



Rural White Paper Action Plan

Annual Progress Report 2013



Department of
**Agriculture and
Rural Development**

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AN ROINN
**Talmhaíochta agus
Forbartha Tuaithe**

MÁNNYSTRIE O
**Fairms an
Kintra Fordèrin**

1 July 2012 - 30 June 2013

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Contents

Foreword by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development	2
Introduction	8
Background	8
Review of Progress by Departments	9
Glossary of terms / Abbreviations	40
Annex A - Monitoring Returns	42
Department of Agriculture and Rural Development	43
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure	49
Department of Education	52
Department for Employment and Learning	55
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment	57
Department of the Environment	67
Department of Finance and Personnel	72
Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety	74
Department of Justice	77
Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister	78
Department for Regional Development	79
Department for Social Development	82

Foreword by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development

As Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, I am delighted to present the first Annual Progress Report on the Rural White Paper Action Plan.

When I launched the Rural White Paper Action Plan back in June 2012, I believed it demonstrated the Executive's commitment to supporting and developing our rural areas. As a rural dweller, I am fully aware of the particular challenges faced by rural communities and the range of actions contained in the Action Plan is the Executive's attempt to address many of the key challenges.



One year on and I am pleased with the progress which has been made to date on implementing the commitments currently contained in the Action Plan. The actions across all departments are progressing in line with agreed timeframes and I am confident that this trend will continue.

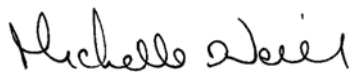
My own Department has launched a number of important initiatives under the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework, all of which aim to make a real and significant difference to the everyday lives of people living in rural areas. There are currently 11 initiatives across a range of issues affecting rural areas including access to transport, fuel poverty, access to safe drinking water, youth employment, maximising access to a range of grants and benefits, health checks for farmers and rural dwellers and the provision of assistance to the elderly and other vulnerable people in rural areas.

A key aspect contributing to the success of this work has been partnership working between DARD and other organisations including other Departments, the Public Health Agency and the Social Security Agency in order to maximise the positive impact of our work on rural communities. I believe that the Rural White Paper Action Plan has proved to be an effective framework for promoting cross-departmental working in seeking to address rural issues.

It is important to remember that the key purpose of this initiative is to improve the quality of life for rural dwellers and I would therefore like to take this opportunity to reaffirm my commitment to the Rural White Paper Action Plan. I intend to ask my Executive colleagues to identify within their Departments new and challenging actions for inclusion in a refreshed Action Plan to be produced during 2014. I see the Rural White Paper Action Plan as a live initiative which continues to respond to the needs of our rural communities and which delivers real and meaningful outcomes for rural dwellers.

I will also be looking at how complementary initiatives such as rural champion and rural proofing could help deliver benefits more effectively for our rural communities. I see a key role for a rural champion in moving forward and I will be looking at potential new models for championing rural issues across government to help deliver better outcomes for rural areas. I will also be exploring opportunities for strengthening rural proofing within government to ensure that rural needs and circumstances are routinely considered in policy making.

The Rural White Paper Action Plan is a key instrument for delivering the Executive's commitments to rural areas and I would therefore encourage all those involved with this initiative to continue to play their part in ensuring that our rural communities continue to thrive and prosper.



Michelle O'Neill MLA
Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development

Réamhrá Leis An Aire Talmhaíochta Agus Forbartha Tuaithe

Mar Aire Talmhaíochta agus Forbartha Tuaithe, tá lúcháir mhór orm an Tuarascáil Bhliantúil ar Dhul Chun Cinn ar an Pháipéar Bán ar Phlean Gníomhaíochta Tuaithe a chur i láthair.

Nuair a sheol mé an Páipéar Bán ar Phlean Gníomhaíochta Tuaithe i Meitheamh 2012, dar liom gur léirigh sé tiomantas an Fheidhmeannais tacú lenár gceantair tuaithe agus iad a fhorbairt. Is duine mé atá ina chónaí faoin tuath, agus is maith a thuigim na dúshláin áirithe atá ag ceantair tuaithe. Is é atá sa réimse gníomhartha sa Phlean Gníomhaíochta iarracht an Fheidhmeannais ar aghaidh a thabhairt ar chuid mhór de na príomhdhúshláin.



I ndiaidh bliana tá mé sásta leis an dul chun cinn a rinneadh go dtí seo ar na gealltanais atá faoi láthair sa Phlean Gníomhaíochta a chur i bhfeidhm. Tá na gníomhartha i ngach roinn ag dul chun cinn ar aon dul leis na cláir ama chomhaontaithe agus creidim go leanfar de sin.

Tá roinnt tionscnamh tábhachtach seolta ag an Roinn s'agam féin faoin Chreat ar Dhul i nGleic le Bochtaineacht Tuaithe agus le hAonrú Sóisialta. Is é cuspóir na dtionscnamh sin fiordhifear suntasach a dhéanamh do ghnáthshaol na ndaoine atá ina gcónaí faoin tuath. Faoi láthair tá 11 tionscnamh ann i réimse de chúrsaí a bhaineann leis an tuath lena n-áirítear iompar, tearcrochtain fuinnimh, rochtain ar uisce óil sábháilte, ógfhostaíocht, uasmhéadú ar an rochtain ar réimse deontas agus sochar, scrúduithe sláinte d'fheirmeoirí agus do chónaitheoirí tuaithe agus cuidiú do sheandaoine agus do dhaoine leochaileacha eile faoin tuath.

Rud a chuidigh go mór le rath na hoibre an chomhpháirtíocht idir RTFT agus eagraíochtaí eile lena n-áirítear Ranna eile, an Ghníomhaireacht um Shláinte Phoiblí agus an Ghníomhaireacht um Shláindáil Shóisialach le go mbainfidh pobail tuaithe lántairbhe as ár gcuid oibre. Sílim gur léiríodh gur creat éifeachtach é an Páipéar Bán ar Phlean Gníomhaíochta Tuaithe le obair trasroinne a chur chun cinn agus muid ag iarraidh aghaidh a thabhairt ar cheisteanna a bhaineann leis an tuath.

Coinnigh cuimhne gurb é príomhchuspóir an tionscnaimh cáilíocht beatha cónaitheoirí tuaithe a fheabhsú agus ba mhaith liom an deis seo a thapú le mo thiomantas don Pháipéar Bán ar Phlean Gníomhaíochta Tuaithe a athdhearbhú. Tá rún agam iarraidh ar mo chomhghleacaithe gníomhartha nua dúshlánacha a aimsiú a bheidh mar chuid de Phlean Gníomhaíochta úr a chuirfear le chéile le linn 2014. Dar liom gur tionscnamh beo

atá sa Pháipéar Bhán ar Phlean Gníomhaíochta Tuaithe, tionscnamh a bhíonn i gcónaí ag freastal ar riachtanais ár bpobal faoin tuath agus a thugann do mhuintir na tuaithe fíorthorthaí suntasacha.

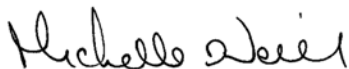
Chomh maith leis sin beidh mé ag breathnú ar an dóigh a rachadh laoch na tuaithe agus promhadh tuaithe níos fearr chun sochair dár bpobail tuaithe. Creidim go bhfuil ról ríthábhachtach ag laoch tuaithe más mian linn dul chun cinn agus beidh beidh mé ag breathnú ar dhóigheanna úra le ceisteanna tuaithe a chur chun tosaigh ar fud an rialtais le go gnóthóimid níos fearr do cheantair tuaithe. Cuardóidh mé deiseanna fosta le promhadh tuaithe taobh istigh den rialtas a neartú lena chinntiú go gcuirtear riachtanais agus dálaí na tuaithe san áireamh mar chuid den ghnáthamh i gceapadh beartais.

Tá an Páipéar Bán ar Phlean Gníomhaíochta Tuaithe ríthábhachtach i gcur i bhfeidhm gealltanais an Fheidhmeannais do phobail tuaithe agus mholfainn mar sin do gach duine a bhaineann leis an tionscnamh seo bheith i gcónaí ag déanamh a ndíchill lena chinntiú go mbeidh rath agus bláth ar ár bpobail tuaithe.

comhmhuintearais agus nasc dohriste leis an talamh le cónaí faoin tuath agus níor mhaith liom féin, ar scor ar bith, cónaí a dhéanamh in áit ar bith eile.

Is doiciméad ríthábhachtach é seo a leagann amach réimse leathan gníomhaíochtaí a dhíríonn ar thacú leo siúd atá ina gcónaí i gceantair thuaithe agus ar naisc níos fearr a chruthú idir ár gceantair uirbeacha agus ár gceantair thuaithe. Don chéad uair, tá doiciméad againn ina léirítear in aon áit amháin an fhreagracht atá ar gach Roinn i dtaca le ceisteanna agus cearta tuaithe de, agus ina mínítear na gealltanais atá á dtabhairt acu le cuidiú linn tabhairt faoi na dúshláin atá ag ár gceantar tuaithe.

Caithfidimid anois díriú ar chur i bhfeidhm an Phlean Ghníomhaíochta. Creidim gur seo an rud a ba mhaith le muintir na tuaithe. Tá mé féin agus mo chomhghleacaithe ar an Fheidhmeannas tiomanta dá chinntiú go gcuirfidh na gníomhaíochtaí sa doiciméad seo go suntasach le feabhsú cháilíocht saoil na ndaoine a chónaíonn agus a oibríonn inár gceantair thuaithe.



Michelle O'Neill CTR

Forethocht Frae Tha Männystèr O Fairms An Kintra Fordèrin

In ma stannin as Männystèr o Fairms an Kintra Fordèrin, A'm hairtsome gled tae pit forrit tha furst yeir-bi-yeir accoont o tha shìft made anent tha Kintraside Leet o Daeins White Paper.

Whaniver A pit oot tha Kintraside Leet o Daeins White Paper in Juin o 20an12, A wus gyely shair it showed tha much tha Execcative wus richt behin onie ections that micht gie bakkin tae, an up-big, oor kintra airts an pairts. Leevin in tha kintraside masel, A unnèstan richt weel whut things resydentèrs in tha kintra fin teuch, an whut aa the' hae tae pit up wi whiles ower an abane toon dwellers. Sae whut adae ye micht hae seen afore, pit oot in tha Daeins Leet, wus tha ettlin o tha Execcative fur tae wrassle wi tha waur o aa that.



Wi twal month noo gan bye A'm plaised wi whut's bin daen, an tha big shìft made up tae noo daein things aareadie unnèrtaen in tha Daeins Leet. Tha ections wrocht bi yin an aa o tha männystries is cumin alang in guid time, ownin til whut wus agreed at tha stairt, an A hae nae doot ava that thon's tha wye the'll chughie at.

Ma ain Männystrie haes taen a wheen o big steps oorsels unnèr tha Banes fur Tecklin Puirtith an Fowks Leevin thair Lane in tha Kintra, whilk ettle at makkin an ower ocht bettèrment o tha day-bi-day leevin fur fowks dwellin in tha kintraside. We hae driv forrit wi 11 steps jist noo ower a hale wheen o things that haes brocht about ill-times in kintrae airts. Sitch things taks in: guid transpoart that's fit tae be got at; puirtith wi fuel; haein guid an siccar drinkin wattèr; jabs fur young yins; makkin tha maist o grants an benefits an makkin thaim aa aisie got at; halth check-ups fur fairmers an kintraside resydentèrs; an giein a helpin han tae tha oul fowk an ither fowk that needs luk't eftèr in an about tha kintra.

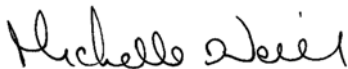
Yin big thīng at lies ahint aa this guid wark haes bin tha pairtnèrin an warkin thegither o DARD alang wi ither boadies – sitch as ither Männystries, tha Halth o Fowks Agentrie an tha Weel-Bein o Fowks Agentrie – aa ettlin fur tae mak tha maist o whut guid we hae aareadie wrocht in tha kintraside. A dae houl masel that tha Kintraside Leet o Daeins White Paper haes showed itsel tae be a guid grun fur fordèrin aa männystries in warkin thegither an gettin doon tae richtifie tha problems o tha kintraside.

It is aye weel tae hae mine o tha main pūsh o this wark – fur tae hae tha stannèrt o life bigged up fur kintra fowks – an sae A maun tak this inlat yinst mair tae declare masel fu

behin tha Kintraside Leet o Daeins White Paper. Ma intent is fur tae ax aa tha ither yins on tha Execcative gin the' cud fin, inside o thair ain Männystryes, teuch new ections fit tae be pit intae a mair strang Daeins Leet tae be brocht oot in 20an14. A dae houll that tha Kintraside Leet o Daeins White Paper maun be driv forrit in a leevin mennèr that wull aye tak tent o tha changin needs o oor kintraside resydentèrs an gie richt an proper ootcums fur fowks dwallin in tha kintraside.

Forbye, A'll be haein a luk at tha wye ither drives o tha same ilk, tha like o kintraside kempin an kintraside preein, micht gie a helpin han tae oor kintraside resydentèrs in gettin mair an uisefu bettèrment. A see a big pairt tae play fur a kintraside kemper in gaun forrit an A wull be lukkin at new schemes that aiblins cud hae kintraside concarns brocht afore tha goverment fur tae gie a bettèrment in kintra districts. A'll be takkin a luk forbye at onie inlats thair micht be fur makkin kintra preein mair strang inside o goverment sae as tae mak cartain that tha needs o tha kintraside in tha real warl get taen intae accoont as a mettèr o coorse whan policies ir a-makkin.

