



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Committee for the Office of the First Minister  
and deputy First Minister

# OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Child Poverty Act: Child Poverty Alliance

20 June 2012

# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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**Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Mr Mike Nesbitt (Chairperson)  
Mr Chris Lyttle (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Trevor Clarke  
Mr Colum Eastwood  
Mr William Humphrey  
Mr Danny Kinahan  
Mr Alex Maskey  
Mr Francie Molloy  
Mr George Robinson

**Witnesses:**

Ms Lorraine Boyd	Child Poverty Alliance
Professor Paddy Hillyard	Child Poverty Alliance
Ms Marie Cavanagh	Child Poverty Alliance
Ms Anne Moore	Child Poverty Alliance

**The Chairperson:** We are now going to hear from the Child Poverty Alliance. Four delegates have come to brief us. I remind members that you have been provided with a copy of their submission. Coming forward are Professor Paddy Hillyard, Lorraine Boyd, Marie Cavanagh and Anne Moore. Does the seating arrangement suggest that Lorraine or Marie is going to kick off?

**Ms Marie Cavanagh (Child Poverty Alliance):** Not at all, Chair.

**The Chairperson:** For the sake of completeness, do you want to give us a couple of sentences on the Child Poverty Alliance and then on each of your roles? Anne, do you want to start?

**Ms Anne Moore (Child Poverty Alliance):** Thank you very much for inviting the alliance to give its views on the child poverty report. I will make the introductions. Save the Children chairs the alliance. We set it up, just over four years ago, to try to keep child poverty high up the political agenda. The alliance has about 50 members, from individuals to organisations. We meet monthly, hold seminars, invite officials to give updates, and so on. I will kick off by introducing my colleagues: Lorraine Boyd, from the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA); Marie Cavanagh, from Gingerbread NI; and Professor Hillyard, from Queen's. Paddy is going to make a few points. We will then throw it open to questions. Are you happy enough with that?

**The Chairperson:** Yes.

**Professor Paddy Hillyard (Child Poverty Alliance):** I have drawn the short straw, and will go through our presentation.

We are very disappointed with the document, 'Improving Children's Life Chances'. First, there is a lack of analysis. Some of these points have already been made, but what we find in the report is a list of activities and things that officials would not give us the last time we spoke to them. There are no clear targets. There are no clear measurements. There is no indication of allocation or spend. Secondly, there is no feel for the extent of the economic crisis we are facing and the impact that that crisis is going to have on budgets and jobs. For example, there is no analysis of the changes in the labour market and the increase in part-time work. Nothing is said about the increased precariousness of many jobs.

There is mention of welfare reform, but no mention of the estimated £600 million cuts, which are coming down the line, and the Government's obligation to tackle the adverse impacts of those. There is no evidence of evidence-based policy. A number of these have been mentioned, but the abolition of charges for prescriptions, for example, is given as a case study in alleviating family poverty.

If you look at the expenditure data, as I did this morning, you will see that it shows quite clearly that in 2008, prior to the abolition of prescription charges, the bottom 30% spent 3p or less on prescription charges and the top 30% in our society paid over 50p a week for them. So, the abolition of prescription charges was a direct redistribution of wealth from the poorest 30% to the top 30%.

Another example is freezing rates. Like prescription charges, most of the poorest are exempt from paying rates. Rates rebates, of course, form part of housing benefit and are, therefore, derived from AME and paid for by Treasury. So, we cannot understand how freezing rates helped to address child poverty.

As you all know, the decision not to introduce water charges resulted in the loss of Barnett consequential, and the cost of non-introduction was therefore taken directly from the block grant. Where did the hundreds of millions of pounds that the policy has cost fall? If, as we suspect, they fell on the poorer section, the non-introduction of water charges has done very little to alleviate child poverty.

The report makes no attempt to assess progress or otherwise in tackling inequalities in the strategy in respect of health, housing and education. When it mentions education gaps, it fails to distinguish between low-income pupils and their richer peers, thus rendering the analysis irrelevant for the purposes of the child poverty report. There are numerous other examples.

