

## Consultation Responses: Nos. 21 - 30

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## RESPONDENT INFORMATION

**Please Note** this form **must** be returned with your response to ensure that we handle your response appropriately.

### 1. Name / Organisation

**Organisation Name (If applicable).**

Community Organisations of South Tyrone & AREAS LTD (COSTA)

**Title** Mr  Ms  Mrs  Miss  Dr  **Please tick as appropriate**

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### Consultation Questions

1) Do you agree that the proposed Aim, Objectives and Intended Outcomes (see Section 6) for the TRPSI Framework are appropriate?

Yes

No

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs) have a proven track record of working with DARD (as partner organisations) to develop and implement new and innovative pilot measures in hundreds of rural villages and communities to Target Rural Poverty and reduce Social Isolation. Although not clearly highlighted in some of the TRPSI consultation papers, it has been acknowledged by all stakeholders (from The Minister and the ARD Committee to local groups) that all the other TRPSI measures in the current programme were dependent on a solid and responsive rural community infrastructure across NI. The LRSNs have worked closely with DARD for over 20 years to put that infrastructure in place and that is the reason so many of the TRPSI measures have been so successful.

For example, in recent months the Rural Micro Capital Grant Programme has been promoted for DARD by the LRSNs and 2 phases have been rolled out to small rural groups in every part of rural NI. The programme has been oversubscribed and highly effective in targeting small grants at the most needy groups, helping them to deliver a wide range of local rural services. The MARA programme, Farm Families Health Checks and the promotion of Library services have all exceeded their targets thanks in large part to the promotional and organisational abilities and reach of the LRSNs. A local presence and knowledge of the area is to key to successful delivery.

This experience - linked to the hundreds of rural groups and thousands of individuals associated with the LRSNs - means that the Networks can help DARD to meet the objectives set in *Section 6 "Proposals for a successor Framework post 2016"*.

Together with other rural stakeholders, we can "promote the development of new and innovative pilot approaches to TRPSI AND encourage effective partnership working AND effectively target financial poverty, access poverty and social isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas".

**2) Do you agree that the 3 Priority Areas – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation (see Section 6) – should continue to be the main priorities for the TRPSI Framework?**

**Yes**

**No**

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks believe that the 3 Priority Areas – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation should continue to be the main priorities for the TRPSI Framework as they are still relevant in 2016, encapsulate the varying needs of the rural community and encompass a service deliverability which can be most effectively demonstrated through a *local or sub regional level approach*.

The identification and successful delivery of various projects and programmes within these priorities would continue to bring greatest positive impact to the needs of those experiencing rural poverty and isolation. The priorities allow for a bottom-up community development approach in not only identifying relevant needs but also in delivering upon them using a cascade approach. It is our view that the most effective TRPSI programmes delivered to date have had a strong community ethos and process coupled with local knowledge access to where rural, social and economic needs are most prevalent. Invariably, there will be different levels of need in different geographical areas, however, as the nature of community sector delivery is designed sub regionally and is based on pertinent local needs then those most in poverty or experiencing isolation have less probability in remaining outside the reach of these priorities and programmes.

The Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation framework and it's priorities to date has been an excellent package of funding aimed at supporting vulnerable people and targeting the root causes of social isolation. As programmes take effect and outputs deliver meaningful change there are indeed necessary modifications within the themes or priorities which are required to continue to make most impact on the frameworks aims whilst external factors such as austerity and public budget finance availability will also determine and prioritize future considerations.

It is our view that the 3 Priority Areas – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social

Isolation should continue to be the main priorities for the TRPSI Framework since programmes can emerge from these themes which meet best the local community needs.

TRPSI and the priorities has now gained substantial traction and is now recognised as an essential brand which has made a huge difference to rural communities and which is complementary to the NIRDP. Many of the issues these priorities have tackled to date were previously hidden and would fall outside the remit of other mainstream funding programmes. There remains, however, continued challenges, needs and rural TRPSI issues which require on-going support at various levels of intervention and which would still come under these 3 priorities.

*The Rural Community Development Support Service currently delivered by the Local Rural Support Networks*, as a model of support to TRPSI, is most certainly envied throughout communities in Europe as a model leader in balancing appropriate and measured interventions to social, economic and access poverty issues at a community level. Promoting Community development at a local / sub regional level ensures that regional programmes are delivered effectively at the local level and access to the real needs and issues of communities is provided for. Supporting access to good governance, to economic and social poverty in communities; the service as provided by these local community based networks has proved an invaluable resource to the delivery of the TRPSI Framework.

These experienced local stakeholders have excellent working relationships with all other TRPSI delivery agents and indeed share a direct role in elements of their success making essential and valuable linkages and connections at sub regional and local levels. The key management role of DARD in direct delivery of this programme has proved to be most effective in ensuring that the networks could assist DARD to manage Regional programmes at local levels and to balance approaches necessary to ensuring programme priority themes reached the community sector using bottom up approaches.

The local access support provided to DARD's Modernisation Programme and its Rural Micro Capital Grants Programmes - as and when required by DARD - evidence how this infrastructure can react and respond to changing rural needs and requirements. Their modus operandi for the delivery of programmes such as MARA

are a testament to the Community Development approach which ensures participation and access to hidden and real needs at a local level across all 3 main priorities.

The networking function plays an invaluable role in achieving key community participation at all necessary levels from village planning facilitation to rural proofing consultation. With the reform of local Government, Community Planning, and the mandatory Charities registration requirements; these networks provide local mentoring support and guidance, technical support and facilitation at grassroots level to those rural communities most in need under the programme priorities of Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation. Most importantly, they can identify what local pertinent needs fit the programme.

We believe that it is the approaches taken under the overlying programme priorities which provide the appropriate lynchpins to ensure leverage of many other programmes and projects into rural areas and which have included such as community mental health awareness, capital build infrastructural programmes, rural tourism, lifelong learning, social investment, migrant support etc. These programmes operate in a time of decentralisation and digitization of services, the closing of rural banks, post offices, schools and other services and thus during a time when the greatest need for local people to provide adequate solutions to their own issues and problems within a community development approach. The 3 themes adequately allow for local communities, sub regional and innovative approach making to meeting rural TRPI needs.

**3) Do you agree that the 12 Key Principles (see Section 6) are appropriate for the TRPSI Framework?**

**Yes**

**No**

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

The rural support organisations delivering the DARD Rural Community Development Support Service / Programme agree with the key TRPSI principles as outlined in the framework document. Historically the Local Rural Support Networks successfully delivered pilot, innovative projects and interventions collaboratively and in partnership with statutory and other community and voluntary organisations and are widely perceived as the link between grass roots community groups operating at a local level with regional statutory bodies.

Positive outcomes of a collaborative approach to the delivery of services aimed at addressing rural poverty and isolation issues include:

- Ensuring the socially isolated and those with financial related issues have access and opportunities to avail of support services
- Increasing the capacity of designated rural support organisations and grass roots community groups to collectively and with greater efficiency deliver both services and support interventions that may not be possible if delivered in isolation.

A negative outcome of delivering a successful pilot or innovative project is the lack of funding to effectively mainstream the service or project. Increased opportunities to continue or mainstream projects that have demonstrated effectiveness should be a key objective of a future TRPSI framework both for addressing poverty and social isolation issues and having to avoid dealing with the expectation when a service or project ceases.

Local Rural Support Networks will continue to be a conduit to disseminate information on key government strategies to the community voluntary sector through their established communication channels and will continue to lobby and be the 'voice' of the rural community sector during discussions with statutory and governmental organisations e.g. Rural Community Development Support Service / Programme and Community Planning.

**4) Do you agree that the list of Target Groups (see Section 6) is appropriate in relation to providing support to vulnerable groups under the successor TRPSI Framework?**

**Yes**

**No**

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSN's) welcome the proposal that the successor Framework would be open to a wider range of target groups. As an infrastructure providing community development support to the rural community across Northern Ireland for many years, we have, almost without exception, worked with all these vulnerable groups.

We particularly welcome the introduction of the working poor and the under employed. The continuing economic uncertainty has left many families in difficult financial circumstances. One or both parents are working however income levels fall below what they need to have a meaningful quality of life. A sudden change in circumstances, such as marital breakup or ill health, can have further detrimental consequences and lead to social exclusion and poverty.

Mental health still retains a significant stigma, particularly in rural areas, and many of the LRSN's run programmes which directly tackle mental ill health in their communities. Statistics show that one in four run the risk of mental ill health thus their inclusion in this framework is essential.

The inclusion of the LGBT community in the framework is also welcome. Whilst members of the LGBT community live in rural areas they tend to meet and socialise in their nearest town. However LRSN's have a role to play in supporting them to remain in their community and in ensuring statutory organisations and the wider public are aware of the issues affecting them.

Perhaps one omission from the list of vulnerable groups is men. Whilst accepted that most farmers are men there may be male rural dwellers who are not farmers. Globally, the gap between male and female life expectancy and healthy life expectancy has widened in the last 40 years and is expected to get even bigger by



2030. Research commissioned by the Priory Group of 1,000 men found that: 77% of men polled have suffered with anxiety / stress / depression; the biggest pressures in men's life are work (32%), finance (31%) and health (23%); the majority of men claim their mental health is having a negative impact on their work performance, parenting ability and relationships; 40% of men polled said it would take thoughts of suicide or self-harm to compel them to seek professional help.

[www.priorygroup.com/blog/mentalhealth/-i-ve-learnt-to-deal-with-it---40-of-men-won-t-talk-to-anyone-about-their-mentalhealth](http://www.priorygroup.com/blog/mentalhealth/-i-ve-learnt-to-deal-with-it---40-of-men-won-t-talk-to-anyone-about-their-mentalhealth)

**5) (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing Access Poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas**

We are pleased to welcome the measures in the draft Framework. Many of the proposed measures will go a long way to tackle issues that blight so many rural dwellers. We appreciate that the list of groups is not exhaustive: Women, Farmers, People on work on low incomes (the working poor), Children and Young People, Older people and Ethnic Minorities and Immigrants, People with low skills or low levels of education etc. Our experience shows that some of the groups need to be broken down into subgroups.

For example there are sections of the farming industry that have seen their incomes severely cut in the last two years (dairy Farmers). Future prices in this industry predict another 10% drop in the next three months. Mental health in this area gives us great cause for concern. This is evidenced by the increase calls to help lines, up by 30% in the last year.

Many Ethnic Minorities are finding it difficult to assimilate, especially those living in the rural community. There are a number of factors that drive this. Some Ethnic groups neither have English as their first or second language; this communication barrier reinforces isolation and is a contributing factor in poor mental health. Those who have a strong grasp of the English language find it easier to "fit in". This also is a factor in this section being "excepted". In conclusion we think this group of Ethnic minorities should be broken down into sections not exclusively into language sections. i.e. short-to-medium dwellers who may seasonal workers.

We are pleased with the other target groups and we welcome that people with low skills and low levels of education might have a chance to enhance their employability. The training involved to up skill this group will act as a medium to tackle social isolation. Many who suffer from social isolation either don't recognise their plight or only recognise it when their horizons broaden due to intervention from an un-proscribed source. i.e. further education either social education or accredited.

The "Outcomes based pilot programmes" is also most welcome. This allows delivery agents latitude to make informed researched based decisions that will go to the hart rural poverty and social isolation.

Under 6.8 V we strongly concur with the mainstreaming of successful pilot projects. The Department launched the Rural Community Micro Grants 2015-2016, we in the Rural Support Networks found this reached parts of the rural community that that had gone under the radar in the past. This has opened a pathway for community development that goes to the core of TRPSI Policy. This merges into 6VII "sustainability". Some groups for the first time now see a pathway using community a development approach with the support of the Networks.

6.8X The sharing of information and best practice learning between organisations has the potential that prevents groups trying to "reinventing the wheel" and will avoid duplication between organisations.

6.8 XI The Community Planning and the consultation process will be key, both in a strategic and a complementary role. It is imperative that at all stages of the community planning that the rural voice is heard and well represented. The Rural Support Networks will play an enabling role to ensure events are well attended and the TRPSI policy principles are promoted.

6.8 VIII Good Relations being promoted: there will be many opportunities to develop innovative partnerships, PEACEIV et al.

One should not underestimate the incidental "good relations" through the Rural Development Programme. The carrot and stick approach for single identity group has been proven to open halls to a wider diaspora. Not only does this lead to better community relations but adds to the sustainability of the halls.

**(b) Please provide details on any further measures which you think should be considered to help address Access Poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas**

The Rural Micro Capital Grants Programme opened many new doors because it gave an incentive for tangible assets to be acquired for the benefit of a particular group. For many this has been the first time in making a funding application. The benefits not only include the asset but their governance has now been under the spotlight and sharpened to enable their participation. We would propose an extension of this innovative idea. The structure used to deliver the grants is now well established, this same structure could deliver small capitol grants say up to £10,000 for basic needs that so many halls throughout the country require.

Community transport should be reviewed to widen its scope. Longer journeys should be considered that travel between a number of service providers.

Evidence indicates that there is an appetite for ICT / Computer Training in rural areas. The LRSNs could deliver this service. There used to be an outreach service from the regional Colleges, we don't advocate for its return. The service that they provided no longer is fit for propose. Farmers and rural dwellers want a basic standard of training that may not necessarily be accredited. The end result would be Farmers having the ability to make online returns. Farm families coming together braking social isolation and have a greater understanding of the world wide web. Greater use and the promotion of Luncheon Clubs in rural areas could provide a service that; tackles social isolation, helps sustain a target audience, increases the sustainability of rural halls. All this combined adds to the cohesion of rural communities.

**6) (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing Financial Poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas**

Financial poverty refers to the measure of the degree to which people face the risk of serious deprivation in terms of their standard of living or to which they fall below a specified minimum level of resources. Through the measures in the draft action plan there is the opportunity to raise the standard of living for those people living in rural areas. Particularly in regard to addressing issues such as rural transport which is currently a major issue which prohibits many rural dwellers from accessing essential basic services. In addition measures targeted at supporting household energy efficiency improvement & the introduction of new employability and entrepreneurship opportunities are also to be welcomed.

**(b) Please provide details on any other measures which you think should be considered to help address Financial Poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas**

Other measures which may alleviate financial poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas include the creation of jobs through investment in infrastructure such as investment in rural hubs, renovating abandoned housing and broadband infrastructure development, therefore increasing the chances of the young people of rural areas to stay, therefore building a stronger rural economy. With added investment in high quality and affordable childcare and early intervention this will create increased opportunities for jobs.

**7) (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing Social Isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas**

The Local Rural Support Networks welcome the continued recognition by DARD of the problems caused within the rural population due to Social Isolation. We acknowledge the priority areas for intervention listed within the Draft Action Plan under Social Isolation of promoting tolerance, health, well-being and inclusion for rural dwellers and through our long established work within rural communities agree that these are valid and worthwhile Priority Areas for Intervention.

Poor Mental Health and well-being is an issue that has major impacts within rural communities given the fact that many people are living in isolated circumstances often on their own or with limited family and / or community connections.

The farming community is also a grouping who have been demonstrated to have poor mental health as they are facing increasing stresses of managing their businesses mostly working on an individual basis with limited opportunities to engage with others. Many of the LRSN's are engaged in delivering mental health and wellbeing programmes over the last ten years, all of these programmes have been externally evaluated and have shown excellent results in improving local mental health and wellbeing. Any new pilot programmes delivered under the new framework need to take into consideration the knowledge and learning of the evaluations.

One concern that the LRSN's would have that by naming the priority as '*promote positive mental health and wellbeing*' rather than '*promoting positive health and wellbeing*'; interventions could be limited in their scope to secure engagement by rural dwellers. There is still a stigma around mental health in rural areas and people would be more likely to engage with activities that are seen to be about general health and wellbeing, people in many instances would not want to be identified through participating in activities as someone who has mental health issue. If people are at least attracted to an activity the issue of mental health can then be addressed.

Therefore as LRSN's we do welcome the example initiatives listed as they list 'Support for health and wellbeing activities' as well as 'Support the promotion of mental health awareness and actions' and we ask that the learning and evidence from positive work that has been undertaken with rural communities through the

LRSN's, Healthy Living Centres, other Community, Voluntary and Statutory bodies on these actions and activities are used when drawing up plans for initiatives to support under the new TRPSI framework.

The Local Rural Support Networks would welcome actions that will support the rural population to improve their health and wellbeing particularly those activities that are operated and provided at local facilities and venues.

The LRSN's welcome that '*increase opportunities for social engagement*' is listed as a priority area of intervention as the value of people of all ages within rural communities being given the opportunity to engage with others on a social basis cannot be underestimated. It is through these social activities that the aim of "promote tolerance, health, wellbeing and inclusion' can be best achieved within rural communities as by bringing people together they are getting to know each other. This is needed within communities as in many instances during their working and education lives many members of rural communities are away from the community during the day and thus have limited opportunities to engage with others. It is only through actual engagement in the same physical space that tolerance can be promoted and this is especially important in rural communities as due to low numbers of people activities are best organised to attract as many members of the population as possible so that a sufficient number of people attend to make an activity viable. Therefore anything that can be done to encourage use of community facilities that have been traditionally associated as belonging to one section of the community would be welcome. Such venues can become hubs for social inclusion activities within rural communities.

Many venues within rural communities require some level of work to ensure that they are brought up to a condition that they are accessible and suitable to be used to provide activities that address social isolation.

The Local Rural Support Networks welcome the inclusion of '*support community capacity*' as an example initiative as a capable and effective local community infrastructure is of vital importance to the fabric of life within rural communities and those involved in organisations within local communities are largely undertaking this role on a voluntary basis. These organisations require ongoing community development support to continue their operations on an effective and efficient basis

and become involved in projects that will address poverty and social isolation at a local level within rural communities.

The community development support work delivered by the Local Rural Support Networks resourced under the previous TRPSI Framework has been very effective in ensuring the survival and continued operation of local community infrastructure. This community infrastructure of the LRSN's working in partnership with organisations located within local communities has also ensured that many of the other initiatives supported under TRPSI have been effective at reaching into rural communities and tackling poverty and social isolation.

**(b) Please provide details on any other measures which you think should be considered to help address Social Isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas**

The Local Rural Support Networks would welcome the resourcing of actions to plan and coordinate the effective operation of activities that would address social isolation. This would involve a resource of a person to co-ordinate activities and associated resource budget to cover some of the costs of operating activities particularly training new and innovative activities on a pilot basis. This would ensure that activities are operated on a coordinated and effective basis, securing sufficient numbers, building linkages within and between communities, duplication is avoided, gaps in provision of social inclusion activities are identified and tackled.

The ongoing work within the LRSN's and their delivery of the MARA project has clearly demonstrated that there is a significant issue around mental health problems in homes, particularly depression and loneliness.

The Framework would provide an excellent opportunity to design a pilot project that would take advantage of the excellent community development model that we have that could be harnessed to deliver a programme to enable rural dwellers to avail of resources to assist them to overcome loneliness and seek help with other mental health conditions. The Programme could be designed to ensure a rural community response is adopted to encourage self-help and self-care.

**8) How might the successor TRPSI Framework contribute towards the development of more effective rural community support structures?**

Please provide comments in the box below

The TRPSI Framework has been a key success factor for rural organisations (e.g. the 9 Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs) / Rural Community Development Support Service Contract) in terms ensuring rural proofing, levering-in vital resources to rural areas, and enabling effective implementation of the TRPSI Framework throughout the region.

*Making Strategic Facilitation and Joined-Up Government a reality:* the TRPSI Framework is vital to ensuring that rural needs are addressed by the government in a localised and joined-up way that reaches the most vulnerable and those most in need.

The successor TRPSI Framework would not only enable much greater utilisation of financial resources, but also would combine the expertise of public sector bodies, and the private, voluntary and community sectors to create greater economies of scale in terms utilising all available knowledge, skills and capacity. This in turn maximises innovation and enables increased access to those most in need and those who are most difficult to reach (e.g. the MARA Project has reached out to almost 15,000 households).

TRPSI has been vital in ensuring that *rural* gets its fair share in terms of community development via a high quality networking infrastructure and Community Development Support Service that is run by grass roots representatives right across the region.

The DARD Rural Micro-Capital Grants Programme delivered on-the-ground by the 9 Local Rural Support Networks, have been essential to ensuring capital investment reaches the smallest and lowest capacity rural groups throughout the entire region.

The additional financial leverage over the last four years from the Local Rural Support Networks alone in terms of additional programmes, projects and grant schemes (promoting health, peace, equality, skills, employability, capacity etc) is £56 million.



The LRSNs have been central to the role of assisting the set-up of the new local Action Groups (NIRDP) and ensuring grass roots community representation.

**9) How might a successor TRPSI Framework support the delivery of local councils Community Plans?**

Please provide comments in the box below

The TRPSI Framework could play a key role in the delivery of local Council Community Plans via the TRPSI-funded Rural Community Development Support Service which can facilitate the ongoing involvement of the Local Rural Support Networks (LRSN's) in the community planning process. The foundations for the delivery of Community Planning already exist within the local Council areas through the LRSN's and their vast network of community based organisations – Community Planning should build upon these existing structures. The delivery of Community Planning within the local Council areas will require the engagement of existing and emerging partnerships working collaboratively. The well-established and proven track record of the LRSN's could well be effective resources in such a delivery process. It is imperative that the development of Community Planning includes the continuing engagement of such current resources so as agreed delivery structures for Community Planning are adopted that act as wider collaborative forums for the benefit of the communities that they will ultimately serve.

During the past 4 years the LRSN's have delivered, under the current TRPSI Framework, a Rural Community Development Support Service to a wide range of rural organisation and groups. This has proven to be an effective model and partnership for the delivery of such services and the LRSN's, with continued support from the TRPSI programme, are therefore well placed to assist local Councils in the delivery of community planning over the next number of years due to the following factors:

- Strong partnership & links with the rural community already in place
- Added value from funding leverage from other programmes
- Already working closely with DARD to deliver services including the development of the NI Rural Development Programme (2014-2020)

The delivery structures for the Community Planning process within local Councils must

therefore take account of existing rural structures & delivery organisations so as to ensure there is less fragmentation of implementation groups and integration of the various locally focused Action Plans. This will ensure that the Community Planning process will effectively serve the priority needs of the rural community, the ongoing support of DARD for the rural community development sector at grass roots level through the TRPSI framework is crucial to this.

**10) Do you have any views on the conclusions reached by DARD (see Section 9) in relation to the proposals for a successor TRPSI Framework in respect of:**

**(i) The Equality and Human Rights Template**

Please provide comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs) / Rural Community Development Support Service contract holders have a proven track record of working with DARD (as partner organisations) to contribute, develop and implement new and innovative pilot measures to Target Rural Poverty and reduce Social Isolation. The LRSNs welcome a localised approach to the design and delivery of measures which effectively target financial poverty, access poverty and social isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas in line with the key principles of the Framework. The LRSNs are advantageously neutral to central and local government ensuring that all rural communities can access resources, services and programmes in a timely manner regardless of religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status, sexual orientation or disability. The LRSNs ensure Section 75 information is recorded in line with procedures under International Quality Standard ISO 9001:2008 and kept securely in keeping with Data Protection Legislation.

**(ii) The Rural Issues Statement**

Please provide comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs) / Rural Community Development Support Service contract holders have a proven track record of working with DARD (as partner organisations) to ensure the TRPSI Framework has been a key success factor ensuring rural proofing and enabling effective implementation positive direct impact on the vulnerable in rural communities through a localised infrastructure. In the last four years we have empowered some 15,000 individuals, including the hardest to reach, socially isolated and most vulnerable of the population in Northern Ireland. Delivering capacity building programmes within rural areas to encourage and ensure participation in the Rural Development Programme. Undertaking the delivery of the MARA Project has reached out to almost 15,000 households directly impacting on their quality of life.

The LRSNs have also been successful in additional leverage which has had positive indirect impacts. For example we have rolled out projects and grant schemes (promoting health, peace, equality, skills, employability) equating to over £56million in the last four years. All of these measures support the delivery of key services for rural dwellers to avail of and have indirectly helped to tackle social isolation and the related mental health connotations that come with this. The central and neutral role that the LRSNs deliver; give local services for local people and ensure grass roots community representation in rolling out TRPSI Framework.

**11) Is there any other aspect of the proposals that you wish to comment on?**

Please provide comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs) are an essential conduit for the delivery of joined-up local initiatives designed to tackle rural poverty and social isolation.

