

Rethinking Northern Ireland: Reports from a seminar series on wellbeing in Northern Ireland



Acknowledgements

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Contents

Introduction	4
Session 1: What does a better early years education and childcare infrastructure look like in Northern Ireland?	11
Session 2: Disability Inclusion in the workplace - What it is and why it matters?	16
Session 3: What does cross-sectoral collaboration look like through a pandemic? What worked, what didn't and learning to build back better	22
Session 4: What does the best in government policy look like? Sharing successes, failures and lessons learnt	27
Session 5: Net Zero in Northern Ireland: what do we need to do, how quickly can we get there and will it be enough?	35
Session 6: What does a better economy look like for Northern Ireland	44
Session 7: What does a society focussed on better mental health look like?	50



Introduction

As the early weeks of the pandemic gave way to months of lockdowns and disruptions, we came together (supported by Carnegie UK and CO3) to build a seminar series that would give civil society some space to explore what we have learned that we can take forward as we move beyond the pandemic.

We wanted to capture a little of the opportunity that can emerge in difficult time, sometimes called the 'Overton Window' when more radical change might appear possible as well as desirable. And we wanted to capture some of the experiences that organisations had in working throughout the pandemic, both positive and negative.

The event series that we produced surpassed our expectations in terms of numbers of participants and quality of speakers. In total we held seven events attended by 396 people with 42 experts (including experts by experience).

We have compiled the event summaries into one report, to record these important discussions and the questions and debates that they sparked. As we go into the pre-election phase for the Northern Ireland Assembly elections in May 2022, they provide a wealth of expertise on what kind of Northern Ireland we could aspire to have, if we were brave enough to make fundamental change.

Policy in Northern Ireland is often siloed despite what we know of the importance of joining up evidence, services and people to improve outcomes. As a group we were interested to explore what the shared themes are. In reviewing these, we were struck by the similarity between the conclusions of the workshops and the Carnegie UK wellbeing tests:

- 1.** Give people voice and choice: Recognising that wellbeing cannot be 'done to' people, it has to be done by and with them. Every session we ran included this as a key element of successfully moving Northern Ireland from talking about change to transforming lives.
- 2.** Recognise relationships: Understanding the importance of human relationships and social connectedness. There is real learning from the pandemic about how human beings relate to each other and our sense of connection and mutuality.
- 3.** Promote dialogue: Encouraging conversations and interactions between diverse communities, sectors and professions. Governments need to bring a lot more people on board into the conversation, with more open discussion on policy choices.
- 4.** Support subsidiarity: Advocating local decision-making which reflects the needs and priorities of people living in that place. There was a shared sense that 'local' matters to improving the economy, public service, mental health, and to meeting our net zero commitments.
- 5.** Enhance transparency: Opening up access to knowledge, data, and evidence to support people themselves taking action on wellbeing. We heard how trust needs to be built up through openness at different layers of services to the public.

6. Tackle poverty: Knowing that people need to have their basic needs met before they can improve other aspects of their wellbeing. Focusing on investing in people was seen as crucial in breaking down entrenched poverty in Northern Ireland.
7. Further equality: Knowing that wellbeing cannot flourish when there is inequality between people and communities. Strong calls for inclusion were made, and for greater understanding and focus on removing barriers to inclusion.
8. Focus on long-termism: Safeguarding the collective wellbeing of future generations. The short-termism of policy was criticised throughout with calls for a more long-term and radical approach to policy-making.

We hope that those who read this report, and take part in our end of programme conference on the 3rd February 2022, will be inspired to think differently about the change we can make in our society.

While we know many people will skim to the chapter covering 'their' department, profession or interest group – we hope that you will also take the time to read the full report. And in doing so note, as we have, that we already know the solutions to the challenges we face, our job now is to have the courage to implement the change we know is required. While some may have more power than others to make change happen, we all have a collective responsibility to strive to improving people's lives now and for the future.

Kerry Anthony, Chief Executive of Inspire	Maeve Monaghan, CEO at Now Group & Chair of the Community Foundation Northern Ireland	Sir David Sterling, Chair of Chief Executives' Forum
Jennifer Neff, co-founder of Elemental	Jen Wallace, Director, Carnegie UK	Grainne Walsh, Director, Stratagem
Professor Neil Gibson, EY Chief Economist in Ireland and Visiting Professor at Ulster University	John Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy, Belfast City Council	Karen Gallagher, Co3

Executive summary

In Autumn 2021, Carnegie UK and CO3 held seven events that explored the key issues facing public policy in Northern Ireland.

Each event was structured to include views from outside of Northern Ireland and then heard from local panellists to explore what the potential opportunities are for change. In total the seven events were attended by 396 people with 42 speakers.

This generated a wealth of knowledge about public policy issues, both related to specific issues (inclusion, early years, the economy, net zero and mental health) and to the way that government works (collaboration and a governance masterclass).

Early years

Chair: Sir David Sterling,
Chair of Chief Executives' Forum

Speakers: Professor Peter Moss, Emeritus Professor of Early Childhood Provision at the Thomas Coram Research Institute in University College London; Professor Gordon Cleveland, Associate Professor Emeritus in Economics at the University of Toronto Scarborough; Aoife Hamilton, Head of Charity Services at Employers for Childcare; Tina Dempster, Head of the Childcare Unit in the Department of Education; Roseann Kelly, Chief Executive of Women in Business; Celine McStravick, Director of the National Children's Bureau and Lynn Carvill, Chief Executive of WOMEN'STEC

The adequate provision of childcare and early-years support is a necessary component of the response to COVID-19, both in facilitating the economic participation of parents/carers and in ensuring the development and progression of children. Increased focus on the early years sector and its critical role in underpinning the broader economy should serve to drive dedicated policy and investment to improve the sector's sustainability.

The priorities for Northern Ireland should be an ambitious, long-term **early years strategy** underpinned by legislation and resourced with a budget. The strategy should focus on integrating childcare and education with better terms and conditions for the workforce and genuine career progression. The voices of the child, the parent, and the family must be heard when developing, delivering, and evaluating early years policy.

Disability inclusion in the workplace

Chair: Maeve Monaghan, CEO at Now Group & Chair of the Community Foundation Northern Ireland

Speakers: Chris Paouros, Strategy Leadership Change and EDI Consultant; Matt Stallard, Director in Enterprise Applications at Deloitte; Sean Hanna, Head of Employment and Training at Now Group; Roisin Wood, CEO of the Community Foundation

In this conversation with expert panellists from both industry and civil society, we explored what disability inclusion means in theory and in practice. Providing the opportunity to consider why disability inclusion matters, who is doing it well and what needs to change to do it better in Northern Ireland.

Creating an inclusive culture is essential if employers are to retain talent and empower people to think differently and share their experiences and perspectives, which is a key driver for innovation development and engagement. We heard a case study from Deloitte on neurodiversity where inclusion had a strong benefit to the business.

