

Response ID [REDACTED]

Submitted to Regional Balance Bill

Submitted on [REDACTED]

Introduction

1 What is your name?

name:

[REDACTED]

2 What is your email address?

email address:

[REDACTED]

3 Are you providing a submission on behalf of an organisation or business?

Yes

If yes, please provide the name of the organisation or business below:

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council

Consent

4 Please confirm that you have read the Northern Ireland Assembly Committee's Privacy Notice by clicking the button below.

yes:

Yes

5 How would you like your submission to be published?

Yes. Publish but with my personal information and any content that could be used to identify me redacted.

Regional Balance Bill

Clause 1 - Strategic Regional Balance Framework

6 Do regional economic and related disparities need legislation in order for them to be addressed appropriately?

Yes

7 Should the obligation on the development of a Strategic Regional Balance Framework sit with the Executive?

Yes

8 Does the Bill correctly set out what should be in the Strategic Regional Balance Framework including: the roles of Departments; the mechanisms to address disparity; the criteria and methodology for assessing regional disparities; the setting of targets and milestones; the use of cross-border data; the identification of a baseline year etc.

No

9 Does the Bill correctly set out the consultation process for the development of the Strategic Regional Balance Framework, its publication and revision?

Yes

10 Do you have any other comments on Clause 1 or suggested amendments for this clause?

Clause 1:

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council supports Clause 1 and agrees that the proposed Framework should include clear outcomes, departmental responsibilities, funding mechanisms, assessment criteria, measurable targets and milestones. Council particularly welcomes the inclusion of provisions relating to cross-border economic data. However, consideration should be given to strengthening the clause through explicit recognition of border, rural and coastal communities; enhanced involvement of local government in framework development and review; greater transparency regarding regional investment allocations; and the inclusion of additional indicators relating to connectivity, accessibility, skills and economic resilience. These amendments would help ensure that the Framework fully reflects the opportunities and challenges facing Newry, Mourne and Down.

Clause 2 - Reporting, Review and Support Functions

11 Is it reasonable and sufficient to require all Departments in developing, adopting, implementing or revising any policy, strategy or plan, to have due regard to the need to reduce regional disparity and to the Strategic Regional Balance Framework?

Yes

12 Is it reasonable and sufficient to require all Departments to exercise their functions, so far as is reasonably practicable, in a manner calculated to contribute to the outcomes and targets set in the Strategic Regional Balance Framework?

Yes

13 Do you have any other comments on Clause 2 or suggested amendments for this clause?

clause 2 :

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council supports Clause 2 and welcomes the proposed duty on Northern Ireland departments to have due regard to reducing regional disparities and to the Regional Balance Strategic Framework. Council considers that this provision has the potential to embed regional balance considerations across government decision-making. However, Council would welcome engagement with government departments when policies that could significantly affect regional balance outcomes are being developed.

Clause 3 - Annual Reporting

14 Do you agree that all Departments should be required to report annually as to how they have reduced regional disparities in the preceding 12 month period?

Yes

15 Do you have any other comments on Clause 3 or suggested amendments for this clause?

If no, please explain below:

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council supports Clause 3 and recognises the importance of robust data collection, monitoring and reporting arrangements in assessing progress towards reducing regional disparities. Effective evidence gathering will be critical in ensuring transparency, accountability and informed decision-making. For Newry, Mourne and Down District Council consideration should be given to collecting data on: Cross-border commuting and labour movement, businesses trading cross border, investment and transport connectivity.

Clause 4 - Annual Reporting

16 Do you agree that the Department for the Economy should be required to report annually and the Minister make a related statement as to how all Departments have reduced regional disparities in the preceding 12 month period?

Yes

17 Do you have any other comments on Clause 4 or suggested amendments for this clause?

clause 4:

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council supports Clause 4 and welcomes the requirement for the publication of annual reports on the implementation and effectiveness of the Regional Balance Strategic Framework. Council considers that transparent and regular reporting is essential to ensuring accountability and monitoring progress towards reducing regional disparities. Council would, however, encourage the inclusion of regional and council-level data. Council also considers that annual reports should include specific analysis of border-region performance and provide opportunities for engagement with local government and other stakeholders to inform future policy development.

