

DARD Direct Interview Notes

Organisation: Rural Development Council
Contact: Martin McDonald
Date: 27th August 2008

Have we accurately captured the impacts of the implementation of the DARD Direct proposal on farmers and farm families / DARD staff for each of the section 75 categories?

- It could be seen from the original DARD estate that service may not be sustainable, and that provision will need to be addressed at some stage, DARD Direct could be ideal for this.
- It is important that the impact of DARD Direct is assessed in terms of both customers and staff.
- There is nothing to suggest that DARD Direct would impact negatively on one particular Section 75 group
- The positive consensus of customers in terms of the DARD Direct principle acts as a form of 'rural proofing' and that it should be a positive move.
- The potential choices for office locations illustrated in the consultation document shouldn't have an overly negative impact on staff.

What other impacts do you feel may be experienced by farmers and farm families / DARD staff through the implementation of the DARD Direct proposal?

- DARD Direct may face issues in its roll out as the department does not own any of the buildings, and as such this will influence and limit the choice of possible locations.
- There may be very few race issues, migrant workers are important in terms of agricultural labour but at present the majority may not be using DARD offices.
- Opening hours will need to be addressed, outside of core 9-5 hours – evening versus Saturday.
- DARD will need to assess whether there is a public expectation to have a DARD Direct office within each RPA area and it may be beneficial to examine actions taken by PSNI in rolling out their new command centres.

What other mitigating actions do you feel we should consider to minimise any impact on farmers and farm families / DARD staff?

- Equality training for staff
- Will have to clarify that any job losses incurred are a product of the Comprehensive Spending Review and not a result of DARD Direct.
- DARD will need to look at the delivery of their service at each office, in terms of the quota of staff for each service line – whether this will be uniform or custom to the area.
- It would be beneficial to have specialists on site at DARD Direct offices on predetermined days of the week.

