



## **NIAPN**

### **Position paper**

### **NI Draft budget**

### **Priorities**



The Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Network was established in 1991 to create a focus on poverty. It is an interactive network, a Company with Limited status and over 300 members drawn mostly from the community and voluntary sectors across Northern Ireland. We work to strengthen the Poverty lobby. We work to influence policy makers by focusing on government policies which impact on poverty and stress the need for anti-poverty measures at local, national and European levels. We work to develop and support anti-poverty campaigns and lobbying activities at NI, UK and EU levels

The Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Network provides newsletters, organise seminars, meetings and conferences, undertake research and disseminate information on poverty and social exclusion. We are one of 15 (25) members of the European Anti-Poverty Network. NIAPN are particularly concerned that people with direct experience of poverty and social exclusion are involved and empowered to influence decisions that **are** going to be implemented.

### **A social dimension to the NI draft budget?**

- It is the opinion of the Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Network that the budget must take account of and be influenced by the social, economic and structural circumstances that all our citizens live within.

### **Anti-Poverty Strategy for Northern Ireland**

- The proposals for an Anti-Poverty Strategy referred to within the draft budget for 2005-08 (to be developed over time) are welcomed by the Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Network. In order to make this meaningful and effective there is a serious need that adequate resources be attached to the budget across all Government Departments. The Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Network recommend top slicing of the Northern Ireland bloc grant, poverty and social exclusion targets must direct and inform the setting of overall budget priorities. The Network also recommends poverty proofing of all aspects of budget provision.
- The Network recommends that a 3% budget provision within all Government Departments and local Councils be introduced. This would ensure transparency and resource anti-poverty work at a local and a regional level right across Northern Ireland.
- NIAPN welcome the general intention of reducing poverty within disadvantaged communities, under Building Equality and Community Cohesion, but there is a need for targets to be tied directly into these objectives. There is a need for SMART objectives, actions, quantified targets and indicators to be detailed against a realistic and ambitious timescale and budget.
- The Barnett Formulae takes no account of greater 'need' in relation to Northern Ireland, as budgetary allocation is made on the basis of population size. This approach discriminates against Northern Ireland on the basis of the total Bloc Grant award.
- NIAPN recommend that a comparative study on the Barnett Formulae and devolved administrations be implemented. NIAPN call for open public debate on spending per



head, budget allocation, population size versus need, particularly in the context of existing Government Department spending on the basis of 'need'.

## Children

- The **Executive Children's Fund** provided support for children in need and young people at risk. £29 million over a period of three years was allocated to the Fund for programmes and projects that had a direct impact on children and young people. The first tranche provided £10.5 million to 12 departmental projects. The Executive recognised the important role of the voluntary and community sector in providing services and support for the most vulnerable children and opened up the Children's Fund directly to the sector making partnership working across the statutory and voluntary and community sectors a key theme. The remaining £18.5 million went to these voluntary and community sector projects and programmes. The most recent allocation of monies was made to the voluntary and community sector in March 2003. Where are the Children's Funds within the draft budget?
- **The Chancellor's Children's Fund** was allocated £450 million and looking ahead to the period 2005 – 08 an allocation of £410 million has been ring-fenced for that Fund. Given that Northern Ireland under the Barnett Formula gets a population share of any change in spending on a comparable programme in England. How much does this share amount to and, if it has not come to the Children's Fund here in Northern Ireland, what is it being spent on?

## Efficiency

- NIAPN call for more clarity on the proposed 2.5% 'efficiency savings' which Health & Social Services Boards Trusts and Education & Library Boards have been told they have to make year on year. Given the lower level of public services in NI already, these 'savings' mean there will be no service development possible. This is counter productive to the government's other targets in relation to getting people, especially lone parents, into paid employment. NIAPN call for the defining of 'frontline' services and the provision of detailed information on where money is being allocated to, e.g. Dept of Health and Education overspends. Where is the accountability and transparency in the current system?
- There is a serious need to consider what the impact of 'efficiencies' will be on those workers who are not frontline service related. Is there a need for differential targets for public bodies and departments based on the degree they provide front line services? Do these proposed efficiencies actually mean cuts?

