



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Research and Information Service Briefing Paper

Paper 135/14

1st October 2014

NIAR 460-14

Mark Allen and Lynda Conlon

Current DARD Programmes/Supports specifically designed to address issues of rural poverty, rural isolation and farmer welfare

1 Background

This paper provides an overview of current DARD programmes which are specifically designed to address issues of rural isolation, rural poverty and farmer welfare.

Building upon previous papers under this theme, the briefing paper does not attempt to define rural isolation, rural poverty and farmer welfare, but rather reflects the approach that DARD is taking in relation to alleviate the issues.

The available types of support are presented within the context of the leading department being DARD, but as will be clear within the paper, there are notable examples of cross departmental working, and in such instances whilst primary reference will be made to the specific support under the lead department, the other departments involved will be identified.

The briefing identifies and quantifies support that DARD provides under the following 3 areas:

- Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Framework 2008-11/Tackling Poverty and Social Isolation Framework 2011-15;
- Rural Development Programme 2014-20; and
- Core funding support to Northern Ireland Women's Network (NIRWN) and Rural Community Network (RCN).

2 Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Framework 2008-11/Tackling Poverty and Social Isolation Framework 2011-15

The initial Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Framework ran between 2008 and 2011 and has been superseded by the Tackling Poverty and Social Isolation Framework which runs up until 2015. The overall aim of both Frameworks has been to ‘...*help the most vulnerable rural dwellers facing poverty and isolation.*’ Both frameworks have supported a range of measures and table 1 below outlines those that are currently running.

Table 1: Current DARD programmes/supports which are part of the Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Framework 2008-11/Tackling Poverty and Social Isolation Framework 2011-15

Measure	More detail on components	DARD spend to date (2011 to present)	Evaluation	Evaluation Recommendations/Discussion points/Observations
<p>Assisted Rural Travel Scheme (ARTS)– Contribution to ensure Smartpass can be used on rural community transport partnership vehicles so holders can travel either free or half fare on dial a lift service – rural specific extension of Dial a lift provision by DRD</p>	<p>members of Rural Community Transport Partnerships are enabled to access a range of local services including essential and social health appointments, community activities, education, religion, shopping centres, banks and regular social contact with relatives and friends.</p>	<p>2011-15 £2,010,000</p>	<p>Interim evaluation report – April 2012-September 2013</p> <p><i>‘Assisted Rural Travel Scheme can be viewed as making a positive contribution to reducing social exclusion and rural isolation’</i></p> <p><i>In period covered by interim evaluation there were a total of 278,654 ARTS supported journeys (among a total of 325,345 Dial-a-Lift trips) which indicates a willingness to use the service. This can be split between 181,698 ARTS supported journeys in 2012/13 (among a total of 214,570 Dial-a-</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the next evaluation covering the period Apr 11 – Mar 15 should revisit the assessment of need for the project in the context of usage and uptake of SmartPasses in rural areas to determine if there continues to be a substantial differential when compared with urban areas; • when risks are reviewed this should be minuted accordingly; • the final evaluation should include a survey of those who have used the Assisted Rural Travel Scheme to provide an overview of the impacts from a user perspective especially how it has impacted on social exclusion and rural isolation; • the final evaluation should establish the actual number of people who have used/benefitted from the scheme over the period of operation; and • the final evaluation should have clearer terms of reference looking at both policy and operational

