



# Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation – A New Framework

Supporting Rural Communities



Department of  
**Agriculture and  
Rural Development**

[www.dardni.gov.uk](http://www.dardni.gov.uk)

AN ROINN  
**Talmhaíochta agus  
Forbartha Tuaithe**

MÁNNYSTRIE O  
**Fairms an  
Kintra Fordèrin**

March 2016

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To get a copy of this document in another format contact:

Sustainable Rural Communities Branch,  
Department of Agriculture and Rural Development,  
Room 404,  
Dundonald House,  
Upper Newtownards Road,  
Ballymiscaw,  
Belfast  
BT4 3SB

Tel: (028) 9082 4705

Email: [ruralpolicy.branch@dardni.gov.uk](mailto:ruralpolicy.branch@dardni.gov.uk)

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## Foreword by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development



I am delighted to present the new Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) Framework with its focus on ‘Supporting Rural Communities’. It was my objective when developing this new Framework to ensure that structures and mechanisms remain in place to enable the Department to continue to support a collaborative approach to help improve the quality of life for vulnerable rural dwellers.

I am very proud of the achievements which have been delivered under the previous TRPSI Framework (2011-2015). The evaluation of this Framework highlighted the positive difference which TRPSI has made to the lives of rural dwellers across a wide range of areas including improving access to transport and broadband services, promoting positive mental health, addressing fuel poverty, improving access to healthcare services and supporting community development.

TRPSI is unique in that it focuses on the needs of the most vulnerable people in rural areas. It has allowed me to combine the tools I have available to tackle poverty and social isolation in rural areas with the resources and expertise of other public bodies and the local knowledge and skills provided by the rural community sector.

The new Framework aims to build on the success of the previous Framework including its flexibility, which enables it to help address a wide range of rural issues through working in partnership with a range of organisations to maximise the benefits for rural communities. This new Framework also has a particular focus on encouraging the development of new and innovative ways to tackle rural poverty and social isolation that can be mainstreamed by public authorities if they prove to be successful.

The new TRPSI Framework will continue to focus on the three priority areas of access poverty, financial poverty and social isolation and retain the ability to develop measures to target vulnerable groups in rural areas based on identified need. There are clear advantages to be gained through a collaborative approach that can lever additional resources for the benefit of rural communities. I want this new Framework to encourage the development of new partnership working between central government, local councils,

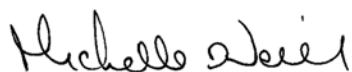
other public bodies and the voluntary and community sector both to maximise the benefits from the TRPSI funding at DARD's disposal and to promote sharing of learning and expertise.

As a rural dweller I am acutely aware of the difficulties facing our rural communities. I often meet with and hear about the plight of the most vulnerable, be they older people who can often feel isolated and alone, young people who feel that they have limited opportunities because of where they live, or people with disabilities who face challenges which are exacerbated by living in a rural area.

In presenting this new Framework, I am conscious that 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 which will impact on the most vulnerable. It is crucial therefore that government continues to focus on the needs of rural dwellers. The successful enactment of the Rural Needs Bill will place a greater onus on public authorities to consider rural needs and TRPSI can therefore play an important role in helping other government organisations to develop new and innovative ways to help support our rural communities.

This changing context also brings with it opportunities. Under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 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 appreciate the difficult financial climate that we are working in, however, in rolling out this new Framework, there is an opportunity to embrace new approaches to tackling poverty and social isolation and to be creative in identifying innovative solutions to help and support rural dwellers. The Executive recognises that no one single Department has responsibility for rural issues. It is therefore vital that we work together both within and outside of government in seeking to deliver better outcomes for rural dwellers.



Michelle O'Neill MLA  
Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development

## Réamhrá An Aire Talmhaíochta agus Forbairt Tuaithe



Tá mé iontach sásta an Chreatlach um Thabhairt Faoi Bhochtaineacht Tuaithe agus Faoi Uaigneas Shóisialta (CBTUS) a chur i láthair agus an bhéim aici ar ‘Supporting Rural Communities’. Ba é cuspóir s’agamsa é agus mé ag forbairt na Creatlaí nua seo go mbeadh na struchtúir agus na meicníochtaí i bhfeidhm go fóill chun cur le cumas na Roinne tacú le cur chuige comhoibritheach a chuideodh le caighdeán saoil chónaitheoirí tuaithe atá ar lagchuidiú.

Tá mé an-bhródúil as na héachtaí atá bainte amach faoin Chreatlach CBTUS (2011-2015) roimhe seo. Chuir an mheastóireacht ar an Chreatlach seo béim ar an difear dhearfach a bhí déanta ag CBTUS do shaolta na gcónaitheoirí tuaithe ar fud réimse leathan ábhar, feabhas na rochtana ar iompar agus ar sheirbhísí leathanbhanda, cur chun cinn sláinte meabhrach dearfaí, tabhairt faoi bhochtaineacht breosla, feabhas na rochtana ar sheirbhísí cúram sláinte agus tacaíocht d’fhorbairt pobail, san áireamh.

Tá CBTUS uathúil agus díríonn sí ar riachtanais na ndaoine is lagchuidithe i gceantair tuaithe. Lig sí dom na huirlisí atá ar fáil agam le tabhairt faoi bhochtaineacht agus faoi uaigneas shóisialta i gceantair tuaithe a chur leis na hacmhainní, le saineolas na gcomhlachtaí poiblí eile, leis an eolas agus leis na scileanna áitiúla atá á soláthar ag an earnáil pobal tuaithe.

Tá sé mar aidhm ag an Chreatlach nua an rath a bhí ag an Chreatlach roimhe seo a fhorbairt, a solúbthacht san áireamh, a ligfidh di tabhairt faoi réimse leathan ceisteanna tuaithe trí obair a dhéanamh i gcomhar le réimse eagrais chun na sochair do phobail tuaithe a uasmhéadú. Tá fócas ar leith ag an Chreatlach nua seo ar fhorbairt bealaí nua agus nuálacha a spreagadh le tabhairt faoi bhochtaineacht tuaithe agus faoi uaigneas shóisialta, bealaí is féidir le húdaráis poiblí a phríomhshruthú má bhíonn rath orthu.

Leanfaidh an Chreatlach CBTUS nua ar aghaidh le díriú ar thrí phríomhréimse, bochtaineacht rochtana, bochtaineacht airgeadais agus uaigneas sóisialta agus coinneoidh sí an ábaltacht le bearta a fhorbairt a dhíreoidh ar ghrúpaí lagchuidithe i gceantair tuaithe, bunaithe ar riachtanais aitheanta. Tá buntáistí soiléire ann ó chur chuige

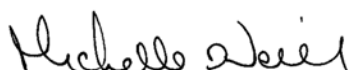
chomhoibritheach ar féidir leis tuilleadh acmhainní a ghíaráil ar mhaithe le pobail tuaithe. Is mian liom go spreagfaidh an Chreatlach nua seo forbairt na hoibre comhpháirtíochta nua idir rialtas lárnach, comhairlí áitiúla, comhlachtaí poiblí eile, an earnáil dheonach agus an earnáil pobail chun na sochair ón mhaoiniú atá ag an RTFT do CBTUS a uasmhéadú agus chun roinnt na foghlama agus an tsaineolais a chur chun cinn.

Mar chónaitheoir tuaithe, tá a fhios agam go fíormhaith ar na deacrachtaí atá ag ár bpobail tuaithe. Is minic a bhuailim le agus a chluinim ó na daoine is mó lagchuidithe faoin dhrochdhóigh atá orthu, bíodh siad ina seandaoine ar féidir leo brath scoite agus uaigneach go minic, ina ndaoine óga a shíleann go bhfuil deiseanna teoranta acu mar gheall ar an áit ina gcónaíonn siad nó ina ndaoine le míchumas a bhfuil níos mó dúshlán acu mar go bhfuil cónaí orthu i gceantair tuaithe.

Agus mise ag cur na Creatlaí nua seo i láthair inniu, tá a fhios agam go bhfuil i bhfad níos mó dúshlán ag ár bpobail tuaithe de dheasca an tionchair atá ag na buiséid laghdaithe ar sholáthar seirbhísí poiblí agus na n-athruithe ar an chóras leasa a mbeidh tionchar acu ar na daoine is mó lagchuidithe. Mar sin de, tá sé barrthábhachtach go leanann an rialtas ar aghaidh le díriú ar riachtanais na gcónaitheoirí tuaithe. Cuirfidh achtú rathúil an Bhille um Riachtanais Tuaithe níos mó dualgas ar údaráis phoiblí machnamh a dhéanamh ar riachtanais tuaithe agus is féidir le CBTUS ról tábhachtach bheith aici cuidiú le heagrais rialtais eile bealaí nua agus nuálacha a fhorbairt a thacóidh lenár bpobail tuaithe.

Beidh deiseanna ann fosta mar gheall ar an athrú seo sa chomthéacs. Faoi Chlár Forbairt Tuaithe 2014-2020, beidh deiseanna ann cuidiú a thabhairt do chónaitheoirí tuaithe, go háirithe trí Leader a dhíreoidh tacaíocht ar na riachtanais aitheanta ag na grúpaí aicsin áitiúla agus a cheanglóidh tacaíocht le próiseas pleanála pobail níos leithne a bheidh na comhairlí áitiúla ag tabhairt chun tosaigh.

Tuigim na cúrsaí airgeadais deacra ina bhfuil muid ag obair faoi láthair, ach, le seoladh na Creatlaí nua seo, beidh deis ann glacadh le cuir chuige nua maidir le tabhairt faoi bhochtaineacht agus faoi uaigneas shóisialta agus le bheith cruthaitheach in aithint réiteach nuálach le cuidiú agus tacú le cónaitheoirí tuaithe. Tuigeann an Feidhmeannas nach bhfuil Roinn shingil amháin freagrach as ceisteanna tuaithe. Mar sin de, tá sé barrthábhachtach go n-oibríonn muid le chéile taobh istigh agus taobh amuigh den rialtas chun torthaí níos fearr a bhaint amach dár gcónaitheoirí tuaithe.



