

CILIP Ireland  
Shantallow Library  
92 Racecourse Road  
Derry/Londonderry  
BT48 8DA

20<sup>th</sup> January 2016

Sustainable Rural Communities Branch  
Department of Agriculture and Rural Development  
Room 406 Dundonald House  
Upper Newtownards Road  
Ballymiscaw  
Belfast  
BT4 3SB

BY EMAIL ONLY: [ruralpolicy.branch@dardni.gov.uk](mailto:ruralpolicy.branch@dardni.gov.uk)

Dear Sir/Madam,

**Re: Public Consultation on Proposals for a Successor to DARD's Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework 2011-15**

We refer to the above matter and write to convey our support for the recently circulated proposals to address rural poverty and social isolation for the forthcoming five year period.

By way of background information CILIP Ireland represents members of CILIP (the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals) in Northern Ireland. It is the leading professional body for librarians, information specialists and knowledge managers within this jurisdiction. CILIP's vision is a fair and economically prosperous society underpinned by literacy, access to information and the transfer of knowledge.

As our funding comes from member subscriptions and our own commercial activity we are able to act as an independent voice of the profession reflecting the knowledge and expertise within our membership. CILIP is a registered charity, no. 313014 and more information about us can be found at <http://www.cilip.org.uk/about/devolved-nations/cilip-ireland>

In our opinion it is crucial that the importance of the role played by libraries in enabling rural dwellers to fully engage with and participate in the democratic process in this jurisdiction is safeguarded. Furthermore it should be recognised that libraries enable the public in general to access a plethora of resources which may otherwise be beyond their reach and this in turn can improve the circumstances of their everyday lives. Clearly against this backdrop we consider it to be of primary importance to continue and indeed enhance the funding of rural libraries in the years ahead.

We believe that libraries in general and specifically in rural areas contribute to tackling social isolation and financial poverty through access to books, information, computers (digital inclusion) and trained professional staff.

The provision of a wide array of enrichment programmes covering a range of topics as diverse as ICT, mental health and Culture and Heritage facilitate people in coming together to learn, gain knowledge and have an opportunity to socialise.

Additionally libraries in rural areas are viewed as:

- neutral, trusted spaces;
- social spaces and community hubs; and
- providers of better broadband access.

Libraries already provide access to a wide range of public services and CILIP Ireland recommends that public libraries are best placed to continue to deliver access to broadband services. This infrastructure is already established and must be complemented by digital skills training which supports rural dwellers to access these services.

We consider it important to highlight that in many cases such libraries are open when other facilities are either permanently closed or are incapable of offering a comparable range of opening hours to suit the community.

We strongly endorse the proposed aim of working together in partnership with key stakeholders to help tackle poverty and social isolation among vulnerable people living in rural areas. A collaborative approach will ensure measures of sufficient range and scope as to make a real difference can be delivered, especially in an environment of reduced funding in the public sector.

Clearly, as set out above, libraries are in a unique position to assist in the promotion of fair and equitable access to key services for all residents in rural areas which can help address access poverty in a meaningful and tangible fashion. Additionally libraries are currently heavily involved in initiatives championing health, well-being and inclusion for rural dwellers which is crucial in bridging the gap created by social isolation.

We are happy to discuss these matters in further detail. If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours Faithfully  
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