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Charities Urge Executive to Rethink Northern Ireland's Anti-Poverty Strategy

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A coalition of charities has called on Northern Ireland's Executive to scrap its proposed anti-poverty strategy, warning that the current draft lacks substance and could do more harm than good. The plan, released for public consultation in June, outlines a ten-year vision but has drawn criticism for failing to include clear funding, timelines, or new policies.

Organisations, including Save the Children Northern Ireland, argue that the strategy does not tackle the root causes of poverty in the region. They point to ongoing challenges, such as low wages, high childcare costs, limited access to services, and restrictive policies like the two-child benefit cap. At a time when nearly one in five people in Northern Ireland live in poverty, including more than 20% of children, campaigners say the need for a meaningful, well-resourced plan is urgent.

The draft was presented by Communities Minister Gordon Lyons, who has described the approach as realistic and focused on long-term outcomes. He stated that the goal is to help people move into work and become financially independent, rather than simply increasing benefit payments. The department has defended the strategy as achievable and aligned with efforts to address poverty through employment support and public services.

However, the reaction from the wider sector has been far less supportive. Politicians, policy experts, and voluntary groups have criticised the plan for lacking ambition and failing to offer any significant change from previous efforts. Some described it as “underwhelming” and questioned how it could deliver meaningful progress without a dedicated budget or implementation framework.

The Executive has a legal obligation to produce an anti-poverty strategy, a commitment that dates back almost two decades. But campaigners now fear the current proposal risks becoming another missed opportunity. They are urging ministers to rethink the strategy, calling for a revised version that includes targeted investment, measurable goals, and meaningful involvement from people with lived experience of poverty. For

many working on the front lines, the hope is for a plan that does more than acknowledge the problem; it must also offer a clear path forward.