Michelle O'Neill CTR

Aire Talmhaíochta agus Forbairt Tuaithe

## Forethocht Frae Tha Männystèr O Fairms An Kintra Fordèrin



A'm gye an fain tae pit forrit tha new Yokkin til Lanwart Puirith an Resydentèr Misslieness (YLPRM) Stailin mintit hale-heidit at 'Fennin Lanwart Resydentèr Curns'. Whanivver A wus graithin this new Stailin, A wus leukkin tae mak shair 'at steidins an patents bes tae tha fore yit furtae haud tae fennin a neiborin oncum fur giein a hize wi tha leevin stannèrts o aisie mismayed lanwart resydentèrs.

A'm gye an croose about tha wunnins the' hae pit owre unnèr tha YLPRM Stailin afore this (20an11 tae 20an15). Tha wechtin o this Stailin gien wut o tha brave differs 'at YLPRM haes made tae tha gates o leevin o lanwart resydentèrs athort a hale clattèr o airts, takkin in giein mair ingang tae hurlin an braidban fennin, fordèrin evenliness o mine, yokkin til puirith owre tha heid o fuel chairges, fordèrin ingang til fennin fur tentin poust an uphaudin resydentèr oncum.

YLPRM bes by-ordnar seein it mints at tha waants o tha maist mismayed fowk in lanwart airts. It haes lat me marrow tha graith A hae tae ma han furtae yokk til puirith an misslieness in lanwart airts wi tha plenishin an skeels o ither apen agentries an tha wittin an skeels inpit wi tha lanwart resydentèr shaidin.

Tha new Stailin ettles at biggin oan tha wunnins o tha tither Stailin, takkin in its wye o shapin, 'at maks it fit tae gie a han wi yokkin til a hale clattèr o lanwart maittèrs, throch neiborin wi a wheen o agentries tae rise tha ootmaist guid fur lanwart resydentèr curns. Forbye, this new Stailin haes a by-ordnar mint oan giein a lift tae tha oncum o new an cute wyes furtae yokk til lanwart puirith an resydentèr misslieness 'at cud be brocht inbye wi apen owerances gin the'r pree'd an come speed.

Tha new YLPRM Stailin wull haud tae mintin at tha thrie heid airts o ingang puirith, sillerie puirith an resydentèr misslieness an haud oan tae tha docht tae graith miszhures tae yokk til mismayed curns in lanwart airts foondit oan tha waants the' hae fun oot. Thair's plain braws tae be haed frae a neiborin oncum 'at cud draa oot eikit plenishin fur tha guid o lanwart resydentèr curns. A'm leukkin this new Stailin tae gie a lift til tha oncum o new



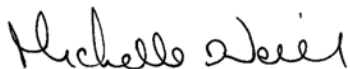
neiborin atween tha heid govermint, local cooncils, ither apen agentries an tha free-warkin an resydentèr shaidin, baith tae tak tha maist guid o tha YLPRM sillerin tae MFKF's han an forbye tae fordèr tha twinin o lear an skeel.

Sin A'm a bodie 'at bides in lanwart pairts, A ken fine tha palls oor lanwart resydentèrs is warslin wi. A affen rin agane an hear tell o tha plicht o tha maist mismayed, set in case the'r eildit fowk 'at's aply feelin twinit an thair lane, youngstèrs 'at alloos the' hae restrickit inlats oan accoont o whaur the' leeve, or fowk wi a mischief 'at tholes wi palls which bes tha waur o leevin in a lanwart airt.

In pittin forrit this new Stailin, A wat weel 'at oor lanwart resydentèr curns is rinnin agane palls 'at's mair muckle yit oan accoont o tha feck o batit siller kists oan tha ootpittin o apen fennin an cheynges til tha weelfarity patent 'at wull hae an 'ill feck oan tha maist mismayed. Syne it recks gyely 'at govermint hauds tae mintin at tha waants o lanwart resydentèrs. Tha cairryin o tha Lanwart Waants Bill intae laa wull pit mair o a tie oan apen owerances tae hae mind o lanwart waants an syne YLPRM can tak a wechtie pairt in giein ither govermint agentries a hize wi graithin new an cute wyes tae inpit til tha fennin o oor lanwart resydentèr curns.

This cheyngin set o things cairries inlats wi't forbye. Unnèr tha Lanwart Oncum Ontak 20an14 tae 20an20 the'r fur haein inlats tae gie a hize wi fennin lanwart resydentèrs, maist o aa throch 'Leader', whaur fennin wull be wisit at tha waants ootwaled wi local warkin curns an claught wi tha oweraa resydentèr ettlin throch-pittin brocht forrit wi tha cooncils.

A wat weel tha sair sillerie set we'r warkin in; still an withal, but, in trinnlin oot this new Stailin thair's an inlat tae get tore intil new oncums tae yokkin til puirtith an resydentèr mislieness an tae be consatey in fynnin oot cute ootgates furtae gie a lift til an fen lanwart resydentèrs. Tha Heich Cooncil jubes 'at no yin sing'l Männystrie haes tha ontak o lanwart maittèrs. Syne it recks gyely 'at we neibor thegither baith athin an ootby govermint in leukkin tae ootpit bettèr ootcums fur lanwart resydentèrs.



Michelle O'Neill MLS

Männystèr o Fairms an Kintra Fordèrin





# Section 1

## Introduction and Background

## Introduction

The Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) Framework is a rural initiative led by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) which aims to tackle poverty and social isolation in rural areas through organisations working in partnership to design and implement measures which target the needs of vulnerable people. TRPSI is one of a number of complementary initiatives led by DARD which are aimed at helping to ensure that the needs of rural communities are addressed.

This new TRPSI Framework is the third in a series of anti-poverty initiatives brought forward by DARD and builds on the success of two previous initiatives, the Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Framework (APSI) 2008-2011 and the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework 2011-15. The new Framework has been developed following consultation with stakeholders and has been informed by the report on the evaluation of the previous TRPSI Framework and the position paper produced by the ARD Committee following its review of the previous Framework.

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

The Executive recognises that no one single Department has responsibility for rural issues and that all Departments have functions which can contribute to alleviating the impact of poverty and social isolation. The TRPSI Framework has been developed to provide a broad Framework within which Departments, other public sector organisations and the rural sector can work in partnership to develop new and innovative ways to help alleviate the effects of poverty and social isolation in rural areas, particularly among vulnerable groups.

DARD recognises the remit that other Departments have in respect of rural areas and their responsibility to take account of the particular needs of rural communities when developing and implementing policy. The TRPSI Framework provides a mechanism which can assist other Departments in identifying and addressing the needs of rural communities by more effective partnership working with DARD and other organisations.

The TRPSI Framework is unique in that it focuses on the needs of the most vulnerable groups in rural areas. It seeks to maximise the benefits from the TRPSI funding at DARD's disposal and to promote the sharing of learning and expertise. It also allows DARD to combine the tools it has available to help tackle poverty and social isolation in rural areas (e.g. financial resources, staff resources, legislation, experience etc) with the financial

resources and expertise of other public sector bodies and the local knowledge and skills provided by the rural community sector. There are benefits to be gained through a collaborative approach that can lever additional resources for the benefit of rural communities. It also provides flexibility to help address a broad range of poverty and social isolation issues and to target specific groups of people in rural areas who have been identified as being at risk of poverty and/or social isolation.

The new TRPSI Framework also seeks to promote the development of new and innovative approaches to address poverty and social isolation issues in rural areas. It also seeks to support interventions which lever additional funding and other resources to target the needs of vulnerable groups. It also facilitates the piloting of new or innovative projects to test out new approaches that can be mainstreamed by public authorities if they prove to be successful.

The new Framework will operate in the period from 2016 onwards and will support a package of measures designed to tackle poverty and social isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas. An Action Plan will be published detailing the measure to be supported during Year 1 of the new Framework. The Action Plan will be updated on an annual basis to include details of measures to be supported in future years, subject to securing resources.

## Background

### Policy Context

Tackling rural poverty and social and economic isolation was a key commitment in the **Programme for Government** 2011-15 and the TRPSI Framework was the mechanism through which DARD delivered the Executive's commitment to bring forward a £13m package of measures to help tackle social and economic isolation in rural areas.

The NI Executive acknowledges that no single Department has exclusive responsibility for rural areas and it is important that all government Departments acknowledge their responsibilities in rural areas. The Executive's **Rural White Paper Action Plan** was developed to provide a Framework for Ministers to work effectively together in seeking to address the main issues and challenges facing rural areas. One of the key policy priorities set out in the Action Plan is to seek to minimise, where it exists, disadvantage, poverty, social exclusion and inequality in rural areas particularly among vulnerable groups. The TRPSI Framework is an important tool for the Executive in delivering this policy priority by providing a mechanism for Departments to work collaboratively to help alleviate the effects of poverty and social isolation among vulnerable rural dwellers.

Most strategies and policies developed and implemented across government have a rural dimension or impact upon people living in rural areas and there is an obligation on all Departments to undertake rural proofing of all major policies and strategies to assess their impact on rural dwellers. The successful enactment of the Rural Needs Bill

will place a greater onus on public authorities to consider rural needs. TRPSI could play an important role in helping organisations to develop and pilot new projects which, if successful, can then be mainstreamed.

Two key strategies which the TRPSI Framework seeks to complement are the Executive's *Delivering Social Change* initiative and *Making Life Better*. *Delivering Social Change* aims to deliver a sustained reduction in poverty and associated issues across all age groups and also seeks to secure an improvement in children and young people's health with a view to breaking the long term cycle of multi-generational problems. *Making Life Better*, the strategic Framework for public health led by DHSSPS, is designed to provide direction for policies and actions to improve the health and wellbeing of people in the north of Ireland and to reduce inequalities in health.

