



# Briefing on Anti-Poverty Strategy & Disability Strategy

Prepared by Ellen Finlay, Policy Officer,  
Children in Northern Ireland

## **Anti-Poverty Strategy**

### **Expert Panel**

The Anti-Poverty Strategy Expert Advisory Panel was appointed in October 2020 and was tasked with preparing a report setting out key recommendations to Deirdre Hargey, Minister for Communities, about the themes and key actions the Anti-Poverty Strategy should include and the gaps in provision that it should seek to address. Members of the panel were: Goretti Horgan, Pauline Leeson, Bernadette McAliskey and Mike Tomlinson.

The Expert Panel Report can be downloaded from here:  
<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/system/files/publications/communities/dfc-social-inclusion-strategy-anti-poverty-expert-advisory-panel-recommendations.pdf>

## **Co-Design Group**

The Department for Communities also established an Anti-Poverty Strategy Co-Design Group to advise DfC on the development and drafting of the new Anti-Poverty Strategy. The Group provides an advisory role.

## **Work to Date**

The Co-Design group has been meeting once a month to progress the anti-poverty strategy. To date meetings have looked at the Expert Panel Report and made several recommendations as well as looking at a vision and outcomes.

The Department is progressing with an aligned approach across all four Social Inclusion Strategies identified in New Decade, New Approach. This will entail the production of a high-level strategic framework with a targeted number of outcomes. In making decisions on the draft strategic framework which will be presented to the Executive, regard will be given to the need for alignment across all social inclusion strategies.

The Anti-Poverty Strategy will underpin the Programme for Government, which states the Executive's vision to create 'an inclusive society in which people of all ages and backgrounds are respected and cared for and in which we all prosper. A society which has no barriers to prevent people from living fulfilling lives.'

The Anti-Poverty Strategy will contribute to a broad range of outcomes under the draft Programme for Government. The cross-cutting nature of the causes and effects of poverty mean that the strategy will have an impact across the PfG. However, some of the outcomes where its effect will be most significant will include the following:

- **'We have an equal and inclusive society where everyone is valued and treated with respect'**
- **'Our children and young people have the best start in life'**

- **'Everyone can reach their potential'**
- **'We have a caring society that supports people throughout their lives'**

As it stands the following is the vision for the strategy but this may be subject to change:

**"An equal society where poverty and its impacts are eradicated, and that respects, protects, promotes and fulfils the rights of those at risk of poverty to ensure they achieve their aspirations."**

The Strategy will contain a set of principles which are currently in development, but an initial outline of proposals for inclusion is provided below:

- **Human rights** – the Strategy is rights-based. Its content and delivery is focused on empowering those experiencing or at risk of poverty to know and exercise their rights. It also aims to ensure that public bodies are accountable for fulfilling their responsibilities to promote and protect the rights of those at experiencing or at risk of poverty. (This will be supported later in the strategy by a section that makes specific reference to human rights and progressive realisation through ICESHR, ECHR, CRC, CRPD, CEDAW etc.)
- **Equality and fairness** – the Strategy promotes equality of opportunity for those experiencing or at risk of poverty in addressing economic, social and structural inequalities.
- **Multiple identities and intersectionality** – the Strategy has regard to the multiple identities of those experiencing or at risk of poverty, recognising that there are many diverse experiences of discrimination and seeking to address the barriers that these can present to individuals. It aims to ensure that no one is left out, and that people can exercise all their rights and freedoms equally regardless of age,

gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religious and political belief, socio-economic status, and whether they live in a rural or urban setting.

- **Participation and inclusion** – the Strategy will place lived experience at the heart of its delivery. It will promote active citizenship and the meaningful involvement of those experiencing or at risk of poverty and their representative organisations in the design and delivery of policies and programmes affecting them.
- **Dignity, respect and choice** – the Strategy aims to ensure that those experiencing or at risk of poverty are treated with dignity and respect in all aspects of life, and that they have the freedom to make choices in how they live their lives.
- **Collaboration and partnership** – the Strategy promotes joined-up working between departments, public bodies, those experiencing or at risk of poverty and their representative groups. The Strategy’s outcomes and commitments will be delivered through evidence-based, co-designed solutions.
- **Leadership** – through the delivery of the Anti-Poverty Strategy, the Executive is committed to achieving societal change and delivering a fairer and more inclusive society with economic wellbeing for all.

The draft strategy outcomes were discussed at a Co-design Group meeting on 22 June and it was agreed that the Department would circulate a revised draft of the outcomes, taking account of views expressed by members. These are currently being worked on.

