



## **Consortium for the Regional Support for Women in Disadvantaged and Rural Areas**

### **Response to: Voluntary and Community Sector Infrastructure and Support Policy Framework**

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Women's Centre Derry  
ACCESS & EMPOWERMENT



Foyle Women's  
Information  
Network



## **Women's Regional Consortium: Working to Support Women in Rural Communities and Disadvantaged Urban Areas**

### **1. Introduction**

**1.1** This response has been undertaken collaboratively by the members of the Consortium for the Regional Support for Women in Disadvantaged and Rural Areas (hereafter, either the Women's Regional Consortium or simply the Consortium), which has been funded by the Department for Communities and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs under the Regional Infrastructure Programme since 2013.

**1.2** DfC's VCD, then DSD's VCU vision for the programme of support for women in disadvantaged and rural communities, developed following the review of the previous Regional Infrastructure Programme, (2010) the DSD and DARD RISP Policy Statement (2012); [regional-support-for-woman-in-disadvantaged-areas-and-rural-areas.doc \(live.com\)](#) clearly demonstrates the need for a structured and resourced project that enables women's organisations to function effectively in order to meet the needs of the communities they serve and states that;

*“women living in disadvantage in urban areas and women living in rural areas will be provided with the specialist support they require to enable them to tackle disadvantage and fulfil their potential in overcoming the barriers that give rise to their marginalisation, experience of poverty and exclusion.”*

**1.3** The Women's Regional Consortium consists of seven established women's sector organisations that are committed to working in partnership with each other, government, statutory organisations and women's organisations, centres and groups in disadvantaged and rural areas, to ensure that organisations working for women are given the best possible support in the work they do in tackling disadvantage and social exclusion.<sup>1</sup> The seven groups are as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> Sections 1.2-1.3 represent the official description of the Consortium's work, as agreed and authored by its seven partner organisation

- ♀ Training for Women Network (TWN) – Project lead
- ♀ Women’s Resource and Development Agency (WRDA)
- ♀ Women’s Support Network (WSN)
- ♀ Northern Ireland’s Rural Women’s Network (NIRWN)
- ♀ Women’s TEC
- ♀ Women’s Centre Derry
- ♀ Foyle Women’s Information Network (FWIN)

**1.4** The Consortium is the established link and strategic partner between government and statutory agencies and women in disadvantaged and rural areas, including all groups, centres and organisations delivering essential frontline services, advice and support. The Consortium ensures that there is a continuous two-way flow of information between government and the sector. It also ensures that organisations/centres and groups are made aware of consultations, government planning and policy implementation. In turn, the Consortium ascertains the views, needs and aspirations of women in disadvantaged and rural areas and takes these views forward to influence policy development and future government planning, which ultimately results in the empowerment of local women in disadvantaged and rurally isolated communities.

1.5 The NI Assembly having not sat for almost three years resumed business in January 2020 with a commitment to deliver on a substantial programme of work as outlined in the ‘New Decade, New Approach deal (NDNA) [2020-01-08 a new decade a new approach.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#) including a commitment that;

“the principles and practice of citizen and community engagement and co-design will be a key part of the development and delivery of the Programme for Government and its supporting strategies.”

The Consortium has been central to enabling government to fulfil this commitment ensuring that the voices and lived experiences of women in disadvantaged and rural areas have their views heard and are represented across all legislation and policy development impacting on them. The resumption of the Assembly after almost three years followed swiftly by the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in delays in addressing the NDNA programme of work. However, when possible, the volume and pace of work undertaken by the various Government Departments to address the backlog of work increased substantially. To progress legislation, develop and update strategies, introduce new Bills, including Private Members Bills resulted in numerous calls for views and the lived experience of women. From January 2020 to March 2022 alone, the Consortium relayed the views of women in disadvantaged and rural areas through twenty-seven responses to government on issues that may impact them. A further twelve responses have been submitted to date in addition to eight 'calls for evidence' even though the NI Assembly was again suspended from February 2022 until February 2024. All of the Consortium responses/calls for evidence can be found at:

[Policy - Women's Regional Consortium \(womensregionalconsortiumni.org.uk\)](https://www.womensregionalconsortiumni.org.uk)

Prior to the collapse of the NI Assembly and the withdrawal of the 'caretaker' Ministers, various Government Departments had been involved with the development and updating of a range of essential strategies for Northern Ireland, including a suite of social strategies and other strategies directly impacting women. Consortium members represented women on the Expert Panels, Co-designs Groups, Stakeholder Forums and Working Groups of the following:

- The Gender Equality Strategy
- The Anti-poverty Strategy
- The Early Learning and Childcare Strategy
- The Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy
- The Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy
- Hate Crime Legislation (various working groups)
- Welfare Reform Mitigations Review Panel

The development/update of these strategies was stalled at different points in their progress until Departmental Ministerial sign-off could be obtained. However, following

the resumption of the NI Assembly in February 2024 and the subsequent appointment of new Departmental Ministers, it will now be incumbent on them to move these forward but this may necessitate changes depending on Ministers and allocation of budgets to implement action plans/recommendations. Consortium members continue to engage with and represent the views of women in disadvantaged and rural areas to ensure that these strategies are fully implemented, specifically those that address poverty, disadvantage, equality and improved lives for all women and girls.

