

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's Response to the Recommendations outlined in the ARD Committee's Position Paper on DARD's Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Programme

The Department welcomes the opportunity to comment on the key recommendations outlined in the Position Paper at paragraphs 29, 41, 47, 52, 65 and 70.

Paragraph 29

The Department has indicated that there will be a successor TRPSI programme when the current programme ends in 2016. The Committee recommends that the Departments build on the successes of the current programme, including the vast knowledge already available from the grass roots organisations in rural communities to help inform and shape a new TRPSI programme.

The Department accepts this recommendation.

The development of a successor to the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) Framework 2011-15 will commence during Spring 2015 and will be informed by an evaluation of the current programme and consultation with stakeholders.

DARD plans to undertake an evaluation of the current TRPSI Framework. It is proposed that the evaluation will include consultation with partner organisations, rural stakeholders and beneficiaries with a view to gathering information which will be used to inform the development of a successor to the TRPSI Framework. It is intended that the evaluation will be completed in time to inform the successor to the TRPSI Framework. The timeframe for completion of the Revised Framework is 31 March 2016.

Paragraph 41

The Committee recommends that the Department, in conjunction with other departments, fully utilises the data capture and evaluation which MARA has produced and uses it to inform and shape the TRPSI successor programme.

The Department accepts this recommendation.

The Public Health Agency is carrying out an evaluation of the MARA Project which will help inform future TRPSI programmes. The evaluation will, in September 2015, be placed on the DARD website. DARD is also currently looking at how the considerable amount of data captured through the MARA project can be utilised to inform future TRPSI Programmes.

Paragraph 47 (a)

The Committee acknowledges the work that DARD has done through its Rural White Paper Action Plan. The Committee recommends that DARD should undertake an evaluation of the extent to which other government departments and the wider public sector considers rural issues in respect of policy, services and resources.

The Department accepts this recommendation (subject to availability of AFBI Resources).

DARD is actively considering commissioning research by AFBI that will critically review the concepts and operation of rural proofing and rural champion policy initiatives. The limitations and successes of these approaches across government and non-government stakeholders will be examined. The project will conceptually benchmark the NI models against other regions in the UK and beyond. The findings will be applied to provide evidence-based evaluation criteria and recommendations to improve rural policy efficiency and effectiveness.

Paragraph 47 (b)

The Committee further recommends that DARD develops an inter-departmental working group with the buy in of Senior Civil Servants within the relevant Departments.

The Department accepts and has implemented this recommendation.

There is currently an Interdepartmental Committee on Rural Policy (IDCRP) which is comprised of senior civil servants from each Department. The IDCRP plays an important role in the monitoring and delivery of the Rural White Paper Action Plan and in the development and implementation of rural proofing policy. DARD will give further consideration to the role the IDCRP can play in relation to the successor to the TRPSI Framework.

DARD's Sustainable Rural Communities Branch led on the development of an inter-departmental working group and this has been implemented.

Paragraph 52 (a)

The Committee recommends that the Department for Agriculture and Rural Development engages proactively with the new Councils to ensure that they are active and vigorous in taking rural issues into account in the development of policy and delivery of services in rural and farming communities.

The Department accepts this recommendation

DARD is currently engaged in a body of work to enhance the existing rural proofing process by making it a statutory provision across central and local government. The proposed Bill would introduce a statutory duty on all Departments and district

councils to consider the needs of rural dwellers when developing new policies, strategies and plans, or revising existing ones and when designing and delivering public services or making changes to the way they are delivered. It is proposed that the Bill would also include provision for: DARD to promote and encourage departments and district councils to consider the needs of people living in rural areas; for departments and district councils to make arrangements for co-operation and collaboration to help ensure a more consistent and cohesive approach to addressing the needs of rural dwellers; DARD to produce regular monitoring reports to be laid before the Assembly; and DARD to provide support rural proofing and the implementation of the Bill through the provision of training, advice and guidance; and an option to extend the provisions of the Bill to non-departmental public bodies . Both before and during the consultation stage of the Bill DARD has had wide ranging engagement with NILGA and many other organisations that are representative of the rural community. This stakeholder engagement will continue on an ongoing basis as the Bill progresses and beyond its completion. The timeframe for completion is 31 March 2017

Paragraph 52 (b)

Furthermore the Committee recommends that the Department for Agriculture and Rural Development engages with the Councils to ensure that there is full and meaningful cognizance given and interaction with those community and voluntary groups currently successfully involved in delivery of the TRPSI Framework so as to prevent duplication of, or the overlooking of such groups.

The Department accepts this recommendation

DARD has regular engagement with Councils through the Rural Development Programme which highlights the role that voluntary and community groups play in delivery of the TRPSI Framework. DARD will continue to engage with Councils throughout the development of any successor to the TRPSI programme taking fully into account the support offered by voluntary and community groups.

Paragraph 65 (a)

That the Department for Agriculture and Rural Development actively engages with DFP to ensure that NISRA is commissioned to undertake an update or review of the NI Multiple Deprivation Indices and that review should also consider the identification of rural deprivation, and specifically the suitability of the indicators employed and geographical areas used.

The Department partially accepts this recommendation.

DARD is represented on the cross-Departmental Statistics Coordinating Group which is looking at the future of the NI Multiple Deprivation Measures (NIMDM). The Group is currently considering options for the future of the NIMDM and DARD has put forward its view that a full in-depth review of the measure should be undertaken for various reasons including the fact that, in general, the measure is not considered to be well suited to measuring rural poverty.

Paragraph 65 (b)

The Committee also recommends that the Department for Agriculture and Rural Development engages with DFP to ensure it undertakes to establish how government departments are using the indices and if indeed any cognizance is given to the Guidance for Rural Area.

The Department accepts and has implemented this recommendation.

To inform decisions regarding the future of the NIMDM, NISRA has collected information from all Departments on their current and past use of the indices. While the NISRA exercise did not ask whether cognizance was given to the Guidance for Rural Areas, DARD has advised that awareness, accessibility and user friendliness of the NIMDM are important and that frequent road shows and newsletters might be useful. These would provide an opportunity to heighten awareness of the guidance and provide direction as to how best the measure might be used with regard to rural areas.

DARD's Policy and Economics Division led on this with assistance from NISRA and the recommendation has been implemented.

Paragraph 70

That the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development acknowledges that the funding for the TRPSI Framework has been resource based and that consequentially engagement with the stakeholders will be required to ensure that:-

(a) suitable capital projects can be identified

The Department accepts this recommendation

DARD continues to engage with a wide range of statutory, community and voluntary rural stakeholders. Recent engagement has led to the opening of the Rural Micro Capital Grants Programme. Consultations on other possible capital grants projects are ongoing.

(b) that such projects can be delivered within the framework.

The Department accepts this recommendation

It is proposed that successor to the TRPSI Framework will be sufficiently flexible to allow for the funding of suitable capital projects.