I will move on to the issue of monitoring. The strategy outlines the role of the ministerial forum on poverty in monitoring a delivery plan. The forum had representatives from the voluntary and community sector and others and from outside the Civil Service. The strategy also noted that the final framework would be structured around child poverty indicators and PSAs. The report ignores those structures. There is no delivery plan and no mention of child poverty indicators or PSAs. The report now outlines a totally new approach, including a delivering social change framework and a programme that will have a board consisting of civil servants, Ministers and special advisers. Two years on from the introduction of the Child Poverty Act, we still have no delivery or monitoring strategy for child poverty in Northern Ireland.

During a previous Committee hearing, Minister Anderson mentioned that OFMDFM had commissioned training and guidance for all Departments to develop the child poverty action delivery plan in 2003. There is no mention of that change of governance or the postponement of the action plan in the report. It is our view that the late submission of the report to the Assembly is highly inadequate and represents a contemptuous attitude to the Committee and its scrutiny role in holding the Executive to account.

What are our recommendations? We suggest that the Committee table a motion for a full plenary debate on the report to meet the Child Poverty Act's requirements. We also suggest that it set up a subcommittee to make links with the Welfare Reform Bill; the employment programme; the Programme for Government; the economic strategy; EU and international obligations, with powers to invite the views of the voluntary and community sector; low-income children and young families; academia; and other interested parties. The Scottish Government have done that.

We also suggest that the Committee seek a briefing from OFMDFM on its national reform programme and the national social report requirements for all EU member states to report annually on meeting the child poverty targets under the Europe 2020 strategy.

In conclusion, we are very pleased to make these recommendations to you. We are very happy to provide further evidence to you in the future. We know that child poverty will get worse, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies. How will the Executive generate the resources necessary to meet their legal obligations and binding targets? If they cannot generate new resources, how will they redistribute the existing resources? From all the evidence that sociologists and others produce, it is clear that Northern Ireland is a very unequal society. There is considerable evidence that this and the last Executive redistributed resources from the poorer sections to the better off sections of society. If we really care about the 90,000 to 120,000 children who are growing up in poverty, these policies have to be reversed.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you very much. I have a couple of points for clarification. You talk about a complete lack of analysis. That does not necessarily mean that the Executive are not getting it right, but it suggests a lack of confidence from the likes of you and me that they are getting it right. That does not seem to be a very sensible way of doing business, does it?

**Professor Hillyard:** No.

**The Chairperson:** There are case studies. Do you think that the intent is that the case studies will take the place of the evidence base and make you believe that there is an evidence base?

**Professor Hillyard:** It is very misleading. If you want to analyse policy sensibly, you look at the policy first. You then look at the spend going towards that policy, and then you look at the outcomes and see to what extent those outcomes are directly related to the reduction of child poverty. In some cases, you will get evidence of spend from those case studies. In other areas, you will get evidence of the number of people affected. In virtually all of them, there is no direct relationship between those policies and how they are going to reduce child poverty. You need joined-up government here. Therefore, you start with the policy, you go to your outcomes, and you try to get all the available evidence to see that it has an impact on child poverty. There is virtually nothing in the report that makes those direct links. There are a number of cases that we have illustrated here where the exact opposite has occurred. As I have illustrated, they are providing evidence of some policy that is having the reverse effect, such as the abolition of prescription charges.

**The Chairperson:** What about water charges?

**Professor Hillyard:** As we all know, we are paying Northern Ireland Water £250 million a year to supply us with water and sewerage services. The public expenditure implications of the new rules are probably hitting the Department for Social Development's departmental budget by another £100 million to £200 million. We do not know the exact sum because nobody will come clean on that. Therefore, we are talking about £500 million to £600 million for the provision of water and sewerage services here. That will come out of our Barnett formula, which does not make any allowance for water and sewerage charges. They are paid elsewhere. Therefore, £600 million is a lot of money. Where does it come from? Has it been used to reduce the services for extra school teachers for the most deprived? Has it come from the health budget? Where has that £600 million come from? Those are the sorts of questions that we have to put to the Executive and civil servants. Water charges are crucial. If you are going to say that this is an example of reducing child poverty, we need to show how it is reducing child poverty.

