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FRANCIS ROCK  
Chief Executive

NL/smcc

23<sup>rd</sup> August 2005

Dr Gerry Mulligan  
OFMDFM  
Equality & Social Need Division  
Room E3, 26  
Castle Buildings  
Stormont  
BELFAST  
BT4 3SR

A.I.I.I - POVERTY  
24 AUG 2005  
RECEIVED

Dear Dr Mulligan

**NEW TSN – The Way Forward – Towards an Anti-Poverty Strategy**

Please find enclosed response from Craigavon Borough Council to the above Strategy which was agreed at the last meeting of Council on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2005.

I have also enclosed a response to the Strategy from Sinn Fein Elected Representatives within Craigavon Borough Council which they requested I forward to the Division.

I trust these comments are helpful.

Yours sincerely

  
Nicola Lane  
HEAD OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Encs

# **CRAIGAVON BOROUGH COUNCIL**

## **RESPONSE TO TOWARDS AN ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY NEW TSN – THE WAY FORWARD**

Craigavon Borough Council welcomes the opportunity to respond to the above consultation document and offers the following comments.

### **Question 1**

*Do you think the proposed strategic aim is the right one?*

It would be hard to disagree with the aim “to improve income and living conditions of the most disadvantaged”. While recognising this is a difficult and long-term task, it is essential that the objectives set to achieve this aim are clear and distinct and that they are supported at all levels.

### **Question 2**

*Do you agree there should be a priority focus on financial exclusion and are there any other areas you feel require closer attention?*

Craigavon Borough Council agrees that priority should be given to dealing with financial hardship. However, as financial hardship has an impact upon other areas of life such as education and health and future employability, these areas should also be taken into consideration. Each of the above areas relate to each other. The priority focus of financial exclusion may also mean more than reinforcing measures to increase the uptake of financial entitlements but may involve looking at the level of entitlement which is being paid out.

### **Question 3**

*Do you think that these high level priorities are appropriate for inclusion in the strategic framework – are there other priorities that you feel should be included?*

Craigavon Borough Council believes that these high level priorities are appropriate for inclusion in the strategic framework and that a holistic approach should be adopted. However, recognition should be given to the fact that even with resources dedicated to New TSN areas, it has not necessarily followed that unemployment etc has fallen sharply in those areas. Therefore, government needs to examine the mechanism by which it deploys its resources in these areas and ensure its assessment of the barriers to employment etc is correct.

## **RESPONSE TO TOWARDS AN ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY NEW TSN – THE WAY FORWARD – Cont**

### **Question 4**

*What are your views on the inclusion of a Regional Poverty Action Plan and the proposed format of the Plan?*

Craigavon Borough Council considers it beneficial to draw up a Regional Action Plan for Northern Ireland as this will concentrate on a smaller geographical area and take local circumstances into account. In drawing up such a Plan, targets should be concrete and easily measurable over time. They should be reviewed at regular intervals in order to establish and adjust initiatives which have been introduced to tackle poverty and social exclusion.

However, the proposed format of the Plan will in all probability lead to a lengthy document given the importance and intricacies of the issues involved. Craigavon Borough Council would ask that a synopsis of the Plan should be drawn up with the key points summarised for ease of reference.

### **Question 5**

*Do you think that the “skewing” approach to resources should be continued? If not, what approach do you feel should be adopted?*

While there is acknowledgement that resources should be dedicated towards those areas in greatest need, Craigavon Borough Council would state that other areas should not be ignored. Cognisance should be taken of the fact that there are small pockets of deprivation within relatively affluent communities and that rural communities face particular difficulties through lack of access to services and amenities etc. Initiatives and programmes from central government should be co-ordinated as often there are a plethora of initiatives targeted at the same areas and their direct impact on financial exclusion should be closely outlined. These programmes should also be designed as long-term initiatives so that their impact can be maximised and measured over a considerable period of time affecting real change. However, in some cases, legislative changes may be needed to tackle the issues which communities face rather than special programmes for funding initiatives. In addition, the role of all agencies with a statutory remit in these areas should be clearly defined so as to promote a co-operative and co-ordinated approach to the issues.

