WPG Feminist Recovery Plan in the NI Assembly 04.10.21

The WPG Feminist Recovery Plan was referenced by three elected officials in the NI Assembly during a debate on cuts to the Universal Credit uplift payment on the 4th October 2021. These included Paula Bradley MLA, Rachel Woods MLA and the Department for Communities Minister, Deirdre Hargey. Other evidence and recommendations from the Plan were referenced by other elected officials in the Assembly, such as Gerry Carrol MLA, who discussed the role of caring responsibilities and the inaccessibility of childcare as barriers to employment (at 2:00:43).

Mentions of the Feminist Recovery Plan:

* Paula Bradley MLA @ 01:08:03 to 01:10:40
* Rachel Woods MLA @ 01:48:24 to 01:54:15
* Deirdre Hargey (DfC Minister) @ 3:03:53 to 3:04:58

Transcript

**Paula Bradley MLA (1:08:03 to 1:10:40)**

We have heard it said many times that the pandemic disproportionately affected women and, in turn, families. We know women are more likely to be in low-paid and part-time employment and it is these very women and families that will be hit the hardest, yet again, without this uplift in universal credit. I want to thank the Women’s… the Northern Ireland Women’s Policy Group in preparing for this speech today and their Feminist Recovery Plan [holds up physical copy of plan], which I have a copy here, not the glossy copy, but the print out, and I think every Minister within our Executive should read the Feminist Recovery Plan because it would give them some indication of just how hard it is out there for women and families.

Pre-pandemic, the rate of women’s participation in the workforce was at a record high, though typically, part-time, low-paid and on a temporary or zero-hours contract. Several studies have shown that those in precarious employment saw a greater loss in earnings and hours than those in secure employment. There are strong links between female poverty and child poverty. The pandemic has increased the negative impacts felt by women and children. Women who were already struggling are now under even more financial pressure as they, their children and families, are pushed even further into poverty, as a result of the pandemic…

Before the pandemic, women were already more vulnerable to poverty, as they made up the majority of lone parents, those with precarious, low-paid jobs and those with caring responsibilities, which limit their time available for paid work. Women are also more likely to claim social security benefits. Job losses and the need to provide increasing levels of unpaid care, as a result of the pandemic, are likely to increase poverty and dependence on social security benefits, especially for women.

**Rachel Woods MLA (01:48:24 to 01:54:15)**

The reality of the pandemic’s impact is that it’s falling disproportionately on the most vulnerable individuals along racial, ethnic, occupational, gendered and socio-economic lines. And inequalities, and people’s protection from and ability to cope with this pandemic show the urgency of the changes needed to reassess what is important, which is our population’s health and well-being into the future…

Research showed that policy change on social security had a disproportionate impact on women, showing that 86% of savings to the Treasury from the tax and benefits changes since 2010 have come from women. We know that one in five children already lived in absolute poverty in Northern Ireland. We had 6219 young people accepted as homeless last year. These are shocking statistics from the Northern Ireland youth forums recent peer research on youth homelessness.

There are strong links between female poverty and child poverty. Women who were already struggling are now under even more financial pressure as they, their children and their families are pushed further into poverty, as a result of the pandemic…

But where is the anti-poverty strategy? Where is the youth homelessness strategy? Where is the Feminist Recovery Plan being implemented by all Executive Ministers? And where’s the childcare strategy? So, as we look to the future, allegedly to build back better, although evidence suggests otherwise, are the Executive going to prioritise health and well-being, and people having a roof over their head, and a warm secure home with food on the table, or are they going to continue on an obsessive quest for capitalist growth that will only exacerbate and entrench inequalities in our society. It’s not working.

**Minister for the Department for Communities (3:03:53 to 3:04:58):**

I know other Members talked about the Feminist Recovery Plan and, indeed, I’ve read the Plan. I’ve also engaged and I’ve listened to the Joseph Rowntree Trust… ehm… the Trussel Foundation, Advice NI, and indeed the broader community and voluntary sector. Many of them are involved in the co-design groups of the social inclusion strategies, around disability, gender, anti-poverty, and LGBTQI+ and again, this… these strategies do need to be delivered, but it’s not just down to the Department for Communities, it has to be all of the Departments playing their role in delivering and implementing these strategies.

The expert panels delivered their reports, of which I published, but that’s not the end of the Strategy, they’re being co-designed and that work is on-going at the moment. And I have said here previously that my intent is to bring those Strategies forward, before the end of this mandate. And that’s something that I’m going to be doing.