately £53 million had been committed, either by Letter of Offer or technical transfer to another government department, to 33 projects, across all 9 Social Investment Zones.			<i>Update</i>
63	We will promote and encourage applications from rural areas for the Contested Spaces Programme.	OFMDFM		S
Status	Green = Implementation achieved			
<i>Update</i>	The Contested Spaces Programme completed on 31 March 2015.			<i>Update</i>

Department for Regional Development

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
1	We will seek to support and sustain rural communities living in smaller settlements and the open countryside and help improve accessibility for rural communities by taking account of the Spatial Framework Guidance (SFG 13 & 14) contained in the Regional Development Strategy 2035 in future plans and programmes of all Departments.	DRD	All Departments	S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	A Progress Report detailing actions supporting the guidance within the Regional Development Strategy 2035 (RDS), including actions relating to rural communities was issued to the Executive in June 2015. Work is ongoing to advise local councils on their responsibilities in relation to the RDS guidance following the transfer of planning to local councils. The Department is procuring new ferries to replace two existing ferries [one for the Ballycastle - Rathlin Island ferry service and one for Portaferry - Strangford ferry service] that are reaching the end of their operational life. The new ferries will enable the Department to continue to provide essential transport services to the rural community.			<i>Update</i>
2	We will maintain the road infrastructure to keep it safe, effective and reliable within the limitations of available funding.	DRD		O
Status	Amber = Implementation commenced but progress is slower than anticipated			
<i>Update</i>	DRD is facing a £60 million resource budget pressure in 15/16 and as a result has had no option other than to introduce a skeleton road maintenance service. Activities such a grass cutting, patching, street lighting repairs gully emptying are being delivered , but at a much reduced scale within the limitations of the available funding.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
9	We will contribute to the delivery of the new Regional Transportation Strategy (RTS) which has a strategic objective of improving access in rural areas. Following adoption of a new RTS an implementation plan post 2015 will be developed to include programmes of measures designed to achieve this strategic objective. This may include road improvements, more innovative public transport services, more Park & Ride sites, better management of our transportation networks and improved road safety measures.	DRD		L
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	“To deliver the strategic objectives of the Department’s current Regional Transportation Strategy (‘The New Approach’) a programme of transport investment for 2016 - 2019 is currently being considered. Improving access in rural areas is one of the strategic objectives that this programme of investment hopes to deliver through road improvements and better management of our transportation networks. The level of impact this investment will have on improving rural access will be aligned to the level of funding allocated to the Department.”			<i>Update</i>
10	We will work with other stakeholders in developing a comprehensive information service for rural public transport services.	DRD	DE, DARD, DHSSPS & Translink	M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	In conjunction with Translinks role in the Rural Transport Fund, under the auspices of the 2012-2015 Financial Memorandum, during the year to 30th June 2015 marketing and promotional activity was carried out to provide information and promote those Ulsterbus services subsidised under the grant-in-aid arrangements. This included production and distribution via ‘micro marketing’ of printed material to stakeholders and passengers, in addition to regionally targeted advertisements and press releases, and collaborative stakeholder engagement.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
11	Subject to enactment of the Transport Bill we will develop local public transport plans aimed at ensuring the effective use of rural public transport.	DRD	DE, DARD, DHSSPS & Translink	M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	The Transport Act 2011 has now been fully enacted. The approach to the development of local public transport plans will be determined once the discussions between Departments on the economic appraisal for wider integration of passenger transport services (see Action 12) have been concluded.			<i>Update</i>
12	We will consider how best to join up transport services that operate in rural areas to ensure most effective use of rural transport resources.	DRD	DE, DARD, DHSSPS & Translink	M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	A pilot project involving multiple publicly funded passenger transport providers has been completed in the Dungannon area. It involved collaboration between Translink, the Education Authority, Southern Health & Social Care Trust and the local community transport provider in integrating services in order to improve the travel options offered to passengers and improve efficiency. An economic appraisal for the wider roll out of integrated passenger transport arrangements is currently being discussed between Departments.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
13	We will examine options to provide financial assistance for householders in areas where no water main is near their homes to get a mains extension or have access to some other wholesome water supply.	DRD		M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	The Rural Borewells Scheme, funded by the Department, was launched on 6 June 2012 and closed on 31 March 2015. The principle aim of the Scheme is to provide a wholesome water supply for existing properties that have never been served by a public water main. Under this scheme, households where it is financially or technically prohibitive to provide with a mains water supply may be eligible for a grant for a private borewell. The scheme is an extension of the Department's policy of providing a Reasonable Cost Allowance (RCA) of up to £10,000 per property towards the costs of obtaining a water main. This was increased in £12,000 in 2013/2014. Under the 2012/2013 Scheme, 23 householders who could not access the public main for financial or technical reasons gained access to a wholesome water supply for the first time. Under the 2013/2014 Scheme (including 13 households carried over from 2012/2013 year), 32 householders who could not access the public main for financial or technical reasons were provided with a wholesome water supply for the first time. 25 householders received assistance during the 2014/2015 year. The householders who received a new borewell and/or treatment now have the assurance of a high quality water supply that is safe to drink. The average cost of providing these properties with mains water would have been £94,000 which would have required the average applicant to contribute at £82,000 for a mains supply.			<i>Update</i>
26	We will seek to ensure the sustainability of island life and the promotion of a vibrant island community by supporting the objectives contained in the Rathlin Island Action Plan.	DRD	Other named Departments	M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	We are currently reviewing the objectives and actions contained within the Rathlin island Action Plan and will seek to ensure the sustainability of island life and the promotion of a vibrant Rathlin Island community.			<i>Update</i>