Measure	More detail on components	DARD spend to date (2011 to present)	Evaluation	Evaluation Recommendations/Discussion points/Observations
			<p><i>Lift trips) and 96,056 ARTS supported journeys (among a total of 110,775 Dial-a-Lift) in the period Apr-Sep 2013</i></p> <p><i>Estimated that approximately 3,784 people directly benefitted from using the scheme in 2012/13 indicating an underlying need for the scheme.</i></p>	<p>aspects, with specific baselines and measures to ensure an easier assessment.</p>
<p>Farm Families Health Checks - one-stop mobile facility offering free health assessments to farm families – service delivered by the Public Health Agency utilising DARD and PHA funding – new standalone project</p>	<p>Undertaken at 31 markets and 31 community based events</p> <p>2 parts to health checks:</p> <p>Medical assessment (10-15 minutes) – conducted by qualified nurse and assesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • blood pressure; • weight and body mass index (BMI); • cholesterol; • blood sugar; • lung function; • mental wellbeing <p>Lifestyle assessment (5-10 minutes) - conducted by qualified nurse and provides an opportunity to discuss health issues with the nurse. Depending on your lifestyle, will receive tailored advice f on</p>	<p>2011-15 £412,000</p>	<p>Interim evaluation report - January 2014</p> <p><i>‘Analysis indicated that screening had a positive impact on clients’ lifestyle choices and health-related behaviour’</i></p> <p><i>‘portion of clients who raised concerns about their mental health was low ...However, half of the clients advised to see their GP about mental health concerns actually did so’</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • programme should continue to visit both farmers’ markets and community-based events in Northern Ireland to provide advice and signposting for a mix of clients. • may be opportunities to expand on the types of locations visited ensuring access to clients who are hardest to reach • Consideration could be given to excluding clients who have already attended their GP within the three months preceding • screening is particularly effective in identifying people with a high BMI, however this is the issue for which clients appear least likely to follow up with their GP, even when advised may be helpful if nurses could make clients aware of what GPs can do to help clients with weight for example referral to weight loss programme or physical activity initiatives • it would be beneficial to consider methods by which clients’ motivation to attend their GP could be improved.

Measure	More detail on components	DARD spend to date (2011 to present)	Evaluation	Evaluation Recommendations/Discussion points/Observations
	<p>smoking, healthy eating, physical activity and alcohol consumption. The nurse can also signpost participants to a service that can ensure they are getting the grants and benefits they are entitled to.</p> <p>Post these phases participants receive free, confidential and tailored health advice and information about steps they can take to improve their health and wellbeing.</p> <p>They also receive a copy of their results and with consent a copy is sent to their GP.</p> <p>If nurses advise participants to see their GP, the nurse coordinator will contact them by telephone within four weeks of the health checks to discuss their results and offer further support if required</p>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> recommended that the importance of standardised care is reiterated to any nurse involved in screening a proportion of clients may be unnecessarily referred to their GP Clients should be contacted for follow-up three months post-screening to ensure data quality is high and the effects of poor recall are minimised Follow-up of clients into the MARA project and other signposted services would provide further evidence of the effectiveness of the programme in providing clients further support
<p>MARA – Maximising Access to Services, Grants and Benefits in Rural Areas¹ – initially a pilot project with the Public Health</p>	<p>Utilises community networks and local knowledge to effectively identify and connect with people who could benefit from a household visit.</p> <p>No eligibility criteria for a MARA household visit. However, typically</p>	<p>2011-15 Phase2: £2,772,000</p>	<p>Yes October 2011 – completed by DeLoitte</p> <p><i>‘...project has provided value for money’</i></p> <p><i>The project has engaged with a significant number of rural</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued need - rationale for maximising access to those “most in need” remains and it is recommended that DARD through the Rural ANTI Poverty Strategy and Social Inclusion Framework should continue to provide a specific intervention to meet this need Identifying need - the community development approach to engaging those most in need should continue to be applied.

¹ [Mara Project Information Sheet](#)

