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Question and Answers**The Junction, Derry/Londonderry****16th August 2005****Damien McIllroy Top of the Hill 2010:**

I feel privileged in order to be able to talk at this consultation as there are only three of them happening across the north. The document would appear to be progressing but there are certain areas which have large omissions. In Derry there have been decades of a lack of commitment to structural investment and it is supposed to be the capital of the North West – however, there is a distinct absence of reference to the cross border status. There needs to be more of a north/south approach to the anti-poverty strategy. It does not cater for how the border contributes to poverty. There is a need to take areas and communities at a micro level and to tie it all into a NAPsincl framework. There need to be clearer linkages between EU action plans in the North and South of Ireland. There are already plans under way to develop regional action plans along the border corridor; this is why we have Cohesion Funds. We need to look at how border voices can be heard particularly within the proposed Ministerial Forum and how Cohesion Funds could be brought in to support cross border anti-poverty actions. Working on an inter-departmental and cross border basis would be a useful way of sharing and pooling resources and it could be a practical way of tying in the Cohesion Funds. There also needs to be consideration given to how the Anti-Poverty Strategy integrates with other spatial strategies.

Michael Mulholland OFMDFM:

It's not in there. I need to go back and discuss this with the Anti-Poverty Unit. I don't know how this is done in other EU countries and whether there is a precedent, or how easily it could be done or if there are reasons why it can't be done.

I would encourage you to make your own submission it would be good to receive your suggestions.

Explanation from Chair Goretti Horgan:

The combat poverty agency has suggested the North and South should have a common chapter within their NAPsincl documents (the Regional Action Plan for NI- NAPsincl for ROI) in terms of cross border poverty alleviation. Basically this

would mean a north and south action plan should have one common chapter in both plans.

Paul Cavanagh Bogside & Brandywell Initiative:

The presentation spoke of co-operation across jurisdiction, what does this mean? Has it been teased out?

Michael Mulholland OFMDFM:

We were really thinking about this in relation to the UK and the wider EU. Basically it needs to be explored further.

Ms. Villa:

Is it possible to have a cross border strategy to tackle anything if it's not addressing benefits and increasing their levels? Is it ok for people to live in hardship on benefits?

Michael Mulholland OFMDFM:

We have stated the current position within the presentation that we would need NI Ministers to consider and to make that decision; we have identified the problems, reduced budgets for other areas etc. But it could happen if the political will is there.

Northern Ireland is allocated a certain amount of money and it is basically a bloc grant which has to cover all areas of funding. Such an action would also require legislative changes to be made.

Ms Villa:

Is it also part of the problem that there is no budget within the strategy?

Michael Mulholland OFMDFM:

I suppose you could say that if the strategy had a separate budget you could raise benefits but it's our opinion that skewing is the best approach because you can access the whole of the NI Bloc Grant.

Ms McGinty Ballymacgroarty WHAZ:

Why is there no mention of debt within the indicators proposed to measure and monitor poverty and social exclusion?

Michael Woods Research Anti-poverty unit

Within the next month we will have a paper on debt in NI. We have also been working on this issue with the General Consumer Council and the Credit Consumer Council. Not to negate the problem but it is not a widespread problem and according to the GCC only 3% of the NI population are over indebted.

Ms McGinty: Ballymacgroarty WHAZ:

Have you taken into consideration the fact that people do not like to acknowledge they are in debt and often hide it from others?

Elaine O'Doherty Investing for Health NI:

What aims are there to link the Investing for Health strategy in with the Anti-Poverty Strategy? How many ministerial groups will there be for we already have one? Can you tell me how the indicators recently developed under the Investment for Health strategy will be dove tailed together with the Anti-Poverty Strategy?

Michael Woods Research Anti-poverty unit:

There will be talks between the two departments (OFMDFM & DH&SS&PS) we recognise Investing for Health as a major player within the APS. We will be discussing targets and indicators. We already have our high level strategic targets and our support targets, the indicators will fit in with these. There are already indicators of social need on birth weight and infant mortality you could examine these and let us know your comments.

Michael Woods Research Anti-Poverty Unit:

Indicators produced include Birth Rates, Infant mortality etc but these will not be just tied down to the Department of Health but also fed through the OFMDFM and the Department of Education.