**The Chairperson:** There was a commitment not to introduce water charges during this mandate. Do you think that was a mistake?

**Professor Hillyard:** As I am Chair of the Independent Water Review Panel, you will know what my views are.

**The Chairperson:** What about the issue of addressing child poverty?

**Professor Hillyard:** We proposed a very comprehensive affordability scheme to address that very issue, which would have been expensive, but it would have meant that those people who were able to pay for water charges would have contributed much more to the Northern Ireland budget. That money

could then have been used to help the most deprived. We have to think about how we redistribute the budget that we have.

**The Chairperson:** Finally from me, you said that, for two years, we have had no delivery or monitoring body. Would you like to add opinion to that?

**Professor Hillyard:** I think that it reflects a complete lack of commitment to those 90,000 to 120,000 children who are being brought up in our society in very poor conditions. As politicians and as academics, the most important issue on our agenda is to make sure that those who are at the bottom of our society are looked after.

**Mr Eastwood:** I will ask the same question that I asked Joe. On the basis of what you have seen, can we reach the targets?

**Professor Hillyard:** No.

**Mr Eastwood:** Aside from what is being done and what you have proposed here, is it possible to reach those targets?

**Professor Hillyard:** Yes. The policies under the last Labour Government fundamentally redistributed the resource, and those figures are now visible in the reduction of child poverty in the UK overall by many thousands. There is evidence that focusing on reducing child poverty is a possibility. A lot of nonsense is talked about the statistics. The argument that poverty will always be with us is a complete misstatement regarding the measurement that we use. We use the median income as the measure and, therefore, it is quite possible to lift everybody up over that benchmark and not have anybody living in poverty. As a decent society, that is what we should all aim for.

**Ms Moore:** Norway has done it.

**Professor Hillyard:** If anyone is in doubt about that, have a look at the [poverty.org.uk](http://poverty.org.uk) website where you can go onto the graph and move people above or below the line to see how you can get everybody out of poverty at 60% of the median measure.

**Mr Eastwood:** Do you accept the argument that the global economic issues make it very difficult to predict whether we can meet the targets?

**Professor Hillyard:** Absolutely, it makes it incredibly difficult.

**Mr Eastwood:** Are you comfortable that we are doing enough on welfare reform to mitigate poverty.

**Professor Hillyard:** No. We have not seen anything yet. If you remove £600 million out of the economy, it will be absolutely devastating.

**Mr Kinahan:** You will have heard my comments on actions. I feel that we never do anything to get a set figure for the target that we are trying to reach. I was concerned about a comment from Jonathan Bell about a mere £10 moving everyone above a line. It may suit the figures, but it does not reduce the feeling of poverty. Therefore, it comes down to jobs, training and giving people hope so that they know where they are going. We should be developing hard action targets, and that is where we need your help. I find that it is all strategy, no action. Do you agree?

**Ms Lorraine Boyd (Child Poverty Alliance):** Yes.

**Ms Moore:** We focus on welfare reforms and benefits, but there is no complementary focus on job creation and the types of jobs that we need — well-paid jobs with living wages — and how you get that finance. There should also be training and progression. We should focus on job training because, if you have a professional qualification, you will get 10 times as much training and development as somebody with low qualifications. It is the reverse: we advantage the already advantaged instead of the other way round.