Research carried out by the Consortium provides up-to-date, relevant, timely and germane research information centred around the common theme of poverty and disadvantage following the pandemic and 'cost-of-living crisis which women's centres and groups use for funding applications and work plans to ensure they are meeting the needs of their women. The research also keeps Government and relevant agencies better informed on substantive issues affecting women in disadvantaged and rural areas. All of the research can be accessed here: [Research - Women's Regional Consortium \(womensregionalconsortiumni.org.uk\)](https://www.womensregionalconsortiumni.org.uk)

**1.6** The Women's Regional Consortium appreciates the opportunity to respond to the Department for Communities' consultation on the revised Voluntary and Community Infrastructure and Support Policy Framework.

**1.7** We wish to endorse the response made by the Women's Policy Group (WPG) of which the Women's Regional Consortium is a member.

The Women's Regional Consortium also endorses the following statement prepared by the NI Womens Budget Group and Ulster University:

Gender Budgeting requires government departments to analyse the different impact of a budget on people of different genders, starting as early in the budget cycle as possible. The aim of gender budgeting is to ensure that the distribution of resources creates more gender equal outcomes. Over time, gender analysis should become embedded at all stages of the budget process. Women's intersecting identities are also included in this analysis and policy-makers are expected to promote these areas of equality as well.

There is widespread political support for gender budgeting in Northern Ireland and a growing evidence base that it can help create a more equal society. In the current budget crisis women will experience particular disadvantages due to the pre-existing socio-economic conditions. For example, there is strong evidence that women have suffered disproportionately from over a decade of Westminster austerity measures, the pandemic, and the cost-of-living crisis<sup>2</sup>. We cannot afford to continue making decisions at the expense of women and risk further degradations to gender equality and additional intersecting equalities as well.

Not only is there an immediate need for gender budgeting in our current crisis, but the benefits would help to improve the budgetary process. Gender budgeting is good budgeting; it encourages greater transparency of government processes, more in-depth assessments of how policies and budgets affect constituents and closer cooperation between governmental and non-governmental stakeholders. It encourages a more targeted approach to the spending of public money, which will improve policy outcomes. Implementing gender budgeting mechanisms would provide decision-makers with the tools to recognise and mitigate gendered economic impacts and promote gender equality. Whilst political crises that affect budget processes are outside the control of departmental officials, strategically embedding gender budgeting measures will create a firewall to prevent such disproportionate disadvantages in future.

We recognise that the current equality screening and impact assessment duties under Section 75 provide policy infrastructure that could be used to progress gender budgeting. The EQIA process allows space to identify budget impacts on women and opportunities to promote more gender equal outcomes. However, as is in this case, too often the analysis included in these documents focuses only on equal treatment or stops at the point of acknowledging pre-existing inequalities. For gender budgeting

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<sup>2</sup> MacDonald, E.M. (2018) The gendered impact of austerity: Cuts are widening the poverty gap between women and men. British Politics and Policy at

LSE. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/gendered-impacts-of-austerity-cuts/>

Charlton, E. (2023) This is Why Women are Bearing the Brunt of the Cost of Living Crisis According to Research. World Economic Forum. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/01/cost-of-living-crisis-women-gender-gap/>

to be fully implemented, the next stage must be to reformulate budgets and budgetary policy with targeted measures to improve outcomes for women and girls. Additionally, Section 75 screening and impact assessment typically takes places at the very end of the budget planning process or after the budget has been finalised. The OECD<sup>3</sup> highlights that best practice for gender budgeting is to embed it at all levels of policy- and budget-making: planning, formulation, approval, implementation, monitoring and reformulation. It is crucial that gender equality obligations are not a ‘tick-box exercise,’ but rather that gender equality is mainstreamed in every area of the budgetary process through gender analysis of data supported by experts from civil society.

## 2.0 General Comments

2.1 The Women’s Regional Consortium has concerns about the format of the majority of the questions within the survey. As WRDA guidance on public consultations<sup>4</sup> states: *“the binary ‘agree/disagree’ nature of many questions hides the complexity of how people feel about different issues.”* We would urge extreme caution on using statistics on the responses to these questions as the basis for making conclusions on the proposals.

The answer to these ‘agree/disagree’ questions needs careful analysis alongside the accompanying text and must not be considered in isolation or presented in such a way that they paint a misleading picture of responses. We would encourage the Department not to use results from these multiple choice questions solely as the basis for any decision making. If they are to be used, they should not be used in isolation from any information given within the accompanying text which if not addressed could result in a different answer.

The majority of the questions in the survey, although binary in nature do give a text box for further comment, however some of the most important question in relation to ‘Delivering the Ambition’ (Section 4) do not, in particular questions 26 and 27. We

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<sup>3</sup> OECD (2023), OECD Best Practices for Gender Budgeting, *OECD Journal on Budgeting*, vol. 23/1, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9574ed6f-en>.

<sup>4</sup> Women at the Heart of Public Consultation, A guide for Public Authorities and Women’s Organisations, WRDA, November 2017 [https://wrda.net/wpcontent/uploads/2018/10/WRDA\\_WomenAtTheHeartOfPublicConsultation.pdf](https://wrda.net/wpcontent/uploads/2018/10/WRDA_WomenAtTheHeartOfPublicConsultation.pdf)

would like to draw attention to Q27, which when describing the three types of 'Community Infrastructure partners', they are referred to as 'local' in the question. We question how can NI wide, regional women's organisations be 'local'? The use of the term also caused confusion between those deemed 'regional' and 'sub-sectoral'. On the same basis how can NI wide, regional women's organisations, if as proposed are 'infrastructure partners (sub-sectoral) be aligned to specific council areas, as detailed? Also within this section there are a number of multi-faceted questions that only allow for one binary answer, some have up to seven indicative priorities, but there is only one opportunity to respond collectively to all. We may have been in agreement with six out of the seven but were not given the opportunity to respond/explain this. These issues may have been an oversight in the survey or a deliberate intention to skew the results.

