

## Draft Anti-Poverty Strategy for Northern Ireland

- The Anti-Poverty Strategy is Government's **plan to tackle poverty** in NI
- The NI Assembly need to hear **what you think** about their plan by **19<sup>th</sup> September or else the current strategy is more likely to be set in stone**

The plan is not good enough. Over 75 organisations have written to the NI Executive to tell them it does not have specific actions or targets. It is unlikely to put more money into the pockets of families or to help people with the pressures they face with the Cost of Living in the short-term. It will not reduce Child Poverty. All our people deserve much better.

### What does poverty mean?

Poverty means someone **does not have enough money to pay for what they need to live** like a warm home, food, clothes and doing things they enjoy.

### Why do we need an Anti-Poverty Strategy?

- 18% of people in NI are living in poverty - nearly 1 in 5 of our population
- 25% of children in NI are living in poverty – 1 in 4 of our children
- 20% of people living in families where someone is disabled are living in poverty – 1 in 5 people living in a disabled household
- A strategy with targeted policies, such as free school meals for everyone or an increase in minimum wage, for example, can make a big difference in people's lives.

### What's in the draft Anti-Poverty Strategy?

The Strategy has a **Vision** which is: by working together different parts of Government will get rid of poverty in our communities

The Strategy sets out a plan to do this in three areas called **Pillars**:

- **Stopping people falling into poverty**
- **Helping people in poverty**
- **Helping people get out of poverty**

## Stopping People Falling into Poverty

The Strategy has suggested some **actions** to help lower the risk of people falling into poverty.

Think about whether these actions would make a difference in your own life or in the lives of people around you who are affected by poverty:

- **Continuing** the Extended Schools Programme – helps with breakfast clubs, after school activities – this already exists and is not new.
- **Researching** the impact of the two-child limit on poverty and calling on Westminster to remove it – we already know it increases poverty and there are no actions to protect people here. In Scotland, the Government has committed to removing it.
- **New** programme to reduce disadvantage in education (RAISE) – there are questions surrounding the fairness of this programme and there is a current court case on whether this programme targets those who need it the most.
- **Refreshing** an existing scheme called the Universal Child Health Promotion programme – this already exists and is not new.
- **Put in place** strategies to support people with disabilities and help them get good jobs – there is no detail on this.

## Helping People in Poverty

The Strategy has suggested some actions to help those who are currently experiencing poverty.

Think about whether these actions would make a difference in your own life or in the lives of people around you who are affected by poverty:

- **Continuing** to mitigate the Bedroom Tax & Benefit Cap – this already happens and is not new.
- **Changes** to Discretionary Support – there is no further detail on this.
- **Continue** to pay childcare costs through a fund called the Adviser Discretion Fund in Universal Credit – this already exists and is not new.
- **Provide** advice to increase take-up of benefits – this work is already being done through the 'Make the Call' service and is not new.
- **Continue** to provide Free School Meals and Uniform Grants – this already happens and is not new. There are no plans to increase the support already provided.
- **New law** to make school uniforms more affordable – this law does not include a cap on school uniform costs or an increase in the school uniform grant.
- **Continue** the Healthy Start Scheme. It provides help to access baby formula and healthy food to pregnant women and families with young children on low incomes – this already exists and is not new. Uptake of this scheme is the lowest in NI compared to England, Scotland and Wales.
- **Continue** to support the advice sector – this is not new.

## Helping People get out of Poverty

The Strategy has suggested some actions to help people get out of poverty.

Think about whether these actions would make a difference in your own life or in the lives of people around you who are affected by poverty

- **Put in place** programmes to offer pathways to work – there is no detail on this.
- **Improve** the quality of jobs – there are new laws in the Assembly to improve the quality of jobs
- **Put in place** high quality skills & training programmes – no further detail on these.
- **Continue** Childcare Subsidy Scheme – this scheme was introduced in 2024 and provides a 15% childcare subsidy for working parents eligible for tax free childcare – there are many parents who are excluded from this Scheme.
- **Bring forward** a Childcare Strategy for consultation – this has been talked about for a long time and we do not know any details of how it will support parents

## Things to think about.....

- Will the actions suggested above make things better for people in poverty?
- Will any of the actions listed above help you?
- What actions would help you that are not included here – what is missing?

## What can I do?

We are working together to inform as many people as possible about the draft Anti-Poverty Strategy so that they can have their say.

- Fill in this [feedback form](#) and we will use the results of these forms to feed into the public consultation.
- **We will also share** your views with politicians (we will not share any of your personal details).
- **Talk** to your family and friends about the draft Anti-Poverty Strategy. Ask them to read this document and to use the feedback form to tell the Government what they think about it.
- **Spread the word** by sharing this link on social media
- **Sign** this [petition](#) telling the Executive to NOT support this draft strategy and use the recommendations from the Anti-Poverty Strategy Group..

## **Suggested Actions that the Anti-Poverty Strategy Group have recommended to the government that would make a difference to households:**

**Introduce a Child Payment** - Scotland has a Scottish Child Payment of £26.70 per week, per child. It is taking children out of poverty.

**Bring back Free School Meal payments during the school holidays** - The Government used to provide people in NI with £27 every fortnight but this was cut in 2023. The cost of food has increased by 40% in the last 5 years.

**Extend Free School Meals to more people** - The Government in London gives Free School Meals to all families who get Universal Credit. In Wales all primary school pupils receive a meal at lunch time. In the Republic of Ireland the Government want to give all children a hot meal in school by 2028.

**Get rid of the two-child limit in Universal Credit** - The Government in Scotland are planning to get rid of the two-child limit from 2026. It is putting more children into poverty every day.

**Provide childcare for parents who want to retrain/go back to education** – Provide affordable childcare for parents who want to get qualifications.

**Get rid of the five-week wait in Universal Credit** – Make sure people aren't put into debt and despair by giving them money to get through the five-week wait until they get their first payment of Universal Credit.

**Increase the School Uniform grant and include costs for shoes** – Take stress from parents by providing more support for the cost of school uniforms which many parents struggle to afford.

**Put a price cap on school uniforms** – Make uniforms more affordable for parents by putting a cap on the cost and get rid of branded PE uniforms.