Our track record is well proven and we aim to continue in ensuring rural communities have their needs met and to deliver the Rural Community Development Support Service from a local and accessible office based in the community as part of a region-wide rural community Infrastructure that is dedicated to rural.

COSTA plays an essential role in ensuring this within the Dungannon & South Tyrone area of Mid Ulster.

## RESPONDENT INFORMATION

**Please Note** this form **must** be returned with your response to ensure that we handle your response appropriately.

### 1. Name / Organisation

**Organisation Name (If applicable).**

Community Organisations of South Tyrone & AREAS LTD (COSTA)

**Title** Mr  Ms  Mrs  Miss  Dr  **Please tick as appropriate**

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**Email**  
info.costa@btconnect.com

### Consultation Questions

1) Do you agree that the proposed Aim, Objectives and Intended Outcomes (see Section 6) for the TRPSI Framework are appropriate?

Yes

No

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

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For example, in recent months the Rural Micro Capital Grant Programme has been promoted for DARD by the LRSNs and 2 phases have been rolled out to small rural groups in every part of rural NI. The programme has been oversubscribed and highly effective in targeting small grants at the most needy groups, helping them to deliver a wide range of local rural services. The MARA programme, Farm Families Health Checks and the promotion of Library services have all exceeded their targets thanks in large part to the promotional and organisational abilities and reach of the LRSNs. A local presence and knowledge of the area is to key to successful delivery.

This experience - linked to the hundreds of rural groups and thousands of individuals associated with the LRSNs - means that the Networks can help DARD to meet the objectives set in *Section 6 "Proposals for a successor Framework post 2016"*.

Together with other rural stakeholders, we can "promote the development of new and innovative pilot approaches to TRPSI AND encourage effective partnership working AND effectively target financial poverty, access poverty and social isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas".

**2) Do you agree that the 3 Priority Areas – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation (see Section 6) – should continue to be the main priorities for the TRPSI Framework?**

**Yes**

**No**

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

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The identification and successful delivery of various projects and programmes within these priorities would continue to bring greatest positive impact to the needs of those experiencing rural poverty and isolation. The priorities allow for a bottom-up community development approach in not only identifying relevant needs but also in delivering upon them using a cascade approach. It is our view that the most effective TRPSI programmes delivered to date have had a strong community ethos and process coupled with local knowledge access to where rural, social and economic needs are most prevalent. Invariably, there will be different levels of need in different geographical areas, however, as the nature of community sector delivery is designed sub regionally and is based on pertinent local needs then those most in poverty or experiencing isolation have less probability in remaining outside the reach of these priorities and programmes.

The Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation framework and it's priorities to date has been an excellent package of funding aimed at supporting vulnerable people and targeting the root causes of social isolation. As programmes take effect and outputs deliver meaningful change there are indeed necessary modifications within the themes or priorities which are required to continue to make most impact on the frameworks aims whilst external factors such as austerity and public budget finance availability will also determine and prioritize future considerations.

It is our view that the 3 Priority Areas – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social

Isolation should continue to be the main priorities for the TRPSI Framework since programmes can emerge from these themes which meet best the local community needs.

TRPSI and the priorities has now gained substantial traction and is now recognised as an essential brand which has made a huge difference to rural communities and which is complementary to the NIRDP. Many of the issues these priorities have tackled to date were previously hidden and would fall outside the remit of other mainstream funding programmes. There remains, however, continued challenges, needs and rural TRPSI issues which require on-going support at various levels of intervention and which would still come under these 3 priorities.

*The Rural Community Development Support Service currently delivered by the Local Rural Support Networks*, as a model of support to TRPSI, is most certainly envied throughout communities in Europe as a model leader in balancing appropriate and measured interventions to social, economic and access poverty issues at a community level. Promoting Community development at a local / sub regional level ensures that regional programmes are delivered effectively at the local level and access to the real needs and issues of communities is provided for. Supporting access to good governance, to economic and social poverty in communities; the service as provided by these local community based networks has proved an invaluable resource to the delivery of the TRPSI Framework.

These experienced local stakeholders have excellent working relationships with all other TRPSI delivery agents and indeed share a direct role in elements of their success making essential and valuable linkages and connections at sub regional and local levels. The key management role of DARD in direct delivery of this programme has proved to be most effective in ensuring that the networks could assist DARD to manage Regional programmes at local levels and to balance approaches necessary to ensuring programme priority themes reached the community sector using bottom up approaches.

The local access support provided to DARD's Modernisation Programme and its Rural Micro Capital Grants Programmes - as and when required by DARD - evidence how this infrastructure can react and respond to changing rural needs and requirements. Their modus operandi for the delivery of programmes such as MARA



are a testament to the Community Development approach which ensures participation and access to hidden and real needs at a local level across all 3 main priorities.

The networking function plays an invaluable role in achieving key community participation at all necessary levels from village planning facilitation to rural proofing consultation. With the reform of local Government, Community Planning, and the mandatory Charities registration requirements; these networks provide local mentoring support and guidance, technical support and facilitation at grassroots level to those rural communities most in need under the programme priorities of Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation. Most importantly, they can identify what local pertinent needs fit the programme.

We believe that it is the approaches taken under the overlying programme priorities which provide the appropriate lynchpins to ensure leverage of many other programmes and projects into rural areas and which have included such as community mental health awareness, capital build infrastructural programmes, rural tourism, lifelong learning, social investment, migrant support etc. These programmes operate in a time of decentralisation and digitization of services, the closing of rural banks, post offices, schools and other services and thus during a time when the greatest need for local people to provide adequate solutions to their own issues and problems within a community development approach. The 3 themes adequately allow for local communities, sub regional and innovative approach making to meeting rural TRPI needs.

**3) Do you agree that the 12 Key Principles (see Section 6) are appropriate for the TRPSI Framework?**

**Yes**

**No**

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

The rural support organisations delivering the DARD Rural Community Development Support Service / Programme agree with the key TRPSI principles as outlined in the framework document. Historically the Local Rural Support Networks successfully delivered pilot, innovative projects and interventions collaboratively and in partnership with statutory and other community and voluntary organisations and are widely perceived as the link between grass roots community groups operating at a local level with regional statutory bodies.

Positive outcomes of a collaborative approach to the delivery of services aimed at addressing rural poverty and isolation issues include:

- Ensuring the socially isolated and those with financial related issues have access and opportunities to avail of support services
- Increasing the capacity of designated rural support organisations and grass roots community groups to collectively and with greater efficiency deliver both services and support interventions that may not be possible if delivered in isolation.

A negative outcome of delivering a successful pilot or innovative project is the lack of funding to effectively mainstream the service or project. Increased opportunities to continue or mainstream projects that have demonstrated effectiveness should be a key objective of a future TRPSI framework both for addressing poverty and social isolation issues and having to avoid dealing with the expectation when a service or project ceases.

Local Rural Support Networks will continue to be a conduit to disseminate information on key government strategies to the community voluntary sector through their established communication channels and will continue to lobby and be the 'voice' of the rural community sector during discussions with statutory and governmental organisations e.g. Rural Community Development Support Service / Programme and Community Planning.

**4) Do you agree that the list of Target Groups (see Section 6) is appropriate in relation to providing support to vulnerable groups under the successor TRPSI Framework?**

**Yes**

**No**

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSN's) welcome the proposal that the successor Framework would be open to a wider range of target groups. As an infrastructure providing community development support to the rural community across Northern Ireland for many years, we have, almost without exception, worked with all these vulnerable groups.

We particularly welcome the introduction of the working poor and the under employed. The continuing economic uncertainty has left many families in difficult financial circumstances. One or both parents are working however income levels fall below what they need to have a meaningful quality of life. A sudden change in circumstances, such as marital breakup or ill health, can have further detrimental consequences and lead to social exclusion and poverty.

Mental health still retains a significant stigma, particularly in rural areas, and many of the LRSN's run programmes which directly tackle mental ill health in their communities. Statistics show that one in four run the risk of mental ill health thus their inclusion in this framework is essential.

The inclusion of the LGBT community in the framework is also welcome. Whilst members of the LGBT community live in rural areas they tend to meet and socialise in their nearest town. However LRSN's have a role to play in supporting them to remain in their community and in ensuring statutory organisations and the wider public are aware of the issues affecting them.

Perhaps one omission from the list of vulnerable groups is men. Whilst accepted that most farmers are men there may be male rural dwellers who are not farmers. Globally, the gap between male and female life expectancy and healthy life expectancy has widened in the last 40 years and is expected to get even bigger by

2030. Research commissioned by the Priory Group of 1,000 men found that: 77% of men polled have suffered with anxiety / stress / depression; the biggest pressures in men's life are work (32%), finance (31%) and health (23%); the majority of men claim their mental health is having a negative impact on their work performance, parenting ability and relationships; 40% of men polled said it would take thoughts of suicide or self-harm to compel them to seek professional help.

[www.priorygroup.com/blog/mentalhealth/-i-ve-learnt-to-deal-with-it---40-of-men-won-t-talk-to-anyone-about-their-mentalhealth](http://www.priorygroup.com/blog/mentalhealth/-i-ve-learnt-to-deal-with-it---40-of-men-won-t-talk-to-anyone-about-their-mentalhealth)

**5) (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing Access Poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas**

We are pleased to welcome the measures in the draft Framework. Many of the proposed measures will go a long way to tackle issues that blight so many rural dwellers. We appreciate that the list of groups is not exhaustive: Women, Farmers, People on work on low incomes (the working poor), Children and Young People, Older people and Ethnic Minorities and Immigrants, People with low skills or low levels of education etc. Our experience shows that some of the groups need to be broken down into subgroups.

For example there are sections of the farming industry that have seen their incomes severely cut in the last two years (dairy Farmers). Future prices in this industry predict another 10% drop in the next three months. Mental health in this area gives us great cause for concern. This is evidenced by the increase calls to help lines, up by 30% in the last year.

Many Ethnic Minorities are finding it difficult to assimilate, especially those living in the rural community. There are a number of factors that drive this. Some Ethnic groups neither have English as their first or second language; this communication barrier reinforces isolation and is a contributing factor in poor mental health. Those who have a strong grasp of the English language find it easier to "fit in". This also is a factor in this section being "excepted". In conclusion we think this group of Ethnic minorities should be broken down into sections not exclusively into language sections. i.e. short-to-medium dwellers who may seasonal workers.

We are pleased with the other target groups and we welcome that people with low skills and low levels of education might have a chance to enhance their employability. The training involved to up skill this group will act as a medium to tackle social isolation. Many who suffer from social isolation either don't recognise their plight or only recognise it when their horizons broaden due to intervention from an un-proscribed source. i.e. further education either social education or accredited.

The "Outcomes based pilot programmes" is also most welcome. This allows delivery agents latitude to make informed researched based decisions that will go to the hart rural poverty and social isolation.

Under 6.8 V we strongly concur with the mainstreaming of successful pilot projects. The Department launched the Rural Community Micro Grants 2015-2016, we in the Rural Support Networks found this reached parts of the rural community that that had gone under the radar in the past. This has opened a pathway for community development that goes to the core of TRPSI Policy. This merges into 6VII "sustainability". Some groups for the first time now see a pathway using community a development approach with the support of the Networks.

6.8X The sharing of information and best practice learning between organisations has the potential that prevents groups trying to "reinventing the wheel" and will avoid duplication between organisations.

6.8 XI The Community Planning and the consultation process will be key, both in a strategic and a complementary role. It is imperative that at all stages of the community planning that the rural voice is heard and well represented. The Rural Support Networks will play an enabling role to ensure events are well attended and the TRPSI policy principles are promoted.

6.8 VIII Good Relations being promoted: there will be many opportunities to develop innovative partnerships, PEACEIV et al.

One should not underestimate the incidental "good relations" through the Rural Development Programme. The carrot and stick approach for single identity group has been proven to open halls to a wider diaspora. Not only does this lead to better community relations but adds to the sustainability of the halls.

**(b) Please provide details on any further measures which you think should be considered to help address Access Poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas**

The Rural Micro Capital Grants Programme opened many new doors because it gave an incentive for tangible assets to be acquired for the benefit of a particular group. For many this has been the first time in making a funding application. The benefits not only include the asset but their governance has now been under the spotlight and sharpened to enable their participation. We would propose an extension of this innovative idea. The structure used to deliver the grants is now well established, this same structure could deliver small capitol grants say up to £10,000 for basic needs that so many halls throughout the country require.

Community transport should be reviewed to widen its scope. Longer journeys should be considered that travel between a number of service providers.

Evidence indicates that there is an appetite for ICT / Computer Training in rural areas. The LRSNs could deliver this service. There used to be an outreach service from the regional Colleges, we don't advocate for its return. The service that they provided no longer is fit for propose. Farmers and rural dwellers want a basic standard of training that may not necessarily be accredited. The end result would be Farmers having the ability to make online returns. Farm families coming together braking social isolation and have a greater understanding of the world wide web. Greater use and the promotion of Luncheon Clubs in rural areas could provide a service that; tackles social isolation, helps sustain a target audience, increases the sustainability of rural halls. All this combined adds to the cohesion of rural communities.

**6) (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing Financial Poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas**

Financial poverty refers to the measure of the degree to which people face the risk of serious deprivation in terms of their standard of living or to which they fall below a specified minimum level of resources. Through the measures in the draft action plan there is the opportunity to raise the standard of living for those people living in rural areas. Particularly in regard to addressing issues such as rural transport which is currently a major issue which prohibits many rural dwellers from accessing essential basic services. In addition measures targeted at supporting household energy efficiency improvement & the introduction of new employability and entrepreneurship opportunities are also to be welcomed.

**(b) Please provide details on any other measures which you think should be considered to help address Financial Poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas**

Other measures which may alleviate financial poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas include the creation of jobs through investment in infrastructure such as investment in rural hubs, renovating abandoned housing and broadband infrastructure development, therefore increasing the chances of the young people of rural areas to stay, therefore building a stronger rural economy. With added investment in high quality and affordable childcare and early intervention this will create increased opportunities for jobs.

**7) (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing Social Isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas**

The Local Rural Support Networks welcome the continued recognition by DARD of the problems caused within the rural population due to Social Isolation. We acknowledge the priority areas for intervention listed within the Draft Action Plan under Social Isolation of promoting tolerance, health, well-being and inclusion for rural dwellers and through our long established work within rural communities agree that these are valid and worthwhile Priority Areas for Intervention.

Poor Mental Health and well-being is an issue that has major impacts within rural communities given the fact that many people are living in isolated circumstances often on their own or with limited family and / or community connections.

The farming community is also a grouping who have been demonstrated to have poor mental health as they are facing increasing stresses of managing their businesses mostly working on an individual basis with limited opportunities to engage with others. Many of the LRSN's are engaged in delivering mental health and wellbeing programmes over the last ten years, all of these programmes have been externally evaluated and have shown excellent results in improving local mental health and wellbeing. Any new pilot programmes delivered under the new framework need to take into consideration the knowledge and learning of the evaluations.

One concern that the LRSN's would have that by naming the priority as '*promote positive mental health and wellbeing*' rather than '*promoting positive health and wellbeing*'; interventions could be limited in their scope to secure engagement by rural dwellers. There is still a stigma around mental health in rural areas and people would be more likely to engage with activities that are seen to be about general health and wellbeing, people in many instances would not want to be identified through participating in activities as someone who has mental health issue. If people are at least attracted to an activity the issue of mental health can then be addressed.

Therefore as LRSN's we do welcome the example initiatives listed as they list 'Support for health and wellbeing activities' as well as 'Support the promotion of mental health awareness and actions' and we ask that the learning and evidence from positive work that has been undertaken with rural communities through the



LRSN's, Healthy Living Centres, other Community, Voluntary and Statutory bodies on these actions and activities are used when drawing up plans for initiatives to support under the new TRPSI framework.

The Local Rural Support Networks would welcome actions that will support the rural population to improve their health and wellbeing particularly those activities that are operated and provided at local facilities and venues.

The LRSN's welcome that '*increase opportunities for social engagement*' is listed as a priority area of intervention as the value of people of all ages within rural communities being given the opportunity to engage with others on a social basis cannot be underestimated. It is through these social activities that the aim of "promote tolerance, health, wellbeing and inclusion' can be best achieved within rural communities as by bringing people together they are getting to know each other. This is needed within communities as in many instances during their working and education lives many members of rural communities are away from the community during the day and thus have limited opportunities to engage with others. It is only through actual engagement in the same physical space that tolerance can be promoted and this is especially important in rural communities as due to low numbers of people activities are best organised to attract as many members of the population as possible so that a sufficient number of people attend to make an activity viable. Therefore anything that can be done to encourage use of community facilities that have been traditionally associated as belonging to one section of the community would be welcome. Such venues can become hubs for social inclusion activities within rural communities.

Many venues within rural communities require some level of work to ensure that they are brought up to a condition that they are accessible and suitable to be used to provide activities that address social isolation.

The Local Rural Support Networks welcome the inclusion of '*support community capacity*' as an example initiative as a capable and effective local community infrastructure is of vital importance to the fabric of life within rural communities and those involved in organisations within local communities are largely undertaking this role on a voluntary basis. These organisations require ongoing community development support to continue their operations on an effective and efficient basis

and become involved in projects that will address poverty and social isolation at a local level within rural communities.

The community development support work delivered by the Local Rural Support Networks resourced under the previous TRPSI Framework has been very effective in ensuring the survival and continued operation of local community infrastructure. This community infrastructure of the LRSN's working in partnership with organisations located within local communities has also ensured that many of the other initiatives supported under TRPSI have been effective at reaching into rural communities and tackling poverty and social isolation.

**(b) Please provide details on any other measures which you think should be considered to help address Social Isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas**

The Local Rural Support Networks would welcome the resourcing of actions to plan and coordinate the effective operation of activities that would address social isolation. This would involve a resource of a person to co-ordinate activities and associated resource budget to cover some of the costs of operating activities particularly training new and innovative activities on a pilot basis. This would ensure that activities are operated on a coordinated and effective basis, securing sufficient numbers, building linkages within and between communities, duplication is avoided, gaps in provision of social inclusion activities are identified and tackled.

The ongoing work within the LRSN's and their delivery of the MARA project has clearly demonstrated that there is a significant issue around mental health problems in homes, particularly depression and loneliness.

The Framework would provide an excellent opportunity to design a pilot project that would take advantage of the excellent community development model that we have that could be harnessed to deliver a programme to enable rural dwellers to avail of resources to assist them to overcome loneliness and seek help with other mental health conditions. The Programme could be designed to ensure a rural community response is adopted to encourage self-help and self-care.

**8) How might the successor TRPSI Framework contribute towards the development of more effective rural community support structures?**

Please provide comments in the box below

The TRPSI Framework has been a key success factor for rural organisations (e.g. the 9 Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs) / Rural Community Development Support Service Contract) in terms ensuring rural proofing, levering-in vital resources to rural areas, and enabling effective implementation of the TRPSI Framework throughout the region.

*Making Strategic Facilitation and Joined-Up Government a reality:* the TRPSI Framework is vital to ensuring that rural needs are addressed by the government in a localised and joined-up way that reaches the most vulnerable and those most in need.

The successor TRPSI Framework would not only enable much greater utilisation of financial resources, but also would combine the expertise of public sector bodies, and the private, voluntary and community sectors to create greater economies of scale in terms utilising all available knowledge, skills and capacity. This in turn maximises innovation and enables increased access to those most in need and those who are most difficult to reach (e.g. the MARA Project has reached out to almost 15,000 households).

TRPSI has been vital in ensuring that *rural* gets its fair share in terms of community development via a high quality networking infrastructure and Community Development Support Service that is run by grass roots representatives right across the region.

The DARD Rural Micro-Capital Grants Programme delivered on-the-ground by the 9 Local Rural Support Networks, have been essential to ensuring capital investment reaches the smallest and lowest capacity rural groups throughout the entire region.

The additional financial leverage over the last four years from the Local Rural Support Networks alone in terms of additional programmes, projects and grant schemes (promoting health, peace, equality, skills, employability, capacity etc) is £56 million.

The LRSNs have been central to the role of assisting the set-up of the new local Action Groups (NIRDP) and ensuring grass roots community representation.

**9) How might a successor TRPSI Framework support the delivery of local councils Community Plans?**

Please provide comments in the box below

The TRPSI Framework could play a key role in the delivery of local Council Community Plans via the TRPSI-funded Rural Community Development Support Service which can facilitate the ongoing involvement of the Local Rural Support Networks (LRSN's) in the community planning process. The foundations for the delivery of Community Planning already exist within the local Council areas through the LRSN's and their vast network of community based organisations – Community Planning should build upon these existing structures. The delivery of Community Planning within the local Council areas will require the engagement of existing and emerging partnerships working collaboratively. The well-established and proven track record of the LRSN's could well be effective resources in such a delivery process. It is imperative that the development of Community Planning includes the continuing engagement of such current resources so as agreed delivery structures for Community Planning are adopted that act as wider collaborative forums for the benefit of the communities that they will ultimately serve.

During the past 4 years the LRSN's have delivered, under the current TRPSI Framework, a Rural Community Development Support Service to a wide range of rural organisation and groups. This has proven to be an effective model and partnership for the delivery of such services and the LRSN's, with continued support from the TRPSI programme, are therefore well placed to assist local Councils in the delivery of community planning over the next number of years due to the following factors:

- Strong partnership & links with the rural community already in place
- Added value from funding leverage from other programmes
- Already working closely with DARD to deliver services including the development of the NI Rural Development Programme (2014-2020)

The delivery structures for the Community Planning process within local Councils must

therefore take account of existing rural structures & delivery organisations so as to ensure there is less fragmentation of implementation groups and integration of the various locally focused Action Plans. This will ensure that the Community Planning process will effectively serve the priority needs of the rural community, the ongoing support of DARD for the rural community development sector at grass roots level through the TRPSI framework is crucial to this.

**10) Do you have any views on the conclusions reached by DARD (see Section 9) in relation to the proposals for a successor TRPSI Framework in respect of:**

**(iii) The Equality and Human Rights Template**

Please provide comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs) / Rural Community Development Support Service contract holders have a proven track record of working with DARD (as partner organisations) to contribute, develop and implement new and innovative pilot measures to Target Rural Poverty and reduce Social Isolation. The LRSNs welcome a localised approach to the design and delivery of measures which effectively target financial poverty, access poverty and social isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas in line with the key principles of the Framework. The LRSNs are advantageously neutral to central and local government ensuring that all rural communities can access resources, services and programmes in a timely manner regardless of religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status, sexual orientation or disability. The LRSNs ensure Section 75 information is recorded in line with procedures under International Quality Standard ISO 9001:2008 and kept securely in keeping with Data Protection Legislation.

**(iv) The Rural Issues Statement**

Please provide comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs) / Rural Community Development Support Service contract holders have a proven track record of working with DARD (as partner organisations) to ensure the TRPSI Framework has been a key success factor ensuring rural proofing and enabling effective implementation positive direct impact on the vulnerable in rural communities through a localised infrastructure. In the last four years we have empowered some 15,000 individuals, including the hardest to reach, socially isolated and most vulnerable of the population in Northern Ireland. Delivering capacity building programmes within rural areas to encourage and ensure participation in the Rural Development Programme. Undertaking the delivery of the MARA Project has reached out to almost 15,000 households directly impacting on their quality of life.

The LRSNs have also been successful in additional leverage which has had positive indirect impacts. For example we have rolled out projects and grant schemes (promoting health, peace, equality, skills, employability) equating to over £56million in the last four years. All of these measures support the delivery of key services for rural dwellers to avail of and have indirectly helped to tackle social isolation and the related mental health connotations that come with this. The central and neutral role that the LRSNs deliver; give local services for local people and ensure grass roots community representation in rolling out TRPSI Framework.

**11) Is there any other aspect of the proposals that you wish to comment on?**

Please provide comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs) are an essential conduit for the delivery of joined-up local initiatives designed to tackle rural poverty and social isolation.

Our track record is well proven and we aim to continue in ensuring rural communities have their needs met and to deliver the Rural Community Development Support Service from a local and accessible office based in the community as part of a region-wide rural community Infrastructure that is dedicated to rural.

COSTA plays an essential role in ensuring this within the Dungannon & South Tyrone area of Mid Ulster.

