

Child Poverty Strategy 2014-17 Consultation  
Child Poverty Unit  
Department for Education  
1<sup>st</sup> Floor Sanctuary Buildings  
Great Smith Street  
London  
SW1P 3BT

22 May 2014

Dear Sir/Madam

### **Child Poverty Strategy 2014-17 Consultation**

The office of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) was created in accordance with The Commissioner for Children and Young People (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 to safeguard and promote the rights and best interests of children and young people in Northern Ireland.

Under article 7(2) of the 2003 Order, NICCY has a duty to keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of law and practice relating to the rights and welfare of children. Under article 7(3), we have a duty to keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of services provided for children by relevant authorities. In carrying out our function, NICCY's paramount consideration is the rights and best interests of the child and our work is based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

I am pleased to note, in the consultation document on the Child Poverty Strategy 2014-17, that the UK Government remains firmly committed to maintaining the goal of ending child poverty by 2020, and the focus on tackling the root causes of child poverty now and across generations. The four UK Commissioners, in our 2011 'mid-term' report on progress on the Concluding Observations from the periodic review in 2008 of the UK State report, sought to highlight our concern about the effect of poverty on children, and the impact of the recession on this particularly disadvantaged group of children.

The focus on supporting families into work and increasing their earnings, improving living standards and tackling poor educational attainment for children in poverty is also to be welcomed. However, there seems to be little evidence of consideration of the Welfare Reform changes on family income, and its potential to result in more children experiencing poverty, and children experiencing deeper, more protracted poverty.

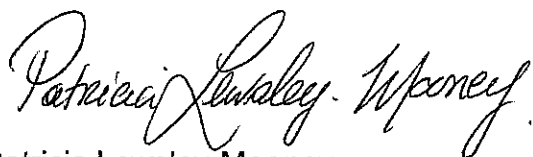
Last year the Office for the First Minister and deputy First Minister released a report it had commissioned from the Institute for Fiscal Studies to produce projections of levels of child poverty by 2020-21, and estimated that the relative child poverty rate will have increased by more than 8 percentage points over the 10 years up to then. Relative child poverty will reach 30% compared to a projected 24% in the UK more generally. Absolute child poverty is estimated to increase by 11.5 percentage points to reach an incredible 33% as compared to 27% across the UK generally. It must be remembered that not only will the number of children in poverty increase, but the depth of poverty children are experiencing will become more extreme. This research presumes that the Northern Ireland Executive takes forward a Bill to maintain parity with GB in relation to Welfare Reform.

I have engaged with The Northern Ireland Executive in relation to its draft Child Poverty Strategy 2014-17 and have raised my concerns at its limited analysis of the increases in child poverty over the lifetime of the previous strategy. I have also pointed out the requirement within the Child Poverty Act 2010 to set specific targets for each of the four measures of child poverty for the period of the 14-17 strategy, and outline clearly the actions that will be taken to meet these targets. While the Northern Ireland Executive has a critical role in tackling child poverty, it is critical that the UK Government is also acting decisively in relation to the reserved, non-devolved matters, to address child poverty. It is vital, therefore, that the UK Government reconsiders its approach to maintaining parity in relation to Welfare Reform in Northern Ireland. The statistics above demonstrate that the impact in Northern Ireland will be considerably more devastating than in Great Britain. For this reason it is imperative that the UK Government withdraw the sanctions it has opposed on the Northern Ireland Executive, so that it may adapt the legislation, which was developed in relation to the administrative and socio-economic context in Great Britain, to meet the particular context of Northern Ireland.

Finally, I would like to make you aware of my concern that a Commissioner has not been appointed to the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission by the Northern Ireland Executive, an issue which I have raised with the Office of the First Minister and deputy first Minister on a number of occasions. I believe that this is critical for two reasons: to ensure that the Commission is fully aware of the different circumstances in Northern Ireland affecting child poverty, and to ensure that the work of the Northern Ireland Executive in delivering on its statutory duties contained in the Child Poverty Act 2010 is properly scrutinised and supported by the Commission. I understand that, despite the requirement in the legislation to seek the advice of the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission in the development of the NI Child Poverty Strategy and have regard to the advice provided, that this has not occurred. I have raised this matter with the Northern Ireland Executive in my advice on this draft Strategy and trust that this will be rectified.

In conclusion in Northern Ireland, as across the UK, child poverty is one of the most significant issues impacting on children's rights and best interests, and it is vital that the UK and devolved governments work together effectively to end child poverty by 2020. As Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People, I am committed to working constructively with the UK government and Northern Ireland Executive in providing advice on its delivery on child poverty and hope that the advice contained in this paper proves useful in planning the way forward.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Patricia Lewsley-Mooney". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Patricia Lewsley-Mooney  
Commissioner