We have provided answers to the check boxes but all are answered with caveats which must be fully taken into account in any analysis of our response.



## Specific Survey Questions

### **Section 1: General Information**

Q1. Are you responding as:

- An individual?   
On behalf of an organisation?

If answer is individual then skip to Section 2 and Question 6 2.

Q2. What is the name of your organisation?

The Women's Regional Consortium NI

Q3. Does our organisation operate more in urban or rural areas?

- a. More urban  
b. More rural  
c. Evenly split

Q4. Which of the following best describes your organisation?

- a. Voluntary and Community Sector organisation   
b. Public Sector organisation Infrastructure Support Consultation Questions  
c. Private Sector organisation  
d. Funder

If answer is b,c or d then skip to Section 2 and Question 6 5.

Q5. If you are answering on behalf of a voluntary and community organisation, which of the following best describes it?

- a. Voluntary organisation  
b. Community organisation   
c. Social Enterprise  
d. Other

If Other, please specify: (text box)

### **Section 2: Infrastructure Support Consultation Questions Section 2: Supporting the Sector's relationship with Government**

Section 2 of the consultation was developed collaboratively by the Joint Forum between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector (the "Joint Forum"). For further information on the Joint Forum and full list of current members please visit [www.NICVA.org](http://www.NICVA.org) In September 2022 former Communities Minister Deirdre Hargey identified the need for a renewal and recommitment of the 2011 "Concordat" agreement between government and Voluntary and Community Sector and invited the Joint Forum to take forward this work, in anticipation of aligning this with a future Programme for Government. As a foundation for a future Concordat agreement, the Joint Forum has articulated the following set of core values and practices which should guide and support the relationship between all of government and the wider sector.

### **Value 1: Accountability**

A shared commitment to act with high standards of integrity and professionalism. This includes being open, honest, and transparent in the interests of a shared and common agenda and demonstrating mutual respect, and accountability for our actions and in our decision making.

#### **Ways of Working which will deliver for this value:**

1. Timely, open and honest communication with stakeholders about progress, challenges, and decision-making.
2. Accountability across both sectors for actions and decisions, promoting a culture of responsibility.
3. Adherence to established guidelines on ethical behaviour and decision-making.
4. Commissioning, grant & procurement processes are transparent and consistent.
5. Clear arrangements for managing change to policy, programmes, and services.

### **Value 2: Active Participation**

A shared commitment to the active participation of all stakeholders in Northern Ireland, which seeks to address inequalities of power and ensures genuine opportunities for participation, involvement, and influence. This is rooted in the shared belief that Infrastructure Support Consultation Questions communities and people have the right, and should be empowered to, identify their own needs and interests and the outcomes required to meet these. Ways of

#### **Working which will deliver for this value:**

1. Participatory approaches to formulating public policy underpinned by strategic commitment and investment.
2. Capacity building and resources to empower stakeholders to effectively participate in decision making and discussions.
3. Informed and deliberative approaches and processes valuing relevant expertise and lived experience.
4. Inclusive mechanisms that ensure diverse voices are taken into account in decision making processes.
5. Participation methods are regularly monitored and reviewed to identify and address any power imbalances.

### **Value 3: Social Justice A shared commitment to human rights, equality, and anti-discrimination.**

This involves promoting, advancing, and protecting human rights and equality in our society while recognising the intersectional impacts of inequality and discrimination experienced by individuals, groups, and communities.

#### **Ways of working which will deliver for this value:**

1. Uphold and promote international human rights standards.
2. Act with due regard to statutory Section 75 and Rural Need commitments
3. Advocate for policies that support marginalised individuals and communities.
4. Pursue and prioritise work that will help to address inequalities.
5. Ensure work to tackle inequalities is informed by lived experiences.

#### **Value 4: Independence**

A shared understanding of the need for an independent, resilient, and sustainable voluntary and community sector to meet shared societal outcomes; recognising and supporting the sectors legal rights to give voice to civic society, to participate in, shape, comment and challenge public policy and decision making and to determine and manage its own affairs.

#### **Ways of Working which will deliver for this value:**

1. Maintain organisational autonomy while seeking ways to collaborate and engage with government.
2. Articulate and communicate the sector's rights and responsibilities to engage in policy discussions
3. Support the sector's capacity to challenge, innovate and add value to public policy and decision-making.
4. Sustain investment and resourcing of the work of the sector.

#### **Value 5: Collaboration**

A shared commitment to promoting and sustaining opportunities for relationship building, collaboration and partnership working between our sectors, and to broadening shared experience and understanding, for the benefit of the communities and people we serve.

#### **Ways of Working which will deliver for this value:**

1. A culture of collaboration and cooperation across the sectors is fostered.
2. Platforms for regular interaction and knowledge-sharing between the sectors are available.
3. Participatory and collaborative approaches to formulating public policy and programmes are championed and resourced.
4. A mutually agreed set of values and principles for collaboration and 'partnership working' is agreed and adopted.
5. Improved inter-sector engagement in planning and co-design of programmes and public services.

#### **Value 6: Sustainability**

A shared commitment to climate justice and sustainable development, including promoting cultural, environmental, economic, and socially sustainable policies and practices.

#### **Ways of Working which will deliver for this value:**

1. Promotion and investment in working practices that are environmentally and socially just and sustainable.
2. Sustainability considerations are integrated into decision-making processes.  
Infrastructure Support Consultation Questions
3. Advocate for climate justice and the importance of sustainable practices among stakeholders.