## RESPONDENT INFORMATION

**Please Note** this form **must** be returned with your response to ensure that we handle your response appropriately.

### 1. Name / Organisation

**Organisation Name (If applicable).**

Community Organisations of South Tyrone & AREAS LTD (COSTA)

**Title** Mr  Ms  Mrs  Miss  Dr  **Please tick as appropriate**

**Surname**

Griffin

**Forename**

Loraine

### 2. Postal Address

President Grant's Homestead

45 Dergenagh Road

Dungannon

Co. Tyrone

**Postcode** BT70 1TW

**Phone** 028 855 56880

**Email**  
info.costa@btconnect.com



### Consultation Questions

1) Do you agree that the proposed Aim, Objectives and Intended Outcomes (see Section 6) for the TRPSI Framework are appropriate?

Yes

No

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs) have a proven track record of working with DARD (as partner organisations) to develop and implement new and innovative pilot measures in hundreds of rural villages and communities to Target Rural Poverty and reduce Social Isolation. Although not clearly highlighted in some of the TRPSI consultation papers, it has been acknowledged by all stakeholders (from The Minister and the ARD Committee to local groups) that all the other TRPSI measures in the current programme were dependent on a solid and responsive rural community infrastructure across NI. The LRSNs have worked closely with DARD for over 20 years to put that infrastructure in place and that is the reason so many of the TRPSI measures have been so successful.

For example, in recent months the Rural Micro Capital Grant Programme has been promoted for DARD by the LRSNs and 2 phases have been rolled out to small rural groups in every part of rural NI. The programme has been oversubscribed and highly effective in targeting small grants at the most needy groups, helping them to deliver a wide range of local rural services. The MARA programme, Farm Families Health Checks and the promotion of Library services have all exceeded their targets thanks in large part to the promotional and organisational abilities and reach of the LRSNs. A local presence and knowledge of the area is to key to successful delivery.

This experience - linked to the hundreds of rural groups and thousands of individuals associated with the LRSNs - means that the Networks can help DARD to meet the objectives set in *Section 6 "Proposals for a successor Framework post 2016"*.

Together with other rural stakeholders, we can “promote the development of new and innovative pilot approaches to TRPSI AND encourage effective partnership working AND effectively target financial poverty, access poverty and social isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas”.

**2) Do you agree that the 3 Priority Areas – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation (see Section 6) – should continue to be the main priorities for the TRPSI Framework?**

**Yes**

**No**

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks believe that the 3 Priority Areas – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation should continue to be the main priorities for the TRPSI Framework as they are still relevant in 2016, encapsulate the varying needs of the rural community and encompass a service deliverability which can be most effectively demonstrated through a *local or sub regional level approach*.

The identification and successful delivery of various projects and programmes within these priorities would continue to bring greatest positive impact to the needs of those experiencing rural poverty and isolation. The priorities allow for a bottom-up community development approach in not only identifying relevant needs but also in delivering upon them using a cascade approach. It is our view that the most effective TRPSI programmes delivered to date have had a strong community ethos and process coupled with local knowledge access to where rural, social and economic needs are most prevalent. Invariably, there will be different levels of need in different geographical areas, however, as the nature of community sector delivery is designed sub regionally and is based on pertinent local needs then those most in poverty or experiencing isolation have less probability in remaining outside the reach of these priorities and programmes.

The Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation framework and it's priorities to date has been an excellent package of funding aimed at supporting vulnerable people and targeting the root causes of social isolation. As programmes take effect and outputs deliver meaningful change there are indeed necessary modifications within the themes or priorities which are required to continue to make most impact on the frameworks aims whilst external factors such as austerity and public budget finance availability will also determine and prioritize future considerations.

It is our view that the 3 Priority Areas – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation should continue to be the main priorities for the TRPSI Framework since programmes can emerge from these themes which meet best the local community needs.

TRPSI and the priorities has now gained substantial traction and is now recognised as an essential brand which has made a huge difference to rural communities and which is complementary to the NIRDP. Many of the issues these priorities have tackled to date were previously hidden and would fall outside the remit of other

mainstream funding programmes. There remains, however, continued challenges, needs and rural TRPSI issues which require on-going support at various levels of intervention and which would still come under these 3 priorities.

*The Rural Community Development Support Service currently delivered by the Local Rural Support Networks*, as a model of support to TRPSI, is most certainly envied throughout communities in Europe as a model leader in balancing appropriate and measured interventions to social, economic and access poverty issues at a community level. Promoting Community development at a local / sub regional level ensures that regional programmes are delivered effectively at the local level and access to the real needs and issues of communities is provided for. Supporting access to good governance, to economic and social poverty in communities; the service as provided by these local community based networks has proved an invaluable resource to the delivery of the TRPSI Framework.

These experienced local stakeholders have excellent working relationships with all other TRPSI delivery agents and indeed share a direct role in elements of their success making essential and valuable linkages and connections at sub regional and local levels. The key management role of DARD in direct delivery of this programme has proved to be most effective in ensuring that the networks could assist DARD to manage Regional programmes at local levels and to balance approaches necessary to ensuring programme priority themes reached the community sector using bottom up approaches.

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The networking function plays an invaluable role in achieving key community participation at all necessary levels from village planning facilitation to rural proofing consultation. With the reform of local Government, Community Planning, and the mandatory Charities registration requirements; these networks provide local

mentoring support and guidance, technical support and facilitation at grassroots level to those rural communities most in need under the programme priorities of Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation. Most importantly, they can identify what local pertinent needs fit the programme.

We believe that it is the approaches taken under the overlying programme priorities which provide the appropriate lynchpins to ensure leverage of many other programmes and projects into rural areas and which have included such as community mental health awareness, capital build infrastructural programmes, rural tourism, lifelong learning, social investment, migrant support etc. These programmes operate in a time of decentralisation and digitization of services, the closing of rural banks, post offices, schools and other services and thus during a time when the greatest need for local people to provide adequate solutions to their own issues and problems within a community development approach. The 3 themes adequately allow for local communities, sub regional and innovative approach making to meeting rural TRPI needs.

**3) Do you agree that the 12 Key Principles (see Section 6) are appropriate for the TRPSI Framework?**

**Yes**

**No**

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

The rural support organisations delivering the DARD Rural Community Development Support Service / Programme agree with the key TRPSI principles as outlined in the framework document. Historically the Local Rural Support Networks successfully delivered pilot, innovative projects and interventions collaboratively and in partnership with statutory and other community and voluntary organisations and are widely perceived as the link between grass roots community groups operating at a local level with regional statutory bodies.

Positive outcomes of a collaborative approach to the delivery of services aimed at addressing rural poverty and isolation issues include:

- Ensuring the socially isolated and those with financial related issues have access and opportunities to avail of support services
- Increasing the capacity of designated rural support organisations and grass roots community groups to collectively and with greater efficiency deliver both services and support interventions that may not be possible if delivered in isolation.

A negative outcome of delivering a successful pilot or innovative project is the lack of funding to effectively mainstream the service or project. Increased opportunities to continue or mainstream projects that have demonstrated effectiveness should be a key objective of a future TRPSI framework both for addressing poverty and social isolation issues and having to avoid dealing with the expectation when a service or project ceases.

Local Rural Support Networks will continue to be a conduit to disseminate information on key government strategies to the community voluntary sector through their established communication channels and will continue to lobby and be the 'voice' of the rural community sector during discussions with statutory and governmental organisations e.g. Rural Community Development Support Service / Programme and Community Planning.

**4) Do you agree that the list of Target Groups (see Section 6) is appropriate in relation to providing support to vulnerable groups under the successor TRPSI Framework?**

**Yes**

**No**

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSN's) welcome the proposal that the successor Framework would be open to a wider range of target groups. As an infrastructure providing community development support to the rural community across Northern Ireland for many years, we have, almost without exception, worked with all these vulnerable groups.

We particularly welcome the introduction of the working poor and the under employed. The continuing economic uncertainty has left many families in difficult financial circumstances. One or both parents are working however income levels fall below what they need to have a meaningful quality of life. A sudden change in circumstances, such as marital breakup or ill health, can have further detrimental consequences and lead to social exclusion and poverty.

Mental health still retains a significant stigma, particularly in rural areas, and many of the LRSN's run programmes which directly tackle mental ill health in their communities. Statistics show that one in four run the risk of mental ill health thus their inclusion in this framework is essential.

The inclusion of the LGBT community in the framework is also welcome. Whilst members of the LGBT community live in rural areas they tend to meet and socialise in their nearest town. However LRSN's have a role to play in supporting them to remain in their community and in ensuring statutory organisations and the wider public are aware of the issues affecting them.

Perhaps one omission from the list of vulnerable groups is men. Whilst accepted that most farmers are men there may be male rural dwellers who are not farmers. Globally, the gap between male and female life expectancy and healthy life expectancy has widened in the last 40 years and is expected to get even bigger by 2030. Research commissioned by the Priory Group of 1,000 men found that: 77% of men polled have suffered with anxiety / stress / depression; the biggest pressures in men's life are work (32%), finance (31%) and health (23%); the majority of men claim

their mental health is having a negative impact on their work performance, parenting ability and relationships; 40% of men polled said it would take thoughts of suicide or self-harm to compel them to seek professional help.

[www.priorygroup.com/blog/mentalhealth/i-ve-learnt-to-deal-with-it---40-of-men-won-t-talk-to-anyone-about-their-mentalhealth](http://www.priorygroup.com/blog/mentalhealth/i-ve-learnt-to-deal-with-it---40-of-men-won-t-talk-to-anyone-about-their-mentalhealth)

**5) (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing Access Poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas**

We are pleased to welcome the measures in the draft Framework. Many of the proposed measures will go a long way to tackle issues that blight so many rural dwellers. We appreciate that the list of groups is not exhaustive: Women, Farmers, People on work on low incomes (the working poor), Children and Young People, Older people and Ethnic Minorities and Immigrants, People with low skills or low levels of education etc. Our experience shows that some of the groups need to be broken down into subgroups.

For example there are sections of the farming industry that have seen their incomes severely cut in the last two years (dairy Farmers). Future prices in this industry predict another 10% drop in the next three months. Mental health in this area gives us great cause for concern. This is evidenced by the increase calls to help lines, up by 30% in the last year.

Many Ethnic Minorities are finding it difficult to assimilate, especially those living in the rural community. There are a number of factors that drive this. Some Ethnic groups neither have English as their first or second language; this communication barrier reinforces isolation and is a contributing factor in poor mental health. Those who have a strong grasp of the English language find it easier to “fit in”. This also is a factor in this section being “excepted”. In conclusion we think this group of Ethnic minorities should be broken down into sections not exclusively into language sections. i.e. short-to-medium dwellers who may seasonal workers.



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The "Outcomes based pilot programmes" is also most welcome. This allows delivery agents latitude to make informed researched based decisions that will go to the hart rural poverty and social isolation.

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6.8X The sharing of information and best practice learning between organisations has the potential that prevents groups trying to "reinventing the wheel" and will avoid duplication between organisations.

6.8 XI The Community Planning and the consultation process will be key, both in a strategic and a complementary role. It is imperative that at all stages of the community planning that the rural voice is heard and well represented. The Rural Support Networks will play an enabling role to ensure events are well attended and the TRPSI policy principles are promoted.

6.8 VIII Good Relations being promoted: there will be many opportunities to develop innovative partnerships, PEACEIV et al.

One should not underestimate the incidental "good relations" through the Rural Development Programme. The carrot and stick approach for single identity group has been proven to open halls to a wider diaspora. Not only does this lead to better community relations but adds to the sustainability of the halls.

**(b) Please provide details on any further measures which you think should be considered to help address Access Poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas**

The Rural Micro Capital Grants Programme opened many new doors because it gave an incentive for tangible assets to be acquired for the benefit of a particular group. For many this has been the first time in making a funding application. The benefits not only include the asset but their governance has now been under the spotlight and sharpened to enable their participation. We would propose an extension of this innovative idea. The structure used to deliver the grants is now well established, this same structure could deliver small capitol grants say up to £10,000 for basic needs that so many halls throughout the country require.

Community transport should be reviewed to widen its scope. Longer journeys should be considered that travel between a number of service providers.

Evidence indicates that there is an appetite for ICT / Computer Training in rural areas. The LRSNs could deliver this service. There used to be an outreach service from the regional Colleges, we don't advocate for its return. The service that they provided no longer is fit for propose. Farmers and rural dwellers want a basic standard of training that may not necessarily be accredited. The end result would be Farmers having the ability to make online returns. Farm families coming together braking social isolation and have a greater understanding of the world wide web. Greater use and the promotion of Luncheon Clubs in rural areas could provide a service that; tackles social isolation, helps sustain a target audience, increases the sustainability of rural halls. All this combined adds to the cohesion of rural communities.

**6) (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing Financial Poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas**

Financial poverty refers to the measure of the degree to which people face the risk of serious deprivation in terms of their standard of living or to which they fall below a specified minimum level of resources. Through the measures in the draft action plan there is the opportunity to raise the standard of living for those people living in rural areas. Particularly in regard to addressing issues such as rural transport which is currently a major issue which prohibits many rural dwellers from accessing essential basic services. In addition measures targeted at supporting household energy efficiency improvement & the introduction of new employability and entrepreneurship opportunities are also to be welcomed.

**(b) Please provide details on any other measures which you think should be considered to help address Financial Poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas**

Other measures which may alleviate financial poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas include the creation of jobs through investment in infrastructure such as investment in rural hubs, renovating abandoned housing and broadband infrastructure development, therefore increasing the chances of the young people of rural areas to stay, therefore building a stronger rural economy. With added investment in high quality and affordable childcare and early intervention this will create increased opportunities for jobs.

**7) (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing Social Isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas**

The Local Rural Support Networks welcome the continued recognition by DARD of the problems caused within the rural population due to Social Isolation. We acknowledge the priority areas for intervention listed within the Draft Action Plan under Social Isolation of promoting tolerance, health, well-being and inclusion for rural dwellers and through our long established work within rural communities agree that these are valid and worthwhile Priority Areas for Intervention.

Poor Mental Health and well-being is an issue that has major impacts within rural communities given the fact that many people are living in isolated circumstances often on their own or with limited family and / or community connections.

The farming community is also a grouping who have been demonstrated to have poor mental health as they are facing increasing stresses of managing their businesses mostly working on an individual basis with limited opportunities to engage with others. Many of the LRSN's are engaged in delivering mental health and wellbeing programmes over the last ten years, all of these programmes have been externally evaluated and have shown excellent results in improving local mental health and wellbeing. Any new pilot programmes delivered under the new framework need to take into consideration the knowledge and learning of the evaluations.

One concern that the LRSN's would have that by naming the priority as '*promote positive mental health and wellbeing*' rather than '*promoting positive health and wellbeing*'; interventions could be limited in their scope to secure engagement by rural dwellers. There is still a stigma around mental health in rural areas and people would be more likely to engage with activities that are seen to be about general health and wellbeing, people in many instances would not want to be identified through participating in activities as someone who has mental health issue. If people are at least attracted to an activity the issue of mental health can then be addressed.

Therefore as LRSN's we do welcome the example initiatives listed as they list 'Support for health and wellbeing activities' as well as 'Support the promotion of mental health awareness and actions' and we ask that the learning and evidence from positive work that has been undertaken with rural communities through the

LRSN's, Healthy Living Centres, other Community, Voluntary and Statutory bodies on these actions and activities are used when drawing up plans for initiatives to support under the new TRPSI framework.

The Local Rural Support Networks would welcome actions that will support the rural population to improve their health and wellbeing particularly those activities that are operated and provided at local facilities and venues.

The LRSN's welcome that '*increase opportunities for social engagement*' is listed as a priority area of intervention as the value of people of all ages within rural communities being given the opportunity to engage with others on a social basis cannot be underestimated. It is through these social activities that the aim of "promote tolerance, health, wellbeing and inclusion' can be best achieved within rural communities as by bringing people together they are getting to know each other. This is needed within communities as in many instances during their working and education lives many members of rural communities are away from the community during the day and thus have limited opportunities to engage with others. It is only through actual engagement in the same physical space that tolerance can be promoted and this is especially important in rural communities as due to low numbers of people activities are best organised to attract as many members of the population as possible so that a sufficient number of people attend to make an activity viable. Therefore anything that can be done to encourage use of community facilities that have been traditionally associated as belonging to one section of the community would be welcome. Such venues can become hubs for social inclusion activities within rural communities.

Many venues within rural communities require some level of work to ensure that they are brought up to a condition that they are accessible and suitable to be used to provide activities that address social isolation.

The Local Rural Support Networks welcome the inclusion of '*support community capacity*' as an example initiative as a capable and effective local community infrastructure is of vital importance to the fabric of life within rural communities and those involved in organisations within local communities are largely undertaking this role on a voluntary basis. These organisations require ongoing community development support to continue their operations on an effective and efficient basis

and become involved in projects that will address poverty and social isolation at a local level within rural communities.

The community development support work delivered by the Local Rural Support Networks resourced under the previous TRPSI Framework has been very effective in ensuring the survival and continued operation of local community infrastructure. This community infrastructure of the LRSN's working in partnership with organisations located within local communities has also ensured that many of the other initiatives supported under TRPSI have been effective at reaching into rural communities and tackling poverty and social isolation.

**(b) Please provide details on any other measures which you think should be considered to help address Social Isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas**

The Local Rural Support Networks would welcome the resourcing of actions to plan and coordinate the effective operation of activities that would address social isolation. This would involve a resource of a person to co-ordinate activities and associated resource budget to cover some of the costs of operating activities particularly training new and innovative activities on a pilot basis. This would ensure that activities are operated on a coordinated and effective basis, securing sufficient numbers, building linkages within and between communities, duplication is avoided, gaps in provision of social inclusion activities are identified and tackled.

The ongoing work within the LRSN's and their delivery of the MARA project has clearly demonstrated that there is a significant issue around mental health problems in homes, particularly depression and loneliness.

The Framework would provide an excellent opportunity to design a pilot project that would take advantage of the excellent community development model that we have that could be harnessed to deliver a programme to enable rural dwellers to avail of resources to assist them to overcome loneliness and seek help with other mental health conditions. The Programme could be designed to ensure a rural community response is adopted to encourage self-help and self-care.

**8) How might the successor TRPSI Framework contribute towards the development of more effective rural community support structures?**

Please provide comments in the box below

The TRPSI Framework has been a key success factor for rural organisations (e.g. the 9 Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs) / Rural Community Development Support Service Contract) in terms ensuring rural proofing, levering-in vital resources to rural areas, and enabling effective implementation of the TRPSI Framework throughout the region.

*Making Strategic Facilitation and Joined-Up Government a reality:* the TRPSI Framework is vital to ensuring that rural needs are addressed by the government in a localised and joined-up way that reaches the most vulnerable and those most in need.

The successor TRPSI Framework would not only enable much greater utilisation of financial resources, but also would combine the expertise of public sector bodies, and the private, voluntary and community sectors to create greater economies of scale in terms utilising all available knowledge, skills and capacity. This in turn maximises innovation and enables increased access to those most in need and those who are most difficult to reach (e.g. the MARA Project has reached out to almost 15,000 households).

TRPSI has been vital in ensuring that *rural* gets its fair share in terms of community development via a high quality networking infrastructure and Community Development Support Service that is run by grass roots representatives right across the region.

The DARD Rural Micro-Capital Grants Programme delivered on-the-ground by the 9 Local Rural Support Networks, have been essential to ensuring capital investment reaches the smallest and lowest capacity rural groups throughout the entire region.

The additional financial leverage over the last four years from the Local Rural Support Networks alone in terms of additional programmes, projects and grant schemes (promoting health, peace, equality, skills, employability, capacity etc) is £56 million.

The LRSNs have been central to the role of assisting the set-up of the new local Action Groups (NIRDP) and ensuring grass roots community representation.

**9) How might a successor TRPSI Framework support the delivery of local councils Community Plans?**

Please provide comments in the box below

The TRPSI Framework could play a key role in the delivery of local Council Community Plans via the TRPSI-funded Rural Community Development Support Service which can facilitate the ongoing involvement of the Local Rural Support Networks (LRSN's) in the community planning process. The foundations for the delivery of Community Planning already exist within the local Council areas through the LRSN's and their vast network of community based organisations – Community Planning should build upon these existing structures. The delivery of Community Planning within the local Council areas will require the engagement of existing and emerging partnerships working collaboratively. The well-established and proven track record of the LRSN's could well be effective resources in such a delivery process. It is imperative that the development of Community Planning includes the continuing engagement of such current resources so as agreed delivery structures for Community Planning are adopted that act as wider collaborative forums for the benefit of the communities that they will ultimately serve.

During the past 4 years the LRSN's have delivered, under the current TRPSI Framework, a Rural Community Development Support Service to a wide range of rural organisation and groups. This has proven to be an effective model and partnership for the delivery of such services and the LRSN's, with continued support from the TRPSI programme, are therefore well placed to assist local Councils in the delivery of community planning over the next number of years due to the following factors:

- Strong partnership & links with the rural community already in place
- Added value from funding leverage from other programmes
- Already working closely with DARD to deliver services including the development of the NI Rural Development Programme (2014-2020)

The delivery structures for the Community Planning process within local Councils must



therefore take account of existing rural structures & delivery organisations so as to ensure there is less fragmentation of implementation groups and integration of the various locally focused Action Plans. This will ensure that the Community Planning process will effectively serve the priority needs of the rural community, the ongoing support of DARD for the rural community development sector at grass roots level through the TRPSI framework is crucial to this.

**10) Do you have any views on the conclusions reached by DARD (see Section 9) in relation to the proposals for a successor TRPSI Framework in respect of:**

**(v) The Equality and Human Rights Template**

Please provide comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs) / Rural Community Development Support Service contract holders have a proven track record of working with DARD (as partner organisations) to contribute, develop and implement new and innovative pilot measures to Target Rural Poverty and reduce Social Isolation. The LRSNs welcome a localised approach to the design and delivery of measures which effectively target financial poverty, access poverty and social isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas in line with the key principles of the Framework. The LRSNs are advantageously neutral to central and local government ensuring that all rural communities can access resources, services and programmes in a timely manner regardless of religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status, sexual orientation or disability. The LRSNs ensure Section 75 information is recorded in line with procedures under International Quality Standard ISO 9001:2008 and kept securely in keeping with Data Protection Legislation.

**(vi) The Rural Issues Statement**

Please provide comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs) / Rural Community Development Support Service contract holders have a proven track record of working with DARD (as partner organisations) to ensure the TRPSI Framework has been a key success factor ensuring rural proofing and enabling effective implementation positive direct impact on the vulnerable in rural communities through a localised infrastructure. In the last four years we have empowered some 15,000 individuals, including the hardest to reach, socially isolated and most vulnerable of the population in Northern Ireland. Delivering capacity building programmes within rural areas to encourage and ensure participation in the Rural Development Programme. Undertaking the delivery of the MARA Project has reached out to almost 15,000 households directly impacting on their quality of life.

The LRSNs have also been successful in additional leverage which has had positive indirect impacts. For example we have rolled out projects and grant schemes (promoting health, peace, equality, skills, employability) equating to over £56million in the last four years. All of these measures support the delivery of key services for rural dwellers to avail of and have indirectly helped to tackle social isolation and the related mental health connotations that come with this. The central and neutral role that the LRSNs deliver; give local services for local people and ensure grass roots community representation in rolling out TRPSI Framework.

**11) Is there any other aspect of the proposals that you wish to comment on?**

Please provide comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs) are an essential conduit for the delivery of joined-up local initiatives designed to tackle rural poverty and social isolation.

Our track record is well proven and we aim to continue in ensuring rural communities have their needs met and to deliver the Rural Community Development Support Service from a local and accessible office based in the community as part of a region-wide rural community Infrastructure that is dedicated to rural.

COSTA plays an essential role in ensuring this within the Dungannon & South Tyrone area of Mid Ulster.

## RESPONDENT INFORMATION

**Please Note** this form **must** be returned with your response to ensure that we handle your response appropriately.

### 1. Name / Organisation

**Organisation Name (If applicable).**

Community Organisations of South Tyrone & AREAS LTD (COSTA)

**Title** Mr  Ms  Mrs  Miss  Dr  **Please tick as appropriate**

**Surname**

Griffin

**Forename**

Loraine

### 2. Postal Address

President Grant's Homestead

45 Dergenagh Road

Dungannon

Co. Tyrone

**Postcode** BT70 1TW

**Phone** 028 855 56880

**Email**  
info.costa@btconnect.com

### Consultation Questions

1) Do you agree that the proposed Aim, Objectives and Intended Outcomes (see Section 6) for the TRPSI Framework are appropriate?

