

ANTI-POVERTY

30 AUG 2005

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Micah

Dr G Mulligan
Head of Equality & Social Needs Division
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Our ref: G/108

26 August 2005

Dear Dr Mulligan

**DRAFT RESPONSE TO NEW TARGETING SOCIAL NEED: THE WAY FORWARD:
A CONSULTATION DOCUMENT: PHASE 2**

Our Development Services Committee considered the Phase 2 consultation document at the Meeting of 16th August 2005. As the elected members have decided that some further information is required, I am forwarding you a draft response that is subject to further revision. Once their response is finalised I will contact you again.

Members welcomed the clear account from the New TSN Unit of the difficulties that surround New TSN. Although the document argues the need not for a separate programme with a dedicated budget, but takes a general approach to programme development and delivery involving all departments, we felt that this is more persuasive when measured at ward level rather than in smaller scale units such as Census Output Areas or Super Output Areas.

Your overall strategic objective of improving the income and living conditions of the most disadvantaged was duly noted. We agreed that those in greatest social need should be identified objectively and targeted fairly, and that by consistently addressing the problems of people who are objectively shown to be in greatest social need regardless of a geographical area, New TSN should, over time, contribute to the erosion of these inequalities.

However, it was also felt that the Phase 2 consultation document was still some way off from being all that it could and should be in terms of making a difference to the lives of people suffering poverty and social exclusion.

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The document has a possible weakness with the lack of the inclusion of targets and indicators that if not proactively addressed quickly may prove to be a stumbling block for the proposed new Anti Poverty Forum. In light of the external evaluation mentioned in Section 3.4 through to Section 3.6, it is disappointing to see that it only references data which is stored in other research material.

However, both Phase 1 & Phase 2 consultation documents are useful points with which to begin to develop further a strategy that will clearly show how New TSN can eliminate poverty and social exclusion.

Antrim Borough Council, in its original response to the New TSN proposals, raised concerns about Government not allocating specific resources to the programme. This meant that Government Departments and other bodies would skew existing resources to TSN areas without regard to pockets of masked deprivation which exist in the Borough. The Phase 2 document reiterates that there is no specific anti-poverty budget or indeed a New TSN budget. We note that any finances will have to come from the existing annual allocations for Government Departments and some Agencies and Non Departmental Public Bodies. The previous approach of skewing resources to areas of subjective need is also continued. However, the commitment to refine the measurement of social need and poverty would go some way in meeting this concern.

There remains an important omission in the Phase 2 document in that there is still no clear framework to accommodate community involvement in this policy area. Given the current state of community relations both generally in Northern Ireland and specifically in the Borough, this could have a negative impact in programme delivery within and between communities.

The document also states that as the proposed policy is a high level framework it does not seek to identify specific initiatives or actions by individual departments, nor to set specific targets. This type of analysis will be carried out by the development of a Regional Action plan that will be overseen by the proposed Anti Poverty Forum. The Anti Poverty Forum will be charged with bringing forward policies and strategies, however Government Departments will continue to involve those most relevant from within public services to inform the debate and assessment of policies. When the strategy is finally launched the Anti Poverty Forum will develop Northern Ireland's regional action plan as well as having an input into the National Plan on Social Inclusion. The Council welcomes this and would ask for insertion into the document that clearly shows how an Anti-Poverty strategy will work in practice with demonstrable indicators and methods of measurement.

Yours sincerely

Maureen Armstrong
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