



Response to the Draft Budget 2011-15: Settlement and Proposals

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Vilma Bisson
Women's Resource and Development Agency
6, Mount Charles,
Belfast
BT7 1NZ
Tel: 028 9023 0212
Email: info@wrda.net

1.

The Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA) is a regional organisation whose mission is to 'advance women's equality and participation in society by working to bring about social, political and economic change'. The organisation was established in 1983 and continues to focus its efforts on working with women and community organisations located within disadvantaged and/or divided communities. WRDA is a membership organisation with over 400 members comprised of Women's Groups, Organisations, and individual members.

2.

Without a Programme for Government, it is extremely difficult to respond adequately to these Draft Budget consultations. As the document is based on a generalized high-level strategy, it is impossible to define what services and funding areas will actually be affected through budget reductions. This Draft Budget is vague and lacks detail in terms of where departmental priorities lie.

3.

WRDA is concerned that budget cuts will impact disproportionately on women. The Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs) are not complete and therefore it is impossible to estimate the true impact of reduced services/job losses on women. Neither is it clear if there are any measures in hand to alleviate negative impacts on women. Due to the brevity of any gender assessment and the lack of proposals to deal with the disproportionate impact on women, Professor Tomlinson of Queen's University suggests that the Executive could be "open to legal challenge for failing to have due regard to equality of opportunity"¹. Women, throughout the United Kingdom, have already been disproportionately affected with the social security cuts imposed by the Westminster government. Research undertaken by the House of Commons Library shows that of the £8 billion of cuts and changes to tax and welfare payments, 72 per cent will be shouldered by women, in comparison to 28 per cent by men².

4.

We are particularly disturbed by the proposed number of job losses, as again this is likely to disproportionately impact upon women. Within Northern Ireland Health and Social Care, 81% of the staff are women³. Over half of these women are employed part-time; therefore any reduction in working hours will severely impact upon women's earnings

¹ Tomlinson, M. And Kelly, G. (2011) *Poverty and Social Exclusion UK: Response to Northern Ireland's Draft Budget*

² House of Commons Library (July 2010) *Gender Audit of Budget*

³ http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/workforce_census_march_2010_web.pdf

5.

Women, especially older women, are both the more likely to be the recipients of care and the higher percentage of carers – 69% of home care service users are women⁴, 65% of claimants of Carer's Allowance are women⁵. There are also many women giving informal care (20% of women are carers compared to 14% of men)⁶. This Draft Budget is set to adversely impact upon women's lives by reducing care for those who need it and by placing a much larger burden of care onto carers. This will lead to women becoming unable to participate in many activities that are an accepted part of daily living.

6.

WRDA are concerned that women's health will be affected by reductions to preventative and early intervention health programmes. Women are the largest users of health care⁷, so any reductions to these programmes will be detrimental to women's health. These programmes are cost efficient in the long term as they promote good health. However the Department is considering sidelining these if money is needed for other frontline services. This would appear to be a short-sighted approach towards creating health efficiencies.

Many of these programmes are run by the community and voluntary sector e.g. WRDA's health awareness programmes such as 'Parents' Promoting Sexual Health', 'Towards Better Mental Health and Emotional Well-being' and 'Breast and Cervical Screening Awareness'. The community and voluntary sector deliver these services in an efficient and effective manner, providing value for money to funders. WRDA are worried, that at a time when the social and economic consequences of the cuts will lead to increased demand for these programmes, that reduced funding will hamper organisations from offering some of these much needed services.

7.

WRDA call upon the Executive and DHSSPS in particular to undertake a full and comprehensive equality impact assessment to ascertain the real impact the spending proposals will have on women. This will enable the Department to put measures in place to minimise the disproportionate impact that Budget cuts are likely to have on this significant and potentially vulnerable group. WRDA urge the Department to work with other Departments to ensure that critical cross-cutting issues such as the Childcare Strategy and the Child Poverty Strategy are included in spending plans and are stipulated as a priority for our devolved government.

⁴ http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/survey_of_home_care_service_users_northern_ireland_2009.pdf

⁵ http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/ca_may_2010.xls

⁶ DHSSPS (2001) *Informal Carers Report*

⁷ DHSSPS (2002) *Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland: A Statistical Profile*