**Ms Boyd:** Research shows that people will move out of poverty by degrees. For example, if there is one person in work poverty and a second person gets a job, then you are shifting up again. However,

it is the type and tenure of that job, and whether it is part-time or full-time work. Statistics show that the work level of joblessness has not changed: it has stayed the same. However, if you look behind those figures, you will see that the type of work is changing dramatically in Northern Ireland. Rather than coming from full-time employment, we are moving more towards service sector employment where the work is part-time. We have heard of instances where people are on zero-hour contracts and are called in only when they are needed. If you are trying to lift people out of poverty and give an individual or a family sustainability, you have to look at the tenure, and support has to go into the type of work. There is the issue of not only getting people into work, but the quality of that work, and, maybe, moving people from part-time to full-time work.

The universal credit and some of the other things coming down the line may help, so that people could, potentially, move into full-time employment. However, we need to focus on employment and educate those who are going into that employment. We have work programmes. When welfare reform comes down the line, there will be a lot of sanctions. However, we need to look at what support and training we can give people so that they can get work.

**Ms Cavanagh:** In relation to that, there is also a timing issue, which is going to be very relevant to the way in which it moves forward. Welfare reform is rolling out, as we have talked about. The work programme is allegedly rolling out, but we will definitely not have a work programme in time to deliver anything that is needed in relation to welfare reform.

We are also still waiting for a childcare strategy. Lorraine made the point that a single family member working can, obviously, raise the bar in relation to poverty, and dual income in a family can raise that bar further. That is a difficulty, particularly where lone parents are concerned. The difficulty they have is that, although there is no lack of will to move into the workforce or to undertake training to move into the workforce, the problem is getting the infrastructure that is needed to develop that, and, fundamentally, that is childcare — day care for parents in work. It applies specifically to lone parents, but it applies to parents in general.

**Mr A Maskey:** Thank you for your presentation so far. We are all adults in the room, so let us be frank. First of all, I want to repeat that I absolutely resent — I am putting it on the record again — any notion that my party colleagues in OFMDFM are in any way contemptuous of this Committee, or, more importantly, the issue of tackling child poverty. I want to put that on record. I do not like to have to start my contribution on that basis, but I am doing so because I have heard it, and I heard you, Paddy, repeat it in very strong terms, so I am just repeating that I resent that suggestion on behalf of my colleagues, who are not here to defend themselves. I have known them personally for a lifetime, and I know their commitments. I simply resent that suggestion.

**Professor Hillyard:** May I just say that I did not say that you were contemptuous of child poverty. It was the report that suggested that there was an attitude —

**Mr A Maskey:** That implies that they are contemptuous.

**The Chairperson:** Alex, you have made your point. Paddy is allowed to offer an opinion.

**Mr A Maskey:** I know that, and I am responding to him. I do not intend to sit and talk about this all day long and I do not want to start off in a negative vein, but I am making the point that I resent any suggestion or implication that my party colleagues are contemptuous of either this Committee or the issue. I am just putting that on the record.

Secondly, I think we are in danger of going into a whole debate around a range of issues. From my point of view, there is a general rationale of trying to make sure that as many families have as much income as possible at their disposal to spend, which is why virtually every party in the Assembly, particularly in this mandate, have committed themselves on issues such as freezing the rate and not imposing water charges. Yes, that money comes out of the money available to us to do other things. Those are political choices that we made. As far as I am concerned, the water charges are a particularly important issue, because, in our view, they are already being paid by people. We do not feel that it is justifiable to impose them twice. Other people take the simple view that, if we do not impose the water charge, that leaves more income in people's pockets to spend so it does not drive more people into being more vulnerable than they currently are. Those are political arguments, which we can argue about, and we will agree or not agree. The reality is that you have to accept, and we have to accept, that there are manifesto commitments that people made on the basis of their own

evidence and their own debate with the general public. It is our democratic right to do that and our responsibility to exercise that.

