



Rural White Paper Action Plan

Annual Progress Report 2016



Department of
**Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs**

www.daera-ni.gov.uk

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Foreword by the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs



I am pleased to present the 2016 Annual Progress Report on the Rural White Paper Action Plan. The Annual Progress Report details the progress made by departments on implementing the commitments contained the Rural White Paper Action Plan. This is the fourth Annual Progress Report published since the initiative was first launched in 2012 and the report demonstrates that all departments continue to make good progress in delivering their commitments.

I recognise that the environment in which we are now operating is changing and this will impact on how we all deliver our rural responsibilities going forward. The Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016, which I propose to commence in respect of government departments and local councils in June 2017, will impose a duty on departments to have due regard to rural needs in the development of policy and in the delivery of services, while the draft Programme for Government Framework sets out a new approach to doing things and focuses more on the impact and the outcomes of what we do and how this benefits all of our citizens. In moving forward I will be looking at how rural initiatives such as the Rural White Paper Action Plan can complement the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 and help to deliver the outcomes set out in the new Programme for Government Framework.

I would like to thank all those who have contributed to this Annual Progress Report. The Rural White Paper Action Plan was developed to provide a framework for the Executive to work together in seeking to address the key issues and challenges facing our rural communities. I believe that a cohesive Executive working together can deliver better outcomes for rural communities and as the Minister with responsibility for rural affairs I will be working closely with my Executive colleagues in seeking to make our rural areas more prosperous.

Michelle McIlveen MLA
Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Introduction

This is the fourth Annual Progress Report on the implementation of the Rural White Paper Action Plan which was launched in June 2012. This report covers the period up to 30th June 2016 and provides an update on the progress by Departments in implementing the actions contained in the Action Plan. The third Annual Progress Report was published on the Department's website in December 2015.

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

This Annual Progress Report 2016 should be read in conjunction with the Rural White Paper Action Plan¹.

Background

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

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

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

¹ <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dard/rural-white-paper-action-plan.pdf>

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 to undertake routine monitoring of the implementation of the Action Plan and to report back to the Executive by means of an Annual Progress Report. The third Annual Progress Report was published on the Department's website in December 2015.

Review of Progress by Departments

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation

A key priority for DAERA in the Rural White Paper Action Plan is to tackle poverty and social isolation in rural areas, particularly amongst vulnerable groups. DAERA's Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) Framework (11/12 - 16/17) supports a package of measures worth up to £25.5 million to support vulnerable people in rural communities and to target the root causes of social isolation. A total of £22 million has been spent in the period up to June 2016 under a diverse range of measures. These measures are delivered, both directly and in partnership with other organisations and aim to complement other poverty and isolation initiatives and actions undertaken by government. The following initiatives are supported under the TRPSI Framework.

Maximising Access Rural Areas (MARA) Project

DAERA supports the delivery of the Maximising Access Rural Areas (MARA) Project in conjunction with the Public Health Agency (PHA). The MARA Project aims to improve the health and wellbeing of people living in rural areas by increasing access to services, grants and benefits by facilitating a co-ordinated service to support rural dwellers living in or at risk of poverty and social isolation. The initiative provides for trained MARA enablers to visit vulnerable households to assist them in obtaining a range of benefits, grants and services of which they may be eligible for but not otherwise be aware. More details on the operation of this project are provided in the Review of Progress by the Department of Health.

Farm Family Health Checks Programme

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

Assisted Rural Travel Scheme

The Assisted Rural Travel Scheme (ARTS) is a joint initiative between DAERA and the Department for Infrastructure (DfC) which aims to address the issue of access to transport services in rural areas. The Scheme is delivered by the Rural Community Transport

Partnerships (RCTPs) which cover all rural areas. Under the ARTS initiative, 'SmartPass holders' (over 60s and disabled people) in rural areas can avail of free and concessionary (half fare) transport via the Rural Community Transport Partnership services. The popularity in this Scheme has been huge and has enabled any passengers with a valid SmartPass to travel free or half fare on the Dial-a-Lift services provided by the Rural Community Transport Partnerships. On average over 16,000 passenger trips are provided by the RCTP's each month through the ARTS Scheme.

Rural Support

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

Rural Community Development

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

Connecting Elderly Rural Isolated (CERI)

Connecting Elderly Rural Isolated (CERI) is a programme funded by DAERA to address social isolation for elderly rural dwellers in the Western Trust area. The programme is operated in conjunction with the WHSCT/PHA and has a focus on health promotion, healthy lifestyles and supporting independent living. CERI has facilitated a range of activities including attendance at health awareness and improvement events, ICT classes, luncheon clubs and various other group activities which help to reduce social isolation for vulnerable older people in rural areas. Over **104,400** contacts were made under the programme which closed on 31 March 2016.

Youth Entrepreneurship Programme

DAERA also supports the Rural Youth Entrepreneurship (RYE) Programme which has been designed to contribute to local, regional, national and transnational rural economic growth by developing business creation potential among young people across Northern Ireland. Through upskilling, networking, mentoring and sharing ideas, RYE creates the foundations for the development of future rural businesses. To date nearly 900 young people have been engaged in the RYE Programme.

Rural Libraries

The Department and Libraries NI continue to work together to develop new projects which will help to sustain rural libraries and communities. The Memorandum of Understanding, developed between the two organisations aims to help ensure that libraries contribute to the sustainability of rural communities and help those living in rural areas to access and benefit from library services. The pilot project, 'Library in a Box' continued and an interim evaluation is due to be completed in September 2016. The learning from this pilot will be used to help inform the delivery of library services in the future. Local Rural Support Networks and local libraries continue to work together effectively on areas of mutual interest.

Health in Mind

The Department continued to work in partnership with a range of organisations including Libraries NI to extend the 'Health in Mind' initiative in rural areas. 'Health in Mind' is a library programme which aims to raise awareness of positive mental health and to increase understanding of mental health issues through reading, learning and information. By the end of March 2016, 'Health in Mind' had been delivered in a further 8 rural libraries with over 500 people participating in the range of activities on offer. These activities focused on subjects including mindfulness, personal resilience and healthy eating.

Rural Micro Capital Grant Programme 2015

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

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

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

Phase 1 of this pilot Programme was launched in April 2015 and attracted a high level of interest with a total of 138 organisations receiving funding. Phase 2 of the Programme launched during October 2015 and to date 200 community and voluntary groups have received funding.

Rural Proofing

The Department continues to promote and support the implementation of rural proofing across all NICS Departments to ensure that all major policies and strategies are assessed to determine whether they have a differential impact on rural areas and, where appropriate, to make adjustments to take account of particular rural circumstances. DAERA provides support to Departments on rural proofing through the provision of advice, guidance and training. During the period of this report the Department brought forward legislation to strengthen rural proofing to help ensure that rural needs and circumstances are routinely considered by government. The Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 received Royal Assent in May 2016 and, following commencement, will impose a duty on Departments, Local Councils and certain other public bodies to have due regard to rural needs in the development of policy and the delivery of services.

North South Co-Operation

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

Research and Evidence

Under the Evidence and Innovation Strategy, DAERA has commissioned AFBI to undertake a number of rural research projects to help inform the future development of rural policy. Current research includes projects relating to developing an effective rural proofing and rural champion approach, identifying the impact of low-income and poverty on the well being of rural households and the role and scope of social enterprises in delivering solutions and, identifying policy options to improve rural household income and employment growth. In addition, DAERA continues to explore policy areas in which new research proposals can be developed.

The DAERA rural statistician has collated a range of statistics which are available on the DAERA website. This resource has become a valuable tool for DAERA and other stakeholders in the development of a rural evidence base to support rural policy development.

Climate Change

Through the Mitigation, Adaptation and Analysts Subs Group of the Cross Departmental Working Group (CDWGCC) the Department has monitored and progressed climate change mitigation and adaptation actions and initiatives in the agriculture sector for the period up to 30th June 2016.

We have coordinated agriculture input into the annual CDWGCC Action Plan and progress report submitted to the Executive in March 2016. The draft PfG delivery plan for indicator

29, increasing environmental sustainability, included input on how the agricultural sector is improving carbon efficiencies in the production process. Updates were provided on the agriculture sectors progress in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and on the implementation of Phase 2 of the Efficient Farming Cuts Greenhouse Gases Strategy.

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

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

Waste Management

The Department allocated over £1.7 million capital funding for 11 projects in 2015-16 for initiatives which will enable local councils to boost waste recycling and reuse.

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

Department for Communities

Housing

Within The Executive Office “Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC) Strategy”, the Department is committed to creating 10 new shared neighbourhood developments. There are two rural sites among the current 10 sites being taken forward for development: Crossgar Road, Saintfield and Main Street, Dundrum. Crossgar Road is now complete with 12 new homes being allocated. The Dundrum scheme went on site in March 2016 and is due to complete in December 2017, delivering 17 new homes. The Department continues to work with the NI housing Executive and the Housing Association movement to identify additional potential sites for inclusion in the T:BUC Shared Neighbourhood programme.

Best practice solutions to rural housing issues

DfC continues to monitor rural housing issues elsewhere - North/South and East/West- and fund pilot projects based on their findings. During 2015 the NIHE carried out a review of the ‘Rural Homes and People’ policy in order to address the specific housing needs of rural communities. A consultation exercise was completed and the responses are being considered to inform the Rural Action Plan 2016-2020.

Improve housing conditions in rural areas

During the 2015/16 financial year, of the 1,568 new social homes started in Northern Ireland, 148 were in rural areas. This was an increase of 24% in rural new starts from the previous year which, in monetary terms, equated to some £9.7 million of Housing Association Grant invested in new social housing schemes in the rural parts of Northern Ireland. There is currently a gross programme of 192 units planned to start in rural areas in 2016/17.

Further rural action planning

At the end of the 3 year period of the NIHE extended Rural Action Plan 2013-2016 work was commenced on 57 of the 58 actions included and encouraging progress was made on 55 (95%) actions. Some of the key achievements included:

- Rural housing needs surveys were undertaken in 34 locations assisting rural communities in examining the provision of social housing in their area;
- 372 social new build homes were delivered in rural areas;
- The extension of floating support services in rural areas across Northern Ireland helping vulnerable individuals to remain in their homes with a tailored care and support package;
- 5,788 ‘Warm Homes’ installations, 1,478 ‘Affordable Warmth’ installations, 6,846 boiler replacements and 2,127 private sector grants were approved in rural locations helping to improve the fabric and energy efficiency of rural housing;

- The introduction of the Housing Executive's Oil Buying Clubs Scheme which was taken up by 21 rural communities;
- The introduction of the Housing Executive's Rural Community Awards in 2014.

During 2015 NIHE undertook a review of the '**Rural Homes and People**' Strategy and subsequently published draft proposals for public consultation in January 2016. '**Sustainable Rural Communities**' the new Rural Strategy and Action Plan 2016-2020 will be formally launched in October/November 2016. The Strategy recognises the growing pressures from rural communities for local, affordable homes, the need to address increasing levels of unfitness and fuel poverty in rural areas and highlights the national recognition that there is a need to support an ageing population, especially in isolated rural areas.

Fuel poverty

The Fuel Poverty Strategy is under review in 2016/17, and the rural dimension is being considered. DfC continues to be supportive of local groups who bulk buy fuel to reduce costs.

Sports Strategies

The Sport Matters Strategy includes 26 high level targets under the themes of Participation, Places and Performance. Following a mid-term review in 2015, a revised action plan was published in January 2016, which details the actions planned with a variety of organisations to offer and improve sporting and physical activity opportunities across Northern Ireland, including within rural communities. This Plan can be viewed at <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/sport-matters-action-plan-2015-2019>

An annual progress report, which includes activities in rural areas, is also available to view at: <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/topic/9172?search=implementation>

Youth Sports Programme

DfC's TBUC strategy team is responsible for delivering a cross-community youth sports programme, one of seven headline actions in the TBUC strategy. A rural pilot is currently taking place in the Erne east area of County Fermanagh. Eighteen young people from across the rural area have come together to design a local sports and good relations project. This youth steering group has already benefitted from training and mentoring in a variety of sports activities and life skills, aimed at helping them become the next generation of community leaders.

Capital Investment

Within the last period, the Department funded a programme for promoting equality, tackling poverty and social exclusion through sport. Funding was distributed to Ulster Colleges Gaelic Athletic Association (UCGAA) (£80k), Ulster Branch, Irish Rugby Football Union (UBIRFU) (£114k) and Irish Football Association (IFA) (£80k) the last year, ending on

31st March 2016. A number of elements of this programme had been rolled out across rural areas, including community gyms in surrounding rural areas, such as Ballynahinch.

In addition to this programme the Department agreed to support an Antrim GAA Centre of Participation at Dunsilly (£800k) providing a range of facilities for community activities for use within the surrounding rural area.

Libraries NI

Branch Libraries: There are 29 libraries in rural areas. The libraries in Carnlough and Fintona have been refurbished and new libraries have opened in Lisnaskea and Moira. In addition the range of services provided by the libraries has been enhanced by the introduction of a new IT system (E2).

Mobile Libraries and Home Call: Libraries NI has access to 16 mobile libraries and 10 home call vehicles. They have successfully introduced a new timetable which has greatly improved access to and use of its mobile libraries.

Libraries have developed a number of initiatives to ensure that those from rural communities are able to engage with culture, arts and leisure activities and continue to work with the local Rural Support Networks on local initiatives. Libraries NI also work closely with DAERA through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to promote library use and contribute to the sustainability of rural communities. In addition Libraries NI, with DAERA funding (£20k), has extended provision of the Health in Mind programme in its rural libraries.

Arts

Arts and Older People Programme

Specific emphasis in activity during this reporting period to June 2016, has focused on improving access to arts participation for older people (in particular older men) living in rural areas. A number of Arts and Older People projects have successfully addressed the negative consequences of rural isolation and loneliness, enhancing personal wellbeing and creating sustainable links with local communities.

Intercultural Programme

This programme aimed to support intercultural engagement and development of the minority ethnic arts infrastructure. Using the arts to develop community cohesion and increase awareness of diversity, develop good relations and tackle racism between new and existing communities.

Approximately half of projects funded took place in the Belfast City Council, with small groups of projects in Derry City and Strabane District Council. Mid Ulster District Council and Fermanagh and Omagh District Council; other projects were dispersed across other district councils, with the exception of Ards and Down District Council and Mid and East Antrim Borough Council, where no projects took place.

Artist Career Enhancement Awards (ACES)

An artist award of £5,000 which aims to deepen the developmental impact of Arts Council's support for artists, with a targeted package of training, mentoring and support provided for successful applicants. Artists are required to work in partnership with an arts venue/organisation in NI.