Yes

No

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs) have a proven track record of working with DARD (as partner organisations) to develop and implement new and innovative pilot measures in hundreds of rural villages and communities to Target Rural Poverty and reduce Social Isolation. Although not clearly highlighted in some of the TRPSI consultation papers, it has been acknowledged by all stakeholders (from The Minister and the ARD Committee to local groups) that all the other TRPSI measures in the current programme were dependent on a solid and responsive rural community infrastructure across NI. The LRSNs have worked closely with DARD for over 20 years to put that infrastructure in place and that is the reason so many of the TRPSI measures have been so successful.

For example, in recent months the Rural Micro Capital Grant Programme has been promoted for DARD by the LRSNs and 2 phases have been rolled out to small rural groups in every part of rural NI. The programme has been oversubscribed and highly effective in targeting small grants at the most needy groups, helping them to deliver a wide range of local rural services. The MARA programme, Farm Families Health Checks and the promotion of Library services have all exceeded their targets thanks in large part to the promotional and organisational abilities and reach of the LRSNs. A local presence and knowledge of the area is to key to successful delivery.

This experience - linked to the hundreds of rural groups and thousands of individuals associated with the LRSNs - means that the Networks can help DARD to meet the objectives set in *Section 6 "Proposals for a successor Framework post 2016"*.

Together with other rural stakeholders, we can "promote the development of new and innovative pilot approaches to TRPSI AND encourage effective partnership working AND effectively target financial poverty, access poverty and social isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas".

**2) Do you agree that the 3 Priority Areas – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation (see Section 6) – should continue to be the main priorities for the TRPSI Framework?**

**Yes**

**No**

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks believe that the 3 Priority Areas – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation should continue to be the main priorities for the TRPSI Framework as they are still relevant in 2016, encapsulate the varying needs of the rural community and encompass a service deliverability which can be most effectively demonstrated through a *local or sub regional level approach*.

The identification and successful delivery of various projects and programmes within these priorities would continue to bring greatest positive impact to the needs of those experiencing rural poverty and isolation. The priorities allow for a bottom-up community development approach in not only identifying relevant needs but also in delivering upon them using a cascade approach. It is our view that the most effective TRPSI programmes delivered to date have had a strong community ethos and process coupled with local knowledge access to where rural, social and economic needs are most prevalent. Invariably, there will be different levels of need in different geographical areas, however, as the nature of community sector delivery is designed sub regionally and is based on pertinent local needs then those most in poverty or experiencing isolation have less probability in remaining outside the reach of these priorities and programmes.

The Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation framework and it's priorities to date has been an excellent package of funding aimed at supporting vulnerable people and targeting the root causes of social isolation. As programmes take effect and outputs deliver meaningful change there are indeed necessary modifications within the themes or priorities which are required to continue to make most impact on the frameworks aims whilst external factors such as austerity and public budget finance availability will also determine and prioritize future considerations.

It is our view that the 3 Priority Areas – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social

Isolation should continue to be the main priorities for the TRPSI Framework since programmes can emerge from these themes which meet best the local community needs.

TRPSI and the priorities has now gained substantial traction and is now recognised as an essential brand which has made a huge difference to rural communities and which is complementary to the NIRDP. Many of the issues these priorities have tackled to date were previously hidden and would fall outside the remit of other mainstream funding programmes. There remains, however, continued challenges, needs and rural TRPSI issues which require on-going support at various levels of intervention and which would still come under these 3 priorities.

*The Rural Community Development Support Service currently delivered by the Local Rural Support Networks*, as a model of support to TRPSI, is most certainly envied throughout communities in Europe as a model leader in balancing appropriate and measured interventions to social, economic and access poverty issues at a community level. Promoting Community development at a local / sub regional level ensures that regional programmes are delivered effectively at the local level and access to the real needs and issues of communities is provided for. Supporting access to good governance, to economic and social poverty in communities; the service as provided by these local community based networks has proved an invaluable resource to the delivery of the TRPSI Framework.

These experienced local stakeholders have excellent working relationships with all other TRPSI delivery agents and indeed share a direct role in elements of their success making essential and valuable linkages and connections at sub regional and local levels. The key management role of DARD in direct delivery of this programme has proved to be most effective in ensuring that the networks could assist DARD to manage Regional programmes at local levels and to balance approaches necessary to ensuring programme priority themes reached the community sector using bottom up approaches.

The local access support provided to DARD's Modernisation Programme and its Rural Micro Capital Grants Programmes - as and when required by DARD - evidence how this infrastructure can react and respond to changing rural needs and requirements. Their modus operandi for the delivery of programmes such as MARA

are a testament to the Community Development approach which ensures participation and access to hidden and real needs at a local level across all 3 main priorities.

The networking function plays an invaluable role in achieving key community participation at all necessary levels from village planning facilitation to rural proofing consultation. With the reform of local Government, Community Planning, and the mandatory Charities registration requirements; these networks provide local mentoring support and guidance, technical support and facilitation at grassroots level to those rural communities most in need under the programme priorities of Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation. Most importantly, they can identify what local pertinent needs fit the programme.

We believe that it is the approaches taken under the overlying programme priorities which provide the appropriate lynchpins to ensure leverage of many other programmes and projects into rural areas and which have included such as community mental health awareness, capital build infrastructural programmes, rural tourism, lifelong learning, social investment, migrant support etc. These programmes operate in a time of decentralisation and digitization of services, the closing of rural banks, post offices, schools and other services and thus during a time when the greatest need for local people to provide adequate solutions to their own issues and problems within a community development approach. The 3 themes adequately allow for local communities, sub regional and innovative approach making to meeting rural TRPI needs.



**3) Do you agree that the 12 Key Principles (see Section 6) are appropriate for the TRPSI Framework?**

**Yes**

**No**

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

The rural support organisations delivering the DARD Rural Community Development Support Service / Programme agree with the key TRPSI principles as outlined in the framework document. Historically the Local Rural Support Networks successfully delivered pilot, innovative projects and interventions collaboratively and in partnership with statutory and other community and voluntary organisations and are widely perceived as the link between grass roots community groups operating at a local level with regional statutory bodies.

Positive outcomes of a collaborative approach to the delivery of services aimed at addressing rural poverty and isolation issues include:

- Ensuring the socially isolated and those with financial related issues have access and opportunities to avail of support services
- Increasing the capacity of designated rural support organisations and grass roots community groups to collectively and with greater efficiency deliver both services and support interventions that may not be possible if delivered in isolation.

A negative outcome of delivering a successful pilot or innovative project is the lack of funding to effectively mainstream the service or project. Increased opportunities to continue or mainstream projects that have demonstrated effectiveness should be a key objective of a future TRPSI framework both for addressing poverty and social isolation issues and having to avoid dealing with the expectation when a service or project ceases.

Local Rural Support Networks will continue to be a conduit to disseminate information on key government strategies to the community voluntary sector through their established communication channels and will continue to lobby and be the 'voice' of the rural community sector during discussions with statutory and governmental organisations e.g. Rural Community Development Support Service / Programme and Community Planning.

**4) Do you agree that the list of Target Groups (see Section 6) is appropriate in relation to providing support to vulnerable groups under the successor TRPSI Framework?**

**Yes**

**No**

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSN's) welcome the proposal that the successor Framework would be open to a wider range of target groups. As an infrastructure providing community development support to the rural community across Northern Ireland for many years, we have, almost without exception, worked with all these vulnerable groups.

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6.8 VIII Good Relations being promoted: there will be many opportunities to develop innovative partnerships, PEACEIV et al.

One should not underestimate the incidental "good relations" through the Rural Development Programme. The carrot and stick approach for single identity group has been proven to open halls to a wider diaspora. Not only does this lead to better community relations but adds to the sustainability of the halls.

**(b) Please provide details on any further measures which you think should be considered to help address Access Poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas**

The Rural Micro Capital Grants Programme opened many new doors because it gave an incentive for tangible assets to be acquired for the benefit of a particular group. For many this has been the first time in making a funding application. The benefits not only include the asset but their governance has now been under the spotlight and sharpened to enable their participation. We would propose an extension of this innovative idea. The structure used to deliver the grants is now well established, this same structure could deliver small capitol grants say up to £10,000 for basic needs that so many halls throughout the country require.

Community transport should be reviewed to widen its scope. Longer journeys should be considered that travel between a number of service providers.

Evidence indicates that there is an appetite for ICT / Computer Training in rural areas. The LRSNs could deliver this service. There used to be an outreach service from the regional Colleges, we don't advocate for its return. The service that they provided no longer is fit for propose. Farmers and rural dwellers want a basic standard of training that may not necessarily be accredited. The end result would be Farmers having the ability to make online returns. Farm families coming together braking social isolation and have a greater understanding of the world wide web. Greater use and the promotion of Luncheon Clubs in rural areas could provide a service that; tackles social isolation, helps sustain a target audience, increases the sustainability of rural halls. All this combined adds to the cohesion of rural communities.

**6) (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing Financial Poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas**

Financial poverty refers to the measure of the degree to which people face the risk of serious deprivation in terms of their standard of living or to which they fall below a specified minimum level of resources. Through the measures in the draft action plan there is the opportunity to raise the standard of living for those people living in rural areas. Particularly in regard to addressing issues such as rural transport which is currently a major issue which prohibits many rural dwellers from accessing essential basic services. In addition measures targeted at supporting household energy efficiency improvement & the introduction of new employability and entrepreneurship opportunities are also to be welcomed.

**(b) Please provide details on any other measures which you think should be considered to help address Financial Poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas**

Other measures which may alleviate financial poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas include the creation of jobs through investment in infrastructure such as investment in rural hubs, renovating abandoned housing and broadband infrastructure development, therefore increasing the chances of the young people of rural areas to stay, therefore building a stronger rural economy. With added investment in high quality and affordable childcare and early intervention this will create increased opportunities for jobs.

**7) (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing Social Isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas**

The Local Rural Support Networks welcome the continued recognition by DARD of the problems caused within the rural population due to Social Isolation. We acknowledge the priority areas for intervention listed within the Draft Action Plan under Social Isolation of promoting tolerance, health, well-being and inclusion for rural dwellers and through our long established work within rural communities agree that these are valid and worthwhile Priority Areas for Intervention.

Poor Mental Health and well-being is an issue that has major impacts within rural communities given the fact that many people are living in isolated circumstances often on their own or with limited family and / or community connections.

The farming community is also a grouping who have been demonstrated to have poor mental health as they are facing increasing stresses of managing their businesses mostly working on an individual basis with limited opportunities to engage with others. Many of the LRSN's are engaged in delivering mental health and wellbeing programmes over the last ten years, all of these programmes have been externally evaluated and have shown excellent results in improving local mental health and wellbeing. Any new pilot programmes delivered under the new framework need to take into consideration the knowledge and learning of the evaluations.

One concern that the LRSN's would have that by naming the priority as '*promote positive mental health and wellbeing*' rather than '*promoting positive health and wellbeing*'; interventions could be limited in their scope to secure engagement by rural dwellers. There is still a stigma around mental health in rural areas and people would be more likely to engage with activities that are seen to be about general health and wellbeing, people in many instances would not want to be identified through participating in activities as someone who has mental health issue. If people are at least attracted to an activity the issue of mental health can then be addressed.

Therefore as LRSN's we do welcome the example initiatives listed as they list 'Support for health and wellbeing activities' as well as 'Support the promotion of mental health awareness and actions' and we ask that the learning and evidence from positive work that has been undertaken with rural communities through the

LRSN's, Healthy Living Centres, other Community, Voluntary and Statutory bodies on these actions and activities are used when drawing up plans for initiatives to support under the new TRPSI framework.

The Local Rural Support Networks would welcome actions that will support the rural population to improve their health and wellbeing particularly those activities that are operated and provided at local facilities and venues.

The LRSN's welcome that '*increase opportunities for social engagement*' is listed as a priority area of intervention as the value of people of all ages within rural communities being given the opportunity to engage with others on a social basis cannot be underestimated. It is through these social activities that the aim of "promote tolerance, health, wellbeing and inclusion' can be best achieved within rural communities as by bringing people together they are getting to know each other. This is needed within communities as in many instances during their working and education lives many members of rural communities are away from the community during the day and thus have limited opportunities to engage with others. It is only through actual engagement in the same physical space that tolerance can be promoted and this is especially important in rural communities as due to low numbers of people activities are best organised to attract as many members of the population as possible so that a sufficient number of people attend to make an activity viable. Therefore anything that can be done to encourage use of community facilities that have been traditionally associated as belonging to one section of the community would be welcome. Such venues can become hubs for social inclusion activities within rural communities.

Many venues within rural communities require some level of work to ensure that they are brought up to a condition that they are accessible and suitable to be used to provide activities that address social isolation.

The Local Rural Support Networks welcome the inclusion of '*support community capacity*' as an example initiative as a capable and effective local community infrastructure is of vital importance to the fabric of life within rural communities and those involved in organisations within local communities are largely undertaking this role on a voluntary basis. These organisations require ongoing community development support to continue their operations on an effective and efficient basis



and become involved in projects that will address poverty and social isolation at a local level within rural communities.

The community development support work delivered by the Local Rural Support Networks resourced under the previous TRPSI Framework has been very effective in ensuring the survival and continued operation of local community infrastructure. This community infrastructure of the LRSN's working in partnership with organisations located within local communities has also ensured that many of the other initiatives supported under TRPSI have been effective at reaching into rural communities and tackling poverty and social isolation.

**(b) Please provide details on any other measures which you think should be considered to help address Social Isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas**

The Local Rural Support Networks would welcome the resourcing of actions to plan and coordinate the effective operation of activities that would address social isolation. This would involve a resource of a person to co-ordinate activities and associated resource budget to cover some of the costs of operating activities particularly training new and innovative activities on a pilot basis. This would ensure that activities are operated on a coordinated and effective basis, securing sufficient numbers, building linkages within and between communities, duplication is avoided, gaps in provision of social inclusion activities are identified and tackled.

The ongoing work within the LRSN's and their delivery of the MARA project has clearly demonstrated that there is a significant issue around mental health problems in homes, particularly depression and loneliness.

The Framework would provide an excellent opportunity to design a pilot project that would take advantage of the excellent community development model that we have that could be harnessed to deliver a programme to enable rural dwellers to avail of resources to assist them to overcome loneliness and seek help with other mental health conditions. The Programme could be designed to ensure a rural community response is adopted to encourage self-help and self-care.

**8) How might the successor TRPSI Framework contribute towards the development of more effective rural community support structures?**

Please provide comments in the box below

The TRPSI Framework has been a key success factor for rural organisations (e.g. the 9 Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs) / Rural Community Development Support Service Contract) in terms ensuring rural proofing, levering-in vital resources to rural areas, and enabling effective implementation of the TRPSI Framework throughout the region.

*Making Strategic Facilitation and Joined-Up Government a reality:* the TRPSI Framework is vital to ensuring that rural needs are addressed by the government in a localised and joined-up way that reaches the most vulnerable and those most in need.

The successor TRPSI Framework would not only enable much greater utilisation of financial resources, but also would combine the expertise of public sector bodies, and the private, voluntary and community sectors to create greater economies of scale in terms utilising all available knowledge, skills and capacity. This in turn maximises innovation and enables increased access to those most in need and those who are most difficult to reach (e.g. the MARA Project has reached out to almost 15,000 households).

TRPSI has been vital in ensuring that *rural* gets its fair share in terms of community development via a high quality networking infrastructure and Community Development Support Service that is run by grass roots representatives right across the region.

The DARD Rural Micro-Capital Grants Programme delivered on-the-ground by the 9 Local Rural Support Networks, have been essential to ensuring capital investment reaches the smallest and lowest capacity rural groups throughout the entire region.

The additional financial leverage over the last four years from the Local Rural Support Networks alone in terms of additional programmes, projects and grant schemes (promoting health, peace, equality, skills, employability, capacity etc) is £56 million.

The LRSNs have been central to the role of assisting the set-up of the new local Action Groups (NIRDP) and ensuring grass roots community representation.

**9) How might a successor TRPSI Framework support the delivery of local councils Community Plans?**

Please provide comments in the box below

The TRPSI Framework could play a key role in the delivery of local Council Community Plans via the TRPSI-funded Rural Community Development Support Service which can facilitate the ongoing involvement of the Local Rural Support Networks (LRSN's) in the community planning process. The foundations for the delivery of Community Planning already exist within the local Council areas through the LRSN's and their vast network of community based organisations – Community Planning should build upon these existing structures. The delivery of Community Planning within the local Council areas will require the engagement of existing and emerging partnerships working collaboratively. The well-established and proven track record of the LRSN's could well be effective resources in such a delivery process. It is imperative that the development of Community Planning includes the continuing engagement of such current resources so as agreed delivery structures for Community Planning are adopted that act as wider collaborative forums for the benefit of the communities that they will ultimately serve.

During the past 4 years the LRSN's have delivered, under the current TRPSI Framework, a Rural Community Development Support Service to a wide range of rural organisation and groups. This has proven to be an effective model and partnership for the delivery of such services and the LRSN's, with continued support from the TRPSI programme, are therefore well placed to assist local Councils in the delivery of community planning over the next number of years due to the following factors:

- Strong partnership & links with the rural community already in place
- Added value from funding leverage from other programmes
- Already working closely with DARD to deliver services including the development of the NI Rural Development Programme (2014-2020)

The delivery structures for the Community Planning process within local Councils must

therefore take account of existing rural structures & delivery organisations so as to ensure there is less fragmentation of implementation groups and integration of the various locally focused Action Plans. This will ensure that the Community Planning process will effectively serve the priority needs of the rural community, the ongoing support of DARD for the rural community development sector at grass roots level through the TRPSI framework is crucial to this.

**10) Do you have any views on the conclusions reached by DARD (see Section 9) in relation to the proposals for a successor TRPSI Framework in respect of:**

**(vii) The Equality and Human Rights Template**

Please provide comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs) / Rural Community Development Support Service contract holders have a proven track record of working with DARD (as partner organisations) to contribute, develop and implement new and innovative pilot measures to Target Rural Poverty and reduce Social Isolation. The LRSNs welcome a localised approach to the design and delivery of measures which effectively target financial poverty, access poverty and social isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas in line with the key principles of the Framework. The LRSNs are advantageously neutral to central and local government ensuring that all rural communities can access resources, services and programmes in a timely manner regardless of religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status, sexual orientation or disability. The LRSNs ensure Section 75 information is recorded in line with procedures under International Quality Standard ISO 9001:2008 and kept securely in keeping with Data Protection Legislation.

**(viii) The Rural Issues Statement**

Please provide comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs) / Rural Community Development Support Service contract holders have a proven track record of working with DARD (as partner organisations) to ensure the TRPSI Framework has been a key success factor ensuring rural proofing and enabling effective implementation positive direct impact on the vulnerable in rural communities through a localised infrastructure. In the last four years we have empowered some 15,000 individuals, including the hardest to reach, socially isolated and most vulnerable of the population in Northern Ireland. Delivering capacity building programmes within rural areas to encourage and ensure participation in the Rural Development Programme. Undertaking the delivery of the MARA Project has reached out to almost 15,000 households directly impacting on their quality of life.

The LRSNs have also been successful in additional leverage which has had positive indirect impacts. For example we have rolled out projects and grant schemes (promoting health, peace, equality, skills, employability) equating to over £56million in the last four years. All of these measures support the delivery of key services for rural dwellers to avail of and have indirectly helped to tackle social isolation and the related mental health connotations that come with this. The central and neutral role that the LRSNs deliver; give local services for local people and ensure grass roots community representation in rolling out TRPSI Framework.

**11) Is there any other aspect of the proposals that you wish to comment on?**

Please provide comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs) are an essential conduit for the delivery of joined-up local initiatives designed to tackle rural poverty and social isolation.

Our track record is well proven and we aim to continue in ensuring rural communities have their needs met and to deliver the Rural Community Development Support Service from a local and accessible office based in the community as part of a region-wide rural community Infrastructure that is dedicated to rural.

COSTA plays an essential role in ensuring this within the Dungannon & South Tyrone area of Mid Ulster.

## RESPONDENT INFORMATION

**Please Note** this form **must** be returned with your response to ensure that we handle your response appropriately.

### 1. Name / Organisation

**Organisation Name (If applicable).**

Community Organisations of South Tyrone & AREAS LTD (COSTA)

**Title** Mr  Ms  Mrs  Miss  Dr  **Please tick as appropriate**

**Surname**

Griffin

**Forename**

Loraine

### 2. Postal Address

President Grant's Homestead

45 Dergenagh Road

Dungannon

Co. Tyrone

**Postcode** BT70 1TW

**Phone** 028 855 56880

**Email**  
info.costa@btconnect.com

### Consultation Questions

1) Do you agree that the proposed Aim, Objectives and Intended Outcomes (see Section 6) for the TRPSI Framework are appropriate?

Yes

No

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs) have a proven track record of working with DARD (as partner organisations) to develop and implement new and innovative pilot measures in hundreds of rural villages and communities to Target Rural Poverty and reduce Social Isolation. Although not clearly highlighted in some of the TRPSI consultation papers, it has been acknowledged by all stakeholders (from The Minister and the ARD Committee to local groups) that all the other TRPSI measures in the current programme were dependent on a solid and responsive rural community infrastructure across NI. The LRSNs have worked closely with DARD for over 20 years to put that infrastructure in place and that is the reason so many of the TRPSI measures have been so successful.

For example, in recent months the Rural Micro Capital Grant Programme has been promoted for DARD by the LRSNs and 2 phases have been rolled out to small rural groups in every part of rural NI. The programme has been oversubscribed and highly effective in targeting small grants at the most needy groups, helping them to deliver a wide range of local rural services. The MARA programme, Farm Families Health Checks and the promotion of Library services have all exceeded their targets thanks in large part to the promotional and organisational abilities and reach of the LRSNs. A local presence and knowledge of the area is to key to successful delivery.

This experience - linked to the hundreds of rural groups and thousands of individuals associated with the LRSNs - means that the Networks can help DARD to meet the objectives set in *Section 6 "Proposals for a successor Framework post 2016"*.

Together with other rural stakeholders, we can "promote the development of new and innovative pilot approaches to TRPSI AND encourage effective partnership working AND effectively target financial poverty, access poverty and social isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas".



**2) Do you agree that the 3 Priority Areas – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation (see Section 6) – should continue to be the main priorities for the TRPSI Framework?**

**Yes**

**No**

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks believe that the 3 Priority Areas – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation should continue to be the main priorities for the TRPSI Framework as they are still relevant in 2016, encapsulate the varying needs of the rural community and encompass a service deliverability which can be most effectively demonstrated through a *local or sub regional level approach*.

The identification and successful delivery of various projects and programmes within these priorities would continue to bring greatest positive impact to the needs of those experiencing rural poverty and isolation. The priorities allow for a bottom-up community development approach in not only identifying relevant needs but also in delivering upon them using a cascade approach. It is our view that the most effective TRPSI programmes delivered to date have had a strong community ethos and process coupled with local knowledge access to where rural, social and economic needs are most prevalent. Invariably, there will be different levels of need in different geographical areas, however, as the nature of community sector delivery is designed sub regionally and is based on pertinent local needs then those most in poverty or experiencing isolation have less probability in remaining outside the reach of these priorities and programmes.

The Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation framework and it's priorities to date has been an excellent package of funding aimed at supporting vulnerable people and targeting the root causes of social isolation. As programmes take effect and outputs deliver meaningful change there are indeed necessary modifications within the themes or priorities which are required to continue to make most impact on the frameworks aims whilst external factors such as austerity and public budget finance availability will also determine and prioritize future considerations.

It is our view that the 3 Priority Areas – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social

Isolation should continue to be the main priorities for the TRPSI Framework since programmes can emerge from these themes which meet best the local community needs.

TRPSI and the priorities has now gained substantial traction and is now recognised as an essential brand which has made a huge difference to rural communities and which is complementary to the NIRDP. Many of the issues these priorities have tackled to date were previously hidden and would fall outside the remit of other mainstream funding programmes. There remains, however, continued challenges, needs and rural TRPSI issues which require on-going support at various levels of intervention and which would still come under these 3 priorities.

*The Rural Community Development Support Service currently delivered by the Local Rural Support Networks*, as a model of support to TRPSI, is most certainly envied throughout communities in Europe as a model leader in balancing appropriate and measured interventions to social, economic and access poverty issues at a community level. Promoting Community development at a local / sub regional level ensures that regional programmes are delivered effectively at the local level and access to the real needs and issues of communities is provided for. Supporting access to good governance, to economic and social poverty in communities; the service as provided by these local community based networks has proved an invaluable resource to the delivery of the TRPSI Framework.