Clause 5 - Reviewing the Framework

18 Do you agree that the operation and effectiveness of the Framework should be revised by the Executive every 5 years?

Yes

19 Do you have any other comments on Clause 5 or suggested amendments for this clause?

clause 5:

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council supports Clause 5 and welcomes the requirement for periodic review of the effectiveness of the Regional Balance Strategic Framework. Regular review is essential to ensure that the Framework remains responsive to changing economic conditions and continues to support the reduction of regional disparities across Northern Ireland.

Clause 6 - Guidance and Research

20 Do you agree that the Department for the Economy should provide guidance and information and undertake, commission or support research on regional disparities?

Yes

21 Do you have any other comments on Clause 6 or suggested amendments for this clause?

clause 6:

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council supports Clause 6 and welcomes the powers provided to the Department to issue guidance, undertake research and promote best practice in relation to regional balance. Council considers that robust evidence, research and knowledge sharing will be essential to the successful implementation of the Regional Balance Strategic Framework. However, there are opportunities to strengthen the clause to ensure that research and guidance fully reflect the circumstances of rural, coastal and border communities.

Clause 7 - Defining regional disparity and regions

22 Do you agree with how regional disparity may be defined by the Bill?

Yes

23 Should regional disparity indices be specified in the Bill?

Yes

24 What other indices should be used to define regional disparity?

clause 7 :

Transport Accessibility and Connectivity

Digital Connectivity

Skills and Workforce Indicators

Business and Enterprise Measures

Cross-Border Economic Indicators

City, Town and Rural Vitality

25 Do you agree with how the Bill may define a region within Northern Ireland?

Yes

26 Do you have any other comments on Clause 7 or suggested amendments for this clause?

clause 7:

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council broadly supports Clause 7 and welcomes the comprehensive definition of regional disparities, including economic, social and infrastructure indicators. Council particularly welcomes the recognition of cross-border economic data. However, the Council considers that the clause could be strengthened through explicit recognition of rural and coastal communities, digital connectivity, broader transport accessibility measures and cross-border labour market dynamics. The Council also recommends replacing the specific reference to "access to airports" with a broader measure of access to strategic transport and connectivity infrastructure. These amendments would provide a more comprehensive and locally relevant basis for assessing and addressing regional disparities across Northern Ireland.

Clause 8 - Commencement and Short Title

27 Do you agree that the provisions of this legislation should be commenced immediately after Royal Assent?

Yes

28 Do you have any other comments on Clause 8 or suggested amendments for this clause?

clause 7:

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council supports Clause 8 and considers that the commencement arrangements provide an appropriate balance between the need for early action to address regional disparities and the practical requirements associated with implementation. Council welcomes the phased approach already embedded within the Bill, which allows time for the preparation of the Regional Balance Strategic Framework and supporting arrangements.

Proposed Additions and Amendments

29 Please provide information on any other potential amendments that you feel would enhance the Bill and the rationale for those.

Information on any potential amendments:

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council supports the objectives of the Bill and considers that it provides a positive framework for addressing regional disparities. Council believes that the legislation could be further strengthened through enhanced accountability arrangements, a formal role for local government, greater recognition of rural, coastal and border communities, stronger requirements regarding regional impact assessment and transparency of public expenditure, and a broader range of indicators relating to connectivity, skills, enterprise and demographic sustainability. Consideration should be given to strengthening the Bill's treatment of cross-border economic activity and functional economic areas, reflecting the importance of the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor.

Additional Comments

30 Please provide any additional comments on the Bill you feel should be considered.

additional comments:

N/A

Almost done...

31 If you provide an email address you will be sent a receipt and a link to a PDF copy of your response.

email: