



OMAGH FORUM
FOR RURAL ASSOCIATIONS

Annual Report 2023– 2024

34th Annual General Meeting

5th November 2024

Hosted by Ecclesville LOL 34

Fintona Orange Hall



Our staff



The staff team: L-R Kerrie Grugan - Social Prescriber, Alaine Ward - Monitoring and Finance Officer, Tiernach Mahon, - OHLN Co-ordinator and Rural Development Officer, Mary T Conway - Network Manager and Claudine Devenney - Admin Officer

Omagh Forum for Rural Associations Trustees Annual Report

Period ended 31 March 2024

The trustees, who are also the directors for the purposes of company law, present their report of the charity for the Period ended 31 March 2024.

Registered charity name Omagh Forum for Rural Associations

Charity registration number 100098

Company registration number NI042973

Principal office and registered office
Omagh Community House
2 Drumragh Avenue
Omagh
Co Tyrone
BT78 1DP

The trustees

Ann Doherty
Dympna McCann
George Kerr
Monica Coyle
Briege Kelly
Cathal McEnhill
Gerry McCaffrey
Ann McSorley
Audrey Adams
Conor Keys
Louise Leonard
Kenny Fisher

Independent examiner Nial Colhoun

Chairperson's report

It is my pleasure to once again present the annual report for Omagh Forum for Rural Associations, a detailed document focussing on the great work carried out by our staff in the year to April 2024.

Each year seems to throw up a new crisis with the pressure on our Health Service showing no signs of abating and the cost of living crisis still affecting many families. These issues impact directly on many of the services we deliver but we continue to be a leading voice for the many rural groups we support through advice, training and funding opportunities.

This time last year, we were about to embark on a new DAERA contract delivered through a new partnership agreement with Fermanagh Rural Community Network. Whilst it was a short 11-month contract, it did pave the way for a more secure contract arrangement and we are pleased that it has been extended for another year. I would like to pay tribute to the staff of both OFRA and FRCN for their commitment to delivering this service for the benefit of all our rural community groups.

We also partnered with FRCN and a number of other organisations in delivering the WRAP project on behalf of FODC – a project offering financial support to families in need. This was quite a demanding project but staff responded to the challenge, providing much-needed help to families over the winter months.

Omagh Healthy Living Network has just completed the first year of its four-year term and has been very successful – consistently outperforming targets. The hard work and professional approach by the team is commendable with its benefits addressing a major health and well-being service gap in the wider Omagh area.

Whilst we always appreciate the work of our staff, I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of the Board of Directors of OFRA to publicly thank our dedicated and hardworking team, Network Manager Mary T Conway and Administrator Claudine Devenney, the Healthy Living Network team led by Tiernach Mahon along with Kerrie Grugan and Alaine Ward and a warm welcome to our newest team member, Catherine McManus, who joined the OHLN in September.

I would also like to thank my fellow board members who give their time freely and are a great support to myself and to the staff. And finally thank you to our funders, detailed further in the report, who support the delivery of our work.

I would encourage any rural community in our area to get in contact with us to see how we can offer support. For more information on our work please visit our website www.omaghforum.org or follow us on Facebook or X (twitter) @ofrarsn.



Gerry McCaffrey

Structure, governance and management

i) Governing document

Omagh Forum for Rural Associations is a Company Limited by guarantee, incorporated on 16th April 2002, and registered as a charity with the Charity Commission for N Ireland on 30th May 2014. The governing document of the charity is a Memorandum & Articles of Association which sets out the objects and powers of the charitable company.

ii) Recruitment and appointment of management committee

The directors of the company are also trustees for the purposes of charity law. Under the requirements of the Memorandum and Articles of Association the management committee is elected for a year and must have between five and fifteen directors.

iii) Trustees' induction and training

An induction pack is available for new directors, and they are taken through this prior to them joining the management committee. Many new directors will already be aware of the work of the organisation through the regular mail outs to member groups' and one to one support to groups.

iv) Risk management

The management committee take risk management seriously and have in place a series of policies and procedures about how the organisation should be managed. Internal control risks are minimised by the implementation of procedures for authorisation of all transactions and projects. Procedures are in place to ensure compliance with health and safety of staff, volunteers and visitors.

v) Organisational structure

Omagh Forum has a management committee of twelve trustees, eleven of whom are Directors of the company, and one is an advisor with no voting rights. The committee meet monthly with the exception of August and are responsible for the strategic direction and policy of the charity.