Tha Kintraside Leet o Daeins White Paper daes be yin ower ocht tool fur gettin whut tha Execcative haes gien its bakkin tae anent kintra districts pit in place, an sae A wud urge aa thaim that's warkin thegither wi this drive fur tae cairry on daein thair bit in takkin tent oor kintraside resydentèrs wull aye dae weel an be weel-aff got.



Michelle O'Neill MLS

Introduction

This is the first Annual Progress Report on the implementation of the Rural White Paper Action Plan. This report covers the period 1st July 2012 to 30th June 2013 and provides an update on progress by each Department in implementing the actions contained in the Action Plan.

The Annual Progress Report is a key mechanism in 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 provides a short narrative by each Department outlining the benefits which the implementation of the Action Plan has brought to our rural communities and our rural areas.

This Annual Progress Report 2013 should be read in conjunction with the Rural White Paper Action Plan.

Background

The Rural White Paper Action Plan is the outcome of an Executive initiative launched 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 which comprised of a range of rural stakeholders, including representatives of 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 on 28th June 2012. The Rural White Paper Action Plan 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 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.

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.

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 2012-13 included:

- Contributing to the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy post 2013 and, in particular, pressing for regional flexibility so that the measures implemented can be tailored to meet local needs in supporting sustainable growth within our farming sector.
- Strongly representing, in the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) Reform process, our key policy positions on decentralisation, transferable fishing concessions and phasing out discards.
- Continuing roll-out of the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme (NIRDP) 2007-2013, including significant investment in economic, environmental, social and industry competitiveness measures.
- Continued development of the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 in line with the Europe 2020 strategic objectives of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.
- Advocating our position to achieve an EU Animal Health law that could help deliver the objectives envisaged in the All-Island Animal Health and Welfare Strategy in order to safeguard animal health and welfare to the benefit of our agri-food industry.
- Working closely with DETI and Invest NI to develop a strategic plan for the agri-food sector. The industry-led Agri-Food Strategy Board, appointed by the DARD and DETI Ministers in May 2012, has identified sustainable growth as one of the over-arching themes of its strategic action plan for the sector and made associated recommendations for government, industry and academia to drive forward this agenda.

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, particularly amongst vulnerable groups in rural areas. Over the last year DARD has been taking forward a number of initiatives under its Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework in partnership with other Departments. A total of £16 million has been secured by DARD to tackle poverty and social isolation in rural areas, of which £8million has been spent up to June 2013 on a diverse range of projects. The following initiatives are supported under the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation 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 was jointly launched by the Minister of Health and the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development in March 2012 and aims to improve the health and wellbeing of people living in rural areas by providing an information service to vulnerable rural households. The initiative provides for trained MARA enablers to visit vulnerable households and provide information to householders on the availability of benefits, grants and services which they may not otherwise be aware of. More details on the roll out 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 has commenced a Farm Family Health Checks Programme in conjunction with the PHA, which provides a detailed health check and a signposting service to various physical and mental health services. The Farm Family Health Checks programme was launched jointly by the Minister of Health and the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development in July 2012. A key aspect of the Health Checks Programme, which differs from other Health Check initiatives, is that client GPs are informed of the details of the Health Check and those clients that have been advised to visit their GP are contacted 6/8 weeks after their check to follow up on any issues that arose. More details on the roll out 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) to address the issue of access to transport services in rural areas. The Scheme is being delivered by the Rural Community Transport Partnerships (RCTPs) which cover all our 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.

Rural Support

DARD through a 'Contract for Funding' provides funding for 'Rural Support', a charitable organisation that provides a listening ear and signposting service for farmers and rural dwellers who are experiencing financial and social stress. Rural Support has 25 volunteers who provide guidance, advice and support to those who request assistance and also signpost individuals to various support services.

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, including the Rural Development Programme and Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation initiatives.

Connecting Elderly Rural Isolated (CERI)

Connecting Elderly Rural Isolated (CERI) is a pilot programme developed by DARD to address social isolation for elderly rural dwellers in the Western Trust area. The programme is operated in conjunction with the PHA and aims to support independent living. The Programme has to date delivered in excess of 34,000 interactions with the elderly and facilitates attendance at health awareness and improvement events, ICT classes, luncheon clubs and various other group activities. An evaluation of the programme has been completed and the PHA is currently considering options for potential wider roll out across all 4 rural Trusts.

Youth Employability and Entrepreneurship Programmes

DARD operates the Youth Employability (BOOST) and Rural Youth Entrepreneurship (RYE) Programmes in conjunction with DEL and the Rural Development Council. Both Programmes are supported by DARD to help reduce economic inactivity among vulnerable young people in rural areas by addressing barriers to employment and business creation. To date 446 eligible participants have completed BOOST and 198 young people have engaged with RYE. Both these programmes are ongoing and it is anticipated that 1,450 vulnerable or unemployed rural young people will benefit from these programmes by 31 March 2014.

Fuel Poverty

DARD aims to help address fuel poverty in rural areas through its involvement in the Department for Social Development's (DSD) Affordable Warmth pilot programme. This programme aims to deliver energy efficiency improvements to domestic households through targeting areas with highest likelihood of severe fuel poverty in the 2012/13 financial year. Through DARD's involvement over 233 vulnerable rural homes received energy efficiency measures in 2012/2013. DARD also provides supplementary funding to the Power NI Free Insulation Scheme, a Scheme managed by Power NI for low income households which is approved and supported under the Northern Ireland Sustainable

Energy Programme (NISEP) which the Utility Regulator co-ordinates. Through this Scheme, DARD has supported 323 additional low income households in rural areas with a package of free cavity and loft insulation.

Rural Borewells Scheme

The Rural Borewells Scheme was developed by DARD in conjunction with DRD to provide financial assistance for the construction of a private borewell (and/or installation of appropriate treatment works) to enable applicants to obtain a wholesome domestic water supply in rural areas where access to the public water mains system is not technically or financially feasible. To date work has been completed at 27 isolated rural properties with initial site inspections having been undertaken at a further 19 locations.

The Rural Challenge Programme

The Rural Challenge Programme operated by DARD is designed to encourage rural community and voluntary groups to identify poverty or social isolation within their community and to propose initiatives to address these needs. In the latest tranche of the Programme which opened in September 2012, 44 applications were approved for funding and Letters of Offer up to a maximum of £10k per project have issued to all successful applicants.

Rural Proofing

DARD promotes and supports 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, make adjustments to take account of particular rural circumstances. Rural proofing has been promoted by DARD through the Interdepartmental Committee on Rural Policy while support is provided through the provision of advice and training. DARD has developed a rural proofing training course which is delivered by the Centre for Applied Learning in conjunction with the Rural Development Council. This training is available to all policy officials across the NICS.

North South Co-Operation

DARD meets with the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (DCELG) in Dublin, regularly on a range of rural issues including the Rural Development Programme, the Rural Enablers Project, the INTERREG IVA Programme, LEADER and rural proofing. Officials from both Departments have also been working together to explore the potential to create a distinct theme to support all-island co-operation within each jurisdiction's new Rural Development Programme 2014-2020.

Research and Evidence

DARD has commissioned AFBI to undertake a number of rural research projects to help inform the future development of rural policy. This research includes projects relating to rural households' experience of access to public services, the impact of the recession in rural labour markets, 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.

DARD has secured agreement from NISRA to appoint a rural statistician to work on a range of rural policy issues. The work of the rural statistician will include working with NISRA on the review of the definition of rural and interrogating information held on NISRA databases on a rural / urban split. Their work will also include exploring the merits of establishing a series of key rural indicators to measure the effectiveness of rural policy making and to inform future policy making.

It is expected that the commissioning of this research and the appointment of a rural statistician will lead to better policy outcomes for rural dwellers through increased knowledge and understanding of rural issues and through a greater focus on evidence informed rural policy making. It is anticipated that the rural statistician will take up post in September 2013.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

DCAL's interventions in rural areas are in support of a number of the Department's priorities, in particular:

- To promote social and economic equality, tackle poverty and social exclusion, and promote sustainable economic and social interventions.
- To promote the positive health impacts of participation in culture, arts and leisure, in particular in relation to suicide prevention.
- To promote the STEM/STEAM agenda and the DCAL family's contribution to education and lifelong learning.
- To bring forward a strategy to protect, enhance and develop the Irish language; to bring forward Irish language legislation and to encourage 5,000 people to sign up to Líofo 2015.

DCAL's funding in relation to rural areas is mainly delivered through its sponsored bodies, the Arts Council (ACNI); NI Screen; SportNI and LibrariesNI. In turn, these bodies engage with the Rural Community Network to discuss aspects of promoting arts, sports, and culture in rural areas and to ensure that members are aware of potential funding streams.

Arts

The Arts Council and NI Screen provide an extensive range of funding and services targeted at those experiencing high levels of poverty and social exclusion. The key benefits are that people who may have previously had difficulties accessing funding and services have increased their ability to participate and been able to partake of social contact and acquiring new skills without the need to travel outside their home area. Groups especially benefitting are older people and children and young people who live in areas of social and economic deprivation.

Community Arts

One of the stated funding objectives of the Arts Council's Community Arts Policy (2007-12), was to encourage applications from organisations outside Belfast or Derry and particularly rural areas. Community Arts practice has engaged with the most disenfranchised members of the communities, including those experiencing the highest levels of poverty and social exclusion.

Arts & Older People

Arts & Older People Programme has a Steering Group with representation from older people's organisations and includes representation from the Rural Community Network. To date, 50% of programme delivery for the Arts & Older People Programme has been outside of the Belfast and Derry areas.

Start-Up Funding

Priority is given to applications that deliver the arts in areas of social and economic deprivation, particularly in rural areas outside Belfast or Derry/Londonderry.

The Creative Industries Innovation Fund (CIIF)

ACNI officers have met the Rural Community Network to discuss arts and creative industries funding to ensure that they are aware of all funding streams so they can make their members aware.

'Building Peace through the Arts - Reimagining Communities'

This initiative targets communities in rural settings and the border areas to tackle the manifestations of sectarianism and racism. A Programme Consortium has been established, with the Rural Community Network represented.

The Arts Council's Intercultural Arts Programme

This programme has a Steering Group with representation from the South Tyrone Empowerment Programme, based in Dungannon, and regional focused organisations including the Community Relations Council and Community Arts Partnership.

The Arts Council funds a number of programmes of Community Arts activities through its annual Lottery programme including the Sliabh Beagh Development Association (Fermanagh), Border Arts (Castlederg), An Creggan (Omagh), Donaghcloney Rural Need Development (Donaghcloney), Craic (Coalisland), BEAM (Donaghmore).

As part of the Programme of Engagement Events on the Arts Council's new Five Year Strategic Plan, the Rural Community Network in partnership with Community Arts Partnership hosted a dedicated workshop in order to gauge views on the content of this successor document.

Filmclub

The expansion of the After Schools Film Club into 300 extended schools (c.70% of Primary and Post Primary Extended Schools) is well underway. Approximately 32% of the Extended Schools currently signed up to FILMCLUB are in Rural Areas.

Digital Film Archive

The Digital Film Archive can be accessed at 20 locations across NI. Archive-related Outreach activities are available to all members of the community, including hard-to-reach and rural groups - this includes a commitment to work on a forthcoming project in Fermanagh to help with social engagement of rural communities. In the period 1 July 2012 to 30 June 2013, there were a total of 49 DFA activities, 5 of which (approx 10%) took place in locations defined as 'rural' - settlement population under 4,500.

Cinemobile

Several projects have been funded in the last year using the Cinemobile, the mobile cinema that travels to rural areas. These include Science on Wheels for primary and secondary schools bringing science and film to rural areas, and the Fighting Words project bringing creative writing to primary schools in rural areas.

Creative Learning Centres

The Creative Learning Centres continue to work with people from rural and hard to reach areas and the Amma Centre in Armagh works primarily with children and teachers from rural areas.

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 opened in Draperstown in April 2013, developed by Workspace with Rural Development Programme funding. This is much bigger and more welcoming and comfortable than the former library, allowing the full range of library services and programmes to be delivered.

Mobile Libraries

Libraries NI procured four new mobile libraries which have been deployed in rural areas, making the service more reliable and more attractive to use. In parallel with this, Libraries NI consulted on a draft strategy for mobile library provision which was approved by the Board in March 2013. The strategy is designed to increase use of the service and to improve children's access to library services in rural areas.

Partnership with DARD

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

- DARD hosting a networking day for its local rural support networks in Dungannon Library, allowing the networks to meet each other and library staff. This has since been followed up at a more local level by individual networks and libraries;
- Promotion of the ICT facilities in libraries e.g. the information packs about single farm payments included information about these facilities; and
- Plans to extend the Health in Mind activities in rural areas.

Agricultural Shows

Libraries NI have begun to pilot the promotion of library services at agricultural shows.

Sports

As part of DCAL's strategy for Sport, Sport Matters, DCAL and Sport NI interact closely with a number of Government Departments and Agencies to help promote all sports, including countryside sports.

For example, Outdoor Recreation NI (ORNI), formerly CAAN, is represented on the Sport NI led Sport Matters Implementation Group and is contributing to a number of actions in the published Sport Matters Action Plan. Other organisations also contributing to the Action Plan include DARD and the NI Environment Agency.