I am more than happy to listen to all of the arguments from the Child Poverty Alliance. I have heard them before. I am very impressed by the argument, if that is the right word. I certainly clearly understand the arguments. I have dealt with many of your colleagues in the past year in relation to the welfare reform agenda in my role as Chair of the Social Development Committee. You made the point earlier, Paddy, that you have heard no response about what the Executive are doing about welfare reform. The reality is that the Executive have been dealing with the issue of welfare reform. They have not got terribly far with the British Government, who are imposing it on us on the basis of parity. We have not yet received one concession from the British Government, even as to how universal credit will be paid out or to whom it will be paid out. Those are all issues that, I believe, exercise the mind of virtually every single Assembly Member. Certainly, where I am coming from is that my party colleagues are engaged in that, both in the Social Development Committee and, in particular, in the Executive subcommittee. There is a lot of work being done to identify what flexibilities we can get, which we think are appropriate and very reasonable. However, we have not had one concession from the British Government yet, even though people such as Owen Paterson have waxed lyrical and Lord Freud and the rest of them tell us that they are very amenable to these flexibilities. I can tell you that, as we sit here, we have not got one commitment yet.

The Executive are also looking at measures of mitigation. They have not published that because they have not signed off on any of that. I am not giving that as an excuse, but all of the parties that are represented on the Committee and in the Assembly are involved in that Executive subgroup and are doing that work as we speak. It will be difficult to know what the Executive are agreeing to or what they have done until we hear from them what they have done or what they will argue to try to do. That will not be without serious and fundamental challenges.

As I said, I am very happy to have a discussion with you on where the report falls short. I am clearly committed to identifying where any of these reports are falling short and, more importantly, to identifying issues that we go back to and argue with the relevant Department and all of the Departments that have responsibilities for this matter.

I am more than happy to take what I believe to be reasonable and important arguments back for discussion with OFMDFM at all levels — at party, ministerial and Departmental levels. The Committee that I chair and the Department that we scrutinise have very important areas of work and responsibility on this matter. It is our job to try not only to hold the Departments to account but to work with Departments to ensure that we take as many mitigating measures as we can and to do other things that are writ large in the Programme for Government to prevent more people from going into poverty, to prevent more people from becoming vulnerable and to decrease the number of people who are slipping into child poverty, fuel poverty or any other type of poverty. People can have a political debate about all of the other policy, and we are all entitled to do that. All I am saying is that we are all committed to manifesto promises, and I believe that the ones that I am committed to are all rational and coherent and will stack up together if they are delivered. Everyone else here has their respective mandates. I want to look at and drill down on your reports and take that back to where we can improve the final outcome for all of us. That is my commitment.

**The Chairperson:** You have no specific question, Alex?

**Mr A Maskey:** No, thank you.

**Mr Humphrey:** Thank you very much for your presentation. A few weeks ago, the junior Ministers were in front of us, and we discussed the issues of educational attainment, employment, training, childcare, health and so on. I said that a joined-up approach was needed to tackle these issues across the city that I represent. North Belfast has some of the most deprived wards in Northern Ireland. Education and training are key to getting meaningful employment, and that is how I see the issue being tackled.

Professor, having gone round the doors in 2007, I do not share your view on the Labour Party.

**Professor Hillyard:** Why not?

**Mr Humphrey:** Things have to be put in context here. When I was going round the doors in 2007, Peter Hain was threatening to impose water charges in Northern Ireland. In the working-class areas

of North Belfast, which I represent, people were terrified about water charges coming down the line. They are paying for them in their rates and remember that. They did not want to have extra charges imposed on them. To be fair to it, the only party that has supported the introduction of water charges is the Alliance Party. That is the position in Northern Ireland. I am not aware of any other political party that has said that it supports water charges being introduced.

The other thing that the Labour Party did when Hain was Secretary of State was to impose a 19% regional rate increase in Northern Ireland. That hit the working-class people. I am afraid that it is not all rosy.

**Professor Hillyard:** My comment on the Labour Party was about its specific strategies on child poverty. The figures show that, at the last count, child poverty has been substantially reduced. That was a result of a number of its strategies. There were a number of other strategies that would have gone against them, which I completely agree with you on.

**Mr Humphrey:** I will come to that. When they left government, and the new Chancellor opened the books, there was a note to say that there was no money left.

