



# **NICVA Response to the DfC Consultation on the draft NI Executive Anti-Poverty Strategy**

**Date: 18 September 2025**

## Who We Are

- **NICVA** (the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action) is the membership and representative umbrella body for the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in Northern Ireland. We currently represent over 1,500 members who deliver a wide range of services and activities for public benefit.
- Our membership is diverse—ranging from large UK-wide charities to small, local community groups—all united by a shared commitment to making a positive impact and building a stronger, more resilient Northern Ireland.
- We work to support and champion the interests of the people and communities our sector serves. Through a wide range of practical services and support, we help our members do what they do best: develop innovative solutions to social challenges.
- We believe that meaningful collaboration between government and the voluntary and community sector is essential to achieving better outcomes for all. To that end, we regularly engage with political representatives, Ministers, and officials to advocate for effective policy and partnership.

## Introduction

NICVA **welcomes the opportunity to respond to the public consultation** on the draft Anti-Poverty Strategy for Northern Ireland.

As a member of the Anti-Poverty Strategy Co-Design Group and a contributor to the Group's [updated recommendations paper](#) (published August 2025), **we must express our deep concern that the current draft strategy is not fit for purpose** and fails to meet the statutory obligations set out in Section 28E of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

We join the collective voice of civil society in **calling for a fundamental revision of the draft strategy**. As it stands, the strategy lacks ambition, measurable targets, dedicated resources, and a rights-based framework. It does not adequately reflect

lived experience, or the extensive evidence shared by and collaborative work undertaken with civil society in recent years. We **urge the NI Executive to respond to the depth and breadth of civil societies concerns with a genuine commitment to meaningful change**—revising the draft Strategy to address its significant gaps and to provide a credible, ambitious roadmap for the eradication of poverty for everyone in Northern Ireland.

## **NICVA's Position: A Roadmap for Real Change**

NICVA fully **endorses the updated recommendations of the Anti-Poverty Strategy Group ( [Ending Poverty in Northern Ireland: A Civil Society Roadmap for Real Change](#) August 2025)**. We believe this report provides **a clear, evidence-based roadmap for a strategy that can deliver meaningful progress in tackling poverty** across Northern Ireland.

This roadmap outlines a bold, practical, and community-informed vision for a strategy that is:

- **Comprehensive and Rights-Based:** Grounded in objective need and aligned with international human rights standards.
- **Ambitious and Outcome-Focused:** With statutory targets to halve poverty by 2035 and eradicate it by 2045.
- **Lifecycle and Place-Based:** Addressing poverty across all age groups and geographies, including rural and urban communities.
- **Adequately Resourced:** With long-term investment and cross-departmental accountability.
- **Co-Designed and Inclusive:** Centring the voices of those with lived experience and the expertise of civil society.

## Key Priorities for Inclusion

In line with the APS Group's updated recommendations, we urge the Department to revise the strategy to include the following core components:

1. **Legislative Commitment:** Introduce an Anti-Poverty Act with statutory targets and an independent commission.
2. **Child Poverty Reduction:** Halve child poverty by 2035 through direct payments, benefit reform, and cost-free education.
3. **Tackle Working-Age Poverty:** Ensure all working-age individuals have sufficient income, whether in or out of work.
4. **Older People's Poverty Reduction:** Halve pensioner poverty by 2035 through improved access to benefits and services.
5. **Place-Based Investment:** Transform the most deprived areas through targeted investment and community wealth building.
6. **Equitable Public Services:** Guarantee timely, high-quality services for all, underpinned by dignity, fairness, and respect.

## Closing Comment - A Call for the NI Executive to Deliver with Ambition, in Partnership, and with Urgency.

The voluntary and community sector has long stepped in to fill the gaps left by government in addressing poverty. But this is **not sustainable**. Civil society must be recognised **as an essential partner** in the design, delivery, and monitoring of the Anti-Poverty Strategy.

The failure of the current draft to adequately reflect the **evidence-based recommendations** of the Expert Advisory Panel, the Anti-Poverty Strategy Group, and oversight bodies such as the [NI Audit Office](#) and [Public Accounts Committee](#) is deeply disappointing. It represents a **significant missed opportunity** to fulfil the Executive's statutory obligation under Section 28E of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to *"adopt a strategy setting out how it proposes to tackle poverty, social exclusion and patterns of deprivation based on objective need."*

As poverty deepens and inequality grows we **call on the NI Executive to act decisively and without delay**. This consultation must not be simply a procedural exercise. Government must engage meaningfully with civil society and incorporate the recommendations of the APS Group, the Expert Advisory Panel, the Welfare Mitigations and Discretionary Support reviews, and other key stakeholders..

These contributions must lead to a strategy that is **transformative, inclusive, and capable of delivering real change**.

**Poverty is not inevitable—it is the result of political and policy choices**. NICVA, alongside our civil society partners, urges the Executive to make the **bold decisions necessary to break the cycle of poverty**. While we acknowledge ongoing budgetary constraints, this ambition cannot be realised by simply delivering more of the same or ‘tinkering around the edges’. **A fundamental shift in approach is required**.

We urge the Department to revise the draft strategy in line with the APS Group’s recommendations, and those of the Public Accounts Committee and NI Audit Office. Constructive engagement with civil society is essential to ensure the final strategy reflects the lived realities, rights, and aspirations of all communities in Northern Ireland.

We believe civil societies recommendations offer a practical, community-informed blueprint for making real progress in tackling poverty across Northern Ireland.

The current draft must be **replaced with a comprehensive, rights-based strategy** that:

- Sets out **measurable, time-bound targets**;
- Is **fully resourced and costed**;
- Is **underpinned by legislation**;
- Embeds **robust accountability and oversight mechanisms**;
- And is **co-designed with people with lived experience of poverty**.

**NICVA, alongside the APS Group and wider civil society, remains committed to working constructively with the Department, the Executive, and all stakeholders to develop and deliver an ambitious Anti-Poverty Strategy**—one that reflects lived

experience, upholds rights and dignity, and **delivers real and lasting change** for communities across Northern Ireland.

**In closing, we again urge the Department and wider NI Executive to respond to the breadth and depth of civil society's concerns with a clear and immediate commitment to revise the draft Strategy, address its critical gaps, and deliver a credible roadmap to ending poverty in Northern Ireland.**

**We thank the Department for the opportunity to respond** to the consultation and **are happy to provide further information** on any aspect of our submission.