The priorities for Northern Ireland are to support a culture shift in favour of diversity and inclusion. This can be done through **training and support for employers and employees.**

Collaboration

Chair: Kerry Anthony, Chief Executive of Inspire

Speakers: Moira Doherty, Deputy Secretary for Engaged Communities Group in the Department for Communities; Lisa McElherron, Group Director of Insight and Engagement at Inspire; Jim Girvan, Community Worker with Upper Andersonstown Community Forum and Kate Clifford, Director of the Rural Community Network

Our session on collaboration focused on the case study of the Emergencies Leadership Group (ELG) which was established by the Minister for Communities to lead and co-ordinate the voluntary and community sector response to the Covid19 pandemic. Group members came from the voluntary and community sector, government departments and agencies, and from local government. Working in close proximity on new projects during very uncertain times, ELG members forged partnerships and ways of working that crossed sectoral and departmental boundaries and delivered impressive and impactful results.

The priorities for Northern Ireland are to take the learning from the emergency phase of COVID-19 and ensure that mainstream policy and delivery is more joined up and connected. There needs to be a commitment to **open policy making, co-design and co-delivery.**

Governance masterclass

Chair: Sir John Elvidge, Chair of Carnegie UK Trust

Speakers: Sir David Sterling, Chair of Chief Executives' Forum; Denis McMahon, Permanent Secretary in the Executive Office; Alice Charles, Project Lead at World Economic Forum; Dawn Baxendale, CEO of Christchurch Council, NZ; Ciaran Martin, Professor of Practice in the Management of Public Organisations at Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford; Pétur Berg Matthiasson, Director General for Iceland; Ann Watt, Director at Pivotal; Suzanne Wylie, Chief Executive of Belfast City Council; Jennie Barugh, Director for Performance and Strategic Outcomes in the Scottish Government

This masterclass explored what the best in government policy design looks like when seeking to facilitate better decision making. It sought to answer the question: How can government do wellbeing better?

International examples provided rich information on what contributes to good policy making, including stakeholder relationships, citizen engagement, localism, transparency and long-termism. It was recognised that good policy making is about a culture, not just a set of actions.

Within Northern Ireland it was recognised that progress is being made but that the culture is still too risk-averse and short-term. More cross-party agreement on policy solutions, multi-year budgets and a **renewed commitment to the outcomes-based approach** in all policies are the priorities. It is also important to build trust and relationships across public services and with communities and citizens.

Net Zero

Chair: Sir David Sterling, Chair of Chief Executives' Forum

Speakers: Terry A'Hearn, Chief Executive of the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency; John Gilliland, Director of Global Agriculture and Sustainability at Devenish Nutrition; Dr. Annika Clements, Director of Nature, Climate, and Environment at Ulster Wildlife; Kirsty McManus, National Director at the Institute of Directors and Colin Breen, Director of Environmental Policy Division at DAERA

The Northern Ireland Assembly declared a climate emergency on February 3rd 2020, in recognition of the urgent and transformative change needed to stop human-induced global warming causing irreversible environmental damage. This workshop explored what needs to change in NI, and what leaders working across the public, private, and third sector can do to help address climate change.

Examples from outside NI highlighted the importance of innovation and seeing the environment as everyone's business, rather than something that can be addressed through initiatives.

Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK where the land use sector acts as a net emitter. Priorities identified included **better measurement** of environmental issues and **nature-based solutions** such as the restoration of peatlands and improving green and blue space. Climate literacy needs to be improved, and we heard about the work of the Institute of Directors on viewing the climate emergency as an opportunity for businesses – focusing on their ability to be innovative and take risks. A **citizen's assembly** on climate change should be

taken forward, and **legislation** on climate change is essential to bring Northern Ireland up to date with international best practice.

Economy

Chair: Richard Johnston, Deputy Director, Ulster University Economic Policy Centre

Speakers: Graeme Roy, Dean of External Engagement in the College of Social Sciences at the University of Glasgow; Dr Victoria Winckler, Director of the Bevan Foundation; Angela McGowan, Director for Northern Ireland at CBI; Cathy Gormley-Heenan, Commissioner to the Independent Fiscal Commission for Northern Ireland; Michelle Scott, Director of Business Interventions in the Department for the Economy NI and Sir David Sterling, Former Permanent Secretary in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Department of Finance; Former Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

The legacy of the pandemic will have long-lasting, possibly irreversible, effects on the economy that the government will have to face over the coming years. This workshop explored what economic recovery should look like as we step forward and crucially, who should pay for that recovery.

Hearing from Scotland and Wales, the participants endorsed the calls for a **new vision for the economy** based on the quality of the economy, not the quantity of goods and services produced. The recognition of the intertwining of economic and societal outcomes is critical to understanding what constitutes success. Great strides have been made to develop better metrics to measure progress and this more complete toolkit is essential for policy makers and wider stakeholders.

This is a long-term change in focus, not a short-term approach. For Northern Ireland there was a recognition that the conversation on the economy needs to **reconnect with what matters to people** and commit to **greater redistribution** to support people on the lowest incomes whose wellbeing is most at risk from the current model. The responsibility for a transformed economy is not only the reserve of policy makers and elected officials. The resilience and adaptability of citizens and businesses during the pandemic and the swift and sizeable policy response provide an example of what level and scale of change is possible. The true levels of transformation required in the economy necessitate brave conversations about willingness and ability to pay, it is essential to engage civic society in that conversation.

Mental Health

Chair: Jennifer Neff, co-founder of Elemental

Speakers: Mary Boyle, Emeritus Professor of Clinical Psychology at the University of East London; Karen Taylor, ex-RMN nurse, Director of Working to Recovery, and Director of Deepness Dementia Media and Ron Coleman, Director of Working to Recovery, Director and Chair of Deepness Dementia Media; Michael Crilly, Director of Social Inclusion and Participation at Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust; Jennifer Wallace, Director at Carnegie UK Trust; Nichola Rooney, Non-Executive Director the Public Health Agency; Senior Professional Advisor to the RQIA; Associate Consultant with the HSC Leadership Centre; Alex Bunting, Group Director of Inspire's Mental Health Addiction Services and Oscar Donnelly, Co-Chair of the Department of Health's Mental Health Strategic Advisory Panel and Chair and Regional Lead for the Northern Ireland Towards Zero Suicide, Mental Health Patient Safety Collaborative

Pre-pandemic, Northern Ireland had the highest prevalence of mental health challenges in the UK, and the highest rate of prescriptions for mental health disorders. We know the pandemic has exacerbated the mental health crisis. This workshop explored how best we can build a society that focuses on mental health for all.

Each of the speakers counselled against taking a medical approach to resolving Northern Ireland's mental health problems. Poor mental health is often a consequence of trauma and/or not having basic needs met, and the solution is not clinical but social – investing in social and economic policies that support people. A priority for Northern Ireland must be to continue investing in building **a peaceful place** for people to live. Most investment is needed in tackling stigma, prevention and early intervention in mental health. Small scale **community solutions** need to be supported by the NHS Trusts.

Session 1:

What does a better early years education and childcare infrastructure look like in Northern Ireland?