In addition, and as part of this process, DCAL, Sport NI and a number of other government departments, including NI Environment Agency, Department of the Environment and NI Tourist Board, provide joint support to ORNI, which is a charity organisation bringing together all groups and bodies which have an interest in, or involvement in, outdoor recreation in NI.

During 2011-13, DCAL, through Sport NI, made 16 investments in rural locations totalling £3,185,408.

Sport NI's Active Communities Programme has been designed to address issues associated with proximity to services experienced by rural communities.

LÍOFA

The Líofoa campaign aims to encourage 5000 people from all walks of life across NI to sign up to becoming fluent in Irish by 2015. The Department is encouraged by the interest shown in rural areas and will continue organise Líofoa events and school information days outside of Belfast and Derry.

Consideration will be given to targeting those in rural areas with resources in a way that has maximum impact on promoting equality and tackling poverty and social exclusion. This includes the development of a new Líofoa website that will include e-learning programmes. The development of the website will be particularly beneficial to those in rural areas who find it difficult to access Irish language classes.

A Líofoa presentation will be delivered to senior management of DARD to increase awareness of Líofoa thus enabling DARD officials to identify suitable events in rural areas at which Líofoa can have a presence.

Collaborative Work

Finally, as part of the delivery of Protect Life, it was agreed that all DCAL networks - sports, arts and libraries will support and collaborate with DARD in supporting rural communities in improving awareness of the problem of suicide and promoting positive mental health.

Department of Education

Rural Schools

The Revised Curriculum

The Revised Curriculum has been taught in schools to all pupils of compulsory school age since 2009/10. It is flexible and allows teachers to modify the content to best meet the needs of all young people and to take account of their local environment.

The Entitlement Framework

The Entitlement Framework, which became a legal requirement in September 2013, requires schools to deliver access for their pupils to a minimum of 18 courses at Key Stage 4 and 21 at post-16, regardless of the type or location of the school they attend. The Entitlement Framework ensures that all post-primary schools not only teach the same curriculum but importantly have the flexibility to offer a wide range of subject choices to both inspire and engage pupils, that have clear pathways to further and higher education, training and employment and that are relevant to the needs of our 21st century economy.

Extended Schools Policy

Extended Schools policy enables those schools that draw pupils from some of the most disadvantaged communities to provide a range of services and programmes outside the traditional school day, to help meet the needs of pupils, their families and wider communities. The programme has a clear focus on improving educational outcomes and providing additional support to help improve the life chances of disadvantaged children and young people. Almost 140 schools (30%) of qualifying schools are situated in rural locations. £12m has been provided for the programme in 2013/14.

The Department, working alongside a joint ELB/CCMS Working Group, has been developing Guidance to assist schools in opening up their premises for use by the community. It is hoped to publish the Guidance in November 2013.

Area Planning

The Area Planning process is ongoing and is being refined and developed taking account of responses to the recent consultation on both the primary and post-primary plans. The Terms of Reference requires active engagement with all key stakeholders to ensure local issues, including those affecting rural areas, are considered throughout the process. Innovative and creative solution are being sought to deal with isolated rural communities to ensure pupils in rural areas have the same access as those living in urban area to a broad and balanced curriculum.

Department for Employment and Learning

The Department for Employment and Learning recognises that there are significant challenges facing rural communities, not least of which is access to quality services.

This is one of the reasons the Department has reviewed the Maximum Student Number (MaSN) allocations across the Regional Colleges to ensure that the allocations represent an equitable and rational distribution of Higher Education places in the Further Education colleges across Northern Ireland.

This is in order to:

- secure maximum recruitment and uptake of available places;
- reflect existing demand and potential future demand across Northern Ireland; and
- support the Department's Widening Participation goals in the geographical distribution of higher education places by providing close to home delivery of places to students who face barriers to their participation in higher education.

In addition, in order to meet the needs of those in rural areas, DEL has supported Lantra (the Sector Skills Council for land based and environmental industries) in the development and expansion of qualifications and training courses. This has enabled Lantra-approved training providers to be able to offer training throughout Northern Ireland - including in rural settings. This supports the retention of skilled workers in rural communities through up-skilling and re-skilling opportunities and contributes to the development and sustaining of rural communities and businesses.

Working within the wider context of facilitating increased interaction between academia and business, DEL's Connected programme has been further able to ensure closer working between the Higher and Further Education sectors and both the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) and the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE), specifically focused on meeting the knowledge transfer needs of our agri-food and biotechnology industry.

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

The Northern Ireland Economic Strategy recognises the important contribution that the rural economy makes to the delivery of the Executive's Economic priorities.

Since the Rural White Paper Action Plan was published, DETI has made significant progress in delivering the full range of actions that it committed to.

Agri-Food Sector

The Agri-Food Strategy Board's Strategic Action Plan "Going for Growth" was launched by the First and deputy First Ministers on 16th May 2013. The report has four key targets for the agri-food sector:

- Grow sales by 60% to over £7bn;
- Grow employment by 15% to over 115,000;
- Grow sales outside Northern Ireland by 75% to £4.5bn;
- Grow by 60% to £1bn the total value of products and services

To deliver these objectives, the Action Plan outlines 118 recommendations, grouped across 7 cross cutting themes and 10 industry sectors, to be taken forward by Government and industry. All relevant Departments are currently assessing the recommendations prior to the DARD and DETI Ministers seeking Executive endorsement of an agreed plan in the autumn.

The Poultry Sector is a key employer in our economy employing approximately 6,000 with the potential for significant expansion. However this growth cannot happen without the development of a sustainable solution to the utilisation of poultry litter. Therefore, in November 2012 DETI and DARD announced a joint project in partnership with the UK Technology Strategy Board to use the Small Business research Initiative to procure the development of solutions to this issue.

The Competition opened on 10 December 2012 and closed on 20 February 2013 with 39 applications received. 9 projects from 8 bidders were awarded contracts for Phase 1 providing support for the development of a broad range of technologies/innovative solutions. Phase 1 is scheduled to be completed in November 2013.

Tourism

A Tourism 'Priorities for Action' Plan has been circulated by DETI to Executive Ministers which contains actions on rural tourism which have been agreed with DARD. Work is well underway on the development of 9 key tourism areas/destinations, many of which cover rural areas. NITB is supporting Local Authorities and other stakeholders in these areas to develop Tourism Area Plans which link to the overall tourism priorities for action.

NITB is providing funding support for innovative tourism project developments aligned to national tourism priorities to support the delivery of a complete rural tourism experience; one that integrates the many aspects of rural life. This will maximise the opportunity for tourism to act as a catalyst for rural development and as a means for the farming community to diversify where appropriate.

NITB continues to work with DARD in co-funding rural tourism projects. In the financial year 2012/2013 NITB administered £1.5m through the Selective Financial Assistance scheme for 15 capital projects (total project value £4m). This includes the Mourne and Antrim coast tourism destinations and will benefit the surrounding rural areas. In addition the Tourism Development Scheme supports 'softer' project development. Under the 2012/2013 scheme NITB has allocated financial assistance of £320,000 to walking routes and mountain trails. Other projects which will benefit rural areas are currently being assessed.

Telecommunications

During the period of this report, DETI has continued to work with the telecommunications industry and other stakeholders to ensure that our communications networks remain reliable, competitive and accessible by all.

While the Department's Next Generation Broadband Project has been a major contributor here having the highest availability of superfast broadband services in the UK at 95% (91% in rural areas)^[1] and, although it is encouraging that the coverage of mobile services has continued to improve, the Department has recognised that more needs to be done to enable the region to keep pace with the technology advances in the communications market and the ever changing demands by consumers, particularly in rural areas.

With that in mind, the Department has been pursuing a project which aims to ensure that all premises here have access to a broadband service of at least 2 Mbps and that 90% of premises can access a broadband service offering a speed of 24 Mbps or better. A public consultation on the initial intervention area for this project completed in October 2012 and a further consultation is underway^[2]. It is expected that the project will commence in early 2014 with a completion date of March 2015.

In addition, the Department is continuing to scope the potential for an intervention to increase the availability of mobile data services here. The intervention area for this project would be informed by the ongoing investment by the Mobile Network Operators in their 3G networks and by the UK-wide Mobile Infrastructure Project which is seeking to address mobile voice not-spots across the UK.

1 . Infrastructure Report 2012 Update: Ofcom (November 2012)

2. <http://www.detini.gov.uk/deti-telecoms-index/deti-telecoms-whats-new.htm>

Renewable Energy

During the period July 2012-2013 DETI continued to ensure that our Renewables Obligation continued to incentivise renewable electricity generation at levels which bring forward investment at least cost to the electricity consumer. Much of this investment is in rural areas. DETI also supported DARD/CAFRE at the twice yearly 'Practical On-farm Renewable Energy' seminars.

Social Economy

In October 2012 DETI awarded a contract to Social Enterprise NI (a consortium which includes the Rural Development Council) to design, manage and deliver a Social Economy Work Programme (SEWP). The SEWP commenced on 1 October 2012 and as part of delivery plans the programme includes a series of events (masterclasses, seminars, training etc) to promote, develop and sustain the sector here. Due to the wide geographical spread of its members Social Enterprise NI has taken a regional approach to implementing its programme and as a result many events have been held in rural areas promoting the availability of support to rural social enterprises and raising awareness of the economic, environmental and social impact made by the sector in those areas.

Over the coming years, DETI will continue to ensure its activities aimed at rebalancing our economy to take cognisance of the needs of rural businesses and communities.

Department of the Environment

The Planning Bill

The Planning Bill was introduced to the Assembly on 14 January 2013, and, following detailed scrutiny of the Bill, the Environment Committee published its report on 6 June 2013. Consideration Stage was completed in the Assembly on 25 June 2013.

The Bill includes a range of reforms to modernise the planning system prior to the intended transfer of planning powers to the 11 new councils in 2015. These include measures to enhance the environment, speed up the processing of planning applications, provide tougher and simpler enforcement, faster and fairer appeals and enhance community involvement for all communities. A duty will be placed on the Department to publish a statement of community involvement within one year of commencement of the Bill. The Bill will also introduce a requirement for developers to consult local communities prior to submitting major applications for planning permission to the Department.

Preparation work for the subordinate legislation flowing from the Bill is ongoing and by bringing forward these reforms in advance of the transfer of planning powers this will allow them to be tested. It also means the Department will transfer a planning system which all users are familiar with and understand.

Planning and Rural Development Policy

Local Planning Division continues to implement the guidance issued in relation to planning applications that are subject to grant funding. The processing of such applications will be prioritised when the applicant advises the Department at the initial stages of the planning process of the tight time frame to seek grant funding.

In addition, each local council has agreed to include certain categories of development to be included within the Streamlined Council Consultation process.

The Streamlined Council Consultation Scheme is a key planning reform initiative involving partnership with local councils in agreeing an innovative process change aimed at supporting the economy through a responsive and proportionate approach to ensure the delivery of timely decisions. The scheme applies to an agreed list of applications, excluding Environmental Impact Assessment development where the recommendation is to approve and no objections have been received to the proposed development. It reduces the processing time of these streamlined applications by consulting with the council at the outset rather than the latter stages of the decision-making process.

In relation to the policy development process Planning Policy Division 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.

Road Safety

The Department of the Environment is responsible for co-ordinating a strategic approach to improving road safety here, 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 key performance indicators include tracking the number of people killed in collisions on rural roads. In 2012 there were 35 deaths on rural roads, a reduction of 62% compared with the 2004/2008 baseline. There were three child deaths in 2012 on rural roads, a reduction of 42% compared with the 2004-2008 baseline.

To 30 June 2013 there were 22 fatalities in the PSNI's rural region compared with 14 in the same period in 2012, an increase of 57% (the PSNI's rural fatality figure includes those sustained on motorways. The DOE's KPI data excludes motorway casualties).

The Department has also 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 already been completed in partnership with DARD and the report can be viewed at:

www.doeni.gov.uk/roadsafety/18938_cyp_rural_road_safety_final_report_v01.pdf

As a result of this research an additional two action measures were added to the Road Safety Strategy in May 2012. The measures, to provide materials and short teaching plans linked to current Publicity Campaigns and to improve practical child pedestrian training, are planned for delivery by 2017.

The campaign 'Just Because' addresses pedestrian vulnerability and highlights both pedestrian and driver fault. This launched in May 2012 and has been on air regularly since. It is also supported by press, digital and outdoor advertising activity. This campaign includes aspects to help address rural pedestrian safety.

Rural Tourism

NIEA: Built Heritage has commenced or completed a number of studies during this period, the results of which will inform future works at our monuments. This will enable us to provide the quality of access, information and facilities which will encourage future visitors to our historic monuments in coming years. A key example of this is the feasibility study which was completed for Tullaghoge Fort, Co. Tyrone, which will steer significant new developments planned for the site to improve both the access/parking and the visitor experience. Funding was also secured towards the development of a strategic plan for improving and developing the Dunluce castle and village site, Co. Antrim, as a world-class visitor destination, as part of the Causeway Coastal Route, and work has commenced on this project. Considerable work was also undertaken to analyse Christian Heritage destinations in southern Co. Down and a survey of State Care monuments was also published by the Historic Monuments Council. Both of these studies identify where access, signage and visitor information needs to be improved, and again this will be used to prioritise and inform future works at these sites to encourage visitors and provide a quality experience for them.

As well as the information gathering noted above, work also took place on the ground, to improve visitor information and access at a number of sites, for example the Mound of Down, Inch Abbey, Grey Abbey, Greencastle, Grey Point Fort and Navan Fort. Conservation work also continued to be carried out at a range of historic monuments, particularly masonry ruins, to ensure that these sites survive in good condition and are safe for visitors to access. A series of events were also held at historic monuments in June 2013 as part of Archaeology Days, providing animation and strongly marketed events at a number of our sites.

