

Towards implementing an Anti-Poverty Strategy for Northern Ireland

The report of a conference organised by the NI Anti-Poverty Network and Child Poverty Alliance held in Belfast on 5th April 2016



NI Anti-Poverty Network



Child Poverty Alliance
campaigning to eradicate child poverty

Table of Contents

1. Welcome and scene setting	6
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Thomas Mahaffy – Head of Organising and Development, UNISON• Fiona McCausland – Vice-Chair, NI Anti-Poverty Network (NIAPN)• Pauline Leeson - Chair, Child Poverty Alliance	
2. Developing an anti-poverty strategy based on objective need	9
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Daniel Holder – Committee on the Administration of Justice	
3. Approaches to reducing poverty	16
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mike Tomlinson - Poverty & Social Exclusion Research Project• Paddy Hillyard - Child Poverty Alliance• Dr Ann Marie Gray – University of Ulster/JRF Anti-Poverty Strategy Task Group	
4. Ensuring the voices of people experiencing poverty are heard	26
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Goretti Horgan - NIAPN/University of Ulster• Marie Cavanagh - NIAPN/Gingerbread NI• Dessie Donnelly - Participation and the Practice of Rights (PPR)	
5. Panel discussion: Poverty, inequality and human rights	37
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Koulla Yiasouma - NI Commissioner for Children and Young People• Dr Michael Wardlow – Chief Commissioner, Equality Commission NI• Grainia Long – Commissioner, NI Human Rights Commission	
6. Next Steps	44
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fiona McCausland – Vice-Chair, NIAPN• Pauline Leeson - Chair, Child Poverty Alliance	

INTRODUCTION

In June 2015 the Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ) won a legal challenge against the NI Executive for failing to adopt a strategy to tackle poverty, social exclusion and patterns of deprivation on the basis of objective need (the Anti-Poverty Strategy).

Despite a clear Court judgement that the Executive is in breach of its legal obligations, by April 2016 no strategy based on objective need had yet emerged. As a result, the NI Anti-Poverty Network and the Child Poverty Alliance organised a conference:

- to highlight the impact of current policies on those currently experiencing poverty;
- to explore different approaches to reducing poverty – including equality and human rights-based perspectives; and
- to examine potential strategies to ensure a robust, effective anti-poverty strategy for NI based on objective need.

The conference – which included speakers from UNISON, NI Anti-Poverty Network, Child Poverty Alliance, Committee on the Administration of Justice, Poverty & Social Exclusion Research Project, Child Poverty Alliance, University of Ulster, JRF Anti-Poverty Strategy Task Group, Gingerbread NI, Participation and the Practice of Rights (PPR), NI Human Rights Commission, Commissioner for Children and Young People and the Equality Commission (NI) - agreed a set of principles that must inform any future strategy.

Common Platform for the Anti-Poverty Strategy Draft Key Principles for the Strategy

The Common Platform is a civil society network campaigning for the effective implementation by the NI Executive of the strategy to tackle poverty, social exclusion and patterns of deprivation based on objective need, required by S28E of the NI Act 1998 (as amended).

In 2015 the High Court found the NI Executive was acting unlawfully for not having adopted such a strategy. The Common Platform urges that among other matters the anti-poverty strategy be informed by the following key principles:

- 1. Define Poverty:** Similar to our neighbouring jurisdictions (1) the strategy should include a proper definition of poverty, consistent with international standards on socio-economic rights, which reflects material deprivation and an income that falls below an adequate standard of living (2);
- 2. Define Objective Need:** The anti-poverty strategy should equally ensure proper definitions of objective need which remove or reduce the scope for discrimination by tying the allocation of resources to neutral criteria that measure deprivation irrespective of community background or other affiliation;
- 3. Overarching, targeted outcomes and monitoring progress:** The anti-poverty strategy should be overarching, covering, and interconnecting Executive policy rather than being limited to a list of existing or proposed initiatives. As such it should also contain measurable targeted outcomes to reduce levels of poverty overall and among specific groups. This includes measures to meet targets set for the reduction of child poverty. The monitoring framework should ensure desegregation across equality categories including gender and ethnic groups (including community background);
- 4. Countering austerity:** The anti-poverty strategy should recognise the context of, and seek to challenge and minimise the impact of the budget cuts on the NI Block Grant in relation to poverty, including gender-specific poverty. This includes the examination of progressive revenue raising measures, including rates for the better off, rather than primacy to further regressive cuts;
- 5. Rights-based approach:** The anti-poverty strategy reflects state responsibility rather than charitable benevolence and should follow a 'rights-based' approach, and hence further the realisation of human rights as laid down in international standards;
- 6. Policy Appraisal:** The anti-poverty strategy should incorporate mechanisms to ensure that all new and revised policies are consistent with the aims of the strategy to tackle poverty on the basis of objective need. Such a process is already implicit within, and could be accommodated within, the existing equality impact assessment process;
- 7. Childcare:** The strategy should incorporate a childcare strategy that implements comprehensive provision and boosts the economy by allowing parents to stay in work and increasing the economic participation of women.

Notes can be found on Page 48

Within the new programme for government, specific reference is made to helping people out of poverty and it appears that Government intends to bring forward an Anti-Poverty Strategy as part of a new Social Strategy, being developed by the new Department of Communities.¹ Although this is somewhat uncertain after the collapse of the institutions we await clarity after the March 2017 elections.

It is essential that the final Programme for Government Framework document make explicit reference to the strategy required to be developed under section 28E of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and that a timetable for its introduction be set out as soon as possible. We would also urge commitment to the above principles in the Anti-Poverty Strategy.

We would further submit that it will prove very difficult to achieve this outcome in an environment of continued cuts to welfare benefits, including the introduction of the Benefit Cap, the expected introduction of Universal Credit, and the fact that the short-term mitigation measures introduced under the Welfare Supplementary Payments Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 will only last until 2020. The impact of these austerity measures will disproportionately affect those already living in areas of disadvantage and will only serve to deepen inequality.

NI Anti-Poverty Network

Child Poverty Alliance

NI Anti-Poverty Network (NIAPN) is a member-led organisation of over 300 individuals and organisations committed to tackling poverty. It was established in 1990 as part of an EU-wide move to address poverty and social exclusion. Its mission is to attain a poverty free society by empowering communities and influencing government through research, education and campaigning. NIAPN also networks with other organisations concerned with poverty and its affect, and is part of the European Anti-Poverty Network

Child Poverty Alliance is an inclusive coalition committed to campaigning for and addressing child poverty by working collaboratively with an evidence-based approach. It has engaged directly with Government and elected representatives seeking to inform public policy and hold Government accountable for tackling child poverty. It continues to advocate publically on behalf of families and children living in poverty so that policy makers will be more informed of the possible impact of their actions on children living in poverty.

¹ Consultation event, 23rd June 2016 and Hansard (AQT 26/16-21), 14 June 2016 Sean Lynch MLA to Minister of Communities, Paul Givan MLA.

1 WELCOME AND SCENE SETTING

Thomas Mahaffy - Head of Organising & Development, UNISON



Thomas Mahaffy has worked for UNISON NI for 20 years. He was employed as Policy Officer in 1996 and was subsequently appointed Head of Organising and Development in 2015. Thomas has been a Non-Executive Director of the Public Health Agency since it was established in 1999 and is also a Board member of NI Anti-Poverty Network, the NI Human Right Consortium and Participation and the Practice of Rights.

I would like to welcome everyone to Galway House for this very timely event. With only 4 weeks to go until the 2016 NI Assembly elections the important message coming from the Conference must be that change will only take place for the poorest in society if our politicians work together to produce the cross cutting policies necessary to challenge inequality, discrimination and disadvantage. The following speakers will discuss what these policies should look like and what these outcomes need to be.

Fiona McCausland - Vice-Chair, NI Anti-Poverty Network



Fiona McCausland is an anti-poverty campaigner and also, as a board member of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Consortium. Fiona originally trained and worked as an accountant before becoming involved in Community Development and qualifying as a Youth and Community Development practitioner. She is currently studying for the LLM in Human Rights at Queens University, Belfast.

The basis of this event is the judicial review by CAJ in June 2015 stating that there is a need for an anti-poverty strategy. 10 years ago the political parties signed up to the St Andrews Agreement and this agreement contained an obligation to develop a strategy that tackled poverty and its root causes in NI. In effect the NI Executive was to develop an anti-poverty strategy. We have now had two subsequent agreements due to crisis within the political institutions at Stormont and somehow the need to tackle anti-poverty in NI seems to have got lost. Almost forgotten is the 2015 judgement by Mr Justice Treacy. He held that the Stormont Government was in breach of the duty to produce an overarching blueprint for tackling social exclusion and deprivation.

What he was saying was that the NI Executive had failed to develop an anti-poverty strategy, or if we put it another way, it has taken the NI Executive eight years not to produce an anti-poverty strategy.

In January 2016 the First Minister and deputy First Minister, replying to members' questions, proclaimed that they were working together to develop a strategy to tackle social exclusion and patterns of deprivation. Now we are in April 2016 and electioneering is in full swing. There needs to be talk on the doorsteps about poverty and the need to tackle deprivation and its root causes. However, political parties are instead worried about who will be called 'First' and who will be called 'Deputy First' Minister. The ability of the parties being able to work together or to agree on any high level strategies including an anti-poverty strategy is looking slim.

Some even have said that poverty does not exist in NI and some believe it is the poor's own fault that poverty exists at all. We did have a journalist say recently that there was no homeless problem in Belfast but since he wrote that article, in the space of a couple of months, six homeless people have died on our streets. Poverty does exist in NI and the numbers are set to increase unless this issue is given the priority it deserves. We hope this event will explore ways of working together to enable the voices of the poor to be heard and to develop a strategy based on objective need.

Pauline Leeson - Chair, Child Poverty Alliance



Pauline is Chief Executive of Children in Northern Ireland, the umbrella organisation for the children's sector here. She is Co-chair of the Children with Disabilities Strategic Alliance and Chair of the Child Poverty Alliance - an inclusive coalition committed to campaigning for and addressing child poverty by working collaboratively with an evidence-based approach.

As Thomas has said, this is a very timely event before the election. Child Poverty Alliance was set up in order to raise awareness of child poverty in NI. It is a coalition that works collaboratively to end child poverty and new members are always welcome. We have two main objectives:

- to hold Government to account on strategies produced to end child poverty, and;
- to reform and reframe the public's understanding of what child poverty is to gain support for measures to support families.

Much work has been done to date to look at the extent of poverty and all the data and research is readily available.

In 2014 the Child Poverty Alliance commissioned a number of experts, some of whom are here today, on key aspects of child poverty in NI. The report was called, 'Beneath the Surface.' This was designed to be a roadmap on how Government should address this issue.

