

DEPARTMENT FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

**CONSULTATION ON THE EQUALITY IMPACTS OF
THE DEPARTMENT'S ELEMENTS OF
THE DRAFT PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT 2008-2011,
DRAFT BUDGET 2008-2011 AND THE DRAFT INVESTMENT
STRATEGY 2008-2018**

Analysis of Responses to the Public Consultation Exercise

February 2008

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INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This paper provides a summary of the responses received to the public consultation on the equality impacts of the Department for Regional Development's elements of the draft Programme for Government (PfG), Budget 2008-2011(Budget 2007) and Investment for Strategy for 2008 – 2018 (ISNI 08). The focus of the paper is on the key issues identified by respondents.

- 1.2 The Department is very grateful to all those who participated in the consultation exercise. A copy of this paper has been sent to all the organisations and individuals who provided written comments. A copy is also available on the Department's website, along with copies of the written submissions received, at:
www.drdni.gov.uk/publications-details.htm?docid=4165
Links to the written submissions are attached at Annex A. Copies can be made available in Braille, on audiotape or in large print on request.

Overview of Consultation Process

- 1.2 On 11 December 2007, the Department for Regional Development launched a public consultation exercise on the equality impacts of the draft PfG, Budget 2007 and ISNI 08. The aim of the consultation exercise was to provide an opportunity for the public and interested parties to identify any equality of opportunity, good relations and disability impacts so that these could inform the Department's input to final budget decisions and the future delivery of programmes including any equality impact assessments carried out.

- 1.3 Over 400 packs of consultation documents were issued to key stakeholders on the Department's consultation list including Section 75 representative groups, individuals and MLAs, MPs and MEPs. The consultation document and the associated draft PfG, Budget 2007 and

ISNI 08 documents were also made available for download and viewing on the Department's website along with details of the associated high level impact assessments (HLIAs).

1.4 To facilitate a general open discussion of the issues, a number of public consultation seminars were organised across the North. Details of the seminars are as follows:

- **Monday 7 January** - Silverbirch Hotel, Omagh
- **Tuesday 8 January** - The Guildhall, Derry
- **Wednesday 9 January** - Southern Education & Library Board Headquarters, Armagh
- **Thursday 10 January** - Spires Conference Centre, Belfast.

1.5 An additional event was organised for key stakeholder representatives, including Section 75 representatives and members of the Equality Coalition, on Wednesday 9 January in Spires Conference Centre, Belfast.

Responses Received

1.6 The consultation exercise concluded on 16th January 2008, but responses were accepted up to 21 January 2008. Written responses were received from the following seven organisations:

- The Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ);
- IMTAC;
- Ballymena Access Group;
- Omagh District Council;
- The Consumer Council;
- RNID; and
- Armagh City and District Council.

- 1.7 Numbers attending the consultation seminars were low, possibly due to the time of year and adverse weather conditions. Those attending included an MLA, a District Councillor, council representatives, representatives from public bodies, Section 75 groups and the public.
- 1.8 At the seminars, a presentation on what the draft Budget 2007, Programme for Government and ISNI 08 meant for the Department in terms of expenditure on roads, public transport and water and sewerage and the associated equality issues, was made by officials. This was followed by a question and answer and discussion session. Despite the disappointing attendance, useful debates took place from which a number of important issues emerged.

Regional Development Committee

- 1.9 On 16 January the Minister briefed the Regional Development Committee about the consultation and took note of their views. The Committee asked about the mechanics of the consultation process, and how the key messages emerging from it would be handled in terms of the final PfG, Budget 2007 and ISNI 08. They identified rural transport services and the extension of the Concessionary Fares Scheme as key issues for the Department in promoting equality of opportunity and social inclusion. The urban /rural dimensions of the Department's programmes and the effectiveness of the consultation exercise were discussed with useful suggestions made for improvements in any future engagement on Budget issues.

MAIN THEMES

Rural Transport Services and the Concessionary Fares Scheme

- 2.1 The most important issue to emerge from the consultation was the significance of rural transport services and the Concessionary Fares Scheme to equality of opportunity, in particular to women, older people, young people and people with disabilities. Respondents identified a need to increase investment in rural transport services. Ballymena Access Group suggested the introduction of a voucher scheme for a subsidised taxi service for disabled people living in rural areas.
- 2.2 While the proposed extension to the Concessionary Fares Scheme to introduce free travel on public transport in the North to those aged 60 and over was welcomed, there was general disappointment about the other unsuccessful proposals to extend the scheme, particularly that of free travel to current half fare recipients and the provision of reduced fares to people using rural transport services.
- 2.3 It was felt that additional funding opportunities should be used to rationalise rural transport and concessionary fares arrangements to ensure that older people and disabled people were treated in the same way.

