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Towards An Anti Poverty Response from RCN

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the above consultation. The Rural Community Network (RCN) is a voluntary organisation established by local community organisations to articulate the voice of rural communities on issues relating to poverty, disadvantage and community development.

In 2004 RCN submitted a detailed policy response including two separate presentations to OFM/DFM indicating how an Anti Poverty Strategy could address rural poverty and disadvantage.

Unfortunately little has changed in the current consultation document with rural specific issues still left unaddressed with the exception of a minimal reference to rural proofing. There is still no evidence that addressing rural poverty and disadvantage will be an integral part of any future Anti Poverty Strategy for Northern Ireland.

Many of the previous concerns still exist with the proposed Anti Poverty Strategy:

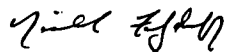
- The need to agree a definition of Poverty which illustrates an understanding of rural poverty;
- The implications of not having a specific budget or a specific programme for effective and new anti poverty work in rural areas;
- The lack of outputs and targets linked to a change in quality of life in rural areas for those experiencing poverty and disadvantage;
- The need for rural proofing indicators and area identification that moves beyond the shortcomings of the current 'Noble Multiple Deprivation Index';
- The need for a 'geographical location' element linked to Section 75.

RCN support the 'Enough is Enough' campaign led by NICVA which is calling for a better Anti Poverty Strategy for Northern Ireland. It is important for the Minister to address the concerns that are raised by the voluntary and community sector regarding this present strategy and the lack of high level targets which are required to form the foundations of a real and effective Anti Poverty Strategy.

RCN believe that for an Anti Poverty Strategy to work it must set clear objectives and targets with a new approach and thinking by Government. The first step is recognising the need to address rural poverty through a rural poverty specific section within the strategy.

We hope these comments are useful.

Yours sincerely



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Director

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