By providing better access and improved on-site interpretation and information we aim to encourage visitors to explore and enjoy more sites throughout the countryside, thereby increasing the amount of time they are spending in these regions, and encouraging repeat visits.

In addition, and with regard to listed buildings in rural areas, NIEA Built Heritage undertakes the annual European Heritage Opendays weekend event here. Last year, this involved over 61,000 visitors to over 310 listed buildings. An 'Owners' Forum' is also undertaken annually, where listed building owners can receive advice on a wide range of subjects, including energy efficiency strategies for their homes; new, sustainable usages for vacant listed buildings; and funding - through the NIEA Listed Buildings Grant-aid scheme - to assist with the costs of eligible repairs (in many rural areas here).

Last year, the NIEA Grant-aid scheme issued 227 payments for eligible repairs to listed buildings, amounting to a total spend of over £3.8M.

Climate Change

Environmental Policy Division has worked with DARD, through the Cross Departmental Working Group on Climate Change (CDWG CC) on both climate change adaptation and mitigation. An adaptation sub-group of the CDWG CC has produced a draft cross departmental adaptation programme, which addresses the risks and opportunities, including those impacting on rural areas that were identified in the NI Climate Change Risk Assessment report. On mitigation, DOE supports DARD's endeavours to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through the Efficient Farming Cuts in Greenhouse Gases Reduction Strategy and Action Plan, the Greenhouse Gas Implementation Partnership (GHGIP) and its sub groups in the Red Meat, Dairy and Arable sectors. The sub group was established to further develop the most appropriate mitigation measures for each sector and to provide input to the development of the 2014-2020 NI Rural Development Programme measures to address competitiveness, lowering carbon and resource efficiency

Waste Management

The Department allocated some £2.15 million capital funding for 11 projects in 2012-13 for initiatives which will enable local councils to boost waste recycling and reuse.

In addition nine successful projects received revenue funding for waste prevention and recycling projects, totalling £367k, awarded to councils, the community and voluntary sector and the private sector under the Rethink Waste Revenue Fund.

During 2012-13, the Department's Rethink Waste campaign, www.rethinkwasteni.org, worked closely with the Food Standards Agency and SafeFood to promote food waste prevention messages from the Love Food Hate Waste campaign, ni.lovefoodhatewaste.com, especially during Food Safety Week in June 2012. The Department in partnership with Conservation Volunteers Northern Ireland continued to support home composting awareness with a series of demonstrations.

The European Week of Waste Reduction (EWWR) in November 2012, administered outside Belfast by the Waste and resources Action Programme (WRAP) was the focal point for the Rethink Waste campaign in the latter half of 2012. The aim of EWWR is to encourage multiple actions during a single week across Europe to raise awareness about waste prevention. A total of 543 different activities were registered here from businesses, schools, councils, charities, retailers and individuals; an increase of 169 registrations from 2011. Our (543) activities here represented 60% of the total UK activities.

The Department's funding and support, in conjunction with stakeholders, has provided a network of activity. 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 here, particularly in rural areas. These types of applications include single wind turbines, wind farms, hydro-electric schemes, solar panels and biomass/anaerobic digestors. Local Planning Division has worked creatively and collectively with key stakeholders to the planning process to ensure timely processing of planning applications and to discuss areas of concern. The number of decisions issued for renewable energy applications increased by 90% from 2011/12 to 2012/13. From 1st July 2012 - 30th June 2013 there have been 799 decisions issued for renewable energy applications with 91% approval rate.

In addition, Planning Policy Division published (Draft) Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) specific to Anaerobic Digestion (AD) for public consultation. It has been drawn up taking account of similar material available for other parts of the UK and the Republic of Ireland and will provide additional advice and guidance to complement the background information already set out in the Best Practice Guidance to PPS 18. The Division also carried out public consultation in November 2012 on proposals to introduce new permitted development rights for the installation of anaerobic digestion plant on agricultural units and revised arrangements for agricultural buildings with the view to introducing relevant amendments to the Planning (General Development) Order (NI) 2013 before the end of summer 2013. This work was well progressed and on target by 30th June 2013.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Enterprise Shared Services

The NI Direct Digital Inclusion Unit within Enterprise Shared Services continues to encourage and support as many people as possible to go online and improve the convenience and efficiency of public service by driving online delivery. It is coordinated through the Go ON NI campaign and targeted at the harder to reach, digitally excluded sections of the population, as highlighted in the NISRA Omnibus Survey, which includes rural communities.

The Digital Inclusion Unit works with Supporting Communities NI (SCNI), a voluntary organisation which encourages a self help approach to community development by providing support, advice, information and training to over 400 community/residents groups, statutory and voluntary organisations - an outreach to over 200,000 residents in NI. By working with SCNI, the Digital Inclusion Unit has been able to assist in joining up digitally excluded communities with local Digital Champions to enable them to receive one-to-one practical training and short skills based training. Throughout 2012/13, over 400 Digital Champions were trained and assessed across NI to fulfil this role within their communities, both urban and rural, to assist individuals and communities to engage with digital technology as a means for improving their social inclusion. The digital champions have delivered training to thousands of individuals, many in rural areas, with 87% of participants reporting that their confidence and ICT usage has improved as a result. Below is a map of where the courses have been taking place:



The Digital Inclusion Unit has also worked with Libraries NI to promote the network of 100 libraries across NI; all of which provide full PC and internet facilities free of charge. This partnership focuses on introducing citizens to ICT and assists them on a journey from basic training through learning development to discover the benefits of using ICT and internet services in daily life - such as government services through nidirect, travel, benefits, leisure and advice.

The annual Silver Surfers Day event was held in May across libraries in rural areas, where people of 50 years of age and above received one-to-one tuition from business volunteers. Learners were shown how to access the internet, learn what email can do for them and how to access Government services through the nidirect website. Going forward the focus is to build on the success of previous years and in particular target older people in more rural areas, older people living in sheltered accommodation and older people with disabilities.

NISRA

A key achievement on the NISRA side is the launch of a new NI Neighbourhood Statistics website www.nisra.gov.uk/ninis which allows rural (and urban) communities across NI to access high quality official statistics on their local area. The launch of the new website was made possible as part of 2011 Census in NI. The website contains a series of Frequently Asked Questions on Urban/Rural issues (e.g. how are areas classed as urban or rural?). As part of this dissemination, a helpline and training and is available. Training has been provided to a number of rural organisations and community groups have been trained 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.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Two key initiatives have been taken forward: -

1. The MARA project jointly launched by the Minister for Health and the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development in March 2012.
2. The Farm Family Health Checks programme launched by the Minister for Health and the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development in July 2012.

Maximising Access in Rural Areas - (Mara)

The MARA Project was jointly launched in March 2012 by the Health Minister Edwin Poots MLA and the DARD Minister Michelle O'Neill MLA.

It is based on the premise that identifying vulnerable rural households, visiting people in these homes and using a "personal touch" encourages them to avail of services, grants and benefits which they would not otherwise have known about or had the wherewithal to apply for. By placing local rural community networks at the heart of the MARA Project and using local knowledge, it is easier to identify and connect with people within the locality who could benefit from a household visit.

Using local information, the project seeks to identify the most vulnerable rural households. To date trained enablers have completed 5,124 initial household visits.

At these visits a detailed household and personal assessment is completed by specially trained 'enablers' and a range of information is provided to occupants regarding regional and locally available services.

Using the information gathered, referrals for grants, benefits and services are made to various partner departments and agencies for immediate processing. A key strength of the project is the active partnership developed across government to take referrals and deliver outputs. At the end of June 2013 13,931 referrals had been made on behalf of participating households.

These referrals will be followed through until such times as the householder receives the grant, benefit or service they are entitled to. A second home visit, of which 2,288 have already taken place, will be carried out for those households that received a referral to ensure the process is followed through to its conclusion with the "personal touch" and trust built up between the enabler and the householder again a key element.

Project outputs are at an early stage but at the end of June 2013:

- 97 people have received additional or new benefits which amount to an annual value of £358,000.
- Over 1,000 households have received equipment and advice to address Home Safety issues.

- 320 people have received significant energy efficiency measures through the Warm Homes Scheme.
- 150 people have become members of their local Rural Community Transport Partnership.
- Others have benefitted from referrals for a Smart Pass, the ongoing Boiler Replacement Scheme, an Occupational Therapy assessment, Social Services assistance and indeed locally available services provided by the community and voluntary sector.

MARA Project - Case Study

MARA Occupational Therapy

Arthritis sufferer Kate's life has been made a whole lot more comfortable since she discovered the MARA Project.

The 52-year-old mother of three and grandmother of three, lives alone in a rural village in County Antrim, her home for more than 26 years.

But following the recent break-up of her marriage, Kate found life "a bit of a struggle". Then she learned about the MARA Project.

"The problem was I knew I was probably entitled to benefits and grants for this and that, but I didn't know where to go or what to do," explained Kate. "That's where the MARA Project folk came in. They came to see me, did an assessment and told me all about the various grants, benefits and local and regional services which were available.

"I've since had an assessment from occupational therapists which led to me receiving help through the NIHE Disabled Facilities Grant. Through it I've had work done in my bathroom; I've had a chair and hoist installed as well as a new raised toilet. I've also had an assistance rail put up in the bedroom to help me get in and out of bed, and when you suffer arthritis I can tell you, all of these things make life a whole lot more comfortable."

With the help of MARA Project enabler Amanda, Kate is also now finding out about benefit entitlements which she may be entitled to, ways to improve energy efficiency in her home, including a boiler replacement survey which could mean a new installation.

"I would not have had any of this had it not been for the MARA Project," insists Kate. "The MARA staff have been very supportive all the way and encouraged and helped me to get to the services, benefits and grants which I would not otherwise have known about or indeed even thought I was entitled to.

"I know there are many more people who are sitting out there and want to ask for help, and like me just don't know where to turn - my advice to them is get in touch with their local MARA Project team. They really can make a difference."

Farm Family Health Checks Programme

The Farm Family Health Check Programme launched on 16th July 2012, since which time approximately 2,300 clients have received health checks. These have been provided primarily at farmers marts but also rural community events. Key achievements of the programme have been:

- 46% of clients seen were advised to see their GP and
- 29% were referred to the MARA project.
- Since June 2013 there has been a new referral pathway created which allows the health check programme to refer into a Farm Health and Safety training programme funded by DARD and to date 61 clients have had onward referral.
- The programme is providing the opportunity to provide generic health and social wellbeing improvement services to the farming population at key times of the year. For example, the programme recently distributed sun cream to the farming community in the run up to the summer period and just in time for the heat wave which was experienced throughout NI in July. This provided an opportunity to practically support the PHA's Care in the Sun Campaign with a section of the community who spend long hours working outdoors.
- The programme also linked closely with Rural Support and UFU during the extreme adverse weather experienced last winter. This assisted with the distribution of claim forms for emergency financial aid.

Given the success of the programme, additional investment has recently been made to increase the capacity of staff available to provide support required at events attended by the team.

A mid-term evaluation of the programme is currently underway. Anecdotal evidence received from the farming community to date is that the programme is very well received and the figures outlined above give testimony to the extent to which it is being used and is picking up clients who otherwise would not have been referred to health professionals for hypertension, weight management, diabetes etc. The testimonial below was received by staff recently and highlights the benefit that this programme brings to isolated rural communities:

Farm Family Health Checks - case study

"Many thanks to you and your staff for bringing The Farm Families Health Check Van to our marquee weekend and providing your services to our farmers and the general public.

It was a pleasure on Saturday morning to see and speak to the farmers in our grounds, especially the elderly farmers from around the glen who were feeling relaxed and looking forward to their health checks. Some having played hurling many years ago were pleased to be in the grounds again reminiscing and sharing their memories of matches etc.

Department of Justice

Community Safety - Tackling Rural Crime

Tackling rural crime is an important strand of the Department of Justice's (DOJ) work on community safety. The most recent PSNI statistics show a fall in both agricultural and rural crime, with reductions of 1.9% and 11.2% respectively when comparing statistics from 2011/12 and 2012/13 (source: Agricultural and Rural Crime in Northern Ireland: Quarterly Update to 31 March, 2013, published 9 May 2013).

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 Business and Rural Crime Delivery Group comprises statutory and non-statutory partners who have developed an action plan to take forward implementation of the strategy. The action plan was approved by the Justice Committee on 17 January 2013, and covers the period until 31 March 2015 at which point it will be reviewed.

Rural Crimestoppers

The Business and Rural Crime Delivery Group action plan contains a number of initiatives aimed specifically at tackling rural crime. The DoJ has, for example, jointly funded a Rural Crimestoppers campaign, launched in December 2012. This involved Crimestoppers, working in partnership with the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), DOJ, DARD, the Ulster Farmers' Union (UFU), the National Farmers' Union (NFU) Mutual, the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE), the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), and Northern Ireland Water, to carry out an awareness-raising and information campaign targeted at the farming community. The campaign focussed on the 'human' cost of rural crime, such as the damage to family business resulting from tractor theft; the importance of reporting suspicious activity; and the value of preventative measures being taken by individuals.