## Economic vision & planning for the future in Northern Ireland

- Existing targets within the proposed budget are focused on the 'positives' of Northern Ireland's economy but they also need to consider and address the 'negatives'. NIAPN call for greater clarity on how the 'economic vision' will be realised. There is no analysis of Northern Ireland's economic sectors, in terms of how to address the declining sectors and how to maximise the new emerging sectors. There is a need for an identified measurable set of indicators to act on.



- There is a serious need for longer term planning and account must be taken of demography, e.g. a growing need re provision of services for older people. This also relates back to schools provision etc. We need to be conscious of what is further down the road. From public sector to private sector economy there is no vision or long term strategy for growth. In other parts of the world economic development is used to further growth. A vision for growth is needed, not the attitude of save a £ here and there. We need to consider how resources can be used best.
- Are there any strategic links between all the strategies referred to in the document and Government Departments?
- There is a need for the development of greater understanding among the general public about how priorities are set and how they link to actual concrete actions. There is a need for greater clarity on how 'Government' makes decisions on the allocation of different Departmental budgets and where planning issues such as geography, community division etc feed into this process.
- NIAPN recommend that key departments identify 1 individual **with key responsibility for** delivery of services on particular budget priorities and targets.
- NIAPN recommend a stronger Partnership approach within Government. This needs to be lead and driven from the top, with an emphasis on co-operation over shared targets across departments.

### **Privatisation & Rights in Northern Ireland**

- PPP will have major impacts on all types of budgets, with contracts lasting between 15-25 years resulting in management having less discretion over how they spend 'money'. NIAPN are of the opinion that PPPs will create significant problems for Government further down the line, as budgets are used to pay private contractors for excessive periods of time and state resources are passed from the public to private hands. NIAPN call for the budget to demonstrate the annual and real long-term costs of these agreements.
- NIAPN have grave concerns over the proposed reform of Rates, Water and Sewerage as policy actions that would directly increase poverty levels in Northern Ireland. It must be asked how these proposals fit within an Anti-Poverty Strategy for Northern Ireland.
- There is a need for TUPE regulations to be observed especially around terms and conditions where workers were being transferred from the public to the private sector. PPP/PFI will have a major impact on Equality, possibly resulting in an imbalanced work force, with less favourable terms and conditions forcing people out of employment and increasing already excessive levels of poverty in Northern Ireland.

### **Funding the Community & Voluntary sector in Northern Ireland**

- Investing Together Taskforce Report identifies the need for an additional 25 million per year to sustain the Community & Voluntary sectors. This is not addressed within the budget. There was a serious need to address the looming crisis in the Voluntary and Community sectors over the impending withdrawal of EU funds especially when these funds addressed and provided initiatives for the economically inactive. Fifteen



thousand jobs are dependent on EU Funds. For example, if no contingency is developed, the Under 16s and out of school initiatives supported by EU Funds, through Peace, will result in young people being back out on the streets. There is a need for Government to acknowledge and support those funded projects working hard toward income generation and those that develop and contribute to social capital through, bridging and linking activities.

### **Employment & education**

- Access to education/retraining for economically inactive and the unemployed needs to be seriously addressed. Barriers exist that prevent access to such and this in turn limits employment and economic activity possibilities, E.g. ACE worked for some people supporting them through provision of a low level wage, to access training and the development of job based skills to return to employment, New Deal does not.
- There is a need for programmes that sustain and develop people to gain qualifications to create a knowledge and skills base that is needed for a strong economy. There is a need for a more holistic approach rather than New Deal which is totally ineffective.

### **Consultation or information?**

- Is there actually any possibility of impacting on the final budget due to the timescale outlined around the budget process?

### **Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Network**

58 Howard Street,

Belfast,

BT1 6PJ,

T: 0845 120 3771

E-mail: [info@niapn.org](mailto:info@niapn.org) Web: [www.niapn.org](http://www.niapn.org)