Measure	More detail on components	DARD spend to date (2011 to present)	Evaluation	Evaluation Recommendations/Discussion points/Observations
<p>Agency in the Strabane area – now rolled out across NI – new programme and rural specific.- jointly funded by DARD and PHA with the PHA in the lead, but relies heavily on the Rural Support Network Structures. Phase 2 project running from March 2012-2015 which targets 12,000 vulnerable rural households across NI</p>	<p>householders that would benefit from a visit include older people, carers, disabled people, lone parents, ethnic minorities, lone adults, farming families and low income families</p> <p>People are given information on useful support and services, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rural community transport, • SmartPass, • warm homes/energy savings homes scheme, • occupational therapy assessments for disabled facilities grants, home safety checks, • benefits entitlement checks. 		<p><i>dweller. The households engaged on the project have been identified with local knowledge as vulnerable and in need of support. Many of those engaged may not otherwise have been supported in accessing the range of benefits, grants and services'</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying need - A procurement process should be established to identify local community organisations with the capacity, expertise and skills to deliver across a full zone • Identifying need - lead organisations identified through the tendering process are asked to establish/identify a plan to establish local zone based steering groups to identify and target households – group should include individuals and local organisations who have access to information on vulnerable households • Referral organisations/agencies - further work should be undertaken at strategic and operational level to ensure that all key stakeholders are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities • Referral organisations/agencies - consideration of partnerships between lead organisations and referral agencies at a local level to ensure consistency • Strengthening Collaboration – consideration should be given to taking opportunities to share best practice with agencies • Enablers – more robust selections criteria, more focus on some aspects of training and more interactive training, need for structures to monitor quality, and creation of an enabler forum. • Marketing the project -development of a full marketing plan, more proactive effort with local and regional media outlets • Sharing and learning best practice – consideration of development of a formal mechanism for sharing/learning – could include an intranet for stakeholders

Measure	More detail on components	DARD spend to date (2011 to present)	Evaluation	Evaluation Recommendations/Discussion points/Observations
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeting the hardest to reach – engage with range of regional representative organisations to develop a dialogue with particular hard to reach groups Referral tracking – all stakeholders should continue to work to ensure consistent referral tracking Householder feedback – systematic approach to collecting householder feedback over the longer terms should be introduced Strengthening quality – PHA/DARD should consider “best practice” for quality controls in working directly with “vulnerable individuals” Building Links/Relationships early – important to identify the key people who have extensive local knowledge and develop these relationships before going into the community
<p>Rural Challenge Programme 2012/13 - encourages rural community and voluntary groups to identify a local need and propose an initiative to address a poverty or social isolation issue within their rural community – New initiative funded and run by DARD building upon success of</p>	<p>Key criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the proposed service was needed by socially excluded groups; the proposed service was not currently being provided; and any barriers to uptake of the proposed service had been identified and addressed. <p>eligible items of expenditure’:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presenter costs 	<p>2011 -15 £127,000</p> <p>44 successful applicants with support up to a max of £10,000</p>	<p>Final Evaluation - November 2011 of initial challenge programme that ran from April 2010 to March 2011.</p> <p><i>Programme was successful in attracting a relatively broad range of projects, delivering a range of activities across Northern Ireland. A total of 78 projects were delivered across Northern Ireland for a spend of £300,785 providing activities and services for around 6,060 beneficiaries.</i></p> <p><i>key findings of this evaluation are that there is good evidence of</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Target to the lesser-represented groups - further round of funding could, therefore, include particular measures to encourage projects aimed at benefiting lone parents; minority ethnic people; the unemployed; and carers; and, potentially, older children and young people. Provide more time and dedicated support at the project development stage Cap the number of projects supported in line with the Programme manager resources available within the Division Develop and formalise relationships with other Programme or Policy managers. Incorporate a Claims Workshop into the delivery of the Programme Establish clear outcome measures in each supported project's Letter of Offer and ensure that systems are in place to routinely collect this data

Measure	More detail on components	DARD spend to date (2011 to present)	Evaluation	Evaluation Recommendations/Discussion points/Observations
pilot Rural Challenge Programme which ran from April 2010 to March 2011.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tutor costs ('train the trainer' approach being preferable) • Course development / material / consumables • Venue hire (if not own building) • Marketing / recruitment of target participants (excludes info / leaflets / booklets to be provided by delivery agent) • Refreshments • Transport (where not covered by SMART pass) • Administration of the scheme (no more than 10% of project cost); and • Minor capital works to enable lands or buildings to meet the needs of the user group, whereby such minor works are additional to previous works undertaken with public monies. 		<i>impact on a relatively large number of people for a relatively small investment. The Programme was delivered effectively, and with some passion, at all levels</i>	
Rural Support ² – DARD provides core funding to Rural Support to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • outreach activities to promote its services and provide support 	2011 -15 £305,000	Issues Paper, Rural Stress: Emerging Issues and Drivers of Change produced in October 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural Support must facilitate adaptive change. To do so, Rural Support must develop strategies and tools to empower its own staff and volunteers and

