

Towards a Wellbeing Framework: From Outcomes to Actions

Conference Report – 28 September 2016

On Wednesday 28 September 2016, politicians and nearly 100 stakeholders from the public, private and third sectors came together at Girdwood Community Hub in Belfast to consider how the Northern Ireland Executive can deliver outcomes-based government to support citizen wellbeing.

The conference followed on from a previous gathering in June 2015, also in Belfast. With the new Executive formed after May's Assembly election, and having set societal wellbeing at the heart of the Programme for Government (PfG) framework and engaged with the public, the conference considered:

What does the new framework mean for delivering future public services?

What are the Executive's priorities for change?

What will joined-up policies and services look like?

What mechanisms do we need to hold government to account?



Opening the all-day conference, Carnegie Trustee Aideen McGinley described the presence of keynote speaker, Rolf Alter of the OECD, as bringing an important part of the jigsaw together. That jigsaw includes Carnegie's findings and publications; the OECD's recent report on Northern Ireland; the coming together of a new, two-party Executive; and the formulation of the Programme for Government framework and its public consultation.

Key note speaker: The role of governance in pursuing wellbeing

Rolf Alter, Director for Public Governance and Territorial Development, OECD

Mr Alter asked: what do we mean when we speak about wellbeing? It is a work in progress, he said; there cannot be a definite answer, for it has to be “a moving piece of work”. Previously, we used to think that the measure of a country’s success lay in its Gross Domestic Product (GDP); we have learned the hard way that this is not true. World trade, “the engine of growth for so many years”, is falling behind. We still have lots of unemployment, lots of young people who have never got into the job market; we see growing inequality in terms of access to public services, health and access to justice.

Wellbeing across and within regions

Mr Alter told delegates that the discussion around wellbeing is not just happening in Northern Ireland; it is happening all over the world. Northern Ireland is in the middle of this movement. He said the region is making a contribution to the global debate as well as making its own progress.

Levels of wellbeing are very different in different countries; and wellbeing outcomes can differ markedly between cities and regions in the same country. We used to think it was enough to consider global averages, but we now recognise the crucial importance of regional or local policies as a complement to national policies. Take Spain as an example; its unemployment rate rocketed with the onset of the global financial crisis; we must ask where is the unemployment, not what is the unemployment rate. Mr Alter said the OECD has tried to measure the current situation in its member countries, and has extended this down to regions. When the OECD talks about health, he said, they can now compare health outcomes in one place to other parts of the country.

Mr Alter shared three ideas on how to improve outcomes:

1. Improving strategic approaches
2. Improving operational delivery of services to citizens and business
3. Improving engagement with people

Improving strategic approaches

In terms of improving strategic policymaking in Northern Ireland, strengthening the Executive’s commitment to working collegially toward a common purpose will require a more effective partnership between the Executive and Department of Finance.

Improving operational delivery

Measuring, reviewing and improving performance – and learning from the past – is important. To improve operational delivery, we can evaluate the impact of departmental and local-government reforms against stated strategic outcomes over the medium term with sound data:

- Solid performance targets; indicators
- Partnering with key players; for instance, the Northern Ireland Audit Office and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA).

Improving engagement with people

Mr Alter asked: are citizens actually asked to engage and participate in policy and decision making? Perhaps they are asked too late in the game. We need to systematically invite citizens to participate; we need a system to mobilise citizens to enable them to influence decisions and participate. We have to talk to people, not just a specific group of citizens. In conclusion, the OECD would be happy to help Northern Ireland with reforms in these areas and contribute to change here.

The Programme for Government: From outcomes to actions

Máirtín Ó Muilleoir MLA, Northern Ireland
Minister of Finance

Máirtín Ó Muilleoir MLA (Sinn Féin) opened his address by praising the conference venue, Girdwood Community Hub, as a great example of delivery for Belfast. A former site of British army barracks in north Belfast, today the venue brings long-divided communities together within a shared space. Mr Ó Muilleoir said the venue itself delivers in terms of wellbeing and health and fostering reconciliation.

On the Programme for Government, the Minister emphasised two words: common purpose. This, he said, must be at the core of everything the Executive does.