**Professor Hillyard:** My comment is solely in respect of the impact on the child poverty figures. That is all I am saying; I am not defending the Labour Party.

**Mr Humphrey:** I understood the point that you were making, but I am putting it in context here. I am not a flag-waving supporter of the parties that govern now or have governed before. I have hitched my wagon to none of them. I am simply making the point that it will be argued by the Tories that the welfare reform stuff is coming down the line because of the world economic situation and because of the policies of the Labour Party.

**Professor Hillyard:** I cannot agree more.

**Mr Humphrey:** Tory policies are complete anathema to me. I fought the last election against them, but the truth of the matter is that those policies are being imposed in Northern Ireland. None of the political parties around this table want them, and none of the political parties around this table who have representatives in the House of Commons will support them, but they are being imposed. I know that people will take a different view on parity, but to break parity with that issue will basically render Northern Ireland bankrupt.

As Nelson McCausland's Assembly Private Secretary (APS), I am aware that he has been working very hard to try to put pressure on Lord Freud and Iain Duncan Smith around those issues. Mr Maskey is quite right to say that there has been a complete lack of flexibility from the Tory Party and the Liberals on that issue.

The people of Northern Ireland do not want it, and their politicians do not want it, but it will be imposed. Given that some of your organisations have national wings, what have you done nationally to lobby the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party, who are bringing in this legislation, to try to express the view that this is wrong. It will be hugely damaging to communities and families in Northern Ireland and will damage the fabric of society. I assure you that the political parties here who have met them will be of one voice in making those points and have made those points, but it has not made one blind bit of difference to the position that those two parties have adopted in relation to it. The reason for that is simple in my view. Before the last general election, the Prime Minister was interviewed on 'Newsnight', and he said that he would look at Scotland, Northern Ireland, north-east England and north-west England. It is very simple: they do not get any votes in any of those places. That is why they are going to impose it.

**Ms Cavanagh:** On behalf of the Child Poverty Alliance, there was a fairly active lobbying campaign going on prior to the Act being implemented in Westminster, and a significant amount of work was done through the House of Lords to try to influence it. I am not going to rehearse the history of it, but a number of amendments were put forward, and the Lords agreed to push forward those amendments, but they were turned away at the House of Commons.

In one sense, you are absolutely right. If the current Conservative/Liberal coalition Government are bent on bringing forward what, in my view, are idealistic changes that they want to make to the welfare system, there might be very little that we can do to stop them at this point in time. However, the one thing that we are required to do, regardless of how valuable this might be in the long run, is to make



the stance for the people on the ground, who are going to bear the brunt of it. It will not be us, sitting around this table, who will be faced with the cuts in benefits that are coming down the line. It will be the people that we all work for. That is where we need to put our energy.

We need to look at how we militate against what is coming. Welfare reform is inextricably linked to child poverty. Paddy made the point that we have started to see some of the policy that the previous Westminster Administration had around in-work benefits and things like that. Those are going to be totally eroded in three or four years' time. Therefore, while there may have been a slight diminution in child poverty in the last Department for Social Development (DSD) figures, we can rest assured that, by 2015, they will be escalating out of all proportion, especially here.

**Ms Moore:** The one thing that you could do, William, is this: we lobby very hard on childcare and a lot of the proposals, but one of the things that was not looked at — and that you could keep an eye on — is schedule 13 to the Welfare Reform Act in London, because that dilutes the child poverty obligations and replaces the duty to report. That is why we were critical of the Executive. We are concerned about what is happening in England. The Welfare Reform Act was used as a vehicle to amend child poverty obligations, and no one in London had the time or energy, if you like, to lobby against it. It slipped through, as the Labour Party made a decision not to act on it.

**Mr Eastwood:** Not everyone failed to lobby against it.

**Ms Moore:** That is right: Mark Durkan and Keith Bell lobbied against it. I apologise. There was one exception, Mark Durkan MP. Schedule 13 to the Act means that the Government in London no longer have to report to Westminster. That obligation is now on a commission, which has not been established yet. So, it reduces the accountability of Government to meet the targets by 2020. All it has to do now is make a statement.