² [Rural Support website, 1st September 2014](#)

Measure	More detail on components	DARD spend to date (2011 to present)	Evaluation	Evaluation Recommendations/Discussion points/Observations
operate a helpline which provides a listening ear and signposting service for farmers and rural dwellers on range of issues including finance, benefits and health issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • presentations to raise awareness of stress • promotional materials • helpline • Research and Influencing Policy 		<p>Included evaluation of current activities</p> <p><i>Rural Support has achieved significant success with 86% of targets having been fully met and 14% having been partially achieved</i></p> <p><i>Consultation with internal and external stakeholders suggests that Rural Support provides a unique and valuable service</i></p>	<p>those rural residents it serves to better cope with the pressure and stresses that change will bring.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges and stress will persist. It is equally clear that the issues involved are diverse, complex, sometimes hidden, and not necessarily well understood. The work of Rural Support since its establishment more than 10 years ago and its continued need is to some extent at least, self-evident. Many have been and continue to be assisted. But the drivers are changing, the pressures increasing and the need expands. As this paper has demonstrated, we are good at what we do, but “How do we know what we don’t know?” • key components of such strategic use – more financial management training for staff and volunteers, a better means to link with younger men, disabled and family groups. This will be fleshed-out in our Strategic Plan
Rural Borewells ³ – provides financial assistance towards the installation of a private borewell (and/or appropriate treatment) in isolated rural areas to enable applicants to	-	<p>DRD provide majority of funding</p> <p>2011-15 - £750,000</p>	Not at present – scheduled to be completed by March 2016	-

³ [Explanatory notes, Rural Borewells Scheme 2014, DRD/DRD](#)

Measure	More detail on components	DARD spend to date (2011 to present)	Evaluation	Evaluation Recommendations/Discussion points/Observations
<p>obtain a wholesome water supply where this is not currently available and where accessing the public water mains network is not technically or financially possible – joint initiative with DRD – applications to the latest phase of the scheme closed at 4pm on Friday 30th May 2014 - maximum grant available per project under the Scheme is £12,000 – some 60 wells have been drilled to date.</p>				
<p>Rural Youth Entrepreneurship Programme (RYE) - aims to develop business potential among vulnerable young</p>	<p>Step 1 - Conduct a context analysis of the economic, business development and social situation in each region relevant to the development of youth enterprise.</p>	<p>2011-15 - £236,000</p>	<p>Pilot Project ended 31/03/2014 Evaluation completed and Business Case approved which supports a 2 year extension <i>As a pilot project, the approach adopted by RYE has been amended over time in order to</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arranging for a better resourced more hands on support during transitions (from workshop to online, business action plan submission and in particular, next steps support). • Making more use of community based approaches, using more visible promotional materials and improved engagement/relationship building with key

