

Programme for Government Team
The Executive Office

By Email: pfg@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk

19/03/2021

Dear Colleague,

British Association of Social Workers Northern Ireland response to the Northern Ireland Executive Programme for Government Draft Outcomes Framework consultation

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this consultation.

Social workers are employed across a diverse range of services to improve the life opportunities of vulnerable individuals from all sections of society. They support individuals and families to overcome disadvantage rooted in social, economic, environmental and physical factors, including disability, physical and mental ill-health, poverty, abuse and neglect, immigration status, and addiction.

The breadth of social work practice in Northern Ireland means that social work will have a role to play in the delivery of the following six draft framework outcomes:

- Our children and young people have the best start in life
- We have an equal and inclusive society where everyone is valued and treated with respect
- We all enjoy long, healthy active lives
- Everyone can reach their potential
- Everyone feels safe – we all respect the law and each other
- We have a caring society that supports people throughout their lives

The British Association of Social Workers Northern Ireland (BASW NI) welcomes the inclusion of these outcomes and it is vital social work services are adequately resourced to ensure the profession can contribute fully to achieving them

However, BASW NI believes an additional outcome should be included to support delivery of the aforementioned six. The additional outcome is needed to commit the NI Executive to *achieve a reduction in poverty across the NI population to negligible levels.*

Not only does poverty result in huge costs in human terms, its financial impact on public services is extremely significant. Research conducted by the Joseph Roundtree

Foundation in 2016¹ estimated £78 billion of public money is spent annually in the UK to deal with poverty and its consequences. The UK Government's total expenditure in 2016 was £772 billion.

So widespread are the impacts of poverty on the lives of many people who use social work services the Chief Social Worker has described poverty as “the wallpaper of practice”². The effects of poverty on public services are, however, not limited to social work. Poverty also has significant implications for the education, justice and health sectors.

BASW NI recognises the Draft Programme for Government Outcomes Framework includes as key priority areas, *tackling the issues that lead to inequality and disadvantage in terms of welfare and poverty and supporting people to build a route out of poverty*.

However, given the cross-cutting nature of poverty and the pervasiveness of its impacts, failure to include an outcome aimed at reducing poverty to negligible levels will not only lead to avoidable impacts on the lives of hundreds of thousands of our citizens, it will also result in significant additional costs to public services.

Rising poverty will exacerbate the social problems which increase demand for social work services. There is an established link³ between a family's socio-economic circumstances and the chances that their children will experience neglect or abuse, with the likelihood and severity of neglect or abuse increasing as poverty worsens.

Research⁴ published in 2017 by Queen's University Belfast found that children living in the most deprived areas in Northern Ireland are six times more likely to be placed on the Child Protection Register and are four times more likely to become looked after by social services than those in the least deprived areas.

Figures provided by the Office of Social Services indicate that in March 2016 the annual average cost per placement of keeping a child in residential care in Northern Ireland ranged from £163,846 to £298,700 per annum depending on the type of residential facility. The average yearly cost for a foster care placement is £27,832.

On 15 March 2021 there were 3,501 children and young people looked after by social services in NI⁵. The Department of Health *Children's Social Care Statistics for Northern Ireland*⁶ indicate that in 2019/20 79% of the children in care were in foster care placements, 10% placed with parents, 6% in residential care and 5% in other placements.

¹ <https://www.jrf.org.uk/press/poverty-costs-uk-£78-billion-year---jrf-report>

² *Anti-Poverty Practice Framework for Social Work in Northern Ireland*, Department for Health, 2018
<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/Povertyframework.pdf>

³ <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/relationship-between-poverty-child-abuse-and-neglect-evidence-review>

⁴ Bunting, L., McCartan, C., & Davidson, G. (2017). Identifying and Understanding Inequalities in Child Welfare Intervention Rates: Comparative studies in four UK countries. Single country quantitative study report: Northern Ireland. Nuffield Foundation
https://pureadmin.qub.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/126821013/NI_Country_Report_Final_Feb_2017.pdf

⁵ <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-childrens-social-services-data-during-covid-19-0>

⁶ <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/child-social-care-19-20.pdf>

This is only one example of costs to social work services associated with poverty. It does not, for instance, reflect impacts resulting from Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) related to poverty. Research conducted by the UCL Institute of Health Equity⁷ and published by the UK Department of Health in 2015 highlights that children growing up in poverty are disproportionately likely to be exposed to ACEs.

The research notes that while it is not always the case that children will be harmed by exposure to ACEs, children and young people who are exposed to ACEs are at a greater risk of death or injury before reaching adulthood and are also more likely to experience a range of serious illnesses, therefore increasing costs, in the long-term, for the health service.

Living in poverty is also associated with shorter life expectancy. According to the Department of Health's publication *Life Expectancy in Northern Ireland 2017-19*⁸, in 2017-19, men living in the 20% most deprived areas of NI could expect to live 7 years less than those living in the 20% least deprived areas. Women's life expectancy in the 20% most deprived areas was 4.8 years less than that of women in the 20% least deprived areas.

Poverty also impacts negatively on young people's experiences of education. A joint National Education Union (NEU) and Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) survey⁹ received responses from 908 NEU members working in early years, primary and secondary schools and settings across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It found that 87% of respondents consider poverty or living on a low income to significantly affect the learning of their pupils.

In its *Recommendations for an Anti-poverty Strategy*¹⁰, the Department for Communities Expert Advisory Panel on Poverty sets out a series of far-reaching proposals "to achieve a reduction in poverty across the NI population to negligible levels". The Panel's terms of reference required it to "ensure that the recommended themes and actions for a new Strategy are aligned to the Programme for Government". However, given the significance of the impacts of poverty and the costs to public services associated with inaction, BASW NI believes the central aim of the Expert Panel's recommendations should be elevated to the level of a Programme for Government outcome to ensure it shapes policy development and service provision across all NI Executive Departments.

If you would like any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me on 07702 517560 or andy.mcclenaghan@basw.co.uk.

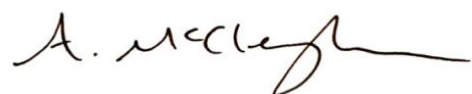
⁷ <http://www.instituteofhealthequity.org/resources-reports/the-impact-of-adverse-experiences-in-the-home-on-children-and-young-people/impact-of-adverse-experiences-in-the-home.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/hscims-life-expectancy-ni-2017-19.pdf>

⁹ Child poverty and education: A survey of the experiences of NEU members April 2018
<https://cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/policypost/Child%20poverty%20and%20education%20-%20A%20survey%20of%20the%20experiences%20of%20NEU%20members%20dated.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/system/files/publications/communities/dfc-social-inclusion-strategy-anti-poverty-expert-advisory-panel-recommendations.pdf>

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. McClenaghan', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Andy McClenaghan

BASW NI Public Affairs, Policy and Communications Lead