The Committee could keep an eye on the new Welfare Reform Bill coming into Northern Ireland — the Northern Ireland version — and make sure that that is not replicated here. That is one of the reasons why we were worried. The Executive just made a report, a written statement during a week when there was no plenary sitting, and they seemed to be denying the Committee its scrutiny obligations and taking away its powers. That is our worry. That is why we ask you to set up a subcommittee of the Executive, the Committee or the Assembly itself.

**Mr Humphrey:** You have to understand that the Bill is still being shaped. The difficulty is that the Labour Party has taken a position similar to that of the Conservatives and Liberals, and so the Bill will go through anyway.

**Ms Moore:** It has gone through in London, but you could stop it here.

**Mr Humphrey:** This is the point. Parties that have created a bit of a hiatus around this are very good at saying, "You cannot do this; you should not do that", but they do not offer an alternative means of paying for these things. That is the key. I am very keen to listen to these arguments, and so is my party. All the parties around this table share your concerns and represent the communities that you talk about. We live in them. The truth of the matter is that this appalling legislation is being imposed. All the parties in Northern Ireland are against it, but it is being imposed from London. It will come here as a Bill, and then the decision will have to be taken on whether to break parity. That is what people must understand. That would bankrupt Northern Ireland.

**Mr A Maskey:** It is a good example of what you need to be alert to and what we might be able to deal with. I would take that point and write it down.

**The Chairperson:** OK. We started with a report and we strayed, legitimately, into welfare reform. It is an absolutely huge issue which is coming down the track at us. Members, have we anything more on the alliance's critique of the report laid before the Assembly? The witnesses were particularly definitive in their views.

**Mr A Maskey:** We should get the Department back again to discuss the report and go through it. I heard Joe Reynolds say earlier that he met the alliance last week, so I presume that you may already have been through a lot of those criticisms and your analysis of it. Having said that, after this meeting, I would be quite happy to have the Department's representatives come back to the Committee, and we

will go through the report with them. That is very legitimate. Some of that information is quite compelling, and we need to get to the bottom of it and move it on.

As to the recommendations, I have no problem at all with them. It is just a little bit early. I would rather have the departmental officials or the Ministers come in. Let us have a discussion on what they are putting forward and the ongoing work that Joe outlined earlier. Then we can discuss your analysis. Let us see what comes out of that particular discussion. It if leads to a report or debate in the Assembly, so be it. I presume that there will be a debate in the Assembly at some point. It would be quite legitimate to do that. Personally, I do not support the setting up of another subcommittee at this time. However, I do not see a problem with expecting the Department to report to the Assembly in the way in which you advocate in your recommendation 3. I am more than happy to take this report, because it is very informative. We need to get to grips with anything that we and, in particular, the Department are missing. I advocate that we bring the Department back to discuss the report and take it from there.

**The Chairperson:** I suggest that we send a summary of the findings to the Department. We should write, get a response and then consider asking officials or Ministers to come.

**Ms Moore:** I will make two points. I have found out since we wrote that note that all the EU member states had to report on how they were meeting their child poverty targets this year. However, in June, the European Commission was making country-specific recommendations. It will be very interesting to see what those recommendations are.

I would also like to draw your attention to the fact that the report does not mention severe child poverty, yet there was a target to end severe child poverty in the last Programme for Government. The delivery report that Chris mentioned acknowledged that that target had not been met, but the current Programme for Government does not pick that up. It does not contain severe child poverty targets, yet the Westminster Government have agreed to measure it. The Executive have agreed to measure severe child poverty, and DSD reports on it, yet there is no mention of it. It is likewise for persistent child poverty, which is more than double the GB level because of the legacy of the Troubles, worry and anxiety about increasing dissident activity, young people not having jobs and so on. It is very important to measure that, and, indeed, it is an obligation under the Child Poverty Act. That should be in the report as well.