A summary of the recommendations from the Expert Panel Report are as follows:

1. *The Northern Ireland Act 1998 obliges the Executive to develop a strategy ‘to tackle poverty, social exclusion and patterns of deprivation based on objective need’. In 2015, the Northern Ireland High Court ruled that there was no such strategy in existence, and this remains the case.*

2. *The political and economic contexts for the anti-poverty strategy (APS) are very unpredictable, globally and locally. The COVID-19 pandemic, the UK's exit from the European Union, the climate emergency and a decade of austerity and antipathy to income redistribution, all present profound economic and political pressures. 'Building back fairer' must be the guiding principle.*
3. *The Panel's key assumption is that the purpose of an APS is to raise living standards and reduce living costs for those below an agreed, objectively-defined poverty line. Our recommendations focus on enabling people to undertake paid work and on improving social security for those who cannot work, or for whom work is unavailable.*
4. *Most of those living in poverty are families with children and the majority of these families have someone in work, mainly part-time. Addressing the constraints on hours worked and pay received are key to the APS.*
5. *The majority of households in poverty live outside of the Belfast area and in the West of NI. One challenge is to ensure that opportunities for work are available in areas of economic underdevelopment.*
6. *Pensioners are the only group for which poverty rates have declined steadily over the last twenty years. Child poverty rates are getting worse since the mid-2010s and the average amount that children are below the poverty line is high. Two-thirds of child poverty is made up of children who have lived in poverty for three of the past four years.*
7. *Destitution is a growing problem and a better understanding of the scale and nature of this issue in NI is urgently required.*
8. *An effective APS must be built on principles of inclusion and consultation, both at designstage and as part of an on-going process of review and revision. The lived experience of poverty should be incorporated into the co-design process and in 'poverty truth' projects and other mechanisms thereafter. Listening to people in poverty, including children, is essential.*
9. *The APS should be based on the social and economic rights set out in the relevant UN conventions and the Sustainable Development Goal commitment to 'end poverty in all its forms everywhere'.*
10. *It is recommended that the Assembly passes an Anti-Poverty Act which includes a duty to reduce child poverty, setting targets and timetables for 2030 and beyond, and including four objective measures of poverty. It will include a duty to review plans and progress against targets every five years, using 2015/16 as the baseline.*

11. *The Anti-Poverty Act should make discrimination in the provision of goods and services on grounds of socio-economic status unlawful, and include a 'socio-economic duty' requiring public bodies to take account of socio-economic disadvantage when making strategic decisions. Age discrimination should also be made unlawful.*
12. *The Act should contain provisions for an Anti-Poverty Commission with responsibilities to a) monitor progress on reducing poverty and income inequality; b) promote the reduction of poverty and income inequality; and c) advise the Executive on any matters relating to poverty.*
13. *The strategy should regularly quantify total objective need by auditing the 'costs of poverty' and by estimating the expenditure required to end household poverty based on the recommendations in this report.*
14. *As agreed in New Decade New Approach, the Executive should take the lead on addressing low pay by declaring NI Government as a Real Living Wage and a 'Living Hours' employer.*
15. *We recommend the introduction of a new non-taxable weekly Child Payment for all 0-4-year olds and for 5-15-year olds who are in receipt of free school meals. We propose that the Child Payment is set at between £12.50 and £15 per week initially.*
16. *We make a number of recommendations on benefit cuts, welfare reform mitigations and Universal Credit on the grounds that the benefit system itself has become a driver of poverty and destitution. These include permanently ending the 'bedroom tax', the two-child limit, the benefit cap and the five-week wait.*
17. *More can be done to encourage the take-up of Pension Credit, housing benefit, disability benefits and National Insurance credits among older people.*
18. *Family outgoings can be reduced by ensuring that participation in school is cost-free, by extending free school meals provision to include school holidays, by expanding funding for the provision of breakfast and homework clubs, and by expanding Sure Start provision.*
19. *Childcare is an essential part of the infrastructure required for a successful APS. The Childcare Strategy must provide childcare that is affordable, accessible and high quality, and that caters for the diversity of needs of families currently below the poverty line.*
20. *There are a number of cross-cutting issues for the APS. Housing is one of them and we recommend reversing the trend of the growing numbers of families in poverty in the private rented sector. This requires long-term investment in social housing and an end to the 'right-to-buy' Housing Executive properties, as well as greater regulation of the private rented sector.*

21. *We recommend a range of interventions that are required to increase the employment of disabled people, young people and older workers.*
22. *As the cliché goes, ‘what is counted is what counts’. We recommend more than a dozen changes to the measurement of poverty and the use of indicators in monitoring progress*

## **Disability Strategy**

### **Expert Panel**

The Disability Strategy Expert Advisory Panel was appointed in October 2020 and was tasked with preparing a report setting out key recommendations to Deirdre Hargey, Minister for Communities, about the themes and key actions the Disability Strategy should include and the gaps in provision that it should seek to address. Members of the panel were: Sean Fitzsimons, Eilionóir Flynn, Bronagh Byrne and Tony O’Reilly.