Date: 1 September 2021

Chair: Sir David Sterling, Chair of Chief Executives' Forum

Speakers:

- Professor Peter Moss, Emeritus Professor of Early Childhood Provision at the Thomas Coram Research Institute in University College London
- Professor Gordon Cleveland, Associate Professor Emeritus in Economics at the University of Toronto Scarborough
- Aoife Hamilton, Head of Charity Services at Employers For Childcare
- Tina Dempster, Head of the Childcare Unit in the Department of Education
- Roseann Kelly, Chief Executive of Women in Business
- Celine McStravick, Director of the National Children's Bureau
- Lynn Carvill, Chief Executive of WOMEN'STEC

The adequate provision of childcare and early-years support is a necessary component of the response to COVID-19, both in facilitating the economic participation of parents/carers and in ensuring the development and progression of children. Increased focus on the childcare sector and its critical role in underpinning the broader economy should serve to drive dedicated policy and investment to improve the sector's sustainability.

Presentation 1:

Professor Peter Moss, Emeritus Professor of Early Childhood Provision at the Thomas Coram Research Institute in University College London

Professor Moss explained how the system is currently split between education and childcare, and needs to be a much more cohesive and integrated system for the early years. Issues include that childcare is of high cost to parents, but is based on low quality employment; that it creates social division due to the cost; and that children are not experiencing their right to education from birth as laid out in the UNCRC.

Professor Moss argued for a fully integrated and public system of early childhood education characterised by:

- **Integrated access:** early childhood education as an entitlement for all children and their carers from birth to six years, complemented by 12 months of well-paid parental leave. Early childhood education and parental leave are in synergy with each other.
- **Integrated provision:** provision that is multipurpose and community-based, replacing the current mishmash of dysfunctional services.
- **Integrated workforce:** based on a graduate early childhood professional (teacher or social pedagogue) which would have parity with school teachers in terms of pay and conditions.

- **Integrated funding:** funding paid directly to services. No more subsidies or tax credits paid to parents but free attendance for a core period.

Presentation 2:

Professor Gordon Cleveland, Associate Professor Emeritus in Economics at the University of Toronto Scarborough

In the next presentation, Professor Gordon Cleveland described the transformation of the system in Canada, which adheres to many of the same principles. This is being achieved by substantial funding from the federal government, administered through agreements with individual provinces, which means that early years care will become a public service, delivered largely by not-for-profit providers. Each province agrees to cut licensed childcare fees so that within five years they are around \$10 (£6) per day. This will be achieved by direct operational funding (to services not parents) and services will be regulated to provide better quality care. The idea is that there should be universal childcare for children aged 0 - 5, with most parents taking parental leave, when children are less than one year.

This agenda is driven by needs for women's employment and empowerment as well as children's needs, and Professor Cleveland shared some economic projections around this, demonstrating that better childcare benefits the economy in the long run. Professor Cleveland also shared some thoughts about how this dramatic shift has been achieved, including the commitment of the childcare advocacy sector in Canada over many years, the work of economist Pierre Fortin, and the role of prominent female politicians in driving forward change.

Presentation 3:

Aoife Hamilton, Head of Charity Services at Employers For Childcare

Aoife Hamilton echoed the key messages around the importance of childcare for employment and the economy as well as for children themselves. She highlighted that the key problems and priorities for change are the affordability of childcare, the need for more flexible and accessible childcare, and the need for improved pay and conditions for childcare workers. Aoife also asserted that an ambitious childcare strategy is needed that is underpinned by legislation and resourced with a budget. Childcare should be viewed as a cross-departmental priority that supports the delivery of key objectives in the Executive's economic strategy and programme for government, as well as having a positive impact on outcomes in areas like health, education, gender equality, and eliminating poverty.

Presentation 4:

Tina Dempster, Head of the Childcare Unit in the Department of Education

Tina Dempster provided an update on the progress of the [Executive Childcare Strategy](#) in Northern Ireland. However, work on the development of the Strategy had to be paused while resources were redirected to dealing with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the childcare sector. From April 2020 to date, approximately £36 million has been invested to support the sector throughout the pandemic. Subject to work on the pandemic coming to an end, work on the development of an Executive Childcare Strategy will be taken forward.

The draft strategy, consulted on in 2015, has two dual aims: Child Development and Promoting Parental Employment. In October

2021 there will be re-engagement with key stakeholders through a Strategic Insight Programme, facilitated by the Department of Finance Innovation Team. The Strategy actions will need to build on what is already available – NI is tied in with the UK-wide tax and benefits systems. Parents may be eligible for up to 85% of childcare costs through Universal Credit, and the UK Tax-Free Childcare Scheme will pay 20% of childcare costs for working parents.

As this is an Executive strategy it will require Executive agreement on significant policy decisions, including a commitment on the availability of funding to take forward implementation of the Strategy. Ongoing cross-departmental working will continue to develop quantifiable, costed actions for Executive approval that meet the dual aims of parental employment and child development.



Presentation 5:

Roseann Kelly, Chief Executive of Women in Business

Roseann Kelly spoke about their work with the [Federation of Small Businesses](#) to support Employers For Childcare with a business and economic case for improved early years infrastructure. They are working on a pilot providing free childcare for women going into training – especially those returning to work after maternity leave or a career break. The proposal is to have a number of hubs in Belfast, Omagh and Derry, where there would be free training and free childcare. Women would be eligible not only for the period of training, but around six to eight months after that if they are getting into employment. Roseann highlighted that as well as working towards increased gender diversity, we also need to educate children about climate change and that democracy of education is important for the future of NI.



Presentation 6:

Celine McStravick, Director of the National Children's Bureau

Celine McStravick spoke on the realisation of children's rights in early childhood and the 4As framework. The 4As framework for health and education rights sets out the characteristics of a rights respecting infrastructure for universal and inclusive early childhood, care, and education:

- **Available:** Is it there in sufficient quantity to meet need. Is there adequate accommodation and facilities? Are skilled staff paid appropriately?
- **Accessibility:** Is it there for everyone, especially the most vulnerable? Are we operating without discrimination? Is it in a safe location within reach of families, and affordable for all? In the case of preschool education, is it free for all?
- **Acceptability:** Is it relevant and evidence-based? Is it culturally appropriate? Does it enhance awareness and uptake amongst underrepresented and disadvantaged groups? Is it good quality?
- **Adaptability:** One size does not fit all – we need flexible, diverse provision, including home based and community-based options. We also need a focus on play and use of outdoor environments where possible, respecting the cultural and social needs of children and families.

Celine also highlighted that participation is important – making sure the voices of the child, the parent, and the family are heard in developing, delivering, and evaluating childcare. Additionally, an integrated and holistic approach is required, which means looking at taxation and benefits, parental leave, working hours, flexible working policies, housing standards, poverty, school-starting age, SEND reform, parental support and parenting education. Social value and

pay also need to be addressed for those working with young children, including comprehensive strategies to attract, train, and retain a suitable workforce.



Presentation 7:

Lynn Carvill, Chief Executive of WOMEN'STEC

Lynn Carvill emphasised that these changes have been long sought after. She highlighted that women are more likely to leave work on the birth of a child, but particularly, a third child, and that this detrimentally impacts women's earning capacity and income throughout their lives, right through to pension entitlement. Investing in early years provision promotes equality and pays dividends later in life.

