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Ms Brenda Shearer
Central Expenditure Division
Department Finance and Personnel
Rathgael House
Balloo Road
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Dear Ms Shearer

Re: Consultation on Dormant Bank Accounts

Barnardo’s are the largest children’s voluntary organisation in Northern Ireland and provides over fifty services which work with the most disadvantaged children and their families. We work across a wide range of issues including providing family support services, child bereavement services, supporting children with disabilities, young carers and young people at risk of offending. We also work actively to change policy and legislation in the interests of children, young people and their families.

Historically there has been a substantial under-spend on children and families services in Northern Ireland compared with Britain. Recent research has identified that in the area of early year’s services that Britain spends on average £2000 per child and that this compares to an average of £630 per child in Northern Ireland. Our spend on Sure Start services, which are aimed at the most disadvantaged children and families at £80 per child in Northern Ireland is distinctly below that of England, £600 per child, Scotland, £380 per child and Wales at £270 per child.

Even if one considers the spend on personal social services for children and families services in Northern Ireland it remains stubbornly lower than elsewhere in Britain. In 2004/2005 we spent £311 per child in Northern Ireland this was 30% lower than the UK average.

Our Disabled children here have also often missed out on discrete areas of funding that have been made available for Disabled children in Britain. So for example the Aiming High programme which has been introduced for Disabled Children in Britain to support their inclusion and achievement is not available in Northern Ireland.
We have also seen in recent years the ending of the Executive Programme Funds for Children which had been used to help re-dress this imbalance and which had supported locally based work with families.

On this basis Barnardo’s would suggest that specifically targeting funding from the Dormant Accounts Scheme to focus on work with children and families provides one mechanism to begin to address the current imbalance in funding and support.

We would particularly like to see the Scheme used to provide a Children and Families Fund which could focus on innovative family support and community based support services to children living in poverty and in the most disadvantaged areas.

Further we believe the Scheme could target funding to those children and families for whom it can often be difficult to access funding. So for example, young people at risk of offending or young people who are being sexually exploited and disabled young people. However, we would be happy to facilitate a more comprehensive discussion on which groups find it most difficult to access funding if this would be helpful.

We believe that there should be some capacity within the Fund to support work which is currently on-going but that has been proven to be effective in-terms of addressing the needs of children and families. It is difficult if all sources of funding look for new and innovative work rather than supporting current work that is truly effective.

The Scheme could have both a capital and revenue element but in our experience it is often the on-going revenue costs which are most difficult to access. We would also suggest that the Scheme includes the costs of evaluation and funds for up to five years if the work is effective as it takes at least this period of time to begin to bring about change.

Barnardo’s often works in partnership as this is a key element of bringing about change. We would support the inclusion of Partnership criteria in any funding under the Scheme.

I hope you find our comments useful and if you would like any further information or to discuss any of the issues we have raised please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Kelly
Assistant Director, Policy