



Department for

Communities

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Daniel McCrossan
Chairperson, Public Accounts Committee
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
BELFAST
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Via email: committee.publicaccounts@niassembly.gov.uk

Dear Daniel,

**CORRESPONDENCE FROM THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS
COMMITTEE - 12 MONTH UPDATE REQUEST ON MOR ON CHILD POVERTY**

I refer to your letter dated 16 January 2026 and your request for an update on progress against all recommendations in the in the 2024 PAC report on Child Poverty in Northern Ireland.

The Department has continued to ensure that the valuable recommendations and lessons learned from the Committee's Report on Child Poverty are built into the development and implementation of the Executive's Anti-Poverty Strategy.

Significant progress against the recommendations has been made over the last 12 months, details of which can be found in attached Annex.

Work on the draft Anti-Poverty Strategy has continued at pace and the Strategy was issued for consultation from 17 June to 19 September 2025. The consultation allowed people and/or organisations to respond either through an online survey setting out levels of agreement with the overall approach of the vision, pillars and commitments captured within the Strategy, or directly in writing.

As part of the consultation, a range of face-to-face engagement events were undertaken including:

- Three public engagements events held in Belfast, Derry and Omagh.
- Local Government engagement events with SOLACE and NILGA.
- Sectoral engagement events with a broad range of stakeholders including faith-based organisation, those working with children and young people, legal and union organisations, and those that are primarily poverty-focused.
- Departmental officials also attended a number of invitational engagement events throughout the consultation period including engagement with Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI), Shankill Shared Women's Centre and Derry and Strabane District Council.

In total there were 205 responses to the consultation process alongside the engagement at the public consultation events. Of these 85 were received through the online survey and 120 were received in a written format via email.

Responses to the consultation, including online survey responses, email submissions, and feedback received during face-to-face engagement session were reviewed and collated by DfC officials into a summary report. Minister shared this report with his Executive colleagues in December 2025 for review and asking them to consider what further strategic commitments/actions from their departments could be contributed to



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the Anti-Poverty Strategy in response to issues raised by consultees. Department of Communities officials are engaging with their counterparts to discuss the responses and to finalise inputs to the Strategy.

This engagement with all Executive departments is ongoing, focused on preparation of an Executive Paper to include a redrafted Anti-Poverty Strategy, an action plan setting out delivery dates for the Strategic Commitments and a range of potential actions which could be considered for inclusion in the Strategy subject to Executive agreement.

I trust you find this reply helpful. Should the Committee require further updates, departmental officials will be happy to provide these.

Yours sincerely,

John Greer

INTERIM PERMANENT SECRETARY



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Annex

PAC recommendation	Update
Recommendation 1 The Committee is determined to hold the Department to its commitment of bringing forward an Anti-Poverty strategy in this financial year. The Department should therefore report back to the Committee by the end of January 2025 to confirm that timescales are on track and an Anti-Poverty strategy will be provided to the Minister for consideration and presentation to the Executive by 31 March 2025.	The Department provided a written update to the Public Accounts Committee on the development by an Anti-Poverty Strategy - February 2025. The Minister put forward a paper to the Executive containing recommendations on the content of a draft Anti-Poverty Strategy on 31 March 2025.
Recommendation 2 There is a clear need for targets and outcomes that are quantitative, qualitative and timebound to properly measure performance and demonstrate the impact of strategic actions. The Committee recommends that an Anti-Poverty strategy to be presented includes an action plan with a range of clearly defined indicators, measures and targets aimed at quantifying and reducing poverty. As part of this process, the Department should learn from good practice and success in other jurisdictions.	An action plan is currently being developed with the Executive departments. While Strategy targets were not set in the draft Strategy, it does include a wide range of measures which will be considered and reported on throughout its lifespan to give a holistic picture of where the Strategy is working and, just as importantly, where it's not. These include measurements of the percentage of individuals in relative poverty, children in relative poverty, working adults in relative poverty and pensioners in relative poverty. These indicators are composed of official statistics produced by NISRA. It is also intended that the action plan will have clear delivery milestones and targets on putting actions in place to ensure that the Executive is delivering. The further inclusion of Strategy targets will be considered during finalisation of the Strategy by the Executive.