It highlighted the extent of child poverty and pushed for a progressive approach based on children's rights. We know the NI Executive are bound by human rights treaties including the UNCRC, ICESCR and UNCRPD. The shamefully high child poverty numbers that exist show a lack of commitment to the UNCRC in particular and a lack of urgent action to end child poverty and address inequality.

Many of the organisations involved are dealing daily with families struggling to survive. I look forward to hearing from people in the room who are acting to try to end poverty on the front line and from the three Commissions represented here today. Lastly I want to thank CAJ. The judicial review outcome for a strategy based on objective need has brought this topic back up where it belongs. We have not had a proper conversation with Government on poverty in about 2 years and I hope we can move forward at the end of the event with agreed key principles.



2 DEVELOPING AN ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY BASED ON OBJECTIVE NEED

Daniel Holder – Committee on the Administration of Justice



Daniel Holder has been employed as the Deputy Director of CAJ since 2011. Prior to this he worked in the policy team of the NI Human Rights Commission, and before that he led a migrant worker equality project run by the South Tyrone Empowerment Programme and Dungannon Council. He previously worked in Havana, Cuba as a language professional. He has a primary degree in Spanish and Sociology and an LLM in Human Rights Law, both from Queens University.

My title for today is ‘developing an anti-poverty strategy based on objective need’. As has been alluded to this is a legal obligation on the NI Executive, and that is who we took the judicial review against. This was not a case that was very complicated or nuanced based on human rights law. It was very straightforward. You have a legal duty to tackle poverty and you have not done it and this is what the court decided after it had considered the facts.

How did we get here?

It is obviously incumbent on the Executive to adopt a strategy after the election and we can talk through today what a likely process for that may be. The legal duty on the Executive, to be clear, is different to the Child Poverty Act obligations. This is additional to it and its genesis is also different. The legal duty comes from the St Andrews Agreement in 2006. The first NI Executive committed to reviewing policies such as ‘Lifetime Opportunities’ and ‘Targeting Social Need’. As a result, it was deemed there should be an anti-poverty strategy based on objective need. This formed part of the St Andrews Agreement and was inserted into the NI Act. This is important as it is not just any piece of legislation. It is effectively constitutional legislation.

There were a number of safeguards meant to be put into law as part of the peace settlement – one of these was of course the Bill of Rights that we still do not have and this would have covered socio-economic rights issues. However, some things were legislated for, and this included an anti-poverty strategy. Section 28(e) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 places a duty on the NI Executive to adopt a strategy to tackle poverty, social exclusion and patterns of deprivation – an anti-poverty strategy. The Executive must keep the strategy under review and from time to time adopt a new strategy.

One other very important element of the duty, and it is in the legislation enshrined in constitutional principle, is that any strategy must be on the basis of objective need. There was reference to objective need in the Good Friday Agreement with regard to tackling the predominantly Catholic unemployment differential. By targeting those in objective need you tackle not only the Catholic differential but also Protestant unemployment and unemployment amongst minority ethnic communities. Objective need became enshrined, after the St Andrews Agreement, into the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and the basis of it was an anti-poverty strategy.

Defining Objective Need

There has been a lot of discussion on how you define the concept of objective need and what its definition should be. There is a way of doing this that actually defines what it is not, rather than what it is. It is basically an allocation of resources that is not a divvy up between any of the equality categories. Let me take gender for instance. Discrimination and disadvantage is disproportionately experienced by women.

Therefore, any approach that matches anti-discrimination measures for men and women 'pound for pound' is not tackling objective need. It is not discrimination if money is not matched pound for pound. If you do try to move forwards on this basis it actually means you are contributing to the gender based discrimination because you are diverting resources away from the group most in need to another group purely to placate a powerful political constituency. The concept of objective need is to get beyond this. Indicators of objective need will be different for different groups and will impact in different ways depending on which policy issue you are dealing with.

In North Belfast PPR has done a lot of work to flag housing inequality, particularly Catholic families on the waiting list, to the international community. But there is another dimension to housing inequality - issues around house prices, particularly in North Belfast. The differentials in house prices, rental prices and the area you wish to live in will have an impact on how much you will have to pay. Therefore, on the one hand you are a young Catholic family looking to get on the property ladder and you will be paying a lot more than your Protestant counterpart. Therefore, the risks of poverty are much higher if you lose your job. On the other hand, if you are an elderly Protestant couple who needs to release the value of their property to pay for care, you will find your asset is worth a fraction of that of your Catholic counterparts. Therefore, strategies based on objective need have to be aware of the complexities of inequality and of the fact that as long as you have neutral criteria based on income and other indicators that are internationally recognised, you are going to meet the needs of all of those who fall beneath a particular level, who fall into deprivation.

Ten years ago an anti-poverty strategy called 'Lifetime Opportunities' was adopted under direct rule by Peter Hain.

We are in a very different place now, whereby we have Conservatives wanting to re-define poverty as something that is a state of mind rather than a state of income. CAJ, QUB and Ulster University collaborated on a document 3 years ago called 'Mapping the Rollback' looking at the equality and human rights commitments in the Good Friday Agreement 15 years on. This is where we identified a key outcome – we are meant to have an anti-poverty strategy based on objective need and we don't. We then started to take action. There was not just a lack of an anti-poverty strategy and a redefining of poverty in recent years, but also a move away from objective need.

We have had concepts such as good relations that are supposed to tackle racism and sectarianism being hijacked and instead used as a vehicle to veto anything that is politically contentious. An example of this is from Great Britain. Community cohesion, very similar to good relations, was stated as a reason for not allocating resources based on objective need. Money was going to certain areas with high ethnic minority populations and this created tensions.

Council Officers recommended that regeneration funding be allocated to predominantly ethnic minorities area based on evidence of need but the elected body of the council refused to approve this and redirected funding to predominantly white British areas due to fear of a white backlash. This is racial discrimination - diverting resources from those in most need to those in less need because they are a more powerful political constituency.

The recent Equality Commission report on housing inequality is very useful and brings up the issues of segregation. We do need to make sure that we discuss segregation as a symptom of housing inequality and not the cause. A symptom of a failure to deal with intimidation and racism etc. We should not get caught up in discourse that segregation causes the problem of inequality.

Recent research from the Equality Coalition on the equality impacts of the Stormont House and Fresh Start Agreements show that the finances attached are essentially structural adjustment programmes for NI – shrinking the size of the public sector, shrinking the size of the welfare state, and reducing taxes to big business. The type of economic model you see in structural adjustment programmes that exacerbate poverty and inequality.

Sometimes we are told it is divisive to talk about inequality and therefore it should not be talked about. It is divisive not to deal with it and find a path to reconciliation.

In October 2015 at a Conference 'Austerity and Inequality: A Threat to Peace?' the Equality Coalition looked at the impact of the Stormont House Agreement financial package, inequality and what is likely to happen over the next few years with regards to austerity. I would like to highlight a paragraph in 'Lifetime Opportunities', paragraph 28:

'There is little doubt that many of the poorest in NI live in areas which have suffered greatly during the long years of inter-community strife and conflict. Many would accept that the poverty and disadvantage endemic within such communities has led to a sense of limited opportunity and limited investment in the future. In such an environment it is easy to see why so many young people were drawn into violence and paramilitarism.'

Interestingly the British Government at the time linked poverty and deprivation to violence and paramilitarism and it is the same in the joint declaration in 2001. The October 2015 conference looked at how different poverty and deprivation is in a society that is emerging from conflict and it had speakers from the OECD, UN CESCR Committee and both the Equality and Human Rights Commissions. The research shows that despite inequality between different groups actually widening over the past NI Executive mandates there are examples of active resistance to approaches based on objective need. For example the PPR 'Equality Can't Wait' report looked at the DSD Housing Selection Scheme that was purportedly based on objective need. It actually tried to redefine objective need and re-direct housing to those in no need. The Social Investment Fund was also held up apparently due to resistance in allocating funding to different zones and areas of objective need by the First Minister.

I would like to mention two last things. The Eileen Evason report on welfare reform mitigations was accused of not being based on objective need. I think it was based on objective need as it looks at the British Government's decision to slash welfare which would have a very particular impact on the particular circumstances of NI which has higher levels of conflict related trauma and poor mental health. The report saw a need to remedy that gap and made recommendations. It is meeting an objective need as the need was clearly identified.

The Equality Commission investigation into DSD strategic housing policy highlighted that one of the vehicles to prevent approaches being taken that are not compatible with objective need is equality impact assessments. You must equality screen your policies and consider alternative policies when necessary if and when the equality impact assessment is done properly. In the case of DSD it was not done at all on any of their strategic housing policies. We asked the Equality Commission to investigate on the basis that this is a breach of their equality scheme commitments and equality of opportunity.

It proved very useful and one of the reasons is that it highlights that you cannot get out of your Section 75 equality duties despite pretending your policy is not a policy by naming it a pilot. You also cannot get out of doing it because your policy is 'high level' and 'overarching' and 'not a policy.' This has been a statement that has been around for a few years so it is very useful to set it out that all high level policies must be screened and/or equality impact assessed.

One of the DSD policies, 'Building Successful Communities,' for example, sets out 6 pilot areas but did not choose the areas based on objective need but on what seemed to be a divvy up. 3 Nationalist and 3 Unionist. What criteria had been used? Some was objective need based and some was based on areas that have empty properties and have experienced decline in housing demand, or even areas which are in proximity to those areas that in housing need. DSD also argued that the approach they took was based on parity, was deliberate and required in the name of good relations and equality. ECNI found that DSD had breached their equality requirements and if the policy had been equality impact assessed the Department would have had to have looked at alternative policies.

I believe that resistance to objective need is the barrier to getting agreement and delivering an anti-poverty strategy. We need to make this untenable and push for an anti-poverty strategy based on objective need, as is the legislative requirement, because it disadvantages everyone in objective need not having a strategy.

Where are we now?

We were originally told that OFMDFM had adopted the principles and architecture of 'Lifetime Opportunities' but of course that is not implementing a strategy *per se*. There was no other strategy that we could see, so we wrote to the head of the civil service to say that they were in breach of their legal duty but he wrote back to say they were not as they had endorsed 'Lifetime Opportunities' and there are things in the 'Delivering Social Change' framework and so we have met the criteria.

We responded that the legal duty also says you must have a process to review so how do you meet that part? The letter we received back was completely different answer as to how the Executive was meeting their legal duties and the claim was that the entire 'Programme for Government' (especially Priority Two) was in fact the Section 28(e) Anti-Poverty Strategy. When we wrote back we asked how all the things listed in Priority Two were based on objective need. There were no more replies after that. We went to Judicial Review and the outcome can be found in the judgement.

