**Appendix 1 – Question 3D**

The needs of people in rural areas were provided within the Corporate Plan public consultation, in particular feedback from the general public highlighted rural isolation as a reoccurring theme, council staff feedback highlighted the need for a diversity of opportunities in rural areas. Rural isolation was a was also a key theme to address within the feedback from governing bodies.

Sport NI engaged with Councils and Community Planning representatives from rural areas, and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs around the theme of rural isolation; to consider its impacts. The key considerations were that some governing bodies of sport and their clubs’ reach was very limited in the West, as was their interaction with Councils. Equally GBs in full as public document were calling for more strategic engagement with Councils. Club offerings were limited in rurally isolate areas to only some selected sports, limiting choice for participants. However, it was recognised that club facility provision and maintenance would be problematic with limited users and the effective management and use of existing assets was critical. The utilisation and effective management of the natural environment for sport in rural and coastal areas was important. Volunteer capacity in rural areas was raised by lead experts as a significant issue, who also supported a Volunteer Strategy.

The EQIA for the Corporate Plan references Sport NI’s four cornerstones required for an equitable and inclusive sports system highlighting need to target sport in rural areas. The feedback from focus groups highlighted those from rural areas described the challenges they faced such as lack of choice of sports, transport issues and social isolation’

‘Increased promotion of the sport and physical activity options available in local communities, particularly in rural areas - many participants explained they believed there are opportunities out there, but they were unsure where to look.

The DAERA Key Rural Issues Northern Ireland 2023 document highlights the issues of people living in rural areas in relation to a number of domains. The evidence shows that on average people living in rural areas travel 2.7 miles more than those living in urban areas. (6.9 miles compared to 4.2 miles) Additionally, people in rural areas travelled more per year when participating in sport (157 miles compared to 112 for those in urban areas). The report also highlights the issues that people who live in rural areas have in relation to access to public transport, which is important for those that do not drive that wish to visit recreation centers for example nearly 40% of people need to walk more than 15 minutes to get access to public transport. Frequency of public transport has also been highlighted in this document, 69% of urban dwellers have access to public transport at least once every hour whilst only 19% of rural dwellers have this regularity. The document highlights that those living in extreme rural areas e.g. more than an hour from Belfast at more likely to be associated with relative and absolute poverty. This becomes an issue when you consider the additional cost required to access sporting opportunities.

The DAERA consultation on their Rural Policy Framework included questions around the challenges and opportunities for people living in rural areas and feedback included issues around access to public services and recreation spaces, transport and infrastructure and access to health and wellbeing services. Respondents also noted that Health and wellbeing through enhanced participation in physical activity in the outdoors is another key opportunity

The information provided highlights the issues facing people living in rural areas. Obviously better access in relation to public transport would help but creating more sporting opportunities in rural areas would also help. Special Olympics Ireland contribute to this by ensuring events, competitions and health and wellbeing initiatives are scheduled not only in urban areas but also where possible in rural areas.