

▶ strategy 2001-2006



▶ | Rural Development Council (NI)
Strategy 2001-2006



► | Chairman's Foreword.

In December 2000 my Council hosted a major consultation conference, addressed by Minister Rodgers, on its future strategy and operational plan. This was followed by extensive consultation over a three-month period with a range of stakeholders.

In response to the needs and demands of rural areas, which have been articulated by many of our consultees and the client base with which we have worked over the last ten years, we anticipate a major shift in direction for Council and its work. This shift, as part of overall project support and grant aid, will see us move away from generic capacity building or community development towards the provision of a range of more targeted technical and development support to the community and voluntary sector. This will be supplemented with a strong focus on policy advice and supported through Northern Ireland's first Rural Baseline. We will also engage in the delivery of further peace monies in association with our partner, the Rural Community Network.

My Council has fully embraced the concepts of Equality and Targeting Social Need, having produced and consulted widely upon our first Equality Scheme and TSN Action Plan. I know these will have significant impact upon how grant aid and all other aspects of our work is allocated over the new programme period.

None of this could be achieved without an efficient and effective management structure and I am glad to report that the significant changes to our organisational structure have prepared us for this new strategic period.

I am delighted to present the Council's Strategy and look forward to reporting on the future impact that our activities and programmes are having on Northern Ireland's rural communities.

Joanna McVey
Chair RDC

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1 | Introduction

This is the Rural Development Council's (RDC) Strategy for the period 2001-2006. It is the result of extensive consultation with a range of rural stakeholders and negotiation with the Council's funding partners, particularly the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Special European Union Programmes Body.

The Strategy has been formally approved and represents how the organisation intends to carry out its business over the coming years and achieve its Strategic Vision of; -

“A rural Northern Ireland, which makes a full and balanced contribution to the development of the region”

2 | Background

The Rural Development Council was established in 1991 as an independent organisation under the Department of Agriculture's Rural Development Programme for Northern Ireland. As a key element in the delivery of that programme the RDC exists to address the needs of deprived rural areas in Northern Ireland.

The RDC is a company limited by guarantee and has a membership of sixteen, although this is currently under review and may result in an increase in the number of Council Members. These Company Directors represent a broad sectoral and geographical mix of rural interest groups.

Under the 1994-99 Rural Development Programme (RDP) the RDC was principally involved in the delivery of support services to organisations that involved local people in planning and regeneration projects which met real needs in disadvantaged rural communities. These activities included:

- the establishment and management of a specific rural focused Intermediary Funding Body under the EU Special Programme for Peace and Reconciliation.
- the development and management of two specific programmes focused on the private sector under the EU LEADER Programme.
- the development and management of a specialised project planning service (PLANET) for community groups under the SPARD Programme.
- the development and management of a Geographic Information Service (GIS) under the SPARD programme.

- the establishment of a number of research based and innovative new pilot projects specifically relevant to rural communities.
- responding to and advising rural organisations on the impact of regional development policy.

DRIVERS FOR CHANGE

Rural Northern Ireland is facing considerable change and subsequently the RDC has shaped its strategy in response to this changing environment.

Drivers for change include:

- the implementation of Agenda 2000 reforms, including Rural Development regulations.
- the need for the sustainable management of large parts of the rural environment in a way that protects habitats, species, water and air quality and key elements of the built environment.
- the need to recognise both the opportunities for recreation, conservation and the public good, and the importance agriculture and its management, has on the rural environment.
- the pace of technological change, including application of ICT and production efficiency improvements.
- organisational development and change i.e. modernising government including the re-organisation of government departments in Northern Ireland since devolution and the rationalisation of Public Sector Administration.
- over-arching, cross-cutting government policies such as targeting social need, human rights and the equality agenda.
- growing emphasis on the pursuit of co-operation with other regional public bodies on issues of common interest.
- potential out migration of young people from disadvantaged rural areas.
- the impact of an ageing population on all aspects of rural life.
- ongoing community division in Northern Ireland, which subsequently affects inward investment.
- global market and competitive pressures on the agricultural sector and the continuing negative impact on the current economic sustainability of farming.
- the impact of external influences on traditional rural industries and services.
- Government's commitment to Rural-proofing, whereby actions and decisions of all parts of Government are assessed for their rural impact.
- the future resource implications of the European Union funding provision post transitional status for Northern Ireland.
- Government's commitment to producing a strategy for sustainable development.
- the social implications of changes in the economic structure of the rural area.

