

Women's Policy Group NI

Key Briefings for Ministers: Finance Minister

6th February 2024

Introduction

The Women's Policy Group (WPG) is a group of policy experts and practitioners who advocate collectively for women and girls by promoting gender equality through an intersectional feminist lens. We challenge systemic injustice and discrimination affecting women and girls by informing society and influencing policy and law. Our work is informed by women and girls' lived experiences and rooted in international human rights law.

There are a number of issues that we have spent several years lobbying for and working towards, that could not be progressed because of the absence of government. Now that the Assembly has returned, we would like to outline our key priorities to every Minister, explain why these issues are important, and highlight what can be achieved if we begin early and focus on the long-term benefits of these actions.

Policy Issues: Gender Budgeting Pilot, EQIAs on budgets and Revenue Raising

- **Gender Budgeting is better budgeting. It contributes to a more efficient use of resources and increases the transparency of budget processes. We recognise that the realities will take time to be embedded and become accepted practice, so we urge a pilot as soon as possible to establish its feasibility and usefulness.**
- **Recent budgets have not had the DoF oversight that we would hope for. There was no cumulative EQIA done for the 2023/2024 budget and the individualised EQIAs did not fully capture the full extent of potential impacts on protected groups. We urge that the practice of completing detailed cumulative EQIAs for budgets becomes standard.**
- **Although, revenue raising measures may be necessary, we urge the Minister to consider reorienting the array of measures currently proposed and any future measures to**

protect the most vulnerable in our society. Any additional revenue raised should not come on the backs of those who are already struggling the most through the Cost of Living Crisis.

Why are these measures important?

We know that Northern Ireland's budget has faced real difficulties in recent years and that the coming years will involve tough choices. The measures we are proposing will best protect the most vulnerable as well as lay the foundations for good budgeting for years to come.

Gender Budgeting is about viewing budgets through the lens of gender and analysing spend for potential and actual gendered impacts. Gender Budgeting helps to ensure that money is allocated in a way that promotes gender equality and tackles gender inequality. This is already the purpose of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act, however, in practice, it has not always been used to its full strength. In equality screenings, Departments often identify potential disproportionate impacts on groups but do not offer mitigations for lessening these impacts, or identify opportunities to further equality.

An approach that sees the Department of Finance collate all Departmental budgets, their EQIAs and the collective impacts highlighted, would be beneficial to the budgeting process overall and would help to protect those most vulnerable to cuts or revenue raising measures.

With regards to revenue raising, we recognise the need for additional money to enter the public coffers. Our position is that the best approach is investing to save, although we recognise that some measures will be introduced at some stage. We urge that these are designed with those most vulnerable in mind. We have carried out extensive research that demonstrates that large parts of the public, and particularly many women, are suffering enormously after 14 years of austerity, the outworkings of the Covid pandemic, and the ongoing cost of living crisis. These groups simply cannot afford any more outgoings and ought to be protected.

What are we asking for?

- A commitment to pilot Gender Budgeting
- A renewed commitment to DoF oversight of budgets for their impacts on S75 groups
- Revenue raising measures that protect the most vulnerable

Further information

If you have any questions or queries regarding this briefing, please contact:

Elaine Crory,
Women's Sector Lobbyist,
Women's Resource and Development Agency
elaine.crary@wrda.net