Rural Crime Unit

The new Rural Crime Unit was launched at the Balmoral Show in May 2013. The Unit, which is jointly funded by the DoJ, NFU Mutual and the PSNI, is using all available data sources to help identify trends and patterns that will assist with preventative action; help to improve community confidence; and, ultimately, reduce rural crime. The analysis provided by the unit will benefit a wide range of stakeholders, including Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs), enabling them to develop initiatives targeted at specific areas of local need. Whilst the initiative is focussed on addressing crime, it is hoped that it will have a wider impact, contributing to an enhanced quality of life in rural communities.

Policing and Community Safety Partnerships

PCSPs are jointly funded by the DoJ and the Northern Ireland Policing Board to engage with, and empower, communities to develop local solutions to tackle crime, fear of crime and anti-social behaviour. During their first year of delivery, in 2012/13, a number of the partnerships have supported initiatives aimed at tackling rural crime, such as Farm Watch, which provides practical crime prevention advice to farmers and landowners, as well as alarms for elderly and vulnerable rural residents, and a text alert service, which enables rural communities to get updates on local crime and additional information on prevention. Many PCSPs support a property-marking service in rural areas, aimed at making it more difficult for thieves to dispose of stolen goods - the scheme involves marking trailers, quads and ride-on lawn mowers with a unique serial number, which is then placed on the PSNI data-base. Some PCSPs have also funded the Construction Equipment Security and Registration (CESAR) Scheme, and Guardcam, which is an all-in-one PIR LED floodlight, camera, speaker and Digital Video Recording system which provides a comprehensive deterrent and crime-monitoring function in one unit.

Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister

Social Investment Fund

The Equality and Strategy Directorate within Office of the First and Deputy First Ministers Department (OFDFMD) are delivering an £80 million Fund to tackle poverty and deprivation focusing on building pathways to employment, tackling the systemic issues linked to deprivation, increasing community services and addressing dereliction. The high level aims of the Social Investment Fund were subject to rural proofing at the consultation stage.

The Executive agreed that delivery of the Social Investment Fund would be delivered through strategic area plans in nine identified social investment zones, developed by cross-sectoral steering groups in partnership with the community. Final area plans were submitted to the department on 28th February 2013 and the projects within them are currently being considered.

Contested Spaces

The Contested Spaces Programme is now funding 9 projects and several in an exclusively rural capacity.

Good progress is being made, bringing real and substantive change to the interface communities.

Lessons are being learned from the outcomes seen so far, and we anticipate substantial progress will arise from this Programme and that we will be able to apply that learning to other programmes and initiatives across NI.

Together: Building a United Community

The new good relations strategy, Together: Building a United Community was published on 23rd May 2013. The Strategy sets out a range of actions and commitments, with the aim of securing improved good relations across and amongst all communities.

Specifically as a result of the Strategy we will work with rural community organisations to encourage increasing openness and accessibility and to reduce chill factors and fears that prevent open access.

Department for Regional Development

The Department for Regional Development (DRD) has 8 actions within the Rural White Paper Action Plan. During the period 1 July 2012 - 30 June 2013 DRD monitored progress against each of the actions and consider that the action plan is a useful tool to review the impact of our work on rural areas.

Rathlin Island Action Plan

In particular, the Rural White Paper Action Plan assisted in the review of the Rathlin Island Action Plan which has been revised to reflect the thematic themes adopted in the Rural White Paper Action Plan. The Rathlin Island Action Plan was formally endorsed by the Minister for Regional Development on 3 July 2013 and, as our only inhabited island, has benefitted from the co-ordinated approach between the two action plans.

Rural Borewells Scheme

The Rural Borewells Scheme funded by DRD was launched in June 2012. The scheme aims to provide access to affordable safe drinking water in rural homes, built before 2000, that are beyond the reach of the public water network. Up to £12,000 is available towards costs and 27 rural projects have been completed to date with funding now available for further applications for 2013/14. It is anticipated that around 50 households will be assisted under the Rural Borewells Scheme in 2013/2014. 19 have already been referred to the scheme hydrogeologist to begin work on these projects.

Transport

The *New Approach to Regional Transportation* was launched in March 2012 and sets three high level aims covering the economy, society and the environment for the future development of transport. These are driven by the Executive's Programme for Government and are supported by twelve strategic transport objectives, one of which is to improve access in rural areas. DRD is currently working on implementation of the New Approach which will influence transport investment from 2015 onwards.

In March 2013 Translink introduced a new Journey Planner to provide better information to passengers using rural public transport services.

Preparations began in January 2013 to conduct a pilot scheme to assist in determining the long-term approach to local public transport planning and ensure the effective use of rural public transport. The Pilot Scheme, based in the Dungannon area, will consider what opportunities there are for a more joined up approach to the delivery of publicly funded passenger transport services including those provided by Translink, Community Transport operators, the Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) and the Southern Health and Social Care Trust. The focus on Community Transport provision will initially be on the operation of 'Collect and Connect' type services in partnership with Translink and SELB. It is expected that the initial phase of the pilot project, which will focus on the delivery of

school transport in the pilot area, will commence in September 2013. The pilot project will run for a period of one year following which a full evaluation will be carried out.

During 2012/13 DRD spent some £110m on roads structural maintenance; resurfacing and reconstruction, surface dressing, patching and structural drainage. Of this, over £65m was spent resurfacing and surface dressing over 1,500km of the local road network which is not on the Motorway and Trunk Road Network.

Interdepartmental Committee on Rural Policy

A senior official from DRD attends the Inter-Departmental Committee on Rural Policy and ensures that there is a focus on the effective use of resources in rural areas and further actions are planned over the next 12 months to continue to address the challenges faced by rural dwellers.

Department for Social Development

Over the past 12 months, DSD has been positively working 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 three key areas for the period of this update: the better co-ordination of rural and urban regeneration needs; community development and social inclusion; and rural housing.

Regeneration, Community Development & Social Inclusion

In an attempt to create a closer working relationship and facilitate the sharing of expertise, officials from DSD have had a number of meetings with DARD colleagues in order to discuss the potential for a regeneration pilot scheme in a rural setting (DSD only conducts its regeneration functions in urban settlements with a population of 4500 or over).

We will continue to engage in these discussions and to explore the resourcing requirements and practicalities associated with the delivery of such a pilot scheme outside DSD's normal operational boundaries.

Our discussions have also concentrated on the obvious longer term implications and considerations associated with the proposed Reform of Local Government in 2015 for regeneration and community development activities especially in the context of the integration of urban and rural Community Planning for the new local authorities.

Excellent progress has also been made towards maximising and integrating funding opportunities for rural communities, identifying and tackling the causes of poverty and disadvantage in rural areas and developing integrated local community development structures with a strong rural component. Through increasingly closer collaborative working between DSD and DARD, the implementation of 'shared generic regional support arrangements' for the Voluntary and Community Sector across NI, to include both urban and rural areas, commenced on 1 October 2012.

Early indications are that the new arrangements are working well and have facilitated the delivery of important services to often disadvantaged rural communities. It is also anticipated that both DSD and DARD will enhance delivery of 'faith-based community development services' in rural areas through a revision to the existing contract for funding with the Churches Community Work Alliance.

New joint regional support arrangements continue to be developed specifically for women in disadvantaged and rural areas, through a collaborative working arrangement between DSD and DARD. Good progress has been made in recent months with organisations which had expressed an interest in acting as delivery agents for these new arrangements. Research was conducted in tandem to identify gaps in, and duplication of, service

provision to women, including those in rural areas. If progress continues as planned, it is anticipated that the new arrangements will come into effect on 1st October 2013.

Rural Housing

DSD and the NI Housing Executive continue to liaise with colleagues in other jurisdictions across the UK to learn from best practice. The Biomass heating initiative, promoting wood fuels produced locally in NI was trialled in 50 properties in the 12/13 year. The trial was evaluated and these were found to be suitable alternative renewable heating source. As a direct result of the success of the trial, from 2013/14 wood pellet boilers will be offered as an optional heating source for rural dwellers.

Other initiatives include the Village Voice which encourages the representation of small rural estates with no dedicated community group. This was also trialled by DSD and introduced to 3 areas during the 2012/13 year.

To date, two rural 'shared future' new build housing schemes, with a total of 44 new homes have been completed. From April 2013, provision has been made on social housing application forms for applicants to indicate if they wish to live in a shared housing area. This will provide a good indication of demand for future new build 'shared housing' schemes. During the current financial year the Shared Communities Programme, which aims to reduce housing segregation and increase community cohesion in existing housing estates, has invited two new rural areas to join the programme.

DSD continues to take action to ensure that rural housing supply is more closely linked to the level of rural housing need. The NI Housing Executive continues to target rural private housing unfitness through targeted grants, and consequently 24 renovation and replacement grants were approved in 2012/13.

DSD has also responsibility for the Fuel Poverty Strategy "Warmer Healthier Homes" which recognises that the population of NI is nearly 40% rural. Rural homes, by definition are located outside the warmer, sheltered urban areas which provide reduced individual heating needs. The Department's Warm Homes Scheme has an annual target to deliver 9,000 energy efficiency improvements to fuel poor households, 40% of these in rural areas. We are delighted to report that this target was achieved in the 2012/2013 year.

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
BDUK	Broadband Delivery UK
CAFRE	College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CAP	Community Arts Partnership
CCMS	Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
CERI	Connecting Elderly Rural Isolated
CIIF	Creative Industries Innovation Fund
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
DFP	Department of Finance and Personnel
DHSSPS	Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety
DOE	Department of the Environment
DOJ	Department of Justice
DRD	Department for Regional Development
DSD	Department for Social Development
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
ELB	Education and Library Board
EQIA	Equality Impact Assessment
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESA	Education and Skills Authority
ESF	European Social Fund
EU	European Union
FE	Further Education
GAA	Gaelic Athletic Association
GHGIP	Greenhouse Gas Implementation Partnership
HSBC	Health and Social Care Board
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IFA	Irish Football Association
LANTRA	Sector Skills Council for land based and environmental industries
LCG	Local Commissioning Group

Líofa	Irish for 'fluent'- Irish language project
MARA	Maximising Access in Rural Areas
MATRIX	An expert panel formed to advise Government on the Exploitation of R&D and science and technology
NIAUR	Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation
<i>NIDIRECT</i>	government services website - http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/
NIEA	Northern Ireland Environment Agency
NIHE	Northern Ireland Housing Executive
NIRO	Northern Ireland Renewable Obligation
NISRA	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
NITB	Northern Ireland Tourist Board
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
PPS	Planning Policy Statement
RAFAEL	Renaissance of Atlantic Food Authenticity and Economic Links
RCA	Reasonable Cost Allowance
RCN	Rural Community Network
RDS	Regional Development Strategy
RTS	Regional Transportation Strategy
RWPAP	Rural White Paper Action Plan
RYE	Rural Youth Entrepreneurship
SAG	Stakeholder Advisory Group
SBRI	Small Business Research Initiative
SCI	Statement of Community Involvement
SEE	Social Economy Enterprise
SEWP	Social Economy Work Programme
SFG	Spatial Framework Guidance
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
SPG	Supplementary Planning Guidance
SSP	Sector Specific Project
Timeframe	S - Short Term (1-3 yrs) M - Medium Term (3-5 yrs) L - Long Term (5-10 yrs) O - Ongoing
UBIRFU	Ulster Branch Irish Rugby Football Union
UCGAA	Ulster Council GAA
UFU	Ulster Farmers Union
VCU	Voluntary and Community Unit
WRAP	An organisation which helps businesses and individuals reduce waste

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	Amber = Implementation not due to commence yet			
<i>Update</i>	Discussions with NISRA have secured agreement on the appointment of a statistician to work in DARD to review a range of rural policy issues, including the definition of rural, and to interrogate information held on NISRA databases on a rural / urban split. It is anticipated that the rural statistician will take up post in September 2013 and that work on the review will commence in 2014.			<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	Amber = Implementation not due to commence yet			
<i>Update</i>	Part of the work of the NISRA statistician will involve exploring the merits of developing a set of rural indicators. It is anticipated that the rural statistician will be in post by September 2013 and that this work will commence in 2014.			<i>Update</i>
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			

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
<i>Update</i>	Rural Proofing Training has been made available to staff within the NICS. DARD offers support and guidance on rural proofing to Departments on an ongoing basis.			<i>Update</i>
38	We will better identify and tackle the causes of poverty and disadvantage in rural areas and promote social inclusion.	DSD / DARD	OFMDFM	M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	DARD is working with AFBI on a research proposal aimed at identifying the characteristics of poverty and isolation in a rural setting. DARD is also currently implementing a £16 million package aimed at tackling rural poverty and social isolation over the next 3 years through a number of initiatives in partnership with other key Departments including: the Assisted Rural Travel Scheme (ARTS); Maximising Access in Rural Areas (MARA); Community Development; Farm Families Health Checks Programme; Rural Support; Rural Challenge (Small Grants) Programme; Connecting Elderly Rural Isolated (CERI); Youth Employability Programme (Boost); Rural Youth Entrepreneurship (RYE) Programme; Rural Borewells Scheme and a Fuel Poverty initiative.			<i>Update</i>
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 rural research projects on behalf of DARD including research on access to services and research to determine the contribution made by rural areas to the region. This 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			