Childcare, or early years development work, is often framed as social infrastructure. This is a misconception: childcare is very much an economic issue and framing it in this way will move it up the political agenda. Lynn described that having a government that is bipartisan does create some difficulties and that the constitutional issue in Northern Ireland can take over the agenda.

[WOMEN'STEC](#) provides non-traditional skills training to women and girls, with the aim of building self-confidence and employability skills, moving them into or closer to work. To enable women to access the programmes, onsite childcare is offered. The work has a positive impact on the lives of hundreds of women. However, it may be raising expectations of WOMEN'STEC students to move forward with their lives when the reality is that access to and the cost of childcare presents a critical barrier preventing them from moving on into paid work or further training. There is merit in keeping people close to the labour market, but more could be done if the proper economic infrastructure was in place.

High level apprenticeships in care, recognition of the skills and career progression routes are needed, but support from the government to put all of this in place is essential.

Discussion

Sir David Sterling stated that providing an early years infrastructure should not be politically contentious and should be within Northern Ireland's capacity. Despite the substantial cost, collective commitment to tackle this particular issue could lead to some major transformation in society. Sir David invited all the audience to discuss in groups and feedback one big thought and one question to pose to the panellists.

Participants raised the following thoughts and questions for speakers to reflect on:

- It would be fantastic to be able to try and bring together all of the political parties and all of those who have a focus on policy development, to support understanding around the long-term vision. Links need to be made to the programme for government, the aspiration towards entrepreneurship, creativity, and building society. We need to invest in children and young people who could be those entrepreneurs and innovators in the future.
- There is an oversubscription of schools in Northern Ireland, and it may be helpful to look at the infrastructure that we have and how it can be best used. Given the segregated nature of education in Northern Ireland, we need to be very mindful that we do not continue to segregate – we need to start looking at an integrated model. We need to look at the stock and the people that we currently have, and not put existing services by the wayside.
- One group discussed the concept of education, recognising that children learn all the time. Some distinctions do

not apply when you are talking about very young children who are learning all the time. It is important to create space to think about what different actors mean by 'education'. Helping parents do better in their role as first educators is also important.

- How can we create the momentum behind the radical change we want to see, and how long are we willing to commit to that – 5/10/15 years? We need achievable interim steps to get us on a path to the final goal.
- The Department of Economy this year has launched the [10X Vision](#), a "10 times economy" vision. It is not a strategic target but a vision which includes ideas around childcare and women in the workplace – it involves innovation, strategy and policy. We need to identify those key areas and get the investment right.
- When you have the word 'care' in something in our society, that means low cost. We have got to move forward in our language and our thinking.
- Northern Ireland does not have the power to raise taxes to do what we need to do.
- A key question is "What are the blockages?" Why has this not happened before? What is delaying this approach to a really good, comprehensive, holistic strategy?
- Reflecting on the 4As (availability, accessibility, affordability, adaptability) we asked, "What would the solutions to those look like?". It is important to ask this question rather than wait for the money.
- Northern Ireland is a very small place with not a huge number of people and may be the perfect pilot territory to do something around this. We could do something that is truly world-class.
- "If not now, then when?"
- "The biggest risk is not going too big, it's going too small" – quote from an article about childcare innovation by Kamala Harris.

- We have got a lot of evidence to build on and an opportunity to have a really meaningful strategic insight programme that embraces the co-design process to actually deliver what people need. We do not want to see another generation of children and parents go without the support and infrastructure that we know they need.

Professor Gordon Cleveland responded that the issue of vision is absolutely key. If you have the right vision, you can make an awful lot of progress. That vision is about building the economic and social infrastructure of early childhood education that will support all the people in society and support children and help children develop. Day-to-day progress and the policies you adopt right now are steps towards building that. Childcare costs a lot but it also delivers a lot.

Professor Peter Moss responded that before pursuing the goal of a childcare strategy, it is important to look critically at the existing split system. This is not something that has happened in any of the four constituent nations of the UK. Look at New Zealand, Sweden and Portugal for inspiration and weigh up the options. There are a number of different paths that can be taken when it comes to developing early childhood services. To just carry down the path that the UK is already on, which is rather obsessed with childcare, is not necessarily the right one. In Sweden it has taken about 30 years to move from a split system to a fully integrated public system of early childhood education, providing for nearly all of its children over 12 months. It has taken New Zealand about 25 years to work on major reforms, and they still have a long way to go. Anything worth doing in this field will take time and continuous effort.

Session 2:



Disability Inclusion in the workplace - What it is and why it matters?

Date: 7 September 2021

Chair: Maeve Monaghan, CEO at Now Group & Chair of the Community Foundation Northern Ireland

Speakers:

- Chris Paouros, Strategy Leadership Change and EDI Consultant,
- Matt Stallard, Director in Enterprise Applications at Deloitte
- Sean Hanna, Head of Employment and Training at Now Group
- Roisin Wood, CEO of the Community Foundation

In this conversation with expert panellists from both industry and civil society, we take a look at what does disability inclusion mean in theory and in practice. The Workshop provided the opportunity to consider why disability inclusion matters, who is doing it well and what needs to change to do it better in Northern Ireland.



Presentation 1:

Chris Paouros, Strategy Leadership Change, EDI Consultant and an activist

Chris started the discussion off with a reflection on what we mean by inclusion in general – and why is disability rarely the only issue.

If *diversity* is mix of people with different characteristics (such as gender identity, race or ethnicity, age, faith, as well as many more), then *inclusion* is the culture in which these

characteristics are accepted and valued, a culture in which people feel comfortable to be themselves and work in a way that suits them and their needs.

When this lens is applied to disability, we come to see just how much not only our workplaces, but the world around us is made for non-disabled people. There are two distinct models of disability – the *medical model* according to which people are disabled by their impairments or their differences which should be “fixed”; and the *social model* which says that disability is caused by the way our society is organised.

Inclusive culture is better for business. However, there is still a significant [disability employment gap](#) – in April to June 2020 the employment rate for non-disabled people was 81.7%, the figure dropped to only 53.6% for disabled people. With nearly 15 million of disabled people in the UK. This is despite the many benefits inclusive workplaces offer – evidence proves that organisations focused on building a more inclusive culture attract and retain a wider diversity of talent and an inclusive culture that empowers the talent to think differently and share their experiences and perspectives, which is a key driver for innovation development and engagement.

It also matters because of what we call the '[purple pound](#)', or the spending power of disabled households. Organisations are missing out on the business of disabled consumers due to poor accessibility (both physical and digital) and not being disability confident in their customer services approach.

