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**Northern Ireland
Rural Women's Network**

Northern Ireland

Rural Women's Network (NIRWN's)

Response To

Draft Rural White Paper Action Plan

**Department of Agriculture and Rural
Development**

Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN)

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN) is a regional network established to articulate the voices of women in rural areas. It is jointly funded by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) and the Department for Social Development (DSD).

1.2 NIRWN has six key objectives:

- Increasing the voice of rural women through giving them a voice at Policy level
- Playing an advocacy and lobbying role on behalf of rural women
- Capacity Building and Group Development for rural women
- Encouraging women in decision-making and providing representation for rural women
- Information and networking opportunities for rural women
- Working within the Women's Centres Regional Partnership to give a voice to rural women's centres

1.3 NIRWN has been engaged in the development of the Rural White Paper since the establishment of a Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG) in 2009. The SAG comprised of 5 sub groups for which NIRWN provided representation for rural women on each of the five.

1.4 To ensure there that the views of rural women on the draft action plan were adequately reflected in our response NIRWN held a focus group consultation on the: 'Draft Rural White Paper Action Plan' and disseminated the findings of the focus group to all our members for further comment and reflection.

1.5 NIRWN's comments in relation to the Rural White Paper Draft Action Plan are set out below.

COMMENTS ON DRAFT RURAL WHITE PAPER ACTION PLAN

2.0 GENERAL COMMENTS

2.1 NIRWN is pleased that after a long development process the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development is now in a position to consult on a Draft Rural White Paper Action Plan.

2.2 NIRWN commends Minister Gildernew and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development for demonstrating leadership and undertaking bi-lateral meetings with Ministerial colleagues to ensure cross Departmental Executive support for addressing the challenges facing our rural communities. NIRWN has always held the view that DARD is not the only Department with responsibility for; actively considering the needs of rural people and delivering to meet these needs.

2.3 The Stakeholder Groups set up in 2009 canvassed the opinion of a diverse range of rural dwellers and sectors and stakeholder members committed an enormous amount of time; research and work voluntarily to support the Minister, DARD and the Executive with the development of a Rural White Paper for Northern Ireland.

2.4 NIRWN is very disappointed that after all the investment from rural stakeholders that what has been produced is not a Rural White Paper for consultation. It is NIRWN's view that the Executive should still proceed with a legislative framework that can facilitate the final agreed Action Plan to become a full Rural White Paper.

2.5 The Draft Rural White Paper Action Plan currently bears little resemblance to the lengthy and time consuming work of the stakeholder sub groups and their clear recommendations to Minister Gildernew. Whilst NIRWN acknowledge that '*DARD worked with other*

Departments to agree realistic and meaningful proposals for inclusion in the Rural White Paper Action Plan' what has emerged falls very short of the SAG recommendations.

- 2.6** NIRWN feels; that the views and work of the SAG have been largely ignored by the Draft Rural White Action Plan and this has resulted in an overwhelming feeling of disappointment 'on the ground'; that again rural voices have been ignored. The Draft Rural White Paper Action Plan for example, makes no reference to gender or diversity within rural communities which is disappointing, considering the breadth of the stakeholder groups.
- 2.7** It is the view of NIRWN that for an Action Plan to be effective it should have SMART targets which; for the most part are absent. Our stakeholder consultative group and members expressed very clearly to NIRWN that it is their view that the majority of actions are not measurable. The language is weak in lots of places e.g. 'seek to minimise...'; 'to promote...' It is not language commensurate with an action plan. An action plan needs to be able to measure the impact the actions are having on improving the quality of rural life. This appears to be neither a White Paper nor an Action Plan
- 2.8** NIRWN believes that The Draft Rural White Paper Action Plan would benefit from linking the identified policy priorities across into the Action plan; in its current format, there are no clear linkages of priorities to actions.
- 2.9** NIRWN and their members welcome the actions which Departments will take in support of achieving the vision for our rural areas and helping to ensure the future sustainability of rural areas. We note however that there seems to be little new in this; most of the actions are work that departments already do or, had planned. NIRWN would like to know; what extra has the Draft Rural White Paper Action plan secured to support the vision and ensure the sustainability of rural areas?