The court held that there was no such anti-poverty strategy and therefore the NI Executive had breached the legal duty. The judgement then stated what a strategy must be. It must be identifiable.

It must be complete with a start, middle and an end. It needs to be effective and this effectiveness must be capable of measurement. The actions taken must be referable back to the overall strategy. It must be a written document. The court also went on to talk about objective need:

'The concept of 'objective need' is obviously central to the statutory provision, the intention of which is to remove or reduce the scope for discrimination by tying the allocation of resources to neutral criteria that measure deprivation irrespective of community background or other affiliation.'

This is a statement that could form some sort of definition. There has been mixed reactions from the political parties. The whole Executive will need to agree a strategy. In terms of an overall reaction, Dolores Kelly SDLP and Jennifer McCann Sinn Féin did make statements welcoming the judgement. Mike Nesbitt UUP similarly welcomed it at his party conference. There has not been a public announcement on where Alliance stands on the judgement. The only party to register disappointment was the DUP in a response by Emma Pengelly to an Assembly question on 23 November 2015. Her statement goes into detail of some of the issues and challenges we will have getting an agreement. In particular their support for, (i) moving away from income-based to more aspirational indicators very much like the Conservatives, and (ii) a resistance to objective need that is area-based not necessarily individual-based. These will need addressed when adopting a strategy.

Where do we go from here?

Can 'Lifetime Opportunities' be dug out and readopted? No, because of various reasons but mostly because it was written in a very different time. For example, the opening paragraphs state that NI, like the rest of the UK has experienced a period of sustained economic growth, growing employment and improvements in standards of education, health and housing. Also the main delivery mechanisms detailed in 'Lifetime Opportunities' no longer exists such as 'Neighbourhood Renewal'. This was also at a time when poverty was being tackled by a new social security system and by things such as tax credits. Now we are in a situation where these are being rolled back.

There was talk that the Government's existing programmes could all be re-packaged into one big strategy. This would not work. They would all have to be based on objective need and 'Delivering Social Change' does not even have a document outlining what it is. There would be no way of using them to tackle poverty and social exclusion. The 'Social Investment Fund' did have some criteria based on need but the projects themselves did not need to tackle poverty or be based on objective need. There is no more information about the projects that were funded.

There is also an official process around adopting a strategy. The Executive has been deemed to be acting unlawfully for not adopting a strategy. We have been in contact again with the Head of the Civil Service although he has only responded to tell us he does not want to meet us. A number of stakeholders are being met but CAJ is not one of them. We have also been told that any new strategy will be focused on a 'needs based' instead of a 'rights based' approach. The letter we received does say it will look at objective need tools in order to deliver.

Summary

A new strategy will need adopted and there are a lot of experts in the room and these experiences should be drawn upon. There is not a process at the moment but we need to decide if we should develop our own model strategy as civil society instead of letting a lowest common denominator strategy be adopted. CAJ sat down at a roundtable in February 2016 with some of the experts in the room and developed a set of overarching principles. These are not set in stone and the thinking was that we could all contribute to come up with a common platform on an anti-poverty strategy to get consensus on some of the things we need.

The other jurisdictions around us have good definitions of poverty that are in line with international standards. We do need a definition of objective need. We need targeted measures and monitoring. It needs to combat austerity, the £3.7 Billion cuts that have happened so far and there are the cuts to come. 'A Fresh Start' talks about making more cuts and thinking about revenue raising later. However, we need to enter into a debate on what the Executive could do to raise revenue (for example raising road tolls, rent controls etc) rather than just cutting public funding. An anti-poverty strategy could look at this using a human rights based approach. It should not just be initiatives but should also look at policy making in line with Section 75 equality impact assessments. The guidance on equality impact assessments could be teased out to include socio-economic indicators and we also need to be discussing childcare, but let me leave it there.



3 APPROACHES TO REDUCING POVERTY

Mike Tomlinson - Poverty & Social Exclusion Research Project



Mike Tomlinson is Emeritus Professor of Social Policy at Queen's University Belfast. His research includes investigations of long-term unemployment (SACHR), poverty and social exclusion (OFMdFM, 2002, and ESRC 2010) poverty and the Northern Ireland conflict (Combat Poverty Agency, 2003) and the effects of 'the Troubles' on mental health (DHSSPS 2005). His recent publications include articles on child poverty in Northern Ireland, child and adult suicide trends, the measurement of well-being, and the social and political risks of austerity.

I see we have a new Good Friday Agreement! The Executive signed off a new Child Poverty Strategy in March on Good Friday. I will talk about broad principles of poverty and begin by going back further than the Good Friday Agreement and the Child Poverty Strategy. I will go back 21 years to the UN summit for social development that was held in Copenhagen exactly 21 years ago. An agreement on poverty and its eradication was signed by up to 117 countries including the UK and Ireland. The agreement then agreed definitions worldwide of both absolute poverty and overall poverty.

Definitions of poverty

Absolute poverty was agreed as a condition characterised by severe deprivation of basic human needs such as safe food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, lack of health, education and information and shelter. Overall poverty was broader and incorporates not only lack of income, food and shelter, education, health and safe environments but also social exclusion in the form of discrimination and lack of participation in decision making in civil, social and cultural life. It is very clear using these definitions that a considerable volume of both absolute and overall poverty exists on the Island of Ireland.

That summit agreement in Copenhagen agreed that Governments, having agreed these definitions, would develop clear plans for the measurement and reduction of overall poverty and the eradication of absolute poverty and that they would do this at local, national and regional level. Ireland responded, one of the first Governments to do so, in 1997 with a national anti-poverty strategy with a clear definition of poverty, two ways of measuring poverty and targets for poverty reduction.

What should an anti-poverty strategy look like?

So, for a couple of decades we have had an international model of what an anti-poverty strategy should look like. First it should be based on a statement of what is meant by the term poverty. I have quickly searched through the child poverty strategy and I cannot see a statement of what is meant by poverty.

It is a very simple thing but if we are not defining what we mean by this then we are lost from the very start. What we say on the Poverty and Social Exclusion Project website is that:

Definitions of poverty really matter. They set the standards by which we determine whether the incomes and living conditions of the poorest in society are acceptable or not and are essential for determining questions of fairness. From these definitions follow all actions to help the poorest.

So we move onto the second ingredient of any anti-poverty strategy. It has to include measurement. We need to measure poverty in clear, objective and consistent ways so that Governments can be held to account on progress or otherwise. I know that for some, conceptual and measurement debates about poverty are somewhat academic and technical and there is criticism that we need to do something about poverty rather than argue about what it is and how it should be measured. However, the difficulty is that ideas about poverty are being challenged daily by the 'war against the poor' whether we are talking about the actions of Governments or the demonisation of welfare in the tabloid press or the weekly diet that we have from the media and its 'poverty porn'. So part of the politics of poverty lies exactly in these areas, areas of popular ideas and the nitty gritty of measurement.

Just remind ourselves in regards to measurement that we have just had a parliamentary battle over the child poverty indicators written into the Child Poverty Act. The Government did in the end agree to maintain the duty to publish, not eradicate, but to publish poverty data according to the four measures while at the same time swiping £30 a week from ESA claimants based on work related activity. Let's be clear about the legislation. The Welfare Reform and Work Act is clear that it is dealing with poverty not rooted in objective measures of income and deprivation but poverty measures rooted in behavioural characteristics such as working with troubled families.

There is a whole section in the legislation looking to define precisely what troubled families are and how they will be monitored. The Centre for Social Justice (Ian Duncan Smith's thinktank) are already proposing that this includes measures on addiction, for example, and various other characteristics of so called 'troubled' families. There is also a section on workless households. I have no problem with the measures of work intensity similar to those in the EU, but here we are talking about workless households as some sort of category and educational attainment, otherwise known as measuring the 'life chances' of children. New rhetoric governing the new measures Government favours. The Act also confirms the new focus from poverty to an interest in social mobility. We have a Social Mobility Commission and there are reporting obligations we need to take account of, but we do not need to get bogged down in those. We need to keep the conversations focused on poverty.

What I spotted from scanning through the new child poverty strategy is that there are some alarming nuances in the direction of social mobility. There is rhetoric that children in poverty is ok as long as the children are healthy! These are the dangers in the influence that ideological concepts of social mobility and the shift towards the pathology of individuals may be having on our own construction of these issues.

Measuring objective poverty

In fact internationally there is a wide consensus that objective poverty measurement should be based on 2 things, (1) low income measures, and (2) patterns of deprivation. Deprivation is a key word used in the Treacy judgement and yet the two measures that will be privileged in the child poverty strategy are both income measures - the relative income measure and the absolute poverty measure which measures income at a fixed point in time. Deprivation is not mentioned, so two out of the four of the key measures in the Child Poverty Act are being taken away. This is very serious. Deprivation is the outcome of poverty and a key measure of the consequences of living for any duration in a situation of poverty and relates, for example if people can afford to eat or not or stay warm.

So we have a wide spread consensus that an objective poverty measurement must be based on low income and deprivation and combinations of the two which is why the Westminster Government finally relented on the child poverty measures.

Individual households with equivalised incomes below 60% of the median income for their country is there in the UK Child Poverty Act measures but also in Ireland's overall poverty measures. The UK takes the 60% measure further by adding absolute poverty which is based on pay in the 60% standard at a fixed point in time. One of the things they dropped was persistent poverty because it is too difficult to measure apparently. Persistent poverty is designed to capture the corrosive effect of living in poverty for several years at a time, the concept of duration - the longer you live in poverty the worse things become for you.

When it comes to measures of deprivation there is much more variability in the items used and argument over method. The EU deprivation rate is based on a different set of items than the South's consentient policy measure and the UK approach is to weight a set of items according to their prevalence - most people can afford 3 meals a day and if you cannot then you score more on the UK deprivation measure than for an item 25% of the population cannot afford.

The UK changed the items used to score deprivation in 2010/11 and at a stroke this reduced the number of children in combined low income deprivation from 16% to 12% so measurement really matters.

The gap has probably got bigger since then but this essentially excluded 20,000 children in NI from the category of being in low income and deprived households.

The items and the way they are combined with income really do matter. At the poverty and social exclusion project we favour what we call a consensual approach anchored in survey evidence about what the majority of people say are the essential things that no one should do without and we derive the poverty line from the relationship between income and deprivation. So if we plot equivalised household income with households with children against a number of items on the deprivation list that households cannot afford then there is some natural break point that defines the poor from the non-poor. Once you are lacking in 4 or more items, based on NI data from 2012 and your income is more or less the same then you can draw a line and say this is the poverty line for NI.

