



Subject:	Motion: Child Poverty Task Force - Response from Department for Communities
Date:	19th March, 2021
Reporting Officer:	John Walsh, City Solicitor
Contact Officer:	Jim Hanna, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	To consider a response on behalf of the Minister for Communities to a motion calling for the establishment of a Child Poverty Task Force, which was passed by the Council at its meeting on 1st February.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	The Committee is requested to consider the response and to take such action thereon as may be determined.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p>At the Council meeting on 1st February, the following motion, which was proposed by Councillor McCusker and seconded by Councillor Whyte, was passed:</p> <p>“This Council notes with alarm the Department of Communities Family Resources Survey 2018/2019 which shows that 122,000 children in Northern Ireland live in relative poverty (24% of children) with 109,000 of those living in absolute poverty and expresses deep concern that these figures have increased significantly since the previous year and have not improved at all in the last five years. The rise of the Universal Credit claimant count and expected end of the furlough scheme could see a</p>

	<p>further increase in these numbers, with the two-child tax credit rule and benefit cap only adding to the pressure on families with children.</p> <p>This Council calls on the Minister for Communities to immediately convene a child poverty task force and to identify regional policy with local outcomes with a clear target: to eradicate child poverty.”</p>
3.2	A response has been received from Mr. Michael Donnelly, Director for Central Policy, on behalf of the Minister for Communities. A copy of the response is attached.
3.3	Mr. Donnelly explains that the Department for Communities is responsible for taking forward poverty policy on behalf of the Northern Ireland Executive. On 24th September 2020, the then Minister for Communities, Carál Ní Chuilín MLA, announced the commencement of work on the development of a range of Social Inclusion Strategies, including an Anti-Poverty Strategy, as part of the commitments made under the New Decade, New Approach deal.
3.4	The Anti-Poverty Strategy will be developed using a co-design approach, with meaningful involvement from stakeholders at all stages of the process. In October 2020, an Expert Advisory Panel was appointed and tasked with producing recommendations on the key themes, priorities and headline actions which the strategy should address. A Co-design Group, with representatives from twenty-seven voluntary and community sector organisations, is helping to shape the development of the strategy and a Cross-departmental Working Group will be responsible for developing the associated action plan.
3.5	Mr. Donnelly goes on to state that, in September, 2020, the Northern Ireland Executive agreed to extend the 2016-2019 Child Poverty Strategy until May, 2022. The purpose of that extension is to allow time for key stakeholders to be consulted on whether the Anti-Poverty Strategy, covering all age groups, is sufficient or whether the development of a Child Poverty Strategy is also required.
3.6	He points out that the most recent Child Poverty Annual Report, for 2019/20, which was published on the Department for Communities website in September 2020, outlines the measures which Departments are taking to ensure, as far as possible, that children do not suffer socio-economic disadvantage. The areas of focus and actions fall under four high level outcomes, namely, health, education, safe/secure stable living environments and economic well-being.
3.7	In view of the work currently taking place, the Department would not, therefore, propose convening an additional body such as a Child Poverty Taskforce at this time.
3.8	Mr. Donnelly adds that, in the course of the development of the Anti-Poverty Strategy, the Department for Communities will continue to engage with and listen to the views and ideas of those impacted by poverty and their representative organisations and will continue to work collaboratively across Departments to address their needs.
3.9	The aforementioned Anti-Poverty Co-design Group will, over the coming months, be assisting the Department for Communities to facilitate a number of feedback sessions to seek the views of stakeholders, in order to inform their decisions on a range of specific areas of the recommendations.

3.10	The Department also plans to host a session to obtain the views of district councils and will be writing to SOLACE with further details shortly. There will also be a public consultation in the latter half of this year and the Department would welcome comments from the Council when this is published.
3.11	Mr. Donnelly concludes by stating that, subject to Executive approval, it is planned that the Child Poverty Annual Report for 2020/21 will be published in March, 2021 and that an Anti-Poverty Strategy will be published in December, 2021.
	<u>Financial and Resource Implications</u>
3.12	None associated with this report.
	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u>
3.13	None
4.0	Document Attached
	Response from Department for Communities