3.0 RURAL VISION

- 3.1 NIRWN welcomes the reference to a “strong community infrastructure”. It is NIRWN’s view that support for community development must be central to developing and maintaining a strong community infrastructure.
- 3.2 The vision makes no mention of increasing services in rural areas; the focus appears to be about providing rural dwellers with transport to access services in urban centres.
- 3.3 NIRWN supports a vision that ensures ‘*rural dwellers can avail of employment opportunities and key services*’. We would, however like a definition of what is meant by ‘key services’?
- 3.4 The vision appears to presume there are no ‘services’ in rural areas and no ‘beauty’ in towns and cities. Our focus group expressed the view that the use of the word ‘*beauty*’ seemed patronising and reduces the value of the breadth and quality that a rural community has to offer. Rural life has much more to offer urban visitors than a visually pleasing environment.
- 3.5 NIRWN do support ‘*the continuing development of linkages between rural and urban areas*’ however we feel that the vision and indeed the action plan seems to dismiss ‘rural’ as an entity in its own right e.g. the vision states: ‘*we envisage vibrant, strong rural communities, resilient and receptive to global trends through strong inter-linkages with urban areas and market towns*’. NIRWN would query whether this can only be achieved ‘**through** *strong inter-linkages with urban areas and market towns*’.
- 3.6 NIRWN’s focus group felt that the vision statement is too long. It was suggested that the first sentence in the first paragraph may suffice as a vision: ‘*Our vision is of a fair and inclusive rural society where rural dwellers enjoy the same quality of life as all others in the region*’. This

vision would ensure equity of access, provision and investment for rural dwellers that is currently absent.

4.0 THEMATIC APPROACH

4.1 NIRWN feels that the policy priorities are too visionary and not specific enough. Our focus group and members were agreed that while the five key themes and policy priorities are difficult to disagree with; it is unclear what they could they actually achieve for rural communities.

4.2 Under Access to Services there is only one policy priority which is; simply not enough. In addition NIRWN holds the view that the language in this policy priority needs to be stronger and more specific: the use of word '*promote*' should be, 'we will deliver'. Who will determine what fair is and is it the same for all rural dwellers? This one priority doesn't take into account different experiences of rural people.

4.3 NIRWN notes that within the thematic approach, there is no mention of the distinctiveness of rural areas and no mention of access to services which our members articulated were important omissions. NIRWN holds the view that it is important to link urban to rural as well as linking rural to urban.

5.0 URBAN/RURAL LINKAGES

5.1 NIRWN believes that under the urban/rural linkages the policy priority doesn't seem to easily link across to the actions.

5.2 The Draft Rural White Paper Action Plan refers to the maintenance of the road infrastructure but doesn't refer to development. It is NIRWN's position that; current infrastructure is not meeting needs and should be developed for rural dwellers to access services. NIRWN suggests that a specific action should be included around the development of road infrastructure; especially in relation to access to services.

5.3 NIRWN, our members and our focus group participants welcome action 5, and consider it a key action. NIRWN views this as a basis for future sound policy decisions and allocation of resources to be made. In addition, training in rural proofing could potentially be very beneficial.

5.4 NIRWN supports actions 7 & 8 relating to community safety but suggest that they might fit better under the theme of sustainable communities. In addition to liaising with Community Safety Partnerships in this regard; NIRWN would request that a wider engagement should take place with organisations such as Women's Aid, during the development of the strategy to ensure that key issues such as domestic violence are fully explored.

6.0 ACCESS TO SERVICES

6.1 While NIRWN agrees that transport and Broadband for rural dwellers should be improved; the Access to Services theme has a disproportionate focus on transport and Broadband-13 out of 24 actions addresses either transport or Broadband. There appears to be an underlying assumption that; if rural people could access the internet and a bus into town, that equity of access to services would no longer be an issue.

6.2 NIRWN believes that the focus on transport and Broadband could be directly related to which Departments illustrated a commitment to working with DARD to address equity of provision for rural people, including actions for the Draft Rural White Paper Action Plan. The emphasis on these issues perhaps represents a positive reflection on DRD and DETI's attitude to delivering for rural and a more negative reflection of other departments

6.3 It is NIRWN's position that within the Access to Services Theme there is no focus on improving/maintaining key services for rural dwellers e.g. childcare; healthcare; post offices; banking services etc. These are the

services our members want addressed and NIRWN is disappointed that the Draft Rural white Paper Action Plan fails to assign any actions against them in the short, medium or even long term.