To summarise an anti-poverty strategy needs to be based on a definition of poverty, the one that is used in Ireland:

People are living in poverty if their income and resources (material, cultural and social) are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living which is regarded as acceptable by Irish society generally. As a result of inadequate income and other resources people may be excluded and marginalised from participating in activities which are considered the norm for other people in society.

The Welsh definition is:

By poverty, we mean a long-term state of not having sufficient resources to afford food, reasonable living conditions or amenities or to participate in activities (such as access to attractive neighbourhoods and open spaces) which are taken for granted by others in their society.

The Poverty and Social Exclusion Project use the following:

Those whose lack of resources forces them to live below a publicly agreed minimum standard.

So one of the common elements here are that they all refer in some way to a normative standard that is commonly agreed, we all have normative expectations and these need defined, and they all incorporate the idea of a significant departure from those standards which means that people are in poverty and therefore cannot participate in society in the same way that everyone else can.

Then we move on to poverty measurement, whatever else is measured we must have an objective measurement of poverty based on income and deprivation and a great deal of thought went into the child poverty act measures and I think it is very important that we use those seriously and do not move too far away from them.

In relation to income I have already referred to the risk of poverty measures, looked at absolute poverty, the persistent poverty notion and then deprivation, the combination of low income and deprivation.

Here there is scope to alter the deprivation items, making those items sensitive to local circumstances that can be brought in when developing an anti-poverty strategy. This might sound obvious but it is important that there is a strategy document and as Justice Treacy recognises some kind of basic commitment to doing something about poverty, not just a vision to reduce poverty, in the future. We need something a little bit tougher than that, we need definite targets and dates even if we believe that constitutionally we are in a position where it is unlikely we have the policy levers to effect that change. We can at least have a vision that includes some sort of commitment to reduce poverty with targets and we can decide who is responsible for the failure at a later stage.

I would also suggest as a matter of principle that any anti-poverty strategy should have regard for any anti-poverty strategies in other surrounding jurisdictions, a strategy that looks North/ South and East/ West but also must take into consideration international standards. Finally a strategy worth its name should have an obligation to counter the experience and views of those most affected by poverty and here would include our obligations to monitor progress using Section 75 equality duties.

Paddy Hillyard - Child Poverty Alliance



Paddy Hillyard is Professor Emeritus of Sociology, Queens University Belfast. He has written widely on many different aspects of NI society. His more recent research has focused mainly on poverty, social exclusion and inequality and includes studies of Inequalities in Older Age; Expenditure Poverty; and an Exploratory Study of Wealth in Ireland. Between 2010 and now he has been involved with the ESRC project 'Poverty and Social Exclusion in the UK' and is finalising work on the development of an Index of Living Standards for the UK and NI.

The Child Poverty Alliance has seen very little happen over the years and we want to see a robust strategy being developed, we also know that from experiences from people on the ground that child poverty is a scourge on our society and it must be eliminated immediately not in the future. There are a number of things in common with a child poverty strategy and an anti-poverty strategy and I will touch on them today. A lot of what I will say will be my own personal view and not endorsed by all in the Child Poverty Alliance.

CAJ have come up with 7 key principles that we as a common platform could sign up to, I want to touch on defining poverty and defining objective need.

It seems to me from what Mike Tomlinson has said; we do have a very clear definition of objective need at an individual and household level, Mike described some of the measures that we have there.

In the Child Poverty Act we have 4 measures that are objectively given; (1) - relative low income (2) - combined relative low income and material deprivation, (3) - absolute low income and (4) - persistent poverty. These statistics have been gathered for many years in relation to each of those measures and it varies between NI and Great Britain but we have a very robust data set that tells us very precisely how many children live in poverty.

In terms of having objective standards there is no doubt all these are objective and scientific and there is a whole methodology now on measuring poverty based on income deprivation, it is extremely well tested. We have seen not only the EU but many other countries around the world adopting their measures of poverty.

What we also do is equalise incomes so we can make comparisons, so if a household has 2 children it can be compared with a 5 children household on the same basis. You could argue that there are differences in the weights you apply there. As for deprivation items, as scientists we say they have to be reliable, valid and additive in other words each item adds something to your measurement. There is also a debate as to whether you measure poverty before or after housing costs and clearly in NI we have housing costs considerably lower than London, if you measure it before housing costs you will get a very different figure than after. So you can see there are objective definitions out there.

We have seen fundamental changes between 2008/09 and 2013 on the extent of child poverty and the extent of low income households and if you take the child in poverty numbers there has been a slight decline in child poverty, but it is very insignificant, we are talking 100,000 in poverty. IFS looks at before housing costs income measures and after housing costs income measures and we see that the poverty level is going to increase quite considerably.

The cost of child poverty comes to about £825m per annum, that is made up of various different items such as loss of post tax earnings because people are brought up in poverty, £421m is being spent on services to help those experiencing child poverty. If we don't do anything about the child poverty rate our budget will decline year in year out. We will spend more on the consequences of people living in child poverty and there is a real need to tackle child poverty. We have seen a number of different strategies over the years, the overall conclusion by the Child Poverty Alliance and many others, is we still do not have a comprehensive, coherent, integrated evidence based and costed strategy to end child poverty. The document released on Good Friday shows this is still true.

It is very simple to end child poverty, all you have to do is increase the unit of resource going into poor families or you have to reduce the unit of resource going out of those families - it does not need 81 pages of a strategy, all you need to say is how you will increase the unit going in or how you will decrease the unit going out.

Northern Ireland could be the first country to eliminate child poverty as it is relatively simple to do.

What we have focused on in discussion is much of the other things that do help in the future to help reduce child poverty, for example reducing illiteracy. This is a good target but it will not eliminate child poverty so we need to focus more clearly on what will. So many of the policies that are to help reduce child poverty are wrong, giving fishing licenses to 18 year olds does not eliminate child poverty.

What do we do? How do we increase the unit of resource going to families? We need to think about a family resource supplement, we need a living wage, we need to eradicate zero hour contracts and we need jobs. Actual environmental job creation schemes including carbon social housing schemes. There are a few things that would increase the unit resource going into families.

How do you reduce their outgoings? A universal childcare system to start, reduce levels of rent by reintroducing rent controls and tackle social housing shortages, we need to refit houses to make sure they are energy efficient. We need free school days, access to affordable credit and breakfast clubs and so on. We do need strategies to promote the wellbeing of children and this won't eliminate poverty immediately but we should expand 'Sure Start' and so on.

We could use our limited tax raising powers in NI more effectively, look at the rates system, we have to look at further charges to discover polluting behaviour, we need to improve public health and we need to reintroduce prescription charges. We need much more transparency in public expenditure so we know where our £10 billion budget actually goes.

Northern Ireland is not poor - we have seen a big surge in the private rented sector from 3% to 18% and it is now worth £3 billion. Northern Ireland ranks 3rd in the region for top end cars, it has 96 high worth individuals and we have 41 millionaires whose assets come to £3.1 billion. The NI Executive has only looked after the better off. The reduction in corporation tax will impact on the poorest. The only thing they have done is mitigate some of the impacts of welfare reform. We are a rich society and we have a structure where people at the top end are doing very nicely from the public purse. That has to change.

The cost of eliminating child poverty is £700 million pounds, only 7% of our overall budget. We can end child poverty in NI, we have objective definitions and targets and we need imagination and joined up Government and a fundamental redistribution of resources.

Dr Ann Marie Gray – University of Ulster/JRF Anti-Poverty Strategy Task Group



Ann Marie Gray is a Senior Lecturer in Social Policy at Ulster University and Policy Director of ARK, a joint Ulster/QUB research organisation. She teaches and researches mainly in the areas of devolution, social policy and health & social care policy. In 2013 she was appointed to a Joseph Rowntree Foundation anti-poverty strategy task group to advise on the development of a UK anti-poverty strategy. She is vice-chair of the UK Social Policy Association and chair of Youth Action NI.

I am going to focus today on work I am doing with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) around developing an anti-poverty strategy for the UK. Linked to that I am a member of an advisory group that the Foundation has set up to advise on the development of that strategy, that has been taking place since 2012 and the UK wide strategy will be ready for publishing in Autumn 2016, but with further work to be done on the devolved areas of the UK.

We have had anti-poverty strategies but as most other speakers have said they have failed to deliver, there have been ambitious targets and sometimes not, but there is mostly a missing middle where the bit where policy will be introduced, with targets set out, is missing. The JRF set out to develop a strategy for the UK that covers all age groups, is evidence based covering all parts of the UK and is fully costed. Each action that comes out of the strategy will have a cost attached to it. Underpinning the development of the strategy there are a number of principles and assumptions, the foundation wanted to encourage a debate based on evidence among a wide range of stakeholders, including those living in poverty, about what UK poverty looks like and to assess and build a political consensus as far as possible on how to reduce poverty. This has been quite challenging since 2012 and also to challenge myths and stereotypes as Mike has alluded to earlier. The task group talked long and hard about definitions and the definition used in the strategy is:

When a person's resources (mainly their material resources) are not sufficient to meet their minimum needs (including social participation).

Resources should also include access to adequate education and health care and also the maintenance of dignity, so it is not just about access to services, but access to appropriate and adequate services and to ensure that people who are living in poverty are treated with dignity and lifted out of poverty. The key underpinning principle on behalf of JRF is that substantially reducing or eliminating poverty in the UK is possible, but there is a real need to identify and push the policy and practice levers that do work, and that this will also take considerable resource and it refers back to what Paddy said at the end of his presentation on revenue raising powers in NI.

There is a lot of work on the causes of poverty and what would reduce poverty so the foundation set out to collate all of that evidence through a number of evidence reviews in four clusters (1) - on money and the income people have and the cost of living, (2) - other resources such as family and community, (3) - around markets and services and finally (4) - severe poverty. There was also an evidence review on cross cutting areas such as gender for example. Through the commissioning of these evidence reviews we were able to see where the strength of evidence was, we could see where there were gaps and we could commission additional work to try and fill some of those gaps. Recently there have been reviews on special educational needs and poverty, on child neglect and poverty and on mental health and poverty - a particularly important issue for NI. In addition to those evidence reviews there has also been some statistical and secondary analysis and some modelling work that has yet to be completed looking primarily at the cost of poverty and then some theoretical reviews on the economics of poverty and the psychology of poverty and so on.

At the moment the strategy is in draft form based on a number of chapters such as tackling poverty in childhood, tackling working age poverty, poverty in later life and the costs of poverty, but also chapters on complex need and poverty. This is going to be a very evidence based strategy, it looks at what we know would make a difference in addressing poverty and the impact of not doing that. It will ask what kind of economy and society is compatible with sustaining no or low levels of poverty. The foundation has published manifestos for all of the devolved regions coming up to the election and those are available on the JRF website. It might be useful to highlight a few things that will be in the strategy particularly around childcare.