Other important policies and strategies which the Framework will seek to complement include the *NI Economic Strategy*, the *Regional Infrastructure Support Programme*, *Enabling Success* - a strategy to tackle economic inactivity in NI, the *Together: Building a United Community* (TBUC) Strategy, the *New Approach to Regional Transportation, Sport Matters* - the NI Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2009-2019, the *Sustainable Development Strategy* for NI, *Our Children and Young People - Our Pledge* - the strategy for Children and Young People and *Warmer Healthier Homes - A New Fuel Poverty Strategy* for NI.

### Informing the Framework

In preparing this new Framework, DARD consulted with a range of key rural stakeholders. A public consultation exercise on the proposals for the new Framework was also undertaken including a stakeholder event at which rural stakeholders had an opportunity to discuss the proposals and put forward their views. A total of 83 written responses to the public consultation were received the overwhelming majority of which supported the proposals for a new TRPSI Framework with many stressing the important role TRPSI plays in tackling rural poverty and social isolation and the positive difference it has made to the lives of vulnerable rural dwellers through the wide range of measures funded under it.

DARD has also considered the Position Paper published by the Agriculture and Rural Development (ARD) Committee in 2015 following its 'review of the Department's Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Programme' (the TRPSI Framework) which made a number of recommendations in relation to the new Framework. In its paper the ARD Committee indicated that it is content with the current TRPSI Framework in terms of the approach taken to date and recommended that the Department builds on the successes of the previous Framework drawing on the knowledge of rural community organisations to help inform and shape the new Framework.

DARD also considered the Report on the evaluation of the TRPSI Framework 2011-15 carried out by the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) during 2015. This report concluded that the previous TRPSI Framework had been successful in supporting measures which helped tackle access poverty, financial poverty and social isolation in rural areas and

has resulted in real and tangible benefits for rural dwellers. It also set out a number of lessons learned which should be applied to the new Framework together with a number of recommendations. These included the need for any future Framework to have a greater focus on targeting the needs of rural dwellers, the need for the establishment of a wider forum for discussing rural poverty and social isolation issues and for more consideration to be given to how to ensure that successful projects are mainstreamed by other government organisations.

### Other Rural Initiatives

The TRPSI Framework is one of a number of complementary rural initiatives led by DARD that are designed to help ensure that the particular needs of rural communities are addressed by government.

The **Rural White Paper Action Plan** is an Executive initiative which aims to provide a Framework for the Executive to work together in seeking to address the main issues and challenges facing rural areas. The Action Plan was launched in 2012 and was the first cross departmental initiative in the north to focus solely on rural areas. The Action Plan sets out the Executive's vision and policy priorities for rural areas and includes over 90 actions from across all Departments covering a wide range of rural issues including rural broadband, healthcare, rural tourism, poverty and social inclusion, housing, rural transport and planning.

**Rural Proofing** is a DARD-led initiative which aims to ensure the fair and equitable treatment of rural dwellers by seeking to ensure that rural needs and circumstances are considered as an integral part of the government policy making process. It requires Departments to evaluate the impact of government policy and public service delivery on rural communities and where appropriate to take action to mitigate against any detrimental impacts.

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

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

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

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

### **Equality and Rural Proofing**

Equality and Human Rights screening was carried out in respect of the proposals for the new Framework prior to the commencement of the public consultation exercise. A Rural Issues Statement was also compiled as part of the rural proofing exercise carried out on the proposals for the new Framework.





## Section 2

### A Picture of Rural

## A Vision for Rural

The Executive set out the following vision for rural areas in the Rural White Paper Action Plan.

- *Our vision is of a fair and inclusive rural society where rural dwellers enjoy the same quality of life as all others in the region. We envisage vibrant, strong rural communities, resilient and receptive to global trends through strong inter-linkages with urban areas and market towns.*
- *Our vision is for rural economies adapting to global trends and improved infrastructure and transport systems to ensure rural dwellers can avail of employment opportunities and key services.*
- *Our vision is for rural areas that maintain their distinctive features as places of agricultural production, areas of outstanding beauty, places of social, historic and cultural uniqueness and places with a strong community infrastructure which can avail of economic, social and cultural opportunities.*
- *Our vision is for the continuing development of linkages between rural and urban areas so that everyone can enjoy the beauty and uniqueness of rural places and the facilities and services of larger towns and cities.*

The Framework supports the Executive's vision for rural areas by promoting a fair and inclusive rural society where rural dwellers enjoy the same quality of life as all others in the region.

## Rural Statistics and Information

### Introduction

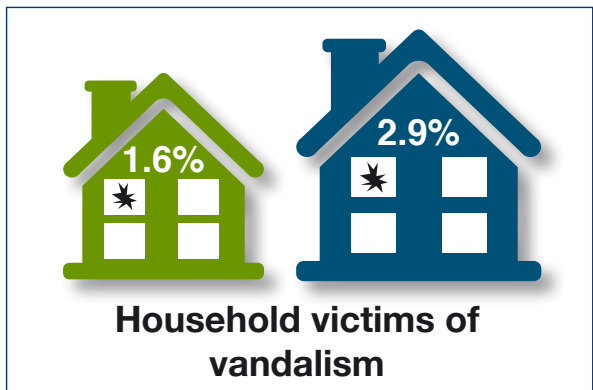
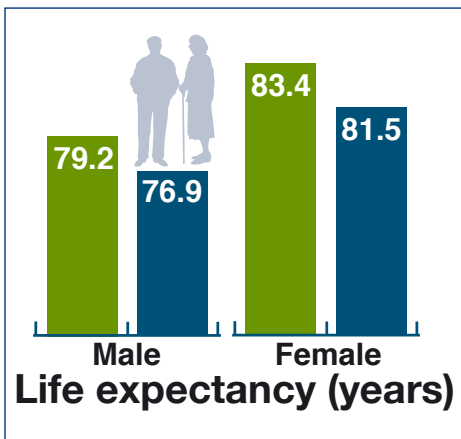
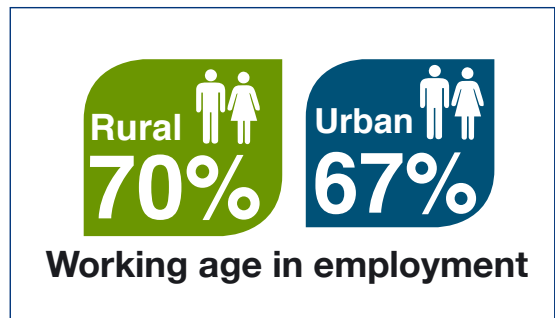
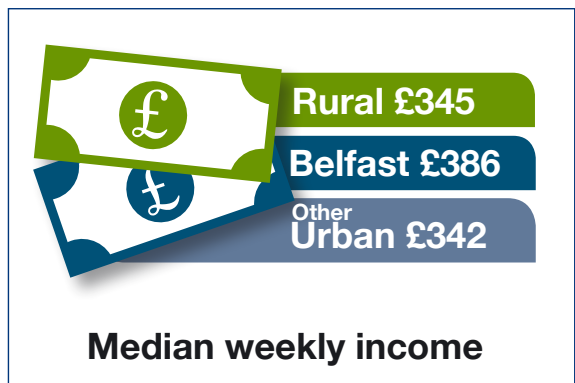
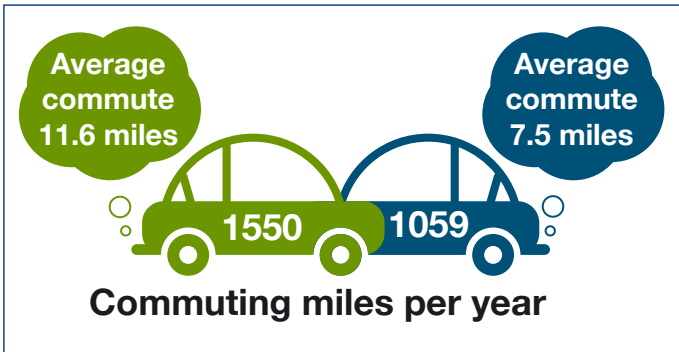
The statistical and other information set out below is intended to provide a broad overview of many of the key issues affecting access poverty, financial poverty and social isolation in rural areas.

### The rural population

At least 80% of the NI land mass and more than 1 in 3 of its population are rural.<sup>i</sup> The rural share of the population is also growing. Over the years 2001-2011 the number of people living in rural areas of NI increased by 15% in comparison to a rise of only 4% in urban areas.

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<sup>i</sup>All figures, apart from those on public/private sector employment, p5, are based on the rural/urban definition contained in the Report of the Inter-Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements (NISRA 2005).



● = Rural ● = Urban

## Employment and income

The rural population of NI is not homogeneous and rural communities are not all alike. Although the term rural is often associated with agricultural land use, there has been a decline in the number of farms in NI and farming incomes have been volatile in recent years. Employment rates in the rural population are slightly higher than for those living in towns and cities but rural workplace earnings are lower. Lowest earnings and household incomes are found in the rural west, where the population is consequently at highest risk of poverty.

**Table 1: Employment and Income**

	Employment rate <sup>1</sup>	Median annual salary <sup>2</sup>	Gross weekly household income <sup>3</sup>	Median equivalised disposable weekly household income <sup>4</sup>	Percentage of individuals in relative poverty <sup>5</sup>
<b>BMUA<sup>6</sup></b>	67%	£21,869	£653	£386	16%
<b>Urban East<sup>7</sup></b>	73%	£18,929	£582	£364	21%
<b>Urban West<sup>7</sup></b>	61%	£18,421	£566	£329	21%
<b>Rural East<sup>7</sup></b>	71%	£16,866	£709	£374	15%
<b>Rural West<sup>7</sup></b>	69%	£15,600	£565	£324	23%
<b>All Urban</b>	67%	£18,596	£573 <sup>8</sup>	£342 <sup>8</sup>	21% <sup>8</sup>
<b>All Rural</b>	70%	£16,117	£625	£345	20%
<b>All NI</b>	68%	£19,488	£617	£358	19%

- Sources: (1) NI Labour Force Survey, Population of working age January-December 2014  
 (2) Workplace address, Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings 2014.  
 (3) Gross average weekly household income, Households Below Average Income (HBAI) 2012/13.  
 (4) Median equivalised net disposable weekly household income after housing costs, HBAI 2012/13.  
 (5) Below 60% of median income after housing costs, HBAI 2012/13.  
 (6) Belfast Metropolitan Urban Area.  
 (7) For exact details of the classification, please see Family Resources Survey Urban Rural Report 2012/13 pps 2-3.  
 (8) Excluding Belfast Metropolitan Urban Area.