These experienced local stakeholders have excellent working relationships with all other TRPSI delivery agents and indeed share a direct role in elements of their success making essential and valuable linkages and connections at sub regional and local levels. The key management role of DARD in direct delivery of this programme has proved to be most effective in ensuring that the networks could assist DARD to manage Regional programmes at local levels and to balance approaches necessary to ensuring programme priority themes reached the community sector using bottom up approaches.

The local access support provided to DARD's Modernisation Programme and its Rural Micro Capital Grants Programmes - as and when required by DARD - evidence how this infrastructure can react and respond to changing rural needs and requirements. Their modus operandi for the delivery of programmes such as MARA

are a testament to the Community Development approach which ensures participation and access to hidden and real needs at a local level across all 3 main priorities.

The networking function plays an invaluable role in achieving key community participation at all necessary levels from village planning facilitation to rural proofing consultation. With the reform of local Government, Community Planning, and the mandatory Charities registration requirements; these networks provide local mentoring support and guidance, technical support and facilitation at grassroots level to those rural communities most in need under the programme priorities of Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation. Most importantly, they can identify what local pertinent needs fit the programme.

We believe that it is the approaches taken under the overlying programme priorities which provide the appropriate lynchpins to ensure leverage of many other programmes and projects into rural areas and which have included such as community mental health awareness, capital build infrastructural programmes, rural tourism, lifelong learning, social investment, migrant support etc. These programmes operate in a time of decentralisation and digitization of services, the closing of rural banks, post offices, schools and other services and thus during a time when the greatest need for local people to provide adequate solutions to their own issues and problems within a community development approach. The 3 themes adequately allow for local communities, sub regional and innovative approach making to meeting rural TRPI needs.

**3) Do you agree that the 12 Key Principles (see Section 6) are appropriate for the TRPSI Framework?**

**Yes**

**No**

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

The rural support organisations delivering the DARD Rural Community Development Support Service / Programme agree with the key TRPSI principles as outlined in the framework document. Historically the Local Rural Support Networks successfully delivered pilot, innovative projects and interventions collaboratively and in partnership with statutory and other community and voluntary organisations and are widely perceived as the link between grass roots community groups operating at a local level with regional statutory bodies.

Positive outcomes of a collaborative approach to the delivery of services aimed at addressing rural poverty and isolation issues include:

- Ensuring the socially isolated and those with financial related issues have access and opportunities to avail of support services
- Increasing the capacity of designated rural support organisations and grass roots community groups to collectively and with greater efficiency deliver both services and support interventions that may not be possible if delivered in isolation.

A negative outcome of delivering a successful pilot or innovative project is the lack of funding to effectively mainstream the service or project. Increased opportunities to continue or mainstream projects that have demonstrated effectiveness should be a key objective of a future TRPSI framework both for addressing poverty and social isolation issues and having to avoid dealing with the expectation when a service or project ceases.

Local Rural Support Networks will continue to be a conduit to disseminate information on key government strategies to the community voluntary sector through their established communication channels and will continue to lobby and be the 'voice' of the rural community sector during discussions with statutory and governmental organisations e.g. Rural Community Development Support Service / Programme and Community Planning.

**4) Do you agree that the list of Target Groups (see Section 6) is appropriate in relation to providing support to vulnerable groups under the successor TRPSI Framework?**

**Yes**

**No**

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSN's) welcome the proposal that the successor Framework would be open to a wider range of target groups. As an infrastructure providing community development support to the rural community across Northern Ireland for many years, we have, almost without exception, worked with all these vulnerable groups.

We particularly welcome the introduction of the working poor and the under employed. The continuing economic uncertainty has left many families in difficult financial circumstances. One or both parents are working however income levels fall below what they need to have a meaningful quality of life. A sudden change in circumstances, such as marital breakup or ill health, can have further detrimental consequences and lead to social exclusion and poverty.

Mental health still retains a significant stigma, particularly in rural areas, and many of the LRSN's run programmes which directly tackle mental ill health in their communities. Statistics show that one in four run the risk of mental ill health thus their inclusion in this framework is essential.

The inclusion of the LGBT community in the framework is also welcome. Whilst members of the LGBT community live in rural areas they tend to meet and socialise in their nearest town. However LRSN's have a role to play in supporting them to remain in their community and in ensuring statutory organisations and the wider public are aware of the issues affecting them.

Perhaps one omission from the list of vulnerable groups is men. Whilst accepted that most farmers are men there may be male rural dwellers who are not farmers. Globally, the gap between male and female life expectancy and healthy life expectancy has widened in the last 40 years and is expected to get even bigger by

2030. Research commissioned by the Priory Group of 1,000 men found that: 77% of men polled have suffered with anxiety / stress / depression; the biggest pressures in men's life are work (32%), finance (31%) and health (23%); the majority of men claim their mental health is having a negative impact on their work performance, parenting ability and relationships; 40% of men polled said it would take thoughts of suicide or self-harm to compel them to seek professional help.

[www.priorygroup.com/blog/mentalhealth/-i-ve-learnt-to-deal-with-it---40-of-men-won-t-talk-to-anyone-about-their-mentalhealth](http://www.priorygroup.com/blog/mentalhealth/-i-ve-learnt-to-deal-with-it---40-of-men-won-t-talk-to-anyone-about-their-mentalhealth)

**5) (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing Access Poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas**

We are pleased to welcome the measures in the draft Framework. Many of the proposed measures will go a long way to tackle issues that blight so many rural dwellers. We appreciate that the list of groups is not exhaustive: Women, Farmers, People on work on low incomes (the working poor), Children and Young People, Older people and Ethnic Minorities and Immigrants, People with low skills or low levels of education etc. Our experience shows that some of the groups need to be broken down into subgroups.

For example there are sections of the farming industry that have seen their incomes severely cut in the last two years (dairy Farmers). Future prices in this industry predict another 10% drop in the next three months. Mental health in this area gives us great cause for concern. This is evidenced by the increase calls to help lines, up by 30% in the last year.

Many Ethnic Minorities are finding it difficult to assimilate, especially those living in the rural community. There are a number of factors that drive this. Some Ethnic groups neither have English as their first or second language; this communication barrier reinforces isolation and is a contributing factor in poor mental health. Those who have a strong grasp of the English language find it easier to "fit in". This also is a factor in this section being "excepted". In conclusion we think this group of Ethnic minorities should be broken down into sections not exclusively into language sections. i.e. short-to-medium dwellers who may seasonal workers.

We are pleased with the other target groups and we welcome that people with low skills and low levels of education might have a chance to enhance their employability. The training involved to up skill this group will act as a medium to tackle social isolation. Many who suffer from social isolation either don't recognise their plight or only recognise it when their horizons broaden due to intervention from an un-proscribed source. i.e. further education either social education or accredited.

The "Outcomes based pilot programmes" is also most welcome. This allows delivery agents latitude to make informed researched based decisions that will go to the hart rural poverty and social isolation.

Under 6.8 V we strongly concur with the mainstreaming of successful pilot projects. The Department launched the Rural Community Micro Grants 2015-2016, we in the Rural Support Networks found this reached parts of the rural community that that had gone under the radar in the past. This has opened a pathway for community development that goes to the core of TRPSI Policy. This merges into 6VII "sustainability". Some groups for the first time now see a pathway using community a development approach with the support of the Networks.

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Poor Mental Health and well-being is an issue that has major impacts within rural communities given the fact that many people are living in isolated circumstances often on their own or with limited family and / or community connections.

The farming community is also a grouping who have been demonstrated to have poor mental health as they are facing increasing stresses of managing their businesses mostly working on an individual basis with limited opportunities to engage with others. Many of the LRSN's are engaged in delivering mental health and wellbeing programmes over the last ten years, all of these programmes have been externally evaluated and have shown excellent results in improving local mental health and wellbeing. Any new pilot programmes delivered under the new framework need to take into consideration the knowledge and learning of the evaluations.

One concern that the LRSN's would have that by naming the priority as '*promote positive mental health and wellbeing*' rather than '*promoting positive health and wellbeing*'; interventions could be limited in their scope to secure engagement by rural dwellers. There is still a stigma around mental health in rural areas and people would be more likely to engage with activities that are seen to be about general health and wellbeing, people in many instances would not want to be identified through participating in activities as someone who has mental health issue. If people are at least attracted to an activity the issue of mental health can then be addressed.

Therefore as LRSN's we do welcome the example initiatives listed as they list 'Support for health and wellbeing activities' as well as 'Support the promotion of mental health awareness and actions' and we ask that the learning and evidence from positive work that has been undertaken with rural communities through the

LRSN's, Healthy Living Centres, other Community, Voluntary and Statutory bodies on these actions and activities are used when drawing up plans for initiatives to support under the new TRPSI framework.

The Local Rural Support Networks would welcome actions that will support the rural population to improve their health and wellbeing particularly those activities that are operated and provided at local facilities and venues.

The LRSN's welcome that '*increase opportunities for social engagement*' is listed as a priority area of intervention as the value of people of all ages within rural communities being given the opportunity to engage with others on a social basis cannot be underestimated. It is through these social activities that the aim of "promote tolerance, health, wellbeing and inclusion' can be best achieved within rural communities as by bringing people together they are getting to know each other. This is needed within communities as in many instances during their working and education lives many members of rural communities are away from the community during the day and thus have limited opportunities to engage with others. It is only through actual engagement in the same physical space that tolerance can be promoted and this is especially important in rural communities as due to low numbers of people activities are best organised to attract as many members of the population as possible so that a sufficient number of people attend to make an activity viable. Therefore anything that can be done to encourage use of community facilities that have been traditionally associated as belonging to one section of the community would be welcome. Such venues can become hubs for social inclusion activities within rural communities.

Many venues within rural communities require some level of work to ensure that they are brought up to a condition that they are accessible and suitable to be used to provide activities that address social isolation.

The Local Rural Support Networks welcome the inclusion of '*support community capacity*' as an example initiative as a capable and effective local community infrastructure is of vital importance to the fabric of life within rural communities and those involved in organisations within local communities are largely undertaking this role on a voluntary basis. These organisations require ongoing community development support to continue their operations on an effective and efficient basis

and become involved in projects that will address poverty and social isolation at a local level within rural communities.

The community development support work delivered by the Local Rural Support Networks resourced under the previous TRPSI Framework has been very effective in ensuring the survival and continued operation of local community infrastructure. This community infrastructure of the LRSN's working in partnership with organisations located within local communities has also ensured that many of the other initiatives supported under TRPSI have been effective at reaching into rural communities and tackling poverty and social isolation.

**(b) Please provide details on any other measures which you think should be considered to help address Social Isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas**

The Local Rural Support Networks would welcome the resourcing of actions to plan and coordinate the effective operation of activities that would address social isolation. This would involve a resource of a person to co-ordinate activities and associated resource budget to cover some of the costs of operating activities particularly training new and innovative activities on a pilot basis. This would ensure that activities are operated on a coordinated and effective basis, securing sufficient numbers, building linkages within and between communities, duplication is avoided, gaps in provision of social inclusion activities are identified and tackled.

The ongoing work within the LRSN's and their delivery of the MARA project has clearly demonstrated that there is a significant issue around mental health problems in homes, particularly depression and loneliness.

The Framework would provide an excellent opportunity to design a pilot project that would take advantage of the excellent community development model that we have that could be harnessed to deliver a programme to enable rural dwellers to avail of resources to assist them to overcome loneliness and seek help with other mental health conditions. The Programme could be designed to ensure a rural community response is adopted to encourage self-help and self-care.

**8) How might the successor TRPSI Framework contribute towards the development of more effective rural community support structures?**

Please provide comments in the box below

The TRPSI Framework has been a key success factor for rural organisations (e.g. the 9 Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs) / Rural Community Development Support Service Contract) in terms ensuring rural proofing, levering-in vital resources to rural areas, and enabling effective implementation of the TRPSI Framework throughout the region.

*Making Strategic Facilitation and Joined-Up Government a reality:* the TRPSI Framework is vital to ensuring that rural needs are addressed by the government in a localised and joined-up way that reaches the most vulnerable and those most in need.

The successor TRPSI Framework would not only enable much greater utilisation of financial resources, but also would combine the expertise of public sector bodies, and the private, voluntary and community sectors to create greater economies of scale in terms utilising all available knowledge, skills and capacity. This in turn maximises innovation and enables increased access to those most in need and those who are most difficult to reach (e.g. the MARA Project has reached out to almost 15,000 households).

TRPSI has been vital in ensuring that *rural* gets its fair share in terms of community development via a high quality networking infrastructure and Community Development Support Service that is run by grass roots representatives right across the region.

The DARD Rural Micro-Capital Grants Programme delivered on-the-ground by the 9 Local Rural Support Networks, have been essential to ensuring capital investment reaches the smallest and lowest capacity rural groups throughout the entire region.

The additional financial leverage over the last four years from the Local Rural Support Networks alone in terms of additional programmes, projects and grant schemes (promoting health, peace, equality, skills, employability, capacity etc) is £56 million.

The LRSNs have been central to the role of assisting the set-up of the new local Action Groups (NIRDP) and ensuring grass roots community representation.

**9) How might a successor TRPSI Framework support the delivery of local councils Community Plans?**

Please provide comments in the box below

The TRPSI Framework could play a key role in the delivery of local Council Community Plans via the TRPSI-funded Rural Community Development Support Service which can facilitate the ongoing involvement of the Local Rural Support Networks (LRSN's) in the community planning process. The foundations for the delivery of Community Planning already exist within the local Council areas through the LRSN's and their vast network of community based organisations – Community Planning should build upon these existing structures. The delivery of Community Planning within the local Council areas will require the engagement of existing and emerging partnerships working collaboratively. The well-established and proven track record of the LRSN's could well be effective resources in such a delivery process. It is imperative that the development of Community Planning includes the continuing engagement of such current resources so as agreed delivery structures for Community Planning are adopted that act as wider collaborative forums for the benefit of the communities that they will ultimately serve.

During the past 4 years the LRSN's have delivered, under the current TRPSI Framework, a Rural Community Development Support Service to a wide range of rural organisation and groups. This has proven to be an effective model and partnership for the delivery of such services and the LRSN's, with continued support from the TRPSI programme, are therefore well placed to assist local Councils in the delivery of community planning over the next number of years due to the following factors:

- Strong partnership & links with the rural community already in place
- Added value from funding leverage from other programmes
- Already working closely with DARD to deliver services including the development of the NI Rural Development Programme (2014-2020)

The delivery structures for the Community Planning process within local Councils must

therefore take account of existing rural structures & delivery organisations so as to ensure there is less fragmentation of implementation groups and integration of the various locally focused Action Plans. This will ensure that the Community Planning process will effectively serve the priority needs of the rural community, the ongoing support of DARD for the rural community development sector at grass roots level through the TRPSI framework is crucial to this.

**10) Do you have any views on the conclusions reached by DARD (see Section 9) in relation to the proposals for a successor TRPSI Framework in respect of:**

**(ix) The Equality and Human Rights Template**

Please provide comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs) / Rural Community Development Support Service contract holders have a proven track record of working with DARD (as partner organisations) to contribute, develop and implement new and innovative pilot measures to Target Rural Poverty and reduce Social Isolation. The LRSNs welcome a localised approach to the design and delivery of measures which effectively target financial poverty, access poverty and social isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas in line with the key principles of the Framework. The LRSNs are advantageously neutral to central and local government ensuring that all rural communities can access resources, services and programmes in a timely manner regardless of religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status, sexual orientation or disability. The LRSNs ensure Section 75 information is recorded in line with procedures under International Quality Standard ISO 9001:2008 and kept securely in keeping with Data Protection Legislation.

**(x) The Rural Issues Statement**

Please provide comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs) / Rural Community Development Support Service contract holders have a proven track record of working with DARD (as partner organisations) to ensure the TRPSI Framework has been a key success factor ensuring rural proofing and enabling effective implementation positive direct impact on the vulnerable in rural communities through a localised infrastructure. In the last four years we have empowered some 15,000 individuals, including the hardest to reach, socially isolated and most vulnerable of the population in Northern Ireland. Delivering capacity building programmes within rural areas to encourage and ensure participation in the Rural Development Programme. Undertaking the delivery of the MARA Project has reached out to almost 15,000 households directly impacting on their quality of life.

The LRSNs have also been successful in additional leverage which has had positive indirect impacts. For example we have rolled out projects and grant schemes (promoting health, peace, equality, skills, employability) equating to over £56million in the last four years. All of these measures support the delivery of key services for rural dwellers to avail of and have indirectly helped to tackle social isolation and the related mental health connotations that come with this. The central and neutral role that the LRSNs deliver; give local services for local people and ensure grass roots community representation in rolling out TRPSI Framework.



**11) Is there any other aspect of the proposals that you wish to comment on?**

Please provide comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs) are an essential conduit for the delivery of joined-up local initiatives designed to tackle rural poverty and social isolation.

Our track record is well proven and we aim to continue in ensuring rural communities have their needs met and to deliver the Rural Community Development Support Service from a local and accessible office based in the community as part of a region-wide rural community Infrastructure that is dedicated to rural.

COSTA plays an essential role in ensuring this within the Dungannon & South Tyrone area of Mid Ulster.

## RESPONDENT INFORMATION

**Please Note** this form **must** be returned with your response to ensure that we handle your response appropriately.

### 1. Name / Organisation

**Organisation Name (If applicable).**

Community Organisations of South Tyrone & AREAS LTD (COSTA)

**Title** Mr  Ms  Mrs  Miss  Dr  **Please tick as appropriate**

**Surname**

Griffin

**Forename**

Lorraine

### 2. Postal Address

President Grant's Homestead

45 Dergenagh Road

Dungannon

Co. Tyrone

**Postcode** BT70 1TW

**Phone** 028 855 56880

**Email**  
info.costa@btconnect.com

### Consultation Questions

1) Do you agree that the proposed Aim, Objectives and Intended Outcomes (see Section 6) for the TRPSI Framework are appropriate?

Yes

No

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs) have a proven track record of working with DARD (as partner organisations) to develop and implement new and innovative pilot measures in hundreds of rural villages and communities to Target Rural Poverty and reduce Social Isolation. Although not clearly highlighted in some of the TRPSI consultation papers, it has been acknowledged by all stakeholders (from The Minister and the ARD Committee to local groups) that all the other TRPSI measures in the current programme were dependent on a solid and responsive rural community infrastructure across NI. The LRSNs have worked closely with DARD for over 20 years to put that infrastructure in place and that is the reason so many of the TRPSI measures have been so successful.

For example, in recent months the Rural Micro Capital Grant Programme has been promoted for DARD by the LRSNs and 2 phases have been rolled out to small rural groups in every part of rural NI. The programme has been oversubscribed and highly effective in targeting small grants at the most needy groups, helping them to deliver a wide range of local rural services. The MARA programme, Farm Families Health Checks and the promotion of Library services have all exceeded their targets thanks in large part to the promotional and organisational abilities and reach of the LRSNs. A local presence and knowledge of the area is to key to successful delivery.

This experience - linked to the hundreds of rural groups and thousands of individuals associated with the LRSNs - means that the Networks can help DARD to meet the objectives set in *Section 6 "Proposals for a successor Framework post 2016"*.

Together with other rural stakeholders, we can "promote the development of new and innovative pilot approaches to TRPSI AND encourage effective partnership working AND effectively target financial poverty, access poverty and social isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas".

**2) Do you agree that the 3 Priority Areas – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation (see Section 6) – should continue to be the main priorities for the TRPSI Framework?**

**Yes**

**No**

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks believe that the 3 Priority Areas – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation should continue to be the main priorities for the TRPSI Framework as they are still relevant in 2016, encapsulate the varying needs of the rural community and encompass a service deliverability which can be most effectively demonstrated through a *local or sub regional level approach*.

The identification and successful delivery of various projects and programmes within these priorities would continue to bring greatest positive impact to the needs of those experiencing rural poverty and isolation. The priorities allow for a bottom-up community development approach in not only identifying relevant needs but also in delivering upon them using a cascade approach. It is our view that the most effective TRPSI programmes delivered to date have had a strong community ethos and process coupled with local knowledge access to where rural, social and economic needs are most prevalent. Invariably, there will be different levels of need in different geographical areas, however, as the nature of community sector delivery is designed sub regionally and is based on pertinent local needs then those most in poverty or experiencing isolation have less probability in remaining outside the reach of these priorities and programmes.

The Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation framework and it's priorities to date has been an excellent package of funding aimed at supporting vulnerable people and targeting the root causes of social isolation. As programmes take effect and outputs deliver meaningful change there are indeed necessary modifications within the themes or priorities which are required to continue to make most impact on the frameworks aims whilst external factors such as austerity and public budget finance availability will also determine and prioritize future considerations.

It is our view that the 3 Priority Areas – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social

Isolation should continue to be the main priorities for the TRPSI Framework since programmes can emerge from these themes which meet best the local community needs.

TRPSI and the priorities has now gained substantial traction and is now recognised as an essential brand which has made a huge difference to rural communities and which is complementary to the NIRDP. Many of the issues these priorities have tackled to date were previously hidden and would fall outside the remit of other mainstream funding programmes. There remains, however, continued challenges, needs and rural TRPSI issues which require on-going support at various levels of intervention and which would still come under these 3 priorities.

*The Rural Community Development Support Service currently delivered by the Local Rural Support Networks*, as a model of support to TRPSI, is most certainly envied throughout communities in Europe as a model leader in balancing appropriate and measured interventions to social, economic and access poverty issues at a community level. Promoting Community development at a local / sub regional level ensures that regional programmes are delivered effectively at the local level and access to the real needs and issues of communities is provided for. Supporting access to good governance, to economic and social poverty in communities; the service as provided by these local community based networks has proved an invaluable resource to the delivery of the TRPSI Framework.

These experienced local stakeholders have excellent working relationships with all other TRPSI delivery agents and indeed share a direct role in elements of their success making essential and valuable linkages and connections at sub regional and local levels. The key management role of DARD in direct delivery of this programme has proved to be most effective in ensuring that the networks could assist DARD to manage Regional programmes at local levels and to balance approaches necessary to ensuring programme priority themes reached the community sector using bottom up approaches.

The local access support provided to DARD's Modernisation Programme and its Rural Micro Capital Grants Programmes - as and when required by DARD - evidence how this infrastructure can react and respond to changing rural needs and requirements. Their modus operandi for the delivery of programmes such as MARA

are a testament to the Community Development approach which ensures participation and access to hidden and real needs at a local level across all 3 main priorities.

The networking function plays an invaluable role in achieving key community participation at all necessary levels from village planning facilitation to rural proofing consultation. With the reform of local Government, Community Planning, and the mandatory Charities registration requirements; these networks provide local mentoring support and guidance, technical support and facilitation at grassroots level to those rural communities most in need under the programme priorities of Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation. Most importantly, they can identify what local pertinent needs fit the programme.

We believe that it is the approaches taken under the overlying programme priorities which provide the appropriate lynchpins to ensure leverage of many other programmes and projects into rural areas and which have included such as community mental health awareness, capital build infrastructural programmes, rural tourism, lifelong learning, social investment, migrant support etc. These programmes operate in a time of decentralisation and digitization of services, the closing of rural banks, post offices, schools and other services and thus during a time when the greatest need for local people to provide adequate solutions to their own issues and problems within a community development approach. The 3 themes adequately allow for local communities, sub regional and innovative approach making to meeting rural TRPI needs.

**3) Do you agree that the 12 Key Principles (see Section 6) are appropriate for the TRPSI Framework?**

**Yes**

**No**

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

The rural support organisations delivering the DARD Rural Community Development Support Service / Programme agree with the key TRPSI principles as outlined in the framework document. Historically the Local Rural Support Networks successfully delivered pilot, innovative projects and interventions collaboratively and in partnership with statutory and other community and voluntary organisations and are widely perceived as the link between grass roots community groups operating at a local level with regional statutory bodies.

Positive outcomes of a collaborative approach to the delivery of services aimed at addressing rural poverty and isolation issues include:

- Ensuring the socially isolated and those with financial related issues have access and opportunities to avail of support services
- Increasing the capacity of designated rural support organisations and grass roots community groups to collectively and with greater efficiency deliver both services and support interventions that may not be possible if delivered in isolation.

A negative outcome of delivering a successful pilot or innovative project is the lack of funding to effectively mainstream the service or project. Increased opportunities to continue or mainstream projects that have demonstrated effectiveness should be a key objective of a future TRPSI framework both for addressing poverty and social isolation issues and having to avoid dealing with the expectation when a service or project ceases.