3 | The role of the RDC in Rural Development

The RDC is one of the core delivery agents in the Rural Development Programme launched by the Minister for Agriculture & Rural Development in November 2001.

The Rural Development Programme has 5 key elements:

- Building the Capacity of rural communities;
- Local Regeneration Projects and Programmes;
- Sectoral and Area Regeneration Projects and Programmes;
- Micro-business Development;
- Natural Resource Rural Tourism.

RDC will deliver 3 distinct programmes within this Programme:

- Local Regeneration projects and programmes for the community based not-for-profit sector;
- A rural Peace programme;
- A Policy & Rural Baselining Programme.

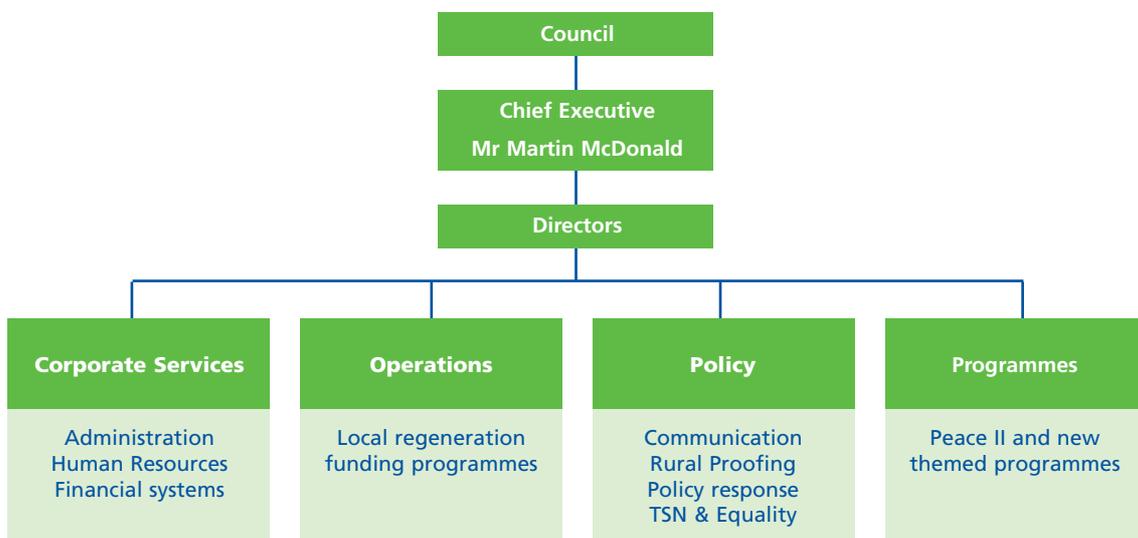
In the implementation of these programmes, RDC will work with the following rural stakeholders:

- Community groups, collectives and individuals in rural areas;
- Other rural development organisations and networks within Northern Ireland, Great Britain, the Republic of Ireland, and Europe;
- Local government;
- Regional government including the Northern Ireland Assembly, Government Departments (primarily DARD) and other statutory agencies;
- The Rural Community Network and Rural Support Networks;
- Other funding organisations (e.g. International Fund for Ireland and Community Fund) including those delivering European Union programmes (e.g. District Partnership Boards, LEADER Groups);
- The media.

However, RDC's primary target client base will be:

- Non-profit taking rural community groups and collectives.

As the RDC reached the end of the previous strategy period, it was felt appropriate to undertake an organisational review, which would re-structure the staffing framework and formulate a more appropriate corporate response to the new funding opportunities. While the corporate governing body, the Council, has remained largely similar, the officers of the Council have been re-arranged under 4 functional directorates, each reporting to the Council through their respective sub-committees. This new structure is represented below.