Chart 1: Proportion of Individuals in Relative Poverty



Source: Households below average income, 2012/13.

### Additional costs

The cost of living is higher in rural than in urban areas, particularly in terms of fuel, transport and heating.<sup>ii</sup> <sup>iii</sup> According to research carried out on behalf of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, people in rural areas of the UK typically need to spend 10-20% more on their everyday needs than those in towns and cities, and these costs increase according to the remoteness of the area.<sup>iv</sup> In NI, the proportion of rural households dependent on oil as their primary heating source is very high (82% compared to an average of 68% across NI) with more widespread fuel poverty in rural areas, particularly the more remote, than in towns and cities. The most recent NI House Condition Survey found that half of all households in isolated rural areas were experiencing fuel poverty.<sup>v</sup> Private transport is also a necessity for most rural dwellers and car ownership and running costs may consume a disproportionate share of their household income when compared to those living in towns and cities. Rural dwellers who cannot afford private transport may experience great difficulty in accessing employment and basic services.<sup>vi</sup>

### Education

On average, young people from rural areas achieve a higher level of educational attainment than those from urban areas, although their performance may be mediated by the location of the school they attend. Schools in the Belfast Metropolitan Urban Area had highest levels of success in 2013/14, followed by those in the rural west.

<sup>ii</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2010 A minimum income standard for rural areas.

<sup>iii</sup> Northern Ireland Consumer Council, 2013, Comparative Domestic Cost of Gas v Oil Report May 2013.

<sup>iv</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2010, A minimum income standard for rural areas.

<sup>v</sup> Northern Ireland Housing Executive, 2011, Northern Ireland House Condition Survey.

<sup>vi</sup> Jack, C. And Patten, N., 2014, The contribution of key basic services to rural dwellers' quality of life in Northern Ireland; A baseline review, Agri-food and Biosciences Institute, Belfast.

Table 2: Performance of school leavers

Proportion of pupils obtaining at least 5 GCSEs including English and Maths		
	Pupil residence	Location of school
BMUA	57%	70%
Urban East	62%	59%
Urban West	59%	60%
Rural East	71%	61%
Rural West	68%	65%
All NI	63%	63%

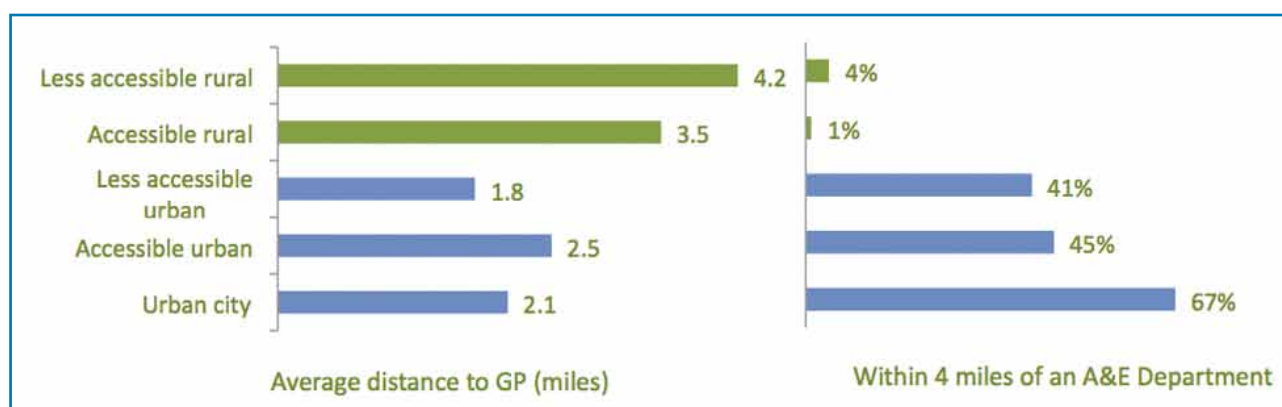
Source: NI School Leavers Survey 2013/14.

### Access to services

The NI Multiple Deprivation Index includes a measure of proximity to services such as G.P. surgeries, accident and emergency departments, pharmacies, supermarkets, banks, post offices, and jobs and benefits offices. The most deprived areas in terms of healthcare and other core services are all rural.

More recent research has confirmed that average distances to GP surgeries are longer for rural dwellers, who are also much less likely to live in close proximity to an Accident and Emergency Department.<sup>vii</sup>

Chart 2: Household access to primary and emergency healthcare



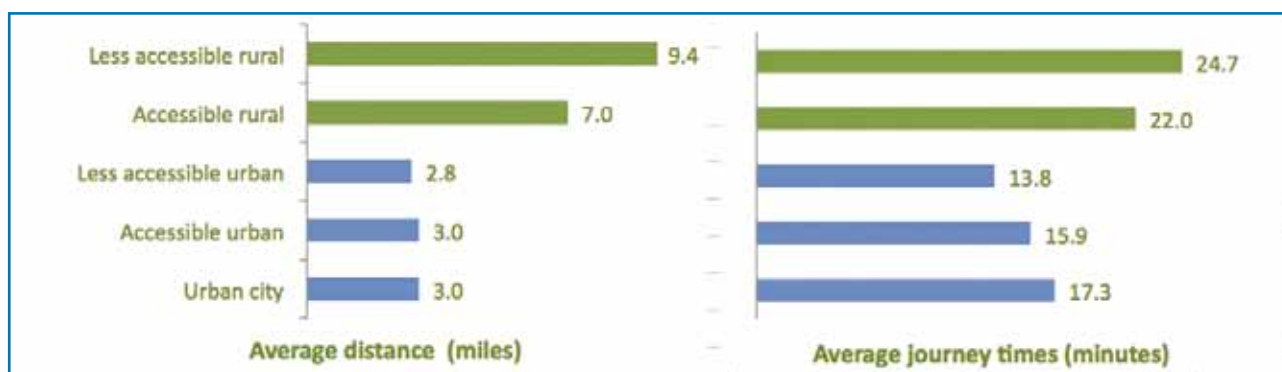
Source: Jack and Patten, 2014.

<sup>vii</sup>Jack, C. And Patten, N., 2014, *The contribution of key basic services to rural dwellers’ quality of life in Northern Ireland; A baseline review*, Agri-food and Biosciences Institute, Belfast.

Researchers have pointed out that costs ‘saved’ by the NHS in centralising services are in reality simply transferred to patients<sup>viii</sup> in the form of additional spending on transport, time out of work and time spent travelling both to access healthcare and to visit relatives and friends in hospital. Rural dwellers, particularly those without private transport, are likely to be most disadvantaged by these changes. In a recent study of a remote rural community in NI, it was found that district nurses had been withdrawn, GP surgeries had become larger and less personalised and GP out of hours services were located at substantial distances.<sup>ix</sup> The rural deficit in access to healthcare may have important implications for more vulnerable rural dwellers. UK wide research indicates that it results in services being accessed later and less frequently, particularly by the elderly and disabled, those on low incomes, and those with poor access to transport.<sup>x</sup> A number of studies have shown that visits to patients, visits to A&E departments, and admissions to hospital all decrease with increasing distance to healthcare facilities. Trauma deaths are also higher in rural areas, and highest ‘Dead on arrival’ rates were found to be in rural towns, with lowest in metropolitan areas. The inverse relationship between distance from hospital and utilisation of services is known as ‘distance decay’.<sup>xi</sup>

The urban/rural divide in terms of services is also apparent in access to education in NI. A recent household survey found that although there is relatively little difference in access to primary education, the vast majority of grammar (97%) and non-grammar secondary (72%) schools are located in urban areas. Consequently average distances and journey times to secondary schools are longer for rural schoolchildren than for those living in towns and cities. Most higher and further education establishments in NI are also urban based.<sup>xii</sup>

**Chart 3: Average distances and journey times to secondary school**



Source: Jack and Patten, 2014.

<sup>viii</sup> Mungall, I.J., *Trend towards centralisation of hospital services, and its effect on access to care for rural and remote communities in the UK*, *Rural Remote Health*, 2005 Apr-Jun;5(2).

<sup>ix</sup> Heenan, D (2010) *Rural ageing in Northern Ireland: Quality of life amongst older people*, Belfast, Research conducted under the ESRC fellowship scheme in partnership with the Equality, Rights and Social Need Division, Office of the First and deputy First Minister.

<sup>x</sup> Mungall, I.J., *Trend towards centralisation of hospital services, and its effect on access to care for rural and remote communities in the UK*, *Rural Remote Health*, 2005 Apr-Jun;5(2).