### **Question 6.**

The Joint Forum has proposed a draft framework of values and practices as a foundation for a future Concordat.

To what extent do you agree with these values and practices as a way of supporting the relationship between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector?

Value 1: Accountability

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Value 2: Active Participation

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Value 3: Social Justice

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Value 4: Independence

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Value 5: Collaboration

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Value 6: Sustainability

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Please share anything you would like to add specific to the individual values:

- a. Accountability (text box)
- b. Active Participation (text box)
- c. Social Justice (text box)
- d. Independence (text box)
- e. Collaboration (text box)
- f. Sustainability (text box)

**Collective answer to the above individual values**

While 'strongly agreeing' with these as values and practices that will support/could the relationship between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector, our responses come with a strong caveat. That being, the structures defined further on in the consultation document (Section 4 – Delivering the Ambition) and specifically in relation to those termed 'regional' organisations. These have already been selected by the Department and include the 'anchor' organisation (NICVA) and their partners in the '**regional infrastructure delivery partnership**', although not specifically named in the consultation document, have been released as, 'a focus on rural need' (Rural Community Network (RCN)), 'leadership' (CO3), 'volunteering' (Volunteer NI) and 'asset ownership/management' (Development Trust NI – (DTNI)). This in itself brings into question the 'independence and accountability' values, as these organisations have already been selected by the Department, which then, by nature calls into question all of the other values.

Question 7.

Please let us know if you think there are gaps in the proposed framework of values and practices or anything additional that you would like to see included:

We do not think that there are gaps in the proposed framework's values but do have reservations on the practical implementation/practices given the restructuring/selections proposed as detailed in Q6 above.

Question 8.

The Joint Forum has been considering options to ensure that a future Concordat/Agreement leads to meaningful change and an improved relationship between the sectors.

To what extent do you agree that a future Concordat/Agreement would be strengthened if a legal duty were created to require NI Executive Ministers to act in compliance with the concordat values and practices when making decisions and carrying out ministerial responsibilities?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Question 9.

The Joint Forum is keen to hear views on what the ambition and scope of a new Concordat/Agreement should be between Government and Voluntary and Community Sector. Please share any thoughts, ideas or challenges below.

We would like to see a more inclusive, transparent and independent and accountable Forum, echoing many of the values sited, but, like the Departmental committees in Stormont, not chaired by the selected 'anchor' organisation or any of the selected '**regional infrastructure delivery partnership**' organisations. There is a need for the Forum to have the scope to question both our own sector and government without prejudice.

Question 10.

The 2011 Concordat was framed as an agreement between Government and the voluntary and community sector. The Joint Forum believes that a future Concordat should apply to a wider range of "civil society" organisations: a very broad definition that includes everything outside the state (public sector) and the market (private sector). This is also sometimes called the "third sector" or the "social sector". There is some debate around the term we should use when we speak about this broader sector.

Which would be your preferred term?

- Third sector
- Social sector
- Civil Society
- Other
- No preference

If Other, please specify? (text box)

Over the past number of years it has become the norm to refer to the wider V&C sector as the 'Third Sector', however recently there has been a call to move away from this as it conjures up connotations of this sector being in 3<sup>rd</sup> place behind the private and public sectors.

We have responded 'other' to give this response! We are the third largest sector and should be recognised as such. However, how wide is the 'wider range' the Forum is suggesting? Civil society maybe appropriate, but this also would a defined definition/range.

It is the tern 'Concordat' that needs reformed!

### **Section 3: Vision and Headline Outcomes (for infrastructure support)**

**Section 3 describes the vision and the range of outcomes which government investment in sector infrastructure can achieve.**

#### **Vision**

“A confident, independent and collaborative sector which empowers and sustains local action and volunteering; a sector that represents the diversity of our communities and supports the delivery of inclusive and accessible services and programme for government outcomes through partnership, innovation and challenge”.

#### **Question 11.**

The draft framework proposes a vision for infrastructure support. To what extent do you agree with this vision?

- |                            |                                     |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Strongly Agree             | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Agree                      | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Disagree                   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Strongly Disagree          | <input type="checkbox"/>            |

If you would like to expand on your answer please do so below. (text box)

We agree with this vision in the main, but again with caveats. Would prefer the inclusion of 'local activity and action', 'action' alone could be misconstrued as some form of activism!

Also, is it truly 'independent' given the proposals and specific selections detailed further in the document?

The Department has developed 4 headline outcomes to articulate what success looks like against this vision.

#### **Leadership and Advocacy headline outcome**

Strong leadership and effective advocacy within the sector promotes the interests of our diverse communities and enables community connection and engagement

#### **Supporting Outcomes:**

- Sector leaders have skills and confidence to support their organisations and communities.
- Sector leaders work together around shared issues.
- Sector leadership is diverse and representative of the sector and communities.
- Data and evidence from the sector is effectively collated, analysed and communicated
- Public policy and decision making (central and local government) is informed by evidence from the sector (including the lived experience of people in our communities)

Question 12.

To what extent do you agree with this Leadership and Advocacy **headline outcome**?

- |                            |                                     |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Strongly Agree             | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Agree                      | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Disagree                   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Strongly Disagree          | <input type="checkbox"/>            |

Question 13.

To what extent do you agree with the supporting outcomes?

