

From The Minister for Social Development

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From: Nigel Dodds

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First Minister

Deputy First Minister

PROGRAMME OF GOVERNMENT : DEPARTMENT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Background

1. You wrote to all Departmental Ministers on 22 December 1999 asking for initial contributions to a Programme of Government. In particular you asked Ministers to identify a limited number of priority issues within their responsibilities, which they felt should be included in such a Programme. Ministers have also been asked to identify crosscutting issues which would merit inclusion in a Programme of Government.
2. This paper sets out a number of priority and crosscutting issues for the Department for Social Development as a basis for further discussion, initially through a bilateral meeting of Ministers as set out in the paper entitled "Programme of Government" which was discussed at the Executive Committee meeting on 11 January.

Department for Social Development : Mission and Corporate Aims

3. The Department's proposals for the Programme of Government have been developed in the context of the overall DSD Mission and corporate aims: Our working mission for the Department is:
- "to promote individual and community well-being through integrated social and economic action."
4. To this end the Department is developing a set of corporate aims designed to underpin the delivery of its various functions and services (set out below) on an integrated basis as current legislation and operational factors allow:
- housing
 - urban regeneration
 - community development
 - social security
 - child support
 - social and charities legislation
 - voluntary sector.
5. These services lie at the core of the equality agenda for Northern Ireland and, in particular, the New Targeting Social Need priority. Moreover, through the geographical nature of many of their delivery systems, these services should constitute the foundation of any cross-cutting programmes designed to address, on an integrated basis across government, problems of poverty and social exclusion. These services should therefore comprise a major part of the Programme of Government.

Programme of Government : Priority Issues for DSD

6. The following represents an initial composite list of the main priority areas for the Department which will form the basis of DSD's contribution to the Programme of Government. I would stress that these issues are not listed in any particular order of priority; and that a number of issues of policy development are at an early stage of consideration:

i. Housing

My aim is to develop housing policies which will build on past success and ensure that those most in need can access affordable, decent housing. In that light, my key objectives are:

- maintaining and improving the quality of housing stock through continuing investment in the social housing and private housing sectors;
- maintaining social housing rents at an affordable level; and
- maximising the impact of public expenditure, together with better targeting of housing resources on those individuals, groups and areas most in need.

I will also be considering the most effective model to deliver the Department's housing regulatory functions; whether to change from a mandatory to a discretionary private sector grants scheme; and the introduction of a statutory right to buy scheme for [new] tenants of registered housing associations. I also intend to bring forward other housing policy initiatives, including measures aimed at addressing fuel poverty and the implementation of a common selection scheme for all social housing tenants.

ii. **Regeneration and Social Inclusion**

Within the regeneration and community development/voluntary action business areas the following priority issues are at various stages of development:

- **Neighbourhood Regeneration:** The Department is currently undertaking a radical review of its policies for regeneration and associated action. My aim is to ensure that a more consistent approach to Neighbourhood Regeneration is delivered across Northern Ireland to the poorest areas, including those neighbourhoods experiencing pockets of intense deprivation. The approach will be people and community centred and will require leadership by groups representative of their neighbourhoods. It will involve action by communities themselves, in partnership with the private and statutory sectors, supported by a sustained political priority. I expect that the review will lead to:
 - a. new strategies for Belfast and Londonderry regeneration;
 - b. the establishment of a number of neighbourhood regeneration partnerships in deprived urban areas across Northern Ireland;
 - c. a related and coherent programme targeted at reinvigorating city and town centres.

I believe that the challenge of neighbourhood regeneration offers equal opportunities for cross-cutting action involving most, if not all, Departments and public bodies, as well as engaging the private, community and voluntary sectors in partnership action (see paragraphs 7 and 8 below).

- **Active Communities:** I am currently considering proposals for the development of an Active Community Action Programme across Northern Ireland. The initiative, whilst promoting community involvement widely across Northern Ireland, will target for specific action the most deprived communities and areas. The action is likely to include the development of appropriate community infrastructure in those disadvantaged communities where it is currently weakest; the encouragement of people in their own communities to take responsibility; increasing community activity; broadening the volunteering base; and generally reinforcing the development of sustainable and inclusive communities. The initiative is likely to include a strong cross-Departmental dimension as well as building partnerships with the voluntary/community sector, the media, local Government and the sector itself. It will also be underpinned by a COMPACT between the Government and Voluntary Sector together with a revised strategy outlining how Government Agencies will implement the COMPACT'S principles and commitments.
- **Legislation:** I intend to introduce a programme of social, charities and urban legislation to update and streamline the Law to reflect changes in social attitudes and expectations and to provide an effective framework of control and enforcement, starting with legislation affecting Street Trading.

(iii) **Welfare Reform and Modernisation**

Welfare Reform

- A substantial programme of welfare reform is planned over the next few years. The aim of the reform is to promote work as the best form of welfare for people of working age capable of work; to eliminate child poverty; to increase security for those who cannot

work; and to modernise service delivery. This is a considerable undertaking that will require additional DRC funding, but which should deliver major savings in programme expenditure.

Parity

- A key objective of the Department is the maintenance of parity between the social security, child support and pension systems in Northern Ireland and Great Britain. To that end I intend to bring forward legislation to provide for child support and pensions reform and to reinforce the welfare reform and modernisation measures already enacted.

Welfare Modernisation

- The implementation of welfare reforms will be accompanied by new ways of working, supported by electronic delivery of services, which will lead to modernised social security and child support services. In particular, it is planned to provide a more coherent social welfare service with, where possible, a single work-focussed gateway to services. In taking this forward the Department and its agencies will work in close partnership with other bodies involved in the delivery of welfare-related services. These include the Training and Employment Agency, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the Rates Collection Agency and Inland Revenue.

Programme of Government : Cross-cutting Issues for DSD

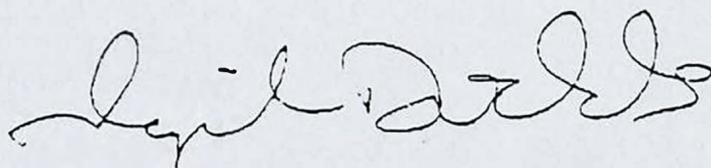
7. The Regeneration, Active Community and Welfare Reform and Modernisation priorities are all issues which are heavily crosscutting, engaging a range of other Departments and public bodies. However, the participation of other public sector

organisations together with the private and voluntary sectors could be substantially enhanced in a concerted drive to better Target Social Need and address the twin evils of poverty and social exclusion.

8. To this end, I wish to propose that a number of Social Action Zone pilot projects should be mounted. These projects would bring together the regeneration, community and welfare initiatives concentrating on several of the most deprived and excluded social housing estates and neighbourhoods which would be identified for early and particular action. To reinforce the impact and effectiveness of such action, the estates or neighbourhoods would be comprehensively equipped with IT infrastructure, and intensive familiarisation and training would be made available to all residents, differentiated to maximise interests, ages, needs and abilities. The electronic estates ('e' estates) would be a model for the interactive engagement of communities with Government and other providers, and explore how emerging technologies could empower and transform the prospects of the most vulnerable or excluded, including enhancing their employability and improving access to public services. To emphasise the cross-Government approach, other initiatives could be centred on these pilot areas. For example, Sure Start and Health Action Areas might be established, pre-school and training initiatives mounted and the engagement of business, academic and the private sectors developed to promote sustained and coherent efforts at transforming the expectations, quality of life and environment of intensely deprived individuals.

Conclusion

9. I look forward to developing these priority issues in discussion with you.



NIGEL DODDS MLA
Minister for Social Development