



Development Department

Your reference: Child Poverty Strategy

Our reference: #114466

Being dealt with by: David Purchase

Date: February 2010

Tel: 02890 320202 ext 3792

Policy Secretariat
OFMDFM
Room E3.19
Castle Buildings
Stormont Estate
Belfast
BT4 3SR
policysec@ofmdfmi.gov.uk

Dear Sir or Madam,

RE: Consultation: Play and Leisure Implementation Plan

Please find attached our provisional response to this consultation document. Please note that this is still subject to final ratification by full council.

Provisional Response

1.1. Overall comments

- 1.1.1. You will be aware that the Council has been working on its own Draft Corporate Action Plan to tackle Poverty and Reduce Inequalities and we believe that the principles of your strategy are complementary to the Council's. We have attended various meetings with you during the development of both strategies, which we believe have been beneficial, and we are keen to continue this dialogue. It is hoped that our draft strategy will be discussed and approved by committee in the near future.
- 1.1.2. Considering the dialogue that we have had, it is slightly surprising that your strategy document does not mention the role that Councils might play in helping to reduce poverty and the affects of poverty. We are pleased that the document acknowledges our input to workshops and that it commits support for local councils, and others, who provide services and programmes which meet the needs of local communities, particularly disadvantaged communities. However, we feel that it may be useful to highlight specific examples of ways in which councils might be able to support the strategy, subject to resource availability.

1.2. Responses to the specific questions

- 1.2.1. We have used the template you provided for specific responses. Please see the following pages.

Thank you for asking us to respond to the proposals.



Yours sincerely

David

Dr David Purchase
Policy & Business Development
Development Dept.
Belfast City Council
The Cecil Ward Building
4-10 Linenhall Street
Belfast. BT2 8BP
Tel: 02890 320202 ext 3792



Consultation Response

I am responding as:

An individual

on behalf of an organisation

Name:	David Purchase
Job title (If applicable)	Policy & Business Development
Organisation (If applicable)	Belfast City Council
Address	Cecil Ward Building 4-10 Linenhall Street Belfast BT2 8BP
Telephone	028903202020 ext 3792
E-mail	purchased@belfastcity.gov.uk



Framework for tackling child poverty

The Executive has adopted, but amended to reflect the NI context, the framework for tackling child poverty, developed by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), para 2.1, and intends to take action around this.

Question 1: Do you agree/disagree with the Framework outlined in chapter 2, section 2.1?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	X			

Please provide details of any areas of the framework which you think should be omitted

n/a

Please provide details of any additional areas which you think should be included in the framework

It would be useful if the framework made reference to the importance of measuring outcomes; the monitoring and collection of data; and the supporting infrastructure required to sustain it.

Our vision, key aims and underpinning principles

Our overarching aim, strategic priorities and underpinning principles

Chapter 2, section 2.1 outlines the overarching aim, strategic priorities and key principles underpinning the child poverty strategy.

Question 2: Do you agree/disagree with the overarching aim at 2.11?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
X				

Do you agree/disagree with the strategic priorities at 2.12?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
X				

Do you agree/disagree with the underpinning principles at 2.13?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
X				

Please provide details of any strategic priorities or principles which you think should be omitted



Please provide details of any additional strategic priorities or principles which you think should be included

'Whilst recognising that the tax and benefits system is led by the UK Government centrally, the Executive will continue to strenuously advocate for the appropriate level of income resources on behalf of our children and their families.' The council's own research into the roots of poverty in Belfast also confirms the primary importance of the tax and benefits system in addressing poverty issues.

- We would note that **support for low income families** might also be included as a priority and that such families are also at great risk from poverty.
- We would suggest consideration of additional principles:
 - Addressing **barriers to accessing statutory services** caused by poverty.
 - Ensuring the **meaningful and ongoing engagement** of those experiencing poverty (and representative organisations) during the delivery of the strategy
 - Encouraging partners to imbed the strategic priorities into their mainstream planning

Priority action areas

The priority action areas are detailed in Chapter 2, section 2.14 and are detailed against the four Strategic priorities

- **Ensure, as far as possible, that poverty in childhood does not translate into poor outcomes**

Question 3: Do you agree/disagree with the priority action areas identified under this strategic priority in section 2.14?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
X				