- a. Sector leaders have skills and confidence to support their organisations and communities

- |                            |                                     |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Strongly Agree             | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree                      | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Disagree                   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Strongly Disagree          | <input type="checkbox"/>            |

- b. Sector leaders work together around shared issues

- |                            |                                     |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Strongly Agree             | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree                      | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Disagree                   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Strongly Disagree          | <input type="checkbox"/>            |

- c. Sector leadership is diverse and representative of the sector and communities

- |                            |                                     |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Strongly Agree             | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree                      | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Disagree                   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Strongly Disagree          | <input type="checkbox"/>            |

- d. Data and evidence from the sector is effectively collated, analysed and communicated

- |                            |                                     |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Strongly Agree             | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree                      | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Disagree                   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Strongly Disagree          | <input type="checkbox"/>            |

- e. Public policy and decision making (central and local government) is informed by evidence from the sector



- |                            |                                     |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Strongly Agree             | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree                      | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Disagree                   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Strongly Disagree          | <input type="checkbox"/>            |

#### Question 14

If you would like to expand on your answers, please do so below:

Evidence from the sector to inform public policy and decision making (central and local government) will be dependent on how the data from the sector is effectively collated, analysed and communicated, this needs to be based on an inclusive, robust and representative broad, statistically viable sample size. In addition the sector research/evidence that is carried out/produced needs to be valued and sufficiently weighted by government to analysis the impacts when carrying out EQIA's, policy and budget proposals. It is acknowledged this is further address later in the consultation.

#### **Volunteering headline outcome**

Volunteering activity is enabled and supported to maximise benefits for individuals, organisations and communities.

#### **Supporting Outcomes:**

- People volunteering with organisations are well supported and valued.
- Voluntary management committees can access the support they need.
- The value and impact of volunteering is understood and communicated.
- Organisations in the sector are supported to recruit and manage volunteers.
- Volunteer management skills are developed within organisations.
- Volunteer opportunities are accessible.
- People volunteering are representative of our diverse communities.

#### Question 15

To what extent do you agree with this Volunteering headline outcome?

- |                            |                                     |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Strongly Agree             | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Agree                      | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Disagree                   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Strongly Disagree          | <input type="checkbox"/>            |

#### Question 16

To what extent do you agree with the supporting outcomes?

- a. People volunteering with organisations are well supported and valued.

- |                |                          |
|----------------|--------------------------|
| Strongly Agree | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree          | <input type="checkbox"/> |

- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

b. Voluntary management committees can access the support they need.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

c. The value and impact of volunteering is understood and communicated.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

d. Organisations in the sector are supported to recruit and manage volunteers.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

e. Volunteer management skills are developed within organisations.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

f. Volunteer opportunities are accessible.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

g. People volunteering are representative of our diverse communities.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

### Questions 17

If you would like to expand on your answer please do so below.

### **Core Capacity and Resilience headline outcome**

Core capacity and resilience of organisations within the sector is sustained and further developed to enable people and communities to thrive.

#### **Supporting Outcomes:**

- Voluntary and community organisations can access a range of support which meets diverse needs.
- Organisations are supported to work effectively within a changing funding and regulatory framework.
- Organisations are supported to demonstrate the impact of their work.
- Organisations are supported to access funding and diversify income.
- Organisations are supported to acquire, develop and sustain assets.

### Question 18.

To what extent do you agree with this Core Capacity and Resilience headline outcome?

- |                            |                                     |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Strongly Agree             | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree                      | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Disagree                   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Strongly Disagree          | <input type="checkbox"/>            |

### Question 19.

To what extent do you agree with the supporting outcomes?

- a. Voluntary and community organisations can access a range of support which meets diverse needs.

- |                            |                                     |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Strongly Agree             | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree                      | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Disagree                   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Strongly Disagree          | <input type="checkbox"/>            |

- b. Organisations are supported to work effectively within a changing funding and regulatory framework.

- |                            |                                     |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Strongly Agree             | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree                      | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Disagree                   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Strongly Disagree          | <input type="checkbox"/>            |

c. Organisations are supported to demonstrate the impact of their work.

- Strongly Agree   
Agree   
Neither Agree nor Disagree   
Disagree   
Strongly Disagree

d. Organisations are supported to access funding and diversify income.

- Strongly Agree   
Agree   
Neither Agree nor Disagree   
Disagree   
Strongly Disagree

e. Organisations are supported to acquire, develop and sustain assets.

- Strongly Agree   
Agree   
Neither Agree nor Disagree   
Disagree   
Strongly Disagree

Question 20.

If you would like to expand on your answer, please do so below. (text box)

In the main strongly agree with supporting outcomes, however, acquiring, developing and sustaining assets is not offered to many, nor suited to all organisations/groups specifically in an uncertain funding climate and dependant on geographical areas. This is about community wealth building, owning your own building/shared building, this is a great idea in theory and support to sustain it would be welcomed. However organisations could end up with/already have their own buildings but do not have the staff costs or programme costs to actually run anything in it, so disjointed is our funding climate. This happened in the past when PEACE funding built community centres all over NI but they ended disused as funding criteria changed and moved more to specific programme funding only, without core staff, sustainability of an asset is impossible. In the current climate, of real term reduced funding coupled with ever increasing running costs due to 'cost of living' crisis this is not on the priority list.

**Collaboration and Partnership headline outcome**

Effective collaboration and partnership enhance the impact of the sector's work

**Supporting Outcomes:**

- Sector infrastructure convenes diverse and representative partnerships and networks

- Sector-led partnerships support effective engagement with government
- Sector-led partnerships support local resilience and civil contingencies arrangements
- Collaboration and partnership enable peer support and sharing of knowledge, skills and competence
- Collaboration and partnerships support organisations to sustain services and improve their impact

Question 21.