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
<i>Update</i>	DARD and DECLG have shared views and learning on rural proofing and DECLG staff have attended DARD run Rural Proofing training courses.			<i>Update</i>
55	We will share our learning from non-EU programmes such as CLAR, Anti Poverty and rural social scheme.	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-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 is currently undertaking a review of the Leader approach and once the report is completed learning will be shared with DECLG.			<i>Update</i>
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 has been regular meetings and ongoing collaboration recently between DARD and DECLG officials across a range of rural development issues including the Rural Development Programme, the Rural Enablers Project and the INTERREG IVA Programme.			<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 & DECLG		S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
<i>Update</i>	DARD engaged with DECLG in the development of the Rural White Paper Action Plan. DECLG advised that plans for a Rural White Paper in the South have been delayed but will provide DARD with regular updates.			<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 commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	The Department's Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework is in place. Projects currently being supported include projects relating to rural community transport, community development, maximising access to benefits and farm family health checks			<i>Update</i>
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 it is expected that the legal text will be adopted by the end of 2013 with implementation to take place in 2015. DARD achieved most of its key asks with the exception of a definition of active farmers that includes a link to previous production. 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. A political agreement has also been reached on the EU Budget with the legal text due to be adopted in the autumn of 2013. In relation to CFP agreement has also been reached and formal adoption by the EU Council and EU Parliament is expected by Autumn 2013. The major goal of flexibility for interested Member States to develop agreed regional management plans and measures was achieved.			<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 & DECLG	Defra and other Devolved Administrations	L
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
<i>Update</i>	Policy work for the new NIRD is under development and DARD is continuing to explore opportunities with other Departments on complementarity between programmes such as ESF and ERDF.			<i>Update</i>
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 commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	An Agri-Food Strategy Board (AFSB), appointed by the DARD and DETI Ministers and comprising agri-food producers and processors, other strategic interests and senior officials from relevant government departments met regularly from June 2012 to April 2013 to develop a strategic plan for export-led growth of the sector. The AFSB's Strategic Action Plan, "Going for Growth" was launched by the First and deputy First Ministers on 16th May 2013. The Report has 4 key 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 Action Plan outlines 118 recommendations to be taken forward by Government and industry. All relevant Departments are currently assessing the recommendations, including their affordability, prior to the DARD and DETI Ministers seeking Executive endorsement of an agreed plan in autumn 2013.			<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>	During the reporting period, DARD has continued to support SEUPB and the organisations funded through the Rural Development theme of the INTERREG IVA Programme. Delivery of the funded actions is progressing well and on target for completion within the Programme timeframe. The Rural Enabler programme has been completed and achieved all of its outcomes. In addition, the Steering Committee for Cross Border Rural Development met in Dublin on 7 June 2013. Officials from DARD and DECLG discussed current progress and future opportunities for co-operation through EU 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			

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
<i>Update</i>	Work is ongoing to achieve this target. A Business Case is currently being completed and will be informed by a report from Central Procurement Directorate on the accommodation options available on the Shackleton Barracks site.			<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>	Sport Matters Action Plan was approved and published in Oct 2012 and a Sport Matters progress report has been published on the DCAL web site. Rural Community Network has been invited to engage with the Sport Matters implementation group. The Department continues to ensure that the provision of sports, arts and leisure activities are available to all. This has been aided through sports provision by Sports Matters which has already achieved 6 of its 26 targets. As part of the Promoting Equality, Tackling Poverty and Social Exclusion through Sports Programme, £4.5m has been given to UCGAA/IFA/UBIRFU. A number of elements of this programme will be 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 and gym equipment for community fitness activities. These facilities will tackle poverty and social exclusion throughout a rural area in Co. Tyrone. As part of the delivery of Sport Matters, DCAL and SportNI have engaged with the Rural Community Network 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. SportNI has invested over £3m capital funding over the last two years (2011-2013) to support sporting infrastructure improvements in rural areas. The 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. This programme has been designed to address issues associated with the lack of proximity to services experienced by many rural communities.			<i>Update</i>
27	Working with the Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI), we will ensure a geographic spread across its programmes.	DCAL, ACNI		L
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
<i>Update</i>	<p>Everyone can access an arts venue within 20 miles. To ensure a wide geographic spread of arts funding, the Arts Council promotes its various programmes through a number of mechanisms such as: roadshows, press releases in regional and local newspapers, third party stakeholder engagement (e.g. RCH and CAP), social media, leaflets and ACNI website. To reference one specific example, ACNI officers have met with Rural Community Network to discuss arts and creative industries funding to ensure that they are aware of all funding streams available for their members, e.g. Arts and Older People Programme, Start-Up, the Creative Industries Innovation Fund (CIIF), Building Peace through the Arts, Intercultural Arts Programme and the annual Lottery programme.</p> <p>The NI Screen Creative Learning Centres have a specific remit to work with people from rural and hard to reach areas. The Amma Centre works primarily with teachers and young people from these areas and the expansion of the Creative Learning Centres in the next 2 years is specifically targeted at reaching further into rural communities. Several projects have been funded by NI Screen in the last year using the “cinemobile”, the mobile cinema that travels to rural areas. These include Science on Wheels for primary and secondary schools bringing science and film to rural areas, and the Fighting Words project bringing creative writing to primary schools in rural areas. The expansion of the film clubs into over 300 extended schools will impact more than 70% of extended funding rural schools. Digital Film Archive can be accessed at a range of locations most of which are rural. Presentations of the archive are offered to reach further into these rural communities.</p>			<i>Update</i>
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	M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
<i>Update</i>	From a sports perspective, this has been aided through sports provision by Sports Matters which has already achieved 6 of its 26 targets. Libraries NI have developed a number of initiatives to ensure that those from rural communities are able to engage with culture, arts and leisure activities. This includes the provision of 28 libraries in rural areas and of mobile libraries which serve rural communities. The new mobile library strategy agreed in March 2013 seeks to improve access to library services for older people, children and their carers primarily in rural locations. The Homecall service provides for housebound people in rural areas. The new e2 project will improve IT provision in rural areas by providing fast broadband and wifi. The Arts Council achieve this through its development of policies such as: Arts and Older People Strategy, Intercultural Arts Strategy, Youth Arts and its forthcoming Community Arts Strategy. In addition, the range of funding programmes available encourage applications from a broad and diverse range of the population. These programmes include Arts and Older People Programme, Start-Up, the Creative Industries Innovation Fund (CIIF), Building Peace through the Arts, Intercultural Arts Programme and the annual Lottery programme. As part of the delivery of Protect Life, it was agreed that all DCAL networks - sport, arts, libraries will support and collaborate with DARD in supporting rural communities in improving awareness of the problem with suicide and promoting positive mental health.			<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>	Líoifa was launched in Warrenpoint and a joint press campaign was undertaken between Líoifa and Bliain na Gaeilge with representatives from Irish Language groups from Down, Tyrone, Armagh, Antrim (as well as Donegal, Derry, Monaghan and Belfast). We will continue to develop the Líoifa campaign in rural areas by organising Líoifa events and school information days outside of Belfast and Derry. Consideration will be given to targeting those in rural areas with resources in a way that has maximum impact on promoting equality and tackling poverty and social exclusion. This includes the development of a new Líoifa website that will include e - learning programmes. The development of the website will be particularly beneficial to those in rural areas who find it difficult to access Irish language classes. A Líoifa presentation will be delivered to senior management of DARD to increase awareness of Líoifa thus enabling DARD officials to identify suitable events in rural areas at which Líoifa can have a presence.			<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 achieved			
<i>Update</i>	A revised curriculum has been taught to all pupils of compulsory school age (4-16) in grant-aided schools since 2009/10. The minimum to be taught is detailed in legislation as Areas of Learning (AoLs). There is also a requirement for young people to develop the cross-curricular skills of Communications, Using Mathematics and Using ICT. The revised curriculum provides teachers with greater flexibility by allowing them to make decisions about how best to interpret and combine minimum requirements so as to provide a broad and balanced 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		O
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	Progress continues towards full implementation of Entitlement Framework by 2015			<i>Update</i>
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			

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
<i>Update</i>	The Extended Schools programme continued to be resourced (£11.8m) in 2012/13 targeting those schools operating in the most disadvantaged areas. Almost 30% of qualifying schools are situated in rural locations. A budget of £12m is available to resource the programme in 2013/14.			<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 commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	DE review of the guidance document nearing completion, publication target November 2013.			<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>	The Education and Library Boards have consulted on primary and post-primary area plans. Post-primary Area Plans were published on 26 February 2013 and it is intended that primary area plans will be revised taking account of the responses to the consultation which ended on 30 June 2013. Work on developing area planning is ongoing and the Department’s work is being supported by the Area Planning Steering Group.			<i>Update</i>
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			

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
<i>Update</i>	Area Based Planning is being taken forward by the ELBs in conjunction with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education and Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta. DE is providing support and guidance through the formation of a representative Area Planning Steering Group, which will assist the Department to co-ordinate and oversee the continuing development of the area plans until the establishment of ESA.			<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>	The Terms of Reference for area-based planning state the need to develop a network of sustainable and viable schools that can fully meet the educational needs of all our young people into the future. Area Planning Guidance specifies that Boards and CCMS may consider realistic, innovative and creative solutions in the planning process.			<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 RWPAP in terms of training opportunities. This has included the development of new training providers/new courses added to educational portfolios/new instructors in a range of skills areas. Approx. 495 individuals have availed of Lantra programmes since Jan 2013 to date and approx. 33 training centres are undertaking training. DEL plays a supporting role to Lantra but does not have direct responsibility for this work.			<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 2011/12* academic year there were 8,079 professional and technical (vocational) enrolments leading to recognised qualifications in respect of those aged 55 and above. Within this, there were 3,422 enrolments in respect of those aged 65 and over. In addition, there were 9,509 and 4,875 enrolments for these two age groups on recreational courses in FE colleges.			<i>Update</i>
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			

*Figures provided do not cover the period July 2012 to June 2013 as validated data for the last academic year is not yet available.

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
<i>Update</i>	DEL has just completed a further review of the maximum student number allocations across the six regional colleges for academic year 2013/14. As a result of this review there has been a further reallocation of places across a number of colleges. The allocations for 2013/14 include 47 of the additional places for higher education in further education colleges announced by the Minister over the last 18 months. The remaining additional places will be phased in to 2015/16. Further annual reviews are planned.			<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. A new pilot Sector Specific Project (SSP) introduced by NWRC this year 'Raising the Steaks for Food Processors to Win New Contracts' has been specifically created to develop links with AFBI and CAFRE. This pilot has achieved a number of successful outputs in a short time frame. In particular, it has created two successful Invest NI Innovation Vouchers with food companies, Donegal Prime Fish and Brightergold. Both Innovation Vouchers generated through this Connected SSP have been handed over to AFBI and CAFRE to deliver on the vouchers.			<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		S
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 ensuring that all premises here have access to broadband services with download speeds of at least 2Mbps and that 90% of premises have access to services of at least 24 Mbps by 2015. The intervention area for this project is currently out for public consultation with procurement expected to commence in September 2013, leading to contract award in early 2014.			<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			

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
<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 here. 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 2012 Update (November 2012) states that Northern Ireland now has the highest level of Superfast (30Mbps or more) Broadband availability in the UK at 95% of premises. 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>
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 is about to procure a supplier to deliver a project aimed at ensuring that all premises across Northern Ireland have access to broadband services with download speeds of at least 2Mbps and that 90% of premises have access to services of at least 24 Mbps by 2015. In developing this project the Department has worked closely with the telecommunications industry and the regulator and has conducted a full public consultation on the initial intervention area. A further public consultation is currently underway which should finalise the intervention area thus allowing procurement to commence in September 2013 with a view to contract award in early 2014. In addition, the Department is scoping a project with the objective of increasing the coverage of 3G mobile services and stimulating early deployment of 4G mobile services here. Again, both the industry and the regulator have been involved in the scoping and the project will be subject to full public consultation as appropriate.			<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	Amber = Implementation commenced but progress is slower than anticipated			

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
<i>Update</i>	DETI has already secured an allocation of £4.4m under the Broadband UK initiative which will be used, in conjunction with other funding sources to deliver the objectives of the NI Broadband Improvement Project i.e. 2Mbps services to all premises and 24 Mbps services to 90% of premises by 2015. Discussions are ongoing with the Department of Culture, Media and Sport(DCMS) and BDUK (the body established by DCMS to administer the £530m Broadband Fund) to secure additional funding in support of a project to improve high speed mobile broadband coverage across the region. The timeline for delivery of both projects is 2015.			<i>Update</i>
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>	Prior to the expiry of the satellite broadband contract with Avanti Communications in January 2012 and, based on a positive value for money case, DETI completed a European-wide, open, competitive and technology-neutral tendering process which led to the appointment of Onwave Ltd to provide satellite broadband services to those areas where a broadband service of at least 512kilobits per second (Kbps) could not be accessed via other means. Onwave has been appointed for a period of three-years ending on 4 January 2015, offering a range of products with download speeds of 20Mbps and price differentiation based on the level of data allowance required.			<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			

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	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.			<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 commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	Work is ongoing to ensure that the gas network is extended to main towns in the West and North-West of Ireland and to East Down. On 10th January 2013, the NI Executive approved government subvention up to a maximum of £32.5 million towards extending the gas network to the main towns in the West and North-West. The Department is currently working towards securing State Aid approval for the grant aid, and during April / May 2013 the Utility Regulator consulted on licence competition issues. DETI presentation given at NIAUR gas extension stakeholder event on 8 June 2013 to consider licensing issues. On 5 July 2013, DETI issued a consultation on proposed amendments to the Gas Applications Regulations and Published Criteria for gas licence applicants. The aim is for a licence(s) to be awarded to a developer(s) in early 2014, and work to install main gas networks to commence during 2015, though this timetable is challenging. Alongside work to provide natural gas to new urban areas. DETI has also made provision for a Renewable Heat Incentive which is currently available to all eligible non-domestic installations. Plans are underway to extend the scheme to include additional technologies and domestic installations. This will be of benefit to all consumers including those who reside in rural areas and will not be able to connect to the new gas networks. In addition DETI continues to incentivise renewable electricity generation through the Northern Ireland Renewable Obligation (NIRO).			<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			