RDC Council Members		
Name	Nominating Body	Areas of Special Interest
Ms Joanna McVey (Chairman)	Department of Agriculture & Rural Development appointee	Enterprise, Private Sector
Mr David Graham (Vice-Chairman)	Department of Agriculture & Rural Development appointee	Agriculture, Enterprise Environment, Transport
Ms Susan Christie (Secretary)	Northern Ireland Environment Link nominee	Agriculture, Environment Health, Transport
Mr Eugene Carson	Department of Agriculture & Rural Development appointee	Agriculture, Enterprise Environment, Health
Mr Gerard McGuckin	Department of Agriculture & Rural Development appointee	Education, Enterprise Training, Youth
Mr Robert Henderson	Department of Agriculture & Rural Development appointee	Agriculture, Enterprise Environment, Training Youth
Mr Peadar Montague	Northern Ireland LEADER Network nominee	Agriculture, Environment Youth
Mr Leslie Craig	NIAPA nominee	Agriculture, Education Environment, Rural Development, Training
Mr Jim Ledwith	Rural Community Network nominee	Traditional Arts & Culture Rural Community Development
Ms Caroline Breakey	Department of Agriculture & Rural Development appointee	Arts & Culture, Education, Health, Training, Transport Women, Youth
Mr Albert Wallace	UFU nominee	Agriculture, Education, Enterprise, Environment Training, Youth
Mr Isaac Hanna	Rural Support Networks nominee	Education, Environment, Health
Ms Monica Coyle	Rural Community Network nominee	Agriculture, Education, Enterprise, Health, Training, Women
Mr. John Dallat	Coleraine Borough Council nominee	Agriculture, Youth, Women, Enterprise
Sidney Anderson	Craigavon Borough Council nominee	Agriculture, Education, Health
Stephen Huggett	Fermanagh District Council nominee	Agriculture, Enterprise, Environment, Health, Transport, Women
David McAllister	Moyle District Council nominee	Arts & Culture, Training, Youth

Council Membership is currently being reviewed. It is anticipated that this review may result in an increase in membership.

4 | Values & Principles

The RDC has defined its future vision and strategic objectives based on the following values and principles.

- Spatial Equity
- Social Inclusion
- Respecting Difference
- Targeting Social Need
- Valuing the Social Resource
- Valuing the Environment
- Valuing People
- Innovation
- Partnership
- Public Service.

5 | Core Corporate Objectives

These principles and values have been applied in the development of the Council's core corporate objective, which is:

“To enable rural Northern Ireland to realise its potential through influencing policy, developing and delivering practical programmes, sharing information and building effective partnerships.”

However, at an operational level, this core objective has been distilled into a number of strategic priorities and sub-objectives.

Strategic priorities and sub-objectives

A centre for rural expertise	A diverse & prosperous countryside	An efficient and efficient organisation
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 To increase the RDC's influence in integrating rural development principles and values into regional policy and decision making through a process of Rural Proofing. 2 To consider and promote strategies for sustainable rural development through the establishment of a rural baseline initiative. 3 To strengthen rural development partnerships by the provision of strategic support. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 To contribute towards the development of a vibrant rural economy. 2 To increase the capacity of local organisations to implement rural regeneration projects and programmes. 3 To enhance the employability of disadvantaged groups. 4 To sustain and develop rural environmental resources. 5 To promote peace and reconciliation in rural areas. 6 To contribute to the enhancement of rural tourism. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 To integrate the principles of quality, best value, equality and TSN into the planning and delivery of all activities. 2 To ensure a sustainable financial base for the organisation. 3 To manage and develop staff as a key organisational resource. 4 To ensure the highest standards of corporate governance and public accountability. 5 To communicate with all our stakeholders on the principles, plans and performance of the RDC. 6 To develop and implement an appropriate corporate ICT strategy.

This Strategic Framework can be directly linked to the Council's intended activities. This is presented in Appendix A.