Day to day responsibility for the provision of services rests with the Network Manager, with an administrator supporting the community development work. The Network Manager has responsibility for ensuring that the charity delivers the services specified and that key targets are met particularly in relation to the operational plan for services being delivered for the main funder, the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA). Omagh

Healthy Living Network is a project within Omagh Forum receiving funding this year from the National Lottery Community Fund for four years. Three staff were employed in the financial year 23-24, a Co-ordinator, a Social Prescribing Link worker and a Monitoring and Finance officer.

Objectives and activities

The company's objective and principal activity is to provide development support to rural community groups in the Fermanagh and Omagh district. They do this by:

- a) The advancement of community development in Northern Ireland but particularly in the Fermanagh and Omagh District Council area (the area of benefit) and in particular the promotion of the community and voluntary sector for the benefit of the public by providing services, training, support, information, facilities and amenities to community and voluntary groups and encouraging and assisting such groups and organisations to cooperate to achieve their aims.
- b) To develop the capacity and skills of residents of communities in the area of benefit that suffer social and economic disadvantage in such a way that they are better able to identify and help meet their needs and participate more fully in society.
- c) The advancement of health and wellbeing.
- d) The advancement of any other exclusively charitable purpose as the trustees may decide in accordance with the law of charity in Northern Ireland.

We have referred to the guidance contained in the Charity Commission's general guidance on public benefit when reviewing our aims and objectives and in planning our future activities.

Annual Report 2023-2024

For the first part of the financial year Omagh Forum continued to deliver the South West Rural Community Development Service, working with groups across the Fermanagh and Omagh District Council area. Mid-year we tendered for a new contract with Fermanagh Rural Community Network which began on 1st November 2023 with Omagh Forum as the lead partner.

This is the core work of Omagh Forum, funded by DAERA – the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, through the TRPSI Programme (Tackling Rural Poverty and Isolation). We still deliver MMC, Marginalised Minority Communities in Rural Border Areas but we had no Rural Micro Capital Grants Programme this year.

Having this core work enables us to deliver other smaller scales programmes such as Hunters Hill and Slieve Divena Wind Farm Community Benefit Funds and to develop new initiatives, which we did this year with Omagh Healthy Living Network, and work on new initiatives such as the WRAP Programme and so on. We will look at each in turn.

Rural Community Development Support Service

The new DAERA tender was published in August 2023 and officers and staff from Omagh Forum for Rural Associations met with Fermanagh Rural Community Network to discuss submitting a joint bid for the area which we subsequently did on 20th September and the new contract began on 1st November 2023.

Omagh Forum staff continue to help groups with various capacity building needs under the themes of Community Planning; Isolated Rural People; Sustainability for Rural Villages and MMC - Marginalised Minority Communities in Rural Border Areas.

This takes the form mainly of one to one meetings with groups in their premises or our office in Omagh. We also talk by phone or over zoom. The most common supports are:

Governance issues such as the role of officers on a committee; changes to governing documents; changes to organisational structure such as changing from an Unincorporated Association to a Co Ltd by Guarantee; succession planning for Officers, etc.

Funding – over the year we provided six funding ebulletins packed with information on grants and other useful support; we can't complete an application form for a group, but we have helped many to talk through an application; identify a funder and review applications.

Information provision – we issue ebulletins approx. once a fortnight to almost 1,200 recipients who are group members or organisations working in the community and voluntary sector. We also regularly post on social media.

Poverty – this year we saw the challenges groups faced with cost-of-living increases and reductions in funding meaning groups had to dip into reserves and some even decided to wind up their organisations.