To what extent do you agree with this Collaboration and Partnership headline outcome?

- |                            |                                     |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Strongly Agree             | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree                      | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Disagree                   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Disagree                   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |

Question 22.

To what extent do you agree with the supporting outcomes?

- a. Sector infrastructure convenes diverse and representative partnerships and networks.

- |                            |                                     |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Strongly Agree             | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree                      | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Disagree                   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Strongly Disagree          | <input type="checkbox"/>            |

- b. Sector-led partnerships support effective engagement with government.

- |                            |                                     |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Strongly Agree             | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree                      | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Disagree                   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Strongly Disagree          | <input type="checkbox"/>            |

- c. Sector-led partnerships support local resilience and civil contingencies arrangements.

- |                            |                                     |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Strongly Agree             | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Agree                      | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Disagree                   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Strongly Disagree          | <input type="checkbox"/>            |

- d. Collaboration and partnership enable peer support and sharing of knowledge, skills and competence.

- |                |                                     |
|----------------|-------------------------------------|
| Strongly Agree | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
|----------------|-------------------------------------|

- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

- e. Collaboration and partnerships support organisations to sustain services and improve their impact.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Question 23.

If you would like to expand on your answer please do so below. (text box)

Question 24.

Are there any key elements or themes missing from either the vision or headline outcomes?

Yes/ No

If yes, please provide further information. (text box)

**Section 4: Delivering the Ambition**

**Section 4 sets out proposals for how the Department will work with the sector and other partners to deliver against the ambition of the vision and outcomes described in Section 3.**

Our recent engagement and discussion with stakeholders points to five key areas where the Department for Communities can lead and deliver in support of sector outcomes:

1. **Creating effective partnerships:** working with sector partners, with government and independent funders
2. **Sustained investment in sector infrastructure:** commissioning an integrated framework of support geared towards a common outcomes framework
3. **Creating a more enabling regulatory and policy environment:** delivering the agreed reforms to charity regulation and strategic policy
4. **Applying and championing improved funding practices:** exploring, developing, applying and sharing good practice
5. **Improving understanding about the work and impact of the sector:** collating, interpreting and sharing data and evidence

Question 25.

The Department has suggested **five key areas for delivery against the proposed outcomes**. To what extent do you agree that focusing on these delivery areas will support the outcomes framework?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

If you would like to expand on your answer please do so below. Note that additional sections of this survey will allow space for more comments on the detail of these delivery areas.

### **1. Creating effective partnerships:**

This section focuses on the Department's direct relationship with sector infrastructure organisations and local government.

#### **Proposals for Sectoral Infrastructure Partnerships**

We will work in partnership with sector infrastructure organisations to ensure effective delivery against the agreed vision and outcomes.

The Department will seek to work with a regional infrastructure delivery partnership covering the whole of NI, capable of designing and delivering appropriate training and support and with the resources to convene and support sector leaders at a regional level (including supporting a network of community infrastructure partners) and deliver an integrated programme of research and data development for the sector.

The Department will seek to work with a network of **Community infrastructure partners** which supports the diversity of community and voluntary action across council areas. Community infrastructure partners will provide a baseline of community development and volunteering infrastructure support and will be expected to operate as a collaborative network. Community Infrastructure Partners will work closely with Regional Delivery Partners where appropriate to identify and meet sectoral support needs and the role will include delivery of direct training and advisory programmes, peer support and mentoring work, local convening and stakeholder engagement, survey and data collection.

The Department has identified the need for three types of **Community infrastructure partners**:

**Community Infrastructure Organisations (sub-regional):** Infrastructure organisations which meet the general infrastructure support needs of VCS organisations in a defined geographical area, providing inclusive, accessible services to any organisation operating in a locality.

**Community Infrastructure Organisations (sub-sectoral):** Infrastructure organisations which support a significant sub-sector of organisations working on behalf of a vulnerable

demographic and where those organisations have distinct infrastructure support needs arising from the nature of their work, that aren't met through general infrastructure support.

**Volunteer Centres:** Infrastructure organisations that provide support and expertise within the local community to potential volunteers, existing volunteers and organisations that involve volunteers. The Department will invest in the core work of a network of volunteer centres to support the identified volunteering outcomes.

Question 26.

To what extent do you agree with the proposed approach to delivering regional infrastructure support?

- |                            |                                     |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Strongly Agree             | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Agree                      | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Disagree                   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Strongly Disagree          | <input type="checkbox"/>            |

**NO OPTION TO COMMENT**

In what is one of the most important questions in this survey, unlike the majority of other questions there is no option (text box) to comment on the reason for this answer. There is one binary question and option to answer on the overall delivery structure which is actually multi-layered, incorporating 'a regional infrastructure delivery partnership and a network of 'Community infrastructure partners' comprised of three different types.

Regional Infrastructure Partnership – this has already been selected by the Department and include the 'anchor' organisation (NICVA) and their partners in the '**regional infrastructure delivery partnership**', although not specifically named in the consultation document, have been released as, 'a focus on rural need' (Rural Community Network (RCN)), 'leadership' (CO3), 'volunteering' (Volunteer NI) and 'asset ownership/management' (Development Trust NI – (DTNI)). All of these organisations were previously funded through RISP, however the women's element of RISP has now been omitted. We would also question how some of these organisations can be considered NI wide as only support their own like organisations/groups and membership.