In the 2015/16 round ACNI encouraged and made a number of awards to artists working within a rural or intercultural context.

Historic Environment

At Tullaghoge Fort, County Tyrone, new visitor facilities, including parking, interpretation along with safer road access and DDA-compliant pathways were opened to the public on 15 June 2016. Work continues to improve the access arrangements across the suite of State Care Monuments, most of which are located within the countryside. Opening arrangements are advertised through the DiscoverNI website, and a programme of events and activities for Archaeology Days and European Heritage Open Days has been developed for launch later in the summer. Works are in development phases with local council and key local stakeholder groups to develop longer-term Landscape Partnership Projects, including Lough Erne Landscape Partnership; works to be completed later this summer as part of an operational phase in the Lough Neagh Landscape Partnership at Church Island. Continued participation in the Strangford Lough Landscape Partnership and the Ring of Gullion Landscape Partnership. This has included access to and use of State Care Monuments and other publicly-accessible heritage sites (buildings and monuments) in those areas.

The works noted here have increased public access to, and information about, the heritage sites in local areas. This has helped provide both focal-points for local communities, shared spaces for the exploration of the past, and sites which provide spaces for recreation (walking, days out, visits, access to the countryside). In many instances there are remarkably few open or publicly-accessible spaces in the countryside, and our historic monuments provide points of access to heritage sites and the natural environment that, otherwise, would simply not be available. These sites are therefore important to the well-being of rural communities because of and complementing their heritage importance.

With increased access to and information about the sites, our historic environment also provides key destinations for our tourism economy and the associated economic benefits this brings to the countryside. The development of, for example, enhanced infrastructure at Tullaghoge Fort provides greater capacity for visitors, promoting a longer dwell-time in the area, and greater foot-fall with associated economic benefits to the district.

Voluntary & Community Sector

DAERA is involved with DfC in part funding two elements of the Regional Infrastructure Support Programme - Generic Support and Support to Women in Disadvantaged Areas.

In October 2015, following Ministerial agreement, the Department began a process of

engagement with the VCS in relation to a review of the Regional Infrastructure Support Programme (RISP) to ensure that the arrangements were fit for purpose over the next 5-7 years. Taking account of the Concordat between the NI Government and The Sector, the Department adopted a co-design approach to afford The Sector an appropriate opportunity to be directly involved and contribute to the development of arrangements. Details of the review process and key findings were published on the former DSD website and are available at www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/workshops-review-vcu-infrastructure-support-arrangements

DAERA have been working with the Department for Communities on this review. The proposed long-term vision for new support arrangements for the VCS is:

“To support an efficient, effective, sustainable and inclusive VCS which will work collaboratively with Government to effectively deliver against agreed PfG outcomes over the next 4 years.”

The proposed new arrangements will be the subject of a further public consultation.

The Community Investment Fund (CIF) was established in 2005 in response to the report of the Taskforce on Resourcing the Voluntary & Community Sector. The aim of the Fund is ‘to provide a stable basis for funding of community development activity, enabling a strategic, longer-term approach which would also help to strengthen communities, tackle disadvantage and ensure better publicly-funded services to local communities’. The objectives are as follows:

- Support for community development activity to build better relationships within and between communities;
- Capacity-building by and for community organisations, especially where activity is low or fragmented, as a prerequisite to further work on improvement of local services;
- Support for and promotion of good practice; and
- An emphasis on building more cohesive and sustainable communities.

An evaluation was completed in June reflecting positive outcomes and concluded that the investment in the Fund of £20m over 10 years is considered to represent good value for money.

During the course of this evaluation, the Regeneration Bill, under which responsibility for the Community Investment Fund amongst other powers would have transferred from the Department for Social Development to local Councils, was postponed, presenting a challenge to the CIF funded groups in maintaining strategic direction within an uncertain future funding context.

Given these uncertainties around the future strategic context for this programme, it is not appropriate to make firm recommendations for the way forward. However, issues arising from the evaluation will form part of the consideration of any future plans for support of sub-regional community infrastructure networks.

Department for the Economy

Telecommunications

Over the period of this report, DfE, working with the telecommunications industry and other stakeholders, has implemented the £23.7m Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement Project (NIBIP) which aimed to provide improvements in access to basic and superfast fixed-line broadband by the end of 2015.

This project has completed its build phase and is now in its operational phase. To date the project had realised benefits for over 46,000 premises across Northern Ireland, primarily in rural areas. This contract with BT has a clawback (gain share) mechanism which requires BT to return part of the investment, when take-up of the new service passes beyond a 20% threshold in related areas, these funds will be used to help further improve the coverage of faster broadband connectivity across Northern Ireland.

Under the auspices of the NIBIP contract, the Department provides support via the “Better Broadband Scheme”, to help with the cost of installing a basic broadband service (using satellite or wireless technology), from a list of registered suppliers. Aimed at premises that cannot access services greater than 2Mbps, this scheme ensures that no eligible household or business need pay more than £400 to access a basic broadband scheme, over a 12 month period. Further details can be found on DfE’s website at: <http://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/northern-ireland-better-broadband-scheme>

In February 2015, DfE signed a further contract with BT for delivery of the Superfast Roll-out Programme, which aims to bring broadband services with speeds of at least 24 Megabits per second, to an additional 38,000 premises across Northern Ireland by 31 December 2017. This £17.1m project has commenced and will take several months to complete. Initial project details can be found on the DfE website at <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/superfast-rollout-programme> and further information will be made available via NI Direct as it becomes available.

During this period DfE officials continued to work with their colleagues in the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) as they rolled-out a number of UK-wide projects, which also delivered benefits for Northern Ireland. These included the Mobile Infrastructure Project which sought to address voice and basic data not-spots; an expansion of the broadband connection voucher scheme to provide support to eligible SMEs, charities and social enterprises across Northern Ireland towards the cost of installing a high speed broadband service; and, a satellite broadband market test pilot which formed part of a programme to identify solutions for delivering superfast broadband services to the hardest to reach rural areas.

DfE has also completed a full public consultation on a two-year telecoms strategy (‘Continuing To Connect -2015-2017’) which includes commitments to maximise funding for further infrastructure improvements and to undertake an educational programme for business and the community to best exploit the benefits of the telecommunications infrastructure. The outcomes of the consultation were published in November 2015.

Further Education

Further Education (FE) colleges offer vocational courses and qualifications in a wide range of subject areas leading to recognised professional and technical qualifications. It is recognised that one of the key strengths of the FE sector is that it is accessible to all, in terms of reaching all levels, types and age of learners, and also the fact that the colleges are locally based and their reach extends into both urban and rural communities. In the 2014/15 academic year (latest data available) there were 4,207 regulated enrolments leading to recognised qualifications in respect of those aged 55 and above. Within this, there were 1,447 enrolments in respect of those aged 65 and over. In addition, there were 9,386 and 4,583 enrolments for these two age groups on non-regulated courses in FE colleges.

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.

The Department has increased the level of full-time higher education provision by 24 HE in FE places in the academic year 2016/17. These places were allocated to Northern Regional College. Northern Regional College covers a large geographical area which includes a substantial rural proportion.

Tourism

DfE Tourism Liaison Branch has been working with Tourism NI to develop a new tourism strategy for NI. Work on developing the new strategy is well advanced and there has been significant stakeholder engagement as part of the strategy development process. Six regional workshops were held across NI during February 2016 to give stakeholders the opportunity to express views on the development of the new Tourism Strategy. These workshops were attended by close to 300 people and were well received. The key messages from the regional workshops were that the Strategy is an opportunity to:

- change mindsets and recognise the economic importance of tourism;
- set the direction for the tourism industry and government;
- develop tourism into an internationally competitive sector.

The new tourism strategy will aim to help tourism partners to work together and understand their role in the achievement of common goals and in the realisation of important synergies. It will also set stretching targets and identify key priorities for action taking account of the emergence of new developments, initiatives and trends in tourism.

It is anticipated that the Strategy will go out for public consultation later in 2016.

Invest NI and Tourism NI continues to work with DAERA and others, notably new Local Councils, on an ongoing basis to support and develop rural businesses. Tourism NI has ensured that each new council has a dedicated Tourism NI regional manager to support tourism development at a local level. In three council areas, that include a rural tourism offering, Tourism NI is co-locating a dedicated regional manager to support local tourism

development and business engagement activity.

Under the new Rural Development Programme (RDP 2014-2020) funding has been allocated to rural economic development that will offer the opportunity for funding streams to be targeted at tourism infrastructure, small business development and with additional potential scope for tourism related projects through village renewal schemes. Tourism NI is represented on the Monitoring Committee for the new programme. Additionally Tourism NI has engaged with DAERA on its proposed Rural Tourism Scheme to advise of strategic tourism priorities.

Invest NI

Invest NI will continue to support investment in tourism accommodation and work closely with other investment stream funders to avoid duplication of public investment.

Overall progress on Invest NI related actions is good and remains ongoing across our areas. Many of our outcomes and achievements are dependent on a collective approach.

Demand for Innovation Vouchers continues to be high and there will be two further calls for applications in 2016/17.

It should be noted that responsibility for Social Entrepreneurship functions transferred to Councils on the 1 April 2015. In June 2016 Invest NI published and shared the findings and recommendations of SEP with both Councils and operators of the Social Economy Hubs as well as wider stakeholders within the social economy sector.

Invest NI continues to provide business support tools through a physical network of Invest NI Regional Offices with 8 current points of presence. Invest NI is also working closely with Local Councils and other stakeholders on developing the economic strand of the plans which will focus on the specific needs of the Council areas including their rural nature.

MATRIX

MATRIX has undertaken two separate foresight studies to identify future global market opportunities which NI companies, including rural businesses, can exploit. The studies focused on the ICT/Digital Digital/ICT sector and Advanced Manufacturing Materials and Engineering (AMME). The Digital/ICT report was launched in February 2016 and the findings of the AMME study will be published in the near future.

Connected Programme

In the arena of encouraging greater engagement between businesses and the local research base, the Department is continuing to support the important work of the Connected programme; this provides a highly effective “one-stop-shop” for companies wishing to access the research and knowledge base within Northern Ireland’s universities and colleges. Under the current round of Connected, the universities and colleges are continuing to actively build meaningful linkages with the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) and the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE).

A particular highlight this year has been a “Food Innovation” project undertaken by Southern Regional College (SRC) in collaboration with Ulster University and Squeeze Wheatgrass, a local producer of fresh wheatgrass shots based in Warrenpoint, Co Down. The team carried out research into the nutritional composition of fresh wheatgrass juice in order to enhance the marketability of the product. The research also identified new product development opportunities for the company to allow it to incorporate wheatgrass into other food/drink products. The knowledge exchange gained from this project allowed SRC to further develop the College’s specialism in Food Innovation, as well as strengthening its links with the Ulster University Business School. However, the main outcome is that Squeeze Wheatgrass now has a range of exciting and innovative products in the final stages of development which will be nutritionally assessed with the potential collaboration of a number of companies. This is very exciting for the company and potentially opens a new route to market for this local company’s sales of wheatgrass juice.

Energy

We will continue to ensure a joined up approach to achieving the full potential offered by renewable energy solutions.

Since the introduction of the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation (NIRO) in 2005 electricity consumption from renewable sources has increased from 3% to over 25% now. The vast majority of this generation is in rural areas.

Electricity Market Reform is being introduced to address market challenges including the closure of the NIRO, along with the Renewables Obligations in GB, to all new projects by 31 March 2017. Three Closure Orders have now been introduced: a Closure Order came into operation on 30 September 2015 to close the NIRO to non-wind technologies on 31 March 2017; a Closure Order came into operation on 17 March 2016 to close the NIRO to new large scale wind on 31 March 2016; and, a Closure Order came into operation on 29 June 2016 to close the NIRO to new small scale wind on 30 June 2016.

We will work towards extending the natural gas network to main towns in the West and to East Down, to offer energy consumers additional fuel choice, along with the cost and efficiency benefits associated with natural gas.

We will promote action to address inequalities in accessing alternative cost effective fuel in rural areas.

Construction work on the first phase of the Gas to the West project, a new gas pipeline from Maydown to Strabane, is well advanced with gas connection expected to be available at Artigarvan in late 2016 and in Strabane from April 2017. Work to connect other towns in the West to natural gas is due to start in 2017, subject to planning and other consents. In December 2015, the Utility Regulator also approved an extension to Phoenix Natural Gas’ licence which will bring natural gas to 13 towns and villages in East Down, providing an additional fuel choice for both business and domestic consumers, and easier budgeting options for households through the use of gas pre-payment meters to help spread energy costs. As part of this project a new gas pipeline has been provided to Ballygowan.

Department of Education

Curriculum

Key Achievements

The common statutory curriculum taught by all grant-aided schools to pupils of compulsory school age (4-16) continues to ensure every pupil receives a good general education. The flexibility of the curriculum allows teachers to tailor their provision to best suit the needs of their pupils, including those pupils who have additional needs such as children with special educational needs, or gifted and talented children.

ICT is an important tool for assisting in delivery of the curriculum. C2k provides a managed ICT service for all grant-aided schools and continues to ensure that pupils and teachers have access to sufficient broadband capability while they are on school premises regardless of geographical location.

The Department has funded a package to update the library management system in schools (called Alice). The new software, Junior Librarian for Primary schools and Eclipse for post-primary schools, provides a very up to date library system. During 2015/16 this package continued to be rolled-out to approximately 460 schools.

During 2015/16, the Department funded work to extend C2k services to pupils and teachers in 33 EOTAS (Education Other Than At School) settings, thus ensuring that pupils who are moved from a mainstream school to such a setting continue to have access to all educational support services, including C2k.

Benefits

The effective implementation of the broad and balanced curriculum has helped young people to develop as individuals, contributors to society and to the economy and the environment.

The new Library software, Junior Librarian for Primary schools and Eclipse for post-primary schools, provides a very up to date library system for schools.

Entitlement Framework

Key Achievements

Full implementation of the Entitlement Framework became statutory from September 2015. Young learners should be able to access a minimum number and range of courses at Key Stage 4 and post-16, regardless of the school they attend or where they live.

Benefits

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

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

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

Extended Schools

Key Achievements

The Extended Schools (ES) programme continues to support the Department's core priorities of addressing educational inequalities and disadvantage. In 2015-16, £10.6 million of ES resources were made available, enabling eligible schools to provide additional learning opportunities and a range of support and interventions aimed at tackling barriers to learning and improving the educational attainment and longer term life chances of disadvantaged children and young people and their families. Over £2.2million of ES funding was allocated to 160 schools located in rural areas in 2015-16.