Measure	More detail on components	DARD spend to date (2011 to present)	Evaluation	Evaluation Recommendations/Discussion points/Observations
<p>people in rural areas. These areas have been identified using multiple deprivation criteria and eligible young people are currently being recruited onto the Programme through various outreach events and workshops. The RYE programme will create the foundations for the development of future rural businesses through up skilling, networking, mentoring and sharing of ideas to stimulate business creation – RDC lead partner in EU ERDF programme project with</p>	<p>Step 2 - Develop an appropriate delivery model to develop rural youth enterprise, drawing on the lessons of the context analyses and from the implementation of previous urban focused programmes. In Northern Ireland the main reference point was the Youth Enterprise Programme funded by Invest NI.</p> <p>Step 3 - Pilot the delivery of the model to young people in each region.</p> <p>Step 4 - Evaluate the lessons of the pilot phase and amend the model accordingly to provide a product which can then be used by delivery agents across the NPP area and beyond.</p>		<p><i>take account of ongoing learning developed as the project progressed.</i></p> <p><i>The workshop approach has proven very successful. A future programme could benefit from inviting input and assistance from young people themselves in promoting and delivering the support to others.</i></p> <p><i>RYE has been welcomed in particular for its role in animating rural young people around the possibility of enterprise / entrepreneurship. Capacity to do this is limited across other providers who are delivering more detailed business development or education and training support.</i></p>	<p>organisations such as YouthAction or the GAA, but continuing also to work with Schools, FE colleges and CAFRE.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing / deepening the level of collaboration with other providers both in terms of referral in (as above) and referral out (e.g. with Enterprise Agencies). A more joined up approach should be tested with CAFRE to track how well participation in workshops complements work in rural diversification business courses. • Establish a method for monitoring progress post programme in onward referrals to other support to assess the longer term benefits conferred by the programme. • Signposting and support to apply to the Rural Development programme should be included in a further round, and incorporated into the web based resource. Furthermore the relationship between RYE and the proposed Rural Business Support Scheme, identified in Priority six of the new Rural Development Programme, should be explored in relation to animating young people. • Given the early focus on the development of the webtool and testing the initial methodology it is considered timely, within any extension agreed, to establish an implementation and advisory group. This group should seek to engage DEL, DETI and local government taking into account local reform and the future responsibilities on enterprise and entrepreneurship. Membership could comprise of DEL, DETI and reform of local government structures. DEL have committed to participating on such a forum. This could assist with alignment to Community Planning and

Measure	More detail on components	DARD spend to date (2011 to present)	Evaluation	Evaluation Recommendations/Discussion points/Observations
<p>involvement of partners in Faeroe Islands, Greenland, Finland and Northern Ireland – DARD provided match funding.</p> <p>RDC and Advantage have now announced an extension of the programme as of 1/8/14⁴</p>				<p>identification of suitable mainstream options post the 2 year extension.</p>
<p>BOOST Youth Employability Programme - aims to improve the employability of rural young unemployed people across Northern Ireland. DARD provides co-funding in conjunction with DEL and the project is delivered on the</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FREE “Get that Job Toolkit”- an interactive disc that allows you to work through the practical skills required by employers at your own pace, in your own home. • A professional CV that will sell you and help you stand out from the crowd. • £25 payment towards interview essentials • Certificate approved by employers 	<p>2011-15 - £185,000</p>	<p>No – due to be completed March 2015</p> <p>BOOST website includes testimonials from participants in the programme which detail positive impacts⁵.</p>	<p>N/A</p>

⁴ [Rural Youth Programme extended, Advantage press release, 1st August 2014](#)

⁵ [BOOST testimonies, Advantage website, 2nd September 2014](#)