The Minister referenced two foremost advocates of social justice: Pope Francis and Irish President Michael D. Higgins. The economy is there to serve us, he said, not us to serve it; the way to transform this society is by a generous and giving approach. These ambitions are of a generational nature, but the new Programme for Government framework leads to continuous development; and when finalised, the Programme for Government and strategies will determine business priorities for this mandate. If we do not have delivery, strategies are of no use to us at all.

For the third sector and anyone across Northern Ireland, he said, the focus is on the 'D' word: delivery. To be a regional European powerhouse Northern Ireland has to foster peace. Inequalities can be eliminated, but only through partnership of everybody here. Northern Ireland boasts the most committed people in Europe, people committed to a peaceful society.

How do we get people to focus on the quality of what we deliver and not just on the numbers? We hope to bring more women to the procurement board, more people from the third sector and someone to represent small business and someone to represent the power of architecture transforming communities; and someone to represent the arts. We have to start investing in our artists again.

Response and scrutiny plans from the Finance Committee

Emma Little Pengelly MLA, Chair of the Northern
Ireland Assembly Committee for Finance

Emma Little Pengelly MLA (DUP) opened her official response to the Minister's comments by stating the Assembly's Committee for Finance has confidence that the values in the draft Programme for Government framework will make their way into the final Programme for Government document. Her role is as collaborator as well as scrutineer.

For a long time politicians and civil servants were saying the same thing about what they wanted to achieve, but year after year these were not being realised; the result was frustration.

Speaking on her own experience, having first occupied the role of Special Advisor to the First Minister before becoming an MLA, Mrs Little Pengelly said she realised that there are numerous barriers in the way of getting things done. Some civil servants, she said, have been risk averse.

The two key challenges ahead are:

1. **Ensuring the term of wellbeing is understood by voters. It is now ingrained in the narrative but do citizens understand what wellbeing is? Until there is understanding, the concept of wellbeing cannot progress.**
2. **Ensuring effective leadership within the civil service. Despite political leadership, if leadership is lacking amongst those tasked with delivering policies then there will be no delivery.**

Political leadership must integrate with civil leadership. There is a need to scrutinise the thousands of civil servants' performance. The civil service can't just use the language of change; they have to implement it, to turn the positive narrative in to action.



Questions from the floor

The Minister and Assembly Committee Chair were asked whether Northern Ireland is making enough connections with the south of Ireland as well as with the east; that is the rest of the UK. To this the Minister said there is not enough cross border connections.

To this, Emma Little Pengelly MLA added that cross border connections are critical. Usually when the Government goes out to consultation, the vast majority of people do not respond; there is a need to look beyond the usual suspects. We need to be sure when we are implementing the Programme for Government that it fits for everyone in society; we have to have high level purpose that works for everybody. The Executive should not lose focus on good designs of initiatives that will produce better outcomes.

A delegate asked a question on supporting innovation; how will the Executive invest in change? Minister Ó Muilleoir said the whole of the Department of Finance is facing in the one direction and want to get things done; often it's the politicians who hold them back. Mrs Little Pengelly argued there has been a problem with creativity in Northern Ireland's civil service; we must encourage people to think differently.

On the topic of civil service, Rolf Alter made the point that many ministers and political leaders often use the civil service as a scapegoat but innovation is a key ingredient to success. You can't have risk and always win, he said; you have to accept that sometimes you will get it wrong.

Another delegate asked is the global agenda adequately reflected in Northern Ireland's Programme for Government framework; are the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) considered? To this Mr Alter said the number of SDGs does not matter; it is ensuring they are acted upon in a shared society. Mrs Little Pengelly added that there has been a genuine attempt at including the global agenda into the Programme for Government; sometimes when the Programme for Government encapsulates everything it can lack a punch, but the Executive is being specific, which is a positive.

On how the Executive can inspire confidence in its emphasis on wellbeing, Mr Ó Muilleoir said fellow ministers are trying to inspire hope and deliver. Mrs Little Pengelly said she is optimistic for the Programme for Government's future. There is a great deal that the governing parties agree on, she said; on having a good health service, economy, and so on. We do have a shared vision and we need to focus on that to implement it. I think people are optimistic.