In recognition of the vital role played by parents in their children's learning and in promoting and instilling the value of education across communities, an additional strand of funding is also made available through the ES programme aimed specifically at involving parents in the life of the school. These resources enable Extended Schools Clusters (neighbouring schools working together) to deliver a co-ordinated approach to providing parenting programmes and activities which help parents to support their children at home including dealing with a range of social, emotional and behavioural issues and in the development of literacy and numeracy skills.

Benefits

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

Pupils:

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

Parents:

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

Community Use of Schools**Key Achievements**

The Department is committed to identifying and disseminating good practice with a particular focus on community use of school premises to help schools build stronger links with parents and local communities. Working with a range of key stakeholders, the Department developed and issued a 'Guidance Toolkit' to all schools in January 2014 which seeks to encourage and assist schools on how to open school facilities for wider community use. Over 80% of schools currently report (2014 School Omnibus Survey) that they make their premises available as a community facility.

Section 2 (4) of the Education Act (NI) 2014 places a statutory duty on the Education Authority *'(so far as its powers extend) to encourage, facilitate and promote the community use of premises of grant-aided schools.'* A further duty requires that *'The Authority shall appoint a standing committee to exercise the functions of the Authority under section 2(4).'* The EA standing committee was appointed in early 2016.

Benefits

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

- Improved learning and achievement;
- Improved access to specialist support services;
- Partnership working across statutory and voluntary bodies;
- Opportunities for adult education and family learning;
- Improved access to sports, arts and other agreed facilities; and
- Healthier and fitter communities.

Area Planning and Shared Education Campuses

Key Achievements

The purpose of Area Planning is to ensure that pupils have access to high quality education in a viable and sustainable school. The renewed Area Planning governance structures continue to embed. The purpose of refreshing them is to ensure that the Area Planning process is transparent; consistent and clearly communicated. They aim to improve the Area Planning process in order to provide strategic direction and operational consistency across Northern Ireland along with an opportunity for increased engagement by the statutory Planning Authorities, the Education Authority (EA) and Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, and all key stakeholder bodies during the process. All sectors are represented in the local groups and local stakeholders have had opportunities to actively engage in the discussion of themes and strategic issues that are reflected in the draft Area Plan for primary, post primary and special schools covering the period April 2017- March 2020 which is currently out for public consultation.

An Annual Action Plan will supplement the strategic Area Plan. It will contain details of the work programme of the Planning and Managing Authorities to address the specific issues at local level in each Local Government District. Planning Authorities have been asked to prioritise proposals that will address the issues that are having the greatest impact on the educational experience of pupils.

The First and Second Call for projects under the Together: Building a United Community Strategy headline action to commence ten projects by 2018 has resulted in five projects in rural areas being approved to progress in planning as part of the Shared Education Campus Programme.

Benefits

The Department's vision of ensuring that every learner achieves his or her full potential at each stage of his or her development is supported through the Schools for the Future: A Policy for Sustainable Schools which drives the Area Planning process. Both promote the need for a viable and sustainable education system and put pupils at the centre of considerations. Children attending rural schools deserve access to the full range of the curriculum in the same way as those who attend urban schools. The Area Planning process requires the School Managing and Planning Authorities to actively consider how best to provide access to a broad and balanced curriculum for all children and should ensure those in rural areas are not disadvantaged.

The Shared Education Programme will provide facilities or new schools to ensure sustainable provision and access to the curriculum in a shared education environment and build on existing sharing partnerships.

Department of Finance

NISRA

The Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information Service (NINIS) website www.nisra.gov.uk/ninis continues to allow rural (and urban) communities across Northern Ireland to freely access high quality official statistics on their local area. The website currently hosts over 2,600 datasets and is the home of the 2011 Census results. The website contains a series of Frequently Asked Questions on Urban/Rural issues (e.g. [how are areas classed as urban or rural?](#)) and includes information on the [Review of the Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements](#) which was published by NISRA in March 2015. New [guidance](#) for producing statistics for Settlement 2015 and/or urban-rural classifications was also published by NISRA in May 2016; this guidance is accompanied by lookup tables which are available under the [‘People and Places’](#) theme on NINIS. Interactive maps on urban/rural classifications for Settlements and Small Areas were also published on NINIS

allowing users to visualise the data. As part of this dissemination, a helpline and training are available. Training has been provided to a number of rural organisations and community groups on the use of official statistics (e.g. the 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 DAERA staff and representatives of rural community networks.

In December 2015, NISRA published an updated version of the Central Postcode Directory; a look-up between postcodes and a range of geographies. The main new development is the inclusion of Settlements according to the Review of the Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements (2015) referred to above. For each Northern Ireland postcode, it provides the settlement name, settlement band, the default urban-rural classification, and whether that postcode is within 20 or 30 minutes travel of a major settlement, as well as banded travel times to Belfast and Derry. In May 2016, similar lookup tables were published for the 4,537 Small Areas and 890 Super Output Areas. Both releases, accompanied by interactive maps on NINIS, have assisted the collection and dissemination of statistics for rural areas, and provide policy makers with the tools to develop, implement and monitor policies.

NISRA is also undertaking a review of deprivation measures with the support of expert users and a Steering Group comprised of representatives from all Government Departments and from a wide range of Non-Departmental Public Bodies and District Councils including those representing the rural community and rural interests. Work to date has focused on investigating the indicators to be included within each of the seven deprivation domains, methodological development and securing access to essential data. It is planned to publish a consultation document in autumn 2016, setting out detailed proposals for the update, followed by a number of public consultation events. Thereafter, the updated deprivation measures will be produced with the aim of publishing results in mid 2017, along with detailed supporting guidance for users. Tailored dissemination events will also be scheduled as appropriate to ensure that the results reach the widest possible audience and are both fully understood and utilised. NISRA is also using its website and social media to keep key stakeholders updated on the progress of the update.

ESS

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

Get On line week and Silver Surfers Days 2016 delivered IT awareness sessions to over 551 citizens in 36 NI locations including Carnlough, Enniskillen, Kilkeel, Lisnaskea and Magherafelt. Supporting Communities NI (SCNI), in partnership with Go ON NI trained an additional 188 citizens in computer essentials with more than half of the training taking place in rural areas including Clady, Ahoghill, Drumnakilly, Cloughmills, Ardstraw and Cullybackey. Go ON NI also attended a Young at Heart event in Lurgan that had an outreach to the mid Ulster area with 190 citizens attending the stand. A Carers IT pilot was delivered within the Northern Trust in Antrim, Cookstown, Ballycastle and Coleraine. In partnership with LGNI an Intergenerational Programme delivered IT sessions to 71 citizens in 6 Primary and 4 post-primary schools, half of which were rural.

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

In collaboration with the organisations owning the services, DSS last year delivered the '16 by 16' programme of work which included, among others:

- Pay a Rates Bill;
- Book a Visitor Attraction;
- Careers Web Chat;
- Access NI;
- Report a Road Fault;
- Purchase OSNI Mapping;
- Landlord Registration;
- Ordering a Birth, Death or Marriage Certificate;
- Buy a Fishing Licence;
- DAERA Single Farm payments;
- Apply for Free School Transport;
- Register a Birth;

- Book a GP Appointment;
- Order a Repeat Prescription;
- Planning Appeals;
- Family History search; and
- Pay a Parking Fine.

Work has commenced on a number of additional transformation projects including:

- Apply for a Driving Licence;
- Report a Flood;
- Register to Vote;
- Apply for a Blue Badge;
- Apply for Free School Meals;
- Compensation Claims;
- Book a Prison Visit;
- Apply for Legal Aid; and
- School Enrolment and Transfer.

Department of Health

Maximising Access in Rural Areas (MARA)

MARA is a cross departmental project developed and delivered in partnership with 13 community network organisations using a community development approach. It aims to improve the health and wellbeing of rural dwellers in Northern Ireland by increasing access to services, grants and benefits and by facilitating a co-ordinated service to support rural dwellers in, or at risk, of poverty and social exclusion.

MARA has been rolled out in various phases since 2009. Two independent evaluations have been completed. The latest evaluation of the project from 2012 - 2015 identified the following outcomes:

- 12,085 households were visited which resulted in 13,748 individual assessments;
- More than half of the clients who participated in MARA were successful in receiving a service after referral (55.4%);
- Overall 45% of clients reported an improvement in general health, with 36% reporting no change and 19% showing deterioration (expected with age of clients). Improvements in general health were statistically related to being successful for any of the services, grants or benefits;
- 40% of clients (clients before and after measures matched and compared) showed improvement in social connectedness after MARA. Some 55% showed no change and 5% showed deterioration;
- 68% of clients reported that MARA had made a difference to their quality of life;
- The MARA programme has delivered a positive evaluative social return on investment of £1.00: £6.00 after one year only. When forecast over 5 years this increases to £1.00: £15.52;
- “In terms of VFM the evidence indicates that the services/activities provided through the MARA programme are additional to the services activities that would be provided in the absence of funding Overall our assessment of the economy, efficiency and effectiveness dimensions found that the project has provided VFM.”
Deloitte, Sept 2015.

Vignettes - highlighting the benefits that MARA has brought to isolated rural communities:

Below are a number of client stories which illustrate the positive impact the MARA programme has had not only on the individual directly involved with MARA but also on the wider family circle.

These cases were provided by Lead Organisations and are presented anonymously to protect the identity of the service users.

Client Story One

This client is a single mother of one. She has a 17 year old daughter who suffers from Autism. She heard of the MARA project through word of mouth and contacted the lead organisation to arrange a visit. [The client] requested to be referred for a Smart pass and rural community transport. She has also requested to find out about getting aids for her daughter's hearing, which is currently being processed. Through her home safety visit she received advice and equipment.

Client Story Two

A female client [client] who has learning difficulties, lives alone, and her daughter is her main carer. Positives outcomes resulting from engagement with the MARA Programme are outlined below:

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

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

Client Story Three

A female client, who lives alone, is very isolated and doesn't drive. She was referred for Warm Homes and Boiler Replacement grant. She has had her loft insulated and has her boiler work completed, reporting that the "MARA project took away the hassle of contacting various departments" and supported her with the application for boiler replacement. She said the difference it makes to her home is "unbelievable".

Client Story Four

[Client] who lives at home has mobility problems and was having problems getting a diagnosis. [The lead organisation contacted the client] and she decided to have a visit, before this she had not heard of the MARA project. She asked to be referred for BECS, OT, Home Safety and Levy. Upon last speaking to [the client], she was in the process

of applying for attendance allowance. She had been in touch with OT who had referred her on to a Physiotherapist. This in turn led to a diagnosis for her condition which was affecting her mobility. The levy process was completed and she got her roof space insulated. Home safety issued her with advice and various bits of equipment. The lady could not be happier and was so pleased she took the visit and was quoted as saying 'you have done more for me in the last three months'. The impact this has had on her life has been immense.

Client Story Five

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

Client Story Six

A [Client] in her 70's with a disabled son in his 40's who was also looking after her husband called MARA to see if she could get any help. [Client] was referred for a benefits check and is now getting carer's allowance. This has made a huge difference to this lady and her family as she can pay for extra help with her son.

Client Story Seven

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

Client Story Eight

A male farmer who is separated from his spouse - his children live with mother but stay with father at weekends. The outcomes this farmer received as a result of MARA intervention are highlighted below:

- BEC - no entitlement.
- Home Safety Check - Received equipment and advice.

- Warm Home Scheme - Received loft insulation and cavity insulation.
- Boiler Replacement Scheme - Application submitted and awaiting outcome.

Client is delighted with MARA - his mother and a number of neighbours have since received a MARA visit.

Client Story Nine

Low Income Household with one adult and two children both in full-time education. Client has income through a divorce and is now suffering from depression as a result. Gross income less than £7k. The only referral was for a BEC but was very successful and resulted in her being awarded and back dated Tax Credits which is understood to be a substantial amount. The client is extremely grateful for the assistance received through MARA. During the visit the enabler was very sympathetic to the situation, listening as well as giving advice.

Client Story Ten

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

Farm Family Health Check Programme

Background:

The Farm Family Health Check Programme launched on 16th July 2012, since which time 10,802 clients have received health checks. These have been provided primarily at farmers marts but also rural community events. In October 2015 an evaluation report, focusing on the outcomes of the FFHCP was completed. It highlighted that the FFHC programme is particularly useful in reaching males, farmers and those aged 45 to 64 years. Stakeholders felt the programme was successful in accessing the hard-to-reach clients who do not attend their GP and helps with the early identification of health problems. Clients who attended the health checks reported that they did so because it was convenient and available.

The programme has successfully secured funding to continue in 2016/17.

Current position:

Whilst the evaluation report was positive in terms of confirming that the objectives of the original business case were either met or surpassed, the report identified particular

areas where the programme could be improved or further developed. Representation from DAERA/NHSCT and PHA have reviewed the findings from the evaluation report, and have made a number of amendments to the programme including an update of the IT system that will incorporate a Qrisk screening tool (based on NICE guidelines). A review of the staffing model will see an additional part time nurse employed that will provide the nurse coordinator an increased opportunity to take forward a more strategic role within the project such as attending farmers meetings as a way to explore access to diary and horticulture events. The coordinator will also explore the development of further effective pathways for referral /signposting at a local level to address identified need.

The following key findings were identified in the report:

- In total, 7,877 clients attended the health checks between July 2012 and June 2015 at 379 farmers' markets (marts), community- and agri-food events.
- Clients were most likely to be male (77%), farmers (66%), aged 45-64 years (48%), and living in the Northern (33%), Southern (27%) and Western (27%) Health and Social Care Trusts.
- 53% all clients were identified as potentially having cholesterol outside the normal ranges. Of these, 83% were advised to see their GP/practice nurse.
- 60% clients were identified as potentially having high blood pressure and, of these, 86% were advised to see their GP/practice nurse.
- 31% had BMI 30 or above and were categorised as obese, with 37% of those being advised to see their GP/practice nurse.
- 34% were identified as potentially being at moderate/high risk of developing diabetes in the future and 79% of those clients were advised to see their GP/practice nurse.
- 3% wanted help with a mental health issue and 46% of those were advised to see their GP/practice nurse for further support.
- At evaluation follow-up, 38% felt their physical health had improved (typically by losing weight or improving their cholesterol) and 21% said their mental health had improved (typically by feeling less stressed or their sleep had improved).