Poverty and Social Inclusion

- 2.4 An extension of these programmes was also regarded as important in terms of social exclusion with lack of access to a car, availability of services, accessibility and affordability all identified as problems. RNID pointed out that it was often cheaper, because of fare structures, for disabled people who qualified for half fare concessions not to use the

concession. The recent roll out of door-to-door transport services for people with disabilities was strongly supported.

- 2.5 The identification of the opportunity to use the procurement of infrastructure programmes to promote social inclusion and equality of opportunity, where possible, was also welcomed.

Equality of Opportunity Generally

- 2.6 Respondents noted that the Department's programmes had been underpinned by a series of equality impact assessments (EQIAs) and that a commitment had been given to carry out full EQIAs on outstanding policies such as the proposed extension of the Concessionary Fares Scheme to all persons at age 60. Some clarification was sought about the status of the HLIA's which accompanied resource bids and how these and the Department's resource bids might be accessed. Details are available via the consultation paper at <http://www.drdni.gov.uk/publications-details.htm?docid=4001>
- 2.7 The CAJ recommended that the Department should screen all proposed efficiency savings for Section 75 impacts and that a future mechanism should be developed for early equality scrutiny of spending proposals with an element of external scrutiny. The Consumer Council focused on the future arrangements for the delivery of for water and sewerage services and emphasised the need to ensure a common and consistent multi-utility approach and clear an unambiguous arrangements for consumers. A case was made for full equality consideration of any policy changes agreed by the Executive on foot of the Strand 2 Report of the Independent Panel Review of Water and Sewerage funding, including debt management policies. Omagh District Council, while against charges for water and sewerage in

principle, expressed support for a fair and affordable system with metering and an affordability tariff.

Urban /Rural and East/West Balance

- 2.8 The equity of urban/ rural and east/ west provision was queried by many of the respondents, with the absence of a railway network and claims of limited bus provision in the west advanced as a justification for greater investment in roads and public transport. Respondents from the west felt that increased investment on transport and infrastructure in the area was essential to secure balanced and sustainable growth providing access to hospitals and gateways such as ports and airports. The levels of investment planned for the Greater Belfast area were queried, including the expenditure proposed for any Rapid Transit project.
- 2.9 Assurances were sought about the levels of funding and the arrangements in place to ensure delivery of planned investment, particularly for the A6.
- 2.10 The issue of mains water and sewerage connections was identified as an important equality issue for rural dwellers.

Lessons Learned

- 2.11 Many helpful suggestions were put forward by respondents, particularly the Regional Development Committee, about ways to improve the consultation process in future including earlier and more focussed engagement with the public and stakeholders.

NEXT STEPS

- 3.1 The Department is very grateful to all who participated in the consultation process. The issues raised in the consultation, particularly the case made on the need to extend the Concessionary Fares Scheme, were taken into account in developing the departmental input to final Budget decisions.

- 3.2 In light of the resources available and the pressures on DRD's existing programmes, the Department is unable, at this time, to extend the Concessionary Fares Scheme further. However, the Department will continue to seek resources in future Budget Rounds to extend the Concessionary Fares Scheme.

- 3.3 Consideration will also continue to be given to the other important themes to emerge from the consultation. The consultation document explained that the DRD programmes covered by the draft PfG, Budget 2007 and ISNI 08 were underpinned by a series of EQIAs. These included full EQIAs on the Regional Transportation Strategy and the other related transport plans and programmes. These EQIAs helped to ensure that resources were allocated across the North on an equitable basis. Rural proofing exercises also ensured that rural concerns were taken fully into account.

- 3.4 Regular Section 75 monitoring of these plans and programmes will continue to ensure that they are delivered in such a way as to promote equality of opportunity and good relations to the fullest extent possible. In addition, full EQIAs will be carried out on any new policies such as the extension of the Concessionary Fares scheme to introduce free travel on public transport in the North to those aged 60 and over. To this end, this paper and all written responses received have been copied to relevant business areas to inform the preparation of EQIAs

and the delivery of programmes over the 2008 - 2011 period and beyond.

ANNEX A - DIRECTORY OF WRITTEN RESPONSES RECEIVED

- Armagh City and District Council
www.drdni.gov.uk/publications-details.htm?docid=4155
- Ballymena Access Group;
<http://www.drdni.gov.uk/publications-details.htm?docid=4156>
- The Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ);
<http://www.drdni.gov.uk/publications-details.htm?docid=4158>
- The Consumer Council;
<http://www.drdni.gov.uk/publications-details.htm?docid=4159>
- IMTAC;
<http://www.drdni.gov.uk/publications-details.htm?docid=4160>
- Omagh District Council;
<http://www.drdni.gov.uk/publications-details.htm?docid=4162>
- RNID
<http://www.drdni.gov.uk/publications-details.htm?docid=4163>