Ten years of outcomes in Scotland: Does it make a difference?

Professor Carol Tannahill, Chief Social Policy Advisor to the Scottish Government

Professor Tannahill opened her remarks by stating that two major things occurred in 2007: 1) the Scottish National Party was elected with an overall majority; and 2) the structure of government changed, towards an outcomes-based approach; a process led by then Permanent Secretary Sir John Elvidge.

The government's stated purpose was to focus government and public services on creating a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish through sustainable economic growth.

This new model of government required the abolition of departmental structures, discouraging silos and facilitating effective cross-cutting government. It encouraged partnership with local actors across all public services. A National Performance Framework (NPF) was established, setting out in the Purpose and National Outcomes a measure of national unified vision for Scotland. Putting wellbeing at the heart of government, a wide range of indicators were developed to assess progress. This is something that will survive political change in the government.

Ten years on, has this made a difference? Have all outcomes been achieved? No, but the framework has helped to align people in the same direction. It has made a difference to how people talk, think and act. Professor Tannahill added it was needed, but in itself it is not enough as "other stars need to align". Although not universally, it has led to changes.

The Scottish Justice strategy provides an example of a government system that has taken an outcomes based approach to its heart. Eight justice outcomes were identified, as things that the government wanted to support; "getting it right for every child," for instance, is the kind of terminology you may not usually associate with the justice department. The priority has been shifting the system towards prevention. A constant reduction in the rate of crime has been a positive outcome.

This system requires leadership that is open and enabling, that looks to collaborations with and experiences from the community, as opposed to thinking politicians and government know all the answers. In Scotland people are really signed up to the outcomes, they are firmly embedded, but we realise we still have work to do on our approach. We live in an environment where there are major changes happening globally; the traditional way of working is just not up to dealing with a changing global landscape. The structured approach is not appropriate for the 'messiness' of the world. In Nicola Sturgeon, Scotland has a proactive First Minister who is very clear about what she wants. How we go about our business is as important as the business we do.

Professor Tannahill likened the new approach to the tip of a change management 'iceberg'. The top 10 per cent of the iceberg relates to issue management: logical, material, facts. 90 per cent of change is out of sight, beneath the waterline; this includes power and perceptions, behavior and belief management. We have to make all of the iceberg visible. Scotland is not there yet but we are certainly making good progress on the way.

Does audit destroy an outcomes approach?

Fraser McKinlay, Director of Performance Audit and Best Value, Audit Scotland

Fraser McKinlay's address focused upon the audit implications of the new outcomes approach. Audit Scotland, he said, spends its time trying to find out what difference government money makes.

The outcomes approach is a good thing, but it is also a difficult thing to do and measure. Sometimes audit is described as the enemy of innovation. And occasionally that might be true, but with this new approach we need to respond differently and to take a long-term view. As auditors we are always about following up on impacts.

Government is no longer just about running the organisation well; national leadership is important. What about local leadership? He said it was interesting

that local government had not been mentioned much during the conference before this address. Community leadership and local government, he added, play an important part of the outcomes approach story.

Leadership is different in different places. What good leadership looks like in Belfast is different to what leadership looks like elsewhere, such as in parts of Scotland. How then can it be audited?

In the context of the outcomes approach to government, there are four questions to consider:

- How do we move beyond 'the motherhood and apple pie'?
- What is our plan(s) / approach(es) / methodology(ies) for getting there?
- How will we know it is working – or not?
- How are we going to resource it? Money, people, buildings, community assets?

It is important to have strong public audit functions. Sometimes it is our job to burst the bubble a little. We try to strike a balance between ensuring things are done right and helping the process progress.

Asked whether an outcomes based Programme for Government and clear strategies make the auditing process easier, Mr McKinlay said the new approach does pose a huge change for public services and public auditors. There is a real challenge to ensure that public service reform in the pursuit of improved outcomes is coherent.

Workshops

Workshop 1: Working with the third sector to deliver outcomes

Led by: Úna McKernan, Deputy Chief Executive, NICVA

The Executive has laid out its outcomes based approach, but how will this work in practice and what role will the voluntary and community sector play? The work and impact of the third sector reaches across all Executive departments, so how can both work together to deliver and monitor outcomes set out in the Programme for Government?

