



COMMITTEE FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Chairperson
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Room 428
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6 November 2009

Dear

RE: Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2009: Consultation Document

1. The Committee for Regional Development welcomes the opportunity to respond to the above consultation. Members approved the following response at the Committee's meeting on 4th November.
2. The Committee recognises the importance of understanding the spatial distribution of deprivation in an effort to address the problem and to gain an understanding of which areas require the greatest targeting of resources to alleviate the situation. The Committee would see this consultation as extremely important from the perspective of ensuring that the views of stakeholders and policy-makers are sought by the inter-departmental steering group.

3. The Committee would wish to comment on each of the seven domains as follows:

Income Deprivation Domain

4. There has been one indicator added to this domain which measures the proportion of people receiving housing benefit. The Committee notes the reasons why housing benefit data is used, and was seriously concerned that this data would obscure the income deprivation of those in receipt of tax credit. Members also discussed the reluctance of some groups to claim their full benefit entitlements, and the need to promote awareness and take-up of benefits in the context of the use of this type of data. Members were of the opinion that the impact of the move away from using tax credit data to the use of housing benefit data on the income deprivation domain needed to be carefully examined and discussed before this domain is changed.

Employment Deprivation Domain

5. The Committee would not wish to raise any concerns around the changes to this domain as it falls outside of the Committee's remit.

Health Deprivation Domain

6. The Regional Development Committee would not raise any major concerns with the proposals surrounding this domain save to support the inclusion of data relating to an emergency hospital admission rate indicator. The Committee would also support the proposal that only information in relation to stays of four nights or longer be included, given the statistics provided in the consultation document.

Education, Skills and Training Domain

7. Again, the Regional Development Committee would not wish to comment on the proposals for this domain as it lies outside the remit of the Committee.

Proximity to Services Deprivation Domain

8. This domain, and the proposed changes therein, is of great importance to the Regional Development Committee. The Committee would raise concerns over the inability of Translink to provide data in relation to the frequency, timing, destination and location of stops for buses and trains. It recognises the knock-on effect of not being able to provide this information and on the ability to provide data on ease of access to public transport as opposed to travelling by car. The Committee would wish to record its disappointment that a measure of travel by public transport, and a car ownership indicator, cannot therefore be included in the domain. Members welcome the proposal to collect information on travel times rather than distances travelled as a more appropriate measure of service proximity.
9. The Regional Development Committee would welcome the inclusion of cross border data, while not compromising the need to adequately reflect the access to services faced by those living in border areas. The Committee also noted the amalgamation of indicators for access to dentist, optician and pharmacist into one indicator called 'other primary health care'. Members were concerned that amalgamating these three services into one indicator may obscure the difficulties faced by people in accessing dental services, particularly in rural areas.
10. The Committee welcomed the inclusion of a general services indicator in this domain.

The Living Environment Deprivation Domain

11. The Committee would wish to comment on two elements of the proposals relating to this domain namely, the decision not to include an indicator of the level of access to mains water supply and the accessibility of access to the sewerage network. Members were content with the decision not to include these indicators as a small number of homes are not connected to a mains

water supply and a small percentage (2%) of homes rely on the use of septic tanks. The Committee was content that, given the rural location of such properties, these indicators were a reflection of place rather than deprivation.

12. The Committee would not wish to comment on the other elements of this domain.

Crime and Disorder Domain

13. Again, the Regional Development Committee would not wish to comment on the proposals for this domain as it lies outside the remit of the Committee.

14. In formulating its response, the Committee drew on a research paper prepared by the Assembly's Research and Library Service, which is attached for information. The Committee will make this paper available on the Assembly's web pages in the coming days. The Committee requested additional information from the researcher on the reasons why tax credit data is not available and the type of tax credit data normally used, what steps, if any, have been taken to develop an indicator to identify those on low incomes who are not claiming / in receipt of benefits. The Committee agreed to forward this information to you Committee, as soon as it becomes available.

15. The Committee welcomes the opportunity to input into this consultation, and has requested a synopsis of the consultation findings, once this becomes available.

Yours sincerely,

Committee Chairperson