- 6.4** NIRWN requires clarification on Action 10: who are other stakeholders? What kind of information service is envisaged? How will that improve services for rural people?
- 6.5** NIRWN believes that a lack of commitment to improving access to services for rural dwellers is evident through weak language e.g. Action 12 '*we will consider...*' How will this be done? How will it be measured? How will it improve access to services for rural dwellers?
- 6.6** NIRWN welcomes Action 31, our focus group felt that rural school facilities could be utilised much more to benefit the wider community and facilitate the sustainability of small, rural schools that must be maintained if the social fabric of rural life is to be preserved.
- 6.7** NIRWN would have expected some actions from DE on 0-6 Early Years commitments for rural children and their families and would like the final Action Plan to include some tangible actions for rural children.
- 6.8** It is NIRWN's view that in general: 'Access to Services' bears little resemblance to the work on Rural Services presented to Minister Gildernew by the stakeholder sub groups. Services for rural dwellers is not just about access; it is about the social fabric of rural communities, not provision of transport to leave rural areas to access services. Services should be more available at point of need and those services currently in place need maintained, developed and resourced by the Executive.

7.0 RURAL COMMUNITIES

- 7.1** NIRWN is very supportive of the content of the preamble and introduction to 'Rural Communities' on P.22 of the Draft Rural White Paper Action Plan which amongst other things acknowledges that within rural communities there is a '*demand for better access to key quality services including healthcare, affordable housing and education.*' This is very much the message NIRWN is hearing from our members.
- 7.2** NIRWN's focus Group participants had lots of questions around specific wording under lots of the Actions in the 'Rural Communities' section of the Draft Rural White Paper Action Plan (see Appendix for all queries) a selection of these are: e.g. Action 33 "The use of the word '*explore*' should be stronger. '*Establish*' means nothing and does not meet any policy priority – playing very safe"; Action 41 "What are the '*actions*'; what does this mean – '*address inequalities*'? If this relates to housing then it is DSD's responsibility. Is this about '*choice*'? The how is missing." These are the concerns raised by rural women and for this document to be meaningful; clarification needs to be provided by the respective Departments.
- 7.3** NIRWN again would like to draw attention to the overuse of visionary language in what is supposed to be an Action Plan; there is no easy way to measure visionary language e.g. Action 39 has no SMART targets. What does '*tackle*' mean? There were lots of opportunities where Departments could have added measurable targets but have failed to do so.
- 7.4** The participants in the focus group NIRWN held represented a wide cross section of rural women and their interests and the view expressed was that under 'Rural Communities' there seemed to be few tangible new actions; most of the work detailed is already happening and generally positive work of benefit to the rural community e.g. Action 38 Housing Executive are already doing this since 2000; it is not new but it is realistic as it has already been established. Rural women already

know the positive work that is impacting on their communities and were hoping that while this would be reflected in a draft Rural White Paper Action Plan; there would also be lots of new commitments by Departments to deliver for rural communities.

- 7.5** NIRWN notes that there are no actions in relation to addressing rural childcare provision. The final Action Plan needs to address this omission.
- 7.6** NIRWN seeks clarification on Action 39; what mechanisms will be utilised to '*better identify and tackle the causes of poverty and disadvantage in rural areas and to promote social inclusion*'? How will we know that the causes of poverty and disadvantage in rural areas have been better identified?
- 7.7** NIRWN would like to offer support to DARD for Action 33 to establish '*key rural indicators to measure the effectiveness of rural development policy*' to ensure that rural development policy is measuring and delivering for the needs of rural women.
- 7.8** NIRWN supports Action 34; an enhanced rural proofing process across all Departments. It is an overarching measure that supports all policy priorities.
- 7.9** NIRWN notes however the significant omission of the absence of any reference in the draft Rural White Paper Action Plan to the OFMDFM Gender Equality Strategy. The strategy has cross-cutting applications and is particularly relevant in the context of a draft plan designed to address issues including poverty, inequality and social exclusion in rural communities.
- 7.10** NIRWN would like to see the addition of the Tackling Violence at Home Strategy, under Action 46 (Pg.25), designed to take account of the needs of rural communities in the implementation of health

improvement and promotion strategies and attributed to the DHSSPS. The failure to make any reference in the draft action plan, the key cross-departmental, multi-agency Government strategy addressing domestic violence in Northern Ireland, represents a serious omission.