Participants said that the community and voluntary sector already makes an impact across a wide range of government areas in terms of community development, housing and so on. The problem lies in that too many things are being measured. The shift in approach by government, then, requires more trust on behalf of government in the community and voluntary sector.

Participants said that the Programme for Government needs to authenticate the definition of wellbeing being employed with people on the ground; the work of this sector can help. The sector exists to achieve social outcomes. Engaging with the public tends to be “at the end of the list of actions”; today it needs to be at the top of the agenda. Participants said they would like to see more evidence in the Programme for Government that government is listening to others, and measurements that will indicate change.



For example, it was said that some housing indicators at present could change without actually representing change on the ground.

Participants asked how a model of partnership can work in practice across all sectors. It was mentioned that there are many single action initiatives by organisations which operate in their own silos, yet suicide prevention co-operation in Northern Ireland provide a positive example of agencies working together. How can this model be replicated more often? More data is also required to measure Programme for Government outcomes, and this can push an inter-agency approach; many of the proposals for outcome measurement do not have the relevant data available.

Among the points made was that 4-5 year plans by government are too short; generational timeframes, like 15 or 25 year plans, are needed for some things to be achieved as a lot of issues are generational. Government needs to invest now, but we will not see a return even after 10 years.

As to the potential for the community and voluntary sector to deliver on their responsibilities, participants said that government simply has to trust the sector; “we are incredibly good value for money.” Participants suggested government has to be less risk averse.

Workshop 2: Aligning Programme for Government outcomes with local government plans and priorities

Led by: John Woods, Carnegie Roundtable Secretariat

Executive legislation preceded a complete restructure of Northern Ireland's Councils in 2015, reducing the numbers from 26 to 11 and devolving increased powers and responsibilities. This year the Executive's departments were reduced from 12 to nine. Considering this context, this workshop will ask how the Programme for Government's outcomes can align with the plans and priorities of the new "super councils", and, as importantly, vice versa.

Workshop leader John Woods opened this discussion, outlining he was keen to explore how local government was working within the draft Programme for Government framework and how all arms of government could ensure horizontal and vertical integration.

Rachel Craig of Derry and Strabane District Council provided feedback from her experience. She told participants that this council narrowed down their community plan to eight outcomes. These outcomes are not the same as those outlined in the Executive's Programme for Government but they are along the same lines; they want the same thing. Rachel Craig said that Councils like to maintain their own identity and sovereignty, but local government will be a partner in delivery of the Programme for Government. She added that local councils see the Programme for Government as part of "a family of plans": these include the Programme for Government, the district wide strategic community plan and the local community plans and desire for synergy between these plans. Local government is stronger as a result of the recent restructuring, and they want huge synergy with all the different plans. She said it is refreshing to have local government as part of the picture of central government's plan, and helpful that both are employing the same language.

Dr Tracy Power, Director of Analysis at the NISRA, outlined her role in leading on the Programme for Government. She referred to the ongoing public consultation; the indicators, she said, were being reviewed to ensure they were the right ones. Dr Power told the workshop that each local council has been allocated a NISRA statistician and are liaising with

central government to ensure they are working in synergy. She added that the NISRA statisticians have all been trained in outcomes based approach (OBA) techniques so that they have the skillset and dataset to assist in the monitoring and evaluation processes going forward. As a result there would be a re-prioritisation of public spending.

A number of participants did raise concerns. Some academics, for instance, expressed reservations at the effectiveness of the outcomes based approach. A mismatch in timescales between the Executive and local councils was highlighted; as stated, community plans tend to be long-term, up to 2030, whereas the Executive's Programme for Government encompasses a 5 year term. Concerns were also raised in relation to local government's capacity and resources to deliver a consolidated approach; one delegate expressed concern that 11 Councils could create 11 "chiefdoms" which all had their own direction.