Vignettes - highlighting the benefits that the Farm Family Check programme brings to isolated rural communities:

Client Story One

Female Client (56) during Review Call said "I went to the screening van and was told my blood pressure and cholesterol was very high. I went to the GP as advised I am now on blood pressure medication. I had been feeling unwell but now feel much better. I am very grateful to Farm Families as I was unaware of my blood pressure problems. I have also made changes to my diet and my energy levels have improved".

Client Story Two

Female called into screening van at Balmoral Show and said to our nurse “You gave me my husband back, thank you very much”. She went on to say that her husband had visited the screening van about 6 months previously and was told that he needed to make some lifestyle changes. He had since lost 3 stone in weight. His mood had also changed and was back to the man she used to know. She was extremely grateful for the time the nurse had spent with him that day and wanted her to know the positive outcome that she had on her family.

Client Story Three

Male Client (71) during Review Call said “More people should use this service”. Client has lost three quarters of a stone since visiting the van as well as cutting down on amount of cigarettes he smokes and alcohol he consumes.

Client Story Four

Male Client (67) during Review Call said “I was unaware that I had any problems prior to visiting the screening van and I am very glad I called in that day”. Client stated that he had visited the van and was referred to the GP for a BMI of 35 and a Diabetic Risk Score of 27. Went to the GP and was diagnosed as a type II diabetic and was commenced on medication. Is now being monitored by the Diabetic Nurse and attending a dietician to help him lose weight.

Client Story Five

Male Client (65) during Review Call said “Best thing I ever did going into the van”. Client stated he was glad he went into the van and got his health issues ‘kick started’. Client had high blood pressure, cholesterol, query irregular heart beat and a high diabetic risk score. Client went to his GP and has been commenced on cholesterol and blood pressure medication as well as medication for his Atrial Fibrillation.

Client Story Six

Male Client (38) - Client stated that he had made drastic lifestyle changes since visiting the van. He had stopped drinking red bull and fizzy drinks, started going to a personal trainer every 2 weeks and has lost 11lbs and 6% body fat and has started to keep a food diary. This is all as a result of being in the van, very grateful.

Client Story Seven

Male Client (39) during Review Call said - “a lot of farmers need help with anxiety and depression especially at the minute in the dairy sector”. He said that he knows a lot of farmers are suicidal. Don’t have time to visit GPs/or don’t want to, so Farm Families is very necessary to advise farmers where to seek help.

Department for Infrastructure

Rural Roads

In the period 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2016, the DfI (and the former Department for Regional Development (DRD)), faced significant budgetary challenges that impacted on the routine maintenance of roads in rural areas. Whilst the Department (and the former DRD) continued to maintain rural roads, it was at a reduced level commensurate with the budgets available. From July 2015 to June 2016 gully cleaning was reduced and focused on hot spots only, one cut of grass took place in the period April to September 2015 and only the most serious potholes were fixed on rural low trafficked roads - although from 8 September all defects over 100mm deep on rural low trafficked roads were fixed with the introduction of a service enhancement. In addition, as contractors were unable to be employed to fix street lighting outages a significant backlog built up - although this was eliminated from January 2016 to May 2016, with additional funding. A full winter service was provided in 2015/16.

From April 2016, the former DRD (now DfI) continued to provide a reduced routine maintenance service commensurate with the funding available, however funding was such that street light repairs could continue and weed spraying operations could recommence.

Following June 2016 monitoring, DfI has embarked on a £10 million Rural Roads Initiative to address the rural roads in the worst condition. Furthermore, additional funding will allow a second grass cut to take place in 2016 and a significant programme of road marking renewals.

As a result of successful in year bidding, combined with careful budget management, TransportNI was able to spend some £53.8million on roads structural maintenance during 2015/16. Of this £53.8million, some £32million was spent resurfacing and surface dressing local roads, that is, roads which are not on the Motorway and Trunk Road Network. With this significant level of investment, almost 1530km of the local road network was either resurfaced or surface dressed.

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

Public Transport Services

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

This included production and distribution via 'micro marketing' of printed material to stakeholders and passengers, in addition to regionally targeted advertisements and press

releases, and collaborative stakeholder engagement. The following is not an exhaustive list but highlights key achievements in this area:

- Outreach to students via attendance at programme of local fresher college events to provide information on public transport options (including attendance at an integrated event in Loughry college with the former DRD and Community Transport);
- Dissemination of information via programme of local meet the manager events;
- Outreach to senior citizens via attendance at relevant exhibitions/events to promote public transport (e.g. Young at Heart exhibition);
- Participation in Newry & Mourne District Councils Age Friendly Strategic Alliance Partnership;
- Participation in Dungannon Integrated Transport Pilot and production of integrated passenger information to promote the 75a service;
- Focused promotional campaign and distribution of printed material (30,000 leaflets May 2015) for the portfolio of Rambler bus services and collaboration with local councils and tourist information centres regarding provision of information. Additionally we provided bus stop departure information, bespoke vehicle liveries, and bus station posters;
- Bespoke rural transport website page/links from main Translink website; and,
- Targeted advertising and provision of passenger information in media publications with extensive audience reach. This included the following media:
 - Newtownabbey in Touch
 - Crossmaglen Examiner (Observer Newspaper Group)
 - Mourne Observer (Observer Newspaper Group)
 - NI Holiday News
 - NI Visitors Journal (Penton Publications)
 - Coleraine Times (Johnson Publishing)
 - Newry Reporter (Observer Newspaper Group)
 - Mid Ulster Mail (Johnson Mail)
 - Tyrone Democrat (Observer Newspaper Group)
 - Londonderry Today (Johnson Publishing)
 - Derry Journal (Johnson Publishing)
 - Mid Ulster Mail (Johnson Mail)
 - Mid Ulster Mail (Johnson Mail)
 - Dungannon Observer

Integrating Passenger Transport in Rural Areas

The evaluation of a cross departmental pilot project operated in the Dungannon area and coordinated by the former DRD, is now complete. It involved collaboration between Translink, the Education Authority, Southern Health & Social Care Trust and the local community transport provider. The main purpose of the pilot was to trial the integration of publicly funded transport services to improve the travel options available to passengers, particularly in rural areas, and identify opportunities for deploying all of the resources available more efficiently. The evaluation of the pilot project has been used to inform plans for the wider roll out of integrated passenger transport arrangements.

A cross-organisation Steering Group has been established and has approved two strands of work as follows:

- **Strand 1** is being led by Translink and the Education Authority and is examining the opportunity and benefits of integrating the passenger transport services provided by their large and medium sized bus fleets. This work is being progressed on a phased basis and will consider both the initial benefits that could be achieved from more integrated planning and delivery in local areas and also the medium-to-longer term benefits of the strategic integration of the two bus fleets.
- **Strand 2** involves the development of proposals for the integration of the specialist and demand-responsive passenger transport services required by:
 - a) Health and Social Care Trust clients;
 - b) Some Education Authority pupils including children with special educational needs;
 - c) People living in rural areas at risk of social isolation; and
 - d) People living in urban areas who are unable to use scheduled public transport services due to their age or disability and meet the criteria for using the service.

The initial Strand 2 work is focused on the area covered by the Southern Health and Social Care Trust. It is currently planned to complete the design of the new integrated services, including public consultation, by early 2017 and begin the first phase of implementation by late 2017.

Financial Assistance for Provision of a Water Supply in Rural Areas

Under Article 76 of the Water and Sewerage Services (NI) Order 2006 NI Water has a duty to provide a public water main if required to do so by the owner or occupier of a domestic property.

NI Water currently provides a Reasonable Cost Allowance (RCA) of £1945 for connections to the public mains and £2,456 for a sewer connection per property.

These allowances are available to offset the cost of watermain and sewer requisitions - situations where developers require an extension to the watermain or sewer in order to service a new development.

Planning and Development in Rural Areas

The Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS)

The Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS), which was published on 28 September 2015, provides a balance between providing a strategic planning framework for the new planning system and flexibility for new councils to make planning decisions and bring forward policies in their Development Plans, tailored to their local circumstances. Included in the SPPS, are the strategic provisions of Planning Policy Statement 21 (PPS 21): 'Sustainable Development in the Countryside' which sets out a range of types of residential and non-residential development which in principle are considered to be acceptable. In addition, the guiding principle for policies and proposals for economic development in the countryside is to facilitate proposals likely to benefit the rural economy and support rural communities, while protecting or enhancing rural character and the environment.

Promotion of Road Safety in Rural Areas

Under the former Department of the Environment (DOE), three new campaigns addressing several road safety issues were launched, with each of them depicting scenarios in rural roads.

The first, a new anti drink driving campaign, was launched in December 2015. It stresses the impairing effects of alcohol on driving - even from the first drink. The message is designed to increase further the unacceptability of driving even after one drink, especially for younger males and reinforces the need for motorists to 'Never Ever Drink and Drive'.

PSNI statistics show that 17-24 year old males are most at risk of causing death and serious injury by drink driving, either to themselves or other innocent road users.

The second and third both address distraction. Driver carelessness/inattention is consistently the main cause of fatalities on our roads. Over the last five years, 116 people have lost their lives due to driver carelessness. This was nearly 40% of the total number of deaths, 298, on our roads from 2010 to 2014.

The second, entitled Friends, is a campaign specifically targeting young drivers carrying young passengers. It uses sports scenes to illustrate how someone can miss a goal or a putt when distracted and then highlights the fatal consequences of a driver being distracted. The core message is "Don't Distract Your Friends When They are Driving".

The third advert, entitled Missing, highlights what can happen in those two seconds when a driver looks at the incoming text on their mobile phone. Drivers know that they shouldn't use their phones, yet they continue to do it. The ad states that, in fact, glancing at your phone, for just two seconds, doubles your risk of crashing.

All three campaigns illustrate tragic consequences of drink driving and distraction in rural settings.

Community Transport

The DFI funds Dial a Lift services provided by Rural Community Transport Partnerships in rural areas. These are targeted at those who cannot easily access Translink services.

In conjunction with services targeted at larger towns in rural areas provided by Disability Action, DFI provides funding of up to £4m annually. It also administers the DAERA ARTS scheme referred to earlier in this document and more recently the Social Investment Fund initiative in the North Coast area recently announced by OFMDFM. Overall the number of trips provided comes close to half a million annually.

Department of Justice

Community Safety - Tackling Rural Crime

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

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

Updates on delivery of the action plans are provided to the Justice Committee on an annual basis. The third annual update was considered by the Justice committee on 21 June 2016. This update included actions taken at a strategic and local level to support safer rural communities, and prevent and reduce crime. This work has included the following:

Strategic Delivery

Rural crime is a cross-cutting issue which requires significant partnership working in the areas of prevention, intervention and enforcement. The key conduits for taking forward this work at a strategic level within the Department of Justice are the Rural Crime Partnership (RCP) - whose membership includes the DoJ, NFU Mutual, Ulster Farmers' Union, DAERA and the PSNI - and the work of the Organised Crime Task Force (OCTF) and Cross Border Task Force (CBTF) in addressing organised crimes affecting rural locations such as fuel laundering. The Department is also represented on the DAERA-led Traceability Assurance Group.

Rural Crime Partnership

The primary focus of the RCP has been on developing a collaborative response to crime which is specific to rural areas - agricultural crime. A data analyst, based in the PSNI, undertook a comprehensive review of agricultural crime incidents using intelligence from multiple sources to analyse the modus operandi of each incident, and to identify any specific trends, or methodologies.

Findings from this exercise concluded that the majority of incidents were opportunist in nature, and a key factor in addressing this issue was to encourage farming businesses to put in place basic crime prevention measures. This work also identified hot spot areas with high levels of machinery and livestock theft.

The RCP used this information to support the development and delivery of a number of initiatives including:

- A regional initiative to fit TRACKER security devices to high value farm machinery, resulting in the protection of over £3 million worth of machinery (source: NFU Mutual);

- Funding to support the delivery of an Ulster Farmers' Union Rural Crime Conference, 'Tackling Rural Crime in Northern Ireland - Working Together', to raise awareness about rural crime, to facilitate sharing of best practice in dealing with rural crime, and to enhance working relationships with key stakeholders; and
- Development of a PSNI training initiative to familiarise officers with key facts to help investigate reports of stolen livestock.

The work of the RCP has also helped in developing more productive relationships between partners which has been evidenced in joint agency enforcement actions, and officials from our Department being invited to join the DAERA Traceability Assurance Group to ensure appropriate measures are in place to prevent stolen animals entering the food chain and to protect the Northern Ireland agri-food brand.

Organised Crime Task Force

While the OCTF does not have a specific remit for rural crime they do have a role in addressing organised crimes which affect rural locations such as fuel laundering. Their Cross Border Fuel Fraud Subgroup which is chaired by HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC), who lead in tackling excise evasion, was instrumental in the introduction of the new marker, AccutraceTMS10, to UK and Republic of Ireland fuel supplies to prevent illicit fuel laundering. The Group continues to work in partnership to prevent the smuggling of fuel.

Cross jurisdictional Joint Agency Task Force

A cross jurisdictional Joint Agency Task Force whose core members include PSNI, An Garda Síochána, the National Crime Agency, Home Office Immigration Enforcement, HMRC, Irish Revenue Commissioners and UK Border Force. The Task Force continues to agree investigative priorities across law enforcement agencies in both jurisdictions and delivers a focused approach to those crimes causing most harm in our communities.

The Joint Task Force Operations Co-ordination Group, which has been operational since April 2016 to coordinate joint operations and direct relevant resources, met in October and agreed that Rural Crime should remain as one of their six priority crime areas.

During April and May 2016, numerous vehicle checkpoints were in operation supported by An Garda Síochána and the PSNI Air Support Unit along both sides of the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to detect and deter rural crime. There were also four operations focused on targeting metal thefts and rogue traders.

A further three cross border operations took place during July, September and October. Successful multi-agency operations have also taken place province wide, involving HMRC, Trading Standards and the Vehicle Testing Agency.

Local Delivery

Policing and Community Safety Partnerships

At a local level, Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs) ensure that the needs of rural communities are reflected in policing and community safety action plans. PCSPs play a key role in building confidence locally, through engagement and consultation with communities on the issues that matter to them, and targeting any initiatives to meet the needs of local areas. This would include initiatives aimed at making rural communities safer. PCSPs working within rural regions are taking forward a wide range of initiatives, from practical schemes aimed at farmers such as trailer marking, to initiatives aimed at making the most vulnerable and isolated members of rural communities feel safer. These include:

- Farmwatch schemes;
- Text alert schemes;
- Trailer marking schemes;
- Installation of security features, e.g. sensor lights/Guard Cams;
- Public meetings to raise awareness of rural crime issues;
- Working with vulnerable individuals to provide security measures;
- Rural Community Safety Warden schemes;
- Rural crime digital screens in farmers marts;
- Rural Neighbourhood Watch schemes; and
- Pilot initiatives for freeze branding of livestock and forensic marking of farm equipment.