7.11 Actions 46-49 are related to Health, Social Services and Public Safety which are very important to rural communities and while Action 49 states: '*we will work with DARD to explore the impact of rurality, isolation and deprivation on health inequalities*'; our members felt that that this was vague; that there is a large body of evidence that exists to inform policy development and actions in this area already and while this action was difficult to disagree with; it simply does not go far enough in the development of actions.

7.12 NIRWN would like the Rural White Paper Action Plan to have as an action; a specific rural health strategy to tackle rural health inequalities.

7.13 NIRWN believes Action 44 is a very positive inclusion; DOE '*will ensure rural dwellers have sufficient involvement and say in the planning and development of rural areas*'. We seek clarification on how this will be done and what the definition in this case of '*sufficient*' is.

7.14 NIRWN welcomes the focus on older people in Action 51 but the remainder of the rural community are not mentioned. Why? There was concern expressed in our consultations on the Draft Rural White Paper Action Plan over the focus '*to enable them to contribute to the sustainability of rural communities*'; surely supporting the economy is not the only reason to engage in further education and not the remit of our older people who have sustained the economy thus far? We ask the question if the focus is on economy; should this be in Rural Economies section rather than Rural Communities? It is disappointing too that DEL only saw fit to add one narrow action to contribute to rural communities.

7.15 NIRWN seeks clarification on Action 52; what is meant by '*viable and sustainable*'? It is our position that this cannot be solely based on student numbers but on contribution of the building and resources to rural community life.

7.16 NIRWN, our members and our focus group participants expected to see actions under 'Rural Communities' on how Departments could contribute to: '*better access to key quality services including healthcare, affordable housing and education*' as outlined on P.22 and how the Executive Departments could work to ensure the erosion of rural services that do exist is stemmed e.g. rural schools, rural Post Offices etc. This is not clearly evident and is therefore disappointing considering the breadth of work and research submitted to DARD by the Stakeholder Action Groups on these issues.

8.0 RURAL ECONOMIES

8.1 NIRWN, our members and our focus group feel that the actions under this theme weren't innovative enough. The Actions aren't particularly dynamic and innovative, this is work Departments should be doing anyway but won't meet their policy priority of growing a dynamic and innovative economy. The actions are focussed on Tourism and agri-food industries and this is too narrow a base from which to develop the economy in rural areas.

8.2 NIRWN's view is that under tourism actions NITB should be referenced as a key partner. In addition; will increased tourism will generate jobs in rural areas? It may generate income but jobs tend to be low paid and seasonal which does not really enhance the sustainability of rural communities or, the position of rural women within their economies.

8.3 NIRWN believes that the Agri-food industry is important and that local meat production and export can be viewed as a success story for local agriculture. Those we consulted were less sure about vegetable

production and agreed that this needs to be based more in NI and could help boost agriculture.

8.4 NIRWN would like to see an action around; allotments and social farming which could assist farm diversification for farmers near centres of population.

8.5 NIRWN feels that there is an Action missing around technology and engineering that has a developed skill base already in rural areas but could be supported to diversify into green economy, producing renewable energy generating equipment.

8.6 NIRWN would like to see a final action plan with numbers/targets set for the actions outlined under rural economies. There is no information in the document about the profile of people who could be attracted to new types of employment.

8.7 It is NIRWN's observation that of the Actions under 'Rural Economies' a disproportionate number of the actions utilise the words '*we will continue...*'. Like the other thematic areas we want to know, 'what is new? What are the Departments committing to for rural people? How will this action plan shift and direct their focus to the needs of rural communities that have been so long neglected?

9.0 THE COUNTRYSIDE

9.1 NIRWN finds it odd that under 'The Countryside' there seems to be a reiteration of actions that were listed under 'Rural economies' particularly around tourism.