Participants also raised concern at the costs incurred when engaging, developing, designing and producing community plans. Reference was made to the need for central government funding for these new costs to Local Government. In response, others outlined that relationships with statutory bodies at a local level do need to be nurtured and supported and requests for administrative support in funding could be detrimental to this relationship at an early stage. Still, a delegate from local government added that irrespective of any concerns around finance, local government has been set up for the challenge on delivering on wellbeing at a local level. "Form follows function and then finance" was a common theme throughout the workshop.

Workshop 3: Openness, accountability and the Programme for Government

Led by: Paul Braithwaite, Programme Leader, Building Change Trust

Contributing organisations: NI Open Government Network, Corrymeela, Advice NI, Rural Community Network, NI Foundation

With the restructuring of Executive departments and a new model for its Programme for Government, does this present new challenges and opportunities to hold the government to account? This workshop will discuss how government can become more accessible and how politicians and organisations can promote improved civic engagement.

Participants considered what role the Programme for Government could play in promoting democratic engagement. Conversations considered whether an additional outcome of the Programme for Government should be “deepening democratic engagement”. They cited political disillusionment, lack of confidence in the institutions, lack of trust in politicians and ineffective policy as the underlying imperative for seeking stronger commitment to democratic enhancement. Some raised concerns around the Programme for Government outcomes as having been pre-determined; this reflected a lack of trust in citizens and communities, as well as the influence of hidden voices and agendas determining the Programme for Government’s priorities. The Programme for Government consultation report was deemed to have given insufficient attention to the narratives provided by consultees; there was too much emphasis on the quantitative aspect of the consultation and the four graphs gave an overly simplistic analysis of the views received.

Participants were generally supportive of adding a new outcome to the Programme for Government to focus upon democracy. On what actions could be taken to deliver deeper democratic engagement, suggestions included open policy making, open contracting, a

“citizen’s budget” and co-design. To deliver deeper democratic engagement, it was agreed that a culture shift is required and the risk averse approach within government needs to be challenged.

Critical to citizen engagement is enhancing political literacy, especially amongst disaffected sections of society. Equipping citizens with the know-how and capacity to engage effectively in the governing process was considered important.

The workshop also considered what creative and cost-effective methods for engagement could be employed. The potential impact of these could be seen on two levels: participation as a means to an end (facilitating change in targeted policy and decision-making); and participation as an end in itself (promoting social cohesion, mental health, greater acceptance of difficult decisions, and so on). Delegates agreed there exists a need to trust the ability of citizens to deliberate and make difficult decisions. The example of proposed hospital closures was employed here; if the health system engages with people earlier, and in a genuine fashion, this could prevent a lot of opposition and acrimony.

Is the Programme for Government delivering on new ways of working? Reflections from the workshops, with Quintin Oliver

Quintin Oliver opened the session by stating we often hear about the blunders of government but less about the success of government. There has to be political leadership to secure success; this conference wonderfully showcased collaboration between the Minister of Finance and the Assembly's Finance Committee Chair. The fact that they can talk together about 'common purpose' is a good thing.

This conference has shown the partnership and understanding that currently exists. We are taking the first step towards something we haven't seen until today. In Northern Ireland we are pretty good at civic engagement, which is not the case in many other places. We cannot govern from top-down any more, we need to engage. The quality of that engagement is important. We are getting better at finding ways to change trends to get a better outcome, for example with policies such as the levy on plastic bags.

Mr Oliver described the private sector as dogs that are not barking. That will change shortly when the Executive's economic strategy is published. Trade unions also have a role that has not yet been recognised.

Where or what is the alignment between the Programme for Government and Council community plans? It is important that those players and actors are brought into the process.

Change is an opportunity and this is the biggest change the public sector in Northern Ireland has ever seen.

What are the next steps for the Programme for Government? A panel discussion

Dr Peter Doran of Queen's University Belfast said that there exists a real opportunity to use this new Programme for Government framework as a platform. He said we have an opportunity now to suspend some

of the harsh judgments made about the Northern Ireland Executive during previous mandates. Do not underestimate the language of generosity and trust; this can be translated into new practices.