Going Forward

Key factors going forward will be managing the expectations of the rural community regarding the wider criminal justice response to crime. Statistical evidence shows a continuing downward trend in rural and agricultural crime, which in turn will inevitably impact on visibility of police in some rural areas as officers are deployed to targeted areas of concern. However, while there are fewer crime incidents the PSNI continue to develop their strategic approach for tackling rural crime, including district single points of contact at inspector level, communication strategies, regular community briefings, and collaborative working with the DAERA enforcement team and other key agencies.

The NFU Mutual Crime Report 2016 - which identifies cybercrime as an emerging crime threat for the rural community -and the initial findings from the Criminal Justice Inspectorate's ongoing inspection of business crime will be key factors in shaping our department's future response to rural crime. Collaborative working will continue to form

the basis of this response through the RCP, OCTF, the Traceability Assurance Group and PCSPs.

In the past the Justice and DAERA Ministers have met to discuss opportunities for joint working and this might be something we would want to consider over the coming months.

The Executive Office

Together: Building a United Community

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

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

The Strategy commits to working with rural community organisations to encourage increasing openness and accessibility and to reduce chill factors and fears that prevent open access. Contracts for the delivery of a rural community development support service have been in place with 8 lead service providers since April 2012 and these have now been extended until 31 March 17.

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

A new team has been set up within The Executive Office to take forward work in relation to interfaces and contested spaces, including within rural areas. Consideration is being given to a pilot programme to deliver good relations outcomes specifically in rural, segregated communities and contested spaces in rural areas.

Social Investment Fund

The Social Investment Fund (SIF) aims to improve social conditions and encourage economic growth in areas of Northern Ireland where there is poverty, unemployment and dereliction. There is no distinction between urban and rural areas.

The Northern and Western Zones have a range of projects which are Zone wide and therefore address deprivation in both rural and urban areas.

In the Northern Zone two capital projects - Community Capacity Hubs and Coleraine Rural and Urban Network - have commenced involving investment of £1.4 m and £0.5m respectively. Indeed the Coleraine Rural and Urban Network project has completed construction and is operational. In addition funding is committed to four revenue projects - Fuel Poverty (£1.8m); Access to Employment (£0.8m); Building Employment through Education (BEE £3.2m); and Community Capacity for Health (£967k). Access to Employment and the BEE projects are operational and delivering services to the local community.

In the Western Zone, there are seven capital projects with a combined value of £4.4m committed: Fermanagh House; Hall Together Now; Community premises; COTHU - St Patricks; Health & Wellbeing - Youth Sport Omagh; COTHU St Canices; and Health & Wellbeing - Banagher. The first four of these projects have commenced.

In the Western Zone there are two revenue projects, Work Ready West and Satchel, with a total investment of £3.5m which are currently being delivered.

Background

The Strategic Policy, Equality and Good Relations Directorate within the Executive Office is delivering the Social Investment 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.

SIF was first announced in 2011 and has been developed using a bottom up, community led approach so that projects belong to and have the support of the communities they are seeking to help. This ethos has meant that we have spent time getting the infrastructure right - setting up 9 Social Investment Zones to cover all of Northern Ireland. These are managed by Steering Groups, with membership drawn from the community/voluntary, political, business and statutory sectors.

To date the full £80 million has been committed to 69 projects across the 9 Social Investment Zones. This is divided into over £44 million of capital funding and £35 million revenue.

Glossary of Terms/Abbreviations

ACNI	Arts Council of Northern Ireland
AD	Anerobic Digester
AFBI	Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute
AFSB	Agri-Food Strategy Board
ALBS	Arms Length Bodies
AOL's	Areas of Learning
AMME	Advanced Manufacturing Materials and Engineering
ARTS	Assisted Rural Transport Scheme
CAFRE	College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CCMS	Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
CERI	Connecting Elderly Rural Isolated
COPE	Centre of Procurement Expertise
CPD	Central Procurement Directorate
DARD	(former) Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
DAERA	Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
DCAL	(former) Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure
DCMS	Department of Culture, Media and Sport
DDA	Disability Discrimination Act
DE	Department of Education
DECLG	Department of Environment, Community and Local Government
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DEL	(former) Department for Employment and Learning
DFC	Department for Communities
DFE	Department for the Economy
DFI	Department for Infrastructure
DOF	Department of Finance
DOH	Department of Health
DOJ	Department of Justice
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ES	Extended Schools Programme

EU	European Union
FE	Further Education
GAA	Gaelic Athletic Association
HE	Higher Education
HSCT	Health and Social Care Trust
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IFA	Irish Football Association
LAG	Local Action Group
LANTRA	Sector Skills Council for land based and environmental industries
LDP	Local Development Plan
LGNI	Linking Generations NI
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
MIP	Mobile Infrastructure Project
NI	Northern Ireland
NIDIRECT	government services website - http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/
NIEA	Northern Ireland Environment Agency
NIHE	Northern Ireland Housing Executive
NINIS	Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information Service
NIRO	Northern Ireland Renewable Obligation
NISRA	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
NITB	Northern Ireland Tourist Board
OFMDFM	(former) Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister
PCSP	Policing and Community Safety Partnership
PHA	Public Health Authority
PPS	Planning Policy Statement
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland
PV	Photovoltaic
RAFAEL	Renaissance of Atlantic Food Authenticity and Economic Links
RCA	Reasonable Cost Allowance
RCN	Rural Community Network
RCTP	Rural Community Transport Partnerships

RDS	Regional Development Strategy
ROC	Renewables Obligation Certificate
RTS	Regional Transportation Strategy
RYE	Rural Youth Entrepreneurship
SCI	Statement of Community Involvement
SEE	Social Economy Enterprise
SFG	Spatial Framework Guidance
SIF	Social Investment Fund
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
SPG	Supplementary Planning Guidance
SPPS	Strategic Planning Policy Statement
SSP	Sector Specific Project
TBUC	Together: Building a United Community
TEO	The Executive Office
Timeframe	S - Short Term (1-3 yrs) M - Medium Term (3-5 yrs) L - Long Term (5-10 yrs) O - Ongoing
TRPSI	Tackling Rural Poverty & Social Isolation (Framework)
UBIRFU	Ulster Branch Irish Rugby Football Union
UCGAA	Ulster Council GAA
UFU	Ulster Farmers' Union
VCS	Voluntary and Community Sector

Annex A

Monitoring Returns



Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

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/ DAERA		M
Status	Green = Implementation achieved			
Update	A review of the settlement classification was completed and a full report was published in March 2015 and is available on the NISRA website at http://www.nisra.gov.uk/archive/geography/review-of-the-statistical-classification-and-delineation-of-settlements-march-2015.pdf . The classification uses a similar methodology to the previous report, retaining an eight-way population based classification although based on 2011 census population estimates. However, the population-based classification is now augmented by a consideration of service provision for each settlement. This has been introduced by considering, for each settlement, the estimated travel time to the location of a major service provider operationalised as the town centre of a settlement containing at least 10,000 usual residents. Accordingly, each settlement has been classified by whether it is within 20 minute drive-time, or within a 30 minute drive-time, of the centre of a settlement containing at least 10,000 usual residents. Settlements are additionally classified by distance to Belfast and Derry.			Update
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.	DAERA		S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
Update	A comprehensive set of rural/urban comparative statistics has been collated from across government in order to enhance the evidence base used to support rural development policy. These include east/west as well as rural/urban comparisons and are available on the DAERA website https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/introduction-rural-statistics . The statistics will be updated in line with the revised settlement classification and urban/rural definition.			Update

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
33	We will support the implementation of an enhanced rural proofing process across all Departments to ensure that all major policies and strategies are assessed to determine whether they have a differential impact on rural areas and, where appropriate, make adjustments to take account of particular rural circumstances.	DAERA	ALL	S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
Update	The Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 was passed by the NI Assembly in March 2016 and received Royal Assent in May 2016. Work is ongoing on the implementation arrangements to support the Act in order for its provisions to be commenced no later than 1 June 2018.			Update
38	We will better identify and tackle the causes of poverty and disadvantage in rural areas and to promote social inclusion.	DfC/DAERA	DfC	M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
Update	AFBI has been commissioned to undertake research on the impact of low income and poverty on the wellbeing of rural households and the role and scope of social enterprises in delivering solutions. DAERA continues to implement a package of measures under its Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework aimed at tackling poverty and social isolation in rural areas, particularly among vulnerable groups. A new TRPSI Framework was launched in March 2016 which aims to promote new and innovative approaches to tackling poverty and social isolation in rural areas.			Update

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
53	We will engage in joint/comparative research, which in turn will inform our policy and programme approaches and future co-operation opportunities.	DAERA & DCELG	Defra and other Devolved Administrations	M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	AFBI has been commissioned to undertake a number of research projects on behalf of DAERA including research on access to services in rural areas, research to determine the contribution that rural areas make to the NI economy and research on the contribution of key services to the quality of life of rural dwellers. The outcomes of this research will be used to engage with DECLG on areas of closer working.			<i>Update</i>
54	We will work together to share learning on rural proofing and use this tool effectively for the benefit of our rural communities.	DAERA & DECLG	Defra and other Devolved Administrations	M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	As part of the implementation of the Rural Needs Act, we will put in place arrangements for co-operation and exchange of information between public authorities. This will include sharing best practice and learning on rural proofing.			<i>Update</i>
55	We will share our learning from non-EU programmes such as CLAR, Anti Poverty and rural social scheme.	DAERA & 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 DAERA and DECLG and meets regularly to review the performance and output of current north and south rural development initiatives.			<i>Update</i>
56	We will share our experiences on the LEADER approach and facilitate the implementation of cross-border co-operation projects.	DAERA & DECLG		S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	We continue to liaise closely with our colleagues in DCEGA and a cross border event is planned for November 2016 which will help facilitate projects going forward.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
57	We will co-operate through formal and informal fora to share learning in developing policy and programme responses to the challenges faced by our rural areas.	DAERA & DECLG	Defra and other Devolved Administrations	M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	There have been regular meetings between DAERA and DECLG on a range of rural development issues including the Rural Development Programme, the Rural Enablers Project and the INTERREG IVA Programme. The two Departments have also continued to work together in relation to the development of their respective Rural Development Programme 2014-2020.			<i>Update</i>
58	We will work closely together in the implementation of our respective Rural White Papers and in any reviews of them.	DAERA & DECLG		M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	A review of the Rural White Paper Action Plan is scheduled to take place in 2017. DAERA continues to engage with DECLG through the Steering Committee for Cross Border Rural Development.			<i>Update</i>
61	We will implement a package of measures to tackle rural poverty and social and economic isolation over the next three years.	DAERA	Other Departments	S
Status	Green = Implementation achieved			
<i>Update</i>	DAERA's Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework (2011/12 - 15/16) supported the delivery of a package of diverse measures worth £21.4 million to support vulnerable people in rural communities and to target the root causes of social isolation. A new Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework (TRPSI) has been developed for 16/17 onwards and is supported to date by a £4m budget. A considerable numbers of TRPSI initiatives are delivered in partnership with other organisations and aim to complement other poverty and isolation initiatives and actions undertaken by government.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
64	Working with Defra, the devolved administrations and stakeholders, we will seek to influence the CAP and CFP negotiations to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > 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 	DAERA	Defra and other Devolved Administrations	S
Status	Green = Implementation achieved			
<i>Update</i>	A political agreement was reached on CAP reform in June 2013 and the legal text was adopted by the end of 2013 with implementation taking place in 2015. The Department achieved most of its key asks including a fair and proportionate share of the budget. In the final agreement the mechanism to move towards flat rate per hectare payments and 'greening' were considerably simplified, while full flexibility to tailor measures to meet local needs was also secured. Progress was also made on clarifying that CAP income support payments should go to active farmers. A political agreement has also been reached on the EU Budget and legal text was adopted at the end of 2013. Work on CAP Simplification continues and some progress was made in June 2015 on simplifying Commission guidance on greening. New CFP Regulation was adopted in December 2013. The element with most local impact is the introduction of the landing obligation by 2019. The Department is represented on the UK delegation of the Western Waters Regional Group that is introducing discard plans to implement the landing obligation. The Group has prepared a draft discards plan which has been submitted to the Commission for approval. The plan will impact on Irish Sea Nephrops and Haddock fisheries from 1 January 2016.			<i>Update</i>
65	We will seek to maximise opportunities to access other EU funding streams and seek opportunities to work with rural partners/stakeholders to maximise the impact of funding available.	DAERA		L
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	The proposals for the new Rural development Programme were submitted to the European Commission in June 2015.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
72	We will work with industry to develop and implement a strategic action plan for the agri-food sector.	DAERA/DfE	InvestNI	S
Status	Green = Implementation achieved			
<i>Update</i>	The AFSB's Strategic Action Plan "Going for Growth" was launched in May 2013. The report has 4 key industry targets to 2020: To grow sales by 60% to £7bn; grow employment by 15% to 115,000; grow sales outside NI by 75% to £4.5bn; and grow value added by 60% to £1bn. To deliver these, the Plan makes over 100 recommendations addressed to Government and industry. The previous Executive's Response to the Strategy was published in October 2014 and significant progress has been made in delivering that response. A formal progress report Delivering Growth was published in March 2016. Key achievements to date include the launch of the knowledge transfer phase of the Farm Business Improvement Scheme as part of the 2014-2020 Rural Development Programme, the creation of an Agri-Food Quest competence Centre, and the ongoing development of a Strategic Agri-Food Marketing Organisation. Continued progress is also being made in securing access to new export markets, supporting innovation, improving animal and plant health, the development of supply chains and promoting sustainable land management.			<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.	DAERA & DECLG		S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	The delivery of rural initiatives funded through the EU INTERREG IVA Programme is now complete. DAERA is facilitating Local Action Groups (LAGs) in Northern Ireland to develop LEADER Cooperation projects with LAGs in Ireland and other EU Member States. These projects will support the social and economic development of rural communities.			<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.	DAERA	DoF	M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	First phase of relocation to Ballykelly remains on target. A planning application for the new building and access road was approved in February 2016 and a contractor appointed in March 2016. The contractor has commenced a period of pre-construction design work. A detailed staffing plan that will set out what posts will relocate to Ballykelly and when is currently being developed.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
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 the developing of 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.	DAERA		L
Status	Green = Implementation achieved			
<i>Update</i>	The Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme was published in January 2014 and it covers the period up to 2019. The Programme sets out key actions by all Departments including DAERA to address the risks and opportunities identified in the Climate Change Risk Assessment report for NI, which includes those impacting on rural areas. The draft PfG Framework includes an outcome 'Increase environmental sustainability' with the measure 'greenhouse gas emissions. Work is being taken forward through the Cross Departmental Working Group of Climate Change to develop and agree a delivery plan that will deliver on this outcome.			<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.	DAERA		L
Status	Amber = Implementation commenced but progress is slower than anticipated			
<i>Update</i>	Calls for funding under the Rethink Waste Fund have not been made yet in 2016-17. The business case for the Fund is currently being processed.			<i>Update</i>