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
<i>Update</i>	A Tourism 'Priorities for Action' Plan, which evolved from the consultation on a tourism strategy, has been circulated by the DETI Minister to Executive Colleagues. Work is well underway on the development of 9 key tourism areas/destinations here, many of which cover rural areas. NITB is supporting Local Authorities and other stakeholders in these areas to develop Tourism Area Plans which link to the overall tourism priorities for action.			<i>Update</i>
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>	While promoters are finding it difficult to source funding to establish new or expand existing tourism accommodation businesses, Invest NI continues to work with existing businesses through provision of developmental support. Invest NI also continues to liaise with other funders on a case by case basis to ensure no duplication of public funding.			<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 NITB continue to work with DARD and others on an ongoing basis to support and develop rural businesses. In the financial year 2012/2013 NITB administered £1.5m through the Selective Financial Assistance scheme for 15 capital projects (total project value £4m). This includes the Mourne and Antrim coast tourism destinations and will benefit the surrounding rural areas.			<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			

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
<i>Update</i>	NITB continues to work with DARD in co -funding rural tourism projects and is providing funding support for innovative tourism project developments aligned to national tourism priorities to support the delivery of a complete rural tourism experience. This will maximise the opportunity for tourism to act as a catalyst for rural development and as a means for the farming community to diversify where appropriate.			<i>Update</i>
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>	Invest NI continues to provide a wide range of information, advice and financial support to SMEs. This support provides expertise in product development, marketing and financial advice. In addition, Invest NI can offer financial support to help research new markets, employ key staff, help with R & D and access specialist consultancy services.			<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	O
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	A joint DETI/DARD SBRI Project to encourage the more sustainable utilisation of poultry litter has been successfully launched as 9 contacts are currently at phase 1 of development of solutions			<i>Update</i>
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			

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
<i>Update</i>	An Agri-Food Strategy Board (AFSB), appointed by the DARD and DETI Ministers and comprising agri-food producers and processors, other strategic interests and senior officials from relevant government departments met regularly from June 2012 to April 2013 to develop a strategic plan for export-led growth of the sector. The AFSB's Strategic Action Plan, "Going for Growth" was launched by the First and deputy First Ministers on 16th May 2013. The Report has 4 key 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 Action Plan outlines 118 recommendations to be taken forward by Government and industry. All relevant Departments are currently assessing the recommendations, including their affordability, prior to the DARD and DETI Ministers seeking Executive endorsement of an agreed plan in autumn 2013.			<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>	The Innovation Voucher initiative provides a £4k voucher to encourage SMEs to engage with public sector Knowledge Providers throughout NI and the ROI to provide innovative solutions to business issues. There are regular open calls for applications and they are widely promoted via advertisements, a dedicated website www.innovationvouchers.com , social media and Knowledge Providers. During the period July 2012 to 30 June 2013 there have been five calls resulting in the award of 491 vouchers. The next calls for applications will take place during October 2013 and February 2014.			<i>Update</i>
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 achieved			

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
<i>Update</i>	MATRIX Horizon Sustainable Energy Foresight Study was completed in February 2013 and was officially launched by DETI Minister in April 2013. The study identified Intelligent Energy Systems as a major opportunity for NI in the global sustainable energy market.			<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>	We continue to work with both DARD and AFBI to encourage knowledge and technology transfer to rural businesses.			<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		S
Status	Green = Implementation achieved			
<i>Update</i>	In October 2012 DETI awarded a contract to Social Enterprise NI (a consortium which includes the Rural Development Council) to design, manage and deliver a Social Economy Work Programme (SEWP). The SEWP commenced on 1 October 2012 and as part of delivery plans the programme includes a series of events (masterclasses, seminars, training etc) to promote, develop and sustain the sector. Due to the wide geographical spread of its members Social Enterprise NI has taken a regional approach to implementing its programme and as a result many events have been held in rural areas promoting the availability of support to rural social enterprises and raising awareness of the economic, environmental and social impact made by the sector in those 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		S
Status	Green = Implementation achieved			

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
<i>Update</i>	As part of the SEWP DETI has ensured that Social Enterprise NI (a consortium which includes the Rural Development Council) has organised events in rural areas promoting the availability of support to rural social enterprises and raising awareness of the economic, environmental and social impact made by the sector in those areas.			<i>Update</i>
78	Invest NI will continue to offer its Social Entrepreneurship Programme with a focus on groups located in disadvantaged areas or which provide a service to a disadvantaged group including those in rural areas.	DETI		O
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	Invest NI's SEP has been operational since January 2013 and is delivered across NI via three sub regional contracts. Participation in the programme involves all council areas and participation from groups in Super output areas is currently 76% against a target of 80%.			<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 achieved			

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
<i>Update</i>	The NI Authority for Utility Regulation is responsible for determining not only the timescale but also the magnitude of grid investment and will continue to consider NIE's investment plans through the Regulatory Price Control process. In February 2013, the Authority approved NIE plans for £30m renewable related investment to increase capacity at Tamnamore in Co. Tyrone and upgrades to the Kells-Coleraine circuit. DETI continues to work with the Authority, NIE and the Systems Operator for NI through the Sustainable Energy Inter departmental Working Group on which DOE and DARD are also represented. DETI has also held tentative discussions with the Regulator and Northern Ireland Electricity, owner of the transmission and distribution networks here to explore the potential for use of funding under the ERDF programme to strengthen the grid. This work is at an exploratory stage and will be developed as priorities under ERDF Programme 2014-2020 are clarified.			<i>Update</i>
89	We will continue to ensure a joined up approach to achieving the full potential offered by renewable energy solutions.	DETI	DARD/AFBI	O
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	DETI continues to ensure that the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation continues to incentivise renewable electricity generation at levels which bring forward investment at least cost to the electricity consumer. DETI continues to support DARD/CAFRE at the twice yearly 'Practical On-farm Renewable Energy' seminars. The cross departmental Renewable Heat Strategy Group meets biannually to ensure that departmental initiatives are coordinated and to work towards the development of a renewable heat road map; the last meeting was on 20 May 2013.			<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>	Work on the development of policy for the substantive legislation underpinning the 2011 Act is ongoing. In the interim, the Planning Bill 2013, which completed Consideration Stage at the Assembly on 24/25 June 2013, will place a statutory requirement on the Department to prepare (within one year) a statement of community involvement (SCI) which sets out the Department's policy for involving communities in relation to its planning functions. The Bill and will also introduce a requirement on developers to consult the community before submitting certain major planning applications to the Department.			<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.	DFP		M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
<i>Update</i>	DOE officials will continue to carry out Rural Proofing Screening as part of the policy development process and liaise with DARD at the earliest opportunity to take advice on whether any further actions or mitigation measures are required. DOE officials will also continue to engage closely with DARD officials to ensure that those applications that are subject to grant funding, are dealt with as a matter of priority. The onus, however, rests with the applicant to alert the department to the timeframe for grant funding at the initial stages of the planning process. Furthermore, those applications that meet the criteria for being dealt with under the streamlined council consultation process will be dealt with expeditiously provided they are not EIA applications, no objections have been received, the recommendation is to approve and the local council within which they are located has agreed to the inclusion of those types of applications within the streamlined process.			<i>Update</i>
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	DARD/AFBI	S
Status	Green = Implementation achieved			
<i>Update</i>	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. The various levels of data available from all road safety partner organisations has been established and the Group continues to adopt a data-sharing approach with data now drawn upon as needed. 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 through the Road Safety Strategy to 2020.			<i>Update</i>
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			

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
<i>Update</i>	<p>Significant progress has been made on a number of items, including commencing or completing studies or reports which will inform future works, for example a feasibility study was completed for Tullaghoge Fort, Co. Tyrone and funding was secured towards the development of a strategic plan for improving and developing the Dunluce castle and village site, Co. Antrim. Analysis was undertaken on Christian Heritage destinations in Co. Down and a survey was undertaken by the Historic Monuments Council, to identify where access, signage and visitor information needs to be improved. At the Mound of Down visitor access was improved and additional visitor information signage provided. New visitor signage was also provided at a number of other State Care monuments, such as Inch Abbey, Grey Abbey, Greencastle, Grey Point Fort and Navan Fort, to encourage visitors and a new guidecard was launched at Grey Abbey. A series of events was also held at historic monuments in June 2013 as part of Archaeology Days, to highlight lesser-known monuments throughout the countryside. Conservation works also continued to be undertaken at a range of sites, particularly masonry monuments, ensuring that these sites will survive in good condition, and are safe for visitors to access. In addition, and with regard to listed buildings in rural areas, NIEA Built Heritage undertakes the annual European Heritage Opendays weekend event here. Last year, this involved over 61,000 visitors to over 310 listed buildings. An 'Owners' Forum' is also undertaken annually, where listed building owners can receive advice on a wide range of subjects, including energy efficiency strategies for their homes; new, sustainable usages for vacant listed buildings; and funding - through the NIEA Listed Buildings Grant-aid scheme - to assist with the costs of eligible repairs (in many rural areas here).</p> <p>Last year, the NIEA Grant-aid scheme issued 227 payments for eligible repairs to listed buildings, amounting to a total spend of over £3.8M.</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			

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
<i>Update</i>	DOE has worked with DARD, through the CDWG CC on both climate change adaptation and mitigation. An adaptation sub-group of the CDWG CC has produced a draft cross departmental adaptation programme, which addresses the risks and opportunities, including those impacting on rural areas, that were identified in the NI Climate Change Risk Assessment report. On mitigation DOE supports DARD's endeavours to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through the Efficient Farming Cuts in Greenhouse Gases Reduction Strategy and Action Plan, the Greenhouse Gas Implementation Partnership (GHGIP) and its sub groups in the Red Meat, Dairy and Arable sectors. The sub group was established to further develop the most appropriate mitigation measures for each sector and development of the 2014-2020 NI Rural Development Plan measures to address competitiveness, lowering carbon and improving resource efficiency.			<i>Update</i>
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>	Funding has been secured to continue with availability of Rethink Waste (Capital and Revenue) grants until 2014/15. Also, grant-in-aid funding to WRAP is ongoing with commitment to end 2014/15			<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		L
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
<i>Update</i>	The Department's Planning Policy Division has published (Draft) Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) specific to Anaerobic Digestion (AD) for public consultation on 17 June 2013. This document provides additional advice and guidance to complement the background information already set out in the Best Practice Guidance to PPS 18. It has been drawn up taking account of similar material available for other parts of the UK and the Republic of Ireland. In addition, a sub group of the Planning Forum - the Renewables Group - has been established to look at a range of measures to improve decision-making for renewable energy planning applications. The Division also publicly consulted on proposals for new permitted development rights for anaerobic digestion plant on agricultural units during 2012/13. The Department will continue to expedite the processing of applications for renewable energy.			<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 nirect to support rural dwellers.	DFP		S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	The NI Direct Programme within DFP is involved in ongoing discussions with representatives from DARD regarding the potential for rural development content on the NI Direct website, subject to the outcome of a review of the DARD website. NI Direct is also identifying services that would be provided online supported by a range of assisted digital channels (eg telephone, network of community based digital champions, LibrariesNI, etc). Future opportunities being explored include the Single Farm Payment as part of CAP reform.			<i>Update</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>	DFP continues to implement Go ON NI, a digital inclusion programme aiming to help and encourage off-liners to become internet beginners and to remove barriers. The programme seeks to encourage as many people as possible to go online and to improve their access to online public information and services through targeted training and a network of over 400 digital champions province wide, many of whom are based in rural areas. Specific initiatives for rural areas are planned for Q3 2013.			<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	Amber = Implementation commenced but progress is slower than anticipated			

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
<i>Update</i>	The new Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Statistics website www.nisra.gov.uk/ninis includes the official definition of urban and rural areas and is being populated with spatial statistics from the Census and administrative data sources. In addition NISRA offer training courses for users of spatial statistics across Northern Ireland and this has helped to ensure that users get access to a full suite of spatial data and associated guidance. This work is being taken forward with the co-operation of DARD and colleagues in other Departments.			<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>	Launched by both DARD and DHSSPS Ministers in July 2012. To date, almost 2,300 clients have received health checks across NI. 46% of clients have been referred to their GP and 29% referred to MARA. New referral pathway created to refer into Farm Health and Safety Training programme - 61 clients have had onward referral. Programme provided close linkage with UFU and Rural Support during extreme adverse weather and distributed claim forms for emergency aid			<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>	Phase 2 of the MARA project was launched by both DHSSPS and DARD Ministers in March 2012. Thirteen Lead Organisations have delivered the MARA project. A total of 5,124 First Household Visits and 2,288 Follow Up Visits have been carried out. The first visits generated a total of 13,923 onward referrals for services, grants and benefits.			<i>Update</i>
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			