In 2019, Ted Kennedy, the chair of the American Association for People with Disabilities, identified [4 practices that can help businesses improve their diversity and inclusion](#):

1. Identify and change processes that support unconscious bias. Reflect on your hiring process – does it discourage applicants with disabilities or prevent them from showing their full skillsets? How could you rethink your assessment practices to be more accessible?
2. Help all employees understand the challenges that persons with disabilities face and contribute to solutions. Companies should consider required training for all employees with and without disabilities – especially anyone in a management or supervisory role. The primary goals of this training are to help people better understand and empathise with the challenges their colleagues may face and reduce the stigma of being disabled. Everyone should also know about tools and accommodations that are available to persons with disabilities, so that the burden of figuring out solutions is not solely on the person with the disability.
3. Strengthen the hiring pipeline by engaging with community groups. Persons with disabilities may be reluctant to apply for jobs they don't think they will get, and so their talent and interest remain under the hiring radar. But the fix isn't difficult. Companies can start to build a robust recruitment pipeline in part by engaging with groups that support people with disabilities.
4. Create a mutually supportive community. Training programs and opportunities to connect with other employees will help ensure that persons with disabilities develop and succeed. Mentoring and coaching initiatives are also vital lifelines. Persons with

disabilities who serve in senior positions should strongly consider becoming mentors or champions – both internally and externally.

Presentation 2:

Matt Stallard, Director in Enterprise Applications at Deloitte

Matt showed how to take these principles and turn them into practice in a business environment, through his successful efforts to create a programme around neurodiversity at Deloitte.

How does Deloitte, as a large multinational company, view inclusion? According to Matt, inclusive culture is not just having a person's unique and authentic self valued by the organisation but feeling included in a way where anyone can speak up without the fear of retaliation, and feel empowered to grow without feeling constrained, based on their needs and talents.

In launching the neurodiversity programme, the biggest challenge was lack of awareness. While other aspects of disability and inclusion are often more visible and have more understanding behind them, neurodiversity (autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyscalculia, and others) tends to be misunderstood. People are likely to focus on what neurodiverse people cannot do or struggle to do – and ignore their strengths. While someone with dyslexia might struggle with spelling, they can be some of the most creative people around.

One in seven people across the UK are believed to identify somewhere across the neurodiversity spectrum, and most people who identify with one area tend to identify with another area, too. However, only 16% of adults with autism are in paid employment.

The neurodiversity programme launched about 18 months ago. Matt's team spent a lot of time raising awareness and, importantly, building a safe community for people to come together, for those who identify and have disclosed both privately and publicly. There is now a safe community where people can come together, they can talk, they can share experiences, and they can learn from each other.

Deloitte ran many listening sessions where they managed to create a safe environment and where people were able to just come and talk. Talk about their experiences – the good, but importantly, also the bad. Just listening and trying to understand from their perspective and their point of view.

They now run awareness sessions and have gone to every part of their business and leadership teams and got them engaged in learning and understanding. Having role models on different levels at every grade is extremely important – as is continuous learning and listening.

Matt identified 5 areas of focus:

- 1.** Disclosure and support
How do we make it easy for individuals to disclose if they identify with a neurodiverse feature? How do we support them with the right kind of community, the right access to different tools and technologies that may help, the right kind of support around counselling, if that's also needed as well?
- 2.** Recruitment and resourcing
Many people didn't get through the initial hurdles who would have been fantastic talents because the recruitment processes are wrong and they were geared in a certain way. For this, Deloitte partnered with different businesses, such as [Auticon](#) which helped them with recruitment

around autism. Not every person needs to be extroverted and be able to stand up and present to a client. Not every person needs to be able to do detailed processes and be so diligent over everything. It's about having a complementary team.

- 3.** Operations review
This is around performance management. How are people assessed? How do we take account of some of the different neurodiverse features that they may identify with, and how would that reflect against that capability framework, and how can we best support that? How can we allow those individuals to strive to be really successful and make their way all the way to the top of our tree? Last year, Deloitte promoted a large number of people who have identified with neurodiversity. In previous years, they would not have been able to get anywhere close. Some people have been in a grade for three or four years, and now feel empowered to be able to drive their own career forward and to be their whole self.
- 4.** Communications
It's about the language that we use and how we engage people. There are some people who regard their neurodiversity as a disability and there are some people who don't regard it as a disability – it is just a different way that their brain functions and processes things. Both are valid points of view. It does mean we have to be really careful over all of the communications that we put out and the language that we use around it to make sure that we're not causing upset in any way.
- 5.** Learning and development
This has two aspects to it. What are the right learning programmes for people who identify with neurodivergent features that will be best suited to help with their development? But also how

we, as individuals, can get a better understanding around neurodiversity and then support those individuals who do identify.

What is important to remember is that one size does not fit all. Any adjustments made in the workplace need to be specific to the individual you are aiming to support. Trying to create a blanket set of workplace adjustments will not work. You need to think about how you can help that individual, and what sort of adjustments need to be put in place. Just like when working with a neurotypical person, you would expect to understand their background, their experiences, where some of their challenges are. You need to get to know them as individuals.

In Deloitte, inclusion really is a great benefit for the business – from engineering to testing, to development, to their design studio. By changing practices and processes they have brought in many people who previously would not have got through the first stage of their recruitment process. This in turn helps Deloitte reflect on their own biases and views and promotes continuous learning and development.



Presentation 3:

Sean Hanna, Head of Employment and Training at [Now Group](#)

Sean brought the discussion into a more localised context and introduced the work Now Group does. The main aim of the Now Group is to help people with learning difficulties and autism with training and employability, especially with sustainable, long-term employment through co-design. As he puts it, it is about creating an opportunity.

As Matt mentioned earlier, it is about looking at individual strengths rather than weaknesses. Ultimately, the Now Group wants to support organisations across Northern Ireland to have an inclusive workforce, and by doing so, enhance their business.

What Now Group does is job-matching people. They have participants who need jobs and by looking at labour market intelligence they are able to job-match people where there are opportunities. In addition, the support given to employers is second to none.

They provide in-work training for employers through disability awareness training for all staff. What are employers doing for their corporate social responsibility, how diverse is their workforce, and what positive action they would promote? These are the questions Now Group tries to ask employers. Ultimately, the aim of the organisation is to promote an inclusive environment, society and workforce across the whole island.



Presentation 4:

Roisin Wood, CEO of the [Community Foundation](#)

Roisin further elaborated on the point that diversity and inclusion are simply better for business. If you do not want to do it because it's morally good, do it because it just simply brings you more money in. It retains people for longer periods of time. If you are, as a business, looking at different markets, you want people in those markets working for you. From that point of view, it makes sense in so many different areas. For some people, that is the bottom line.

However, having a diverse team is not always enough. It is the workplace experience that shapes whether people remain or leave.

Roisin was able to give a personal experience as someone who became disabled and had to suddenly manage the expectations of a workplace made for non-disabled people. As she says, she did not disclose her condition at first out of fear that it would be seen as a barrier limiting her skills. However, she was also able to share her experience from the other side, as a CEO and explain how difficult it can be to disclose disability or mental health issues when in a leading position.

Leading by example is crucial and it can help break down some of the taboos that exist, particularly in senior leadership roles about what is 'okay' and what is not, and that a form of disability or health related condition can be seen as a weakness.