Department for Communities

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
3	We will take action to better co-ordinate urban and rural regeneration needs.	DfC		S
Status	Green = Implementation achieved			
<i>Update</i>	No update in this reporting period.			<i>Update</i>
4	We will maximise, and where possible integrate, funding opportunities available for regeneration of urban and rural communities.	DfC		S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	A co-design approach was utilised to afford The Third Sector an appropriate opportunity to be directly involved and it is planned that the new arrangements for supporting the VCS will be structured around an agreed vision statement, four key outcomes within an outcome based approach and underpinned by priorities and proposals in relation to specific support arrangements which are collectively designed to support the VCS over the period 2017-2021 contribute to the development of arrangements.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
25	We will, with the support of DAERA, approve detailed actions plans for the delivery of Sport Matters that will include provision for sport in rural areas and amongst rural dwellers.	DfC		M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	The Department continues to ensure that the provision of sports and leisure activities are available to all, including amongst rural dwellers, through the Sport Matters Strategy. As part of this, DfC and Sport NI have engaged with the Rural Community Network and DAERA to identify opportunities for promoting sport in rural areas and how the Strategy may help to address issues relevant to rural communities eg geographical isolation from facilities. Sport NI's Active Communities programme and its replacement Everybody Active from April 16, are delivered in partnerships with Councils and designed to provide under-represented groups with better opportunities to participate in sporting activities within each Council area. Sport NI is also working with Councils to develop a Sports Facilities Strategy and Council Area Plans which will identify the sports facilities need for all Council areas. Already work has commenced on DfC capital investment to provide a Sports Centre/Community Hub for the rural community in Dungiven. A revised Sport Matters Action Plan was approved in December 2015 which identifies further key actions to be delivered by partners over the next five years, including for rural communities. A celebrating sport event was held in Enniskillen in March 16, and involved schools from across the rural community in the Fermanagh Area. Within the last period, DCAL funded a programme for promoting equality, tackling poverty and social exclusion through sport. Funding was distributed to UCGAA (£80k), UBIRFU (£114k) and IFA (£80k) the last year, ending on 31st March 2016. A number of elements of this programme had been rolled out across rural areas, including community gyms in surrounding rural areas, such as Ballynahinch. In addition to this programme the Department agreed to support an Antrim GAA Centre of Participation at Dunsilly (£800k) providing a range of facilities for community activities for use within the surrounding rural area.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
27	Working with the Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI), we will ensure a geographic spread across its programmes.	DfC, ACNI	NI Screen	L
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	The Arts and Older People Programme, Intercultural Grants Programme and Small Grants Programmes are all ongoing and continue to ensure a good geographic spread of programming.			<i>Update</i>
34	We will promote and develop further 'Shared Future' housing in rural areas.	DfC		S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	Within the TEO Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC) Strategy, The Department is committed to creating 10 new shared neighbourhood developments. There are two rural sites among the current 10 sites being taken forward for development: Crossgar Road, Saintfield and Main Street, Dundrum. Crossgar Road is now complete with 12 new homes being allocated. The Dundrum scheme went on site in March 2016 and is due to complete in December 2017, delivering 17 new homes. The Department continues to work with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the Housing Association movement to identify additional potential sites for inclusion in the T:BUC Shared Neighbourhood programme.			<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.	DfC		M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	DfC continues to monitor rural housing issues elsewhere- North/South and East/West- and fund pilots projects based on their findings. During 2015 the NIHE carried out a review of the 'Rural Homes and People' policy in order to address the specific housing needs of rural communities. A consultation exercise was completed and the responses are being considered to inform the Rural Action Plan 2016-2020.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
36	We will continue to improve housing conditions in rural areas (subject to funding).	DfC		O
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
Update	During the 2015/16 financial year, of the 1,568 new social homes started in Northern Ireland, 148 were in rural areas. This was an increase of 24% in rural new starts from the previous year which, in monetary terms, equated to some £9.7 million of Housing Association Grant invested in new social housing schemes in the rural parts of Northern Ireland. There is currently a gross programme of 192 units planned to start in rural areas in 2016/17.			Update
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.	DfC		S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
Update	During the first half of 2016 NIHE carried out public consultation on the draft proposals for our new Rural Strategy seeking to build on the success of the 2013-16 Rural Action Plan and taking advantage of the opportunities that community planning will present to work collaboratively to support and invest in our rural communities. 'Sustainable Rural Communities' the Housing Executive's Rural Strategy & Action Plan 2016-2020 has been shaped by public consultation and focused discussions with internal and external stakeholders. It will be formally launched in October/November 2016 although work has already commenced on many of the 43 actions included within the action plan. The Housing Executive believes that the strategy should contribute to our overarching vision for rural housing: 'Vibrant, shared, healthy and sustainable rural communities where everyone has access to decent and affordable housing'.			Update

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
38	We will better identify and tackle the causes of poverty and disadvantage in rural areas and to promote social inclusion.	DfC/DAERA		M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
Update	A co-design approach was utilised to afford The Sector an appropriate opportunity to be directly involved and It is planned that the new arrangements for supporting the VCS will be structured around an agreed vision statement, four key outcomes within an outcome based approach and underpinned by priorities and proposals in relation to specific support arrangements which are collectively designed to support the VCS over the period 2017-2021 contribute to the development of arrangements.			Update
39	We will ensure that the new fuel poverty strategy takes account of the particular needs of rural households and houses.	DfC		S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
Update	Fuel poverty strategy under review in 2016/17. Rural dimension being considered			Update
40	We will promote action to address inequalities in accessing alternative cost effective fuel in rural areas.	DfC/DfE		M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
Update	DfE led - DfC supportive of local groups who bulk buy fuel to reduce costs.			Update

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
41	We will develop integrated regional and local community development structures which have a strong rural component.	DfC		M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
Update	A co-design approach was utilised to afford The Sector an appropriate opportunity to be directly involved and It is planned that the new arrangements for supporting the VCS will be structured around an agreed vision statement, four key outcomes within an outcome based approach and underpinned by priorities and proposals in relation to specific support arrangements which are collectively designed to support the VCS over the period 2017-2021 contribute to the development of arrangements.			Update
47	We will enable a broad and diverse range of the population to participate in culture, arts and leisure activities.	DfC ACNI SportNI LibrariesNI	ALBS	L
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
Update	DfC through Sport NI and in partnership with local councils, sports governing bodies, community and voluntary organisations and schools, continues to provide opportunities for people to participate in leisure activities through a range of programmes which target under-represented groups, including rural communities. eg Active Communities/Everybody Active, Active Awards for Sport, Activ8, Active Clubs etc. DfC and Sport NI are also working with 25 partner organisations, including DAERA, to implement the Sports Matters Strategy. DfC and DAERA official have also been working closely together to explore the provision of sporting facilities in rural areas. A revised Sport Matters Action Plan was approved in December 2015 and includes steps to be taken over next 5 years of Sport Matters Strategy. This includes work with NI Outdoor Recreation to support the implementation of its Action Plan 'Our Great Outdoors'. Libraries NI - has developed a number of initiatives to ensure that those from rural communities are able to engage with culture, arts and leisure activities. These include the provision of 29 libraries in rural areas as well as access to 16 mobile libraries and 10 home call vehicles. Libraries NI has successfully introduced a new timetable which has greatly improved access to and use of its mobile libraries. In addition the range of services provided by the libraries has been enhanced			Update
	Continued on next page ...			

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
<i>Update</i>	Continued ... by the introduction of a new IT system (E2). Libraries NI also works closely with DAERA through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to promote library use and contribute to the sustainability of rural communities. In addition Libraries NI, with DAERA funding (£20k), has extended provision of the Health in Mind programme in its rural libraries. The libraries in Carnlough and Fintona have been refurbished and new libraries have opened in Lisnaskea and Moira. Libraries NI continues to work with the local Rural Support Networks on local initiatives. The Arts and Older People Programme, Intercultural Grants Programme and Small Grants Programmes are all ongoing and continue to ensure that a broad and diverse range of the population participate in arts and culture.			<i>Update</i>
59	We will work to further disseminate and develop the Líofo Initiative in rural areas by organising 3 localised Líofo launches outside of Belfast and Londonderry and facilitate rural learning where local classes might be unavailable by ensuring that online Irish language courses are signposted on the Department's website.	DfC		M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	Líofo engaged with a number of GAA clubs and community groups in rural areas in an effort to encourage Líofo sign ups and Irish classes in those areas. We will organise 3 localised Líofo launches outside of Belfast and Londonderry and facilitate rural learning where local classes might be unavailable by ensuring that online Irish language courses are signposted on the Department's website.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
85	We will seek to increase the contribution made by rural tourism by promoting the sustainable use of our natural and built heritage. We will also seek to increase the number of visits to historic monuments located in the countryside by improving access for visitors and undertaking more effective marketing.	DfC		M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	At Tullaghoge Fort, County Tyrone, new visitor facilities, including parking, interpretation along with safer road access and DDA-compliant pathways were opened to the public on 15 June 2016. Work continues to improve the access arrangements across the suite of State Care Monuments, most of which are located within the countryside. Opening arrangements are advertised through the DiscoverNI website, and a programme of events and activities for Archaeology Days and European Heritage Open Days has been developed for launch later in the summer. Works are in development phases with local council and key local stakeholder groups to develop longer-term Landscape Partnership Projects, including Lough Erne Landscape Partnership; works to be completed later this summer as part of an operational phase in the Lough Neagh Landscape Partnership at Church Island. Continued participation in the Strangford Lough Landscape Partnership and the Ring of Gullion Landscape Partnership, which has included access to and use of State Care Monuments and other publicly-accessible heritage sites (buildings and monuments) in those areas.			<i>Update</i>