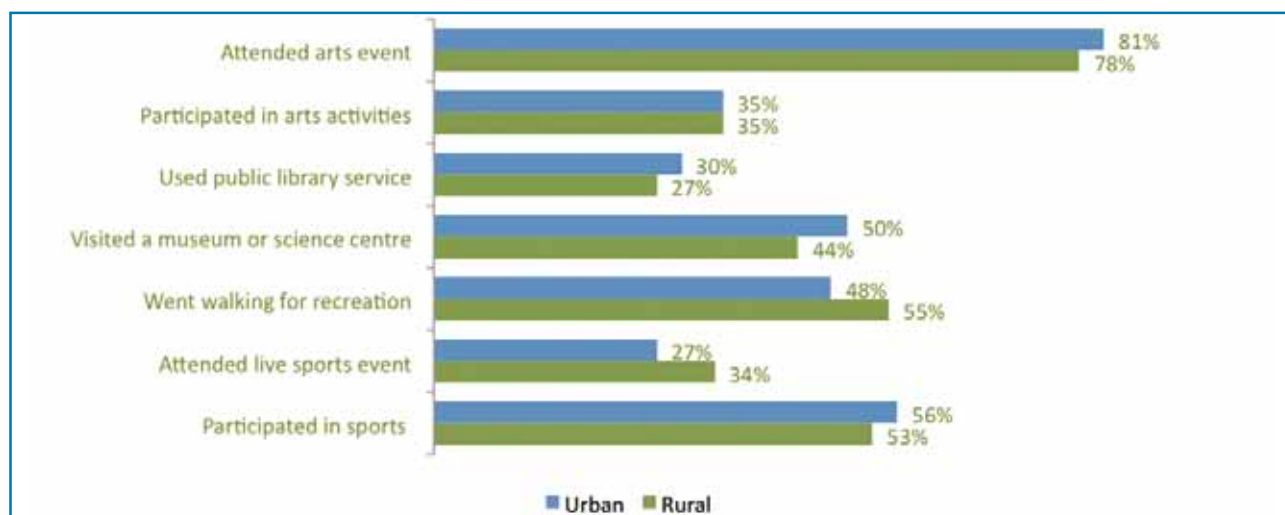
<sup>xi</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>xii</sup> Jack, C. And Patten, N., 2014, *The contribution of key basic services to rural dwellers’ quality of life in Northern Ireland; A baseline review*, Agri-food and Biosciences Institute, Belfast.

Culture, arts and leisure facilities are also disproportionately located in urban areas. A Cultural Deprivation Index produced by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, showed that the majority (86 out of 89) of the most culturally deprived areas of NI are rural.<sup>xiii</sup> In related research carried out by the Department, rural dwellers cited location and accessibility as the main barriers to participation in cultural and leisure pursuits.<sup>xiv</sup>

Despite these barriers, proportions of rural dwellers attending and participating in arts events were similar to those of urban dwellers in 2015, although those living in rural areas were slightly less likely to participate in sports, use a library service or visit a museum or science centre. Levels of attendance at sports events, and walking for recreation were higher among the rural than urban population.

**Chart 4: Participation in sports, culture and leisure in last year**



Source: Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, 2015.

Employment opportunities are also more limited for the rural population. Recent research carried out by Jack and Patten found that income security and access to employment were ranked highest in importance by rural dwellers in terms of quality of life.<sup>xv</sup> However, rural areas have a lower share of employee jobs,<sup>xvi</sup> with Belfast being the main centre of employment, and with higher quality and public sector jobs concentrated in urban areas.

<sup>xiii</sup> Cultural Deprivation Index 2014, February 2014, Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure.

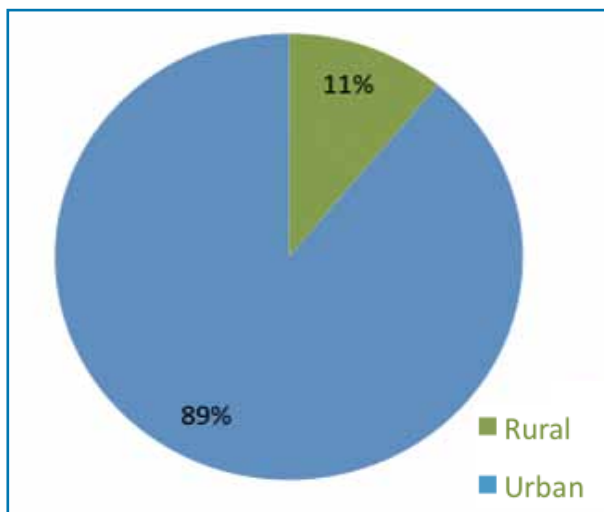
<sup>xiv</sup> Research to examine the barriers to engaging in arts, sports, libraries and museums for people living in poverty. Main report, January 2015, Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure NI.

<sup>xv</sup> Jack, C. And Patten, N., 2014, The contribution of key basic services to rural dwellers' quality of life in Northern Ireland; A baseline review, Agri-food and Biosciences Institute, Belfast.

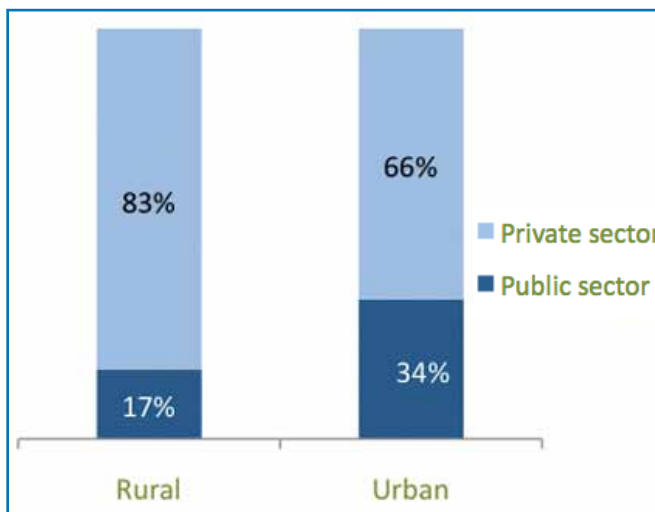
<sup>xvi</sup> Secondary Analysis of Employer Surveys: Urban and Rural Differences in Jobs, Training, and Skills, UK Commission for Employment and skills, Evidence Report 75, October 2013.



**Chart 5: Location of public sector employment**



**Chart 6: Employee jobs**

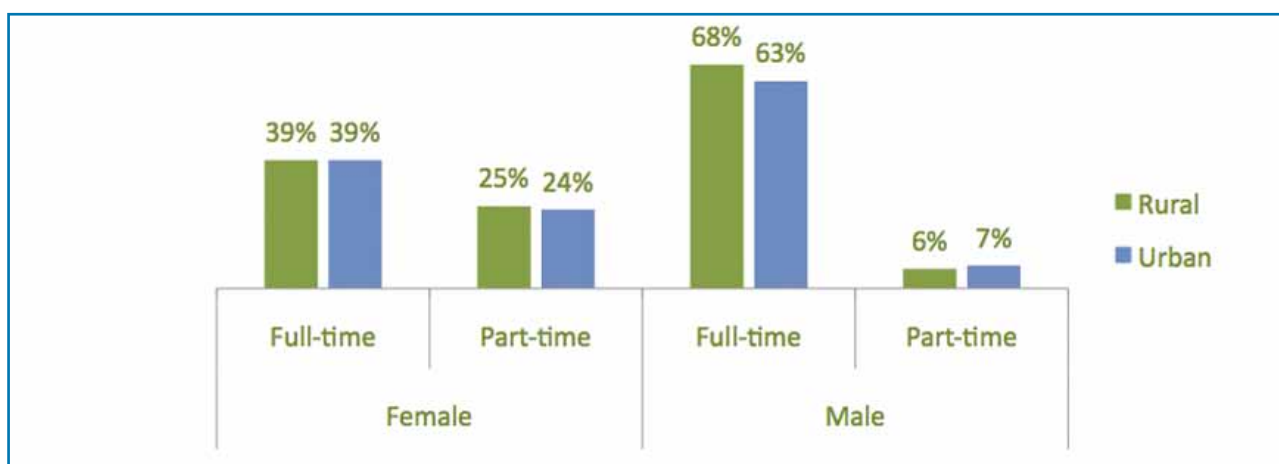


Source: DETI, Census of Employment, 2013.

Note: The Rural/Urban classification is based on updated settlement classification, 2015.

Jack and Patten relate that one of the key concerns raised by rural respondents was the exodus of young job-seekers to towns and cities and the consequent imbalance and reduced sustainability of the population in some areas.<sup>xvii</sup> Research carried out by the Agri-food and Biosciences Institute concluded that stimulation of employment opportunities in rural areas should be the main focus in terms of improving household incomes.<sup>xviii</sup>

**Chart 7: Employment rates**



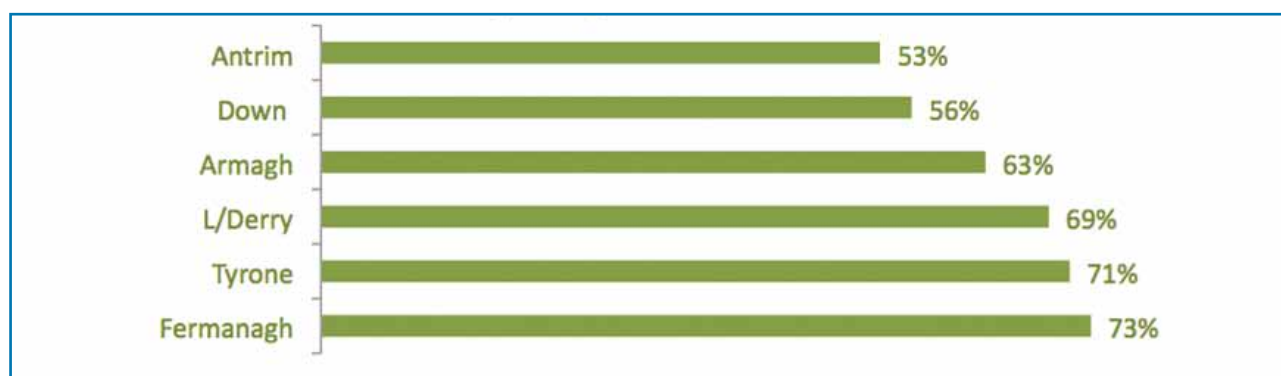
Source: NI Labour Force Survey, 2014.

<sup>xvii</sup> Jack, C. And Patten, N., 2014, *The contribution of key basic services to rural dwellers’ quality of life in Northern Ireland; A baseline review*, Agri-food and Biosciences Institute, Belfast.

<sup>xviii</sup> Wu, Z. *Policy options to improve rural household income and employment growth*, Agri-food and Biosciences Institute, Belfast.