9.2 In a similar fashion NIRWN believes that the actions relating to renewable energy should be included under 'Rural Economies'. It is our view that these two themes are duplicating actions and that they should be collapsed into one theme.

9.3 It is NIRWN's suggestion that an additional theme of 'Rural Governance' as per the Stakeholder Action should be added as the fifth Theme. How will departments engage with rural dwellers around the delivery and monitoring of these actions? How will they engage in consulting with rural people on what they need? What happened to the SAG proposal of a rural forum?

10.0 STAKEHOLDER ACTION GROUPS (SAG)

10.1 NIRWN participated in and dedicated a lot of time and commitment to the Stakeholder Action Groups on behalf of rural women; consequently, we are very disheartened that little of the content that was submitted to Minister Gildernew by the SAG is evidenced in this Action Plan. We have detailed below some of the submissions that were made and that we feel need to be evidenced as Actions in the final Rural White Paper Action Plan.

10.2 Any emerging structure should have measures in place to ensure a gender balance is achieved.

10.3 There should be a promotion of on site childcare provision to accompany education and training provision. Consistent on-site childcare across FE, as well as the use of local community-based education and training provision which can offer on-site childcare, for example the women's centres, is recommended.

10.4 Health and social care needs to mention of services for victims of domestic violence.

10.5 Robust long term support must be put in place for frontline services for women dealing with sexual violence and abuse and the programmes which enable women dealing with sexual violence and abuse to overcome barriers to education, training, development and full participation in all aspects of life. Sexual violence and abuse to be recognised as factors which impact on all areas of women's lives and

resources should be put in place to support all aspects of the 2008 – 2013 Tackling Sexual Violence and Abuse Strategy.

- 10.6** Mental ill health should be recognised as an additional significant barrier to women accessing other services in rural areas, including, education, training, work and public life.
- 10.7** Given that rural women have additional barriers in accessing education and training, consideration should be given to financial support for women accessing education and training, whether this be for materials, childcare or equipment and this should be available up front where possible.
- 10.8** Specific research is required on mobility and accessibility; transport needs, demands and behavior; interconnections between rural and urban environments; relationships between transport providers, services and facilities and differential impacts on women and other Section 75 groups.

11.0 CONCLUSION

- 11.1** NIRWN is pleased that there has been a Draft Rural White Paper Action Plan to produced to comment on after all the time invested by stakeholders in the planning stages. We are disappointed that much of the work of the SAG has been omitted and that much of the actions included are not SMART actions which can be measured and monitored for impact. NIRWN views the Draft Rural White Paper Action Plan as a draft and would like considerable clarification and more tangible actions included in the final version. NIRWN would also like to see a commitment from the Executive to continue to proceed with a legislative framework that can facilitate the final agreed Action Plan to become a full Rural White Paper.

APPENDIX



NIRWN Women's Sector Focus Group Consultation Notes
Recorded from participants on
Rural White Paper Draft Action Plan
9th May 2011 in CRC, Dungannon

PART 1 – RURAL VISION

- Good to have an action plan to look at after all the time invested by stakeholders in the planning stages.
- All welcomed the reference to a “strong community infrastructure”.
- No mention of bringing services to rural areas, more about providing us with transport to go outside rural.
- No mention of access.
- What are ‘key services’? Clarification needed
- Presumes there are no ‘services’ in rural areas and no ‘beauty’ in towns and cities.
- Does mention ‘global’ which is quite new in the language.
- What is ‘fair and inclusive’?
- ‘Beauty’ is a bit patronising and reduces the value of rural community.
- Fear that Gildernew had a personal commitment and now, with change because of election, that maybe will no longer be a priority. If there is a change of Minister the Rural White Paper may fall.
- What are ‘key successes’ in health, childcare, disability etc involved – this is included at point 16 – ‘access’ is defined.
- Transport – linking urban to rural and rural to urban.
- Failure to see ‘rural’ as an entity in its own right.
- No direct link to the stakeholder sub group vision
- General feelings were that the policy priorities were too visionary and not specific enough. All agreed that they were hard to disagree with but what would they actually achieve for rural communities.