For Sir John Elvidge, former Permanent Secretary to the Scottish Government, many countries today are interested in talking about this new approach, yet the number of places actually taking the approach is still very limited. This new framework ought to be an antidote to cynicism. No politician who wishes to avoid criticism would sign up to this new approach. There has to be a significant degree of engagement in the process; whatever imperfections there are, it is a significant step forward. He said the government has to keep the engagement open. By treating this as an intricate process, the more likely it is to lead to successful innovation. You can't sustain trust if the new approach does not deliver.

Kate McCauley of Housing Rights NI said that when the organisation first read the Programme for Government they were excited but when they reached the part that detailed the outcomes and measures they were deflated. The absence of housing did not reflect housing's role in promoting wellbeing, which is the central aim of the Northern Ireland in the Programme for Government; the next step for the organisation is to find out how much of the feedback from the subsequent public consultation has been taken on board. The clear benefit of the outcomes based approach, she said, is that we are all aligned in one direction of travel. We have understood for a while the connections needed between departments, but it's about how the Programme for Government facilitates us to make the connections. The Programme for Government has to supply the infrastructure to help us achieve where we want to all go.

Katrina Godfrey, Head of Programme for Government at The Northern Ireland Executive Office, spoke about the new outcomes-focused approach to the Programme for Government, telling delegates that a plan to help you achieve an outcome is never going to be an end plan and must remain live. We must ask: how will we know when anyone is better off? It feels very different but it also feels exceptionally challenging. The public sector has to adopt new disciplines including increased partnership working. The commitment from Ministers and the leadership of the civil service is obvious but the journey will inevitably

have bumps along the road as we get used to a very different way of working; we may have to be forgiving and forgiven as we make our way along. Different sorts of conversations have been starting to happen, but the civil service working on its own will not be able to effect the change that is needed.

Katrina Godfrey said that the aim in the weeks that follows the conference is to bring through a draft Programme for Government. The engagement itself thus far has been positive, she said; what the civil service has found more challenging is, naturally, writing into a delivery plan an approach that takes a wider perspective than that of government. Those leading delivery plans have more work to do to find the voices of all the other groups who say they want to help deliver improvement. The most powerful delivery plans will be those where people have the opportunity to say “we can do this for you... we will help you with this” and where those contributions are reflected. She called on these organisations to come to the SROs leading delivery plans with the roles that they think they can play in delivering the outcomes set out in the Programme for Government.

Closing remarks

Bringing the conference to a close, Carnegie Trustee Aideen McGinley said that the Government will want shared ownership of the Programme for Government. Carnegie Chief Executive, Martyn Evans highlighted that trust, leadership and engagement are active words that have come through a lot throughout the day’s conference. There is something changing in these small jurisdictions, he said. This work on wellbeing and the Programme for Government in Northern Ireland is being undertaken within an involuntary coalition, a post-conflict society, within a subnational level; this story within such an exceptional situation reinvigorates others.

Update on progress since the conference

In late October, a further draft Programme for Government was released for consultation by the Northern Ireland Executive. The consultation period closed on 23 December 2016.

In November, the Committee for the Executive Office requested a briefing from the Carnegie UK Trust, outlining the Trust’s views of the Executive’s Programme for Government. The briefing can be [downloaded here](#).

The Trust is delighted that the work of the Carnegie Roundtable is highlighted in the introduction of the Programme for Government and to have been involved in the process towards developing a new approach to policy making in Northern Ireland. This process is still in its early stages and has a number of challenges but we are optimistic about its success. There appears to us to be a broad consensus that a new, whole-of-government approach to policy making in Northern Ireland is both desirable and possible and the Programme for Government is a significant step in this direction.



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Fresh elections have been called in Northern Ireland for 2 March 2017.

The Fresh Start Agreement specifies that after the Assembly meets following an election and before the First Minister and deputy First Minister are selected, the d’Hondt process runs to allocate all other ministries. During this period, representatives of the parties who are entitled to take up places in the Executive, and who confirm their intention to do so, will meet to resolve a draft Programme for Government.

Once agreed by the Executive, a draft Programme is subject to approval by the Assembly.

Depending on the outcome of the upcoming election, any new Programme for Government may differ from that which was drafted and consulted upon between the election of May 2016 and dissolution of the Assembly in January 2017.