FODC Community Plan - We encourage groups to link into the Fermanagh and Omagh Community Plan and staff are represented on the Fermanagh and Omagh CVS Forum

Group activity – We help groups consider how they might diversify their activities and meet the needs of the community they serve.

Omagh Forum staff and Directors met the new Director of Rural Affairs, Teresa O'Neill, from DAERA in the Lough Neagh Discovery Centre on 27th June 2023 with the other Rural Support Networks and DAERA staff. She was new to the work of the Rural Support Networks (RSN's) and to community development and was impressed with what we do. A representative from Seskinore Rural Community Group came along to speak of the work of their group and how Omagh Forum helped them.

Rural Micro Capital Grants Programme

There was no programme this financial year however staff were working on claims from the 2022 programme well into June 2023. There were a total of 181 completed projects in the FODC area to the value of £314,434 and there were 34,503 total project beneficiaries.

MMC, Marginalised Minority Communities in Rural Border Areas

Tiernach organised a visit for members of the MMC Community on 18th November 2023. Kirlish Ulster Scots travelled to the Battle of the Boyne sites and interpretative centre. A representative of Tievemore LOL led the tour and gave a very interesting insight into the history of the battle, its impact on Ireland at the time and the setting up of the interpretive centre. The 25 attendees found it most informative with this being the first time the majority had been to the Boyne. Several young people took part, and they found it most interesting. Thanks to Tom Buchannan MLA for his help in organising. This visit was funded by the Department of Foreign affairs (DfA).

Omagh Healthy Living Network

Omagh Healthy Living Network was formally launched on 17th May 2023 and was a great celebration of the efforts that went into its development.



The funding of £499,595 from the National Lottery Community Fund is for the delivery of a range of health promotion programmes across the rural and urban areas of Omagh as well as the roll out of Social Prescribing.

Launch of Omagh Healthy Living Network

Three new jobs were created this year, and the following took up appointment in September 2023: Tiernach Mahon as Co-ordinator; Kerrie Grugan as Social Prescriber and Alaine Ward as Monitoring and Finance Officer.

Omagh Healthy Living had a very productive and successful first year - 37 people availed of our social prescribing service (41 predicted), 211 people attended our programmes (200 predicted) and 359 people availed of information sessions (155 predicted) so we met our targets. Examples include Links to Wellbeing in September, with 14 participants and Transform your Trolley in November hosted by Gortin Men's Shed with 13 participants. Links To



Living with Menopause Information Session

Wellbeing commenced in Dromore in March 2024, in conjunction with Dromore & Trillick GP Practice, as did Smoking Cessation in Fintona on 13th March. During the year we identified areas of health inequalities and need and have addressed them when possible. For example the very successful event we held based around Living with Menopause and the follow-on programme 'Your Time To Thrive'. We were asked to be involved in helping to develop a Traveller led Omagh Traveller group in conjunction with FODC and the Western Trust.

Other areas identified will be addressed over the coming year using relationships built up with other voluntary and statutory organisations. During the first year we also developed our branding and building our name within the local community, local groups, the voluntary and community sector and the statutory organisations.

Hunters Hill and Slieve Divena Wind Farm Community Benefit Funds

We have been operating these two Funds for many years now and they provide great financial support to the groups in the catchment area. We bring together a panel, including external representation, to assess the applications. See below some successful projects

- Slieve Divena opened for applications on 27th March 2023 and closed on Monday 17 April 2023 with a large number of applications. 15 groups were successful with an allocation of £15,104. Claims were to be submitted by 30th November 2023.

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- Hunters Hill opened on 1st June 2023 and closed on Monday 23rd June. The Fund was way over subscribed with 23 applications looking £68,022. After the panel assessment there were 14 successful groups to a value of £23,915.48. Claims were to be submitted by 31 January 2024.



Successful projects from the Wind Farm Community Benefit Funds

Tackling Poverty

This is an important context for the work we do in both the community development and Healthy Living Network aspects of Omagh Forum.