We also do not agree that this delivery partnership will be given as stated in the detail; '**the resources to convene and support** sector leaders at a regional level (including supporting a network of community infrastructure partners)'.

It is also stated that; 'the Department will seek to work with a network of **Community infrastructure partners** which supports the diversity of community and voluntary action across council areas. Regional organisations such as the regional women's organisations within the Women's Regional Consortium are NI wide and not specific to council areas.

Question 27.

To what extent do you agree with the need for 3 types of local infrastructure support:

- a. community infrastructure organisations (sub regional)



- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

b. community infrastructure organisations (sub sectoral)

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

c. Volunteer Centres

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

**NO OPTION TO COMMENT – this question specifically states that these are ‘local’ infrastructure, how can a NI regional organisation be considered ‘local’? We are concerned about the removal of the women’s RISP from regional support and its inclusion in ‘sub-sectoral’ partnership as detailed above as ‘local’. We are also concerned that this represents a failure to recognise the NI wide regional value of the work undertaken by the women’s sector and by not holding specific funding for NI wide regional women’s work, such as that for the Infrastructure Partnership organisations, women’s sector regional organisations will have to compete with other ‘sub-regional’ organisations who may have very different niche work.**

**In Summary, this delivery area commits to:**

- Create new range of partnerships with sector infrastructure organisations to support delivery against the outcomes framework
- Redesign the Community Support Programme in partnership with local government.

Question 28.

To what extent do you agree with these commitments?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

If you would like to expand on your answer please do so below.

The reason for this answer is because again we have only been allowed one binary option to answer what are two very different commitments, and very independent of each other. We do not agree with some of the proposed partnerships and their make-up reach. Q27 refers to the three types of 'Community infrastructure partners as 'local infrastructure support', regional organisations are not local. Also given these three partner definitions, some organisations will actually be both sub-regional and sub-sectoral, leading to confusion

**2. Sustained investment in sector infrastructure:** commissioning an integrated framework of support geared towards a common outcomes framework

As part of this key area for delivery, the framework looks at each of the 4 headline outcomes and outlines a number of indicative priorities for investment. The following questions will be about each of these headline outcomes and the priorities under each of these.

**Headline outcome: Strong leadership and effective advocacy within the sector promotes the interests of our diverse communities and enables community connection and engagement.**

**Indicative Priorities for Investment:**

- Leadership development (developing leadership capacity within VCS organisations at different levels, including a focus on staff retention, succession planning, driving change and growth, peer mentoring)
- Support for advocacy and effective representation (developing the skills and knowledge within organisations)
- Development and sharing of good practice on inclusive engagement methods.
- Knowledge exchange mechanisms (both virtual and in-person; formal and informal; networks, seminars, conferences etc.)
- Digital communication resources (to maximise reach and impact and enable effective sharing and dissemination of information)
- Research creating meaningful data and supporting a greater understanding of the health and impact of the voluntary and community sector.
- Building skills and confidence on participatory methods and practices throughout the sector.

Question 29.

To what extent do you agree with these priorities for investment under the leadership and advocacy headline outcome?

- |                            |                                     |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Strongly Agree             | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Agree                      | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Disagree                   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Strongly Disagree          | <input type="checkbox"/>            |

**NO OPTION TO COMMENT – again one binary option to answer seven indicative priorities**

Question 30.

Can you suggest other priorities?

**Headline outcome: Volunteering activity is enabled and supported to maximise benefits for individuals, organisations and communities.**

**Indicative Priorities for Investment:**

- Supporting the core work of volunteer centres (Infrastructure organisations that provide support and expertise within the local community to potential volunteers, existing volunteers and organisations that involve volunteers. The Department will invest in the core work of a network of volunteer centres to support the identified volunteering outcomes)
- Supporting the work of volunteers in management positions (developing skills and knowledge of, for example, volunteers on management boards and also support to encourage increased levels of volunteering in this area).
- Digital resources to support volunteering: accessible, user-friendly resources, to promote advice, guidance, volunteer-matching.
- Research to improve available data and increase understanding on issues affecting volunteering, the impact of volunteering and the future of volunteering.
- Outreach and communication to promote awareness and volunteer recruitment.
- Recognition and reward initiatives for volunteers

Question 31.

To what extent do you agree with these priorities for investment under the volunteering headline outcome?

- |                            |                                     |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Strongly Agree             | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Agree                      | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Disagree                   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Strongly Disagree          | <input type="checkbox"/>            |

Question 32.

Can you suggest other priorities? (text box)

**Headline outcome: Core capacity and resilience of organisations within the sector is sustained and developed.**

**Indicative Priorities for Investment:**

- Online resources (maintaining key data relevant to the sector including funding sources and regulation)

- Directory of local infrastructure support, better signposting to increase awareness of support available.
- Training programmes and resources (digital and in-person delivery with a flexibility to meet diverse needs), including post training consolidation and support/peer mentoring, with a focus on:
  - Income diversification (including accessing funding sources; income generation; tender writing and fundraising)
  - Business planning and Innovation - Governance
  - Monitoring, impact measurement, and reporting
  - Acquiring, developing and managing assets (acquisition and development of land and buildings; support to manage and maximise assets including marketing, increasing accessibility and sign-posting to properly utilise and level up existing facilities)
  - HR, staff recruitment and development, succession planning
  - Building resilience; being responsive and flexible to meet changing/emerging needs.
- Ad hoc support and advice in response to changing needs.

Question 33.

To what extent do you agree with these priorities for investment under the core capacity and resilience headline outcome?