6 | Activities & Programmes

6.1 LOCAL REGENERATION PROGRAMME

A measure under the Rural Development Programme.

The main aim of the Programme is:

“To contribute to the sustainable improvement of economic, environmental and social conditions in disadvantaged rural communities through the implementation of regeneration projects and programmes.”

In keeping with the RDC’s belief that rural communities are themselves best placed to identify their needs and propose solutions, the Council has designed this Programme under three measures which fit within the strategic objectives of the Rural Development Programme.

- Access to Services
- Prosperous Environment
- Local Economy

This grant programme will offer financial & technical assistance to successful groups. Grants of up to £150,000 at a maximum rate of 75% will be available (although technical support costs may be funded at up to 100%)

It will also be open to small or new organisations needing small amounts of money. A proportion of the budget has been earmarked for this.

6.2 RURAL PEACE PROGRAMME

A programme under the Peace II programme for Northern Ireland.

The overall aim of the Rural Peace Programme reflects that of the Community Support Framework:

“To contribute to the creation of a more peaceful, prosperous and stable rural society through processes of economic and social renewal”

The RDC will act in partnership with the Rural Community Network (RCN) as a rural intermediary funding body for the Peace II programme

The RDC proposes to implement three measures under the rural peace programme:

- Peaceful Environment
- Local Identity Culture & Heritage
- Rural ICT

This grant programme will offer financial & technical assistance to successful groups. Grants of up to £50,000 at a maximum rate of 95% will be available (although technical support activities may be funded at up to 100%).

Two further measures will be operated as programmes rather than funding opportunities.

These include;

- Rural Retail Programme
- Part Time Rural Jobs Programme

7 | Monitoring & Strategic Indicators

6.3 RURAL POLICY PROOFING

Services administered under the Rural Development Programme.

Rural Baselineing

Building on the existing resources and capabilities of the organisation in respect of its successful Small Area Geographic Information Service (SAGIS) and participatory planning models and structures developed under the Learning Communities programme, the RDC intends to deliver a programme that will inform and support the concept of Rural Proofing of regional programmes. This will be delivered by a four strand approach:

1. Collation of secondary data within the framework of the Noble Review of Social Deprivation;
2. Collation of primary data from a network of rural focus groups developed under the Learning Communities programme;
3. Co-ordination of a number of specific sectoral research projects in response to emerging debates in the rural sector;
4. Innovation, monitoring or environmental scanning of relevant new rural programmes and projects that impact on rural policy.

Under the third strand it is the intention of the RDC to make available a limited number of small Policy Study Awards (maximum £10,000) to interested and relevant groups or organisations.

The RDC will establish and maintain a comprehensive monitoring framework, which will facilitate the continuous improvement of the organisation's performance and practice. The monitoring framework is also central to ensuring public accountability and the promotion of the RDC's roles and activities to external stakeholders.

Specifically this framework will record outputs, results, and impacts at three levels. It will:

- Measure the impact of the RDC's intervention in the rural areas against targets set by DARD under the Rural Development Programme and the SEUPB under the Peace II programme (Programme indicators);
- Provide information on impacts of its programmes, policies and activities with regard to our statutory duties on Equality and Targeting Social Need (TSN) (Statutory indicators);
- Provide information, which will facilitate the continuous improvement in the RDC's performance and practice towards the achievement of our corporate objectives (Corporate indicators).

The level of performance against these indicators will be determined by the level of resources secured from RDC's funding bodies.

Information will be collected by the following:

- By Equality grouping (9 groupings);
- By Geographic Boundary (Council area);
- By Cultural Identity (where known and relevant);
- By RDP Priority group (i.e. Women, Youth, Long term Unemployed, Farm families);
- By sector (i.e. Economic, Social, Environmental);
- By Business Size (Micro, SME, Sole trader);
- By RDP element;
- By Funding Source;
- By Rural Development Regulation Indent;
- By Peace and Reconciliation dimension.