The foundation has been very ambitious about what it will say about childcare, they will be advocating a single funding system for childcare based on the Danish model. That would include free childcare for the parents of 2 year olds but the cap should be that no family should pay more than 10% of their income on childcare. That has been costed as £7 billion for the UK so it is not a cheap option but it will be at the very heart of the strategy.

Focusing resources – the foundation will be saying that difficult choices need to be made around focusing resources. Projections show that child poverty will rise by about 400,000 in the next 5 years while pensioner poverty continues to fall.

We are not advocating putting older people into poverty in order to reduce child poverty but we need to think about things like the winter fuel allowance for example and about the targeting of the resources. The foundation has spoken about supporting living rents to tackle housing shortages and rising housing costs.

There is a very big focus on jobs, not just more jobs but good quality jobs, putting in place advanced training schemes, better quality training at the outset and particularly in the low skilled but growth sector such as hospitality, caring and so on. I won't say too much on welfare to work as I think we are in a very challenging situation given what is happening to the Westminster Government around Universal Credit but there will be a foundation position on sanctions, that they should not further push people into poverty or force people into destitution.

I will end by saying that this strategy is being produced in very politically challenging times, in a time of austerity when parts of Government have no support. It is very important that what we do today happens more extensively, building coalitions across the UK, across organisations and internationally, based on international principles, rights and standards on dignity and so on.



4 ENSURING THE VOICES OF PEOPLE EXPERIENCING POVERTY ARE HEARD

Goretti Horgan – University of Ulster/NI Anti Poverty Network



Goretti Horgan is a lecturer in Social Policy in the School of Criminology, Politics and Social Policy at Ulster University where she is a member of the Institute for Research in Social Sciences and Deputy Director of Policy with ARK. She has been active on the board of the NI Anti Poverty Network since 2002 and is a former chair of the Network.

Getting people experiencing poverty's views about poverty is not as straightforward as might be thought. For one thing, the level of stigma surrounding poverty is so great that most people experiencing poverty (PEP) don't even think they are poor. They think poor people are 'other'; they are people who are homeless or really destitute. But with half of all people living in poverty in employment and with the no-pay/low-pay cycle that so many people are stuck in, the truth is that many of us will live in poverty at some stage of our lives – especially when our children are younger.

Over 10 years ago, NIAPN was part of a project called Get Heard, which aimed to include voices of PEP in the policy process. The Get Heard programme worked over five years, 2003-08, to involve people experiencing poverty in the development of the UK's National Action Plan on Social Inclusion (for the EU). Under the New Labour Government, the DWP led the process, with involvement from the devolved administrations & in partnership with anti-poverty networks in Scotland, England, Wales and NI. Under Direct Rule, NIAPN was funded on an annual basis by OFMDFM and additional funding was provided for Get Heard. A toolkit was developed to give PEP a chance to have their voices heard at highest policy levels in the UK and EU.

Before looking at what Get Heard found, it is interesting to hear what PEP say about poverty generally, as well as in the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland. A Get Heard, focus group in 2005 described poverty like this:

Poverty is the 'drip drip erosion of your soul.'

... 'Poverty means children lose out... 'Young people who are bright, doing very well in school have to leave school at 16 because the family needs the wages.'

'Insecurity and instability that come with poverty is a lack of basic Human Rights, a lack of human values, that leads to frustration, total distress and disappointment in life.'

At a NIAPN workshop in Newry (2004), PEP said:

'There has been no serious attempt to look at the legacy of conflict in Northern Ireland over the last 300, 800 or 70 years, whatever way you view it.... this community has been left with a legacy of sectarianism, fear, trauma and grief. All of these limit people's opportunities and access to 'rights of citizenship.'

Get Heard found concern among PEP that government was not taking the need for an Anti-Poverty Strategy (APS) seriously. They were particularly critical of *Lifetime Opportunities: an Anti-Poverty Strategy* because:

- Not evidence-based, although much of the research evidence had been commissioned by OFMDFM itself.
- No commitment to identify the causes and consequences of poverty in NI
- No commitment to address the impact and legacy of the conflict in NI
- For many people, employment is not an option nor does it offer a valid route out of poverty. There must be SMART objectives relating to people with disabilities and carers and other disadvantaged groups who cannot take up paid employment
- As part of the APS, all Government departments must develop clearly defined and specified targets, which must be measurable and time based.
- APS requires increased consistency, communication and co-ordination across Government departments and other Strategies (gender, children's etc)
- The APS must have a budget to ensure People Experiencing Poverty are supported to inform and direct the preparation, implementation and monitoring of the APS.
- The APS should be *the* strategy that informs and directs all others
- An All-Party Anti-Poverty Group should be established in the Assembly to ensure the spirit and word of the APS is implemented.

People experiencing poverty in 2007 were concerned at the growing inequality and poverty in NI:

- Higher and ever rising cost of living in NI
- Lower level incomes than rest of UK
- Will be harder hit by welfare cuts than E, S & W
- Higher costs for childcare in NI
- Higher cost for fuel to heat the home
- Higher cost of food, even in Tesco's etc

I would add that, in 2016, according to Barclay's Bank, Belfast has more millionaires than any other city in UK, apart from London & Aberdeen.

According to the institute of Fiscal Studies over the next five years, households with children in NI stand to lose more by 2020 than most other regions in the UK.

By 2020 30% of our children will be in relative poverty and 33% will be in absolute poverty. Absolute poverty means children that in 2020 will be living below what was the poverty level in 2010-11. That is very worrying. NI is going to lose more income than any other region outside of London due to welfare reform. The poorest families are going to lose the most. With benefit rates plummeting, child benefit capped and working tax credit cuts families will struggle massively. The new proposed benefit cap will impose tight restrictions on family size. The NI Government must deal with this. They cannot say we are pro family and pro life parties and then propose this limit on family size.

The NI poverty and social exclusion survey found 1 in 10 households across the region being unable to keep their homes warm and damp free. The NI Anti Poverty Network ran this statistic past some people living in poverty and their response was that it's a lot more than 1 in 10. And, of course, given the concentration of poverty in the North, it is a lot more in the poorest areas. It's probably 8 out of 10 people in the poorest areas who cannot keep their homes warm enough to be damp-free. The implications of a non damp free home are detrimental to health in terms of respiratory diseases and this can have a knock on effect in terms of the household's overall health.

Clearly, the lives of PEP are going to be even harder over the coming years – we need an Anti-Poverty strategy based on objective need **and** an Anti-Poverty Network that can force Stormont to take poverty seriously.

Marie Cavanagh –Gingerbread NI / NI Anti-poverty Network



Marie is Director of Gingerbread NI. She is also Managing Director of Possibilities NI Ltd; Chair of NICVA ; Chair of Children in Northern Ireland and joint chair of the Government /Voluntary Sector Joint Forum. She is a member of the Board of the NI Anti-Poverty Network, the Lower Ormeau Residents Action Group and the Cromac Regeneration Initiative.

I have been involved with Gingerbread for a good number of years and we work with one parent families. I am not going to rehearse statistically or otherwise all of the research that is out there that indicates lone parents are significantly over represented in those experiencing poverty, they have been for many long years and they continue to be, and by all accounts will continue to be when welfare reform is implemented in Northern Ireland.

What is a lone parent? Sometimes people find this quite interesting, well they can be someone who is bringing up dependent children alone and mostly these are women, mostly mothers but significant numbers of fathers as well.

They are divorced, separated, widowed, single and never married or single and pregnant and there are also parents who have foster care responsibilities or grandparents who have family responsibilities.

We have approximately 92,000 families within Northern Ireland, who would be identified as one parent families, as I say 93% of them are women, and they incorporate about 150,000 children and that effectively equates to 1 in 4 families with children being represented as a lone parent family. The majority are divorced or separated, a significant number are single and never married. We have a small percentage who are widowed and about 80% are between the ages of 25 and 49, so you can see where in the work spectrum, if you like, lone parents fit in. Less than 3% are teenagers and I have been specific about that because very often what we hear is that all "lone parents are feckless teenagers who don't know how to look after themselves."

I am going to look at some issues that have been raised with us by lone parents themselves. What we do through our membership is consult with them and ask them what it is they need.

We have about 2,500 lone parents who are members of Gingerbread. We deal with in the region of 3,500 lone parents per year or at least that is the most recent figure of 2014/15. What are the issues that lone parents raise themselves in relation to poverty and what needs to be addressed in an anti-poverty strategy? Money.

Money is the fundamental issue when it comes to poverty. While I was doing some research for this I had read an article that JK Rowling had wrote back in 2010 when the previous Westminster elections were happening and she was saying about this highfalutin idea that people have, that poverty is not down to money, it is! If you have nothing to put in the electric meter and you have no electric for the next three days then money is your problem, nothing else. Aspiration has nothing to do with it and neither has anything else, it just down to hard cash. Financial hardship is a major issue. Housing costs are a fundamental issue, as are benefit levels because a significant number of lone parents certainly rely significantly on benefits. Debt of course is an issue and in work poverty is a significant issue. (Speaker refers to slides and comments that lone parents themselves made).

These comments are an indication of what people are saying are their issues. Even those lone parents who are in work and consider themselves to be reasonably well paid find that they experience issues around poverty. They don't know that they will be able to make ends meet from week to week and month to month. Unexpected expenditure can have a colossal effect on them. So all of those issues I think are very important. Financial hardship and reduction in family income is inevitable following relationship breakdowns, when one family becomes two, which is effectively what happens then the money does not go as far.

There is a heavy reliance on social security benefits and child support and other methods of income to the family. 75% of lone parents have no savings and that compares to 41% of other households within Northern Ireland, so you can see how that unexpected emergency is going to cause significant problems for lone parents. Children in one parent families are twice as likely to live in poverty.

Housing costs - the prohibitive nature of housing costs for those wishing to move into work is a fundamental aspect for lone parents. One of the things we have experienced and would have worked closely with lone parents over the years is a looking at employment as an option for them. But one of the very important things that they raise among others is the fear of moving away from housing benefit and the impact that is likely to have on them because the roof over their heads is the most important thing for themselves and their children at that particular time. So the fear of losing housing benefit is a big factor for lone parents and fundamentally there is also an issue about availability of housing stock.

New build social housing for example hasn't kept pace with the growing population that exists, and through our own research and certainly talking to lone parents face to face, we can see situations where they are having to make up the difference between housing benefit that they receive and the rent they have to pay, particularly if they are in the private rented sector, and that can be as much as £40 or £50 a week in some cases. If you are on benefits and trying to make up that difference it is significant in the extreme.