1 WRAP – Western Response and Action on Poverty

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council issued a tender, through funding from the Department of Communities, for a Food Poverty – Financial and Wraparound Support programme. We became a partner with Fermanagh Rural Community Network leading a consortium of six organisations, also including Lakeland Community Care Limited; Erne East Community Partnership-OAK Healthy Living Centre; ARC Healthy Living Centre; and The Courthouse Kesh Limited.

The programme began on 21st November 2023 and across the district a total of 143 households comprising 411 individuals received direct support to maximise income and reduce household costs. Highlights were: 39 households to St Vincent de Paul and British Red Cross for emergency fuel support; 69 households were referred to independent advice services based in the district, primarily for benefit advice and entitlement checks; 70 households were referred to the Housing Executive oil saving club and 60 were referred to the

Affordable Warmth Scheme. Other advice was provided on budgeting, healthy eating, housing, physical and mental health referral, and education, training and volunteering opportunities to enhance employability skills.

Omagh Forum staff worked with 52 families in the Omagh area with face to face visits and telephone calls over an 8 week period November '23 – March '24. The visits highlighted the many issues that families / individuals are facing like very poor mental health, social anxiety and struggles to pay bills.

2 Emergency Relief Cost of Living Initiative

We delivered this initiative in the Omagh area which involved the provision of assistance to those in urgent need of help to cover the cost of electricity. It lasted from October 2023 through to March 2024, targeting 14,400+ households across N Ireland with funding from a large charity. We supported 34 households in the Omagh area with electricity costs with a monetary value of £6,800, and this was a great support to people, one participant said “I am employed but on a low wage, my husband can’t work due to ill health, and we are expecting our second child so it would be great to get this help, I won’t have to worry so much ...”

3 FODC Anti-Poverty Strategy working group.

Omagh Forum is part of this group who are meeting to draft a strategy and action plan for the Fermanagh and Omagh area. Others are involved such as the Advice Sector, Western Health & Social Care Trust, Community Transport etc. The food poverty tender – WRAP - came from the work of this group.

Other events and activities

Cost of Living Crisis - We held a joint event with NICVA on 9th May 2023 entitled “Cost of Living Crisis – Tough Times, Smart Solutions”. A number of local organisations came together to discuss the challenges people were facing and we met the new NICVA CEO Celine McStravick.

NIO Office - We met a representative of the NI Office on 14th June 2023 as he wanted to hear the concerns of local people, so we brought in a few organisations as well as some Directors. Those present talked about various

issues such as the difficulties presented by withdrawal of funding from the community and voluntary (c/v) sector; loss of services from rural areas especially Banks and the problems that poses for people; the cost of living crisis; the lack of rural transport which heightens social isolation; the Protestant community facing barriers in applying for grants and the need for public service transformation, among others. This has opened up a channel of communication between NIO and local communities.

People and Place Review - Cashel Community Association helped us facilitate a meeting with the Department for Communities to talk to people about the issues they face in rural and border areas as part of their People and Place Review (known as Neighbourhood Renewal).

Networking visit - Directors attended a networking visit to Derry in August 2023 and met with representatives of groups in Sion Mills to learn from their experiences. This visit was funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and we gained an increased knowledge of our shared history through the walking tour guide and the hosts in the Siege Museum and the Museum of Free Derry.

Annual General Meeting

The AGM took place in October 2023 in Mountfield with speakers Margaret McCloskey, from the Money and Pension Services (MAPS) and Edel Browne, Peace Plus, FODC and a welcome from Declan McAleer MLA. We also had the community group launch of Omagh Healthy Living Network.

Peace Plus Partnership

Our Network Manager, Mary T Conway, sits on the FODC Peace Plus Partnership. An action plan has been agreed under three themes and working groups have been set up:

*Community Regeneration & Transformation – up to 40%, €2.24m (2,450 participants)

*Thriving and Peaceful Communities – up to 40%, €2.24m (2,250 participants)

*Celebrating Cultural Diversity – minimum of 20%, €1.12m (980 participants)

Groups interested in participating in delivery of the action plan must be able to demonstrate the core requirement of cross-community and how it will lead to increased and sustained cross-community interaction and make a lasting contribution to peacebuilding in the district.