- |                            |                                     |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Strongly Agree             | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Agree                      | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Disagree                   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Strongly Disagree          | <input type="checkbox"/>            |

**NO OPTION TO COMMENT – again one binary option to answer four indicative priorities, one of which has a further six sub priorities. In the main we agree with all of the indicative priorities and welcome the ability to meet changing/emerging needs, however we do question the inclusion of ‘ Acquiring, developing and managing assets’ as a sub-section of the ‘Training programmes and resources’ indicative priority.**

Question 34.

Can you suggest other priorities?

**Headline outcome: Effective collaboration and partnership enhance the impact of the sector’s work.**

**Indicative Priorities for Investment:**

- Development and facilitation of a strategic stakeholder Forum for VCS and government (currently the Joint Forum between government and the VCS)
- Infrastructure Support Consultation Questions

- Development and facilitation of regional networks of infrastructure organisations, increasing connectivity and supporting relationship building (to include all DfC supported infrastructure partners)
- Development and coordination of peer learning/peer exchange programme (learning from Community Academy model and Collaboration NI)
- Development and facilitation of a VCS Civil Contingencies/Resilience Partnership

Question 35.

To what extent do you agree with these priorities for investment under the collaboration and partnership headline outcome?

- |                            |                                     |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Strongly Agree             | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Agree                      | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Disagree                   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Strongly Disagree          | <input type="checkbox"/>            |

Question 36.

Can you suggest other priorities?

**In Summary, this delivery area commits to:**

- Renew investment in sector infrastructure supports.

Question 37.

To what extent do you agree with this commitment?

- |                            |                                     |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Strongly Agree             | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Agree                      | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Disagree                   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Strongly Disagree          | <input type="checkbox"/>            |

If you would like to expand on your answer please do so below.

We welcome the commitment to renew investment in sector infrastructure supports, however as previously stated to not agree with all of the delivery structures proposed. In particular the change for the women's RISP strand from a 'regional support structure' to a sub-sectoral partner. We are also concerned that the structures will favour larger organisations over those that provide more specialised infrastructure support. There are also concerns around just how the investment will be managed across the sector as the detail in the Consultation document coupled with detail preceding some questions in this document could be interpreted that all resources will flow through NICVA and decisions on who is funded decided upon by the 'Regional Infrastructure Partnership'.

**3. Creating a more enabling regulatory and policy environment:** delivering the agreed reforms to charity regulation and strategic policy.

The Department for Communities is committed to creating a more enabling regulatory environment for the Voluntary and Community Sector through the implementation of the recommendations arising from the Independent Review of Charity Regulation in NI. In Summary, this delivery area commits to: • Improve the regulation of charities.

Question 38.

To what extent do you agree that improving charity regulation will support positive outcomes for the sector?

- |                            |                                     |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Strongly Agree             | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Agree                      | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Disagree                   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Strongly Disagree          | <input type="checkbox"/>            |

If you would like to expand on your answer please do so below.

**4. Applying and championing improved funding practices:** exploring, developing, applying and sharing good practice The Department recognises that our funding practices are a key factor in our ability to create and sustain effective partnerships with sector infrastructure organisations, and more widely to meet the challenge of “fair funding” and proportionate bureaucracy in the funding relationship between government and the sector.

**In Summary, this delivery area commits to:**

- Support strategic relationships with government and non-government funders.
- Apply and champion fair and improved funding practices.

Question 39.

To what extent do you agree with these commitments?

- |                            |                                     |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Strongly Agree             | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Agree                      | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Disagree                   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Strongly Disagree          | <input type="checkbox"/>            |

If you would like to expand on your answer, please do so below.

**5. Improving understanding about the work and impact of the sector:** collating, interpreting and sharing data and evidence

The Department recognises that we need to make improvements to how we commission, collate, consider and communicate data if we want to understand what the sector needs and

how best to support those needs. This will require a focus on both qualitative and quantitative information.

**In Summary, this delivery area commits to:**

- Boost data on the VCS
- Improve understanding of the VCS

Questions 40.

To what extent do you agree with these commitments?

- |                            |                                     |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Strongly Agree             | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree                      | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Disagree                   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Strongly Disagree          | <input type="checkbox"/>            |

If you would like to expand on your answer, please do so below. (text box)

Annex 3: Statutory Assessments Equality screening of the policy framework has identified no adverse impacts. On this basis, the decision is that the policy framework should not be subject to a full equality impact assessment.

Question 41.

Do you agree with the conclusions of the Equality Screening exercise?

- |            |                                     |
|------------|-------------------------------------|
| Yes        | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| No         | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Don't know | <input type="checkbox"/>            |

If no, please provide your reasons.

The Equality screening exercise recognises the significant amount of work carried out by women's organisations under the Department's remit, but assigns no negative impact to the proposed changes, despite the fact that the Women's RISP programme is to be discontinued. If the document produced is read at face value, however, it appears to be the case that open competition may result in no women's organisations being funded to provide infrastructure support from either sub-sectoral or sub-regional. That will have a negative impact on women.

We believe that the decision that there will be no negative impacts from these changes on the basis of the protected characteristic of gender is a mistaken conclusion, and in light of the concerns raised here, by other women's organisations and directly with the Department, this decision should be reconsidered.

Question 42.

A Rural Needs Impact Assessment has been completed in line with the Department's duty under the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016. The needs of people in rural areas have been identified and taken into consideration with the aim of providing balanced infrastructure support provision across all geographies.

Do you think the proposed draft framework presents any other issues for rural communities?

- Yes   
No   
Don't know

If you wish to expand on your answer, you may provide further comments.

N/A