Please provide details of any priority action areas which you think should be omitted

Please provide details of any additional priority action areas which you think should be included



Support more parents to be in work that pays

Question 4: Do you agree/disagree with the priority action areas identified under this strategic priority in section 2.14?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
X				

Please provide details of any priority action areas which you think should be omitted

Please provide details of any additional priority action areas which you think should be included

The Council already provides access to parents through basic skills training programmes. These are delivered in our Community Centres that are often in areas at risk of poverty. Programmes include:

- The ACE Scheme;
- The Job Assist Scheme;
- Digital Communities;
- Step up to Work;
- Volunteering opportunities and;
- Step up to Learn

Additional funding might enable the Council to extend these programmes.

Ensure the child's environment supports them to thrive

Question 5: Do you agree/disagree with the priority action areas identified under this strategic priority in section 2.14?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
X				

Please provide details of any priority action areas which you think should be omitted



Please provide details of any additional priority action areas which you think should be included

There is potential for support for this section from existing Council services. As well as the obvious play and leisure support we provide (see separate consultation response on the Play and Leisure implementation plan), the Council could support this through:

- Its funding and delivery of arts, sporting and leisure activities.
- Using its contacts and Community Centres to enable access to parents, especially those in poverty or in danger of poverty.
- Targeting its physical regeneration activities.

Target financial support to be responsive to family situations

Question 6: Do you agree/disagree with the priority action areas identified under this strategic priority in section 2.14?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
X				

Please provide details of any priority action areas which you think should be omitted

Please provide details of any additional priority action areas which you think should be included



Future implementation of the strategy

Question 7: Please provide any comments on how you think the priority action areas in section 2.14 should be taken forward to deliver the overarching aim of the strategy

The priority action areas are comprehensive and we agree with their content. We do have a number of general points, listed below:

- One potential concern is the number of priorities (there are 32 significant priority areas listed). If the strategy has too many priorities then, by definition, they are not actual 'priorities'. There may be an argument to be made - particularly in times of constrained budget - for a greater focus on those priorities which are likely to have the most significant impact on child poverty in Northern Ireland.
- We would suggest that a critical element of the strategy (as in any strategy) is the robustness of the delivery plan, which we note will be published in due course. It is therefore difficult to make comments on the likelihood of successful implementation without reference to this plan. It would be important to see, against each action, detail of lead departments or organisations, targets, delivery dates, etc.
- There is reference in the document to "those key initiatives and signature projects to progress the strategic priorities". While such initiatives are important, and to be welcomed, we would also suggest that for a long term, sustainable impact the strategy must influence and re-shape the day-to-day mainstream planning and service delivery of government departments.

Please provide details on how you think the Monitoring framework should be developed, including the identification of appropriate indicators to measure progress

We suggest that monitoring should also include an integrated approach to on-going engagement with those in poverty (and their representative organisations). While statistical data is important in measuring impact, it is not the complete picture and the views and experience of those for which the strategy is being developed will inform an important and more nuanced measure.

Please provide any other comments you wish to make



While we appreciate the efforts made to make the consultation response process easier to complete, we would suggest that more work is required to make the process more convenient.

The Department might like to consider the use of more modern electronic tools and techniques to allow commenting and consideration of the strategy (eg, wikis, comment-able web pages, or other online collaboration tools).

We'd also be keen to see feedback on the consultation process – in terms of how and why comments and suggestions have (or have not) be incorporated into the final draft.

Confidentiality and Access to Information Legislation

Information provided in response to this consultation, including personal information, may be published or disclosed in accordance with access to information legislation: these are chiefly the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA), the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA) and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR).

If you want the information that you provide to be treated as confidential, please be aware that, under the FOIA, there is a statutory Code of Practice (section 45) with which public authorities must comply and which deals, amongst other things, with obligations of confidence. In view of this, it would be helpful if you could explain to us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential. If we receive a request for disclosure of the information, we will take full account of your explanation, but we cannot give an assurance that confidentiality can be maintained in all circumstances. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

For further information about confidentiality of responses please contact the Information Commissioner's Office on 028 9026 9380 or email ni@ico.gsi.gov.uk (or see their website at www.ico.gov.uk).