**Mr G Robinson:** I want to make a couple of brief observations. Paddy seems to be a big advocate of water charges. However, we are talking about child poverty and see the extent of it. We received an excellent presentation in the Long Gallery from Anne and her team; it was absolutely brilliant. There is so much child poverty at the moment, and it would be added to enormously if we started to charge for water and so forth.

**Professor Hillyard:** The whole water charges issue has been pushed over to me simply because I was involved with the water review panel. What I am saying is that we need to look at where the costs of not introducing water charges fall. We are not, and certainly the Child Poverty Alliance is not, advocating the introduction of water charges. It is simply an example. If you have a child poverty strategy, you have to ask this question: if water costs this amount of money, where is that money coming from? That is the only point that we were making. We were certainly not advocating water charges. I do not know what the coalition Government's position is on water charges. However, to have a robust policy, you need to know what is happening. We do not know what is happening to the costs, because there is no element for water charges in the Barnett formula. All that we are asking is this: where is that money coming from?

**Mr G Robinson:** Quite honestly, I think that it is a bad topic at the present time.

**Professor Hillyard:** It is a huge topic.

**Mr G Robinson:** Paddy, you must also take into consideration the fact that there has been a £4 billion cut in our block grant. That is not helping the whole situation from anybody's point of view. Politicians and officials are having to sit down and scratch their heads week in and week out. That cut was imposed by the Conservative Government and their partners.

**Professor Hillyard:** I would not like the Committee to misunderstand what we are saying . We are saying that we need to know where the money is going and try to drill down to find out the impact of that. If all that money —

**Mr G Robinson:** We already know what the impact is.

**Professor Hillyard:** We don't though. Who has been hit mostly? It has been the poorest sections of society. That raises a question of whether we have got the element of redistribution in our society right.

**Mr A Maskey:** I accept your point entirely. It is a debate. I was trying to point out earlier that, after you have a debate, you make your decisions. You have to stand over those decisions, but that does not mean to say that they will stand in perpetuity. I accept that entirely. I was just making a point. I thought that there was a degree of judgement earlier on, and I was just trying to respond in kind. We have dealt with that. I understand your point.

**Ms Cavanagh:** Can I make a point about what you are saying, Alex? I absolutely appreciate that manifestos are made and that parties want to carry out their manifestos to the best of their ability. We do not really have any control over that. We need to analyse the impact, and our frustration comes from the speed at which that is happening. We can see things coming down the line, and we want to see movement. I am not suggesting that we rush into anything, because I do not think that that is good government, but we should at least start to set down parameters to analyse some of the issues.

At a meeting recently, I pointed out that one of the examples given of child poverty relief in the report is the £22 million in fuel payments that was given out in February through the social protection fund. That is fine; that was much-needed money in people's pockets. However, there was no analysis or drilling down into that to find out how it impacted on child poverty. A vast swathe of that money would have gone to older people in fuel poverty and those with disabilities or long-term illnesses, and it would have not impacted on child poverty. So, there are actions that can be measured to give us some information. However, we are not getting that information yet, and that is the problem.

**The Chairperson:** For me, the bottom line is that it is easier to analyse government vertically: the Health Department did this, the Department of Education did that, and the Department for Social Development did the other. You are trying to analyse it horizontally by looking at victims, child poverty and the elderly. That is more of a challenge, not just to this Administration but to all of government.

**Ms Boyd:** I wish to restate that, from the initial strategy, it is vital that opportunities for improved interagency and cross-cutting departmental working are fully explored and that the Executive ensure that statutory obligations placed on Departments are afforded the highest priority. That is the frustration. We want to make sure that the Child Poverty Act and the pieces of legislation arising from that are afforded the highest priority, especially now.

**The Chairperson:** I am going to bring the session to a close, if you do not mind. Thank you very much. I hope that we keep in touch. I must say that in this Q&A session, there has been a lot more Q and comment than A; do not take that as anything other than a sign that you made an impact. To all four of you: thank you very much indeed for coming in today.