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
<i>Update</i>	<p>The 'Transforming Your Care: Vision to Action' consultation took place from October 2012 - January 2013. As part of this consultation, public meetings were held in a number of areas, providing an opportunity for the views and opinions of people - including those in rural communities - to feed into the consultation process. A post-consultation report was launched by the Health Minister in March 2013 and work is ongoing on the specific actions that need to be taken to implement these proposals.</p> <p>During this period Trust Development Plans and Local Economy Plans in each LCG area have been subject to a consultation process that included rural communities.</p>			<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>	The PHA works in partnership with a range of statutory and community partners in the design and delivery of programmes in its Health and Social Wellbeing Improvement Directorate. DARD and a range of rurally based agencies (such as Sub Regional Networks) and community partners are included in such structures at a strategic level and also as delivery partners in some instances for the disbursement of grant aid.			<i>Update</i>
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			

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
<i>Update</i>	PHA (jointly with HSCB) launched 'Working in Partnership' a Community Development Strategy in July 2012. This Strategy recognises and supports the important and pivotal role that community development plays in improving health and wellbeing in local communities. The PHA's thematic action plan on Community Development requires each of the 5 Health and Social Wellbeing Improvement teams to commission community development support, and between 1 July 2012 and 30 June 2013, over £4m was spent on supporting the employment of community health and wellbeing workers, capacity building, small grants and supporting local organisations to deliver community development programmes.			<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>	We will continue to work on an ongoing basis with the Health Inequalities Monitoring System. In addition, the MARA programme provides a significant opportunity to analyse the impact of rurality and isolation given the extent of the programme and the number and range of clients its interfaces with. Extensive IT systems have been commissioned through the MARA and Family Farm Health Checks which will provide a comprehensive opportunity to study the impact of isolation, rurality and deprivation on rural communities. Until these programmes were commissioned, there was relatively little primary research data available for analysing the impact on health in rural communities. PHA are also contributing to the Interdepartmental Forum established to examine improving the uptake of benefits, services and support, using the experience from MARA to influence wider government strategy development.			<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	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	RAFAEL is in the process of being tendered, and is not currently operational. It is anticipated that a new service delivery organisation will be in place by April 2014.			<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. The plan includes outcomes on supporting safer rural communities, and working in partnership with rural groups to prevent and reduce crime. Significant work is now underway, including initiatives such as a Rural Crimestoppers campaign, launched in December 2012, and the Rural Crime Unit launched in May 2013.			<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		O
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	PCSPs have now submitted their action plans for the 2013/2015 period. These plans reflect significant community consultation, including engagement with rural communities. In taking forward delivery of their plans, PCSPs are currently supporting a wide range of initiatives, aimed at tackling rural crime, fear of crime and anti-social behaviour. Initiatives include practical crime prevention advice to farmers and landowners through the Farm Watch scheme, as well as alarms for elderly and vulnerable rural residents, and property marking schemes.			<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>	Steering Groups across the 9 social investment zones submitted final area plans at the end of February. Projects within those plans are currently being appraised by OFMDFM. The first phase of the fund has been extended to March 2016.			<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 second call for applications under the Contested Spaces Programme in 2012 resulted in an increase in rural applications and OFMDFM is now funding several rural projects under the programme.			<i>Update</i>

Department of 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>	An implementation Action Plan for the Regional Development Strategy has been agreed by the Inter-Departmental Steering Group and a progress report is due by the end of 2013.			<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	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	Roads Service will continue to bid for additional structural maintenance funds during in-year monitoring rounds to help deliver on its commitment with the Action Plan.			<i>Update</i>
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 achieved			

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
<i>Update</i>	A New Approach to Regional Transportation was launched in March 2012. This New Approach outlines three high level aims and twelve strategic objectives which will help guide the Department in prioritising strategic transport interventions beyond 2015. One of the Strategic Objectives of the New Approach includes "improving access in rural areas". The Department is currently working on the development of a Policy Prioritisation Framework which will help the Department reach better decisions on transportation investment.			<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>	The first meeting of a cross-Departmental Working Group to plan a pilot of local public transport plans took place in December 2012. The pilot is expected to commence in the Dungannon/Cookstown area in September 2013. The pilot will consider the opportunities for a more joined up approach to the planning and delivery of passenger transport services by the various providers across a range of areas including the availability and provision of passenger information. The pilot project will run for one year following which a full evaluation will be carried out.			<i>Update</i>
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 Dungannon/Cookstown pilot will assist with determining the long term local public transport plans that will be required to inform the new contracting regime with Translink and the integration of passenger services funded by other Departments.			<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			

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
<i>Update</i>	This is one of the main purposes of the Dungannon/Cookstown pilot. There will be ongoing evaluation of the pilot to determine what works and what refinements are needed with a view to wider roll-out in due course.			<i>Update</i>
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. 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. 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. Householders become eligible for consideration for a borewell grant if the requisition route has proved uneconomical. 35 applications have been approved and the successful householders have now procured contractors to install the borewells and required treatment facilities. The first borewells were drilled in early January 2013 with all 35 projects due for completion by end of March 2013. This meets the scheme target for financial assistance for 2012/13 with around 70 households ready to proceed/likely to proceed when the scheme reopens in April 2013 subject to the outcome of ongoing end of first year review.			<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>	The Rathlin Island Action Plan was revised to reflect the thematic themes adopted in the Rural White Paper and the revised plan was formally endorsed by the Minister for Regional Development on 3 July 2013. Work is ongoing across all Department's to implement the revised plan.			<i>Update</i>

Department of Social Development
1st July 2012 - 30th June 2013

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 commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	<p>Over the past 12 months, DSD and DARD officials have sought to explore arrangements for closer working and sharing of expertise. Discussions came about not only as part of the RWPAP but also following the public consultation on DSD's Urban Regeneration and Community Development Policy Framework in the summer of 2012 in which respondents expressed a desire for a more flexible approach to the rigid definition of urban in directing DSD's regeneration activities (settlements with a population over 4,500).</p> <p>Officials have identified two broad strands to guide future cooperation: the first, relating to short term actions to explore the feasibility of a pilot in a rural settlement; and the second relating to the longer term relationship between the Departments and the new local authorities as they respond to the Reform of Local Government.</p> <p>In relation to a possible pilot it has been agreed that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DARD will seek to identify resources that could be used to support a demonstration pilot project in a rural settlement. • Subject to resources being identified by DARD, DSD will confirm the nature of the assistance that could be provided to deliver the project, to include sharing of relevant information and expertise. <p>In relation to the longer-term relationship it has been agreed that there is a need to jointly explore the implications of Community Planning for regeneration (both rural and urban) in the new local government environment as councils will have greater responsibility for delivery post 2015.</p>			<i>Update</i>

Continued

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
<i>Update</i>	In addition, there are a number of areas relating to policy and strategy development and operational delivery where DSD has acquired expertise and experience which could inform regeneration initiatives in rural areas post 2015 and where DARD'S experience in village renewal particularly under the Rural Development Programme programme could inform urban regeneration.			<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>	<p>DSD and DARD have been working collaboratively to develop shared regional support arrangements for the voluntary and community sector to include both urban and rural areas and the integration of funding streams when appropriate. The joint DSD/DARD programme for generic regional infrastructure support to the voluntary and community sector in both urban and rural areas went live on 1 October 2012 and early indications are that the shared arrangements are working well.</p> <p>Work is progressing in the development of joint arrangements for regional thematic support for women in disadvantaged and rural areas. A consortium has been formed of seven women's Voluntary & Community Sector organisations and a project proposal has been submitted to DSD. If progress continues it is anticipated that the new arrangements will be in place by October 2013.</p> <p>A joint policy document and addendum to the DSD economic appraisal are under development for faith sector engagement again covering both urban and rural areas from September 2013. New regional support arrangements for voluntary advice services have also been put in place, to cover all areas to include both urban and rural areas.</p>			<i>Update</i>
34	We will promote and develop further 'Shared Future' housing in rural areas.	DSD		S
Status	Green = Implementation achieved			

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
<i>Update</i>	<p>To date, two rural shared future new build housing schemes, with a total of 44 new homes have been completed. From April 2013, provision has been made on application forms for applicants to indicate if they want to live in a shared housing area. This will facilitate identification of potential for future new build shared housing schemes, none as yet identified.</p> <p>During 2013/14, the Shared Communities Programme, which aims to reduce housing segregation and increase community cohesion in existing estates, has targeted to invite two new rural areas to join the programme.</p>			<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 achieved			
<i>Update</i>	<p>The Department and the Housing Executive continue to liaise with colleagues in other jurisdictions to learn from best practice elsewhere. Pilots/scoping include:</p> <p>Emerging need site development (to generate additional interest to support development of sites that at first sight appear bigger than required for existing need) - 3 sites identified. Two completed 2011 and third completed October 2012.</p> <p>Biomass heating initiative (to promote wood fuels produced locally in NI) - 50 properties trialled 2012/13. Pilot adjudged successful. From 2013/14, wood pellet boilers are now offered as an option for rural dwellers.</p> <p>Village Voice (to encourage representation of small rural estates with no community group) - trialled and introduced to 3 areas during 2012/13.</p> <p>Private Partnering (to link those in housing need with private sector lets) - broad scoping exercise, including legal and procurement issues, carried out to identify a rural pilot. During 2012/13, following evaluation and due to a number of limitations, it was decided not to proceed with the pilot.</p>			<i>Update</i>
36	We will continue to improve housing conditions in rural areas (subject to funding).	DSD		O
Status	Green = Implementation achieved			

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
<i>Update</i>	<p>The Department has facilitated a specific action to ensure that rural housing new build equates more precisely to the level of rural housing need. As a result, the rural share of the overall NI housing programme is calculated on housing stress and in line with strategic guidelines.</p> <p>For 2012/13 the rural target was calculated at 10.3% of the overall programme, compared to 13.2% in 2011/12, 12.5% in 2010/11 and 10.1% in 2009/10.</p> <p>The 2012/13 outturn was 118 units or 1.5% (15 units) above the initial 10.3% target.</p> <p>The Housing Executive continues to target rural private housing unfitness through targeted grants, although budgetary constraints have meant that discretionary grants for renovation and replacement are now only available in exceptional circumstances.</p> <p>Hence, a total of 24 renovation and replacement grants were approved in 2012/13, compared to 76 in 2011/12 and 396 in 2010/11.</p> <p>Mandatory grants for disabled facilities and repair continue to be available as required. Continuing Warm Homes installations (see action 39) continue to contribute to better energy efficiency in rural homes.</p>			<i>Update</i>
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 achieved			
<i>Update</i>	<p>The final report on the 2009 - 2012 Rural Action Plan was issued in June 2012. The new Rural Action Plan 2013 - 2015 was finalised in April 2013 following the review of the consultation responses and was launched by the Minister at the Balmoral Show on 15/05/2013.</p> <p>The Rural Action Plan contains 58 Actions to be completed by 2015. The Actions are contained under 4 themes, Delivering Better Homes, Supporting Independent Living, Building Stronger Communities and Delivering Quality Services. To date work has already commenced on at least 29 of the actions contained within the Plan with preparatory work on an additional 5 actions underway. A six monthly report on the progress to date will be prepared in October 2013.</p>			<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			

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
<i>Update</i>	<p>DSD and DARD have worked collaboratively to develop new shared regional support arrangements for the voluntary and community sector for both urban and rural areas. Through the provision of appropriately targeted support arrangements the wider Voluntary & Community Sector is supported and facilitated in the delivery of important services to often disadvantaged rural communities. The new regional support arrangements have been in place from 1 October 2012.</p> <p>DSD and DARD have been working collaboratively to develop new regional support arrangements for supporting women in disadvantaged and rural areas. A joint research piece was conducted to help better understand the needs of women in disadvantaged and rural areas and a programme of targeted engagement with key local women's organisations, facilitated by DFP, took place. This was to help identify and address gaps in service provision as well as ensuring there was no duplication of service. The new regional support arrangements for women in disadvantaged and rural areas should be in place from October 2013.</p> <p>The faith sector engagement will assist in identifying and tackling the causes of poverty and disadvantage in rural areas and promoting social inclusion.</p> <p>DSD Housing Division has responsibility for the Fuel Poverty Strategy, however through this VCU has a target to assist Rural Homes, through Energy efficiency measures. This is a target of 40% of the measures going into rural areas.</p>			<i>Update</i>
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>	The Department's Fuel Poverty Strategy "Warmer Healthier Homes" recognises that the population here is nearly 40% rural, which means that a large part of the population lives outside the warmer sheltered urban areas with reduced individual heating needs. The Department's Warm Homes Scheme has an annual target to deliver 9,000 energy efficiency improvements to fuel poor households, 40% of these in rural areas. This target has been achieved in 2012/2013.			<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			

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
<i>Update</i>	The Department's Fuel Poverty Strategy "Warmer Healthier Homes" encourages partnership working to tackle fuel poverty and supports proposals from groups in relation to oil stamp savings schemes. Conversion to wood pellet boilers is a measure included in the Warm Homes Scheme for eligible properties.			<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>	<p>DSD has worked closely with colleagues in DARD in developing joint regional support arrangements geared specifically to provide the important generic regional support which Voluntary and Community Sector organisations (both urban and rural across all areas here) are likely to need in order to function effectively and efficiently. The new arrangements, which came into play on 1 October 2012, are jointly supported with funding from both DSD/DARD.</p> <p>Work is progressing in the development of joint arrangements for regional thematic support for women in disadvantaged and rural areas. A consortium has been formed of seven women's VCS organisations and a project proposal has been submitted to DSD. If progress continues it is anticipated that the new arrangements will be in place by October 2013.</p> <p>A joint policy document and addendum to the DSD economic appraisal are under development for faith sector engagement again covering both urban and rural areas across all areas here from June 2013.</p>			<i>Update</i>

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