

A Response to: Draft Budgets 2011-15

Issued by the Department of Finance and
Personnel

February 2011

Introduction

- 1.1. The Women's Support Network (WSN) welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation issued by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.
- 1.2. The Women's Support Network (WSN), established in 1989, is a regional organisation that works across all areas of Northern Ireland. It includes in its membership community based women's centres, groups and organisations, with a concentration in disadvantaged areas. WSN is a charitable and feminist organisation, which adopts a community development approach. We provide a range of support and services to 62 community based women's centres, projects and infrastructure groups and 22 associate members drawn from across the community and voluntary sector who support women, families and communities. (see Appendix 1).
- 1.2. Our members provide a wide range of women-centred front line services across Northern Ireland, including:
 - Specialist Advice
 - Childcare and Family Support
 - Counselling, Support and Advocacy
 - Complementary Therapies
 - Training & Education
 - Health & Wellbeing Programmes
 - Personal Development & Employment Support
 - Volunteering, Leadership & Empowerment
- 1.3. WSN aims to achieve social, political and economic justice through the promotion of the autonomous organisation of women. The Network aims to strengthen the collective voice of women's groups and to promote and develop networking opportunities, to enable collective action and to impact upon policy and decision making processes. WSN provides an accessible, feminist, relevant and high quality support service and resource for its member groups. The Network is also an

important information resource on issues relevant to community based women's organisations and for other infrastructure groups, nationally and internationally.

- 1.4. Over the past 30+ years, the community based women's sector has developed a range of front-line services such as childcare, support, advice, and education & training services in response to the needs they identified at a grass roots level. Women's groups continue to meet the particular needs of women and their children living in areas considered to be some of most affected by the conflict, and recognised as some of the most disadvantaged areas across Northern Ireland today.
- 1.5. Network members are actively engaged with their local communities, cross-community initiatives and regional structures throughout Northern Ireland.

2. Comments for all departments

- 2.1. WSN wishes to raise concern about the length of the consultation period. This 8.5 week period is totally inadequate for interested parties to respond and give due consideration to the budgets especially since this period included Christmas and New Year holidays.
- 2.2. We wish to highlight that the draft budgets are inaccessible and contain technical jargon. Consultees should be provided with sufficient meaningful information to understand, scrutinise and comment on policies. The Department of Finance and Personnel's Equality Scheme which states that "barriers to proper consultation will be removed by ensuring accessibility of language and appropriate formats in a timely fashion to ensure meaningful consultation."¹ WSN believes that the Department has not followed its own Equality Scheme with regards to these issues and we recommend that the Department revisits the

¹ <http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/dfpequal.pdf>, pg 7.

wording in the budgets and follows its Equality Scheme in future policies.

- 2.3. WSN is disappointed that a gender perspective has not been mainstreamed in the revised spending plans. OFMDFM has highlighted in the Gender Equality Strategy that “the gender perspective will be taken into account during the whole process of policy development in all the Government functions.”²
- 2.4. WSN notes with disappointment that a full Equality Impact Assessment has not been carried out. We would stress that a High Level Impact Assessment (HLIA) is not sufficient, in itself, to discharge Section 75 duties. OFMDFM’s Gender Equality Strategy highlights that “as part of the process of developing policy priorities and budgets, DFP and OFMDFM consult widely on how the budget proposals may impact on different section 75 equality categories.”³ WSN is concerned that the budgets will impact disproportionately upon women. The Fawcett Society highlights that “Of the £8 billion worth of cuts to tax and welfare, 72 per cent will come from women’s pockets, in comparison to 28 per cent from men’s.”⁴ Professor Mike Tomlinson (Poverty and Social Exclusion UK Project Queens University) suggests that the Executive could be “open to legal challenge for failing to have due regard to equality of opportunity.”⁵ Section 75 imposes a statutory duty on public authorities “to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity.” WSN urges all departments to carry out thorough evidence-based impact assessments as required by Section 75.
- 2.5. The Council of Europe has published a handbook on Gender Budgeting and defines gender budgeting as “an application of gender mainstreaming in the budgetary process.”⁶ According to the Council of Europe, gender budgeting involves three stages including analysis

² OFMDFMNI *Gender Equality Strategy: A Strategic framework to promote gender equality for women and men 2006-2016*, Pg 35.

³ <http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/genderequalitystrategy2006-2016.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk//index.asp?PageID=1204>

⁵ Tomlinson, M. And Kelly, G. (2011) *Poverty and Social Exclusion UK: Response to Northern Ireland’s Draft Budget*

⁶ Council of Europe (2009) *Gender Budgeting: Practical Implementation handbook*, Pg 5.

involving gender disaggregated data, determining the differential impact of the budget between men and women; reformulation of policies and redistribution of resources to ensure gender equality outcomes; and embedding gender equality within all budgetary processes.⁷ WSN believes the approach highlighted in the Council of Europe's handbook is vital to ensure that equality of opportunity on the grounds of gender is embedded in the budgetary process. WSN recommends that DFP and other government departments in their individual budgets adopt the approach published by the Council of Europe in its guidance on gender budgeting thus ensuring gender equality in budgetary processes, in this case in the draft budget 2011-15 for Northern Ireland.