FODC Agricultural Liaison Group Meeting

George Kerr, a long standing Director, has been representing Omagh Forum at the quarterly WebEx meeting of FODC Agricultural Liaison Group.

Charity Commission

We held two sessions on Charity Commission Annual Reporting, one in Omagh Community House on 11th October 2023 and one for Fermanagh Trust on Wed 29th November. Staff help groups to register an Expression of Intent to register; we help them with the registration process and to complete their Annual Monitoring Return to Charity Commission for Northern Ireland, as well as other contact that a group might have such as updating details with the CCNI or reporting a Serious Incident.

Our Network Manager, Mary T Conway, sits on the Charity Commission Stakeholder Engagement group which facilitates regular meetings between community, voluntary sector reps and the Deputy Chief Commissioner and Charity Commission Staff. Discussions are detailed and varied, and we have been able to bring many messages from local groups to the ear of the Commissioners. I also reviewed 4 draft documents and 3 letters as a Critical Friend for CCNI.

Members survey

We had two surveys over the year, the first in October 2023 and the second in March - April 2024. It is important for our members and the groups we work with to take part and the results of these help to plan our work ahead and are used as evidence of need in funding applications.

Area Integrated Partnership Board

Mary T & Tiernach were involved in the roll out of the AIPB's – Area Integrated Partnership Board (AIPB) – which is a local planning body with the overarching aim of improving health and social care outcomes and reducing health inequalities for its local population. Tiernach was subsequently selected as a user representative on the Western AIPB.

Council Funding Fair

Omagh Forum and Omagh Healthy Living Network staff had a table at the Funding and Advice Fair held in Omagh Leisure Centre on 13th February 2024 and had a lot of enquiries from groups.

Food Safety course

We ran the Level 2 Food Safety and Hygiene course in St Patrick's GAA Tattyreagh in March which was attended by 13 people from groups across the district.

Members Meeting

At the tail end of this financial year, we were organising a Network Meeting in April with 3 speakers – The National Lottery; The Fundraising Regulator - Code of Fundraising Practice and FODC Sustainable Food Programme.

Financial Information

2023/24 was a successful year for Omagh Forum for Rural Associations as we managed to have a surplus.

Principal Funding Sources

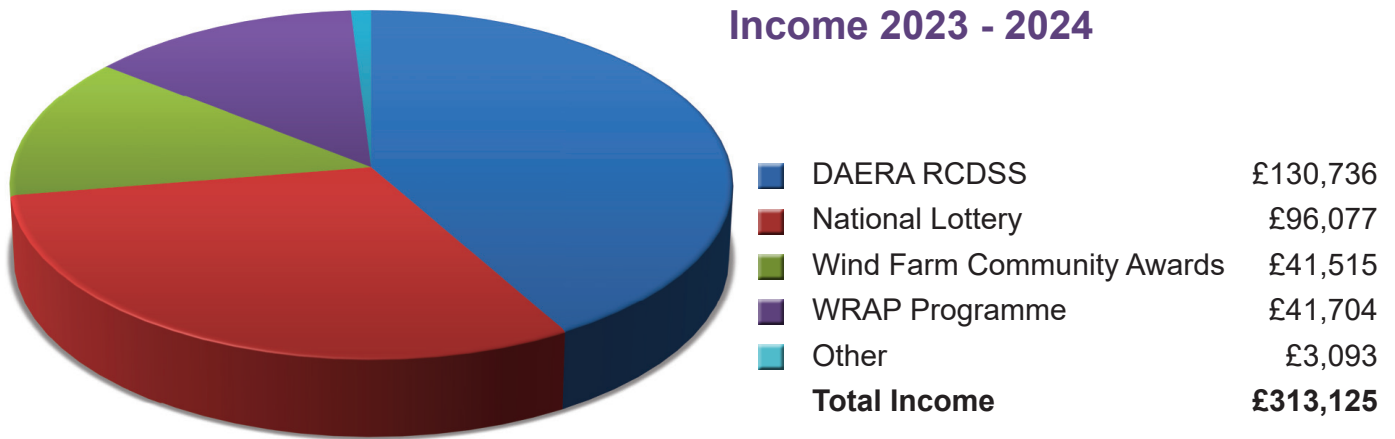
The main source of funds is from the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), which equates to 42% of the overall income for the year with the lottery at almost 31% for Omagh Healthy living Network. The charity has always sought and secured funding from other sources to assist with ongoing expenditure by way of management of two community wind farm grant schemes, tendering opportunities, management fees of other projects and sponsorship to name but a few.

