

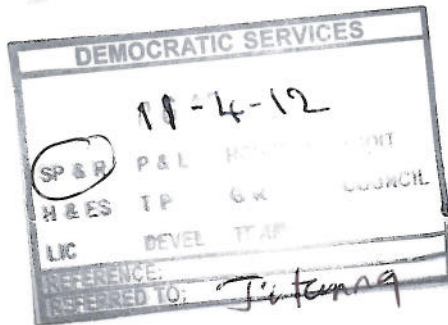


JOE REYNOLDS
EQUALITY & STRATEGY DIRECTORATE
E3.15 Castle Buildings
Stormont Estate
BELFAST, BT4 3SR

Telephone: 028 9052 3210
Email: joe.reynolds@ofmdfmi.gov.uk

Mr Henry Downey
Democratic Services Officer
Belfast City Council
City Hall
Belfast
BT1 5GS

Our Ref: COR/173/2012



3 April 2012

Dear Mr Downey

Welfare Reform proposals

Thank you for your recent correspondence dated 12 March 2012, advising of the meeting of the Belfast City Council on the 1 March 2012 and its agreement to a resolution regarding welfare reform. I have been asked to reply.

The Coalition Government's Welfare Reform Bill became law on the 8 March 2012. The Minister for Social Development will now bring forward his proposals for a Welfare Reform Bill to give effect locally to the proposed changes.

Ministers are aware that similar motions have been debated at the Assembly and in other local Councils. During the Assembly debate, the work of the Executive's sub-committee on Welfare Reform and the ongoing engagement between Department for Social Development and Department for Work and Pensions were also noted. The Executive took the opportunity to reaffirm its commitment to this ongoing work and will continue to work to lessen any potentially detrimental effects of welfare reform.

Tackling disadvantage is a key priority for the Executive and is an essential element in the draft Programme for Government. Ministers have therefore

included in the Programme a commitment to establish an advisory group, to assist in alleviating hardship including any implications of the Coalition Government's Welfare Reform Programme.

Ministers will be asking the Group to explore the scope available to ease and lessen poverty and to reduce financial hardship. Ministers have also asked them to take account of the likely prospects for economic growth.

Ministers have asked the Group for particular advice on the impact on individuals and families who are living on benefits or who are dependent on low wages. Alleviating hardship is a key priority for the Executive and Ministers look forward to receiving the advice of this group over the coming months.

Ministers welcome your interest in this matter and look forward to the Council's continuing support as we continue to address the issues raised in the debate and in the work they continue to undertake to address the issues of poverty and deprivation.

Yours sincerely

Joe Reynolds

Head of Poverty, Social Inclusion, Disability Branch