A copy of the Expert Panel Report can be downloaded here: <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/system/files/publications/communities/dfc-social-inclusion-strategy-disability-expert-advisory-panel-report.pdf>

### **Co-Design Group**

As with the Anti-Poverty Strategy a co-design group was established to advise DfC on recommendations for designing a disability strategy. Upon reading the Expert Panel Report Children in Northern Ireland and the Children’s Law Centre realised that the report did not capture the issues experienced by children and young people with disabilities and their parents. We therefore lobbied for a supplementary report to be completed. DfC commissioned Professor Berni Kelly

from Queens University to conduct a report based on rapid review of literature on issues for disabled children and young people in Northern Ireland (NI) to supplement the earlier report from the Disability Strategy Expert Advisory Panel (2020). The report aimed to set out high level, strategic issues impacting on disabled children and young people to assist in the development of a new Disability Strategy by:

- providing baseline, evidence-based information on the experience of, and issues faced by, disabled children and young people in NI; and
- making recommendations, based on the available research, on the gaps in provision for disabled children and young people and potential strategic actions that should be considered in the new Disability Strategy, taking account of the rights framework for disabled children and young people.

The report makes for stark reading, but it provides an evidence base on which we can move forward and has helped us secure a specific outcome for children and young people with disabilities within the Disability Strategy. Indeed, the Department has said:

“Having regard to the additional research on disabled children and young people that was commissioned by the Department with the agreement of the Co-design Group, the Department proposes that it would be beneficial to include a specific outcome focusing on the specific needs, voices and experiences of Deaf and disabled children and young people would be beneficial. This outcome acknowledges the importance of early intervention, embeds Article 7 of CRPD, as well as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Children’s Services Co-operation Act (NI) 2015. It also ensures alignment with the Executive’s Children & Young People’s Strategy.’

The vision for the Disability Strategy is noted below but may be subject to change:



**“An inclusive society that respects, protects, promotes and fulfils the rights of all Deaf and disabled people to participate fully as citizens free from discrimination.”**

Again, this strategy will be underpinned by a set of principles:

- **Human rights** – the Strategy is rights-based. Its content and delivery is focused on empowering Deaf and disabled people to know and exercise their rights. It also aims to ensure that public bodies are accountable for fulfilling their responsibilities to promote and protect the rights of Deaf and disabled people. (this will be supported later in the strategy by a section that makes specific reference to CRPD (in particular, the General Principles in Article 3), ECHR, CRC, CEDAW etc.)
- **Equality and fairness** – the Strategy promotes equality of opportunity for Deaf and disabled people in addressing social and structural inequalities. It ensures that Deaf and disabled people are equal before the law and statutory protections are fit for purpose, effective and robustly implemented.
- **Multiple identities and intersectionality** – the Strategy has regard to the multiple identities of Deaf and disabled people, recognising that there are many diverse experiences of discrimination and seeking to address the barriers that these can present to individuals. It aims to ensure that no one is left out, and that Deaf and disabled people exercise all their rights and freedoms equally regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religious and political belief, socio-economic status, and whether they live in a rural or urban setting.
- **Participation and inclusion** – the Strategy will place lived experience at the heart of its delivery. It will promote active citizenship and the meaningful involvement of Deaf and disabled people in the design and delivery of policies and programmes affecting them. It aims to ensure the full participation of Deaf and disabled people in all aspects of life, on an equal basis with others.
- **Dignity, respect and choice** – the Strategy aims to ensure that Deaf and disabled people are treated with dignity and respect in all aspects

of life, and that they have the freedom and autonomy to make choices in how they live their lives.

- **Collaboration and partnership** – the Strategy promotes joined-up working between departments, public bodies, Deaf and disabled people and their representative groups. The Strategy's outcomes and commitments will be delivered through evidence-based, co-designed solutions.
- **Leadership** – through the delivery of the Disability Strategy, the Executive is committed to achieving societal change and delivering a fairer and more inclusive society for all Deaf and disabled people.