



Department for
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Date : 27 August 2010

Dear Sir/Madam

21ST CENTURY WELFARE

The attached Consultation Paper was issued by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on the 30 July 2010. The paper sets out a number of long-term options for reform of the benefits system and seeks views to inform thinking on reform.

In order to ensure that the people of Northern Ireland have the opportunity to make their views known, the Department for Social Development is issuing copies of the paper to interest groups and making it available on the departmental website:

www.dsdni.gov.uk/consultations.htm.

I am very aware that Northern Ireland faces particular challenges. Our economy is disproportionately reliant on the public sector, complicated in nature, recovering from the consequences of conflict and affected by the downturn in the South of Ireland. Experts advise that it will emerge from recession some time after the economy in Britain.

There are many parts of Northern Ireland that have suffered, and continue to suffer, from high and even acute levels of deprivation and joblessness, often giving rise to heightened levels of ill health. Even as we eventually emerge from recession, there will be a significant challenge in ensuring that sufficient jobs are available in what will undoubtedly be a highly competitive market.

During July, I met the Welfare Reform Minister Lord Freud and stressed that Northern Ireland has unique circumstances. This must be a particular factor in coming to judgements on Welfare Reform.

This consultation provides an important opportunity for everyone in Northern Ireland to contribute to the debate on the future of the benefits system. I would encourage everyone to do so, in order to define what may be good and what is wrong in the proposals. All responses will be carefully considered and my officials will forward them to the Department for Work and Pensions.

Responses to the consultation should be made by 1 October 2010 to:

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alex Attwood". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

ALEX ATTWOOD MLA
Minister for Social Development