Measure	More detail on components	DARD spend to date (2011 to present)	Evaluation	Evaluation Recommendations/Discussion points/Observations
ground by Advantage Foundation Ltd from Carrickfergus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support from Boost for up to 6 months Exclusive content via e-mail, including our “Get That Job Masterclass” series - 			
<p>Contacting Elderly Rural Isolated (CERI) - pilot project, in conjunction with the Public Health Agency, in the Western Health and Social Care Trust (WHSCCT) area to address social isolation and to enhance independent living for rural elderly dwellers - extension of the Western Trusts original Flexi Care Scheme (which delivers shopping support, chaperoning, minor home maintenance services and befriending).</p>		2011-15 – £648,000	<p>Yes – published in May 2013</p> <p><i>Feedback from recipients of the services and their carers is positive and the services are described as valued by service managers as part of a wider portfolio of provision aimed at supporting older people in the community. The analysis of activity and feedback from the recipient survey clearly demonstrates that the service has a focus on health improvement/health promotion</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> event should be organised to showcase the learning arising out of the CERI project and initiatives from other Trusts that currently aim to focus on; health improvement, health promotion, dealing with social exclusion, supporting the use of facilities and services, and promoting independent living for older people. We would suggest that the PHA may be best placed to host such an event. DARD (Rural Development), the HSCB and the PHA should meet to consider the way forward in relation to how the DARD, Older People’s Rural Project can best fit with other initiatives such as the Reablement Project and Transforming Your Care. It would be our view that an input from the Department of Social Development (DSD) would also be useful given their role in supporting similar initiatives within urban areas should a decision be taken to roll out the CERI project to other areas that DARD should consider having a more direct input into the management of the initiative at Project Board or Steering Group level. any proposal for a roll out of a CERI type of service should be the subject of a formal business case with a plan for project management of the initiative. Such a proposal needs to include an exit strategy for the end of any project stage any plan for an extension of the CERI project needs to have clarity of purpose with a division of services that

Measure	More detail on components	DARD spend to date (2011 to present)	Evaluation	Evaluation Recommendations/Discussion points/Observations
				<p>are aimed at providing low level on-going support and services that are of a time limited input and that aims to address more exclusively health improvement or health promotion objective</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the commissioning arrangements used to engage the community/voluntary sector should be more consultative engaging the potential partners in discussion prior to any tendering when a partnership, community development model is part of the desired outcomes. promotion of self directed access to services aimed at health improvement or health promotion is central to encouraging the concept of individual responsibility for the management of health and wellbeing. We would recommend that where services are funded on this basis that public sector funders build in arrangements that satisfy their governance and audit requirements. the WHSCT and DARD hold discussions in relation to how any interim period for the services stimulated by the CERI project should be managed, if it becomes clear from the strategic planning recommended between DARD and HSCB/PHA will require time beyond the extended timetable for the pilot project
<p>Fuel Poverty Intervention - DARD has provided funding support, in collaboration with DSD and Power NI, to assist rural homes avail of a range of energy</p>	<p>Warm Homes scheme is open to eligible householders and will provide insulation measures up to a maximum set value. The current statutory maximum is £1,500 and this figure is reviewed every year</p> <p>assessment process within Warm Homes will identify households where additional measures, such as</p>	<p>2011-15 – £1,545,000</p>	<p>DSD may have conducted but unable to find evidence</p> <p>NIAO report into the Warm Homes scheme published in 2008 revealed</p> <p><i>Warm Homes has helped to improve the lives of many. The Scheme has provided energy</i></p>	<p>DSD may have conducted but unable to find evidence</p>

Measure	More detail on components	DARD spend to date (2011 to present)	Evaluation	Evaluation Recommendations/Discussion points/Observations
<p>efficient measures in recent years (Warm Homes and Warm Homes Plus)</p>	<p>heating or complex insulation, are required. Heating measures will focus on those with no central heating system, a solid fuel, Economy 7 or bottled gas system (LPG). These households will be passported through into Warm Homes Plus. The current statutory maximum for Warm Homes Plus is £6,500</p>		<p><i>efficiency measures to some 60,000 homes since 2001: in 2007-08 it gave grants averaging £1,835 to almost 11,300 households. It has contributed to a range of government priorities beyond addressing fuel poverty, such as better health and fewer winter deaths, improved air quality and reduced carbon dioxide emissions</i></p>	
<p>Community Development – DARD core funding support for rural Community Development with a focus on tackling rural poverty and isolation through improving the economic capability of rural areas by increasing access to various funding programmes, promoting the social economy, and building capacity –</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving the capacity of local groups; • Improving the capacity of individuals, farmers and farm families; • Improving relationships within and between rural communities. 	<p>2011-15 - £4,153,000</p>	<p>Yes –interim pilot paper in 2013– pilot to assess means of measuring impact of community development support – looked at 1 geographic area</p> <p>Current process for appointing a consultant to complete and fuller interim assessment of impact of community development support</p> <p>DARD also committed to conducting a full post project evaluation post 2015</p>	<p>-</p>