Benefit levels - we are almost on the verge of welfare reform but in the meantime we still have to contend with the existing complicated system and I think Mike already alluded to the issue around universal credit. Fundamentally when it was first mooted I don't think anyone would have had any objections to the idea of simplifying the system that to date is complicated in the extreme and probably unnecessarily complicated as well. You are sent from pillar to post to try and identify what it is you are entitled to. I don't think there would have been objections to moving to a simplified system. Unfortunately however that simplified system does not seem to be materialising and certainly the feedback we are getting from where universal credit is trying to be implemented already is suggesting that it is proving to be extremely difficult.

In the meantime we have our current system and current benefit levels are too low, they are too difficult to access in some instances and they are too complicated. Access to things like the social fund, community care grant and other types of assistance are difficult to achieve if you don't have the benefit of an advice service behind you. It's almost impossible at first application to secure anything like that. So those are all issues that need to be addressed.

Access to passport benefits is difficult without the assistance of advisors again and the range of bodies involved in assessing benefit entitlement is prohibitive, I've already alluded to the pillar to post situation that people find themselves in.

Debt is another major issue that has presented itself when we have spoken to lone parents themselves. Almost 75% are in some form of debt. Now that can extend from relatively small debt I suppose in the scheme of things such as social fund loans to as broad as mortgage interest problems, multiple debt problems with credit cards or with other types of loan provision which is out there. Significantly many families also have limited access to proper formal credit arrangements and this is particularly problematic as well. (Speaker refers to slides and lone parents comments).

In work poverty - it has been mentioned already so we raised the question earlier; what is the cost of going to work? There are a number of issues that are out there not least child care which I will discuss later so I won't go into it now. Things like travel, clothing, lunches all that comes into it too. If you have been out of work for a long time or this is your first job in 20 years for example then you are going to have unexpected expenditure.

There are losses in relation to other benefits such as free school meals, uniform grants and all of that. You have to balance up what you need to have to live on. Also the nature of work, many lone parents, and again research is out there, that many lone parents have to rely on part time and low paid work. Also this could impact on housing costs and what that actually means to people in reality.

All of this then impacts on health and again people themselves will tell you the stress that they experience in terms of financial hardship, caring for children 24/7, over representation of lone parents with children with disabilities or other issues that cause excessive strain on the household. There is also depression, relationship break down by its very nature can cause all sorts of difficulties whether that's on a temporary or long term basis. Low self-esteem and all the things that go with that have to be addressed. Poor health, poor diet and lack of medical care and dental care. The one thing that lone parents say to us and other organisations is that their main concern is their children, very often they neglect their own health to ensure that their children get everything that they need and again they are very good at working on a budget, for example mince steak is a cheap meat, nutritious and quick and so lone parents will tell us they know how to cook mince in many different ways.

Employment - This is very important in terms of an anti-poverty strategy, although it is not a silver bullet in terms of family or child poverty, but good quality and sustainable employment can be a useful tool in terms of helping a family in child poverty, but that requires significant investment and requires significant input from Government and from employers themselves.

It has already been alluded to by other speakers, the quality, type and sustainability of employment, access to in work benefits – if the job is in the lower income bracket we need to have baseline incomes for people. Specifically for lone parents, but probably all families generally, a question is whether working opportunities are family friendly and flexible. All families know the difficulties of balancing work life and family life, if you are a single parent then work/life balance is that more precarious. Quality and type of sustainable employment - part time work, dependence on low incomes, lack of flexibility in the job market, need for information and access to in work benefits. One fundamental thing is talking about welfare reform and the supposed transfer from benefits into work, there needs to be information and advice services.

Childcare - the need for a mixed economy, the need for universal childcare and the need for childcare to be subsidised. If we do not have a proper childcare strategy in place, unless it is available to those who need it and is affordable to those who need it or subsidised so people can access it, then it won't do anything for families generally and it does nothing for lone parents. I was happy to hear from Ann Marie Gray about the JRF strategy and how childcare is underpinning it. What would we like? - Universal childcare!

High quality and high level training – there has been problems this year with ESF and delivery of training at about level 1.

Previously organisations could offer level 2 but this year the decision was taken that organisations could not bid for funding to deliver courses above level 1 – which equates to a fail at O level. To limit the aspirations of people in the community and voluntary sector who want to go through that training is abysmal and a Government Department who delivers such demands on training fly in the face of their own economic strategy. But we need people in high level training to get them into jobs that will improve sustainability.

Finally we need increased affordable housing; this is a primary concern for lone parents to keep a roof over their children's heads.

Dessie Donnelly - Participation and the Practice of Rights Project



Dessie Donnelly has been Co-Director (Development) of Participation and the Practice of Rights since 2006 and has helped to organise strong human rights campaigns across on issues such as housing, mental health, social security and employment, access to Irish medium education and rights of asylum seekers. In 2012, PPR's work was recognised by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights as best practice on how to hold the state to account for international obligations. Previously, Dessie organised in the U.S. and Irish labour movements.

I want to take a slightly different look at poverty using 2 case studies of the work we do with a group of unemployed people called the 'Right to Work, Right to Welfare.' They, since 2012, have gone across Belfast dole offices and worked with other unemployed people to monitor human rights compliance of the NI Government on a range of measures. I want to look at the relationship between poverty and powerlessness. The level of accountability afforded to you, the level of transparency of Government decision making and the influence you have over policy has a direct correlation to your income.

In 2014/15 'Right to Work' engaged about 300 people across Belfast dole offices. We looked at two issues that are relevant, people who are able to work but not able to find work, so in the last 12 months 79% or 7 out of 10 people had been out of work for over 12 months, had done all things that you have to do to fulfil your job seekers agreement including applying for jobs and couldn't find any work at all.

Secondly they looked at the Government programme to get you into work, at the time it was called 'Steps to Work,' turned out not to be a step at all, that only 4% found employment after this programme. This was stark compared to the Government's own statistics that said 24% of people who engaged in this programme found full time work.

The context of this research was that in 2012 ICTU did the maths and found that 125,000 people were unemployed and able to work in NI yet the Programme for Government for 2012 - 2015 had planned to create 5,000 jobs a year – there is not enough jobs to go around. But for people going into the dole office and speaking with their advisers it was an attitude of you are the problem here, it is your employability and attitude towards work, we need to shape you up so you are job ready, when in actual fact it was a natural phenomena because of the amount of jobs and these people were unlikely to find work at all.

The group did not simply want to complain about this. Instead they looked at the issue of public procurement and at the last count it was about £4 billion a year paying private companies money to build buildings, deliver services. The group looked at a pilot project that the Department for Finance and Personnel did in 2005 to employ long term unemployed people across 14 departmental projects, it was evaluated by the Ulster University and found to be successful, as impact wise, people were finding sustainable employment and the recommendation was that it should be mainstreamed across all Government Departments and guidance was produced between the Equality Commission and Department for Finance and Personnel which is excellent, showing how public authorities could mainstream this into all procurement practices. However it is currently collecting dust on a shelf somewhere and has not been implemented in any sort of meaningful way whatsoever – this would be a great way of bringing in money to areas that are affected by long term unemployment.

So what did the group do as a result of this? They decided not to tackle the NI Executive to get no response. Instead they looked to Belfast City Council. Belfast City Council was launching an investment programme of £147 million, they worked with a barrister Laura McMahon who sat down with them and looked at what they wanted to do and they filed a motion mandating Belfast City Council to put in a social clause guaranteeing ring fenced jobs for long term unemployed at every available opportunity.

It was in a run up to an election, we got local party support, they got 1600 unemployed people's signatures to say that they wanted this implemented, this was the quota for Belfast City Council at the time.

They got broad based coalitions across Belfast to sign up such as Irish language groups, ex-prisoners groups, community groups, Sure Starts etc. It was during the flag protests and so Belfast City Council were able to unify and agree on this with support from the TUV, Alliance, Sinn Féin, SDLP, People before Profit, UUP and PUP. The DUP did not meet them and abstained during the vote but it was passed.

The political will was there to implement this across the board but knowing that the failing would be in implementation, the morning after it was passed at council the 'Right to Work' group went down with an implementation plan to show how it could be done working with existing stakeholders etc. Then the issue was how was this going to be monitored and what were the outcomes going to be.

The group decided on monitoring on a site by site basis to try to monitor this to try to see what benefits could be brought for unemployed people. They went to Girdwood Hub, £11.7 million pounds where there could have been 220 homes, instead there is a leisure centre there now.

They wanted to go and see how many jobs were being ring fenced and created for long term unemployed people so they started asking questions and essentially what happened was that despite the policy being in place, despite the political will being in place, despite engagement with civil servants they had to submit a freedom of information request to ask what the contract was with the developer, the contract conditions had been considerably watered down in terms of the developer having to employ long term unemployed people.

There was no mention of hours, the obligation to employ people using the 'Steps to Work' programme, there was extremely poor monitoring of the outcomes, so much so that the group themselves came up with a monitoring form and they asked Belfast City Council to ask the contractor to fill it in and that the group would meet on a monthly basis to see how it is going.

All meetings were cancelled for about 3 months, when the private contractor filled it in the group went back with questions, that was last June and there has been no meeting since then. I am pointing this out because even if you have political commitment and a policy in place, then this applies to an anti-poverty strategy too, if it does not drill down into how it is impacting communities and there is no monitoring process that is where it will fall down.

My second issue is around social security, this was only launched last week, and it is around sanctions and job seekers allowance but also how people were being assessed medically to be fit for work. What the group found was that between March 2013 and August 2015 the amount of people who had been sanctioned rose from 39% to 60% and some of these people were getting no income for up to 6 months. Fundamentally what we put in the proposal last week was that 83% of people who were subject to these sanctions did not have enough information to engage.

There is research on our website around this, but people were relying on food banks, loan sharks and other private lenders. Where people lose housing benefit and go homeless sometimes due to a mistaken decision, then they are put in a hostel that costs the Government more money than the rented sector. This was all before welfare reform happened.

We did a freedom of information request and found that in 2014/15, for 12 months there were 21,386 sanctions of people across NI that is 79 per working day, it is hard to see how people are being given due process to representation and information if there is that extent of a regime of sanctioning people. We then looked further at how these decisions were being taken. It wasn't as simple as what powers were being maintained by Westminster in terms of implementing welfare reform, but also what powers actually exist in the Department of Employment and Learning and the Department for Social Development to stop this happening.

What we found was that there had been significant changes in regards to staffing and social security agencies level of responsibility. The frontline staff dealing with a claimant were significantly disempowered when it came to the sanctioning process, as that goes to someone called the decision maker and also the private companies that are being paid to administer these sanctions such as 'People Plus.'