When talking about overcoming barriers, Roisin highlighted the importance of allies and role models – but also the importance of empathy. The ability to offer help or understanding makes all the difference. As Roisin said, having an ally can make her not afraid to challenge herself when someone offers her help when she needs it and makes it possible for her to admit when she is struggling.

Something all speakers mentioned and emphasised is the role of *training* within the organisation in understanding inclusion and in helping people overcome the uncertainty of how to support their disabled colleague. People often have good intent but are unsure of the actions they can take to support someone or to create a more inclusive environment – and training is crucial in educating people about what they need to do, what they need to understand.

Finally, as the CEO of the Community Foundation, she reflected on what the aim of the organisation should be. Through engagement with practitioners and participants the foundation should make sure money gets where it needs to be, but it should not be the organisation speaking on behalf of the sector. Instead, it is about **empowering the sector to have its own voice.**

Discussion

Participants raised the following thoughts and questions for speakers to reflect on:

- 1.** Disability is something that can affect any of us at any time. Making the workplace as inclusive as can be does not benefit only people who are currently disabled, but benefits everybody.
- 2.** *How do you create a culture change that people can safely disclose information in?* For this question, the panellists highlighted the importance of role models, especially in higher and leadership positions in building an inclusive work culture. It is a risk to disclose a disability or a mental health issue, it pays off by helping the company be better. **Matt Stallard** added that having a senior sponsor who is authentic and not just ticking a box, that then reverberates through the organisation. Disclosure then becomes much easier for people in different parts of the company. Also, having varied channels for a more discreet disclosure, but also for people to have the opportunity to come out and say publicly "This is me, this is who I am" is another important aspect that ties in with senior sponsors and culture change.

- 3.** *How can we be more proactive and include awareness, understanding, acceptance, and inclusion in our schools amongst our children from a very young age?* If the awareness and the inclusion aspect has been embedded within their school, then it does not become as big a barrier at the other end when they go into work, whether those children have disabilities themselves, or whether they are a child who has come through an inclusive school and has a better understanding and acceptance going into their workplace.

Matt Stallard provided an insight informed by personal experience: The challenge is not the children. Children are very intuitive. They work it out. The challenge is the teachers, and the perceptions that they create. With children, acceptance is already there, because they want to be friends and understand that person.

- 4.** *How do we go about changing the attitudes of employers more broadly?* There does seem to be a number of very good employers who provide access and diversity, but they are in the minority. How do we reach the majority?

Roisin Wood provided a detailed answer to this: Whenever inclusion of any description is passed from pillar to post, who has responsibility for it? It has to be built into everybody's work, because people devolve responsibility, and it puts it onto one person. It is about making it a business imperative in everything that you do, you stop thinking about it less because it just becomes part of your work. You need leadership and you need your board, but you also need it at every other level as well so that it becomes a culture of the organisation, and you have champions at every level in different areas as well.

Session 3:



What does cross-sectoral collaboration look like through a pandemic? What worked, what didn't and learning to build back better

Date: 23 September 2021

Chair: Kerry Anthony, Chief Executive of Inspire

Speakers:

- Moira Doherty, Deputy Secretary for Engaged Communities Group in the Department for Communities
- Lisa McElherron, Group Director of Insight and Engagement at Inspire
- Jim Girvan, Community Worker with Upper Andersonstown Community Forum
- Kate Clifford, Director of the Rural Community Network

The Emergencies Leadership Group (ELG) was established by the Minister for Communities to lead and co-ordinate the voluntary and community sector response to the Covid19 pandemic. Group members came from the voluntary, and community sector, government departments and agencies, and from local government. Working in close proximity on new projects during very uncertain times, ELG members forged partnerships and ways of working that crossed sectoral and departmental boundaries and delivered impressive and impactful results.

Kerry Anthony started the discussion off with a short reflection on her experience of cross-sectoral collaboration during the pandemic.

Presentation 1:

Moira Doherty from the Department for Communities

At the extremely intense and uncertain time of early pandemic, the [Emergencies Leadership Group](#) was formed by the Communities Minister, Deirdre Hargey, with the intention to add government support to community responders who were already hard at work. This group became central to coordinating response to the pandemic and ensuring a wide range of people from the sector is represented in order to reach vulnerable members of the community. The importance of access to food or medication was soon supplemented by focus on wellbeing and mental health.

Centred around the idea of co-design, the ELG was about playing into each other's strengths. For the statutory sector this meant providing funding where it was needed and to act as an assurance for people to not be afraid of resetting targets or making mistakes, as well as creating an enabling space and removing barriers. What was an obstacle for the statutory sector was a lack of knowledge about the situation in general, lack of data and evidence about who would need support, such as shielding people. This is where the importance of trusted community partners became crucial. They were able to provide insight and intelligence

in real time on what was the reality and what would work. Instead of a top-down response, the ELG provided flexibility and fluidity for the team to respond and adjust based on the community's particular needs and infrastructure.

The department is now reflecting on what behaviours and decisions will make most sense from now on, what should be mainstreamed.

- What does a building back fairer agenda look like going forward?
- What is the manifesto for the future according to community partners?

She concluded that the biggest takeaway for her was the importance of relationships and a shared purpose and the ability to respect each other's strengths and understand the constraints faced by each partner.

Presentation 2:

Lisa McElherron, Group Director of Insight and Engagement at Inspire

As a group director of insight engagement and innovation with Inspire Group Lisa McElherron posed the question of what was different about the group that made it work? As she puts it, it was a partnership forged in a fire. The most crucial factor in the success of the cross-sectoral group was the absolute clarity of purpose on all sides. She highlights the Minister's ability to give clear instructions about leading the wellbeing stream. Her work was to be impactful and achievable, have an immediate effect, should not duplicate already existing work – and needed to move very quickly. Not everything was going to be perfect, but if the group waited for perfection, nothing would ever get done. Lisa learned to accept mistakes and come back to them over time. Essentially,

this meant that a year's worth of work was done in only a few short weeks.

She commented on the interesting influence that working in a purely digital sphere over Zoom or Teams had on the work environment and relationships with her co-workers. In this context, the pandemic functioned as a leveller – everyone was working towards a shared goal, and it was irrelevant whether one was a director or working on the ground in a food bank. There was mutual respect for each other, without the constraints of a hierarchy typical for more standard work conditions. The group initially struggled with data collection and information gathering, but over time managed to find help in international organisations such as the Red Cross who have experience with international crises. This allowed the ELG to start planning ahead.

Finally, Lisa reflected on her own experience of leadership. She said that a big part of her role was risk taking – and accepting accountability when she made a mistake. What made this easier was the fact that she was a part of an organisation, which was able to shelter her to some extent. An experience, she stated, likely not shared by other, more community-based speakers, who had a much closer contact with members of their community and were more visible.

Presentation 3:

Jim Girvan from the [Upper Andersonstown Community Forum](#)

Jim Girvan shared with the panel that throughout the whole process, and even now, he has been asking himself whether he is doing enough or doing the right thing – an internal struggle surely shared by many of those engaged in community work not only during the pandemic. As he says, he can only

hope that the actions he has taken were able to alleviate some of the pressure on families and vulnerable members of the community.