Although overall rates of employment are similar across rural and urban areas of NI, working parents from rural areas face greater difficulties in accessing appropriate childcare close to home. According to a recent survey,<sup>xix</sup> parents living in the more westerly, rural counties of NI were more likely to report a need for increased childcare in their area, and Jack and Patten found more dependence on registered childcare in rural areas, due to a lack of day nurseries and out of school care.<sup>xx</sup> Parents who are commuting long distances may face an extra hurdle in finding childcare which can accommodate extra hours per working day, and will also incur higher childcare costs, thereby forfeiting a greater proportion of the income they gain from employment. Rural workers in general may have to weigh the benefits of higher quality employment involving long commutes, against those of lower paid work in their local area.

**Chart 8: Parents reporting insufficient local childcare**



Source: *Employers for Childcare Charitable Group, 2015.*

### Telecommunications

Research has shown that access to good telecommunication services, particularly the internet, is very beneficial in terms of individual quality of life. Among the advantages listed by Jack and Patten<sup>xxi</sup> were social connectedness, access to information to support wellbeing, economic and financial benefits, increased skills and knowledge, enhanced confidence, pleasure and enjoyment. Internet usage may be vital to those living in isolated rural areas with reduced opportunity for face to face contact. However, good quality and reliable connectivity is also increasingly essential for commerce and the economy, as businesses may depend on it for advertising, buying and supplying goods and services.

<sup>xix</sup> Northern Ireland Childcare Cost Survey 2015, *Employers For Childcare Charitable Group, November 2015.*

<sup>xx</sup> Jack, C. And Patten, N., 2014, *The contribution of key basic services to rural dwellers' quality of life in Northern Ireland; A baseline review, Agri-food and Biosciences Institute, Belfast.*

<sup>xxi</sup> *Ibid.*

Latest information indicates that although internet services have improved in rural areas of NI, quality of access is still poorer for rural than urban premises. Rural dwellers may have a more limited choice of providers, and Next Generation Access and Superfast Broadband availability are lower in rural than in urban areas. Longer line lengths in rural areas may also result in deteriorations in speed.<sup>xxii</sup>

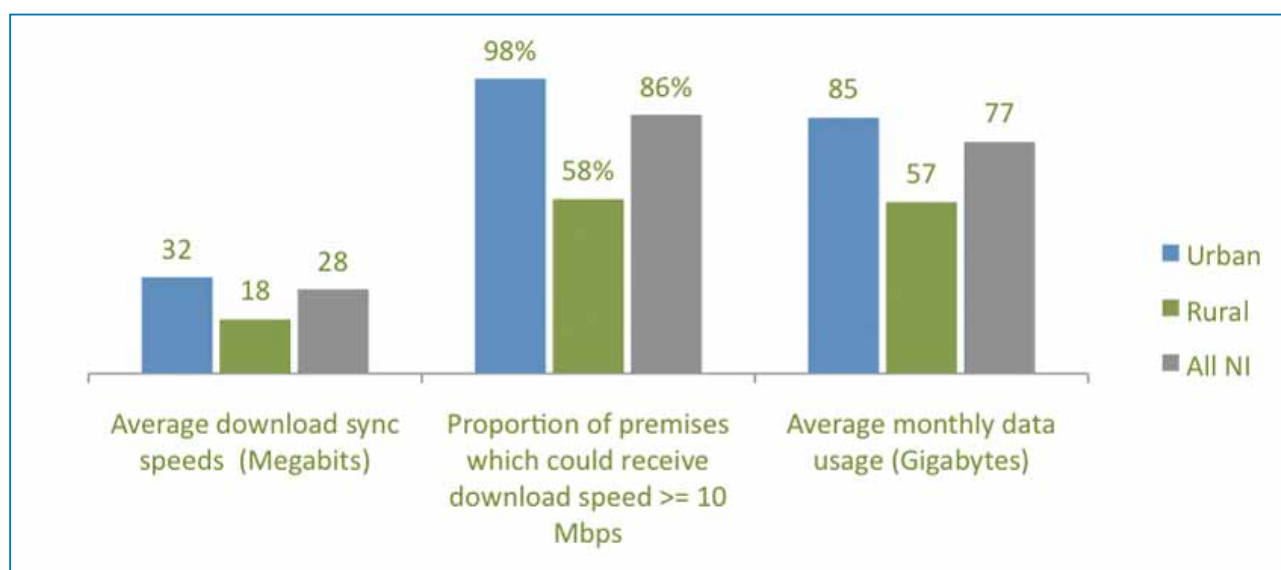
**Table 3: NGA and SFBB availability**

	Virgin Media NGA availability	Virgin Media SFBB availability	BT NGA availability	BT SFBB availability
<b>Urban</b>	38%	38%	93%	87%
<b>Rural</b>	0%	0%	90%	40%
<b>All NI</b>	27%	27%	92%	73%

Source: Ofcom, 2015.

A recent Ofcom review of electronic communications networks and services in NI<sup>xxiii</sup> reported that although intervention programmes are effecting rapid change, rural premises in NI are still much less likely than those in urban areas to be able to achieve speeds of 10 megabits per second or more. Lower average speeds in rural areas are also associated with lower data usage.<sup>xxiv</sup>

**Chart 9: Download speeds and data usage (fixed networks)**



Source: Ofcom, 2015

<sup>xxii</sup> Connected Nations 2015 NI, Ofcom, December 2015.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Ibid.

## Transport

As already noted, transport is key in enabling rural dwellers to access employment and core services. However, the Department for Regional Development’s Sub-Regional Transport Plan for 2015 noted the following problems in rural areas:

- limited facilities for pedestrians and cyclists in some small settlements;
- few public transport services; and
- inadequate levels of investment in road maintenance.

Rural households in NI are unlikely to have access to a regular public transport service. Bus service frequencies and coverage are much poorer than in urban areas. There is also a lack of modern, fully accessible buses, as well as proper footway access and places to wait.<sup>xxv</sup> Over half (52%) of rural households report ‘never’ using bus services<sup>xxvi</sup> with rural dwellers commenting that routes and service times do not serve their needs.<sup>xxvii</sup> Travel times to railway stations are also higher for rural dwellers<sup>xxviii</sup> and rail usage much lower. Travelling by foot may be hazardous due to a lack of footways and missing footway links as well as limited facilities for crossing roads in some settlements.<sup>xxix</sup>

**Table 4: Transport and travel**

	Rural	Urban	All NI
<b>Bus service<sup>1</sup> : at least hourly</b>	20%	70%	52%
<b>once a day or less</b>	13%	1%	5%
<b>Annual journeys by rail<sup>1</sup></b>	1	8	5
<b>Access to car/van<sup>2</sup></b>	88%	73%	78%
<b>Travel to work by car<sup>1</sup></b>	91%	78%	83%
<b>Average commuting distance (miles)<sup>1</sup></b>	11.6	7.5	9.1
<b>Miles travelled per year<sup>1</sup>: by car</b>	4,250	2,727	3,349
<b>by other private vehicle</b>	774	185	426
<b>Average journey length (miles: all modes of transport)</b>	8.4	5.3	6.6

Source: (1) *Travel Survey for NI (TSNI) urban-rural report 2011-2013*.

(2) *NI Continuous Household Survey 2013-14*.

<sup>xxv</sup> *Sub-regional Transport Plan 2015, Department for Regional Development.*

<sup>xxvi</sup> Jack, C. And Patten, N., 2014, *The contribution of key basic services to rural dwellers’ quality of life in Northern Ireland; A baseline review, Agri-food and Biosciences Institute, Belfast.*

<sup>xxvii</sup> *Sub-regional Transport Plan 2015, Department for Regional Development.*

<sup>xxviii</sup> *Rural statistics, Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.*

<sup>xxix</sup> *Sub-regional Transport Plan 2015, Department for Regional Development.*

Average journey lengths and commuting distances for rural dwellers are 50% higher than for those living in urban areas, and limited public transport necessitates reliance on private means of travel. This is reflected in higher rural car ownership and proportions commuting by car.

Road travel may also be more difficult in rural than urban areas due to problems such as uneven surfaces, occasional localised flooding and road standards which have become inadequate for the volume and type of traffic which is being carried in some areas. Some of these deficiencies may stem from inadequate investment and historic under-funding of road maintenance in rural areas.<sup>xxx</sup> Higher speeds and increasing traffic on rural roads also create risk. On average, around three-quarters of annual road deaths in NI occur in rural areas. Of the 129 fatal collisions recorded across NI in 2013 and 2014, 74% took place on rural roads.<sup>xxxi</sup>

### Social Isolation

Research findings are sometimes contradictory in terms of comparative levels of loneliness and social isolation in rural and urban areas. However, one U.K. study established a link between loneliness in elderly people and population density in rural areas<sup>xxxii</sup> and Jack and Patten found that isolation was ranked third in the list of key disadvantages for older people in rural areas of NI.<sup>xxxiii</sup> A number of aspects of rural living may contribute to social isolation, not only for the elderly but also for the disabled, those in poor health or surviving on a low income, those who are most geographically remote, and those without access to private means of transport.

There is growing recognition of the link between poor transport services and social isolation. Some rural households may have no access to a car, and in many others private transport may be used exclusively by those travelling to work, with other household members consequently dependent on alternative means of travel. Paucity of public transport combined with increased distance to retail, social and leisure facilities, may significantly impact on the ability of the elderly, the less physically able and those with young children to engage in social interaction. Friends and family may also be scattered residentially. With reduced opportunity for face to face contact, some rural dwellers may feel little incentive to leave their homes, and this may have implications for health and physical fitness. They may also have less facility for contact through social media – older people may be less familiar with technology for example, and those on low incomes may be prevented by costs.

