



## **Northern Ireland Anti Poverty Network responds to DRD on impact of water charges on people living in poverty**

**Northern Ireland  
Anti Poverty  
Network**

## **Press Release**

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Enquiries**

**Frances Dowds  
028 9024 4555 -  
077 8632 4442  
or**

**Goretti Horgan  
07973528772**

NIAPN 58 Howard  
Street, Belfast, BT1 6PJ  
T: 0845 120 3771  
E-mail:  
nfo@niapn.org  
website:  
www.niapn.org  
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The Northern Ireland Anti Poverty Network (NIAPN) has responded to the Dept of Regional Development's statement briefing against non-payment of separate water charges. The DRD has claimed that the charges are "fair and affordable" and said more than a quarter of householders qualify for reduced tariffs, which means, no one would experience "genuine hardship".

NIAPN's Director Frances Dowds says she is "horrified at the deception which is being perpetrated on the public and particularly on the poorest people in the region who have been led to believe that the "affordability tariff" is to be "guaranteed" for low-income households when the legislation makes it clear that it is only available for three years."

NIAPN is troubled also by the basis on which the "affordability tariff" is based. The Explanatory Memorandum accompanying the legislation says the tariff is based on the single person pension credit guarantee, which is £114 at present.

Ms Dowds says "this is more than double what a working age person without children on benefit receives and just a pound less than a single parent with one child receives in benefits (including Child Benefit). At present 40 percent (80,000) of working age people who are unemployed and dependent on state benefits in NI are working age adults without children. A further 25 percent (50,000) are lone parents. Most, if not all, of these people will be plunged into water poverty even under the "affordability tariff". In three years time – even with the 'affordability tariff', which will end in 2010 – these poorest people in the region will be paying about 6 percent of their income on water."

Similarly, the DRD says that non-payers will face "credit rating implications, which could affect bank loans, mortgages and other future transactions."

The Chair of NIAPN, Goretti Horgan says "These warnings were given in Britain also during the campaign against the Poll Tax but credit agencies recognised the difference between a bill that someone would not pay, as opposed to one that they could not pay and general credit was not greatly affected. In any case, one

in eight households here, almost a third of the poorest households, do not have access to a simple bank account – so they are denied any credit rating however quickly they pay their bills.”

Ms. Horgan says that the recent *Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion in Northern Ireland 2006* report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation “gives the lie to much of what the DRD says about the impact of the non-payment campaign on people living in poverty.” She says “It points out that one in five households here lack essential items because they cannot afford them. In particular, they are already unable to pay utility bills or have money for repairs or home insurance. The JRF report also indicated that levels of income poverty here are likely to soar with the introduction of water charges and increases in household rates. This is because housing costs in NI have traditionally been lower than in Britain. Housing costs are deemed to include not only the cost of rent or mortgage but also rates/council tax and water charges. However, with the rapid increase in the cost of buying a house and the imposition of much higher rates, the evidence is clear that the introduction of separate water charges will make poverty here far greater.”

Ms Horgan continued: “NIAPN believes that the right to an adequate supply of safe, clean water is a basic human right. Water is a fundamental requirement of public health and hygiene, particularly for families with children. Further, a modern, safe and effective water and sewerage system is essential for the protection of both people and the environment now and into the future. In view of the Government’s refusal to keep water in public hands and protect the poorest in our society from falling into deeper poverty, NIAPN will be supporting the water charges non-payment campaign. The point of non-payment is to ensure that a stream of revenue attractive to private corporations will not be established and the Government will be forced to reconsider its position and take account of the strongly held views of the overwhelming majority of people in Northern Ireland about how our water should be provided and funded.”

Notes to editor:

The Northern Ireland Anti Poverty Network was established in 1991 to create a focus on poverty. NIAPN is a Network with over 300 members drawn mostly from the community and voluntary sectors. The Network research and publicise the extent, causes and effects of poverty in Northern Ireland. We work to influence policy makers by focusing on government policies, which impact upon poverty and stress the need for anti-poverty measures at local, national and European levels.

Our vision is 'a poverty free society'

Our mission is, 'to end poverty by empowering communities and influencing government through research, education and campaigning.'

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