Kevin O'Carroll Triax:

With reference to Neighbourhood Renewal, will there be communication between our inter-departmental ministerial groups?

Michael Mulholland OFMDFM:

Yes, absolutely, it carries out very positive work in relation to anti-poverty work. We will be meeting all departments for round table talks in the next few weeks and then bilateral negotiations shall outline what can be put in place in terms of an anti-poverty strategy. Then we will have to sit down department by department to see what can be achieved.

Kenny McAdams Disability Action:

I don't see a training programme for 'de-brainwashing' top civil servants to prove that poverty does exist in NI. Is there any proposal for cross border work within the strategy?

Michael Mulholland OFMDFM:

There is a commitment at a very high level to developing a strong Anti-Poverty strategy for NI. A senior Minister will be involved, and Government departments have signed up to the strategy and these departments are prepared to develop targets.

Ann Johnston Save the Children:

Children and young people on the ground don't live life by statistics and targets but what counts is how children experience life. How can the anti-poverty strategy be effective if it does not focus on kids?

Michael Mulholland OFMDFM:

We accept the criticisms made in Belfast. The APS would always have included child poverty. We do feel that it falls within the APS though this will be further discussed between us and the Children and Young Peoples department. The APS does acknowledge that it doesn't feature enough and we will definitely be picking that up.

We know that we haven't specified it enough that we cannot side-step child poverty. The responsibility definitely lies with us and not with the children and young people's strategy. If the UK met its target it could be met without Northern Ireland reaching its target. Jeff Brooker the children's minister has

demonstrated a positive approach to addressing child poverty and this strategy will reflect that.

DERRY/LONDONDERRY EVENT – 16TH AUGUST 2005

WORKSHOP 1 – BLUE COMMUNITIES & DISADVANTAGED GROUPS

FACILITATOR: FRANCES DOWDS – NIAPN

SCRIBE: CAREY ANN CLARKE

1 Initial reactions/comments/questions to what has been presented today

It was stated that this process is simply lip service, with no real intention to develop a strategy based on what is said at the 'consultative' events.

Participants expressed concerns that OFMDFM were merely 'paying lip service' through this consultation process. They believed it was not their intention to fully engage in consultation and as such there was really no political will to put an effective strategy, a broad reaching strategy into action.

The current outlined approach within the Phase II document was not seen as sufficient. Education is still being pushed as the key to tackling poverty in Northern Ireland but schools do not target and support children from the poorest areas. It was stated that you can't make a difference to poor people if you treat everyone equally. It was also stated that education was no longer a way out of poverty, that it alone was not capable of making an impact on poverty and social exclusion; particularly when jobs just do not exist.

OFMDFM were asked how the recommended 'skewing' of resources was being demonstrated within the current climate of 'health & education cuts' or 'efficiency savings'? It was stated clearly that 'skewing' was definitely not delivering for those involved in anti-poverty work.

The move toward outcomes mentioned in the policy was welcomed but it was expressed that the language with regards to this would need to be 'tied down'.

It was expressed that there was a need to focus on community development and to be inclusive of those experiencing poverty in a real way.

It was highlighted by a participant that the 6Cs given in the OFMDFM presentation were not reflected in the content of the document (i.e. Clarity of Purpose, Coherence, Consistency with EU/UK priorities, Comprehensive, Consensus, and Consistency with Changing Social Need).

The ministerial group was viewed as potentially problematic particularly in relation to lack of clarity around any sense of 'ownership' from different government departments.

Another participant stated that there was a real problem over the skewing of resources and that there was a real need for the NI Assembly to be involved in monitoring and influencing all budget allocation. It was asked how the Anti-Poverty Strategy would work with the Review of Public Administration. The upcoming Review of Public Administration was seen as crucial to how the strategy could be 'actioned' particularly at a local level.

It was stated that the proposed 'zones' for Health & Education Trusts and Councils was a logical framework for the allocation of resources on a geographical basis. However, a participant did caution that the resources must initially be there in order to target/ skew.

It was stated that the relationship between social and economic factors had to be explored more and that the relationship between the social and economic outcomes was over simplified. The purely economic emphasis within the document was not seen as adequate for addressing Poverty and Social exclusion in NI.