Local Rural Support Networks will continue to be a conduit to disseminate information on key government strategies to the community voluntary sector through their established communication channels and will continue to lobby and be the 'voice' of the rural community sector during discussions with statutory and governmental organisations e.g. Rural Community Development Support Service / Programme and Community Planning.

**4) Do you agree that the list of Target Groups (see Section 6) is appropriate in relation to providing support to vulnerable groups under the successor TRPSI Framework?**

**Yes**

**No**

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSN's) welcome the proposal that the successor Framework would be open to a wider range of target groups. As an infrastructure providing community development support to the rural community across Northern Ireland for many years, we have, almost without exception, worked with all these vulnerable groups.

We particularly welcome the introduction of the working poor and the under employed. The continuing economic uncertainty has left many families in difficult financial circumstances. One or both parents are working however income levels fall below what they need to have a meaningful quality of life. A sudden change in circumstances, such as marital breakup or ill health, can have further detrimental consequences and lead to social exclusion and poverty.

Mental health still retains a significant stigma, particularly in rural areas, and many of the LRSN's run programmes which directly tackle mental ill health in their communities. Statistics show that one in four run the risk of mental ill health thus their inclusion in this framework is essential.

The inclusion of the LGBT community in the framework is also welcome. Whilst members of the LGBT community live in rural areas they tend to meet and socialise in their nearest town. However LRSN's have a role to play in supporting them to remain in their community and in ensuring statutory organisations and the wider public are aware of the issues affecting them.

Perhaps one omission from the list of vulnerable groups is men. Whilst accepted that most farmers are men there may be male rural dwellers who are not farmers. Globally, the gap between male and female life expectancy and healthy life expectancy has widened in the last 40 years and is expected to get even bigger by



2030. Research commissioned by the Priory Group of 1,000 men found that: 77% of men polled have suffered with anxiety / stress / depression; the biggest pressures in men's life are work (32%), finance (31%) and health (23%); the majority of men claim their mental health is having a negative impact on their work performance, parenting ability and relationships; 40% of men polled said it would take thoughts of suicide or self-harm to compel them to seek professional help.

[www.priorygroup.com/blog/mentalhealth/-i-ve-learnt-to-deal-with-it---40-of-men-won-t-talk-to-anyone-about-their-mentalhealth](http://www.priorygroup.com/blog/mentalhealth/-i-ve-learnt-to-deal-with-it---40-of-men-won-t-talk-to-anyone-about-their-mentalhealth)

**5) (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing Access Poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas**

We are pleased to welcome the measures in the draft Framework. Many of the proposed measures will go a long way to tackle issues that blight so many rural dwellers. We appreciate that the list of groups is not exhaustive: Women, Farmers, People on work on low incomes (the working poor), Children and Young People, Older people and Ethnic Minorities and Immigrants, People with low skills or low levels of education etc. Our experience shows that some of the groups need to be broken down into subgroups.

For example there are sections of the farming industry that have seen their incomes severely cut in the last two years (dairy Farmers). Future prices in this industry predict another 10% drop in the next three months. Mental health in this area gives us great cause for concern. This is evidenced by the increase calls to help lines, up by 30% in the last year.

Many Ethnic Minorities are finding it difficult to assimilate, especially those living in the rural community. There are a number of factors that drive this. Some Ethnic groups neither have English as their first or second language; this communication barrier reinforces isolation and is a contributing factor in poor mental health. Those who have a strong grasp of the English language find it easier to "fit in". This also is a factor in this section being "excepted". In conclusion we think this group of Ethnic minorities should be broken down into sections not exclusively into language sections. i.e. short-to-medium dwellers who may seasonal workers.

We are pleased with the other target groups and we welcome that people with low skills and low levels of education might have a chance to enhance their employability. The training involved to up skill this group will act as a medium to tackle social isolation. Many who suffer from social isolation either don't recognise their plight or only recognise it when their horizons broaden due to intervention from an un-proscribed source. i.e. further education either social education or accredited.

The "Outcomes based pilot programmes" is also most welcome. This allows delivery agents latitude to make informed researched based decisions that will go to the hart rural poverty and social isolation.

Under 6.8 V we strongly concur with the mainstreaming of successful pilot projects. The Department launched the Rural Community Micro Grants 2015-2016, we in the Rural Support Networks found this reached parts of the rural community that that had gone under the radar in the past. This has opened a pathway for community development that goes to the core of TRPSI Policy. This merges into 6VII "sustainability". Some groups for the first time now see a pathway using community a development approach with the support of the Networks.

6.8X The sharing of information and best practice learning between organisations has the potential that prevents groups trying to "reinventing the wheel" and will avoid duplication between organisations.

6.8 XI The Community Planning and the consultation process will be key, both in a strategic and a complementary role. It is imperative that at all stages of the community planning that the rural voice is heard and well represented. The Rural Support Networks will play an enabling role to ensure events are well attended and the TRPSI policy principles are promoted.

6.8 VIII Good Relations being promoted: there will be many opportunities to develop innovative partnerships, PEACEIV et al.

One should not underestimate the incidental "good relations" through the Rural Development Programme. The carrot and stick approach for single identity group has been proven to open halls to a wider diaspora. Not only does this lead to better community relations but adds to the sustainability of the halls.

**(b) Please provide details on any further measures which you think should be considered to help address Access Poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas**

The Rural Micro Capital Grants Programme opened many new doors because it gave an incentive for tangible assets to be acquired for the benefit of a particular group. For many this has been the first time in making a funding application. The benefits not only include the asset but their governance has now been under the spotlight and sharpened to enable their participation. We would propose an extension of this innovative idea. The structure used to deliver the grants is now well established, this same structure could deliver small capitol grants say up to £10,000 for basic needs that so many halls throughout the country require.

Community transport should be reviewed to widen its scope. Longer journeys should be considered that travel between a number of service providers.

Evidence indicates that there is an appetite for ICT / Computer Training in rural areas. The LRSNs could deliver this service. There used to be an outreach service from the regional Colleges, we don't advocate for its return. The service that they provided no longer is fit for propose. Farmers and rural dwellers want a basic standard of training that may not necessarily be accredited. The end result would be Farmers having the ability to make online returns. Farm families coming together braking social isolation and have a greater understanding of the world wide web. Greater use and the promotion of Luncheon Clubs in rural areas could provide a service that; tackles social isolation, helps sustain a target audience, increases the sustainability of rural halls. All this combined adds to the cohesion of rural communities.

**6) (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing Financial Poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas**

Financial poverty refers to the measure of the degree to which people face the risk of serious deprivation in terms of their standard of living or to which they fall below a specified minimum level of resources. Through the measures in the draft action plan there is the opportunity to raise the standard of living for those people living in rural areas. Particularly in regard to addressing issues such as rural transport which is currently a major issue which prohibits many rural dwellers from accessing essential basic services. In addition measures targeted at supporting household energy efficiency improvement & the introduction of new employability and entrepreneurship opportunities are also to be welcomed.

**(b) Please provide details on any other measures which you think should be considered to help address Financial Poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas**

Other measures which may alleviate financial poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas include the creation of jobs through investment in infrastructure such as investment in rural hubs, renovating abandoned housing and broadband infrastructure development, therefore increasing the chances of the young people of rural areas to stay, therefore building a stronger rural economy. With added investment in high quality and affordable childcare and early intervention this will create increased opportunities for jobs.

**7) (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing Social Isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas**

The Local Rural Support Networks welcome the continued recognition by DARD of the problems caused within the rural population due to Social Isolation. We acknowledge the priority areas for intervention listed within the Draft Action Plan under Social Isolation of promoting tolerance, health, well-being and inclusion for rural dwellers and through our long established work within rural communities agree that these are valid and worthwhile Priority Areas for Intervention.

Poor Mental Health and well-being is an issue that has major impacts within rural communities given the fact that many people are living in isolated circumstances often on their own or with limited family and / or community connections.

The farming community is also a grouping who have been demonstrated to have poor mental health as they are facing increasing stresses of managing their businesses mostly working on an individual basis with limited opportunities to engage with others. Many of the LRSN's are engaged in delivering mental health and wellbeing programmes over the last ten years, all of these programmes have been externally evaluated and have shown excellent results in improving local mental health and wellbeing. Any new pilot programmes delivered under the new framework need to take into consideration the knowledge and learning of the evaluations.

One concern that the LRSN's would have that by naming the priority as '*promote positive mental health and wellbeing*' rather than '*promoting positive health and wellbeing*'; interventions could be limited in their scope to secure engagement by rural dwellers. There is still a stigma around mental health in rural areas and people would be more likely to engage with activities that are seen to be about general health and wellbeing, people in many instances would not want to be identified through participating in activities as someone who has mental health issue. If people are at least attracted to an activity the issue of mental health can then be addressed.

Therefore as LRSN's we do welcome the example initiatives listed as they list 'Support for health and wellbeing activities' as well as 'Support the promotion of mental health awareness and actions' and we ask that the learning and evidence from positive work that has been undertaken with rural communities through the

LRSN's, Healthy Living Centres, other Community, Voluntary and Statutory bodies on these actions and activities are used when drawing up plans for initiatives to support under the new TRPSI framework.

The Local Rural Support Networks would welcome actions that will support the rural population to improve their health and wellbeing particularly those activities that are operated and provided at local facilities and venues.

The LRSN's welcome that '*increase opportunities for social engagement*' is listed as a priority area of intervention as the value of people of all ages within rural communities being given the opportunity to engage with others on a social basis cannot be underestimated. It is through these social activities that the aim of "promote tolerance, health, wellbeing and inclusion' can be best achieved within rural communities as by bringing people together they are getting to know each other. This is needed within communities as in many instances during their working and education lives many members of rural communities are away from the community during the day and thus have limited opportunities to engage with others. It is only through actual engagement in the same physical space that tolerance can be promoted and this is especially important in rural communities as due to low numbers of people activities are best organised to attract as many members of the population as possible so that a sufficient number of people attend to make an activity viable. Therefore anything that can be done to encourage use of community facilities that have been traditionally associated as belonging to one section of the community would be welcome. Such venues can become hubs for social inclusion activities within rural communities.

Many venues within rural communities require some level of work to ensure that they are brought up to a condition that they are accessible and suitable to be used to provide activities that address social isolation.

The Local Rural Support Networks welcome the inclusion of '*support community capacity*' as an example initiative as a capable and effective local community infrastructure is of vital importance to the fabric of life within rural communities and those involved in organisations within local communities are largely undertaking this role on a voluntary basis. These organisations require ongoing community development support to continue their operations on an effective and efficient basis

and become involved in projects that will address poverty and social isolation at a local level within rural communities.

The community development support work delivered by the Local Rural Support Networks resourced under the previous TRPSI Framework has been very effective in ensuring the survival and continued operation of local community infrastructure. This community infrastructure of the LRSN's working in partnership with organisations located within local communities has also ensured that many of the other initiatives supported under TRPSI have been effective at reaching into rural communities and tackling poverty and social isolation.

**(b) Please provide details on any other measures which you think should be considered to help address Social Isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas**

The Local Rural Support Networks would welcome the resourcing of actions to plan and coordinate the effective operation of activities that would address social isolation. This would involve a resource of a person to co-ordinate activities and associated resource budget to cover some of the costs of operating activities particularly training new and innovative activities on a pilot basis. This would ensure that activities are operated on a coordinated and effective basis, securing sufficient numbers, building linkages within and between communities, duplication is avoided, gaps in provision of social inclusion activities are identified and tackled.

The ongoing work within the LRSN's and their delivery of the MARA project has clearly demonstrated that there is a significant issue around mental health problems in homes, particularly depression and loneliness.

The Framework would provide an excellent opportunity to design a pilot project that would take advantage of the excellent community development model that we have that could be harnessed to deliver a programme to enable rural dwellers to avail of resources to assist them to overcome loneliness and seek help with other mental health conditions. The Programme could be designed to ensure a rural community response is adopted to encourage self-help and self-care.

**8) How might the successor TRPSI Framework contribute towards the development of more effective rural community support structures?**

Please provide comments in the box below

The TRPSI Framework has been a key success factor for rural organisations (e.g. the 9 Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs) / Rural Community Development Support Service Contract) in terms ensuring rural proofing, levering-in vital resources to rural areas, and enabling effective implementation of the TRPSI Framework throughout the region.

*Making Strategic Facilitation and Joined-Up Government a reality:* the TRPSI Framework is vital to ensuring that rural needs are addressed by the government in a localised and joined-up way that reaches the most vulnerable and those most in need.

The successor TRPSI Framework would not only enable much greater utilisation of financial resources, but also would combine the expertise of public sector bodies, and the private, voluntary and community sectors to create greater economies of scale in terms utilising all available knowledge, skills and capacity. This in turn maximises innovation and enables increased access to those most in need and those who are most difficult to reach (e.g. the MARA Project has reached out to almost 15,000 households).

TRPSI has been vital in ensuring that *rural* gets its fair share in terms of community development via a high quality networking infrastructure and Community Development Support Service that is run by grass roots representatives right across the region.

The DARD Rural Micro-Capital Grants Programme delivered on-the-ground by the 9 Local Rural Support Networks, have been essential to ensuring capital investment reaches the smallest and lowest capacity rural groups throughout the entire region.

The additional financial leverage over the last four years from the Local Rural Support Networks alone in terms of additional programmes, projects and grant schemes (promoting health, peace, equality, skills, employability, capacity etc) is £56 million.



The LRSNs have been central to the role of assisting the set-up of the new local Action Groups (NIRDP) and ensuring grass roots community representation.

**9) How might a successor TRPSI Framework support the delivery of local councils Community Plans?**

Please provide comments in the box below

The TRPSI Framework could play a key role in the delivery of local Council Community Plans via the TRPSI-funded Rural Community Development Support Service which can facilitate the ongoing involvement of the Local Rural Support Networks (LRSN's) in the community planning process. The foundations for the delivery of Community Planning already exist within the local Council areas through the LRSN's and their vast network of community based organisations – Community Planning should build upon these existing structures. The delivery of Community Planning within the local Council areas will require the engagement of existing and emerging partnerships working collaboratively. The well-established and proven track record of the LRSN's could well be effective resources in such a delivery process. It is imperative that the development of Community Planning includes the continuing engagement of such current resources so as agreed delivery structures for Community Planning are adopted that act as wider collaborative forums for the benefit of the communities that they will ultimately serve.

During the past 4 years the LRSN's have delivered, under the current TRPSI Framework, a Rural Community Development Support Service to a wide range of rural organisation and groups. This has proven to be an effective model and partnership for the delivery of such services and the LRSN's, with continued support from the TRPSI programme, are therefore well placed to assist local Councils in the delivery of community planning over the next number of years due to the following factors:

- Strong partnership & links with the rural community already in place
- Added value from funding leverage from other programmes
- Already working closely with DARD to deliver services including the development of the NI Rural Development Programme (2014-2020)

The delivery structures for the Community Planning process within local Councils must

therefore take account of existing rural structures & delivery organisations so as to ensure there is less fragmentation of implementation groups and integration of the various locally focused Action Plans. This will ensure that the Community Planning process will effectively serve the priority needs of the rural community, the ongoing support of DARD for the rural community development sector at grass roots level through the TRPSI framework is crucial to this.

**10) Do you have any views on the conclusions reached by DARD (see Section 9) in relation to the proposals for a successor TRPSI Framework in respect of:**

**(xi) The Equality and Human Rights Template**

Please provide comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs) / Rural Community Development Support Service contract holders have a proven track record of working with DARD (as partner organisations) to contribute, develop and implement new and innovative pilot measures to Target Rural Poverty and reduce Social Isolation. The LRSNs welcome a localised approach to the design and delivery of measures which effectively target financial poverty, access poverty and social isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas in line with the key principles of the Framework. The LRSNs are advantageously neutral to central and local government ensuring that all rural communities can access resources, services and programmes in a timely manner regardless of religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status, sexual orientation or disability. The LRSNs ensure Section 75 information is recorded in line with procedures under International Quality Standard ISO 9001:2008 and kept securely in keeping with Data Protection Legislation.

**(xii) The Rural Issues Statement**

Please provide comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs) / Rural Community Development Support Service contract holders have a proven track record of working with DARD (as partner organisations) to ensure the TRPSI Framework has been a key success factor ensuring rural proofing and enabling effective implementation positive direct impact on the vulnerable in rural communities through a localised infrastructure. In the last four years we have empowered some 15,000 individuals, including the hardest to reach, socially isolated and most vulnerable of the population in Northern Ireland. Delivering capacity building programmes within rural areas to encourage and ensure participation in the Rural Development Programme. Undertaking the delivery of the MARA Project has reached out to almost 15,000 households directly impacting on their quality of life.

The LRSNs have also been successful in additional leverage which has had positive indirect impacts. For example we have rolled out projects and grant schemes (promoting health, peace, equality, skills, employability) equating to over £56million in the last four years. All of these measures support the delivery of key services for rural dwellers to avail of and have indirectly helped to tackle social isolation and the related mental health connotations that come with this. The central and neutral role that the LRSNs deliver; give local services for local people and ensure grass roots community representation in rolling out TRPSI Framework.

**11) Is there any other aspect of the proposals that you wish to comment on?**

Please provide comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs) are an essential conduit for the delivery of joined-up local initiatives designed to tackle rural poverty and social isolation.

Our track record is well proven and we aim to continue in ensuring rural communities have their needs met and to deliver the Rural Community Development Support Service from a local and accessible office based in the community as part of a region-wide rural community Infrastructure that is dedicated to rural.

COSTA plays an essential role in ensuring this within the Dungannon & South Tyrone area of Mid Ulster.

## RESPONDENT INFORMATION

**Please Note** this form **must** be returned with your response to ensure that we handle your response appropriately.

### 1. Name / Organisation

**Organisation Name (If applicable).**

Community Organisations of South Tyrone & AREAS LTD (COSTA)

**Title** Mr  Ms  Mrs  Miss  Dr  **Please tick as appropriate**

**Surname**

Griffin

**Forename**

Lorraine

### 2. Postal Address

President Grant's Homestead

45 Dergenagh Road

Dungannon

Co. Tyrone

**Postcode** BT70 1TW

**Phone** 028 855 56880

**Email**  
info.costa@btconnect.com

### Consultation Questions

1) Do you agree that the proposed Aim, Objectives and Intended Outcomes (see Section 6) for the TRPSI Framework are appropriate?

Yes

No

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs) have a proven track record of working with DARD (as partner organisations) to develop and implement new and innovative pilot measures in hundreds of rural villages and communities to Target Rural Poverty and reduce Social Isolation. Although not clearly highlighted in some of the TRPSI consultation papers, it has been acknowledged by all stakeholders (from The Minister and the ARD Committee to local groups) that all the other TRPSI measures in the current programme were dependent on a solid and responsive rural community infrastructure across NI. The LRSNs have worked closely with DARD for over 20 years to put that infrastructure in place and that is the reason so many of the TRPSI measures have been so successful.

For example, in recent months the Rural Micro Capital Grant Programme has been promoted for DARD by the LRSNs and 2 phases have been rolled out to small rural groups in every part of rural NI. The programme has been oversubscribed and highly effective in targeting small grants at the most needy groups, helping them to deliver a wide range of local rural services. The MARA programme, Farm Families Health Checks and the promotion of Library services have all exceeded their targets thanks in large part to the promotional and organisational abilities and reach of the LRSNs. A local presence and knowledge of the area is to key to successful delivery.

This experience - linked to the hundreds of rural groups and thousands of individuals associated with the LRSNs - means that the Networks can help DARD to meet the objectives set in *Section 6 "Proposals for a successor Framework post 2016"*.

Together with other rural stakeholders, we can "promote the development of new and innovative pilot approaches to TRPSI AND encourage effective partnership working AND effectively target financial poverty, access poverty and social isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas".

**2) Do you agree that the 3 Priority Areas – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation (see Section 6) – should continue to be the main priorities for the TRPSI Framework?**

**Yes**

**No**

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks believe that the 3 Priority Areas – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation should continue to be the main priorities for the TRPSI Framework as they are still relevant in 2016, encapsulate the varying needs of the rural community and encompass a service deliverability which can be most effectively demonstrated through a *local or sub regional level approach*.

The identification and successful delivery of various projects and programmes within these priorities would continue to bring greatest positive impact to the needs of those experiencing rural poverty and isolation. The priorities allow for a bottom-up community development approach in not only identifying relevant needs but also in delivering upon them using a cascade approach. It is our view that the most effective TRPSI programmes delivered to date have had a strong community ethos and process coupled with local knowledge access to where rural, social and economic needs are most prevalent. Invariably, there will be different levels of need in different geographical areas, however, as the nature of community sector delivery is designed sub regionally and is based on pertinent local needs then those most in poverty or experiencing isolation have less probability in remaining outside the reach of these priorities and programmes.

The Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation framework and it's priorities to date has been an excellent package of funding aimed at supporting vulnerable people and targeting the root causes of social isolation. As programmes take effect and outputs deliver meaningful change there are indeed necessary modifications within the themes or priorities which are required to continue to make most impact on the frameworks aims whilst external factors such as austerity and public budget finance availability will also determine and prioritize future considerations.

It is our view that the 3 Priority Areas – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social

Isolation should continue to be the main priorities for the TRPSI Framework since programmes can emerge from these themes which meet best the local community needs.

TRPSI and the priorities has now gained substantial traction and is now recognised as an essential brand which has made a huge difference to rural communities and which is complementary to the NIRDP. Many of the issues these priorities have tackled to date were previously hidden and would fall outside the remit of other mainstream funding programmes. There remains, however, continued challenges, needs and rural TRPSI issues which require on-going support at various levels of intervention and which would still come under these 3 priorities.

*The Rural Community Development Support Service currently delivered by the Local Rural Support Networks, as a model of support to TRPSI, is most certainly envied throughout communities in Europe as a model leader in balancing appropriate and measured interventions to social, economic and access poverty issues at a community level. Promoting Community development at a local / sub regional level ensures that regional programmes are delivered effectively at the local level and access to the real needs and issues of communities is provided for. Supporting access to good governance, to economic and social poverty in communities; the service as provided by these local community based networks has proved an invaluable resource to the delivery of the TRPSI Framework.*

These experienced local stakeholders have excellent working relationships with all other TRPSI delivery agents and indeed share a direct role in elements of their success making essential and valuable linkages and connections at sub regional and local levels. The key management role of DARD in direct delivery of this programme has proved to be most effective in ensuring that the networks could assist DARD to manage Regional programmes at local levels and to balance approaches necessary to ensuring programme priority themes reached the community sector using bottom up approaches.

The local access support provided to DARD's Modernisation Programme and its Rural Micro Capital Grants Programmes - as and when required by DARD - evidence how this infrastructure can react and respond to changing rural needs and requirements. Their modus operandi for the delivery of programmes such as MARA



are a testament to the Community Development approach which ensures participation and access to hidden and real needs at a local level across all 3 main priorities.

The networking function plays an invaluable role in achieving key community participation at all necessary levels from village planning facilitation to rural proofing consultation. With the reform of local Government, Community Planning, and the mandatory Charities registration requirements; these networks provide local mentoring support and guidance, technical support and facilitation at grassroots level to those rural communities most in need under the programme priorities of Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation. Most importantly, they can identify what local pertinent needs fit the programme.

We believe that it is the approaches taken under the overlying programme priorities which provide the appropriate lynchpins to ensure leverage of many other programmes and projects into rural areas and which have included such as community mental health awareness, capital build infrastructural programmes, rural tourism, lifelong learning, social investment, migrant support etc. These programmes operate in a time of decentralisation and digitization of services, the closing of rural banks, post offices, schools and other services and thus during a time when the greatest need for local people to provide adequate solutions to their own issues and problems within a community development approach. The 3 themes adequately allow for local communities, sub regional and innovative approach making to meeting rural TRPI needs.

**3) Do you agree that the 12 Key Principles (see Section 6) are appropriate for the TRPSI Framework?**

**Yes**

**No**

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

The rural support organisations delivering the DARD Rural Community Development Support Service / Programme agree with the key TRPSI principles as outlined in the framework document. Historically the Local Rural Support Networks successfully delivered pilot, innovative projects and interventions collaboratively and in partnership with statutory and other community and voluntary organisations and are widely perceived as the link between grass roots community groups operating at a local level with regional statutory bodies.

Positive outcomes of a collaborative approach to the delivery of services aimed at addressing rural poverty and isolation issues include:

- Ensuring the socially isolated and those with financial related issues have access and opportunities to avail of support services
- Increasing the capacity of designated rural support organisations and grass roots community groups to collectively and with greater efficiency deliver both services and support interventions that may not be possible if delivered in isolation.

