



A2B Access to Benefits for Older People

Response to Consultation on draft Programme for Government and draft Budget

Version: Final
Date: 03/01/2008
Author: Zoë Anderson
Contact: 028 9075 4070/ 07875 092 915/ zoe@a2b.org.uk

1.0 Introduction

1.1 A2B is a not-for-profit organisation with a four year, fixed term life-span. Its vision is to empower and enable the older people of Northern Ireland to maximise their take-up of benefit entitlements.

1.2 A2B will be developing online resources, available to older people, their carers and Voluntary Sector and Governmental advisers to screen older people for benefit eligibility, prepare their claims applications and submit their data for claims processing.

1.3 A2B welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation. While we appreciate the constraints of the budgeting process, we are disappointed that the consultation runs for only ten weeks which include the Christmas period when many organisations are closed and groups do not meet.

2.0 Draft Programme for Government

2.1 We welcome the overall commitment to 'a better future for all – a society which is at ease with itself and where everyone shares and enjoys the benefits of this new opportunity' and to a better quality of life for everyone.

2.2 While we are in favour of a strong economy, it should be remembered that often, older people are unable to benefit from this, whether due to already having left the workforce or issues that prevent them working such as disability, discrimination in the workplace or caring responsibility. The majority of older people receive the State Pension and do not have any wish to work; therefore the policies required to convert the benefits of economic growth into improved quality of life for all older people need to be illustrated. The document does state that 'we cannot grow the economy in isolation from determined efforts to transform our society', but in the continuing absence of an anti-poverty strategy and the lack of provision for one in the Budget, it remains to be seen how this may be achieved.

2.3 We wholly welcome the extension of free public transport to all people over the age of 60. However, a recent written answer in the Assembly has put this at the end of next year. This should not be put off for any longer than is absolutely necessary; women in particular have waited for too long for this already. We are disappointed that the Smartpass scheme is not going to be extended to rural and community transport schemes, despite the Deputy First Minister stating in the Assembly that 'We will also be introducing concessionary fares on rural services and