It was also observed that the document did not adequately address equality issues particularly for disadvantaged groups such as people with a disability, rather there was too heavy on emphasis on the two 'main' communities within NI.

It was also asked where the peace dividend was within the proposal.

Participants also stated that there needed to be a Joint Declaration on poverty and SE for both governments and that it was important to deliver on this strategy especially for disadvantaged communities.

2 What are the gaps/weaknesses within the current Phase II document?

Voice was given to the fact that there was an obvious lack of a cross border dimension to tackling poverty & SE and that there was a lack of analysis of the impact of the border in terms of poverty and social exclusion.

Participants also stated that pushing people off benefits does not alleviate poverty as the strategy simplistically suggests.

There appeared to be no consideration of the impact this strategy would or should have on other policies within the document.

The use of indicators was widely discussed and participants suggested that there was a greater need for the inclusion of qualitative indicators to assess the impact of the strategy on how people live. In relation to this it was suggested that it is only those living in deprivation that can monitor real change.

The group continued to look at the possibility of changing indicators and a workshop participant suggested that there was a need for the socio-economic indicators to become more comprehensive. It was also suggested that a life-cycle approach to tackling poverty and SE should be adopted by the strategy.

Concern was expressed at the lack of a joined-up approach in developing indicators for the APS with Investing for Health and the Children and Young Persons Strategy. Participants expressed a desire not necessarily for the inclusion of more indicators but for collaborative agreement on indicators and base level targets to be used.

A workshop member highlighted the fact that child poverty is something that should be measured in the 'here and now' and that there should be other targets besides educational attainment. There was concern expressed that the targets to be used should not just be put in place to measure government objectives. There was concern expressed that there was a serious omission of those in the 16-18 year old age bracket not in education, in work or on a training scheme who are a growing group experiencing poverty. Additionally it was highlighted that there was a tendency within the document to view people as economic indicators.

It was expressed by one participant that there was a lack of understanding of the role of continued under investment in the West of the Bann had played on the creation of poverty and in terms of access to services. The difficulties in gaining access to speech and language therapists was cited an example of this.

Workshop participants expressed concern over who would be monitoring and evaluating the success/ or lack of success of a New APS in addressing poverty. It was expressed that there was a lack of transparency on how to get involved in such a process.

It was recommended within the group that Ministers should ensure that government departments should top-slice their budgets to address poverty & SE.

Several members of the group were concerned at the absence of reference to debt and over indebtedness within the strategy. It was also suggested that consultation should take place to define a base line criteria for such work. It was also stated that many people experiencing debt were likely to be reluctant to publicly admit their situation. The outcome of this would be their 'invisibility' within official statistics.

A lack of focus on the personal development of young people and those experiencing poverty was highlighted.

After addressing some of the failings of the Sure Start programme particularly in relation to being able to facilitate childcare in support of participation within adult education, it was stated that there was an appalling lack of a coherent strategy on childcare.

One member expressed how worrying it was that Government had failed to listen to the last consultation and indeed, it would appear, have learnt very little from the whole process. They also expressed deep concern that an approach and initiatives which had already failed to deliver for so many would continue to be adopted (p.60 of document).

A key area for action within an APS it was stated must be to reduce health inequalities, which continue to grow at an alarming rate across NI.

It was also asked how such anti-poverty work would be funded in an environment of cuts and budget protection.

Participants highlighted that there was a lack of analysis within the document on the causes of poverty and there was no clearly stated commitment to continue to monitor the changing face of poverty and social exclusion.

It was stated that the whole process had demonstrated a severe lack of communication and that there were not enough consultative events. It was also stated these were also not held widely enough across NI.

It was stated that the best approach to the consultation would have been through a social partnership model. It was also stated that a lack of effective, well timed and wide scale consultative events excludes many groups from engaging in the process.

One participant went on to query the consultation process in terms of its timescale and suggested that the period over which it was conducted could be taken to infer that there was no real willingness to engage in full consultation and that many decisions regarding the strategy had already been taken.

3 What are the strengths within the current Phase II document?

Commitment to developing strategy was commended by some participants. Although the finally agreed format would be the real indication as to how sincere the government was in eradicating poverty.