A negative outcome of delivering a successful pilot or innovative project is the lack of funding to effectively mainstream the service or project. Increased opportunities to continue or mainstream projects that have demonstrated effectiveness should be a key objective of a future TRPSI framework both for addressing poverty and social isolation issues and having to avoid dealing with the expectation when a service or project ceases.

Local Rural Support Networks will continue to be a conduit to disseminate information on key government strategies to the community voluntary sector through their established communication channels and will continue to lobby and be the 'voice' of the rural community sector during discussions with statutory and governmental organisations e.g. Rural Community Development Support Service / Programme and Community Planning.

**4) Do you agree that the list of Target Groups (see Section 6) is appropriate in relation to providing support to vulnerable groups under the successor TRPSI Framework?**

**Yes**

**No**

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSN's) welcome the proposal that the successor Framework would be open to a wider range of target groups. As an infrastructure providing community development support to the rural community across Northern Ireland for many years, we have, almost without exception, worked with all these vulnerable groups.

We particularly welcome the introduction of the working poor and the under employed. The continuing economic uncertainty has left many families in difficult financial circumstances. One or both parents are working however income levels fall below what they need to have a meaningful quality of life. A sudden change in circumstances, such as marital breakup or ill health, can have further detrimental consequences and lead to social exclusion and poverty.

Mental health still retains a significant stigma, particularly in rural areas, and many of the LRSN's run programmes which directly tackle mental ill health in their communities. Statistics show that one in four run the risk of mental ill health thus their inclusion in this framework is essential.

The inclusion of the LGBT community in the framework is also welcome. Whilst members of the LGBT community live in rural areas they tend to meet and socialise in their nearest town. However LRSN's have a role to play in supporting them to remain in their community and in ensuring statutory organisations and the wider public are aware of the issues affecting them.

Perhaps one omission from the list of vulnerable groups is men. Whilst accepted that most farmers are men there may be male rural dwellers who are not farmers. Globally, the gap between male and female life expectancy and healthy life expectancy has widened in the last 40 years and is expected to get even bigger by

2030. Research commissioned by the Priory Group of 1,000 men found that: 77% of men polled have suffered with anxiety / stress / depression; the biggest pressures in men's life are work (32%), finance (31%) and health (23%); the majority of men claim their mental health is having a negative impact on their work performance, parenting ability and relationships; 40% of men polled said it would take thoughts of suicide or self-harm to compel them to seek professional help.

[www.priorygroup.com/blog/mentalhealth/-i-ve-learnt-to-deal-with-it---40-of-men-won-t-talk-to-anyone-about-their-mentalhealth](http://www.priorygroup.com/blog/mentalhealth/-i-ve-learnt-to-deal-with-it---40-of-men-won-t-talk-to-anyone-about-their-mentalhealth)

**5) (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing Access Poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas**

We are pleased to welcome the measures in the draft Framework. Many of the proposed measures will go a long way to tackle issues that blight so many rural dwellers. We appreciate that the list of groups is not exhaustive: Women, Farmers, People on work on low incomes (the working poor), Children and Young People, Older people and Ethnic Minorities and Immigrants, People with low skills or low levels of education etc. Our experience shows that some of the groups need to be broken down into subgroups.

For example there are sections of the farming industry that have seen their incomes severely cut in the last two years (dairy Farmers). Future prices in this industry predict another 10% drop in the next three months. Mental health in this area gives us great cause for concern. This is evidenced by the increase calls to help lines, up by 30% in the last year.

Many Ethnic Minorities are finding it difficult to assimilate, especially those living in the rural community. There are a number of factors that drive this. Some Ethnic groups neither have English as their first or second language; this communication barrier reinforces isolation and is a contributing factor in poor mental health. Those who have a strong grasp of the English language find it easier to "fit in". This also is a factor in this section being "excepted". In conclusion we think this group of Ethnic minorities should be broken down into sections not exclusively into language sections. i.e. short-to-medium dwellers who may seasonal workers.

We are pleased with the other target groups and we welcome that people with low skills and low levels of education might have a chance to enhance their employability. The training involved to up skill this group will act as a medium to tackle social isolation. Many who suffer from social isolation either don't recognise their plight or only recognise it when their horizons broaden due to intervention from an un-proscribed source. i.e. further education either social education or accredited.

The "Outcomes based pilot programmes" is also most welcome. This allows delivery agents latitude to make informed researched based decisions that will go to the hart rural poverty and social isolation.

Under 6.8 V we strongly concur with the mainstreaming of successful pilot projects. The Department launched the Rural Community Micro Grants 2015-2016, we in the Rural Support Networks found this reached parts of the rural community that that had gone under the radar in the past. This has opened a pathway for community development that goes to the core of TRPSI Policy. This merges into 6VII "sustainability". Some groups for the first time now see a pathway using community a development approach with the support of the Networks.

6.8X The sharing of information and best practice learning between organisations has the potential that prevents groups trying to "reinventing the wheel" and will avoid duplication between organisations.

6.8 XI The Community Planning and the consultation process will be key, both in a strategic and a complementary role. It is imperative that at all stages of the community planning that the rural voice is heard and well represented. The Rural Support Networks will play an enabling role to ensure events are well attended and the TRPSI policy principles are promoted.

6.8 VIII Good Relations being promoted: there will be many opportunities to develop innovative partnerships, PEACEIV et al.

One should not underestimate the incidental "good relations" through the Rural Development Programme. The carrot and stick approach for single identity group has been proven to open halls to a wider diaspora. Not only does this lead to better community relations but adds to the sustainability of the halls.

**(b) Please provide details on any further measures which you think should be considered to help address Access Poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas**

The Rural Micro Capital Grants Programme opened many new doors because it gave an incentive for tangible assets to be acquired for the benefit of a particular group. For many this has been the first time in making a funding application. The benefits not only include the asset but their governance has now been under the spotlight and sharpened to enable their participation. We would propose an extension of this innovative idea. The structure used to deliver the grants is now well established, this same structure could deliver small capitol grants say up to £10,000 for basic needs that so many halls throughout the country require.

Community transport should be reviewed to widen its scope. Longer journeys should be considered that travel between a number of service providers.

Evidence indicates that there is an appetite for ICT / Computer Training in rural areas. The LRSNs could deliver this service. There used to be an outreach service from the regional Colleges, we don't advocate for its return. The service that they provided no longer is fit for propose. Farmers and rural dwellers want a basic standard of training that may not necessarily be accredited. The end result would be Farmers having the ability to make online returns. Farm families coming together braking social isolation and have a greater understanding of the world wide web. Greater use and the promotion of Luncheon Clubs in rural areas could provide a service that; tackles social isolation, helps sustain a target audience, increases the sustainability of rural halls. All this combined adds to the cohesion of rural communities.

**6) (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing Financial Poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas**

Financial poverty refers to the measure of the degree to which people face the risk of serious deprivation in terms of their standard of living or to which they fall below a specified minimum level of resources. Through the measures in the draft action plan there is the opportunity to raise the standard of living for those people living in rural areas. Particularly in regard to addressing issues such as rural transport which is currently a major issue which prohibits many rural dwellers from accessing essential basic services. In addition measures targeted at supporting household energy efficiency improvement & the introduction of new employability and entrepreneurship opportunities are also to be welcomed.

**(b) Please provide details on any other measures which you think should be considered to help address Financial Poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas**

Other measures which may alleviate financial poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas include the creation of jobs through investment in infrastructure such as investment in rural hubs, renovating abandoned housing and broadband infrastructure development, therefore increasing the chances of the young people of rural areas to stay, therefore building a stronger rural economy. With added investment in high quality and affordable childcare and early intervention this will create increased opportunities for jobs.

**7) (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing Social Isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas**

The Local Rural Support Networks welcome the continued recognition by DARD of the problems caused within the rural population due to Social Isolation. We acknowledge the priority areas for intervention listed within the Draft Action Plan under Social Isolation of promoting tolerance, health, well-being and inclusion for rural dwellers and through our long established work within rural communities agree that these are valid and worthwhile Priority Areas for Intervention.

Poor Mental Health and well-being is an issue that has major impacts within rural communities given the fact that many people are living in isolated circumstances often on their own or with limited family and / or community connections.

The farming community is also a grouping who have been demonstrated to have poor mental health as they are facing increasing stresses of managing their businesses mostly working on an individual basis with limited opportunities to engage with others. Many of the LRSN's are engaged in delivering mental health and wellbeing programmes over the last ten years, all of these programmes have been externally evaluated and have shown excellent results in improving local mental health and wellbeing. Any new pilot programmes delivered under the new framework need to take into consideration the knowledge and learning of the evaluations.

One concern that the LRSN's would have that by naming the priority as '*promote positive mental health and wellbeing*' rather than '*promoting positive health and wellbeing*'; interventions could be limited in their scope to secure engagement by rural dwellers. There is still a stigma around mental health in rural areas and people would be more likely to engage with activities that are seen to be about general health and wellbeing, people in many instances would not want to be identified through participating in activities as someone who has mental health issue. If people are at least attracted to an activity the issue of mental health can then be addressed.

Therefore as LRSN's we do welcome the example initiatives listed as they list 'Support for health and wellbeing activities' as well as 'Support the promotion of mental health awareness and actions' and we ask that the learning and evidence from positive work that has been undertaken with rural communities through the



LRSN's, Healthy Living Centres, other Community, Voluntary and Statutory bodies on these actions and activities are used when drawing up plans for initiatives to support under the new TRPSI framework.

The Local Rural Support Networks would welcome actions that will support the rural population to improve their health and wellbeing particularly those activities that are operated and provided at local facilities and venues.

The LRSN's welcome that '*increase opportunities for social engagement*' is listed as a priority area of intervention as the value of people of all ages within rural communities being given the opportunity to engage with others on a social basis cannot be underestimated. It is through these social activities that the aim of "promote tolerance, health, wellbeing and inclusion' can be best achieved within rural communities as by bringing people together they are getting to know each other. This is needed within communities as in many instances during their working and education lives many members of rural communities are away from the community during the day and thus have limited opportunities to engage with others. It is only through actual engagement in the same physical space that tolerance can be promoted and this is especially important in rural communities as due to low numbers of people activities are best organised to attract as many members of the population as possible so that a sufficient number of people attend to make an activity viable. Therefore anything that can be done to encourage use of community facilities that have been traditionally associated as belonging to one section of the community would be welcome. Such venues can become hubs for social inclusion activities within rural communities.

Many venues within rural communities require some level of work to ensure that they are brought up to a condition that they are accessible and suitable to be used to provide activities that address social isolation.

The Local Rural Support Networks welcome the inclusion of '*support community capacity*' as an example initiative as a capable and effective local community infrastructure is of vital importance to the fabric of life within rural communities and those involved in organisations within local communities are largely undertaking this role on a voluntary basis. These organisations require ongoing community development support to continue their operations on an effective and efficient basis

and become involved in projects that will address poverty and social isolation at a local level within rural communities.

The community development support work delivered by the Local Rural Support Networks resourced under the previous TRPSI Framework has been very effective in ensuring the survival and continued operation of local community infrastructure. This community infrastructure of the LRSN's working in partnership with organisations located within local communities has also ensured that many of the other initiatives supported under TRPSI have been effective at reaching into rural communities and tackling poverty and social isolation.

**(b) Please provide details on any other measures which you think should be considered to help address Social Isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas**

The Local Rural Support Networks would welcome the resourcing of actions to plan and coordinate the effective operation of activities that would address social isolation. This would involve a resource of a person to co-ordinate activities and associated resource budget to cover some of the costs of operating activities particularly training new and innovative activities on a pilot basis. This would ensure that activities are operated on a coordinated and effective basis, securing sufficient numbers, building linkages within and between communities, duplication is avoided, gaps in provision of social inclusion activities are identified and tackled.

The ongoing work within the LRSN's and their delivery of the MARA project has clearly demonstrated that there is a significant issue around mental health problems in homes, particularly depression and loneliness.

The Framework would provide an excellent opportunity to design a pilot project that would take advantage of the excellent community development model that we have that could be harnessed to deliver a programme to enable rural dwellers to avail of resources to assist them to overcome loneliness and seek help with other mental health conditions. The Programme could be designed to ensure a rural community response is adopted to encourage self-help and self-care.

**8) How might the successor TRPSI Framework contribute towards the development of more effective rural community support structures?**

Please provide comments in the box below

The TRPSI Framework has been a key success factor for rural organisations (e.g. the 9 Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs) / Rural Community Development Support Service Contract) in terms ensuring rural proofing, levering-in vital resources to rural areas, and enabling effective implementation of the TRPSI Framework throughout the region.

*Making Strategic Facilitation and Joined-Up Government a reality:* the TRPSI Framework is vital to ensuring that rural needs are addressed by the government in a localised and joined-up way that reaches the most vulnerable and those most in need.

The successor TRPSI Framework would not only enable much greater utilisation of financial resources, but also would combine the expertise of public sector bodies, and the private, voluntary and community sectors to create greater economies of scale in terms utilising all available knowledge, skills and capacity. This in turn maximises innovation and enables increased access to those most in need and those who are most difficult to reach (e.g. the MARA Project has reached out to almost 15,000 households).

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The LRSNs have been central to the role of assisting the set-up of the new local Action Groups (NIRDP) and ensuring grass roots community representation.

**9) How might a successor TRPSI Framework support the delivery of local councils Community Plans?**

Please provide comments in the box below

The TRPSI Framework could play a key role in the delivery of local Council Community Plans via the TRPSI-funded Rural Community Development Support Service which can facilitate the ongoing involvement of the Local Rural Support Networks (LRSN's) in the community planning process. The foundations for the delivery of Community Planning already exist within the local Council areas through the LRSN's and their vast network of community based organisations – Community Planning should build upon these existing structures. The delivery of Community Planning within the local Council areas will require the engagement of existing and emerging partnerships working collaboratively. The well-established and proven track record of the LRSN's could well be effective resources in such a delivery process. It is imperative that the development of Community Planning includes the continuing engagement of such current resources so as agreed delivery structures for Community Planning are adopted that act as wider collaborative forums for the benefit of the communities that they will ultimately serve.

During the past 4 years the LRSN's have delivered, under the current TRPSI Framework, a Rural Community Development Support Service to a wide range of rural organisation and groups. This has proven to be an effective model and partnership for the delivery of such services and the LRSN's, with continued support from the TRPSI programme, are therefore well placed to assist local Councils in the delivery of community planning over the next number of years due to the following factors:

- Strong partnership & links with the rural community already in place
- Added value from funding leverage from other programmes
- Already working closely with DARD to deliver services including the development of the NI Rural Development Programme (2014-2020)

The delivery structures for the Community Planning process within local Councils must

therefore take account of existing rural structures & delivery organisations so as to ensure there is less fragmentation of implementation groups and integration of the various locally focused Action Plans. This will ensure that the Community Planning process will effectively serve the priority needs of the rural community, the ongoing support of DARD for the rural community development sector at grass roots level through the TRPSI framework is crucial to this.

**10) Do you have any views on the conclusions reached by DARD (see Section 9) in relation to the proposals for a successor TRPSI Framework in respect of:**

**(xiii) The Equality and Human Rights Template**

Please provide comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs) / Rural Community Development Support Service contract holders have a proven track record of working with DARD (as partner organisations) to contribute, develop and implement new and innovative pilot measures to Target Rural Poverty and reduce Social Isolation. The LRSNs welcome a localised approach to the design and delivery of measures which effectively target financial poverty, access poverty and social isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas in line with the key principles of the Framework. The LRSNs are advantageously neutral to central and local government ensuring that all rural communities can access resources, services and programmes in a timely manner regardless of religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status, sexual orientation or disability. The LRSNs ensure Section 75 information is recorded in line with procedures under International Quality Standard ISO 9001:2008 and kept securely in keeping with Data Protection Legislation.

**(xiv) The Rural Issues Statement**

Please provide comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs) / Rural Community Development Support Service contract holders have a proven track record of working with DARD (as partner organisations) to ensure the TRPSI Framework has been a key success factor ensuring rural proofing and enabling effective implementation positive direct impact on the vulnerable in rural communities through a localised infrastructure. In the last four years we have empowered some 15,000 individuals, including the hardest to reach, socially isolated and most vulnerable of the population in Northern Ireland. Delivering capacity building programmes within rural areas to encourage and ensure participation in the Rural Development Programme. Undertaking the delivery of the MARA Project has reached out to almost 15,000 households directly impacting on their quality of life.

The LRSNs have also been successful in additional leverage which has had positive indirect impacts. For example we have rolled out projects and grant schemes (promoting health, peace, equality, skills, employability) equating to over £56million in the last four years. All of these measures support the delivery of key services for rural dwellers to avail of and have indirectly helped to tackle social isolation and the related mental health connotations that come with this. The central and neutral role that the LRSNs deliver; give local services for local people and ensure grass roots community representation in rolling out TRPSI Framework.

**11) Is there any other aspect of the proposals that you wish to comment on?**

Please provide comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs) are an essential conduit for the delivery of joined-up local initiatives designed to tackle rural poverty and social isolation.

Our track record is well proven and we aim to continue in ensuring rural communities have their needs met and to deliver the Rural Community Development Support Service from a local and accessible office based in the community as part of a region-wide rural community Infrastructure that is dedicated to rural.

COSTA plays an essential role in ensuring this within the Dungannon & South Tyrone area of Mid Ulster.

## RESPONDENT INFORMATION

**Please Note** this form **must** be returned with your response to ensure that we handle your response appropriately.

### 1. Name / Organisation

**Organisation Name (If applicable).**

ARMAGH RURAL TRANSPORT (ART)

**Title** Mr  Ms  Mrs  Miss  Dr  **Please tick as appropriate**

**Surname**

IRWIN

**Forename**

DIANE

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### Consultation Questions

**1) Do you agree that the proposed Aim, Objectives and Intended Outcomes (see Section 6) for the TRPSI Framework are appropriate?**

**Yes**

**No**

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

Having considered the proposals for a successor TRPSI Framework and would recognise, as a key delivery agent for demand responsive rural transport services across County Armagh that the current TRPSI Framework has led to significant improvement in combating Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation for rural dwellers through the ARTS and MARA projects.

**2) Do you agree that the 3 Priority Areas – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation (see Section 6) – should continue to be the main priorities for the TRPSI Framework?**

**Yes**

**No**

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

The 3 Priority Areas are satisfactory as broad measures of strategic intent for post 2016.

**3) Do you agree that the 12 Key Principles (see Section 6) are appropriate for the TRPSI Framework?**

**Yes**

**No**

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

It would be important to note that as much as innovative pilot projects can revitalize and give new birth to the successor framework, successful projects like MARA and ARTS have proven to meet need in all three priority areas, therefore I would strongly recommend that consideration must be given to sustaining these projects post 2016.

**4) Do you agree that the list of Target Groups (see Section 6) is appropriate in relation to providing support to vulnerable groups under the successor TRPSI Framework?**

**Yes**

**No**

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

Whilst ARTS has been hugely successful, only those rural dwellers who are registered disabled and the elderly benefit from free or half fare travel by presenting a valid smart pass. However ART currently offer services to "all" under the proposed target grouping and would draw attention that anyone from a rural area who doesn't have access to either public or private transport can qualify to be a member with us and avail of the heavily subsidised Dial-A-Lift Service which is available Monday to Friday 8am - 6pm throughout County Armagh, therefore providing those individuals who fall outside of ARTS with an affordable transport option.

**5) (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing Access Poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas**

I am supportive of the measures to address Access Poverty however we would stress that transport is an integral part of each initiative and needs to be given consideration at development stage as this issue comes up time and again when speaking to rural dwellers.

Example; New pilot projects are set up to support rural hubs and inclusion activities, how do individuals get to these projects if they do not have access to transport?

**(b) Please provide details on any further measures which you think should be considered to help address Access Poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas**

Continued support of Community Transport Partnerships like ourselves through ARTS would assist DARD in achieving new initiatives under all three priority areas as a prevalent problem is a lack of affordable transport where rural dwellers have severe difficulty in accessing local basic services, hub facilities, employment and education.

As a further point, Translink have made significant changes to the frequency on rural routes with some services being discontinued completely, intensifying the problem.

**6) (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing Financial Poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas**

I am supportive of the measure to address Financial Poverty.

Individuals from the rural community can avail of the heavily subsidised Dial-A-Lift Service which is available throughout the province plus Community Groups can also access affordable transport for their members under the Self Drive or With Driver Group Hire options that are available from ART and throughout all Rural Transport Partnerships

**(b) Please provide details on any other measures which you think should be considered to help address Financial Poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas**

Continuation of free or half fare travel through ARTS which will help alleviate financial poverty for the elderly and the disabled in our rural communities.

**7) (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing Social Isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas**

I am supportive of the measure to address Social Isolation. ART currently offer services to anyone from a rural area who doesn't have access to transport, individuals can qualify to be a member and avail of the heavily subsidised Dial-A-Lift Service which is available Monday to Friday 8am - 6pm, therefore providing individuals with an affordable transport option so they can keep their independence and be socially active within their communities.

**(b) Please provide details on any other measures which you think should be considered to help address Social Isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas**

Again, I believe that continued support of Rural Community Transport Partnerships through ARTS would assist DARD in achieving new initiatives under all three priority areas.

**8) How might the successor TRPSI Framework contribute towards the development of more effective rural community support structures?**

Please provide comments in the box below

Improved cross departmental working to ensure that Rural issues are kept to the fore for future planning and development.

Build on relationships and continue engagement with grass roots stakeholder groups to ensure that projects are essentially effective and add value to community structures.

**9) How might a successor TRPSI Framework support the delivery of local councils Community Plans?**

Please provide comments in the box below

Further Departmental collaboration with Councils to ensure that specific needs of a particular area are being addressed and that the successor framework links directly with future community plans.

**10) Do you have any views on the conclusions reached by DARD (see Section 9) in relation to the proposals for a successor TRPSI Framework in respect of:**

**(xv) The Equality and Human Rights Template**

Please provide comments in the box below

I am supportive of the Departments commitment to ensure Equality and Human Rights.

**(xvi) The Rural Issues Statement**

Please provide comments in the box below

I am supportive of the Departments commitment under the Rural Issues Statement to ensure potential impacts of a policy on people living in rural areas are fully considered.

**11) Is there any other aspect of the proposals that you wish to comment on?**

Please provide comments in the box below

ART and the other Rural Community Transport Partnerships (RCTPs) have been very happy to be involved in a number of the TRPSI projects to date, in particular the MARA Project and the Assisted Rural Transport Scheme (ARTS). We have seen first-hand and on a daily basis the significant positive impact these schemes have had on the lives of many rural dwellers who previously had no access to affordable transport options.

I would strongly encourage the Department to do all in its power to maintain the ARTS because of the very direct benefits this scheme has in achieving the 3 Priority Areas of the successor TRPSI Framework – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation.

ART would like to continue working with DARD in any future projects or initiatives through the successor TRPSI programme to ensure that any transport elements of these new and innovative projects can be delivered to ensure the potential benefits are realised by as many rural dwellers as possible.



## RESPONDENT INFORMATION

**Please Note** this form **must** be returned with your response to ensure that we handle your response appropriately.

### 1. Name / Organisation

**Organisation Name (If applicable).**

Libraries NI

**Title** Mr  Ms  Mrs  Miss  Dr  **Please tick as appropriate**

**Surname**

Osborn

**Forename**

Helen

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### Consultation Questions

**1) Do you agree that the proposed Aim, Objectives and Intended Outcomes (see Section 6) for the TRPSI Framework are appropriate?**

Yes

No

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

Although the overall aim of working together to help tackle poverty and social isolation among vulnerable people living in rural areas is very appropriate, there is an overemphasis on the development of new and innovative pilot projects and approaches in the Aims and Objectives. This is worthwhile but needs to be balanced by funding for the further development of approaches and projects funded previously by TRPSI. This approach is more likely to deliver the Intended Outcomes.

A collaborative approach with different organisations working together in partnership is the best way to deliver the TRPSI outcomes. However, it should be recognised that in many cases organisations will make a contribution in kind to this. Therefore the term 'cocktail of funding' which appears in the Aim and the Outcomes should be replaced by 'cocktail of resources'. A relevant example to support this which received positive mention in the SIB Evaluation of TRPSI is rural Health in Mind. In this instance TRPSI funding was provided and Libraries NI contributed premises, skills and staff time, working in partnership with various local and regional mental health charities and organisations which benefitted from the TRPSI funding.