Department for the Economy

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.	DfE		L
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	Lantra, Sector Skills Council, specialises in training courses and qualifications for the land-based and environmental sector and is seeking to deliver on the RWP in terms of training opportunities. Lantra offers a broad range of training courses and qualifications to meet industry requirements delivered/ assessed by a network of approved training providers/ instructors. There are currently 35 Lantra approved centres in NI offering a wide range of courses. From January 2016 to June 2016 - 1,252 learners completed a Lantra Awards training course/ qualification.			<i>Update</i>
14	We will continue to support innovative ways of improving broadband quality in rural areas through the operation of the Broadband Fund.	DfE		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 providing improvements in access to a basic broadband service for at least 45,000 premises across Northern Ireland by the end of 2015. The contract for this project (The Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement Project) was awarded on 4 February 2014, was delivered in eight phases and completed in of 31 December 2015. To date just over 41,000 premises across Northern Ireland had benefited from the infrastructure improvements delivered by this project.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
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.	DfE		S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within 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. 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 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.	DfE		O
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	DfE awarded a contract to BT on 4 February 2014 to deliver the Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement Project (NIBIP) to improve access to fixed-line broadband services for 45,000 premises by 31 December 2015 (See 14 above). In February 2015, the Department awarded a further contract to BT for delivery of the Superfast Roll-out Programme which aims to extend the reach of broadband services with speeds of at least 24 Megabits per second to a further 39,000 premises across Northern Ireland by 31 December 2017. In developing these projects the Department has worked closely with the telecommunications industry and the regulator and has conducted full public consultations on the intervention areas.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
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.	DfE		0
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	DfE has secured an allocation of £4.4m under the Broadband UK initiative which is being used, in conjunction with other funding sources, including the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the Northern Ireland Sustainable Competitiveness Programme, to deliver the objectives of the NI Broadband Improvement Project (see 14 above). DfE also secured just over £7m from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) which, matched with a similar amount from DfE, is being used to deliver the Superfast Roll-out Programme. DfE officials continue to liaise with their DCMS colleagues on these projects and potential opportunities for additional funding that could be used to further upgrade the Northern Ireland telecommunications infrastructure. DfE officials also assisted their DCMS counterparts in the delivery of the Mobile Infrastructure Project (MIP) and the Super-Connected Cities Programme; as they take forward reform of the Electronic Communications Code; and as they implement the EU Directive on reducing the costs of deploying high speed broadband and develop plans for the introduction of a Universal Service Obligation for Broadband.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
18	We will examine options to maintain 100% access to at least a first generation broadband service across the region on expiry of the existing Remote Broadband Services Contract.	DfE		M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	In January 2012, Onwave Ltd was appointed for a period of three-years ending on to offer a range of satellite broadband products which would meet the needs of consumers who were experiencing difficulties in accessing broadband services via other means. While the Department's contract with Onwave has expired, it is understood that they are continuing to offer products with download speeds of 20Mbps and price differentiation based on the level of data allowance required. Through the NI Broadband Fund, DfE has supported a number of projects which have extended the availability of fixed-wireless broadband networks offering services of between 3Mbps and 100Mbps. Additionally under the NIBIP contract, in areas where fixed-line broadband is not viable and where speeds are less than 2Mbps, DfE has a scheme in place ("NI Better Broadband Scheme") to subsidise the cost of installation of satellite or wireless broadband, including first year monthly charges - up to a maximum of £350.			<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.	DfE		M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	In March 2011 DfE commenced a full public consultation of its Telecoms Action Plan, for the period 2011-2015, which included seven public meetings in Armagh, Ballymena, Belfast, Enniskillen, Londonderry, Newcastle and Omagh. As part of that process, it also published details of its impact screening, on which comments were also sought. Fifty written responses were received and a formal response to these was published on the Department's website in September 2011, including responses to any impact related comments. In addition, individual responses were issued to a number of stakeholders, who submitted detailed replies, or made representations at the public meeting events. With regard to the NI Broadband Improvement Project, two public consultations were run, in order to obtain views on the proposed intervention area (October 2012 and June 2013). A consultation on the Superfast Broadband Programme Phase 2 was taken forward in August/September 2014. DfE carried out a public consultation on its proposed telecommunications activities for the period 2015-2017 ('Continuing to Connect - Telecoms 2015-2017').			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
40	We will promote action to address inequalities in accessing alternative cost effective fuel in rural areas.	DfC/DfE		M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	The Gas to the West project will extend the natural gas network in Northern Ireland to the main towns in the West, providing an additional fuel choice for business and domestic consumers and easier budgeting options for households through the use of gas pre-payment meters to help spread energy costs. The Utility Regulator awarded licences to developers Mutual Energy and SGN in February 2015 to take the project forward. Construction on the new gas pipeline to Strabane is well advanced with gas connection expected to be available at Artigarvan in late 2016 and in Strabane from April 2017. Subject to planning and other consents, works on the new gas infrastructure to other towns in the West is due to start in 2017. In December 2015, the Utility Regulator also approved an extension to Phoenix Natural Gas' licence which will bring natural gas to 13 towns and villages in East Down, and a new pipeline has been provided to Ballygowan as part of this project.			<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.	DfE		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 2014/15 academic year there were 4,207 regulated enrolments leading to recognised qualifications in respect of those aged 55 and above. Within this, there were 1,447 enrolments in respect of those aged 65 and over. In addition, there were 9,386 and 4,583 enrolments for these two age groups on non-regulated courses in FE colleges. (These are the latest validated college enrolment figures).			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
52	We will seek to secure local access to higher education through an equitable distribution of maximum student number places across all of the Further Education colleges.	DfE		L
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	DEL carried out the 2016 College Development Plan process. Colleges submitted their report on their HE in FE performance in 2015/16 and their plans for HE delivery in 2016/17. Meetings were held with colleges' senior management to discuss the plans and these informed a review of the maximum student number (MaSN) allocations across the colleges. The aim of the review was to ensure an equitable and rational distribution of HE in FE places across NI. Despite budgetary reductions the Department has been able to maintain the same level of full-time higher education provision in most regional colleges in academic year 2016/17 and have increased Northern Regional College HE in FE places by 24. Northern Regional College covers a large geographical area which includes a substantial rural portion.			<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'.	DfE		O
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	A key recommendation from the Hunter Review, an independent review of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (now renamed Tourism NI) and wider tourism structures commissioned in 2014 was that the Northern Ireland Executive should publish an updated strategy for tourism at an early date. Work on developing a new tourism strategy is well underway. There has been significant stakeholder engagement as part of the strategy development process - which included six regional workshops across Northern Ireland in February 2016 and a further series of action planning sessions during May 2016. Engagement with the Minister on the proposed vision for tourism to 2025 and outline action plan is underway. It is anticipated that the draft Tourism Strategy to 2025 will go out for public consultation later in 2016.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
67	Invest NI will continue to support investment in tourism accommodation and work closely with other investment stream funders to avoid duplication of public investment.	DfE		O
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	Invest NI continues to offer support for selected tourism accommodation development. While number of applications and approvals remain low, support for development of competitiveness in existing client businesses continues. Invest NI continues to liaise with other funders on a case by case basis to ensure no duplication of public funds. DfE in conjunction with Invest NI and Tourism NI has completed a review of future accommodation needs. Consultation process has concluded and a revised policy for intervention will be published after completion of the tourism strategy.			<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.	DfE		O
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	Invest NI and Tourism NI continue to work with DAERA and others, notably new Local Councils, on an ongoing basis to support and develop rural businesses. Tourism NI has ensured that each new council has a dedicated Tourism NI regional manager to support tourism development at a local level. In three council areas, that include a rural tourism offering, TNI is co-locating a dedicated regional manager to support local tourism development and business engagement activity.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
69	We will continue to work with others to ensure a co-ordinated approach to rural tourism development.	DfE		O
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	Under the new Rural Development Programme (RDP 2014-2020) funding has been allocated to rural economic development that will offer the opportunity for funding streams to be targeted at tourism infrastructure, small business development and with additional potential scope for tourism related projects through village renewal schemes. TNI will liaise with Local Councils in the development of Local tourism strategies in the context of Council's Community Plans. Local Advisory Groups, as funding mechanisms for rural economic development projects, will have a role in this process.			<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.	DfE		O
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	Access to business support tools through a physical network of Invest NI Regional Offices, currently with 8 points of presence across NI; and through a multi-channel contact strategy for the NI business base (access through web, telephone, mobile, text etc; examples being nibusinessinfo website and Invest NI's Freephone no. 0800 1814422). As a Statutory Partner in the Community Planning process Invest NI is working closely with Local Councils and other stakeholders on developing the economic strand of the plans which will focus on the specific needs of the Council areas including their rural nature.			<i>Update</i>
71	We will continue to work with DAERA 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.	DfE	DoF	O
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	This work is ongoing, including briefings to staff in CPD and COPEs.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
72	We will work with industry to develop and implement a strategic action plan for the agri-food sector.	DAERA/DfE	A&AF	S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	Departments will continue to work with industry to implement the strategic action plan as outlined in 2014 in the NI Executive response to the "Going for Growth" Agri food report (published in 2013). The majority of actions are interdependent and reliant on a number of measures being delivered through a collective approach both within individual sectorial supply chains and between industry and government.			<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.	DfE		O
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	Innovation vouchers are worth £5000 and allow businesses to access expertise from public sector Knowledge Providers to solve business issues. There are generally four calls for applications per year and these are widely promoted throughout NI. 268 vouchers were awarded during 2015/16. 54 vouchers have been awarded this year 2016/17 to date and assessment is ongoing from the June call. There will be 2 further calls later this year (September 2016 and February 2017).			<i>Update</i>
74	Through MATRIX we will continue to provide information and foresight to help rural businesses find new markets and opportunities.	DfE		O
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	MATRIX has undertaken two separate (but overlapping) foresight studies to identify future global market opportunities which NI companies, including rural businesses, can exploit. The studies focused on the Digital/ICT sector and Advanced Manufacturing Materials and Engineering (AMME). The Digital/ICT report was launched in February 2016 and the findings of the AMME study will be published in the near future.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
75	We will continue to work with the Agri Food and Biosciences Institute and DAERA to encourage knowledge and technology transfer to rural businesses and to leverage support under the EU Framework Programme.	DfE	DAERA/ AFBI	O
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
Update	This work is ongoing using H2020 Contact Point Network.			Update
76	We will continue to work with DAERA, rural communities and the Social Economy Network to promote the social economy sector in rural areas.	DfE	DAERA/ AFBI	S
Status	Amber = Implementation commenced but is slower than anticipated			
Update	Work continues through the Social Economy Policy Group to bring forward proposals to further support the sector as part of the implementation of the RDP 2014-2020.			Update
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.	DfE		S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
Update	This work continues through funding Social Enterprise NI as the representative body of the sector. Social Enterprise NI continue to share learning and best practice through events such as showcase days held in rural areas.			Update

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
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.	DfE		O
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	Responsibility for Social Entrepreneurship transferred to Councils on the 1 April 2015 although Invest NI continued to manage the Social Entrepreneurship Programme (SEP) until its completion in July 2015. Invest NI has continued to consult with Councils pre and post April 2015 to ensure a smooth transition of functions. In June 2016 Invest NI published and shared the findings and recommendations of SEP with both Councils and operators of the Social Economy Hubs as well as wider stakeholders within the social economy sector.			<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.	DfE		L
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	During the last year, Connected has continued to link with AFBI and CAFRE across its project work, in particular through a suite of live sector specific projects in the agri-food arena. These currently include projects led by Southern Regional College (Food Innovation), North West Regional College (Food Development, Business Generation & Support) and South Eastern Regional College (Environmental Skills).			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
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.	DfE		O
Status	Amber = Implementation commenced but progress is slower than anticipated			
<i>Update</i>	Following prolonged discussions with Regulator, System Operator (SONI), Northern Ireland Electricity Networks and informal dialogue with European Commission, work to examine the potential to use 2014-2020 ERDF funding for grid investment will not proceed. Investment in the electricity grid continues under regulatory Price Determination arrangements. Work is also progressing on the System Operator led DS3 ("Delivering a Secure, Sustainable Electricity System) programme. DS3 is the programme aimed at developing new system operational policies and tools to manage the increasing complexity associated with integrating large amounts of renewable generation on the electricity grid while keeping the grid safe and secure. Funding arrangements for DS3 are also subject to regulatory oversight.			<i>Update</i>
89	We will continue to ensure a joined up approach to achieving the full potential offered by renewable energy solutions.	DfE		O
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	Consultation on small scale ROC levels proposed no change to existing ROC levels for AD, wind and hydro, but a reduction for PV. Consultation response issued in January 2015. Three closure orders have now been introduced to close the NIRO: a Closure Order came into operation on 30 September 2015 to close the NIRO to non-wind technologies on 31 March 2017; a Closure Order came into operation on 17 March 2016 to close the NIRO to new large scale wind on 31 March 2016; and, a Closure Order came into operation on 29 June 2016 to close the NIRO to new small scale wind on 30 June 2016.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
90	We will work towards extending the natural gas network to main towns in the West and to East Down, to offer energy consumers additional fuel choice, along with the cost and efficiency benefits associated with natural gas.	DfE		S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	Construction work on the first phase of the Gas to the West project, a new gas pipeline from Maydown to Strabane, is well advanced with gas connection expected to be available at Artigarvan in late 2016 and in Strabane from April 2017. It is anticipated that work to connect other towns in the West to gas will commence in 2017, subject to the developer obtaining planning and other consents. Phoenix Natural Gas has provided a new pipeline to connect Ballygowan to gas, and the company will be progressing connection of other towns in East Down.			<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>	The statutory Curriculum prescribes a number of high-level Areas of Learning (AoLs) as the minimum to be taught across each Key Stage, combining skills, knowledge and understanding. Teachers have considerable freedom to decide on the specific content to be taught under each AoL as well as the resources or programmes they use in their delivery of the curriculum. While all AoLs have to be covered, the curriculum does include an access statement which allows teachers to modify/adapt their teaching to meet the needs of individual pupils thus providing equality of opportunity and access for all.			<i>Update</i>
29	We will ensure that post primary school pupils in rural areas have access to a wide range of courses at 14 and 16 and to promote collaborative working amongst schools serving rural areas to achieve full delivery of the Entitlement Framework.	DE		S
Status	Green = Implementation achieved			
<i>Update</i>	Full implementation of the Entitlement Framework became statutory from September 2015. Funding, as a contribution to costs, to provide pupils with equality of access to a broad range of economically relevant and engaging courses supported by high quality, timely careers advice continued in the 2016-17 financial year. Contributions were weighted in order to ensure that rural schools received a higher rate. In 2016-17 DE will also continue to provide funding to support schools actively working in Area Learning Communities to ensure the needs of all pupils in the area are met, and to more easily facilitate collaborative working including in rural areas.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
30	We will continue, through the Extended schools Programme, to support breakfast clubs and after schools clubs in rural communities.	DE		O
Status	Green = Implementation achieved			
Update	In the 2015-16 financial year, £10.65m was made available through the Extended Schools (ES) programme enabling eligible schools to provide a wide range of interventions and learning support activities outside of the school day in accordance with priority needs identified, including breakfast clubs and after schools clubs. Approximately 30% of schools receiving ES funding in 2015-16 (160 schools) were located in rural areas.			Update
31	We will encourage school owners and promoters, through the publication of a DE guidance document targeted at increasing community use of schools facilities, to seek opportunities to provide “out of hours” opportunities for the use of the wide range of facilities available in schools for the benefit of children and the wider community.	DE		S
Status	Green = Implementation achieved			
Update	DE published guidance in January 2014 entitled <i>Community Use of Schools: A Guidance Toolkit for Schools</i> which is designed to encourage and support schools in providing community access to school facilities (when not otherwise required for education purposes). Over 80% of schools currently report that they make their premises available to local communities. The Education Act (NI) 2014 also places a statutory duty on the Education Authority (so far as its powers extend) to encourage, facilitate and promote the community use of premises of grant-aided schools. An EA standing committee was appointed in early 2016 to exercise these functions.			Update

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
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 achieved			
<i>Update</i>	The Education Authority with overall responsibility for planning along with CCMS and sector support bodies are engaged in Area Planning governance at a Local Group, Working Group and Steering Group level and are actively engaging with all communities affected by potential change in education provision. The Sustainable Schools Policy which drives Area Planning takes account of the specific needs of rural communities.			<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 achieved			
<i>Update</i>	Area Planning is ongoing and Planning Authorities are actively engaging with all communities affected by potential change in education provision. An Area Planning Cycle has been agreed and Area Plans and accompanying Annual Action Plans will be subject to DE scrutiny.			<i>Update</i>
51	We will explore innovative and creative solutions to the delivery of education provision in rural areas through the area based planning approach.	DE		M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	Area Planning Guidance requires Planning and Managing authorities to explore all options to secure viable and sustainable solutions for the provision of education in all areas. The Shared Education Campus Programme provides capital investment for shared education campus projects and guidance is in place for jointly managed schools. These innovative models of provision provide opportunities for schools to come together to secure long term provision in rural areas.			<i>Update</i>

Department of Finance

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
20	We will work with other government Departments to explore better opportunities for <i>nidirect</i> to support rural dwellers.	DoF		S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	NI Direct Digital Transformation Programme is working with a number of departments to develop on-line access to government services allowing rural dwellers to complete transactional processes at a place and time of their choosing.			<i>16 by 16 Programme Delivered by March 2016.</i>
21	We will reduce barriers to access online services.	DoF		S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	Go ON NI Rural event to be delivered in partnership with DAERA in Enniskillen Campus. Spring on Line week April 2016 - sessions to be delivered rurally in partnership with SCNI. Silver Surfers Days activities and IT sessions to be delivered in libraries and community centres throughout NI including targeted rural locations as well as urban. Go ON NI roadshow to attend Young at Heart event May 2016 in Lurgan that will encompass the mid Ulster area. Carers Pilot to be delivered in Northern Trust rural locations to assist carers with digital skills. Four Intergenerational programmes in partnership with LGNI in two rural and two urban schools. All programmes/sessions aim to educate citizens on online use and address the barriers of digital exclusion and promote the benefits of being online.			<i>All delivered under Go ON NI programme.</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
82	We will work closely with DAERA to ensure our statistics are disseminated in a format which supports effective rural policy making.	DoF/NISRA	DAERA	S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	<p>NI Neighbourhood Information Service (NINIS) www.nisra.gov.uk/ninis continues to allow rural (and urban) communities across NI free access to high quality official statistics on their local area. The website contains a series of Frequently Asked Questions on urban/rural issues including the Review of the Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements. In May 2016, NINIS exhibited at the Balmoral Show to promote the availability of statistics to the rural (and urban) communities. A NINIS training event was also held at the Rural Community Network in February 2016. A NINIS e-zine is circulated widely to DAERA staff and rural community networks. New guidance for producing statistics for Settlement 2015 and/or urban-rural classifications was published by NISRA in May 2016; this guidance is accompanied by lookup tables which are available under the 'People and Places' theme on NINIS. Interactive maps on urban/rural classifications for Settlements and Small Areas were also published on NINIS.</p> <p>NISRA is also undertaking a review of deprivation measures with the support of expert users and a Steering Group comprised of representatives from all Government Departments and from a wide range of Non-Departmental Public Bodies and District Councils. Work to date has focused on investigating the indicators to be included within each of the seven deprivation domains, methodological development and securing access to essential data. It is planned to publish a consultation document in the autumn, setting out detailed proposals for the update, followed by a number of public consultation events. Thereafter, the updated deprivation measures will be produced with the aim of publishing results in mid 2017, along with detailed supporting guidance for users. Tailored dissemination events will also be scheduled as appropriate to ensure that the results reach the widest possible audience and are both fully understood and utilised. NISRA is also using its website and social media to keep key stakeholders updated on the progress of the update.</p>	<i>Update</i>		