Focus on outcomes was welcomed by participants although caution was expressed over the fact that the outcomes should be identified by people experiencing poverty and not civil servants.

Commitment to a co-ordinated approach was also highlighted as being a positive move. However, it was also highlighted that important consideration needed to be given to who would co-ordinate and how they would co-ordinate this important policy.

The proposed ministerial forum was widely welcomed as a positive feature. However, the composition of the forum needs to be given important consideration and it must contain members from the community sector. Workshop participants were insistent that the composition of the forum would be key to its success and that the normal gatekeepers should not be the key representatives of the V & C sectors.

It was also stated that there were no mechanisms for facilitating local input and that it was essential that resources be provided to local groups to enable capacity building for People Experiencing Poverty to be actively involved in the Ministerial Forum. Additionally, the forum had to deliver on facilitating a geographic spread to the forum particularly for those living and working outside the Belfast area.

4 What should a strong Anti-Poverty Strategy aim to do and how?

It was felt that there should be acknowledgment within the strategy that poverty was a fundamental denial of human rights. Members felt that a strong anti-poverty strategy should be built upon a visionary, rights based approach. Included in this there should be new, more directive initiatives aimed at bringing about a more equal society.

There was positive feedback for the vision proposed on p.90 of the document referring to "*Development of A Society Which Aims To Enable All It's Citizens To Be Fully Participative, To Realise Their Full Potential And Live Free From Poverty And Social Exclusion.*" However, it was agreed in the group that the wording should be changed to "*Development of a Society Which **Enables** It's Citizens To Be Fully Participative, To Realise Their Full Potential And Live Free From Poverty And Social Exclusion*"

The APS needs to be regionally reflective and to have cross border elements. It was also stated that the strategy needed to reflect the problems imposed by the border and a practical suggestion was for a 'common chapter' to be included in both NI and the ROI National Action Plans for Social Inclusion with a specific focus on border poverty.

It needs to state how it will integrate with other policies and strategies.

It needs to be honest about the current situation and about what is achievable in the long-term as people are not afraid of the truth.

It needs to avoid the use of jargon and it needs to be over arching, not just a tick box exercise.

A strong anti-poverty strategy must be ambitious.

Importantly it needs to be funded; skewing is too easy a way out and will not deliver for people living with poverty and social exclusion.

Participants expressed that there was a need for the strategy to be integrated into other strategies currently being developed so similar objectives and baseline targets can be agreed at an early stage.

A participant expressed the need for transparency in objectives but also in language. Jargon and seemingly meaningless terminology cannot be part of a strong strategy.

A strategy must be fully overarching in combating poverty, social exclusion and not just a tick box exercise in meeting singular targets for government department but also impacting on individuals' lives.

A strong anti-poverty strategy should be ambitious in what it sets itself to achieve and not just associate itself with what is currently being done.

Workshop participants suggest that there is a need to be fund a strong APS. Participants viewed the skewing proposal contained within the current proposals as a weak opt out that indicated of a lack of commitment to tackling poverty.

Political involvement and commitment to the Anti-Poverty Strategy were viewed by all workshop participants as being essential to ensure the consistency of the strategy and its ability to make a real difference for those experiencing poverty.

5 Are there any comments you would like to make in general or on the proposed measurements to be used within the Strategy?

It was the view of some participants that the intentions behind the proposed form of strategy were good. However, there was fear that the mechanics of the process were capable of weighing down its potential effectiveness.

Some asked if there was anything which could be done by individual groups to improve their input into the consultation. It was also noted that this should be the key question that OFMDFM to ask itself.

Participants stated that the consultation had not been wide enough. More needed to be held with people directly experiencing poverty. More work was needed to inform the indicators to be used in the strategy before Phase III. Requests were made for additional local workshops on the proposed indicators to be used.

Concern was expressed that the application of the Strategy on an inter-departmental basis would prove challenging as there had not been a broad enough consultation with government.

Participants also stated that there was a need to provide detail on how government departments would be monitored and who would do this job in the Phase III document. It was also stated that the Phase III document/strategy must be consulted on in a public arena.

KEY PRIORITIES

1. The Anti-Poverty Strategy must outline a cross border and regional approach to addressing poverty and social exclusion.
2. Indicators must be developed in partnership with the V & C sectors.
3. There must be a life cycle approach to tackling poverty.