**2) Do you agree that the 3 Priority Areas – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation (see Section 6) – should continue to be the main priorities for the TRPSI Framework?**

Yes

No

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

The three complementary priority areas have proved their value to date.

**3) Do you agree that the 12 Key Principles (see Section 6) are appropriate for the TRPSI Framework?**

**Yes**

**No**

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

The principles support good practice, collaboration, sustainability and complementarity.

**4) Do you agree that the list of Target Groups (see Section 6) is appropriate in relation to providing support to vulnerable groups under the successor TRPSI Framework?**

**Yes**

**No**

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

Libraries NI also welcomes the proposal that this list will not be prescriptive.

Experience of delivering TRPSI-funded Health in Mind demonstrated the importance of targeting:

- those affected by poor mental health (which may include family and/or carers)
- those at risk of poor mental health.

Prevention and early intervention is important.

**5) (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing Access Poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas**

Access to broadband services is an important enabler which Libraries NI is well-placed to address. This needs to be complemented by programmes which provide rural dwellers with the skills and confidence to benefit from broadband access in terms of carrying out transactions online, availing of learning opportunities and socialising online.

**(b) Please provide details on any further measures which you think should be considered to help address Access Poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas**

The sustainability of current rural services and infrastructure is another important issue. A more 'joined up' approach to provision would assist with this, using existing infrastructure to provide a range of services.

**6) (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing Financial Poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas**

The measures are appropriate but there are important omissions.

**(b) Please provide details on any other measures which you think should be considered to help address Financial Poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas**

The best way to address poverty and to break the cycle of deprivation and educational under-achievement is early intervention and an investment in children and young people, particularly in the early years. Simple interventions such as Libraries NI's Rhythm and Rhyme programme, which demonstrably assists with the development of early learning skills, encourages parents to spend time reading to their children and enhance social skills and opportunities, make a real difference.

Providing access to broadband and the skills and confidence to use it is an important measure in this area. A recent report *The economic impact of Basic Digital Skills and inclusion in the UK: A report for Tinder Foundation and GO ON UK*, November 2015 that indicated shopping online saves individuals on average 13%, equivalent to £143 per person per year.

**7) (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing Social Isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas**

The measures are appropriate.

**(b) Please provide details on any other measures which you think should be considered to help address Social Isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas**

There could be greater emphasis on 'good relations' activities and the celebration of cultural heritage and diversity.

**8) How might the successor TRPSI Framework contribute towards the development of more effective rural community support structures?**

Please provide comments in the box below

Libraries NI has found the Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs) to be invaluable when consulting on, developing and implementing rural library services and projects.

**9) How might a successor TRPSI Framework support the delivery of local councils Community Plans?**

Please provide comments in the box below

Community planning is an important development albeit in its infancy. The LRSNs could be a useful means of ensuring alignment with Community Plans as they develop.

**10) Do you have any views on the conclusions reached by DARD (see Section 9) in relation to the proposals for a successor TRPSI Framework in respect of:**

**(xvii) The Equality and Human Rights Template**

Please provide comments in the box below

Libraries NI has no issues with the conclusions reached.

**(xviii) The Rural Issues Statement**

Please provide comments in the box below

Libraries NI has no issues with the conclusions reached.

**11) Is there any other aspect of the proposals that you wish to comment on?**

Please provide comments in the box below

Libraries NI welcomes the concept of a new TRPSI Framework as TRPSI overall has demonstrably made a difference to the lives of rural dwellers to date and has enabled Libraries NI, using its existing staff and infrastructure, to provide value added services in rural areas at relatively little cost.

We are grateful for the funding already provided through TRPSI that has enabled us to run a number of programmes in rural libraries to support positive mental health. The public has responded very positively to these programmes and their success has led to demands for more such programmes.

Libraries NI is very keen to explore the potential offered by TRPSI for the network of libraries to be used by other organisations to deliver their services at a more local level and at the same time achieve economies of scope. Our most recent public consultation on revised opening hours because of budget constraints has produced plenty of evidence of the importance to people in rural communities of the branch and mobile libraries network. They contribute significantly to sustainability and to quality of life. It is the case that 89% of the population live within two miles of a branch library or a mobile library stop.

Libraries NI recognises the difficulties that still exist in many rural areas with access to broadband and would be keen to investigate how it can address this issue within the context of TRPSI. All our libraries now provide fast broadband access, both through computers for use by the public as well as Wi-Fi, both of which are free to library members. We are conscious that most of our rural libraries are open on a part-time basis and therefore some services like internet access may not be available when people need them. We would like to explore the possibility of enhancing access to at least some of these libraries, possibly on a pilot basis, through a concept known as 'Open Libraries', whereby library members would be able to access certain facilities in a library building at times when it is normally closed, using swipe card technology.

We are also very aware that there is a real need, not just to provide access to the internet, but also to give people the skills to do so safely. Our Got IT? and Go ON programmes seek to address the very real issue of digital exclusion and again there is a proven need in rural areas for more of this kind of work.



## RESPONDENT INFORMATION

**Please Note** this form **must** be returned with your response to ensure that we handle your response appropriately.

### 1. Name / Organisation

**Organisation Name (If applicable).**

Drumquin Development Association

**Title** Mr  Ms  Mrs  Miss  Dr  **Please tick as appropriate**

**Surname**

Kerr

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George

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## Consultation Questions

1) Do you agree that the proposed Aim, Objectives and Intended Outcomes (see Section 6) for the TRPSI Framework are appropriate?

Yes

No

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

Drumquin Development Association has considered the proposals for a successor TRPSI framework and recognises that the current TRPSI framework has led to significant improvement in combatting Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation particularly through MARA and the ARTS programme as well as the support provided by the Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs – of which Omagh Forum is one). The LRSN's have a proven track record of working with DARD to develop and implement new and innovative pilot measures in hundreds of rural villages and communities to Target Rural Poverty and reduce Social Isolation. We believe that many of the TRPSI measures in the current programme were dependent on a solid and responsive rural community infrastructure across NI. The LRSNs have worked closely with DARD for over 20 years to put that infrastructure in place and that is the reason so many of the TRPSI measures have been so successful.

Our group was involved in supporting the MARA programme, which was rolled out by the LRSN's and Omagh Forum are proactive in giving us information about Farm Families Health Checks and the promotion of Library services and countless other useful information. A local presence and knowledge of the area is to key to successful delivery.

This experience linked to the hundreds of rural groups and thousands of individuals associated with the LRSNs across N Ireland means that the Networks can help DARD to meet the objectives set in section 6 "Proposals for a successor Framework post 2016". Together with other rural stakeholders, we can "promote the development of new and innovative pilot approaches to TRPSI AND encourage effective partnership working AND effectively target financial poverty, access poverty and social isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas".

**2) Do you agree that the 3 Priority Areas – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation (see Section 6) – should continue to be the main priorities for the TRPSI Framework?**

**Yes**

**No**

Please provide any supporting comments in the box below

Our group believes that the 3 Priority Areas – Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation should continue to be the main priorities for the TRPSI Framework as they are still relevant in 2016, and can be delivered or supported locally or at sub regional level approach. The priorities allow for a bottom-up community development approach in not only identifying relevant needs but also in delivering upon them using a cascade approach.

It is our view that the most effective TRPSI programmes delivered to date have had a strong community ethos and process coupled with local knowledge as to where rural, social and economic needs are most prevalent. Invariably, there will be different levels of need in different geographical areas, however, as the nature of community development support, through the LRSN's, is designed sub regionally and is based on pertinent local needs then those most in poverty or experiencing isolation are targeted.

TRPSI and these priorities are now recognised as an essential brand which has made a huge difference to rural communities and which is complementary to the NIRD. Many of the issues these priorities have tackled to date were previously hidden and would fall outside the remit of other mainstream funding programmes. There remains, however, continued challenges and needs which require on-going support at various levels of intervention and which would still come under these 3 priorities.

Promoting community development at a local/sub regional level ensures that Regional programmes are delivered effectively at the local level meeting local needs. Promoting good governance, giving access to economic and social support in communities - the service provided by these local community based networks has proved an invaluable resource to the delivery of the TRPSI framework.

These experienced local stakeholders have good working relationships with all other TRPSI delivery agents and indeed share a direct role in elements of their success making essential and valuable linkages and connections at sub regional and local

levels. The key management role of DARD in direct delivery of this programme has proved to be most effective in ensuring that the networks could assist DARD to manage Regional programmes at local levels and to balance approaches necessary to ensuring programme priority themes reached the community sector using bottom up approaches.

The local access support provided to DARDs Modernisation programme and its Rural Micro Capital Grants programmes, as and when required by DARD, evidence how this infrastructure can react and respond to changing rural needs and requirements. The delivery of programmes such as MARA are a testament to the Community Development approach which ensures participation and access to hidden and real needs at a local level across all 3 main priorities.

The networking function plays an invaluable role in achieving key community participation at all necessary levels from village planning facilitation to rural proofing consultation. With the reform of local Government, Community Planning, and the mandatory Charities registration requirements; these networks provide local mentoring support and guidance, technical support and facilitation at grassroots level to those rural communities most in need under the programme priorities of Access Poverty, Financial Poverty and Social Isolation. Most importantly, they can identify what local pertinent needs fit the programme.

At a time of decentralisation and digitization of services, the closing of rural banks, post offices, schools and other services, this gives an opportunity for local people to devise solutions to their own issues and problems within a community development approach. The 3 themes adequately allow for local communities, sub regional and innovative approach making to meeting rural TRPSI needs.

**3) Do you agree that the 12 Key Principles (see Section 6) are appropriate for the TRPSI Framework?**

**Yes**

**No**

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

Drumquin Development Association agrees with the key TRPSI principles as outlined in the framework document. We endorse that historically Local Rural Support Networks successfully delivered pilot, innovative projects and interventions collaboratively and in partnership with statutory and other community and voluntary organisations and are widely perceived as the link between grass roots community groups operating at a local level and regional statutory bodies.

Positive outcomes of a collaborative approach to the delivery of services aimed at addressing rural poverty and isolation issues include:

- Ensures the socially isolated and those with financial related issues have access and opportunities to avail of support services
- Increases the capacity of LRSN's and grass roots community groups to collectively and with greater efficiency deliver both services and support interventions that may not be possible if delivered in isolation.

A negative outcome of delivering a successful pilot or innovative project is the lack of funding to effectively mainstream the service or project. Increased opportunities to continue or mainstream projects that have demonstrated effectiveness should be a key objective of a future TRPSI framework both for addressing poverty and social isolation issues and having to avoid dealing with the expectation when a service or project ceases. So in recognising that new and innovative pilot projects do work we would strongly recommend that successful projects like MARA, the ARTS and rural community development support be sustained post 2016.

Local Rural Support Networks will continue to be a conduit to disseminate information on key government strategies to our member groups and to the community voluntary sector through our established communication channels and will continue to lobby and be the 'voice' of the rural community sector during discussions with statutory and governmental organisations e.g. Rural Development Programme and Community Planning.

**4) Do you agree that the list of Target Groups (see Section 6) is appropriate in relation to providing support to vulnerable groups under the successor TRPSI Framework?**

**Yes**

**No**

Please provide supporting comments in the box below

The Local Rural Support Networks (LRSN's) welcome the proposal that the successor Framework would be open to a wider range of target groups. As an infrastructure providing community development support to the rural community across Northern Ireland for many years, we have, almost without exception, worked with all these vulnerable groups.

We particularly welcome the introduction of the working poor and the under employed. The continuing economic uncertainty has left many families in difficult financial circumstances. One or both parents are working however income levels fall below what they need to have a meaningful quality of life. A sudden change in circumstances, such as marital breakup or ill health, can have further detrimental consequences and lead to social exclusion and poverty.

Mental health still retains a significant stigma, particularly in rural areas, and many of the LRSN's run programmes which directly tackle mental ill health in their communities. Statistics show that one in four run the risk of mental ill health thus their inclusion in this framework is essential.

The inclusion of the LGBT community in the framework is also welcome. Whilst members of the LGBT community live in rural areas they tend to meet and socialise in their nearest town. However LRSN's have a role to play in supporting them to remain in their community and in ensuring statutory organisations and the wider public are aware of the issues affecting them.

Perhaps one omission from the list of vulnerable groups is men. Whilst accepted that most farmers are men there may be male rural dwellers who are not farmers. Globally, the gap between male and female life expectancy and healthy life expectancy has widened in the last 40 years and is expected to get even bigger by 2030. Research commissioned by the Priory Group of 1,000 men found that: 77% of

men polled have suffered with anxiety / stress / depression; the biggest pressures in men's life are work (32%), finance (31%) and health (23%); the majority of men claim their mental health is having a negative impact on their work performance, parenting ability and relationships; 40% of men polled said it would take thoughts of suicide or self-harm to compel them to seek professional help.

[www.priorygroup.com/blog/mentalhealth/i-ve-learnt-to-deal-with-it---40-of-men-won-t-talk-to-anyone-about-their-mentalhealth](http://www.priorygroup.com/blog/mentalhealth/i-ve-learnt-to-deal-with-it---40-of-men-won-t-talk-to-anyone-about-their-mentalhealth)

**5) (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing Access Poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas**

To our group access poverty means that because of our location in a rural area people are not able to access services that our urban counterparts may take for granted. We believe the priority areas for intervention in the action plan and the measures outlined will be effective in addressing access poverty

- \* Innovative Health Solutions can encompass MARA and other initiatives to improve emotional well being.

- \* Broadband solutions are vital in the area we live in however whether TRPSI can adequately address this is questionable. There needs to be major infrastructure investment for rural areas to have adequate broadband

- \* Rural hub facilities – It is very important in our rural villages, hamlets and open countryside to have community venues that can deliver services and programmes to benefit local people

- \* Social economy models for delivery of services – as above

We believe that, in order to adequately support access poverty, LRSN's are a vital support service to community groups like ours who wish to develop measures to address access poverty. Likewise community transport is an integral part of this priority area and needs to be included so that rural isolated people can avail of these services.

**(b) Please provide details on any further measures which you think should be considered to help address Access Poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas**

The Rural Micro Capital Grants programme opened many new doors because it gave an incentive for tangible assets to be acquired for the benefit of a particular group. We would propose more of this innovative idea. The structure used to deliver the grants is now well established, this same structure could deliver small capital grants say up to £10,000 for basic needs that so many halls throughout the countryside need.

Community transport should be reviewed to widen its scope. Longer journeys should be considered that travel between a number of service providers. Our group and many like it need to be able to travel to appointments between Council areas and this is hampered because of lack of resources to the community transport sector.

Evidence indicates that there is an appetite for computer training in rural areas. The LRSNs could deliver this service. Farmers and rural dwellers want a basic standard of training that may not necessarily be accredited. The end result would be Farmers having the ability to make online returns. Farm families coming together breaking social isolation and have a greater understanding of the world wide web.

Greater use and the promotion of Luncheon Clubs in rural areas could provide a service that; tackles social isolation, helps sustain a target audience, increases the sustainability of rural halls. All this combined adds to the cohesion of rural communities.

Our group believes that continued support of the LRSN infrastructure will assist DARD in achieving initiatives to address access poverty.



**6) (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing Financial Poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas**

Financial poverty refers to the measure of the degree to which people face the risk of serious deprivation in terms of their standard of living or to which they fall below a specified minimum level of resources. Through the measures in the draft action plan there is the opportunity to raise the standard of living for those people living in rural areas. Particularly in regard to addressing issues such as rural transport which is currently a major issue which prohibits many rural dwellers from accessing essential basic services. In addition measures targeted at supporting household energy efficiency improvement & the introduction of new employability and entrepreneurship opportunities are also to be welcomed. MARA continues to be very effective in increasing household income and we welcome its retention.

**(b) Please provide details on any other measures which you think should be considered to help address Financial Poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas**

Other measures which may alleviate financial poverty among vulnerable people in rural areas include the creation of jobs through investment in infrastructure such as investment in rural hubs, renovating abandoned housing and broadband infrastructure development, therefore increasing the chances of the young people of rural areas to stay, therefore building a stronger rural economy.

With added investment in high quality and affordable childcare and early intervention this will create increased opportunities for jobs. Childcare is vital to enable women to fulfil their career potential, get them out of the house, return to education and bring income into the family home.

**7) (a) Please comment on how effective you think the measures contained in the draft Action Plan (see Section 7) will be in addressing Social Isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas**

Drumquin Development Association welcomes the continued recognition by DARD of the problems caused within the rural population due to Social Isolation. We acknowledge the priority areas for intervention listed within the Draft Action Plan under Social Isolation of promoting tolerance, health, well-being and inclusion for rural dwellers and agree that these are valid and worthwhile Priority Areas for Intervention.

Poor Mental Health and well-being is an issue that has major impacts within rural communities given the fact that many people are living in isolated circumstances often on their own or with limited family and / or community connections.

The farming community are known to have poor mental health as they are facing increasing stresses of managing their businesses mostly working alone with limited opportunities to engage with others.

We are keen to engage people in actions that improve their mental health however we believe the wording may deter some: '*promoting positive health and wellbeing*' has more positive connotations. There is still a stigma around mental health in rural areas and people would be more likely to engage with activities that are seen to be about general health and wellbeing. We particularly welcome those activities that are operated and provided at local facilities and venues.

We welcome the example initiatives listed: 'Support for health and wellbeing activities' as well as 'Support the promotion of mental health awareness and actions' and we ask that the learning and evidence from positive work that has been undertaken with rural communities through the LRSN's, Healthy Living Centres, other Community, Voluntary and Statutory bodies on these actions and activities are used when drawing up plans for initiatives to support under the new TRPSI framework.

We welcome '*increase opportunities for social engagement*' as a priority area of intervention as the value of people of all ages within rural communities being given the opportunity to engage with others on a social basis cannot be underestimated. It is through these social activities that the aim of "promote tolerance, health, wellbeing

and inclusion' can be best achieved within rural communities as by bringing people together they are getting to know each other. This is needed within communities as in many instances during their working lives and schooling many members of rural communities are away from the community during the day and thus have limited opportunities to engage with others. It is only through actual engagement in the same physical space that tolerance can be promoted and this is especially important in rural communities. Anything that can be done to encourage more use of community facilities that have been traditionally associated as belonging to one section of the community would be welcome. Such venues can become hubs for social inclusion activities within rural communities.

Many venues within rural communities require some level of work to ensure that they are brought up to a condition that they are accessible and suitable to be used to provide activities that address social isolation.

We welcome the inclusion of '*support community capacity*' as a capable and effective local community infrastructure is so important to the fabric of life within rural communities and those involved in organisations within local communities are largely undertaking this role on a voluntary basis. These organisations require ongoing community development support to continue their operations on an effective and efficient basis and become involved in projects that will address poverty and social isolation at a local level within rural communities.

The community development support work delivered by the Local Rural Support Networks resourced under the previous TRPSI Framework has been very effective in ensuring the survival and continued operation of local community infrastructure. This community infrastructure of the LRSN's working in partnership with organisations located within local communities has also ensured that many of the other initiatives supported under TRPSI have been effective at reaching into rural communities and tackling poverty and social isolation.

**(b) Please provide details on any other measures which you think should be considered to help address Social Isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas**

The ongoing work within the LRSN's and their delivery of the MARA project has clearly demonstrated that there is a significant issue around mental health problems in homes, particularly depression and loneliness. The framework would provide an excellent opportunity to design a pilot project that would take advantage of the excellent community development model that exists that could be harnessed to deliver a programme to enable rural dwellers to avail of resources to assist them to overcome loneliness and seek help with other mental health conditions. The programme could be designed to ensure a rural community response is adopted to encourage self-help and self-care.

**8) How might the successor TRPSI Framework contribute towards the development of more effective rural community support structures?**

Please provide comments in the box below

The TRPSI Framework has been a key success factor for rural organisations (e.g. the 9 Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs) / Rural Community Development Support Service Contract) in terms of ensuring rural proofing, leveraging-in vital resources to rural areas, and enabling effective implementation of the TRPSI Framework throughout the region.

As a small community group we would like to see the work of the LRSN's supported through a successor TRPSI framework as they link us into a wider network in an attempt to ensure that rural needs are addressed by the government in a localised and joined-up way that reaches the most vulnerable and those most in need.

The successor TRPSI Framework would not only enable much greater utilisation of financial resources, but also would combine the expertise of public sector bodies, and the private, voluntary and community sectors to create greater economies of

scale in terms of utilising all available knowledge, skills and capacity. This in turn maximises innovation and enables increased access to those most in need and those who are most difficult to reach.

The DARD Rural Micro-Capital Grants Programme delivered on-the-ground by the 9 Local Rural Support Networks, have been essential to ensuring capital investment reaches the smallest and lowest capacity rural groups throughout the entire region.

The LRSNs have been central to the role of assisting the set-up of the new local Action Groups (NIRDP) and ensuring grass roots community representation.

**9) How might a successor TRPSI Framework support the delivery of local councils Community Plans?**

Please provide comments in the box below

The TRPSI Framework could play a key role in the delivery of local Council Community Plans via the TRPSI funded Rural Community Development Support Service which can facilitate the ongoing involvement of the Local Rural Support Networks (LRSN's) in the community planning process and ultimately the wider rural community. The foundations for the delivery of Community Planning already exist within the local Council areas through the LRSN's and their vast network of community based organisations – Community Planning should build upon these existing structures. The delivery of Community Planning within the local Council areas will require the engagement of existing and emerging partnerships working collaboratively. The well-established and proven track record of the LRSN's could well be effective resources in such a delivery process. It is imperative that the development of Community Planning includes the continuing engagement of such current resources so as agreed delivery structures for Community Planning are adopted that act as wider collaborative forums for the benefit of the communities that they will ultimately serve.

During the past 4 years the LRSN's have delivered, under the current TRPSI Framework, a Rural Community Development Support Service to a wide range of rural

organisation & groups. This has proven to be an effective model and partnership for the delivery of such services and the LRSN's, with continued support from the TRPSI programme, are therefore well placed to assist local Councils in the delivery of community planning over the next number of years due to the following factors:

- Strong partnership & links with the rural community already in place
- Added value from funding leverage from other programmes
- Already working closely with DARD to deliver services including the development of the NI Rural Development Programme (2014-2020)

The delivery structures for the Community Planning process within local Councils must therefore take account of existing rural structures & delivery organisations so as to ensure there is less fragmentation of implementation groups and integration of the various locally focused Action Plans. This will ensure that the Community Planning process will effectively serve the priority needs of the rural community, the ongoing support of DARD for the rural community development sector at grass roots level through the TRPSI framework is crucial to this.

**10) Do you have any views on the conclusions reached by DARD (see Section 9) in relation to the proposals for a successor TRPSI Framework in respect of:**

**(ix) The Equality and Human Rights Template**

Please provide comments in the box below

As a local group we are aware that the Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs)/Rural Community Development Support Service contract holders have a proven track record of working with DARD to contribute, develop and implement new and innovative pilot measures to Target Rural Poverty and reduce Social Isolation. We welcome a localised approach to the design and delivery of measures which effectively target financial poverty, access poverty and social isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas in line with the key principles of the Framework. The LRSNs are advantageously neutral to central and local government ensuring that all rural communities can access resources, services and programmes in a timely manner regardless of religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status, sexual orientation or disability. We know that the LRSNs ensure Section 75 information is recorded in line with procedures under International Quality Standard

ISO 9001:2008 and kept securely in keeping with Data Protection Legislation.

**(xx) The Rural Issues Statement**

Please provide comments in the box below

As a local group we are also aware that the Local Rural Support Networks (LRSNs)/Rural Community Development Support Service contract holders have a proven track record of working with DARD (as partner organisations) to ensure the TRPSI Framework has been a key success factor ensuring rural proofing and enabling direct positive impact on the vulnerable in rural communities through a localised infrastructure. The LRSN's have effectively engaged with us as a local group over many years and we work with the hardest to reach, socially isolated and most vulnerable members of the population in Northern Ireland. We know that they delivering capacity building programmes within rural areas and encourage and ensure participation in the Rural Development Programme. We helped in the roll out of the MARA Project which has reached almost 15,000 households directly impacting on their quality of life. All of these measures support the delivery of key services for rural dwellers to avail of and have indirectly helped to tackle social isolation and the related mental health connotations that come with this. The central and neutral role that the LRSNs deliver give local services for local people and ensure grass roots community representation in rolling out TRPSI Framework.

**11) Is there any other aspect of the proposals that you wish to comment on?**

Please provide comments in the box below