- Question was raised over what else we could expect from other government departments that would benefit rural dwellers and the question was raised over which Departments would take responsibility for policy priorities, was it up to DARD or other Departments?
- No mention of the distinctiveness of rural areas and no mention of access to services which people thought were important omissions. Also important to link urban to rural as well as linking rural to urban.
- Maybe with their vision statement – ‘less is more’ 1 paragraph might be sufficient. Suggestion that the first sentence in the first paragraph may suffice as a vision.

PART 2: POLICY PRIORITIES

ACCESS TO SERVICES

- Only one action point; simply not enough
- use of word ‘promote’; it should be ‘we will deliver’
- who determines what fair is and is it the same for all rural dwellers; doesn’t take into account different experiences of rural people.

SUSTAINABLE RURAL COMMUNITIES

- RDP – where did that come from and how are they going to do this?
- Use of visionary language – no easy way to measure ‘visionary’ language.
- Tolerance? – What of and by whom? It is a very negative word.
- What does the last policy priority in this section mean? Seems reactionary to the Mid Term Evaluation

SUSTAINABLE COUNTRYSIDE

- No mention of rural NI as a tourist destination.

GENERAL

Language is weak in lots of places e.g. ‘seek to minimise...’ ‘to promote...’ It is not language commensurate with an action plan. An action plan should be measurable.

PART 3- ACTION PLAN (Consultation Group Notes)

URBAN/RURAL LINKAGES

- People commented that under the urban/rural linkages the policy priority doesn't easily link across to the actions.
- The document talks about the maintenance of the road infrastructure but doesn't say anything about development. Current infra structure is not meeting needs and should be developed which is key for rural dwellers to access services. Suggested that a specific action should be included around the development of road infra structure especially in relation to access to services.
- Suggested that actions 7&8 relating to community safety might fit better under sustainable communities theme.
- People welcomed action 5, a key action and people pleased to see this as basis for sound policy decisions and allocation of resources to be made (importance of rural definitions).

ACCESS TO SERVICES

- Too much focus on transport and Broadband 13 out of 24 actions addresses either transport or Broadband. While it was agreed these should be improved there was an underlying feeling that the assumption was that if rural people could access the internet and a bus into town that access to services would no longer be an issue.
- A general feeling that the focus on transport and broadband could be directly related to which departments illustrated a commitment to including actions

and the emphasis on these is a positive reflection on DRD and DETI and a more negative reflection of other departments

- No focus on improving/maintaining key services for rural dwellers e.g. healthcare; post offices; banking services; childcare etc.
- Action 10-clarification needed; who are other stakeholders? What kind of information service is envisaged? How will that improve services for rural?
- Lack of commitment displayed through weak language e.g. Action 12 'we will consider...' How will this be done? How will it be measured? How will it improve access to services for rural dwellers?
- Action 31 very much welcomed, the focus group felt that rural school facilities could be utilised much more to benefit the wider community and facilitate the sustainability of small, rural schools that must be maintained if the social fabric of rural life is to be preserved.
- Would have liked to see some actions from DE on 0-6 Early Years commitments for rural children and their families
- Generally 'Access to Services' bears little resemblance to the work on Rural Services presented to Minister Gildernew by the stakeholder sub groups. Services for rural dwellers is not just about access it is about the social fabric of rural communities not provision of transport to leave rural areas to access services; services should be more available at point of need and those currently in place need maintained and resourced.

RURAL COMMUNITIES

- Childcare not mentioned
- The question presumes we agree with all the policy priorities.
- The way they laid out the consultation directs that you give answers in a particular way so this is quite a narrow opportunity to respond.

33 The use of the word 'explore' should be stronger. 'Establish' means nothing and does not meet any policy priority – playing very safe.

34 This is good as they have developed a training programme on rural proofing. Over arching measure which supports all policy priorities.

35 This is nothing new. This is a standard policy in Housing so it is realistic and fairly meaningful.

36 What pilot project? It would be very helpful if they did something new. Much of this is already happening so this is fairly realistic.

37 'Subject to funding' – if we don't have the money we will do it, if not, then will not. To say this in view of having cut their major grant programmes is not really as good as it could be.

