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Towards An Anti Poverty Response from SARN

South Antrim Rural Network (SARN) is a Rural Support Network (RSN) for the South Antrim area encouraging the participation of rural people and groups in all aspects of rural community life. SARN actively encourages community involvement at all levels and is committed to ensuring people who have been socially excluded are heard and involved in the issues that affect them.

We would echo the concerns expressed by RCN in that unfortunately little has changed in the current consultation document with rural specific issues still left unaddressed with the exception of a minimal reference to rural proofing. There is still no evidence that addressing rural poverty and disadvantage will be an integral part of any future Anti Poverty Strategy for Northern Ireland.

Many of the previous concerns still exist with the proposed Anti Poverty Strategy:

- The need to agree a definition of Poverty which illustrates an understanding of rural poverty;
- The implications of not having a specific budget or a specific programme for effective and new anti poverty work in rural areas;
- The lack of rural outputs and targets linked to a change in quality of life in rural areas for those experiencing poverty and disadvantage;
- The need for rural proofing indicators and area identification that moves beyond the rural insensitive 'Noble Multiple Deprivation Index';
- The need for a 'geographical location' element linked to Section 75.

SARN support the 'Enough is Enough' campaign led by NICVA which is calling for a better Anti Poverty Strategy for Northern Ireland. It is important for the Minister to address the concerns that are raised by the voluntary and community sector regarding this present strategy and the lack of high level targets which are required to form the foundations of a real and effective Anti Poverty Strategy, and to demonstrate a commitment to addressing the rural poverty in Northern Ireland.

SARN believe that for an Anti Poverty Strategy to work it must be robust with a new approach and thinking by Government. The first step is recognising the need to address rural poverty through a rural poverty specific section.

We hope these comments are useful.

Yours sincerely

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Chairperson

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