<sup>xxx</sup> *Sub-regional Transport Plan 2015, Department for Regional Development.*

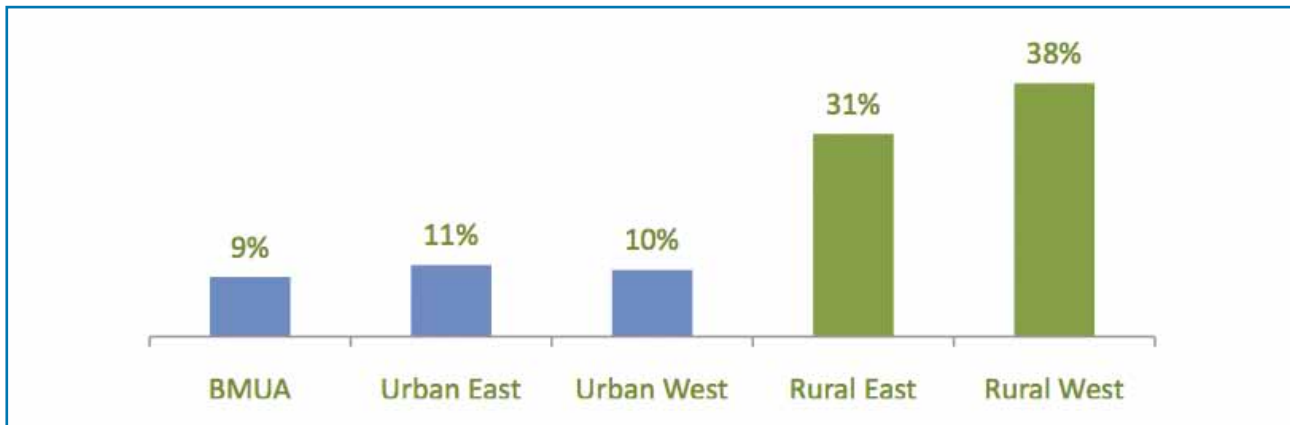
<sup>xxxi</sup> *Torney, K., Two years of death and serious injury on Northern Ireland's roads, The Detail, 2015.*

<sup>xxxii</sup> *Burholt V., (2011). Loneliness of older men and women in rural areas of the UK. In Safeguarding the convoy (pp. 35–29). Oxford: Age UK Oxfordshire.*

<sup>xxxiii</sup> *Jack, C. And Patten, N., 2014, The contribution of key basic services to rural dwellers' quality of life in Northern Ireland; A baseline review, Agri-food and Biosciences Institute, Belfast.*

Lone workers may also be vulnerable to loneliness and social isolation. Rural businesses are much more likely than urban establishments to be operated by a sole trader with no employees, and with the rise in mechanisation, farmers are increasingly likely to work alone. Loneliness and isolation have been linked to poor physical and mental health,<sup>xxxiv</sup> to depression<sup>xxxv</sup> and to a significantly increased risk of mortality.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

**Chart 10: Proportion of businesses operated by a sole trader**



Source: DETI Interdepartmental business register, 2014.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Age UK (2015) *Loneliness and Isolation Evidence Review*, London, Age UK, available at: [http://www.ageuk.org.uk/documents/en-gb/for-professionals/evidence\\_review\\_loneliness\\_and\\_isolation.pdf?dtrk=true](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/documents/en-gb/for-professionals/evidence_review_loneliness_and_isolation.pdf?dtrk=true)

<sup>xxxv</sup> Cacioppo JT, Hughes ME, Waite LJ, Hawkley LC, Thisted RA (2006). Loneliness as a specific risk factor for depressive symptoms: cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses. *Psychology and Aging* 21(1).

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

## Housing

Rural households are on average larger than those in towns and cities in NI. There is a lower availability of both social and private rented housing in rural communities, and although house prices are higher, a much greater proportion of households are owner occupiers. Private sector rents are on average lower in rural than in urban areas, particularly in the north and west.<sup>xxxvii</sup> However, the rate of non-decency in private rented accommodation is higher in rural areas than in towns and cities.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

**Table 5: Housing**

	Average household size <sup>1</sup>	Proportion			Average House Price <sup>2</sup>
		Owner Occupied <sup>1</sup>	Social Rented <sup>1</sup>	Private Rented <sup>1</sup>	
<b>BMUA</b>	2.32	61%	21%	17%	£120,542
<b>Urban East</b>	2.33	67%	13%	18%	£103,232
<b>Urban West</b>	2.35	54%	20%	23%	£101,361
<b>Rural East</b>	2.50	82%	7%	10%	£140,034
<b>Rural West</b>	2.69	77%	10%	10%	£120,106
<b>All Urban</b>	2.33	62%	19%	19%	£112,087
<b>All Rural</b>	2.62	79%	9%	10%	£130,326
<b>All NI</b>	2.43	67%	16%	16%	£116,765

Sources: (1) NI Continuous Household Survey 2013-14.

(2) Standardised price, NI Property Price Index 3rd quarter 2015.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Northern Ireland Rental Index: Issue No. 1 H1 2013.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR in Northern Ireland Living in the Private Rented Sector: Key Government Indicators, Report Five.

Highest average house prices, by a large margin, are found in the rural east, which also has the highest level of home ownership.

Chart 11: Housing



Sources: NI Property Price Index, 3rd quarter 2015, NI Continuous Household Survey 2013-14.



## Fear of crime and anti-social behaviour

‘Rural crime’ such as theft of livestock, tractors and farming equipment, appears to have been rising in recent years in NI. The financial impact of such crimes on farmers and rural businesses may be considerable and according to a recent UK survey<sup>xxxix</sup> anxiety about crime has been rising among rural business owners. However, rural dwellers in NI in general appear to experience lower levels of anti-social behaviour, are more likely to feel safe in their neighbourhoods and are less fearful about crime than those who live in urban areas. The exception to this pattern is worry about safety when alone at home at night, which is reported by very small proportions of the population in both rural and urban settings, but which may be felt more keenly by the elderly and more vulnerable.

**Table 6: Fear of crime and anti-social behaviour**

	Perceived high level of anti-social behaviour in area	Very worried about crime overall	Feeling very unsafe walking alone after dark	Feeling very unsafe alone in home at night
<b>BMUA</b>	12%	10%	9%	3%
<b>Urban East</b>	17%	10%	10%	1%
<b>Urban West</b>	14%	7%	7%	2%
<b>Rural East</b>	4%	4%	6%	1%
<b>Rural West</b>	3%	5%	4%	2%
<b>Rural</b>	4%	5%	5%	1%
<b>Urban</b>	14%	9%	9%	2%
<b>All NI</b>	10%	7%	7%	2%

Source: NI Crime Survey 2013/14.

<sup>xxxix</sup> The True Cost of Crime in Rural Areas (2015) National Rural Crime Network.

## Health

As noted above, people in isolated rural communities may find it comparatively difficult to access both primary and secondary healthcare services. Emergency response times are also higher in rural than urban areas of NI with potential consequences for individuals in urgent, life threatening situations. Some rural dwellers may also be at higher risk of loneliness and isolation. Nevertheless, data from a wide range of indicators confirm the widely held belief that, at least in NI, rural living is beneficial for health. The highest standards of physical health are enjoyed by the population of the rural east, who are generally more affluent and less isolated than those in the rural west.

**Table 7: Ambulance response times and health indicators**

	<b>Ambulance response times (mins: secs)<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Cancer incidence<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Standard death rate (avoidable deaths)<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>Potential years of life lost<sup>4</sup></b>	<b>Crude Suicide rate<sup>5</sup></b>
<b>BMUA</b>	05:54	622	373	11.9	24.4
<b>Urban East</b>	06:05	565	264	8.9	16.7
<b>Urban West</b>	05:00	579	296	9.9	17.5
<b>Rural East</b>	11:51	530	200	7.2	11.9
<b>Rural West</b>	13:06	548	225	7.5	11.5
<b>All Urban</b>	05:45	582	297	9.8	18.6
<b>All Rural</b>	12:26	541	216	7.4	11.6
<b>All NI</b>	06:48	567	267	9.0	16.2

Sources: (1) Data for 2013, Health and Social Care Inequalities Monitoring System Regional 2014.

(2) Rates per 100,000 population, 2006-12, Health and Social Care Inequalities Monitoring System Regional 2014.

(3) Deaths per 100,000 population 2008-12, Health and Social Care Inequalities Monitoring System Regional 2014.

(4) Data for 2010-12, Health and Social Care Inequalities Monitoring System Regional 2014.

(5) Deaths per 100,000 population, 2010-12, Health and Social Care Inequalities Monitoring System Regional 2014.

## Happiness and well being

The geographical isolation of many rural dwellers may cause difficulty in accessing employment and other services, and result in a heightened risk of income poverty and social isolation. Despite these disadvantages however, those living in rural areas appear on average to enjoy not only better health but also higher levels of happiness and general satisfaction with life than those living in towns and cities in NI. They are also less likely to feel anxious and more likely to feel that their everyday activities are worthwhile. Those living in the less prosperous and accessible rural west report highest levels of wellbeing overall.

**Table 8: Happiness and well being**

	High level of happiness	High level of satisfaction with life	Strongly believe things do in life are worthwhile	High level of anxiety
<b>BMUA</b>	31%	29%	44%	23%
<b>Urban East</b>	37%	36%	38%	17%
<b>Urban West</b>	44%	40%	44%	17%
<b>Rural East</b>	46%	47%	46%	18%
<b>Rural West</b>	49%	48%	56%	14%
<b>Rural</b>	48%	48%	52%	15%
<b>Urban</b>	37%	35%	41%	19%
<b>All NI</b>	41%	40%	45%	18%

Source: Annual Population Survey and NI Labour Force Survey, 2014/15.

## Conclusion

This short summary has provided clear evidence of disparities between rural and urban areas of NI, particularly in terms of transport and access to employment and core services. These disadvantages impact in a multitude of ways on the everyday lives of rural dwellers. Many of the issues involved are complex and long-standing and cannot be resolved in the short-term.

More detail on the economy, education, health, access to services, housing and well-being can be found on the Department’s website in the rural statistics section from where links to other statistical publications and reports can be accessed.





## Section 3

### The Framework

## Aim

The aim of the Framework is:

To improve the quality of life for vulnerable people in rural areas by providing a flexible mechanism for the Department to work in partnership with government bodies and other organisations to develop and implement measures which help tackle rural poverty and social isolation.