38 Housing Executive are already doing this since 2000 – not new – but it is realistic as it has already been established.

39 Big Statement – no 'how' and way to 'measure' it. Wonderful if it happened but lacking in detail. No SMART targets. What does 'tackle' mean? There are lots of areas where they could have put in targets but have failed to do so.

40 New rural poverty strategy is already issued – nothing new, but check to see if this is the case in case it is not public. Was there a rural consultation?

41 What are the 'actions'; what does this mean – 'address inequalities'? If this relates to housing then it is DSD's responsibility. Is this about 'choice'? The how is missing.

42 Is this urban driven? – Why is only DSD against this? Is it DARD's intention to develop a new structure and pass it over to DSD? – surely this is a waste of

resources – this does not support policy priorities re infrastructure. Gender is not mentioned at all.

43 PPS21 – and do what after the review?

44 How?

45 Why not just have a timeframe for this and targets set?

46 How are they going to take account of rural? They are being fairly patronising. What about older people? No mention of women etc. ‘Continue’ – what account have they taken to date? What mechanism are they going to use to talk about rural? Rural proofing would help.

No mention of established rural experts or accessing what is already there.

47 Says nothing – aspirational – no action.

51 Welcome the focus on older people but the remainder of the rural community are not mentioned. Why? There was concern expressed over the focus ‘to enable them to contribute to the sustainability of rural communities’ surely supporting the economy is not the only reason to engage in further education. Should this be in Rural economies section rather than Rural Communities?

52 Would like clarification on ‘viable and sustainable’ this cannot be solely based on student numbers but on contribution of the building and resources to rural community life.

Disappointing that DEL only included one very narrow action; what about delivery at point of need; engaging ‘hard to reach’ learners etc. What are DEL doing for rural?

RURAL ECONOMY

- General feeling was that actions under this theme weren’t innovative enough and people felt it was same old same old.
- Actions aren’t particularly dynamic and innovative, this is work Departments should be doing anyway but won’t meet their policy priority of growing a dynamic and innovative economy. Actions are focussed on Tourism and agri-food industries and this is too narrow a base from which to develop the economy in rural areas.

- In tourism actions NITB should be referenced as a key partner. Big question was raised whether or not tourism will generate jobs in rural areas. Agreed that it may generate income but jobs tend to be low paid and seasonal.
- Agri-food important and people agreed that local meat production and export seen as a success story for local agriculture. People less sure about vegetable production and agreed that this needs to be based more in NI and could help boost agriculture.
- Allotments and social farming could also be included as an action to help farm diversification for farmers near centres of population.
- Action missing around technology and engineering that has a developed skill base already in rural areas but could be supported to diversify into green economy, producing renewable energy generating equipment.
- Actions under rural economies should set numbers/targets for the actions outlined and there is no information in document about the profile of people who could be attracted to new types of employment.

Further actions that should be included:

- Health (actions 46/47/48/49)
- Action 46 refers to current health promotion programmes that are run by Health Trusts but people questioned the lack of accountability and no definition of differing health needs in rural communities.
- People would have liked to have seen a specific rural health strategy that targeted older rural dwellers and concentrated on ensuring equitable access to health services (GPs, hospitals, screening).

- Action 49 should include a reference to a specific rural health strategy to tackle health inequalities.

THE COUNTRYSIDE

82 Aspirational – who owns the countryside – surely it belongs to the people and not DOE.

83 Why ‘seek’? Why not just do it?

84 Climate change mitigation – what? Adaptation – what? Who is providing leadership? – no evidence of this to date.

85 What help?

GENERAL COMMENTS, REFLECTIONS

- This appears to be neither a White Paper nor an Action Plan - it is not legislation and it isn't an action plan with SMART targets.
- Majority of actions are not measurable
- It bears little resemblance to the lengthy and time consuming work of the stakeholder sub groups
- The action plan such is not linked to the policy priorities identified-they don't map across
- The Short, Medium, Long Term timeframes are not adequate
- There seems to be little new in this; most of the actions are work that departments already do or, had planned-what extra has the rural white paper action plan brought
- No reference to gender/diversity within rural communities which was disappointing considering the breadth of the stakeholder groups.
- The “how to” is missing and the action plan is too aspirational.