Department for
**Social**
**Development**

www.dsdni.gov.uk



Department of
**Agriculture and**
**Rural Development**

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AN ROINN
**Talmhaíochta agus**
**Forbartha Tuaithe**

MÄNNYSTRIE O
**Fairms an**
**Kintra Fordèrin**

# JOINT POLICY STATEMENT

# REGIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORT PROGRAMME (RISP)

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1     The Department for Social Development (DSD) is the lead department taking responsibility for setting the direction for relationships between Government and  the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS).  DSD's Public Service Agreement (PSA), actions and targets are set out in the Corporate Plan and are linked directly to the Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government (PFG).

1.2     This document constitutes a joint Policy Statement between DSD and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) on the Regional Infrastructure Support Programme (RISP). This policy details arrangements for the provision of generic infrastructure support, which enables the VCS to operate effectively and efficiently across Northern Ireland, in both urban and rural areas. Generic infrastructure support can include a combination of capacity, skills, physical resources and structures which help voluntary and community organisations function effectively in order to meet the needs of the communities they serve. This programme sits alongside (and is complimentary to) the range of programmes and activities, delivered and managed by DSD's Voluntary and Community Unit (VCU).

1.3     The Regional Infrastructure Support Programme, together with the development of a new policy framework to govern relationships between government and the VCS (Concordat), arrangements for increasing the number of volunteers (Volunteering Strategy) and the support of voluntary advice services (Advice Services Strategy), collectively create a programme of change designed to enhance support for the VCS.

1.4     This policy statement was developed following VCU's review of the previous Regional Infrastructure Programme (RIP) in 2010 and has been **developed to provide the generic support[1]** required by the VCS

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[1] Key day to day support required by all VCS organisations

with thematic support[2] provided as appropriate via other programmes linked to strategies and policies in DSD and other Departments.

## 2.    RISP - STRATEGIC CONTEXT

2.1    Government's longstanding commitment to working in partnership with the VCS is clearly identified through numerous policy and strategy documents such as "Positive Steps", "Partners for Change" "Opening Doors", and the "Concordat", framing relationships between Government and the VCS.

2.2    Working alongside a number of delivery partners, DSD contributes to a range of Public Service Agreements (PSAs) and takes the lead in the delivery of those relating to Housing and Urban Regeneration and Community Development. Developing communities, tackling disadvantage and social  exclusion are at the heart of the work of DSD. Through the draft Rural White Paper Action Plan, DSD has also committed to developing an integrated regional and local community development structures which have a strong rural component.

2.3    The prevailing economic climate presents significant challenges for the sector and government, making it ever more important to ensure that appropriate support arrangements are in place to support the VCS

2.4    Government is committed to working with and supporting the VCS to help secure the delivery of efficient and effective public services, particularly to vulnerable and disadvantaged communities. This in turn, places an obligation on the VCS to ensure they provide cost effective, efficient services with clearly identifiable outcomes.

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[2] Support required by a specific type of organisation or concerned with a particular policy/strategy

## 3. VISION & AIMS OF THE REGIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORT PROGRAMME (RISP)

**3.1    The Vision for the programme is:-**

> *That voluntary and community sector organisations across Northern Ireland (urban and rural) are provided with the key generic infrastructure support which allows them to function effectively to deliver government objectives and maximise the impact of the work they do.*

3.2    The aims of this programme are to help ensure that, in so far as is possible, the VCS operating in Northern Ireland is supported in order to operate effectively and efficiently. This support is known as" *Infrastructure Support".* This "infrastructure" on which the VCS depends, can include a combination of  capacity, skills, physical resources and structures which help voluntary and community organisations function effectively in order to meet the needs of the communities they serve**.**

**In other words, the programme aims to promote an;**

- **Efficient**
- **Effective**
- **Economic; and,**
- **Equitable**

**Voluntary and community sector across Northern Ireland.**

## 4.     RISP POLICY OUTCOMES

4.1     The "Positive Steps" Report published in 2005 and many recent reports and evaluations have highlighted the need for longer term "outcome/impact focused" funding, as well as the need to be able to measure the contribution of voluntary and community organisations to improving public services.

4.2     Outcomes/impact can be described as "*identifying the changes or other results which have happened as a result of the work that we do".* An outcome/impact focused approach can:

- aid planning

- increase the likelihood that activities will achieve the intended outcomes (by "starting out with the end in mind")

- encourage people to think about outcomes rather than outputs and consider the difference actions and activities can make in people's lives; and

- aid and enable evaluation, learning and measurement of the effectiveness of the program.

4.3     The policy outcomes for this programme are designed to ensure that the programme is geared to deliver the key aims and vision for the programme, in turn contributing to the overall programme for Government across NI and assisting the voluntary and community sector across Northern Ireland in maximising the impact of the work they do.

