

Rural Business and Community Investment Programme Rural Advisory Group –Terms of Reference

Background

Given the nature of the proposed priority areas for intervention identified within the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland; the importance of grass-roots involvement of rural stakeholders and considering the lessons learned from LEADER, it is clear that there is strong support for the bottom up approach to form part of the solution to implementing a new programme. To this end, the Department is establishing a Rural Advisory Group (RAG) to help ensure the best possible outcomes when designing the future Rural Business and Community Investment Programme.

Purpose

The purpose of the Rural Advisory Group is to provide guidance, advice and strategic support to ensure the effective and sustainable implementation of the Rural Business and Community Investment Programme and by so doing improve the lives of everyone living in our rural communities in a sustainable and environmentally responsible way.

Role of the Rural Advisory Group

1. The role of the Rural Advisory Group for the Rural Business and Community Investment Programme is to:
 - Working in partnership across Government and with key rural stakeholders, to propose solutions to the priority interventions in the Rural Policy Framework;
 - To oversee the implementation of the Rural Business and Community Investment Programme;
 - To help hold government departments, including DAERA, more accountable for addressing issues in rural communities; and
 - Provide feedback on the monitoring of outputs, outcomes and financial targets during the implementation of the programme.
2. The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) is the implementing body for the Rural Business and Community Investment Programme. The

secretariat to the Rural Advisory Group is provided by Rural Affairs Policy and Delivery Branch, DAERA.

Rural Advisory Group Membership

3. Members of the Group will take part in discussions at meetings. A list of the organisations that are members of the Group can be found at Annex A of this document.
4. The organisation is a full member of the Rural Advisory Group, as opposed to their individual representative. However, it is expected that organisations will be represented at meetings by the same individual, allowing that person to increase their knowledge of the Programme over time and ensuring continuity. Organisations may change their individual representative attending meetings if necessary, having notified DAERA in advance.
5. Members of the Rural Advisory Group are expected to demonstrate the following behaviours:
 - Thoroughly prepare for and attend meetings of the Rural Advisory Group.
 - Participate actively to support the work of the Rural Advisory Group.
 - Listen to and respect the views and contributions of other Rural Advisory Group members and advisors.
 - Be objective in their views.
 - Respect the confidentiality of the issues discussed and the views expressed by other members of the Rural Advisory Group.
 - Participate in proceedings in an open and transparent manner.
 - Balance their individual and organisational views against the collective objectives and needs of the Rural Advisory Group.
 - Be mindful of the equality issues related to the Programme and the equality responsibilities of the Rural Advisory Group and its members.

Conflict of Interest and Register of Interest

6. Members must declare any real or perceived conflicts of interest and excuse themselves from any decision making where they may have a real or perceived conflict of interest (see Annex B).
7. All members should complete the attached Conflict of Interest (COI) Declaration and Register of Interests Declaration will be retained for inspection by DAERA. There will be an annual review of these declarations which will be formally recorded in the minutes of the relevant meeting.
8. DAERA will keep the membership of the Rural Advisory Group under review. Membership of the Rural Advisory Group may be adjusted from time to time to ensure the effectiveness and representativeness of the Rural Advisory Group.

Chair and Deputy Chair

9. The Chair of the Rural Advisory Group will be the Director of Rural Affairs, DAERA. The Deputy Chair will be the Deputy Director of Rural Affairs, DAERA.

Meetings of the Committee

10. The Rural Advisory Group will meet at least twice per year, with additional meetings scheduled if necessary. The venue for meetings will be accessible to all members and consideration will be given to the timing of meetings to allow for the attendance of members with other professional and caring commitments.
11. The agenda and associated papers for each meeting will be made available no later than 5 working days in advance of each meeting, as far as reasonably practicable. Members of

the Rural Advisory Group will nominate an individual as a contact point to the Secretariat to receive the papers via email. It is the responsibility of this individual to forward the papers to their representatives before the meeting.

12. Members are responsible for printing and bringing their own copies of papers to meetings, should they require them.
13. Following each meeting, draft action points and minutes will be circulated for comment within 20 working days.

Decision making

14. The Chair will act primarily as the facilitator for Rural Advisory Group business and where possible, the Rural Advisory Group will operate on the basis of consensus. Although the Rural Advisory Group is not a decision making body it will be expected to discuss issues and make recommendations to DAERA, which the department may or may not implement. However if a recommendation is not implemented, DAERA will provide a full rationale as to its decision.
15. Written procedure may be used when advice/opinion of the Rural Advisory Group is required but a meeting cannot be scheduled. Under this procedure, the Implementing Rural Advisory Body will email all members of the Rural Advisory Group, forwarding any relevant papers for consideration and asking for their response within 10 working days. Requests from members for clarification or further discussion will be facilitated.

Allowances payable to members

16. Members are entitled to claim payment at prevailing civil service rates of the cost of travel incurred in performing their duties, where these costs are not met by their own organisation.

17. Claims for travel and subsistence will only be considered for payment when made using a claim form provided by the secretariat and when submitted within 90 days of the meeting. There are no exceptions to this rule.

18. Reimbursement of registered childcare and other caring expenses incurred directly as a result of a full member's participation is also eligible.

Changes to the Terms of Reference

19. These Terms of Reference are kept under review and changes to them may be proposed by the Implementing Body, subject to the normal decision making process of the Rural Advisory Group. A copy is also available to members on the DAERA website.

Annex A – Members of the Rural Business and Community Investment Programme Rural Advisory Group

Dept for Economy	1
Dept for Infrastructure	1
Dept for Communities	1
Dept of Health	1
Dept of Justice	1
Dept of Finance	1
Dept of Education	1
The Executive Office	1
Tourism NI	1
NILGA	1
SOLACE	1
Rural Community Network	1
Rural Support Networks	1
Rural Stakeholder	1
Rural Stakeholder	1
Rural Stakeholder	1
Rural Stakeholder	1
Rural Stakeholder	1
Rural Stakeholder	1
Rural Stakeholder	1
Overall total membership	20

Annex B

CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATION

Introduction

Members of the Rural Advisory Group should be aware of the rationale for having a policy on possible conflict of interest. It is essential to ensure that no member of the Group can influence decisions in any way that may be to his or her advantage or the advantage of their organisation. Additionally, it is necessary to reassure the public that all decision making is fair and above board. Finally, it acts as a protection to the member against any possible allegation that he or she may have used their position to their own advantage.

Areas of Uncertainty

In circumstances where a member is unsure whether they have what could be perceived as an interest, the degree of their interest, or whether they should withdraw, they should seek the advice of the Chairperson before the meeting begins. The Chairperson shall have the discretion to rule on these issues.

DECLARATION

I have read and fully understood the details contained within the Conflict of Interest declaration. I agree to comply with the recommendation and condition as detailed in the document and to abide by those principles and procedures as directed by my role as a member of the Rural Business and Community Investment Programme Rural Advisory Group.

Name (in block capitals)

Signature

Date