You have a social security system which is making people feel more and more insecure but at the same time it is a very profitable industry. In the first 4 months of these contracts being operated almost £3.5 million had been paid to these companies to get sick people into work and to sanction people, not only that but if you get someone on Job Seekers Allowance into one of the job placements there are incentives of an extra £1000 as well.

The whole system of sanctions assumes guilt, as do the assessments for those looking at work related activity - it presumes that the person is lying about their health condition, it downgrades GP evidence and gives primacy to the health care professional hired by the private company. The decision to sanction lies with the Department.

To contrast the way state power is being exercised, on one hand you have extreme resistance and a refusal to take on private companies in terms of delivering their contractual obligations to state policy when it comes to ensuring there are benefits for the long term unemployed, whilst on the other hand you have an extremely enthusiastic, almost a conveyor belt system penalising the poor and taking away the rights of due process as well.

So when looking at an anti-poverty strategy I would argue that it is not a panacea for addressing these issues, but it is extremely important for setting an overarching framework and can make departments work to develop targeted measures. It has to involve targets but if these are broken, it should include remedies for people affected and there needs to be punishment for not meeting targets.

Secondly in terms of monitoring systems - look at the way we look at Government data and the way departments monitor themselves, it has to be at the point of implementation and those impacted by these policies need to be part of the monitoring system. Only by using this form of monitoring can we find ways of effective policies.

In terms of an anti-poverty strategy, the danger is the veto of political parties and that can always be exercised. Taking a judicial review is extremely critical, but an anti-poverty strategy should not be dependent on agreement - any party that agrees could deliver an anti-poverty strategy for their department to keep the momentum moving on this.



5 PANEL DISCUSSION - POVERTY, INEQUALITY & HUMAN RIGHTS

In this session representatives from the Equality Commission for NI, NI Human Rights Commission and the NI Commission for Children and Young People reflected on what they heard during the day and outlined what they are doing to combat poverty within their own agencies.

Koulla Yiasouma - NI Commissioner for Children and Young People



Koulla Yiasouma took up appointment as NI Commissioner for Children and Young People in March 2015. She trained as a social worker and had previously worked in probation, NI Women's Aid and was Director of Include Youth. Until recently she was a Board member of the Patient and Client Council, a school governor, a member of the NI Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership and the Safeguarding Board for NI.

It's not my intention to say a huge amount, because I think a lot of it has already been said, and I'm grateful for the emphasis already placed on child poverty. As Pauline has rightly said, since I became Children's Commissioner a year ago I announced that child poverty would be one of my priorities. I think we've heard today why that is. And then what do you do? As the Children's Commissioner what do you do to address child poverty?

There's two things that we are going to do and one of them is to work with Government to make sure that all their actions and strategies and action plans and what have you, it's to learn from the point Dessie has made, we can all paper these walls with really good intentions, and the Children's and Young People's Strategy of 2006 is one such example. It wasn't a bad document, many of us sweated many things to make that happen, but actually what difference has it made, because all of the work went into developing the strategy, with very little work going into its implementation. We have to be able to follow through, so one of the things we will be doing is working with Government to make sure that they have a child poverty strategy and action plan that has a mission to actually eradicate child poverty, because that's what this is about. Am I confident that this is going to happen? I am more confident that it will happen after the election because it's going into one Minister's department in the Department of Communities?

Although Dessie's presentation depressed me enormously, it did leave me with some nuggets of hope, which is we do have a job of work to do working with each Department and agencies around what is it you can do?

The Children's Services Co-Operation Act will assist that. So that's one of the things NICCY will be doing – using whatever authority and powers we have to make sure the Government meets its responsibilities to children and families living in poverty.

The second thing is what Goretta raised around the children's notion of the free school day and that's something that children and young people are saying to us as well, that this would make a huge difference to the quality of their lives and the quality of their families lives and will also raise the aspirations, as many children and many families are saying they are not applying for certain schools, even though the school is on their doorstep and they are more than able for it, because of the financial difficulties of actually attending.

We were having a conversation, I have two girls, both doing music, and it cost me £1,000 just for them to do music at school and all the joys that that brings and that's fine, I can afford for my kids to do music and pay £30 for someone to play the piano while my daughter sings and what have you, not many families can do that, and we need to equalise the score, so not a penny should anybody have to pay whilst walking through those school gates including meals, uniforms, everything and that's another specific piece of work that we will be doing working with children and young people.

I just want to leave you with one thing, then I'm happy to take any questions because there's so much I'd like to say about this, and Dessie's right - I made a speech at a Conference 10 months ago and I could actually read out the same speech. The other thing I want to say is that we talked about the people with the lowest income having the least power – children have no income and that explains why they have no power and we have an obligation to talk about this one further.

Dr Michael Wardlow- Chief Commissioner, Equality Commission



Dr Michael Wardlow is the Chief Commissioner for the Equality Commission for NI. Before joining the Commission in 2012 he was CEO of the NI Council for Integrated Education. Prior to this, following 7 years in commerce, the majority of his work experience was in the area of peace building and reconciliation. In addition to being a graduate of Queen's University Belfast, Michael is a Chartered Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development and a Fellow of the Chartered Insurance Institute.

Hello, I think we were asked to do two things, one is to reflect on what we heard and then secondly what we are doing.

I think it was Mike that actually said it's a 'war against the poor.'

That came from America and it made me think of one of the things that Ghandi said, "Poverty is the worst form of violence" We know that this is true.

Then someone else said 'it's like being punished for a crime you didn't commit.' The thing that we can't forget here and what two particular individuals brought to our attention today was the word 'dignity' and the word 'human.'

It's very easy to get caught up in the statistics, the averages, the graphs, the robustness and the statistical significance of stuff. However this is about people. The 100,000 young people who are living in poverty. Those people living with disabilities. Young people, where 57% are living in poverty, they are not just statistics.

We heard today that media are opinion formers, we are better than that, but we let it inform our opinions, whether we read The Sun, The Mail, The Guardian, The Times. It's a bit like if we've something wrong we go to the doctor who tells us what we like to hear. You know you go and seek out the person that confirms your own view and we've done that all our lives. I've lived through the 40 years of what we euphemistically call the troubles and a lot of what I heard was through the papers that I read.

I know that in the Equality Commission we are dealing with people daily, the top 40% of the cases coming to us every year, and the 3,500 that approach us directly are about disability. Despite the legislation the top 37% of people who were polled said they wouldn't like someone with mental ill health in the family. 37%. That is roughly the same as 'would not like a traveller in the family.' Now that sits against the fact that 1 in 4 of us will suffer from what is called a mental ill health problem in our lifetime. The maths does not add up. We have got to challenge the media stereotypes that are out there.

I heard people saying that austerity is driving the agenda; austerity is actually a chosen path of Government. Austerity isn't a condition that has somehow appeared; any more than 80,000 spare desks appeared in education overnight. We actually know this stuff is happening. We are presented with under achievement, not just in the protestant working class communities, in terms of pure numbers; more catholic boys are leaving school without qualifications. In pure stats, more protestant boys leave school without qualifications, but it actually doesn't matter if you are one of either.

The same as when a travelling woman comes into our office and is discriminated against, it matters not a jot whether it's because she is a female, or young or a traveller, the fact is she has received discrimination and she happens to be living in poverty.

So although within the Commission poverty isn't a protected characteristic, we know there is an inextricable link between many people who live with inequalities and live in poverty and as a Commission we have undertaken to look through a poverty lens at everything we do.

I am taking to heart what you said about Section 75. We are in the process of initiating a review and that will be finished in this corporate plan and one of the things we want to look at is what's happening – is it just a tick-box exercise?

We do know that when we're looking at a lot of things when we have investigated it, that people could do better. I'm fed up with people saying, 'actually everybody's equally affected by this so then nobody is badly affected' – that's nonsense! When we recently did the housing and education inequalities reports, we found data gaps and yet we are meant to have stats and we don't have all the stats. LGBT are probably one of the prime examples of this whenever people are a bit nervous collecting it, race is another one as we aren't quite sure how we treat people in other races who live in poverty cause we do not have the stats and that's very unhelpful – when you don't have stats, you can't give the figures. There is no excuse and so we're saying as a Commission that we are committed to making sure that we deliver as much as we can within our statutory boundaries to stand up for those 3,500 people who are at the thin end of the wedge who approach us every year and say we think we are being discriminated against.

You want to define objective need, but it seems there is a lack of vision. I heard today Northern Ireland is not poor and we need to stop saying it is and stop having a begging bowl mentality because actually this is not simply about redistribution of wealth because gets into the wider sociological and ideological issues.

It's about how we could do better and about valuing what you measure and measure what you value. Instead of just numbers, we should be looking at outcomes and as a Commission we are now committed in this new strategic plan to be measured against outcomes. I have had 11 new Commissioner Colleagues just join me in 2015/16 and each one of them has said they would like to know that when they leave in three years time that they have made a difference. I can tell them the number of training events, the number of people we have helped through advice and the support cases we've got. What I cannot tell them is how people's lives are made different.

We are here because we care about, I am here because I hope and I actually believe we can do things differently. I have heard all the academics say (1) this is a solvable problem, (2) we actually know how to solve it and (3) we can cost it. That's a good business case. Now why is the political will not there to do something? I don't want simply to wait for the politicians to catch up. We've got a role here as stewards of statutory responsibility under our various guises that we can stand up and help support people and I believe we are doing that.

The Equality Commission is looking into this through our housing inequalities and education inequalities reports.

We are also looking at gender and the role of diversity in the public sphere, why are there not enough women in public appointments, and we know The Commissioner for Public Appointments has been looking at that too.

Even though we don't have poverty as a protected group, we have given a commitment that we will consistently look to see what enduring inequalities are tied into poverty and there is a way in a Section 75 and EQIA level that we can capture that.

Our new Commissioners, many of whom you know, hold me to account as an individual, what have you done about this, what are we saying about that, and you know words are very easy. Statistics, we can trot them out, but don't lose sight that these are real people suffering real inequalities and they are enduring inequalities that will get worse and we can define objective need and we can define what poverty is, but unless we actually aspire to do things differently and better and we measure ourselves against the things we actually value, we'll be in groundhog day and I'll be back in 10 years time. The Commission is committed to partnership working and I think that's the challenge here, so I'm delighted to be here and delighted to say we are doing our bit – I'd love to do it more and we now have in Equality House a lot of the Commissions together and it's brilliant that it's a one stop shop – so please come and visit us.