4. There must be accountability and co-ordination across strategies.
5. A budget is crucial if the Anti-poverty strategy is to be effective.
6. Democratic Social Partnership must be central in forming and putting the anti-poverty strategy into practice. However, there is a need to beware of the usual 'gatekeepers' and for this process to be as inclusive as possible. (*such an approach does not necessarily deliver for people experiencing poverty, to be truly effective this must be taken on board)
7. The use of 'Plain English' and transparency of process are essential to enable this important policy to be understood and endorsed by all.

DERRY/LONDONDERRY EVENT – 16TH AUGUST 2005

WORKSHOP 2 – GREEN FAMILY & CHILD POVERTY

FACILITATOR: GERRY MACLOCHLAINN – NIAPN

1 Initial reactions/comments/questions to what has been presented today

Initial comments stated that the Phase II document is not yet a strategy. Participants asked what the time frame was for it all to be brought together and exactly how the strategy would be finalised. People wanted to know how department targets would be set and how they could be involved in commenting on them and the final version of the strategy. Many felt that they were consulted too late in the day to really impact but did want the opportunity to be heard and to really influence the resulting strategy.

The proposed lack of a specific budget for the Anti-Poverty Strategy was a big weakness. Workshop participants stated a budget was clearly needed particularly for poverty issues specific to Northern Ireland.

It was stated clearly that unless a strategy proposed to address benefit levels (particularly income support as opposed to invalidity benefits) it would have no impact on poverty in NI.

The drive to push people off benefits and into employment was not seen as the answer here; e.g. there were 6,500 applications for a limited number of shop assistant jobs when the new Debenhams store opened in Derry. It was stated that for many people living in areas with low or no job availability "Work is not a

route out of poverty.” Work cannot be the solution to poverty at present for those with disabilities or for the elderly.

It was emphasised that the levels of benefit people are expected to exist on are totally inadequate and this results in people living with chronic levels of debt.

Participants acknowledged that tackling child poverty was not a central objective of the strategy. It was observed that the only way to break the cycle of poverty is to begin at the beginning and to take children out of poverty.

It was also stated that the Sure Start programme (aimed at 0-4 year old children) is not resourced enough and it is not rolled out in a balanced way across the north.

Participants also stated that families living in areas that experienced the most extreme levels of poverty need help with teenagers and older children; the children who are most socially excluded within communities across NI. There is a need for programmes specifically for older children like Connexions in England. The strategy makes no reference to 16 – 17 year olds who are living at home, those who are not working, not in school and not on a government programme receive no money from state and have to be totally supported by their family. This situation adds further to the poverty of low and no income families.

The strategy also makes no mention of the issue of student loans and student debt. The current system of top up and tuition fees makes higher education less likely for young people from poor backgrounds. This situation it was stated will lead to rich middle class kids being the only ones getting a higher education. Even though the assembly rejected top-up fees we are getting them anyway and the strategy has not addressed this situation.

The strategy is not informed by brilliant research which OFMDFM have carried out.

One person suggested that they distrusted the presentation – it lacked realism and passion. The statistics report was based on figures and missed the human significance of what was being dealt with.

Serious concern was expressed with regard to the process of identifying and setting targets. It was felt that there was a major weakness in the strategy as it stood, as it proposed that government departments would set their own targets. It was stated that it is difficult enough to change or influence departments and this way of working would lessen the likelihood of the strategy making any difference to how or what government departments already do.

Attendees stated that Phase I over emphasised process as opposed to outcome. The Community and Voluntary sector can take on board the challenge to work

on process. It was clearly stated that their input is required as people were not sure that OFMDFM would know what to do with a budget if they had one.

There was a problem with skewing. Here we find the skewing of resources has led to education and school meal cuts etc. Skewing just leads to taking resources away from somewhere else; e.g. in Derry school buses were withdrawn in areas of greatest need - Creggan and this has caused additional hardship for parents with low and no incomes.

Many questions were asked about participation and the ministerial forum. How and when will it be established who will be on it? Will people experiencing poverty be supported to be there? What power will it have to affect these types of decisions?

The issue of contradictions between different departments and different strategies was raised. Where will pressure on this come from? Will Ministerial Forum do this?

