

Mallon and Poots announce working partnership to support the most vulnerable in rural areas

Infrastructure Minister Nichola Mallon and Rural Affairs Minister Edwin Poots have put further measures in place to support people in rural areas that are isolated as a result of COVID-19.

From today, community transport operators funded by the Department for Infrastructure will be able to reappropriate Dial-A-Lift services to provide essential services for vulnerable people living in rural areas under the Assisted Rural Travel Scheme funded by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

Minister Mallon said:

“Community Transport Operators play an important role in connecting our rural communities in particular and now they will be able to support those communities by assisting with the delivery of prepaid groceries, prescriptions or fulfilling essential journeys.

“At this critical time in the fight against COVID-19 I want to do all I can to support wider efforts and this is a small but important step in supporting those who are among our most vulnerable. Partnership working and leadership has already been displayed very clearly by our communities. I'm delighted that myself and Minister Poots have been able to come together to support efforts to better serve our communities.

“We are now in an extraordinary time and we must listen to the advice and guidance given on social distancing, helping shield those who may be most vulnerable to the virus. The advice is clear, stay at home to save lives. I know this will be incredibly difficult, but we must each play our part in keeping ourselves and others safe, and slowing the transmission of COVID-19. I'll continue to play my part and work in partnership to find new solutions to the challenges our communities continue to face.”

Minister Poots said:

“The provision of suitable transport services in rural areas is essential for people to live their lives in a satisfactory manner and that is why my Department have continued a partnership arrangement with the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) to fund the Assisted Rural Travel Scheme. The Scheme allows the most vulnerable in all rural areas (mainly the elderly and disabled) to access shops and services for everyday requirements.

However, because of the Coronavirus this service now needs to turn full circle to help protect the lives of the most vulnerable in our society. So rather than transporting people to services, the services must now be transported to the people. I am wholeheartedly committed to supporting rural people through this difficult time and the actions that the rural Community Transport Operators will undertake in the coming period will be a further indication of this support. Therefore, through my Department's Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Programme, DAERA will continue to support the revised services provided by the Community Transport Operators and work with DfI and across Government to monitor the impact of this

revised service and modify it as necessary and where possible to meet the needs of all rural dwellers”.