Grainia Long – Commissioner, NI Human Rights Commission



Grainia Long was appointed a Commissioner to the NI Human Rights Commission in 2011. She is currently CEO of the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. Previous roles include CEO of the Chartered Institute of Housing, Principal Adviser to the Commission on the Future for Housing in NI, and Director of Policy at the Equality Commission for NI. She is a member of the Institute of Directors, and a Fellow of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce.

Good morning, I have been a Commissioner for 6 years and actually I spent 2 years working with Paul and other colleagues in the Equality Commission, so I've had a background in the Commissions, and I've worked in housing.

My job as a Commissioner is to bring knowledge of what's going on in housing, not just in Northern Ireland but also elsewhere in the UK, to the table so that when Government says to us 'no we can't do that', then I can say 'I can tell you how it's happening in Wales.'

Just to give you an example of this, I have worked on housing across the UK and Wales, in 2014 the Welsh Assembly Government, an incredibly progressive Government in lots of ways, placed a statutory obligation on all state agencies to prevent homelessness, and at the time we thought that's going to be really difficult

– how are you going to do it, and here’s what happened – everyone got together in the room and they all said, we have an obligation and we’re going to do this, and we are going to do it right.

I rang a former colleague in Wales yesterday and I asked how it went. New legislation in the Housing (Wales) Act has helped prevent 70% of at risk households from becoming homeless since April 2015, so in 18 months, 3,400 households, who would have become homeless, are not homeless, are not going to food banks, are not going to their version of the Housing Executive or local councils seeking services because agencies/ statutory/ public/ voluntary got together because of an obligation that was placed.

I tell you this because (a) it can be done and I suppose partly to finish on an optimistic note, some of these things can seem like intractable, big problems, will we ever get there? (b) when Government takes leadership and (c) when agencies like ourselves, the commissions and the voluntary sector get behind the table and say what can we do – what is our job, so that’s one glimmer of hope that elsewhere in the UK you have seen examples of really good poverty alleviation there, it’s indirect. Poverty is about income, it is about money, it’s about cash in people’s pockets, I thought Marie’s presentation was fabulous and an excellent example of why we need to constantly listen.

On to the work that we do and I have written down one word actually – ‘dignity’ – it’s the dignity of the human person, it’s how we treat them. The NI Human Rights Commission undertook an investigation into accident and emergency and what really struck me as a Commissioner listening to people, patients and former patients of the accident and emergency services was they kept saying, “why won’t they treat us with dignity” – and that’s good human rights work. Human rights work is us reminding Government day in day out of its obligations and the State’s obligations in relation to poverty are very, very clear. Poverty is what happens as both a cause and a consequence of rights being denied – whether it’s the right to housing, the right to education, whether it’s the right to health – so every piece of work we do in the Human Rights Commission in relation to housing has a human rights based framework as part of it.

We aren’t there yet and I would be the first to say that as a Commission and as a State we’re still learning our way into this. I’m more optimistic now than I was 5 years ago when I started in the Commission.

I think we have done a better job of going into Government and training civil servants in this and that’s forgotten, I have been a civil servant in a previous life, I’ve had papers put in front of me and I’ve been told fix it, or write a strategy or do it but who is going to admit they don’t know the answers though?

So the Human Rights Commission spent a lot of time over the last 3 years training public servants and civil servants to get them to understand human rights in its most basic forms and what human rights work looks like. I think we'll start to see the impact and the positive impact of that in the future.

I'm going to finish now, but just one final point I'm going to end on, I suppose on two positives. What we have in the room and what the Commissioners need (and you do it already), but all I can say is to echo both my colleagues points is you have the reality of people's lives in your grasp.

You know what it's like, you listen every day. In my day job, by the way I'm CEO of the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. We listen to children all day every day on Childline and I know the powerfulness of that and I know you can go to Government and say hold on stop telling us it's not like this. I can tell you because the child has told me.

So everything that you hear we will always want to hear and I don't want to sound like we're pushing that work on to you, it's more about saying we're here to listen. And the final point, and I'm only saying this because I spent yesterday reading a lot of newspapers, is the words tax and justice are now being used together by organisations like the IMF, the World Bank, did we ever think we would see the day. I'm saying this in a personal capacity, but I think you will see a lot more of those two terms being used together and I know we'll be saying them together at the Commission but I'm slightly more optimistic and I re-echo the points that were made earlier. I've spent a good bit of time working across the UK, the narrative is changing, it's our job to keep changing it and none of us will stop until we do I'm sure.



5. NEXT STEPS

During the final conference session, participants agreed a set of principles that must inform any future strategy.

Common Platform for the Anti-Poverty Strategy Draft Key Principles for the Strategy

The Common Platform is a civil society network campaigning for the effective implementation by the NI Executive of the strategy to tackle poverty, social exclusion and patterns of deprivation based on objective need, required by S28E of the NI Act 1998 (as amended).

In 2015 the High Court found the NI Executive was acting unlawfully for not having adopted such a strategy. The Common Platform urges that among other matters the anti-poverty strategy be informed by the following key principles:

- 1. Define Poverty:** Similar to our neighbouring jurisdictions (1) the strategy should include a proper definition of poverty, consistent with international standards on socio-economic rights, which reflects material deprivation and an income that falls below an adequate standard of living (2);
- 2. Define Objective Need:** The anti-poverty strategy should equally ensure proper definitions of objective need which remove or reduce the scope for discrimination by tying the allocation of resources to neutral criteria that measure deprivation irrespective of community background or other affiliation;
- 3. Overarching, targeted outcomes and monitoring progress:** The anti-poverty strategy should be overarching, covering, and interconnecting Executive policy rather than being limited to a list of existing or proposed initiatives. As such it should also contain measurable targeted outcomes to reduce levels of poverty overall and among specific groups. This includes measures to meet targets set for the reduction of child poverty. The monitoring framework should ensure desegregation across equality categories including gender and ethnic groups (including community background);
- 4. Countering austerity:** The anti-poverty strategy should recognise the context of, and seek to challenge and minimise the impact of the budget cuts on the NI Block Grant in relation to poverty, including gender-specific poverty. This includes the examination of progressive revenue raising measures, including rates for the better off, rather than primacy to further regressive cuts;

5. **Rights-based approach:** The anti-poverty strategy reflects state responsibility rather than charitable benevolence and should follow a 'rights-based' approach, and hence further the realisation of human rights as laid down in international standards;
6. **Policy Appraisal:** The anti-poverty strategy should incorporate mechanisms to ensure that all new and revised policies are consistent with the aims of the strategy to tackle poverty on the basis of objective need. Such a process is already implicit within, and could be accommodated within, the existing equality impact assessment process;
7. **Childcare:** The strategy should incorporate a childcare strategy that implements comprehensive provision and boosts the economy by allowing parents to stay in work and increasing the economic participation of women.

Notes: (1) "People are living in poverty if their income and resources (material, cultural and social) are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living which is regarded as acceptable by Irish society generally. As a result of inadequate income and resources people may be excluded and marginalised from participating in 20 activities which are considered the norm for other people in society." Republic of Ireland: National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016. "By poverty, we mean a long-term state of not having sufficient resources to afford food, reasonable living conditions or amenities or to participate in activities (such as access to attractive neighbourhoods and open spaces) which are taken for granted by others in their society." Child Poverty Strategy for Wales 2015

(2) For example: Poverty as social exclusion: "Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the types of diet, participate in the activities, and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or at least widely encouraged or approved, in the societies to which they belong. Their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from ordinary patterns, customs and activities." Peter Townsend, 1979; 'Consensual' definition: People are living in poverty if their lack of resources forces them to live below a publicly agreed minimum standard. Jo Mack and Stewart Lansley, 1985; Poverty is a relative concept. 'Poor' people are those who are considerably worse off than the majority of the population - a level of deprivation heavily out of line with the general living standards enjoyed by the majority of the population in one of the most affluent countries in the world. Joseph Rowntree Foundation; Rights-based approach Poverty is an income level below which people are unable to attain their economic and social rights. David Woodward and Saamah Abdallah (for New Economics Foundation)

Conference Registration

Zoe	Anderson	Start 360
Pat	Austin	NEA
Lorraine	Boyd	Voluntary & Community Sector Forum
Ann	Brown	UNISON
Fred	Brown	NASUWT
Ivan	Burns	CAP UK
Jelena	Buick	Belfast City Council
Roisin	Byrne	UNISON
Aidan	Campbell	Rural Community Network
Marie	Cavanagh	Speaker, NIAPN / Gingerbread NI
Fiona	Cole	Mencap in NI
Rachel	Dennison	Employers for Childcare
Dessie	Donnelly	Speaker, Participation and the Practice of Rights
Susanne	Downey	Trussell Trust (food banks)
Jean	Dunlop	Unite the Union
Rob	Fairmichael	CCWA
Rhea	Farrell	East Belfast Independent Advice Centre
Ellen	Finlay	WRDA
Leah	Glass	Causeway Coast & Glens Council
Tony	Graham	Trussell Trust (food banks)
Ann Marie	Gray	Speaker, University of Ulster / JRF Anti-Poverty Strategy Group
David	Hawkins	PILS NI
Kevin	Higgins	Advice NI
Paddy	Hillyard	Speaker, Child Poverty Alliance
Daniel	Holder	Speaker, Committee on Administration of Justice
Goretti	Horgan	Speaker, NIAPN / University of Ulster

Pauline	Leeson	Chair, Child Poverty Alliance
Grainia	Long	Speaker, Commissioner, NIHRC
Sean	Lynch	Sinn Fein Fermanagh
Una	Lynch	Sonrisa Solutions Limited
Jenna	Maghie	NICVA
Thomas	Mahaffy	NIAPN / UNISON
Michelle	McCabe	Lifestart Foundation
Fiona	McCausland	Vice Chair, NIAPN
Stephen	McCloskey	Centre for Global Education
Jenny	McEaney	NICVA
Karl	McKee	Start 360
Margaret	McKee	UNISON
Mairead	McMcCafferty	NICCY
Mary	McManus	East Belfast Independent Advice Centre
Anne	Moore	Save the Children
Clare	Moore	Irish Congress of Trade Unions
Frances	Murphy	Contact a Family NI
Paul	Noonan	ECNI
Meabh	Poacher	Community Development Health Network
Alanagh	Rea	Whiterock Community Centre
Brian	Sykes	RFCA NI
Alex	Tennant	NI Commissioner for Children & Young People
Michael	Tomlinson	Poverty and Social Exclusion Research project
Dr Michael	Wardlow	Chief Commissioner, ECNI
Neal	White	RFCA NI
Koulla	Yiasouma	NI Commissioner for Children & Young People

MEETING OBJECTIVE NEED

Towards implementing an Anti-Poverty Strategy for Northern Ireland

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