Recommendation 3 There is a strong argument for investing in long-term, preventative measures which would reduce the number of children falling into poverty and therefore save public money in the future. The Committee recommends that the action plan prepared with an Anti-Poverty strategy incorporates clear actions which address early intervention and prevention.	The Executive agreed to the following three pillars underpinning the APS: • Minimising Risks • Minimising Impacts • Exiting Poverty. The focus across all three pillars will be on identifying and addressing the root causes of poverty with the aim of prevention, where this is possible. Actions and commitments were included to address the risks of falling into poverty, including a range of preventative actions in relation to children.
Recommendation 4 Despite rising levels of child poverty in Northern Ireland and the clear impact this has on outcomes and opportunities, the Child Poverty strategy was not properly funded. To allow the Executive to make informed decisions about budget allocations, the Committee recommends that the action plan prepared with an Anti-Poverty strategy is properly costed, and outlines which specific actions can be delivered from existing budgets and those which require further dedicated funding to be made available.	The ongoing work with departments to finalise the Strategy and Action Plan for Executive consideration also includes specific consideration of programmes and actions which are currently funded and what could be done further should additional budget be available.
Recommendation 5 Continuous review is an important part of accountability and monitoring processes. The Committee recommends an Anti-Poverty strategy should include accountability mechanisms to ensure ongoing review and impact assessment of underlying actions, including the direct involvement of those with lived experience, to identify aspects which are not working as intended and need to be amended.	Accountability and monitoring mechanisms form a core part of the Anti-Poverty Strategy which was consulted on in 2025. This included timescales for review throughout the lifespan of the Strategy including a commitment to look at how best to build in the involvement of those with lived experience of the issues and the Strategy's impacts.



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Recommendation 6 In preparing an Anti-Poverty strategy, the Committee recommends the Department should clearly outline and communicate the governance and accountability arrangements for delivering actions, including clarity over the lead department role and how it will work effectively with others in delivering the strategy and associated actions.	As set out in the draft agreed by the Executive for consultation, it is proposed that implementation/delivery of the Strategy will be overseen by an Anti-Poverty Strategy Board which will be chaired by the Head of the Civil Service. This will help ensure sign up to delivery at departmental level. The Board will also be further supported by three Pillar Sub-Committees responsible for delivery under each of the Strategy's pillars. These will be chaired by a representative nominated by the relevant Permanent Secretary. The Board will meet regularly and will assess the effectiveness of the Strategy, agree changes and updates to the actions plans and sign off on formal reports.
Recommendation 7 The Committee recommends that the Department should explore options for independent monitoring to provide more robust scrutiny and monitoring of outcomes and bring a recommendation to the Minister for consideration no later than 6 months after an Anti-Poverty strategy is launched.	This is subject to ongoing consideration in the context of the responses to the consultation. Consideration of an independent monitoring will be considered during finalisation of the Strategy by the Executive.
Recommendation 8 The monitoring and reporting mechanisms for the Child Poverty Strategy were not effective, and this means there has been no assessment of the cumulative impact of the Strategy. The Committee recommends that in developing an Anti-Poverty strategy, the Department should ensure that it designs monitoring mechanisms that are more streamlined and focused on achieving outcomes.	The monitoring mechanisms in the draft Strategy have been designed to be streamlined and provide a focused approach. Under the draft Strategy, each Pillar Sub-Committee will be responsible for monitoring their progress on the action plan, identifying and adding new actions where this is appropriate and providing information as requested to the Anti-Poverty Strategy Board. Each Strategy outcome will be underpinned by the action plan which will be updated on an ongoing basis. To track the Strategy's progress against its vision and pillars, a number of indicators will be used to monitor progress over time.



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Recommendation 9 The Committee considers that there is significant untapped potential in the Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 that would allow organisations to pool resources and share outcomes. However, bureaucracy and administrative burdens, alongside a lack of detailed guidance, has limited its implementation and effectiveness. The Committee recommends that the Department of Finance works with other departments to review the barriers to the Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 and by December 2025 produces an agreed action plan to reduce and remove these barriers.	The Department of Finance's "Removing barriers to the Children's Services Co-operation Act" report was published in December 2025.
Recommendation 10 The community and voluntary sector is a vital partner in delivering effective services for children and representing those with lived experience. The Committee therefore urges the Department to take a proactive role in effective engagement with the sector to improve relationships and ensure those with lived experience continue to be engaged through the life of an Anti-Poverty strategy and the ongoing achievement of real outcomes. The Committee recommends the Department puts in place such an engagement strategy with the community and voluntary sector no later than 6 months after an Anti-Poverty strategy is launched.	Engagement with the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) took place during the consultation process & will continue throughout the lifespan of the Anti-Poverty Strategy implementation. A formal engagement strategy has not yet been developed but will be taken forward when the Strategy has been approved by the Executive.
Recommendation 11 The Department should ensure that it has a comprehensive list of those community and voluntary sector organisations currently delivering services for children in poverty and proactively engages with these organisations to inform new Anti-Poverty action plans in design and delivery phases.	Engagement with the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) took place during the consultation process & will continue throughout the lifespan of the Anti-Poverty Strategy implementation. Work to build a comprehensive list of organisations is ongoing.