



Advocacy



Quarterly Zine
Jan-March
2024



INTRODUCING OUR QUARTERLY ZINE ADVOCACY EDITION

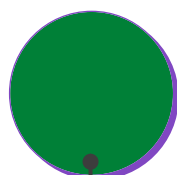
By Megan McClure Botha | WRDA

The Secretary of State's budget for Northern Ireland will compound an already difficult financial situation for many women's organisations. Strong advocacy from the women's sector in NI is particularly important at this time, even as the budget makes that advocacy harder.

Our first piece looks at the impact of the Spring Budget and offers a brief analysis. In particular, looking at the impact of the Barnett Squeeze and pressure on the Stormont Executive to deliver a balanced budget. We then look at what advocacy in the women's sector means and how it fits into the Consortium's work. The piece from WRDA calls on Ministers and Departments to resist the implementation of revenue raising measures. We end this zine on a hopeful note with NIRWN discussing the work that has been done to advocate for a women's health strategy.

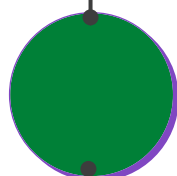
We hope you find the information contained in this edition useful as we continue to ensure a voice for women from disadvantaged and rural areas.

IN THIS EDITION



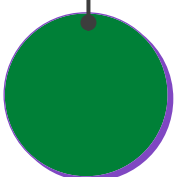
Women's Budget Group

Westminster's budget will put public services in Northern Ireland at a great risk.



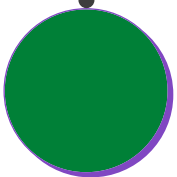
Women's Centre Derry

An explainer on what advocacy is and how it relates to the work of the Consortium.



Women's Resource and Development Agency

WRDA calls on Ministers and Departments to resist the implementation of revenue raising measures.



Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network

NIRWN discusses the work it has been doing to advocate for a women's health strategy.



NORTHERN IRELAND FEELING THE IMPACT OF A LACK OF GENDER BUDGETING AT WESTMINSTER

By Alexandra Brennan | WBG NI

At the beginning of March, the Coordinator of the NIWBG travelled to London to participate in a Spring Budget watch-along, as well as present a brief analysis of the impact of the Spring Budget on women in Northern Ireland at a 4 Nations Budget Review event. Following the Chancellor's statement, it was clear that this Budget was not made with women in mind. Tax cuts won't benefit women overall in NI, and this puts public services in Northern Ireland at a great risk. The past financial year in NI has been tough; we've had no in-year funding due to our repayment of the debt to Treasury. The 22-23 Budget saw 10%-20% cuts per Department, as well as cuts to the Community and Voluntary sector which has filled and continues to fill in gaps in public services. Additionally, we have some of the longest hospital waiting lists in the UK.

Cutting tax is passing on an opportunity to improve if not maintain public services in Northern Ireland. In addition to this, Northern Ireland has approached the Barnett Squeeze, where average spend-per-head in devolved nations will fall closer to the English figure despite different spend-per-head need. The current spend per head is 20% where our Fiscal Council says that it should be at 24% spend per head.

In this Budget, there was also a strong emphasis on productivity. The Chancellor cited that 10 million working-age adults were currently not working - it was not mentioned how many of these people were students, retired, or out of work due to barriers around skills attainment like caring responsibilities and hospital waiting lists. This focus will have a severe impact on women in Northern Ireland as the services that are needed to get women back into work are not available here such as public childcare provision. Additionally, no support nor investment was mentioned for skills attainment or services to help those furthest from the labour market get into work. This will put added pressure on women that have little or no support yet are being forced back into a labour market they have been locked out of.

Cutting tax is passing on an opportunity to improve if not maintain public services in Northern Ireland.

Looking towards this upcoming financial year, our Executive must deliver a balanced budget by raising £113 mil through locally generated income – most of the proposals on how to raise this revenue is from areas of super parity, or policy divergences such as the welfare mitigations and no water charges, for example. These were policy decisions taken by the Northern Ireland Executive and despite the current financial challenges, the revenue raising proposals would not be enough to pay for the overspend nor fix our financial crisis. However, many of the proposals would have an impact on those most vulnerable to the cost-of-living crisis.

We are seeing a squeeze on public services at both the Westminster level and at the devolved level. Undoubtedly, women will bear the brunt of this as they are more likely to rely on public services, more likely to be working low-paid/precarious jobs, and more likely to be in poverty.