2.6. A report by the Women's Centres Regional Partnership (WCRP) identified lack of appropriate childcare as the single biggest barrier to women's participation in education, training and work, as well as public and political life. The report made a number of recommendations including the development of an integrated childcare strategy for Northern Ireland and increased provision of local, high quality, affordable and flexible childcare.⁸ The Law Centre NI also cited childcare as a barrier to employment stating that "any child poverty strategy needs to make progress in this area if the route to work is to be a meaningful route out of poverty."⁹ The Law Centre NI also raised concerns during the Committee stages of the Welfare Reform Bill regarding obligations for lone parents with children aged seven or over to look for employment from 2010, given that there is no childcare strategy or childcare infrastructure in place in NI.¹⁰ WSN are very concerned regarding the lack of co-operation to deal with cross-cutting strategies such as childcare funding and a childcare strategy.

2.7. We have concerns that budgets have been prepared without an agreed Programme for Government. Having the PfG in place would have

⁷ Council of Europe (2009) *Gender Budgeting: Practical Implementation handbook*, Pg 17.

⁸ Save the Children: *Measuring Severe Child Poverty in NI*, January 2010

⁹ H McLaughlin (2009) *Women Living in Disadvantaged Communities: Barriers to Participation*, Report written on behalf of WCRP, pg 37

¹⁰ Law Centre NI *Working Together To Reduce Child Poverty Seminar: The Child Poverty Act 2010*, May 2010

provided a framework to identify priorities and where cuts and spend would be allocated. Further it is necessary to acknowledge that the effects of the recession might lead to greater need in terms of providing advice and services, etc. There could also be costs associated with withdrawing funding (e.g. the state would need to pay unemployment benefit to staff made redundant).

- 2.8. There is little evidence of a co-ordinated approach to the drafting of departmental budgets. Minister Alex Attwood highlighted at a recent event¹¹ a meeting with Michelle Gildernew to discuss a way of working together and made reference to “looking at funding streams to ensure those who are disadvantaged in both rural and urban areas continue to receive vital services.” Apart from this one meeting it would appear departments are competing for budgets which could lead to vital services being reduced and those who are disadvantaged bearing the brunt of the budget cuts.

Conclusion

WSN welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation document. Whilst welcoming this document, we have offered some constructive recommendations as to how it could be improved. Of particular concern is the serious impact on women and their families. We are happy to further discuss this response if required.

For further information, contact:

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¹¹ Spectrum 2 Event held on Thursday 10th February 2011

MEMBERSHIP 2011

	<u>Member Group</u>
1	All Ireland Mother's Union
2	An Munia Tober (Travellers)
3	Antrim & Ballymena Women's Aid
4	Ardmonagh Women's Group
5	Ardoyne Women's Group
6	ATLAS Women's Centre
7	Al Nisa Women's Group
8	Ballybeen Women's Centre
9	Ballymurphy Women's Group
10	Belfast & Lisburn Women's Aid
11	Belvoir Women's Improvement Group
12	Carrickfergus Women's Forum
13	Carew II
14	Causeway Women's Aid
15	Chrysalis Women's Centre
16	Clan Mor Women's Group (Sure Start)
17	Derry Well Woman
18	Derry Women's Centre
19	Falls Women's Centre
20	First Steps Women's Group
21	Footprints Women's Centre
22	Foyle Women's Aid
23	Foyle Women's Information Network
24	Granaghant District Women's Group
25	Greenway Women's Centre
26	Kilcooley Women's Centre
27	Lesbian Advocacy Services Initiative
28	Lesbian Line
29	Lenadoon Women's Group
30	Ligoneil Family Centre
31	Link Women's Group
32	Manor Women's Group
33	Markets Women's Group
34	NI Women's Aid Federation
35	NI Women's European Platform
36	Fermanagh Women's Network
37	Newry & Mourne Women
38	Newtownabbey Women's Group
39	Older Women's Network NI
40	Omagh Women's Aid
41	Rape Crisis Centre
42	Rasharkin Women's Group
43	Shankill Women's Centre
44	Strabane & Lifford Women's Centre
45	Strathfoyle Women's Centre
46	The Learning Lodge
47	Voices Women's Group

48	Waterside Women's Centre
49	Windsor Women's Centre
50	Women Connect Project
51	Women into Politics
52	Women's Information Group
53	Women's News
54	Women's TEC
55	Women 2 Gather
56	Women's Resource & Development Agency
57	WISPA (Women in Sport & Physical Activity)
58	Ardcarn Women's Group
59	OIYIN Women's Group
60	Mossley Women's Institute
61	Mount Vernon Women's Group
62	Coole New Opportunities
63	Foyle Women's Aid
	<u>Associate Members</u>
1.	Ballymena Community Forum
2.	CiNI
3.	Community Relations Forum
4.	East Belfast Community Partnership
5.	Employers for Childcare
6.	HIV Centre (Women's Support Group)
7.	Mencap
8.	National Women's Council of Ireland
9.	Playboard
10.	RNIB (Women's Group)
11.	Good Morning Newtownabbey
12.	Monkstown Community Association
13.	WAVE Trauma Centre
14.	WEA
15.	Parents Advice Centre
16.	Templemore Community Action Group
17.	Gingerbread
18.	Larne Community Development Project
19.	Community First Coaching
20.	Changing Faces
21.	Sands NI