How will ordinary people be represented on the forum? i.e. People experiencing poverty.

How will it be ensured that the groups on the forum actually represent those experiencing poverty?

Will there be mechanisms to involve people and support them?

There is an issue of governance – participation and ownership.

Is the government really listening to people? There is cynicism here about that. Water charges are being imposed and yet there is no support for them among any NI political parties.

The issue of buck passing was raised. An example was that "Investing for Health" had an objective of ending child poverty but there was no transparency over the shared focus of this strategies and how it would 'work' with the APS. Questions were asked about how other strategies with similar aims, objectives and targets would be 'acknowledged' or 'partnered' within an Anti-Poverty Strategy. It was also stated that the Children's Strategy and the Anti-Poverty Strategy each stated that the other strategy would address child poverty in NI. It was suggested that the Anti-Poverty Strategy and the Children's Strategy should both include the same targets and that each strategy should share a "Common Chapter" (similar to the north-south common chapter re NAPSincl).

2. What are gaps/weaknesses within current Phase II document?

The total failure to deal with in-work poverty – for example the disaster around tax credits. It is vital that this be dealt with to ensure “continuity of income” Disability & poverty have not been dealt with adequately – in particular women and women with children. In NI there are poor levels of service delivery and there are particular issues about service delivery for people with learning and mental health needs. Extra help is required for people taking up work, especially people with a child with a disability. There are particular problems for people living in poverty over the summer months and for those with teenage children who are not eligible for benefits. These barriers make it impossible for people to start off in low paid work on route back to employment.

The strategy is not research based – the information is there at OFMDFM to inform – 50% of households living in poverty but not addressed in strategy.

There is a view that PSI’s were cut and pasted – where is the evaluation of existing PSI’s e.g. Travellers, Teenage Pregnancy? These are being presented as a solution but have not been evaluated. They need to be evaluated and revised.

3. What are strengths within current Phase II document?

It recognises the need for a strategy and that is positive, it’s a good start. There is talk about targets but they are not there yet. Ministerial Forum may be a good concept depending on how it is implemented.

4. What should a strong Anti-Poverty Strategy aim to do and how?

Utilise research e.g. that 32,000 children are living in severe poverty in NI
Must set clear objectives and targets that are SMART. This is demanded of the Community and Voluntary Sector so why not of government.

It should be inspirational and pull decision makers along.

It should set the goal of ensuring all children have equal access to meals, play etc and there must be measurable outcomes in this regard.

It should have a positive approach rather than anti e.g. more to achieve a, b or c rather than against x, y or z.

It must tackle the inequality gap between rich and poor and all strategies must work to that.

The Section 75 definitions are too narrow and need to be revised.

It should celebrate those strategies that are working on the ground. The strategy should plan for their sustainability and maintain what is there.

The needs of older people must be addressed.

Its important to keep different measures but the public headline measurements are important.

The poorest people are often the single unemployed people on basic income support and who are at considerable risk of fuel poverty for example.

The cost of public transport is an important issue

The issue of separated fathers who have no resources or facilities to see their children.

KEY PRIORITIES

- 1** SMART targets are required to tackle child poverty.
 - People experiencing poverty and young people need to be consulted on these targets and indeed need to “move up the table” and be part of the setting of targets and not just “blue petered” i.e. presented with something prepared already.
 - This is not something adversarial but a collaborative and partnership issue. If we do not work together on these targets they may not meet needs.

- 2** There needs to be a joined up approach across the board and this could be achieved with “Common Chapters” across various departments and the Anti-Poverty Strategy to complement and overlap each other.

- 3** Child poverty needs to encompass the complete age range of young people and children taking into account
 - Benefits 16 to 18 year olds.
 - Students and student debt.
 - Disabilities
 - Youth service (underfunded)
 - Measures indicators for young people

- 4** The strategy needs to be based on research which is already done and available to OFMDFM – no need to do it again.

- 5** There is a need to increase benefits. NI is a special case. Need for a special supplement to benefits.
 - The issue of a route back to work being a problem here.
 - Cost of living and family expenditure is higher here – (Family Spending Survey).
 - Benefits in South are more for large families.
 - Representations are need within the strategy for increased benefits – even if this requires changes to the block grant.