ADVOCATING FOR WOMEN

By Rayna Downey | Women's Centre Derry

The definition of the word Advocacy is quite simple, it means **“getting support from someone to help you express your views and wishes, and help you stand up for your rights”** that's why it is one of the key themes of the Regional Consortium and why it will always be at the heart of our work. This is a great responsibility, we work in partnership with statutory and governmental agencies and local women's organisations, centres and groups to ensure that women on the ground in disadvantaged and rural areas are receiving support to meet their needs and having their views heard.

we advocate on behalf of women and children in everything that we do, we have to ensure that their rights are being protected and that their voices are being heard. Engaging with decision makers, responding to strategies, liaising with MLA's, Ministers and local

politicians is essential, we have to be the voice of women and represent them in every area. Women are all too often left behind, they are the backbone of the home and society yet the specific needs of women are not being met, the consortiums focus and work in areas such as;

- **Care**
- **Cost of Living**
- **Violence**
- **Mental Health**
- **Welfare Reform**
- **Childcare**
- **Gender Budgeting**

If we do not advocate for those who do not have a voice then we cannot live in an equal society, we have to ensure that the needs of everyone and not just the few are being met. The Community sector will continue to bridge the gap between all agencies and keep the focus on the needs of women.



WE ARE CALLING ON MINISTERS AND DEPARTMENTS TO RESIST THE IMPLEMENTATION OF REVENUE RAISING MEASURES

By Elaine Crory | WRDA

This is an excerpt from the Women's Policy Group Response to the Department of Infrastructure Consultation on Water & Sewerage Charges.

Northern Ireland is facing a difficult financial environment. Although the Assembly has returned and this is welcome, we know that a lot of work has to be done to ensure financial stability beyond the financial package. The budget we are currently operating under further contributed to the decimation of public services we have seen over more than a decade.

The 2023 budget cuts have already had a devastating impact on organisations and communities in Northern Ireland. The Secretary of State has argued that the cuts had to be made in order to repay public debt, but **the impact of the cuts will not save money. Instead, they will worsen people's quality of life and their health and, in turn, increase dependence on the public purse.**

Cutting government spending and implementing revenue raising measures during a financial crisis will not save the government money, it will cost the government more in the long term and have disproportionate impacts on the most vulnerable communities. Asking Northern Ireland to generate additional revenue at a time when our public services are on their knees will not lead to economic prosperity, it will simply plunge the most vulnerable communities further into poverty. Savings to the public purse should not be made on the backs of people in Northern Ireland who are already struggling to make ends meet.

Asking Northern Ireland to generate additional revenue at a time when our public services are on their knees will not lead to economic prosperity, it will simply plunge the most vulnerable communities further into poverty.

We are calling on Ministers and Departments to resist the implementation of revenue raising measures and listen to the voices of communities in Northern Ireland who will bear the brunt of the financial hardship that will come with reducing funding for public services. To find out more about the need for common sense to be applied in regards to the NI budget, you can read the 'Where's Our Democracy?' Campaign's 'Common Sense Budget (2023) [here](#).

This is a excerpt from the Women's Policy Group Response to the [Department of Infrastructure Consultation on Water & Sewerage Charges](#).



NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US

By Louise Coyle | NIRWN

The Nothing About Us Without Us group is a coalition of women from diverse backgrounds and experiences working within and across communities in Northern Ireland and supported by the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland and Porticus. The group focusses on supporting grassroots women to identify and mobilise around key issues impacting on their lives including the need for a Women's Health Strategy for Northern Ireland.



Members of the NAUWU Coalition Group pictured at Stormont on 13th February where the motion for the introduction of a Women's Health Strategy was debated by the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Louise Coyle, Director at Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN) and a member of the NAUWU panel, said: **"To date Northern Ireland and Wales are the only regions not to have a dedicated Women's health Strategy in the UK. By failing to develop a Northern Ireland Women's Health Strategy, we are essentially failing to recognise the unique needs of 51% of our population."**

On 7th March CFNI alongside the Nothing About Us Without Us women's panel hosted an event in The Tullyglass Hotel in Ballymena to celebrate International Women's Day and to continue to advocate for a Women's Health Strategy..

160 women participated, many from grassroots women's organisations across Northern Ireland and all united by a common interest. Junior Ministers Aisling Reilly MLA and Pam Cameron MLA lent their voices in support of the event, alongside Orlathi Flynn MLA, Chair of the All-Party Working Group on Women's Health.

Northern Ireland needs a dedicated Women's Health Strategy



Louise Coyle, Director of NIRWN with colleagues from CFNI and the Nothing About Us Without Us Group at the International Women's Day event in Ballymena

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