Department for Social Development

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
3	We will take action to better co-ordinate urban and rural regeneration needs.	DSD		S
Status	Green = Implementation achieved			
<i>Update</i>	DSD has consulted with the 11 New Councils on the development of a funding package to accompany the transfer of regeneration and community development powers which gives greater weight to rural settlements in the allocation of funds.			<i>Update</i>
4	We will maximise, and where possible integrate, funding opportunities available for regeneration of urban and rural communities.	DSD		S
Status	Green = Implementation achieved			
<i>Update</i>	DSD and DARD have developed shared regional support arrangements for generic support for the voluntary and community sector as well as for faith based and women's organisations in areas of disadvantage and rural areas. Joint DSD/DARD support arrangements are currently in place through September 2015.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
34	We will promote and develop further 'Shared Future' housing in rural areas.	DSD		S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	Within the OFMDFM Together: Building a United Community Strategy, the Department is committed to creating 10 new shared neighbourhood developments. Among the revised proposed sites for taking forward these developments, 1 rural scheme; Crossgar Road, Saintfield has been identified. Work has commenced on site and the scheme will deliver 12 new homes in 2015/16. The Department continues to seek additional potential sites to develop as shared neighbourhoods across Northern Ireland.			<i>Update</i>
35	We will examine best practice solutions to rural housing issues elsewhere – North/South and East/West - and fund pilot projects based on these findings.	DSD		M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	DSD continues to monitor rural housing initiatives in other jurisdictions and pilot projects as appropriate.			<i>Update</i>
36	We will continue to improve housing conditions in rural areas (subject to funding).	DSD		O
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	During 2014/15, housing associations increased rural activity by starting 21 schemes with 119 new homes, compared to 15 schemes with 105 new homes in 2013/14. A programme of work has been approved which aims to significantly increase output by starting up to 200 new homes in 2015/16. Given the lead in time, none have yet started in the first quarter. Also, in 2015/16, NIHE grant activity increased with 643 grants approved at a cost of £5.6m compared to 506 at a cost of £4.7m in 2013/14.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
37	We will progress the actions in the NIHE Rural Action Plan 2009/10 – 2012/13 and prepare a further plan from 2013/14 onwards.	DSD		S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	During the first half of 2015 the NIHE have commenced the full review of their 'Rural Homes and People' Strategy and have extended their current Rural Action Plan (2013-2015) over the review period until March 2016. During 2014/15, encouraging progress has been made on 55 of the 58 actions included in the Action Plan. 21 social new build schemes (119 units) were started, 643 private sector home improvement grants were approved and approximately 2550 Warm Homes installations and 2600 boiler replacements were approved in rural locations. They continue to seek to improve their services in rural areas and promote initiatives which could benefit rural residents including our 'Rural Community Awards' competition which was launched for the second consecutive year at the Balmoral Show in May. Following their Strategy review, they aim to launch the next 'NIHE Rural Housing Strategy' in early 2016 for public consultation.			<i>Update</i>
38	We will better identify and tackle the causes of poverty and disadvantage in rural areas and to promote social inclusion.	DSD/DARD	OFMDFM	M
Status	Green = Implementation achieved			
<i>Update</i>	DSD and DARD have developed shared regional support arrangements for generic support and for the voluntary and community sector as well as for faith based and women's organisations in areas of disadvantage and rural areas. Funding for these arrangements has been agreed until 30th September 2015.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
39	We will ensure that the new fuel poverty strategy takes account of the particular needs of rural households and houses.	DSD		S
Status	Green = Implementation achieved			
<i>Update</i>	Fuel poverty strategy to be reviewed in 2016/17. Rural dimension will be considered.			<i>Update</i>
40	We will promote action to address inequalities in accessing alternative cost effective fuel in rural areas.	DSD/DETI		M
Status	Green = Implementation achieved			
<i>Update</i>	DETI lead - DSD continue to support local groups who bulk buy fuel to reduce costs.			<i>Update</i>
41	We will develop integrated regional and local community development structures which have a strong rural component.	DSD		M
Status	Green = Implementation achieved			
<i>Update</i>	DSD and DARD have developed shared regional support arrangements for generic support for the voluntary and community sector as well as for faith based and women's organisations in areas of disadvantage and rural areas. Funding for these arrangements has been agreed through 30 September 2015.			<i>Update</i>

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