Jim highlighted the benefit of collective leadership in the ELG. After the initial panic shortly after its foundation, it became clear how valuable everyone's varied experiences and approaches were. The group members were able to use their different perspectives to deliver relief to those that needed it effectively. ELG then became a great opportunity to talk about co-design and cooperation. As was previously said by other speakers, it was a truly iterative process which needed an agile and adaptive approach. It was necessary to change or add things as they went, while making use of embedded frameworks on which the group was able to build.

What became a real advantage was the knowledge and skills of the community and residents. Vulnerable and hard to reach members of the community were reached quickly and help and support were delivered where it was needed. Within the first couple of weeks, 1400 households were identified by the group in West Belfast that needed support. Of course, there were some issues at the beginning of the pandemic – especially with food supply, which had to be brought from various parts of the country; data sharing with other institutions was also a challenge, which was resolved through a data sharing protocol with the Belfast council as their strategic partner.

This type of a two-way flow of information was an incredibly useful and practical way of ensuring coordination. The functioning of the ELG allowed for maintaining a strategic approach whilst connecting with communities and hearing what those communities were saying. The Upper Andersonstown Community Forum made decisions jointly with the ELG using evidence at hand, working in a way that was based

on co-design and joint leadership. Now, as Jim says, the frameworks of co-design and cross-sectoral collaboration are there, we just need to build on them.

Presentation 4:

Kate Clifford, Director of the [Rural Community Network](#)

Reflecting on the initial chaos of the pandemic, she stated that what really made a difference was localism. People working in the community, on the ground, immediately knew who was vulnerable and who needed support and help. People capitalised on what they knew and what they had at their disposal. While community venues were closed to the public, they could function as distribution centres or places to organise support, community helplines and online groups popped up, local shops were able to coordinate with community organisations and deliver food – and people made use of that. It was this strong infrastructure of community organisations who stepped up and mobilised response more easily because they had a deep understanding of their community.

There was a sense of shared responsibility and accountability to each other. What was important was the ability to take risks and give each other permission to take risks too, despite the ever-present possibility of failing. Trying something and not succeeding was a better option than not trying at all. Community organisations were able to take these risks because they had the backing of other organisations who were in the same situation. Overall, there was very strong communication and coordination between community organisations based on local knowledge.

This was then communicated back to the Emergencies Leadership Group, which was quite a new concept to the Rural Communities Network (RCN). The RCN was, however, able to bring real and factual case studies to the table and work jointly on solving problems in the rural context. For example, while there are equal numbers of older people or people with disabilities in rural and urban areas, those living in rural areas tend to be harder to reach and have less access to services, which was only exacerbated by the pandemic.

Kate also highlighted the role of communication as a key element in the groups' success, as well as the cooperation with the Red Cross, who were eager to help rural communities, the RCN was able to facilitate. Meetings with the Red Cross then became as important as meetings with the ELG, and the ability to communicate across sectors was vital. Kate was able to facilitate a two-way flow of information between the state sector and community groups, as well as communication with trusted partners such as the [Holywell Trust](#) or various community actors and individuals.

What does she feel did not work as well? Primarily the conflicting rules and measures in border regions, especially with travel restrictions. This made community response in these regions very difficult – the UK and Ireland did not have an aligned policy, which meant that border regions ended up being neglected by both sides. What soon became a problem was the fact that many of the community actors were in fact older and shielding, thus leaving areas with no response. The RCN had to find alternative groups to apply for funding available in order to distribute help. Finally, they had to account for new groups needing support, such as self-employed or casual workers who suddenly lost income. While the RCN would not normally engage these groups, they became a new target audience.

To finish off, Kate summed up some of the key learning points.

- The sector needs support and funding. It has been operating on very limited funding for years and is exhausted with no succession planning.
- It is essential for Northern Ireland to have a strong third sector. But there is a lack of employment opportunities and lack of people willing to step into leadership roles beyond volunteering.
- There is inequality within the community and voluntary sector. While there are opportunities in urban areas for community support, this is not the case for rural areas.
- It is necessary to future-proof the sector. It is necessary to examine what the training and education needs are in the sector and to provide long-term training opportunities to prepare for any future crises.

Discussion

Participants raised the following thoughts and questions for speakers to reflect on:

- *As we move towards a new normal, how do we move towards a model of true co-design in policy? What could have community responders done differently?*

To begin with, Moira Doherty asked a question of her own: what does co-design mean? There are different ideas about what it means in theory and in practice – but the ELG did not have the time to develop toolkits or frameworks. Instead, thanks to a very strong shared purpose and clear idea of expectations, as well as their own and others' strengths and constraints, the group was able to focus on outcomes. The problem now is that without that strong sense of purpose, co-design might not come as easy as it did during the pandemic,

especially for the statutory sector. The ELG group members have a certain idea of how it should work and when it works well – but now co-design needs to become the standard of how things should work, with more thought and planning behind it. Co-design is now thought to be the ideal of how things should work, but it will not become the norm overnight.

According to Lisa McElherron, it would be naïve of the sector to imagine that the model of co-working will be immediately perfected and that all the hard work has to be done by the statutory sector. While community development practice is embedded in the organisations, co-design requires being able to understand the priorities and limitations of the other side (statutory and third sector).

Co-design is the best way to be informed, added Kate Clifford, and needs to have a two-way flow of information. It is also important to bring the information to the community membership. Finally, it would be a bad idea to let things that are not co-design be called co-design – practitioners need to call out when it is not true co-design.

- *Did you learn anything about how the Northern Irish civil service collaborated during the pandemic and will this be explored going forward to reduce inefficiencies or to enhance other areas of working together?*

As the statutory representative, Moira Doherty answered that there was an amazing collaboration with the Department of Health. It really showed the importance of close collaboration and relationships, including brilliant but initially unexpected collaborations such as with the Forestry Service. A big lesson for the sector is a question of how can we strip away some of the barriers between civil service and civil society? She highlighted the role of trust. There was initially a doubt about whether community volunteers would be able to do in Northern Ireland what the army did in England – which was quickly dispersed by the dedication of volunteers and community actors in practice. She concluded with a reflection on the term “hard to reach” which is often applied to individuals and communities. The pandemic had shown that the community sector knew how to reach those groups – those of us in the statutory sector need to learn from this.

- *Going forward, how do we bring the voice of the community into the fore?*

This question was answered by Kate Clifford with a simple answer: communication. There is a very good voluntary sector, but we do not always provide space for people to come together via reflective practice and learn together and reflect. Sharing of ideas is something she would like to take forward: how do we become more generous and intentional in networking? How do we create and use that collective voice?

