

Response to the Consultation on the Draft Anti-Poverty Strategy (2025) From Lisburn City Church Community Trust

July 2025

Introduction

Lisburn City Church Community Trust (LCC Community Trust) is a faith-based charity working at the heart of the local community to support individuals and families facing poverty, crisis, and social isolation.

We deliver a wide range of services designed to meet practical, emotional, and social needs, including a foodbank (as part of the Trussell network), warm welcome spaces, Kickstart Social Supermarket, a weekly community drop-in, Community Money Advice & Money Matters courses, and ongoing pastoral and spiritual care for those who seek it.

Every week, we support local people through these activities, providing a safe, welcoming environment where people can access help, find connections, and begin to rebuild their lives. Our work is underpinned by the values of dignity, compassion, and hope.

We welcome the publication of the Northern Ireland Executive's draft Anti-Poverty Strategy (APS) but believe that the current draft requires significant strengthening in order to deliver real, lasting change. The following response outlines our key concerns and recommendations, informed by both evidence and frontline experience.

1. Absence of Clear Implementation Mechanisms

The strategy lacks fundamental delivery mechanisms, including timelines, measurable outcomes, and a costed implementation plan. Without these core components, it is impossible to assess whether the strategy will be effective or achievable.

As highlighted in the Northern Ireland Audit Office's 2024 report on child poverty, the absence of a replacement for the 2016–2022 Child Poverty Strategy has left a policy vacuum. The Executive must avoid repeating the same pattern. This new strategy must include specific, time-bound commitments and a detailed delivery plan that can be monitored and evaluated.

2. Lack of Alignment with Existing Expert Recommendations

We are concerned that the draft strategy does not fully reflect the comprehensive recommendations already put forward by the 2021 Anti-Poverty Expert Advisory Panel and the NICVA 2022 paper authored by members of the co-design group. These contributions offer evidence-based proposals on rights-based approaches, structural reform, and meaningful co-design with those with lived experience.

Failing to embed this prior work into the current strategy undermines both the consultative process and the potential for real impact. These expert recommendations must be taken seriously and form the backbone of the revised strategy.

3. Need for Executive-Level Ownership and Accountability

While we acknowledge the Department for Communities' lead role in developing the strategy, poverty intersects with the work of every government department. Education, health, justice, and the economy all have a role to play.

The final strategy must be adopted and owned by the entire Executive and must include clear mechanisms for cross-departmental coordination, delivery, and accountability. Without full Executive support, the strategy risks fragmentation and underperformance.

4. Insufficient Consideration of Northern Ireland's Context and External Learning

We are disappointed that the strategy does not sufficiently reference the specific political, social, and economic context of Northern Ireland. Poverty here is shaped by a complex legacy of division, conflict, and structural inequality. These realities must be recognised if the strategy is to be effective. Additionally, there is a missed opportunity to reflect on good practice from other devolved nations such as Scotland and Wales. Learning from these strategies, both their successes and limitations, could enhance the effectiveness of Northern Ireland's approach.

5. Over-Reliance on the Voluntary and Community Sector

Throughout the cost-of-living crisis, the voluntary and community sector has played a vital role in supporting individuals and families in need. However, this support has often been provided in the absence of sufficient state provision. Organisations like ours are operating under considerable pressure, with staff and volunteers stretched to their limits.

Volunteers are not a limitless resource. The weight being carried by the sector is unsustainable. Any Anti-Poverty Strategy must recognise the sector not only as a delivery partner, but as a stakeholder in need of meaningful support - particularly in terms of long-term, flexible funding and capacity-building.

6. Recognition of the Role and Contribution of Faith-Based Organisations

As a faith-based organisation, our approach to tackling poverty is holistic. We provide emotional, practical, and, where appropriate, spiritual support. Our ethos is grounded in hope and compassion, values which are not abstract but translate into real change for individuals who feel seen, heard, and supported.

We are concerned that the draft strategy does not sufficiently recognise the unique role that faith-based organisations play in responding to poverty. Faith communities are deeply embedded in local areas and bring a long-standing commitment to social justice, reconciliation, and community transformation.

Language matters. The way in which the faith sector is referenced within the strategy is important: it must affirm the value of faith-based organisations as equal and trusted partners, rather than marginal or token contributors.

We also recommend that those drafting and implementing the strategy develop faith literacy, an understanding of how faith motivates and shapes community action, and how faith-based organisations operate. Without this, there is a risk that the contribution of the faith sector will be misunderstood or underutilised. Faith literacy would help ensure that engagement is meaningful, respectful, and reflective of the reality that for many people, support offered by faith-based organisations is both accessible and culturally relevant.

Conclusion

LCC Community Trust welcomes the intention behind the Anti-Poverty Strategy. However, we urge the Northern Ireland Executive to revise and strengthen the current draft so that it reflects the urgency, scale, and complexity of the poverty challenge.

This strategy must be evidence-led, properly resourced, cross-departmental, and context-aware. It must draw on expert recommendations and commit to working in meaningful partnership with the voluntary and faith sectors. Most of all, it must be bold enough to deliver not just alleviation of poverty, but long-term, systemic change.

We stand ready to be part of the solution, but we need a strategy that matches the resilience, generosity, and determination we see in our communities every day.

Submitted by:

LCC Community Trust

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www.lcccommunitytrust.org