### **Question 6**

*What are your views on the proposal for a Ministerially Led Forum? Do you agree with the composition and remit of the Forum?*

Craigavon Borough Council believes that a Ministerially Led Forum will give the strategy the importance and accountability which is essential when taking the policy forward.

The composition of the Forum should entail representatives from agencies with statutory responsibility for the objectives/targets set out in the Plan. Representation from the Voluntary and Community Sector should also be established on this basis.

## NTSN – Toward An Anti-Poverty Strategy

Statistics show that levels of poverty in the north of Ireland continue to be unacceptably high and that the poverty gap is becoming wider, not narrowing. There is a clear linkage between poverty and inequality. This should remain a central tenet of any anti-poverty strategy. TSN should, therefore, be given a statutory basis. This should include a duty to adhere to the departmental targets and outcomes required to reduce poverty within defined timeframes.

### Resources and Incomes

An anti-poverty strategy that is not given generous and adequate extra resources is meaningless; therefore extra resources should be allocated. Resources should be skewed on the basis of objective need.

Benefit payments should also be re-evaluated to an adequate level in line with a commitment to focus on speedy outcomes. It is not enough to merely 'reinforce the importance of measures to increase the uptake of financial entitlements'. The department should look at ways to increase the income of the poorest, for example, in the south of Ireland, those on benefits, by the year 2007, will have their income increase linked to a 30% increase in gross average industrial earnings.

### Ministerially Led Anti-Poverty Forum

The problem of poverty needs to be given political leadership at the highest level. Government departments, Assembly committees, local councils and political parties, working in partnership with sectoral and community organisations, have a crucial role to play.

A cross-departmental ministerially led forum should be the vehicle for bringing all these partnerships together. It would have the necessary political 'clout' and ability to move the issue along with the speed it deserves and it would send a tangible signal that poverty is being prioritised. This forum should be responsible for monitoring targets for eliminating poverty and for publishing an annual report to this effect.

In the absence of the Assembly, the forum should be established with political parties invited to nominate representatives until the Assembly and Committees are in place.

In line with the provisions of the Good Friday Agreement the ministerially led Anti-Poverty Forum should come under the auspices of the All-Ireland Ministerial Council in joint partnership with the relevant minister in the south.

### Conclusion

While it is clear that specific and vulnerable groups such as older people, children, lone parents, those who are sick and people with a disability should be targeted these should not be the only factors taken into account. An anti-poverty strategy should not be afraid to tackle the hard issues unique to the north of Ireland, that is, that nationalists suffer disproportionately from inequality, poverty and disadvantage (see Table 1 below). This is not to deny unionist disadvantage. Of course there is, and this also needs to be tackled. However there needs to be a recognition that on all the indicators nationalists suffer systemic and widespread disadvantage while unionist disadvantage and deprivation tends to be located in pockets. Research also shows that

the areas which suffered most from the conflict have higher levels of poverty and inequality. Any successful anti-poverty strategy needs to deal with these issue and spell out clearly, with targets and timetables, how it will tackle and eradicate community differentials, poverty and inequality.

**Table 1**

<b>INDICATOR</b>	<b>CATHOLIC %</b>	<b>PROTESTANT %</b>
Proportion of children 0-15 in workless households	21.5	11.8
Proportion of pupils achieving no qualifications	5.9	4.7
Proportion of pupils achieving no GCSE's	6.6	5.1
Proportion of working age people who are employed	61.2	71.2
Proportion of working age people who are unemployed	5.6	3.3
Proportion of working age economically active people who are long term unemployed	3.4	1.7
Proportion of lone parents of working age who are in employment	45.3	52.9
Proportion of persons of working age not in employment who would like a job	13.0	7.8
Working age economic inactivity rates	33.2	25.5
Proportion of working age persons in workless households	15.7	10.5
Proportion of working age adults living in work rich households	37.9	53.3
Proportion of persons of working age without a qualification	27.8	24.2
Unemployment differential between Catholics and Protestant (male and female)	(1992: 2.0) 2002:1.9	
Unemployment differential between catholic and Protestant (male)	(1992: 2.4) 2002: 2.1	
Unemployment differential between catholic and Protestant (female)	(1992: 1.4) 2002: 1.6	

**Source: 'Indicators of Social Need for NI', OFMDFM September, 2004**