

## **Committee for Employment and Learning**

### **RE: Consultation on the (NI) Multiple Deprivation Measure**

The Committee for Employment and Learning welcomes the opportunity to write to you with comments on the above consultation. Members approved the following response at the Committee's meeting on Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> October.

The Committee believes it is vitally important that policy-makers have access to high quality information on levels of deprivation here. A clear understanding of where deprivation is concentrated will allow us to more readily pursue the equality agenda set out in the Programme for Government and take more targeted action to close the gap between areas. Members are supportive of the reasons behind this consultation seeking changes at this point while acknowledging that a fuller methodological review of the measures will take place following the 2011 Census. The Committee believes that the seven 'domains' or types of deprivation provide the broadest range of measurement without becoming unmanageable.

With regard to the changes to the 'sub-domains' proposed in the consultation, Members have considered these and the resulting views are set out below.

#### **Income Deprivation Domain**

The Committee is content that Adults and Children in Households in receipt of Housing Benefit be included in the domain measure. The Committee notes, however, that an indicator relating to Tax Credits will not be included in the domain because DSD no longer has access to the data. This data was available to DSD until October 2007 and Members would question why this data is not being made available by Revenue and Customs.

#### **Employment Deprivation Domain**

This domain was of particular interest to the Committee as it falls into the Employment and Learning remit. Members consider that it is disappointing that no specific indicator relating to 'hidden unemployment' will be included in the domain. Members consider this to be a significant factor with regard to deprivation. The Committee understands that the small sample sizes and small numbers of relevant respondents mean that results would not be considered 'robust'; however, Members would advocate that the possibility of including this measure is considered when the fuller review of methodology in 2011 provides an opportunity for some modification of processes etc.

The Committee is also very keen that the Steps to Work programme be included as an indicator as part of the fuller review in 2011. By that time the programme should be fully rolled out. Members have a keen interest in the operation of the programme.

### **Health Deprivation and Disability Domain**

The Committee works hard to ensure that those with a disability are included in DEL's considerations with regard to workforce development and general access to the workplace. Members are very supportive of identifying areas with concentrations of people with disabilities so that resources and facilities can be properly targeted. In terms of the proposals for the addition of indicators to the domain, the Committee is supportive of the Emergency Hospital Admission indicator, Children's Dental Health indicator and Low Birth Weight indicator being included in the domain. In addition, Members agree that Mental Health Hospital Admissions should be included in the Mental health indicator.

### **Education, Skills and Training Domain**

This domain is particularly close to the work of the Committee. Members are strong advocates of the development of our education, skills and training base and are clear in their understanding that overall workforce development will benefit from locating and then targeting the areas where these elements necessary for our economic development are missing. The Committee is supportive of the Key Stage 2 performance data replacing the 'proportions of children aged 11 and 12 not attending a grammar school' as the grammar school sector now accommodates some 40% of those leaving the post-primary sector and, as such, grammar school attendance is no longer a reliable measure of educational achievement and grammar schools no longer have consistent entry criteria. The Committee also supports the inclusion of primary level absenteeism rates and the proportion of primary school age pupils with Special Education Needs in the domain. The Committee works closely with a number of organisations which run programmes to reach school leavers who do not go into further education, employment or training, the so-called 'NEETs'. Consequently, members are very supportive of the destination of those not entering Further education or training being included in the destination of school leavers indicator. It is important that policy-makers are aware of the concentration of NEETs in particular areas so that these can be properly targeted with support services. The Committee is also content that the combination of indicators into sub-domains, decreasing the importance of the 2001 Census data as this information is dated and has lost some of its accuracy.

### **Proximity to Services Domain**

The Committee is disappointed that Translink is unable to provide integrated data for its buses and trains and, as a result a measure of travel by public transport cannot be included in the domain. Access to public transport has been shown to be a key factor in deprivation and the ability of particular communities to lift themselves out of disadvantage in terms of being able to access job opportunities outside the area etc. With regard to the other proposals for this domain Members have no particular objections.

### **Living Environment Domain**

With regard to the proposals for this domain, the Committee has no particular views. However, while Members understand that the data on Household Overcrowding from the 2001 Census is dated, they do believe it to be an important indicator of deprivation

and would be supportive of its inclusion again when data from the 2011 Census becomes available.

**Crime and Disorder Domain**

The proposals for this domain are minor amendments and the Committee has no issue with these.

The Committee would be grateful if you would forward a synopsis of responses to the consultation when this becomes available.