



## **Voices Manifesto**

### ***'Tackling Poverty from the Bottom Up'***

#### **POVERTY**

- A strong Anti-Poverty Strategy needs to be the key strategy that informs and directs all other strategies. Northern Ireland Assemblies Anti-Poverty Strategy must be ratified as a matter of urgency.
- All Government departments must develop, for external public comment, clearly defined and specified targets, which must be measurable and time based and we need increased consistency, communication and co-ordination across Government departments which are transparent to those outside government.
- A fully resourced Anti-Poverty Strategy must be effectively resourced and include free personal care.
- Rates and water charges must not penalise those on low incomes – people living on low incomes must be exempt from payment.
- Northern Ireland's planned billion pound infrastructure spend must demonstrate a key contribution to reducing poverty and plans for departmental spending must demonstrate this contribution clearly.

#### **HEALTH**

- The Northern Ireland Health Service must not be treated as a business; it is a fundamental pillar of the welfare state and must remain so. The newly reformed Health system must adopt best practice in involving and consulting users and representatives groups in the voluntary and community sector.
- Health budgets should be calculated and allocated based on need.
- Core funding should be awarded to voluntary and community organisations to promote health and well being, especially among disadvantaged groups, and projects should be funded on a full cost recovery basis.
- Investments in healthy living options should be substantially increased and provided to people living in disadvantaged areas.
- There must be greater government investment in NHS dentists' provision.
- Hospital waiting lists are still too long and must be reduced by resourcing the NHS not private company provision.
- Prescriptions should be free.

#### **HOUSING**

- There must be increased investment in and provision of affordable Social Housing from the NI Housing executive.
- Housing Associations must be properly regulated by the Housing Executive to fulfil a Social Charter especially in relation to affordable rents and well maintained properties.
- Housing Benefit payments must reflect actual housing costs.
- Social Housing must be kept available for Social Housing tenants not private speculators.
- A multi agency approach is needed urgently with immediate action to address anti-social behaviour issues.
- The Minister for Social Development must act with urgency to regulate the private rent sector. There must be immediate action to curb the unregulated and massive increase in private landlords within disadvantaged communities and provide protection to private tenants.

#### **FINANCE - INCOME & SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS**

- There is a large gap between benefit and pension rates and the Governments 60% poverty line. In order to begin to address this, pension and benefit rates must be tied to average earnings.
- The minimum wage must be developed into a living wage and rigorously enforced.
- Government must act as a matter of urgency to regulate legal lenders and to prosecute illegal lenders. Government must develop a joined up approach to end extortionate lending; legislate for interest rate ceilings; link better regulation and transparency of the credit industry with initiatives to encourage credit union development. The failing social fund must be reformed. Access to affordable credit must be widened so that poor people do not continue to pay more; Government must act now to regulate and limit the public advertising of loan companies.