



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

Emer Morelli
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19 February 2026

Cc: Stuart Stevenson, TOA

Dear Emer

**MEMORANDUM OF REPLY: 12 MONTH MOR UPDATE ON CHILD
POVERTY IN NI**

At its meeting on 12 February 2026, the Committee considered your correspondence dated 29 January 2026 in which you have sought to provide a 12 month update on the Memorandum of Reply (MOR) to the PAC Report on 'Child Poverty in Northern Ireland'.

After considering your response at last week's meeting, members expressed deep frustration and disappointment about the lack of detail regarding timelines and progress against some recommendations.

Members consider the response to be wholly inadequate and not reflective of the seriousness of the issue, nor of the assurances previously given to the Committee that tackling child poverty was a departmental priority.

While the Committee notes that the majority of recommendations were formally accepted, it is deeply concerned that meaningful progress remains limited. Of the eleven recommendations made by the Committee, only two are recorded as complete. The remainder are marked as ongoing, with actions either lacking defined delivery timelines, dependent on future Executive

approval, or described in vague and non-specific terms.

The Committee is particularly concerned by:

- The Department's reliance on the absence of an agreed Executive strategy as justification for limited progress, without sufficient explanation of what actions can and should be progressed in the interim;
- The absence of clear milestones and measurable delivery timelines;
- The lack of demonstrable, structured engagement with the voluntary and community sector;
- The limited evidence of urgency in addressing an issue which the Committee, and indeed the Department, have previously recognised as a matter of critical public importance.

The Committee does not accept that progress on such a significant societal issue can remain largely static pending wider strategic developments. It is the Committee's view that tangible, practical actions should be capable of advancement irrespective of broader Executive processes.

In light of these concerns, the Committee requires your attendance before it on **Thursday 12 March 2026** to address the following matters in detail:

1. A clear explanation for the limited progress recorded against accepted recommendations;
2. A detailed breakdown of actions that can be progressed immediately, with associated timelines;
3. Clarification of governance arrangements and accountability for delivery;
4. Evidence of structured engagement with stakeholders and how this engagement is influencing policy development;
5. Revised delivery milestones for each outstanding recommendation.

The Committee expects a full and comprehensive oral briefing on these issues and reserves the right to seek further written clarification following that session.

Given the seriousness of the matter and the strength of concern expressed by Members, it is essential that the Department approaches this session prepared to provide substantive and detailed responses.

The Committee's next report on Homelessness in NI is due to be published over the coming weeks and I am keen to stress that the Committee would like to see a more robust and strengthened MOR around this report.

Please respond by email using the address above by **Friday, 27th February 2026**.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Daniel McCrossan', with a small flourish at the end.

Daniel McCrossan
Chairperson
Public Accounts Committee