



PPR response to the NI Executive consultation on its draft anti poverty strategy 2025-2035

17 September 2025

New and concerning data is shining a light on poverty across the north, from unprecedented homelessness (nearly 32,000 households with Full Duty Applicant homeless status, including [over 20,000 children](#)) to increasingly widespread hunger (520,000 people, including [130,000 children](#), living in food insecure households).

How did we get here? As part of the peace, the [NI Act 1998 \(section 28E\)](#) placed a legal obligation on the NI Executive to produce a strategy to “tackle poverty, social exclusion and patterns of deprivation based on objective need”. Over two decades later, this remains undone.

In [2015](#) the High Court found that NI authorities acted unlawfully in failing to produce a strategy. The department responsible for addressing poverty (and housing – a foundational component of the right to an adequate standard of living), the Department for Communities, eventually set up a four-person Anti-Poverty Strategy [Expert Advisory Panel](#) (which issued detailed [recommendations](#) in December 2020) and a larger [Co-Design Group](#) (which has recently published an [update](#) of its 2022 recommendations).

Despite both groups’ concrete inputs, no strategy emerged. In [March 2025](#) the High Court examined the issue again and again found the authorities (this time, the NI Executive) to be in breach of their legal obligations under section 28E.

The Executive finally opened [consultation](#) on the long-anticipated draft strategy in June 2025. The public reaction was prompt and sharp. The evidence-based recommendations produced by the expert and co-design groups were nowhere reflected in the draft. PPR was amongst the signatories to an 8 July [Open Letter](#) urging the Executive to withdraw its support for the document as it was not fit for purpose. We shared the view expressed by over 75 other organisations, academics and faith leaders, that a strategy that does not effectively address poverty is more harmful than no strategy at all.

The 8 July letter was signed by the DFC’s four Expert Panel members and by members of its Co-Design Group. In the face of clear advice from its own chosen experts and advisors that they needed to reverse course, the authorities have instead chosen to forge ahead.

As the NI Anti-Poverty Network’s [response](#) to the flawed draft explains, it fails to provide anything like a path toward the goal of eradicating poverty: it lacks everything from identified resources to independent oversight to specific, measurable and time-bound indicators, targets

and actions. (Promises of an eventual action plan to be made public at a later date do nothing to repair trust or confidence).

The NI Anti-Poverty Network further highlights how the failure to engage meaningfully and systematically with people living with these issues has resulted in a document that “reinforce(s) the stigmatisation of people experiencing poverty, making it an individual problem which can be solved by changes to ‘lifestyle’ – while ignoring the systemic causes of poverty”. (The individualised approach is not new. In the context of the official Take 5 public health campaign on how individuals can improve their own mental health, PPR supports New Script for Mental Health activists’ [Give 5](#) campaign around what government and organisations can do to better tackle the mental health crisis.)

Insistently battering on in the wrong direction isn’t leadership or progress; it’s the latest chapter in the state’s ongoing dereliction of its duty towards people in poverty. The DFC and the Executive have a wealth of experience- and evidence-based [recommendations](#) from the Expert Panel and co-design strategy group; it urgently needs to follow them.