Department of Health

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
22	We will work with DAERA to roll out a programme of community based health checks and information targeting farm families across all HSC Trust areas.	DoH	DAERA	S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	During the reporting period, the Farm Families Health Check programme attended 75 farmers marts and 66 community events. A total of 2,901 clients attended for a health check with 1,027 subsequently advised to see their GP. The programme was subject to a comprehensive evaluation which highlighted how valuable the programme has been to the rural community.			<i>Update</i>
23	We will work in partnership with DAERA to support rolling out the 'Maximising Access to and uptake of Grants Benefits and Services Project'.	DoH	DAERA	S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	The MARA Project has been extended until September 2016. Thirteen Lead Organisations continue to deliver the MARA project. For the period July 1st 2015 to June 30th 2016 MARA Extended has conducted a total of 3,046 First Household Visits and 2,370 Follow Up Visits. The first visits have generated a total of 7,277 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.	DoH		L
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	The Public Health Agency continues to consult with residents across all rural areas in the planning and design of service specifications for its new services. Consultations are facilitated in venues throughout Northern Ireland including rural areas to enable all residents to attend and provide their views.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
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.	DoH		S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	Partnership structures exist in all 5 HSCT areas to enable inclusion of the views of both urban and rural communities in the development and implementation of health improvement and promotion strategies.			<i>Update</i>
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.	DoH	DAERA	S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	The PHA has adopted a community development strategy to strategically influence the way in which its work is developed and implemented.			<i>Update</i>
46	We will work with DAERA to explore the impact of rurality, isolation and deprivation on health inequalities.	DoH	DAERA	M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	Work ongoing with DAERA TRIPSI Team.			<i>Update</i>
80	We will engage with DAERA, 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.	DoH		L
Status	Red = Implementation not achieved and/or not expected to be achieved			
<i>Update</i>	Programme stopped until further notice.			<i>Update</i>

Department for Infrastructure

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.	Dfi	All Departments	S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	The Department is procuring new ferries to replace two existing ferries [one for the Ballycastle - Rathlin Island ferry service and one for Portaferry - Strangford ferry service] that are reaching the end of their operational life. The new ferries will enable the Department to continue to provide essential transport services to the rural community. The Department has also produced Accessibility Analysis data for each local council. This information will help feed into each council's emerging Local Development Plan in terms of analysing connectivity and how settlements are served by public transport. The restructuring of government departments and the recent formation of new councils significantly changes the monitoring environment of the Regional Development Strategy 2035. In light of this we propose to revisit our approach to monitoring to provide for appropriate input and engagement from local government. In addition we also propose to explore how the monitoring report can be used to provide a more robust assessment of delivery.			<i>Update</i>
2	We will maintain the road infrastructure to keep it safe, effective and reliable within the limitations of available funding.	Dfi		O
Status	Amber = Implementation commenced but progress is slower than anticipated			
<i>Update</i>	DFI provided limited routine maintenance service due to funding constraints for much of the period. Starting capital position for 16/17 is reasonable allowing resurfacing and surface dressing programmes to be implemented. The outcome of June monitoring will lead to enhanced routine maintenance services (additional £5m) and a £10m programme of small scale resurfacing on rural roads to deal with the most needy areas.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
9	We will contribute to the delivery of the new Regional Transportation Strategy (RTS) which has a strategic objective of improving access in rural areas. Following adoption of a new RTS an implementation plan post 2015 will be developed to include programmes of measures designed to achieve this strategic objective. This may include road improvements, more innovative public transport services, more Park & Ride sites, better management of our transportation networks and improved road safety measures.	Dfi		L
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	This will be taken forward as Departmental delivery plans for the new Programme for Government are developed.			<i>Update</i>
10	We will work with other stakeholders in developing a comprehensive information service for rural public transport services.	Dfi	DE, DAERA, DoH & Translink	M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	Translink provide services to the rural areas of Northern Ireland through its Ulsterbus network. Information for these routes is widely available through Translink's timetable information which includes their website, mobile phone applications and printed materials. Further to this and in conjunction with Translink's role in the Rural Transport Fund, under the auspices of the 2012-2015 Financial Memorandum, marketing and promotional activity continued to be carried out to provide information and promote those Ulsterbus services subsidised under the grant-in-aid arrangements. This included production and distribution via 'micro marketing' of printed material to stakeholders and passengers, in addition to regionally targeted advertisements and press releases, and collaborative stakeholder engagement. This scheme ended on 30 September 2015.			<i>Update</i>

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
11	Subject to enactment of the Transport Bill we will develop local public transport plans aimed at ensuring the effective use of rural public transport.	Dfl	DE, DAERA, DoH & Translink	M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
Update	Dfl staff are currently engaged with local council staff in the development of local transport plans integrated with Local Development Plans. The local transport plans will identify the role for public transport and take account of the work being progressed under Action 12.			Update
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.	Dfl	DE, DAERA, DoH & Translink	M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
Update	<p>As part of the NICS Cross-cutting Reform Programme, a cross-organisational steering group has been set up to oversee the implementation of the changes necessary to better integrate passenger transport services. They have agreed two strands of work as follows: (1) Strand 1: Led by Translink and the Education Authority, this work involves the integrated planning and delivery of the scheduled public transport services operated by Translink and the school transport services operated by the Education Authority using large and medium-sized bus fleets. The scope of this work involves examining the short-term improvements that could be introduced in order to assist both organisations to live within the reduced resources available to them and also the longer-term benefits of integrating the two fleets.</p> <p>(2) Strand 2: Led by the Department for Infrastructure (Dfl), this strand of work involves the integrated planning and delivery of statutory, specialist and demand-responsive passenger transport services as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The specialist statutory and routine passenger transport services required by Health and Social Care Trust clients and the non-statutory transport required for Day Opportunities participants; • The specialist statutory transport services required by pupils with special educational needs and the pupil transport services delivered by minibuses in rural areas; and • The demand-responsive services funded by Dfl for people in urban areas who, because of their age or disability, cannot use mainstream public transport services and also the demand-responsive services provided to address the transport needs of people living in rural areas where there is limited or no access to mainstream public transport services. 			Update

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
13	We will examine options to provide financial assistance for householders in areas where no water main is near their homes to get a mains extension or have access to some other wholesome water supply.	Dfl		M
Status	Green = Implementation achieved			
Update	Under Article 76 of the Water and Sewerage Services (NI) Order 2006 NI Water has a duty to provide a public water main if required to do so by the owner or occupier of a domestic property. NI Water currently provides a Reasonable Cost Allowance (RCA) of around £2,000 per property. In addition, a Rural Borewells Scheme was carried out between June 2012 and March 2015. This was an innovative three-year programme carried out in partnership between the Department for Regional Development (DRD) and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD). The Scheme provided financial assistance towards the cost of a private borewell (and/or treatment) for rural households. It allowed householders to obtain a wholesome water supply where it was not technically or financially feasible to access the public water mains. During the three years of the Scheme, 74 householders, who could not access the public main, gained a wholesome water supply for the first time at a cost of £1.19million to the Department.			Update
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.	Dfl	Other named Departments	M
Status	Green = Implementation achieved			
Update	Work has been ongoing to produce a Revised Rathlin Island Action Plan. There has been extensive engagement which included three consultation days with the island community and key stakeholders. The Revised Action Plan is now at draft stage. Once published, it will provide a new framework for an integrated approach by the Executive in seeking to address the challenges faced by our only island community.			Update

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.	Dfi		L
Status	Green = Implementation achieved			
Update	<p>The Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 was commenced on 01 April and transferred responsibility for the majority of planning functions to the 11 newly formed councils. Each council must prepare and publish a statement of community involvement (SCI). The statement must set out the council's policy for involving the community in the exercise of its local development plan and planning control functions. To date, 8 councils have submitted and agreed their SCIs with the Department. The Department published its SCI for its planning functions on 30 March 2016.</p> <p>The Act also places a statutory requirement on developers to carry out pre-application community consultation on major development proposals before submitting a planning application to the council or Department.</p> <p>Under the Act the 11 councils will be responsible for preparing their own local development plans (LDP) which will set out the councils' vision for the future development in their districts. Before preparing their LDP councils must prepare a preferred options paper setting out a number of options for the future development in the district and the paper will be subjected to public consultation. Local communities will also be engaged at further key stages in the LDP process including the preparation of the Plan Strategy and Local Policies Plan. The councils must take into account any representations received when preparing their LDP. To date, 6 councils have submitted and agreed timetables for taking forward their local development plans with the Department.</p> <p>The Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) was published on 28th September 2015 and provides the strategic planning policy framework for the reformed two-tier planning system that became operational on 1 April 2015.</p>			Update

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
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.	Dfl		M
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
Update	<p>In relation to the policy development process Planning Policy Division (PPD) will continue to carry out Rural Proofing Screening and liaise with DAERA at the earliest opportunity to take advice on whether any further actions or mitigation measures are required.</p> <p>In addition, with the transfer of planning functions (from central government) on 1st April 2015, councils now have responsibility for preparing local development plans, making the majority of planning decisions, and shaping how their area grows and develops in ways that respond to the needs of the communities they serve. In doing so councils must take account of the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) and should also take account of the aims and objectives of the 2014-2020 Rural Development Programme (RDP).</p> <p>As the majority of RDP applications are now considered by councils, chief executives and planning managers have been encouraged to treat such applications with priority.</p> <p>The SPPS (published in September 2015) supports development, which enables social and economic development in rural areas, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and community projects where appropriate.</p> <p>A 'Call for Evidence' in relation to Development in the Countryside issued in March 2016 and closed on 6 May 2016. A variety of interests are reflected in the responses and these are currently being analysed. The Infrastructure Minister will then consider the appropriate next steps he wishes to take in relation to strategic planning policy for Development in the Countryside.</p>		Update	

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

Action No.	Action	Lead Dept	Support	Timeframe
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.	Dfi		S
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
Update	<p>Renewable energy is a key economic driver for Northern Ireland, particularly in rural areas. These types of applications include single wind turbines, wind farms, hydro-electric schemes, solar panels and biomass/anaerobic digesters.</p> <p>Planning policy for all types of renewable energy development in Northern Ireland is set out in the SPPS. The transitional arrangements of the SPPS ensure that Planning Policy Statement 18 'Renewable Energy' (PPS 18) is retained until a council adopts its new Plan Strategy of its LDP. However, any conflict between the SPPS and any policy retained under the transitional arrangements must be resolved in the favour of the provisions of the SPPS.</p> <p>A 'Call for Evidence' in relation to Renewable Energy issued in March 2016 and closed on 6 May 2016. A variety of interests are reflected in the responses received and these are currently being analysed. The Infrastructure Minister will then consider the appropriate next steps he wishes to take in relation to strategic planning policy for Renewable Energy Development.</p> <p>In addition, Departmental officials have prepared internal guidance notes for processing renewable energy applications (including wind farms/solar farms) which will provide useful advice and guidance to planning staff.</p>		Update	

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 commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	The Community Safety Strategy was agreed by the Justice Committee and the Executive in June 2012, and published on 26 July 2012. Subsequently action plans for each of the 8 strands of activity detailed in the Strategy, including business and rural crime, were developed and agreed by the Justice Committee on 17 January 2013. Updates on delivery of the action plans are provided to the Justice Committee on an annual basis. The third annual update was considered by the Justice committee on 21 April 2016. This update included actions taken at a strategic level to support safer rural communities, and prevent and reduce crime. This work has included daily data analysis of rural crime to identify specific trends in support of operations in local areas, specifically hotspots, the development of an initiative to help tackle the theft of farm machinery, cross departmental working on Traceability Assurance in the food chain including Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) training on livestock theft and the work of the Organised Crime Taskforce in addressing organised crimes affecting rural locations such as fuel laundering. Significant partnership working has also taken place in the areas of prevention, intervention and enforcement between the Rural Crime Partnership whose members include: Department of Justice, National Farmers Union Mutual, Ulster's Farmers Union, the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs and the PSNI. Statistical evidence shows a continuing downward trend in rural and agricultural crime.			<i>Update</i>
8	At a local level, partnerships such as Policing and Community Safety Partnerships will ensure that the needs of rural communities are reflected in policing and community safety action plans.	DoJ		L
Status	Green = Implementation commenced and on track to be achieved within timeframe			
<i>Update</i>	The Department of Justice and the Northern Ireland Policing Board jointly fund Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs), which are established by each Council in Northern Ireland, to make a positive difference to communities in the area, contribute to a reduction in crime and enhance community safety in the district.			<i>Update</i>

The Executive Office

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.	TEO		S
Status	Green = Implementation achieved			
<i>Update</i>	The Good Relations Strategy, Together Building a United Community was published on 23 May 2013. The strategy applies to all areas, including rural areas.			<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.	TEO		S
Status	Green = Implementation achieved			
<i>Update</i>	The Social Investment Fund was developed using a community led approach so that projects belong to and have the support of the communities they are seeking to help. The Executive agreed that the 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. SIF projects tackle poverty, unemployment and physical deterioration. The Social Investment Fund has made significant progress over the last year and to date funding has been committed to all 69 projects worth £80million.			<i>Update</i>
63	We will promote and encourage applications from rural areas for the Contested Spaces Programme.	TEO		S
Status	Green = Implementation achieved			
<i>Update</i>	As part of the second call for applications to the Contested Spaces Programme in July 2012, there was a strong emphasis on receiving applications from rural areas. The Contested Spaces Programme completed on 31 March 2015.			<i>Update</i>

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