Activity	Output	Result	Impact
Project activity	No. of Projects supported	No. and value of Projects completed and operational	% of people who believe their overall environment has improved
	Value of projects supported	Value of Co-Funding levered into programmes	
Community Involvement	No. of Community Groups involved in programmes	Level of access provided to new Community facilities	% of people who believe their social environment has improved
		Level of access used in new Community facilities	
New Business Activity	No. of new Businesses Created and Safeguarded	No. of new full time equivalent jobs created Value of reported trading profit from new businesses in year 1	% of new SMEs still in business after 1 year as a result of programme intervention
Training	No. of Training programmes Supported	No of persons with recognised qualifications	% of people with improved skills
	No. of persons participating in training programme.		% participation in lifelong learning
	No. of community groups provided with project development support	No. of groups fulfilling the obligations of their funding contract.	% of projects which continue to meet their objectives
Employment	No. of new Jobs created (by Seasonal, Part time, Full time)	Full time equivalent jobs created Full time equivalent jobs safeguarded	% of people still in employment after 1 year as a result of programme intervention
Environmental	No. of projects supported relevant to the natural & physical and sustainable living environment	No. of sites (historic, archaeological, and cultural) maintained	% of people who believe their natural environment has improved
		No. of sites (historic, archaeological, and cultural) enhanced	
		No. of sites (fragile or high value) maintained	
		No. of sites (fragile or high value) enhanced	
		No. of Sustainable living projects created or enhanced	

Appendix A

Corporate Objectives and Associated Activities

Objective	Indicative Actions
To increase the RDC's influence in integrating rural development principles and values into regional policy and decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public policy statements issued by RDC with our partners in response to select government bodies; RDC's participation on key policy forums; Publication of rural information to inform policy discussions and facilitate Rural Proofing of regional programmes.
To research and promote strategies for sustainable development (within the context of the N.I. Sustainable Development Strategy)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of monitoring and evaluation frameworks; Joint action research programmes with other organisations;
To strengthen rural development partnerships by the provision of strategic support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programme developed and implemented to provide technical and strategic advice to partnerships ; Development of GIS system.

Realising the Potential - A Diverse and Prosperous Countryside

Objective	Indicative Actions
To contribute towards the development of a vibrant rural economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programmes and associated sub measures to support rural social economy; Development and implementation of the Local Regeneration Measures of the Building Sustainable Prosperity programme.
To increase capacity of local organisations to engage in rural regeneration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programmes and resources to assist groups develop their competencies, capabilities and capacity; Management of grants delivery programmes.
To enhance the employability of disadvantaged groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programme to enhance employability of target groups (as per European structural fund performance targets and indicators).
To sustain and develop rural environmental resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To ensure that environmental sustainability criteria are used in all programmes and activities.
To promote peace and reconciliation in rural areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To establish a Rural IFB under the EUSPPR with appropriate measures and activities to promote peace and reconciliation; To apply the principles of peace & reconciliation across the organisation.
To contribute to the enhancement of rural tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programme to promote rural tourism and associated marketing activities.

Organisational Development - An Efficient and Effective Organisation

Objective	Indicative Actions
To integrate the principles of quality, best value, equality and TSN into the planning and delivery of all activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adoption of appropriate “best value”, TSN and Equality practices; • Development of organisational operational manual; • Development of internal management information systems.
To ensure a sustainable financial base for the organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publication of unqualified annual accounts each year; • Satisfactory internal audit reports; • Agreed annual budget by 31 December each year.
To manage and develop staff as a key organisational resource	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor & evaluate the review of organisational structure; • Staff development plan; • Accreditation of staff management practices.
To ensure the highest standards of corporate governance and public accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate strategy agreed and approved for publication; • Review of membership and structure of Council; • Publication of business plan, annual plan and reports; • A training and development programme for Council members.
To disseminate information about the principles, plans and performance of the RDC to all stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publication of corporate strategy; • Publication of annual plans and reports; • Development of conference programme; • Development of regular publications; • Develop mechanism of consultation with key stakeholders.
To develop and implement an appropriate Corporate ICT strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development and maintenance of a RDC web site; • Delivery of specific services on-line.



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