



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Room 412
Parliament Buildings
BELFAST
BT4 3XX

Email: peter.mccallion@niassembly.gov.uk

Tel: 028 9052 1864

Fax: 028 9052 1667

18 January 2011

Our Ref: CSD/020/2008/PM

Ms Margaret Sisk
Department for Social Development
Lighthouse Building
1 Cromac Place
Gasworks Business Park
Ormeau Road
Belfast BT7 2JB

Dear Ms Sisk,

Budget 2011-2015

At its meeting of 13 January 2011, the Minister and Departmental officials briefed the Committee on the Department's Draft Budget 2011-2015.

The Committee agreed that the Clerk should write to the Department seeking clarification on the draft budget plan as follows:

- **Northern Ireland Housing Executive**

Can the Department advise on the level of increase of NIHE rents for the period 2011-2015? Can the Department also advise on the impact of rent rises on the expenditure profile for the Housing Executive?

Can the Department indicate the expected changes to the number of posts within the Housing Executive during the budget period – including the number of expected redundancies both compulsory (if any) and voluntary and the level of natural wastage?

The capital allocation for bringing NIHE homes up to the Decent Homes Standard appears to be around one third of the Department's bid (made in September 2010). Can the Department advise on the number of NIHE homes that will be brought up to the Decent Homes Standard during the budget period – will this be around 250 rather than the planned 800?

- **Invest to Save – Severe Cold Weather Measures**

Can the Department advise on the details of its Invest to Save proposal which is designed to limit the impact on NIHE tenures of future severe cold weather events?

- **Warm Homes**

The Department's Warm Homes bid was £20m pa. Officials advised that the capital allocation of around £12m pa was to be supplemented so as to maintain expenditure at current levels. Can the Department confirm whether Warm Homes expenditure in private housing will be maintained at £20m pa and if the performance targets for this scheme will be altered in 2011-15?

Can the Department also advise on spend on other fuel poverty measures and whether current levels of expenditure on fuel poverty / Warm Homes are to be maintained in the budget period?

- **Supporting People**

Can the Department clarify if the current expenditure for Supporting People will continue at current levels (of around £65m pa) or if it is to increase to reflect inflationary pressures or if it is to increase to fully fund the recommendations of the Bamford Review?

The capital allocation for Supporting People (Bamford Review) appears to be around £35m less than the Department's bid in September 2010 for the 2011-2015 period. Can the Department advise if the target of 1168 new build units of specially adapted accommodation is to be reduced or spread over a longer time period? Can the Department advise if the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety is to meet the extra care costs accrued as a result of delaying independent living provisions for long-term care facility residents?

- **Housing**

The capital allocation for the Social Housing Development Programme appears to be less than the Department's bid (in September 2010). Can the Department advise on the number of new social houses it intends to start pa in the budget period? Can the Department advise on the impact on other programmes of possible reallocations of non-ring-fenced funds to the Social Housing Development Programme?

Can the Department advise on the quantum of the increased contribution which is to be sought from Housing Associations to support new house-building? Can the Department advise on the progress of Housing Associations in securing procurement efficiencies?

- **Mortgage Rescue Scheme**

The Department's bid for funding for a Mortgage Rescue Scheme appears to have been unsuccessful. Can the Department advise if the Social Protection Fund is to be used to provide support for householders some of whom may have been in receipt of the Support for Mortgage Interest payment and who now face repossession?

- **Community Development**

Can the Department clarify the funding position for the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy and related programmes such as Areas at Risk and Small Pockets of Deprivation? Is funding for these programmes to be maintained or increased in the budget period?

Can the Department set out its plans to encourage organisations that receive funding to identify opportunities to collaborate, share services and merge to reduce costs and protect services?

Can the Department advise if, following the Neighbourhood Renewal Mid-Term Report, Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships will be

encouraged to merge where this enhances partnership working and delivery of outcomes?

- **Urban Regeneration**

The capital allocation for the vesting of houses in declared Urban Regeneration Areas appears to be lower than the Department's bid. Can the Department advise on the impact of this on the vesting of housing in Urban Regeneration Areas in: Parkside; Glandore; Lawnbrook; Woodvale Avenue; the Village; and Upper New Lodge?

The capital allocation for Physical Development projects appears to be about half of the Department's bid. Can the Department advise on the impact of the lower allocation on projects in Belfast's middle core (Lower Falls; Lower Shankill; Crumlin Road; York Road; Inner East Belfast); 11 areas in Londonderry, Limavady and Strabane and the redevelopment of Girdwood; Phases 2/3 of Belfast Streets Ahead. Etc.

The allocation for Ilex and the City of Culture appears to be about one third of the Department's bid. Can the Department comment on the impact on these projects of the lower allocation?

Can the Department confirm that the reduced capital allocation for the Royal Exchange will not delay the delivery of this project?

- **Capital Maintenance and Enforcement Division**

Can the Department indicate the expected changes to the number of posts within CMED during the budget period – including the number of expected redundancies both compulsory (if any) and voluntary and the level of natural wastage?

- **Administrative cost controls**

Can the Department set out the elements of its baseline current expenditure which are subject to administrative cost controls and are therefore not frontline expenditure?

I would be grateful if you could provide this information at your earliest convenience.

On behalf of the Committee I would like to convey my thanks to the officials for their briefing.

Yours sincerely



Peter McCallion
Committee Clerk