Measure	More detail on components	DARD spend to date (2011 to present)	Evaluation	Evaluation Recommendations/Discussion points/Observations
delivered by the 7 Rural Support networks that cover Northern Ireland				

3 Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme (NIRDP) 2014-20

The 2014-20 NIRDP has a provisional budget of £623 million. Whilst DARD has yet to submit a finalised Programme to the European Commission for approval (due to happen on the 14th October). There is a requirement for the programme to meet at least 4 of 6 EU priorities, one of which Priority 6, *'Promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas'*. A draft copy of the proposed NIRDP Programme does include specific and explicit reference to a Combating Poverty and Social Isolation – Basic Services Scheme (within Priority 6), more detail on which is provided in table 2 below. It should be noted that there may well be other measures within the finalised NIRDP which could directly or indirectly address issues relating to rural poverty, rural isolation and farmer welfare.

Table 2: NIRDP support 2014-20

Measure	More detail on components	Projected total budget	Evaluation	Evaluation Recommendations/Discussion points/Observations
<p>Combating Poverty and Social Isolation – Basic Services Scheme</p>	<p>Community Development and capacity building – support for setting up and development of existing community infrastructure which is focussed on the improvement of local basic services to tackle poverty and social isolation.</p> <p>Strategic Services – partnership working with other Departments and Agencies to deliver services such as innovative health solutions, transport, broadband and childcare.</p> <p>Local Community Grant Fund – a support grant of up to £10,000 to help rural communities address need in line with local area plans</p>	<p>£15m</p>	<p>Programme has yet to commence</p>	<p>-</p>

4 Core funding support to Northern Ireland Women’s Network (NIRWN) and Rural Community Network (RCN)

DARD provides core funding support in conjunction with DSD to support the existing rural community infrastructure organisations (NIRWN and RCN), and by so doing enable their ongoing work with rural communities.

Measure	More detail on components	DARD spend to date (2011 to present)	Evaluation	Evaluation Recommendations/Discussion points/Observations
Core funding support to NIRWN and RCN	Enables organisation to continue their work in support of rural communities	2012/13 RISP £234,000 NIRWN £75,000 2013/14 RISP £186,000 NIRWN £75,000 2014/15 RISP £80,000 NIRWN £75,000	Not as yet	-

5 Observations and commentary

- DARD is actively supporting a range of measures that are directly addressing issues of rural poverty, rural isolation and farmer welfare;
- In looking at the output data (where available) for many of these measures, it is clear that there are a significant number of beneficiaries as a result of this DARD expenditure. Notable examples here include the 278,654 Assisted Rural Travel Scheme supported journeys between April 2012- September 2013, and the more than 4,000 households recruited to the Maximising Access to Services, Grants and Benefits in Rural Areas (MARA);
- Many of the projects have also been subject to interim or final evaluations and the general tenor of these is positive in relation to programme impacts. It should however be noted that there are projects/supports which have still to be evaluated;
- Recommendations have been made for all of the projects/supports that have been evaluated and there may be value in considering how many of these recommendations have either been addressed in the current or will be incorporated in similar projects/supports going forward;
- There are clear instances of cross departmental working in projects such as the ARTS (DRD), MARA(PHA), Farm Families Health Checks(PHA), Rural Borewells (DRD), CERI (PHA and WHSCT), Fuel Poverty(DSD) and BOOST (DEL), and this model appears to have been successful. There could however be question marks around whether such an approach will still be viable if departmental spending pressures continue, or conversely whether the approach might actually be more attractive at a time of budgetary constraint;
- The participation of the community/voluntary and NGO sectors is key to the effective and targeted delivery of many of the projects/supports identified within this paper, and this highlights the facilitating role that DARD support can play in enabling those with local knowledge and expertise to bring this into play.