**The high level policy outcomes for this programme are identified as;**

- **VCS organisations across Northern Ireland, urban and rural, have access to key generic infrastructure support they need to function effectively and efficiently,**

- **VCS organisations are supported to achieve their objectives better than before and provide an improved quality of service to their customers,**

- **VCS organisations are fully supported to avail of the government programmes/initiatives that are available to them,**

- **VCS organisations are supported in maintaining effective governance arrangements, obtain and better manage resources, and improve sustainability,**

- **The VCS is supported in making a valued and effective contribution to policy development across Government,**

- **There is increased VCS participation across NI and improved community development/engagement,**

- **There are improved working relationships, better collaboration and more effective partnerships across the VCS.**

4.4     Funding arrangements under the RISP will reflect the high level policy outcomes identified for the programme, taking account of key challenges and priorities for the VCS. It is recognised that the priorities

and challenges facing the VCS can change over a period of time, and therefore, this programme needs to remain flexible to respond to this. Accordingly, whilst the high level outcomes identified above will remain in place for the duration of this programme, lower level outcomes and targets will be negotiated as part of any funding arrangements, taking account of priorities and challenges in existence at a particular time. Such outcomes and targets should be:-

- Specific,
- Measurable,
- Achievable,
- Realistic, and;
- Timebound.

## 5.    PRIORITY FUNCTIONS

5.1    Functions are described as those actions or activities which contribute to the delivery of the outcomes for the programme, in turn helping to make the vision a reality. For this programme priority *"Functions"* are described as those which are likely to be needed by all or most voluntary and community organisations (generic activities) provided on a Northern Ireland wide level, and which are key to achieving the desired outcomes for the programme.

5.2    Whilst it is recognised that some organisations may need specific support linked to a particular theme or delivery of a particular DSD policy or strategy, this support will not be provided for under the Regional Infrastructure Support Programme. The need for such specific "thematic" support will be considered separately as part of the arrangements for the delivery or implementation of a particular policy or strategy e.g. volunteering or voluntary advice. Functions that fall within the remit of other Government Departments will not be supported by this programme.

> **The priority functions for this programme, in no particular order, are identified as;**
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> - **Lead the development of an investment/sustainability strategy for the VCS,**
> - **Leadership to and representation on behalf of the VCS,**
> - **Promoting/disseminating best practice,**
> - **Assisting the sector to maximise impact across the VCS**
> - **Support for training and workforce management for staff at all levels and Board/Committee members,**
> - **Support for organisational development,**
> - **Promote collaboration, mergers and networking,**
> - **Support (but not provision) for Finance, Governance and Quality Assurance,**
> - **Supporting service improvement,**
> - **Supporting monitoring and evaluation,**
> - **Advice on funding, income generation and sustainability, in particular the opportunities afforded by social economy and development trust approaches,**
> - **Conducting research relevant to the needs of the Sector and Government priorities,**
> - **Influencing the development of Government policy,**
> - **Support for change management arising from impacts such as RPA and other governance changes.**

## 6.   ELIGIBILITY / FUNDING CRITERION

6.1   To deliver the RISP, DSD will seek to engage a strategic partner or consortium capable of providing the identified support to the VCS across Northern Ireland.  Where a number of organisations come together to work and provide services as part of a consortium, the Department may only accept a single application for funding on behalf of the consortium in order to promote collaboration, reduce gaps in and avoid duplication of provision.

6.2   **The eligibility criteria for this programme are identified as:**

**DSD will seek to engage a strategic partner/consortium, who can provide equitable coverage across all of Northern Ireland (in both urban and rural areas) who can best demonstrate that they meet the following criterion, in no particular order of importance;**

- **Demonstrate that they have the capacity and expertise to deliver the identified functions across the whole of Northern Ireland,**
- **Demonstrate that they provide services that are value for money,**
- **Demonstrate they have the flexibility to provide services outside office hours and at weekends,**
- **A proven capacity for working in partnership/collaboration with others to avoid duplication,**
- **A proven ability to engage across the voluntary and community sector and with communities across NI,**
- **Target activities to tackle disadvantage,**
- **Demonstrate that they meet section 75 obligations,**
- **Identify and target unmet need and potential,**
- **Specify and provide evidence of outcomes and impact,**
- **Demonstrate administrative efficiency,**
- **Show planning for continuous improvement in quality and reach,**
- **Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the need for the wide range of services required by the VCS,**
- **A proven track record of working with local councils, and central government in NI to support the delivery of local services.**

**7. PROGRAMME REVIEW, MONITORING AND EVALUATION**

7.1     At a strategic level, the RISP will be reviewed periodically to take account of changing;

- Programme For Government; and
- Comprehensive Spending Review.

7.2     At project level within the programme, review and evaluation will be completed in accordance with normal DSD procedures.