## Objectives

The objectives of the Framework are:

- To promote the development of new and innovative approaches to tackling poverty and social isolation in rural areas;
- To encourage effective partnership working between the Department, other statutory organisations and the rural community sector in seeking to tackle poverty and social isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas;
- To support interventions which lever additional resources to tackle poverty and social isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas to maximise the benefits from TRPSI funding;
- To facilitate the piloting of new projects aimed at tackling poverty and social isolation in rural areas more effectively and to encourage the mainstreaming of new approaches by public authorities if they prove to be successful;
- To promote the sharing of information, best practice and expertise and to promote an increase in understanding of the causes of poverty and social isolation in rural areas.

## Intended Outcomes

The intended outcomes for the Framework are:

- An increase in the availability of new and innovative models/approaches designed to address rural poverty and social isolation;
- An increase in funding and/or other resources levered through partnership working between government organisations and the rural community sector in seeking to tackle poverty and social isolation in rural areas;
- An increase in levels of knowledge and understanding of the causes of poverty and social isolation in rural areas and increased sharing of information, best practice and expertise;
- The successful implementation of interventions which help alleviate the effects of access poverty, financial poverty and social isolation in rural areas among specific vulnerable groups;
- Positive and effective engagement by rural communities in seeking to address poverty and social isolation issues within their areas.

## Priority Areas for Intervention

The Framework will focus on three Priority Areas for Intervention, namely Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation, and will aim to support measures designed to address these priorities in rural areas. It is recognised that there is potential for significant overlap between the three priority areas and that individual measures may address more than one priority area.

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

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

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

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

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

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



## Key Principles

The following 12 key principles apply to the Framework:

- The Framework will focus on addressing the needs of rural communities through the delivery of outcomes based initiatives;
- The Framework will promote the piloting of new and innovative approaches to tackling rural poverty and social isolation;
- The Framework will encourage partnership working between Departments, other public sector organisations and the rural community sector;
- The Framework will recognise the important role played by the rural community sector and the need to encourage rural community empowerment;
- The Framework will encourage the mainstreaming of successful projects and the development of suitable exit strategies;
- The Framework will complement other rural initiatives including Rural Proofing, the Rural Needs Act, the Rural White Paper Action Plan and the Rural Development Programme;
- The Framework will promote sustainability through support for projects which deliver long term benefits for rural communities;
- The Framework will seek to promote equality and good relations in line with the Department's duties under Section 75;
- The Framework will seek to complement the aims and objectives of other key government strategies relating to poverty and social isolation;
- The Framework will promote the sharing of information, learning and best practice between organisations;
- The Framework will seek to complement the community planning process;
- The Framework will recognise opportunities for partnership working on a North/South, East/West or transnational basis.

## Target Groups

The Framework aims primarily to target those groups that have been identified as being at risk of poverty and/or social isolation in rural areas based on evidence of need. However rather than being too prescriptive by providing a specific 'Target Group' list, the new Framework has the flexibility to target a wider range of groups based on evidence of need.

The following list of target groups provides examples of the types of groups that may be targeted under the new Framework and includes groups included in the previous Framework and new groups. The new Framework has the flexibility to target these groups and other groups which are identified as being at risk but which are not listed here.

- Children and Young People
- Farmers
- Lone parents
- People with caring responsibilities
- People who are unemployed or on benefits
- The LGB&T community
- People with low skills and/or low levels of education
- Ethnic Minorities
- Immigrants
- Older People
- Women
- People with disabilities
- People with poor mental health
- People in work on low incomes (the 'working poor')

The Framework also has the flexibility to target certain defined geographical areas where this approach is considered to be an effective way of addressing poverty and social isolation among vulnerable groups in line with the overall aims and objectives of the Framework.

## Implementation

The Framework will operate from 2016 onwards and will be supported by an initial one year budget of £4 million for 2016/17.

DARD will work with other organisations in designing and implementing a programme of measures to be delivered under the Framework. These organisations will include other Departments, local councils, other public and/or private bodies and the rural community sector.

A separate Action Plan will be published setting out details of the programme of measures to be funded under the Framework during Year One (2016/17). The Action Plan will be updated regularly during the lifetime of the Framework to reflect any changes to the programme of measures to be funded. A Forum will be also established to advise on poverty and social isolation issues in rural areas.

An Equality Screening exercise will be carried out in respect of each individual measure delivered under the TRPSI Framework and, where appropriate, full EQIAs will be carried out by the lead public authority.

## Monitoring

The Interdepartmental Committee on Rural Policy (IDCRP) will have a role in overseeing the implementation of the Framework.

Targets will also be developed to assist with the monitoring of the effectiveness of the Framework. These targets will be developed during Year One of the Framework.

Monitoring arrangements will be put in place in respect of individual measures funded under the Framework and will include regular updates on progress and expenditure.

An annual update on the implementation of the Framework will be published in the Department's Annual Progress Report on the Rural White Paper Action Plan.

Equality Monitoring will be undertaken in respect of individual measures funded under the Framework.

## Evaluation

Each measure funded under the Framework will be subject to an evaluation following its completion. An evaluation of the Framework will be undertaken prior to the development of any future Framework.





# Section 4

## Annexes

## Annex A - Definitions and Terminology

### Rural

There is no single definition of what is meant by the term “rural”, however the NI Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) published a Report<sup>1</sup> by the Inter-Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group in February 2005 that recommended that Government Departments and other users should consider defining urban and rural areas in ways that are appropriate for the specific programmes and projects under consideration. This review was updated in 2015.<sup>2</sup> In the absence of a programme-specific definition, the revised classification proposed that settlements with a population of 5,000 or less should be defined as rural. The review also considered service provision and categorised each settlement as within or outside 20 and 30 minute drive times of a medium or larger town with a population of 10,000 or more. On the basis of the revised definition, approximately 63% of the 1.8 million of the North’s inhabitants live in urban areas, 37% (678,939) in rural areas<sup>3</sup> and 20% of the population live outside a 20 minute drive time of a medium or larger town<sup>4</sup>.

### Low-income Poverty

The NI Executive uses two main indicators of low-income poverty<sup>5</sup>, as defined in the Child Poverty Act 2010 and reflected in the NI Child Poverty Strategy. These indicators are relative and absolute poverty. These indicators combined with the low income and material deprivation indicator and the persistent poverty indicator provide the basis for measurable targets in the North of Ireland and Britain in relation to the Child Poverty Act 2010.

### Relative Poverty

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

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<sup>1</sup>Report of the Inter-Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group: *Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements*, NISRA, February 2005.

<sup>2</sup>Review of the *Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements*.

<sup>3</sup>March 2015 <http://www.nisra.gov.uk/archive/geography/review-of-the-statistical-classification-and-delineation-of-settlements-march-2015.pdf>

<sup>4</sup>Derived from Table 2 of the *Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements* report.

<sup>5</sup>Table 1 of the *Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements* report [www.dsdni.gov.uk/ni\\_poverty\\_bulletin\\_201213.pdf](http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/ni_poverty_bulletin_201213.pdf)

### Absolute Poverty

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

### Combined Low Income and Material Deprivation

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

### Social Isolation

Social isolation is characterised by a lack of contact with other people in normal daily living-in the workplace, with friends, and in social activities. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), social isolation is “both a symptom and a cause of social distress.” It may follow a difficult event in a person’s life-the loss of a job, the breakdown of a marriage, illness or financial difficulties.

Feelings of isolation can, in turn, make it difficult for that individual to reintegrate socially and can have serious consequences: Social isolation can be a downward spiral: feelings of exclusion affect morale, can impact on a person’s mental health and lack of contacts with other people may reduce both social and economic opportunities.<sup>6</sup> Research has shown that loneliness and isolation are associated with poor physical as well as mental health<sup>7</sup> and with a significantly increased risk of mortality.<sup>8</sup>

Feelings of social isolation may be exacerbated by the areas where people live. Individuals may experience poor housing, high unemployment and low incomes. They may also find that there are barriers to them accessing goods and services that are available to others in society such as access to public transport, health services, benefits etc, something that is more prevalent in rural areas. Again this isolation may be as a direct result of poverty/lack of income, the place that they live, or as this Framework recognises, a combination of both.

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<sup>6</sup>SOCIETY AT A GLANCE: OECD SOCIAL INDICATORS 2005 EDITION – I 82 SBN 92-64-00712-1 – © OECD 2005.

<sup>7</sup>Age UK (2015) *Loneliness and Isolation Evidence Review*, London, Age UK, available at: [http://www.ageuk.org.uk/documents/en-gb/for-professionals/evidence\\_review\\_loneliness\\_and\\_isolation.pdf?dtrk=true](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/documents/en-gb/for-professionals/evidence_review_loneliness_and_isolation.pdf?dtrk=true)

<sup>8</sup>Holt Lundstad, J, Smith, T, Baker, M, Harris, T and Stephenson, D, (2015) *Loneliness and Social Isolation as Risk Factors for Mortality: A Meta-Analytic Review*, Washington, *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 2015, Vol. 10(2) 227–237 available at: <http://pps.sagepub.com/content/10/2/227.full.pdf+html>

## Annex B – List of Abbreviations

<b>A&amp;E</b>	Accident and Emergency Department
<b>APSI</b>	Anti Poverty and Social Inclusion
<b>ARD</b>	Agriculture and Rural Development
<b>BHC</b>	Before Housing Costs
<b>BMUA</b>	Belfast Metropolitan Urban Area
<b>DARD</b>	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
<b>EQIA</b>	Equality Impact Assessment
<b>GP</b>	General Practitioner
<b>IDCRP</b>	Inter-departmental Committee on Rural Policy
<b>LGB&amp;T</b>	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender
<b>NGA</b>	Next Generation Access
<b>NI</b>	Northern Ireland
<b>NISRA</b>	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
<b>PGF</b>	Programme for Government
<b>RDP</b>	NI Rural Development Programme
<b>SFBB</b>	Superfast Broadband
<b>SIB</b>	Strategic Investment Board
<b>TBUC</b>	Together: Building a United Community
<b>TRPSI</b>	Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation



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