Reserves Policy and Going Concern

The trustees have examined the charity's requirements for reserves in light of the main risk to the organisation, namely the availability of funding from third parties, and agreed that the unrestricted funds not committed should be 6 months of the charity's annual expenditure. The reserves are needed to bridge the gap between the receiving and spending of income and to cover unplanned emergency spending.

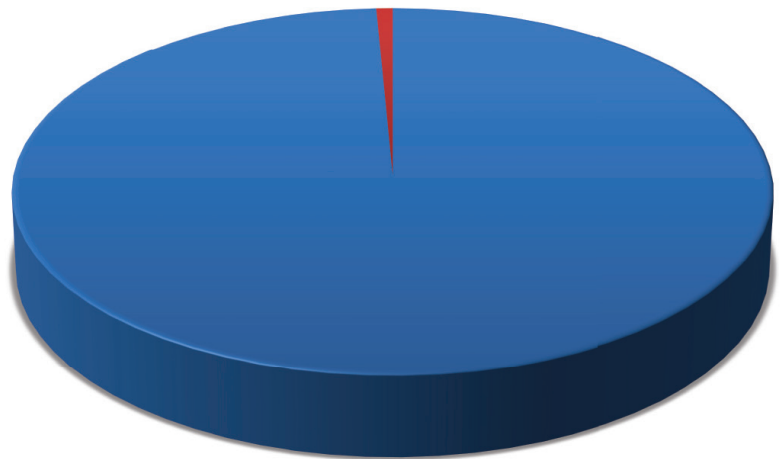
Income 2023 -24

| | |
|----------------------------|-----------------|
| DARD RCDSS | £130,736 |
| National Lottery | 96,077 |
| Wind Farm community awards | £41,515 |
| WRAP programme | £41,704 |
| Other | £3,093 |
| Total Income | £313,125 |



Expenditure 2023 - 2024

| | |
|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Charitable Activities | £255,666 |
| Support Costs | £1,950 |
| Total | £257,616 |



EXPENDITURE

| | |
|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Charitable activities | £255,666 |
| Support costs | £1,950 |
| Total expenditure | £257,616 |

This generated net income and net movement in funds of £58,631. The majority of this is restricted as advance payment for programmes and £16,114 is unrestricted. At the yearend we had net assets of £198,591.

Acknowledgements & Thanks

We wish to express our thanks to our Funders during the period April 2023 – March 2024.

Core funding:

- The Rural Community Development Support Service is funded by the Department of Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs (DAERA) through the Tackling Rural Poverty & Social Isolation (TRPSI) Programme.

With project funding coming through

- The National Lottery Community Fund – for Omagh Healthy Living Network
- The Department for Communities via a Fermanagh & Omagh District Council tender consortium bid led by Fermanagh Rural Community Network - WRAP
- ESB International
- Greencoat
- Department of Foreign Affairs (in a previous year)

Last but not least

Thank you to our hosts tonight – Ecclesville LOL 34.

Charity Commission Helper Group

Rural Micro Capital Grants Scheme

Community Development

Good Relations

Omagh Healthy Living Network

Wind Farm Community Grants

Rural Community Development Support Service



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