

Help the Aged

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ANTI-POVERTY

24 AUG 2005

RECEIVED

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23rd August 2005

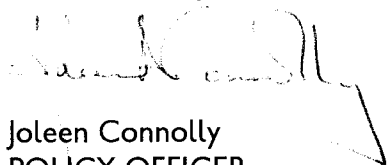
Dear Sir or Madam

Re: Help the Aged's response to "Towards an Anti-Poverty Strategy;
New TSN-The Way Forward"

Please find enclosed Help the Aged's Response to the Towards an Anti-Poverty Strategy. Help the Aged welcome the opportunity to comment on the comment.

We hope that you will take our comments into consideration and hope that you will keep us up to date with any future developments.

Yours sincerely,



Joleen Connolly
POLICY OFFICER

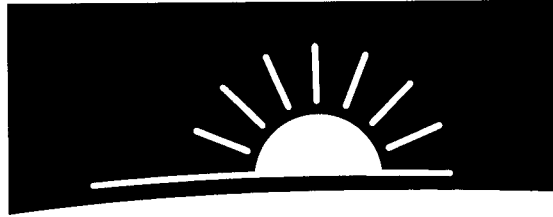


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Help the Aged

**Response to “Towards Anti-Poverty Strategy:
New TSN-The way forward”**

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Introduction

The work of Help the Aged is about facilitating and enabling older people to remain in control of their lives. We work through a partnership approach with older people as equal partners. In addition, we also work with other agencies through an age sector approach to influence future policies. The work is aimed towards practical services as well as campaigning and lobbying on a range of issues. Older people are directly involved in this work. The core values which underpin our work are combating poverty, defeating ageism, reducing isolation and promoting quality in care.

General

Help the Aged welcome the opportunity to further comment on "The Anti-Poverty Strategy". This having been said we have serious reservations about the "consultation process" to date and feel that the views and concerns of the community/voluntary sector have not been listened to and are not reflected in the current document. From an Age Sector perspective this is certainly true. The document lacks substance and robustness to tackle the issue of pensioner poverty on a real level and the risk analysis framework misses pensioners specifically. Help the Aged however do believe that government and the other various pillars in society working together can develop an Anti-Poverty Strategy which is capable of delivering real results and that has the confidence of the people of Northern Ireland. We believe that OFMDFM must show commitment and courage to develop a policy initiative which is innovative and has enough depth to tackle the problems of poverty in Northern Ireland. As such Help the Aged call for OFMDFM to begin to a meaningful engagement process with two way dialogue from its social partners throughout the processes so that we can begin to design an agreed Anti-poverty Strategy with agreed targets.

The Picture of Poverty in Northern Ireland

The Picture of poverty in Northern Ireland doesn't give actually give a full picture of poverty and omits groupings of society worse affected by poverty particularly older people. Older people are not merely "at risk" from poverty, but poverty is an inevitable part of growing older for many living in Northern Ireland. It is a daily fact and as the document acknowledges there is little escape from pensioner poverty. Research undertaken by Fiona Scullion and Paddy Hillyard on behalf of OFMDFM in 2005 states that "Pensioners Households represent 26% of all poor Households- Single Pensioner households make up the largest share¹". Furthermore there are 80,486 lone pensioners households in Northern Ireland in comparison to for example 50,641 lone parent households². Hence with these compelling statistics Help the Aged believe that targets and the strategic frameworks should be directed to focus on groups most affected by poverty, particularly older people.

Despite the sub-title "Poverty and Social Exclusion" the document focuses mainly on financial poverty. As stated in Help the Aged's previous submission we believe poverty encompasses wider issues such as ability to participate in society and quality of life issues, as well as access to information and an ability to communicate needs.

Stimulus for Change

Chapter 2 refers to demographic trends and the growth of vulnerable groups and cites an increasingly ageing population as a growing vulnerable groups. It is important not to underestimate the impact that this demographic trend will have. The 2001 Census declared that the UK is officially a maturing society. Currently in Northern Ireland there are 500,684 people over fifty, 270,592 of which are of pensionable age (that is presently 60 for women and 65 for men).

¹ "Pensioner Households in Northern Ireland, Bulletin NO2 April 2005, Fiona Scullion and Paddy Hillyard

² NISRA Census, www.nicensus2001.gov.uk

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency predicts that in 2021 there will be 314,000 people over pensionable age accounting for nearly 18% of the total population in Northern Ireland. By 2041 that number will have increased to 429,000, meaning that pensioners will make up a quarter of the total population³. Yet the demographic realities are not reflected in “The Changing Patterns of Social Need”. The analysis in this section has completely ignored the plight of Northern Ireland’s pensioners now and in the future.

Response to Consultation

Help the Aged is disappointed with the outcome of the Consultation Process in this instance. Certainly, we believe that despite our representations on behalf of older people, little consideration has been given to our initial submission.

We criticize the decision to continue to rely on the skewing of resources rather than dedicating a top up budget to show commitment to tackling hardship and disadvantage. From an Age Sector perspective Help the Aged criticize the lack of additional resources to tackle poverty and social exclusion amongst older people and implement “Ageing in an Inclusive Society.”

Help the Aged believe that steps need to be taken to ensure that the consultation process is not merely an exercise. The Anti-Poverty Strategy is something which will affect the lives of older people, lone parent families, children, people with disabilities and many other groupings in society. It is absolutely vital that when trying to set high level targets and objectives that we can be sure that actions translate into tangible outcomes on the ground level. As such we would like to see real and open discussions with those groups. Help the Aged and others within the community/voluntary sector can facilitate in tandem with OFMDFM an engagement process.

³ NISRA 2003 Mid Year Estimates

Northern Ireland's Contribution to NAPs

Help the Aged believe that the processes for developing NAPs should be modified. We believe that the Republic of Ireland is an example of good practice in aspects of their design, particularly the development of principles underlining the development of NAPs. We believe that this should be replicated in the development of Northern Ireland's NAPs. We propose the following principles are adopted.

- Ensuring Equal Access and encouraging participation for all
- Guaranteeing the rights of Section 75 groupings including Older people through Anti-Discrimination measures
- The reduction of inequalities within poverty
- The development of the partnership approach
- Actively involving the community and voluntary sector
- Encouraging self reliance through respecting individual dignity and promoting empowerment
- Engaging in appropriate consultative processes, especially with users of services

As stated earlier Help the Aged believe the NAPs should be created through two way dialogue between the voluntary sector including representatives from the Age Sector and Government Departments.

The Strategic Framework

Help the Aged believe that the Strategic Framework as it currently stands does not have the confidence of older people, the Age Sector, or the Community and Voluntary Sector in Northern Ireland. Government must take heed of this as we are the organisations that are closest to the ground,

working with those that are affected by poverty, disadvantage and social exclusion and we are committed to the fight to eradicate these afflictions within our society. Whilst we do not doubt the intentions of government we believe the current proposals will not have the desired affect and we believe that we can do better. That is why Help the Aged believe that it is so important that we go back to the drawing board and that government departments and social partners engage in dialogue together and create an Anti-poverty Strategy that can and will have the confidence of everyone.

We believe that the establishment of an Anti-Poverty Forum after the creation of the Anti-poverty Strategy is drawn up by government is too late in the day. An Anti-Poverty Forum drawn up to oversee the implementation of a strategy the government has designed itself will be toothless and have limited impact or access and certainly no ownership of an Anti-Poverty Strategy.

Conclusion

Help the Aged call upon the Minister Jeff Rooker to call a round table discussion with the Representatives from the Age Sector, Community/Voluntary Sector and government departments to discuss the way forward in developing an agreed Anti-Poverty Strategy.