Session 4:

What does the best in government policy look like? Sharing successes, failures and lessons learnt

Date: 27 September 2021

Chair: Sir John Elvidge, Chair of Carnegie UK Trust

Speakers:

- Sir David Sterling, Chair of Chief Executives' Forum
- Denis McMahon, Permanent Secretary in the Executive Office
- Alice Charles, Lead, Cities, Infrastructure & Urban Services at World Economic Forum
- Dawn Baxendale, CEO of Christchurch Council, NZ
- Ciaran Martin, Professor of Practice in the Management of Public Organisations at Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford
- Pétur Berg Matthíasson, Director General for Iceland
- Ann Watt, Director at Pivotal
- Suzanne Wylie, Chief Executive of Belfast City Council
- Jennie Barugh, Director for Performance and Strategic Outcomes in the Scottish Government

This workshop, chaired by Sir John Elvidge, aimed to explore what the best in government policy design looks like when seeking to facilitate better decision making. It sought to answer the question: How can government do wellbeing better?

Presentation 1:

Alice Charles, Lead, Cities, Infrastructure & Urban Services at World Economic Forum

What governments in your view deliver wellbeing best, and how could the UK and Northern Ireland do better?

What does a good functioning government look like? Firstly, it is the ability of government to engage with multiple stakeholders. Whether that's the private sector to be aware of the latest innovation and technology that can scale, or working with leading academic institutions to understand what the latest research is, or working with civil society groups to really get an understanding of what is affecting citizens. The best governments tend to work with multiple stakeholders.

High functioning governments also tend to develop a lifecycle approach rather than focus on piecemeal interventions. They seek to deliver the solutions that are most sustainable in the longer term, rather than just focusing on the short term quick fix solutions or those that present the lowest capital cost without understanding the operational cost over the lifecycle of the asset.

Thirdly, having clear policies that are built across political parties. If you want a stable, long-term vision, that means working beyond

one political administration, and thinking about how a vision can be realised over time. There is nothing that frustrates investors more than the vision changing with each political administration. Investors want to be reassured that there is political stability and maturity to invest.

It also means having an appropriate legal and regulatory framework in place. From a multilevel governance point of view, this means being prepared to empower city-level governments and city leaders who are nearest to the citizens and are better able to deliver solutions on the ground. If you empower city level government, you're going to have a more functioning government.

The best of government also has strong institutions that can function and that can be built on to overcome your weaknesses. For example, one of the weaknesses that we would see consistently in government would generally be in terms of capacity. By this she means that the government often does not have the resources with the skills and experience and indeed digital technology and systems to enable them to deliver change.

Finally, the best governments are transparent and not only have strong policies to eradicate corruption but also have mechanisms in place to resolve disputes and bring parties with them.

What does this look like in practice? Some examples....

The Canadian Smart Cities Challenge

The Canadian "[Smart Cities Challenge](#)" was about reinventing cities in Canada to ensure that they could address climate issues, inclusion, social issues and provide the enabling technology to ensure they were future proof. The Ministry of Infrastructure and Communities decided that they needed to work with all levels of government: from

village level to city level, to try and ensure that they work with their citizens on the ground to create a vision for what their future city, town or village would look like. This involved engaging all levels of local government to ensure a vision was created for the future of those urban environments.

The Ministry also worked with its Ministry for Finance to unlock funds for these projects. The most difficult projects to implement in any city are often social and community-related infrastructure related to wellbeing. They worked with the Ministry for Finance to unlock the appropriate funding and set up an infrastructure bank. That gave another option in terms of financing change within cities, villages, and towns across Canada. It is a strong example of multi-level governance functioning well.

Addressing wellbeing in Melbourne, Australia

Melbourne is a city that is consistently rated as one of the most liveable in the world. What has made it liveable is that it has addressed these chronic issues that the city faces. Taking affordable housing as an example, local government in Melbourne have been prudent and smart about how they gather data on the affordable housing challenge. They considered, for example, [the level of empty houses in the city by analysing water usage](#). They were then able to bring in appropriate taxation.

Melbourne also has a large [grey-to-green strategy](#) facing challenges like air pollution and increasing temperatures as a result of climate change by creating strategies to get citizens to think about how these issues could be addressed. The grey-to-green strategy encompasses transforming roads into green space for example. They measure success through indicators such as a reduction of tarmac and an increase in green space. In that sense, they're also providing additional green and community facilities

across the city to meet the needs of their population, while also addressing climate change.

They also have the [20-Minute Neighbourhood](#) concept, where they provide the facilities that people need to live, work and play, within 20 minutes of where they live. More recently, this has been harnessed by the city of [Paris with the 15-Minute City](#) concept.

Liveable Cities: Geneva & Zurich, Switzerland

Despite being some of the most expensive cities in the world, Geneva and Zurich are liveable cities. What makes them liveable is the focus of the government on providing infrastructure. They also have a very democratic system. There are frequent referendums, for example most recently on marriage equality. They give the public the opportunity to advise the administration of what they want, so it's a very democratic society in that regard.

Any government has the opportunity to transform. What is really needed in Northern Ireland is firstly, a government that looks outward in terms of getting best international practice and solutions; and secondly, a government that's prepared to work with all levels of government to try and bring change on the ground; to work collaboratively across parties.



Presentation 2:

Dawn Baxendale, CEO of Christchurch Council in New Zealand

The New Zealand government recognised that things were not changing, and that in reality, that shift for all New Zealanders, and in particular people who were in the most deprived communities, just wasn't moving.

New Zealand is first and foremost, a bi-cultural nation. There are agreements between the crown and Iwi Māori that are set in statute, particularly over treaty settlements from the 1990s onwards. There is a national bi-cultural view set within the context of local communities that are very diverse and culturally multi-ethnic.

One of the fundamental differences is that the New Zealand Treasury has been developing the [Living Standards Framework](#) since 2011. It built on OECD evidence, and it fundamentally looks not just at the 'now' position for New Zealanders, but very much around the intergenerational impact over many decades. The Treasury has bought into the system and is able to negotiate with government departments in a very different way. That Living Standards Framework has evolved over that period and is continuously reviewed.

The NZ Government focus on the following capitals: natural, social, human, financial and practical. There are 12 wellbeing elements. They include the issues you would expect to see, such as environmental, health, housing, jobs and income. But civic engagement and governance, cultural identity, social connectedness, time use, and subjective wellbeing are also high up on the agenda. They take a long-term view, and the national budget process also considers wellbeing.

There are over 70 local authorities in New Zealand with a sense of connectedness of communities to their local government. There is a real sense of ownership and engagement at a local level.

However, the relationship between central government and local government is still quite immature. At a local level, the wellbeing focus has been in and out of legislation. It is currently in local government's legislation but has been removed in the past.

The understanding of what local government is and does is not well-known in central government, though that has changed since COVID-19 when local authorities were able to step into the forum because of their deep relationships within the communities.

The advantages of taking a wellbeing approach are fundamentally around how our communities are, how our families and individuals are, and how their long-term position in their life and in their families continue to benefit. The three main points to highlight are:

- 1.** Returning the Treasury, it is clear that if you really want to get anything done, you need the Treasury on side. The Treasury absolutely is in that space here in New Zealand and continues to evolve.
- 2.** At a local authority level, in New Zealand they create a 'long-term plan' which spans 10 years. It's not a short-term approach to budgeting, it's a very long-term view, and communities are engaged over that 10 year period. There is a real sense of ownership.
- 3.** The third element is around the resilience of individuals, of families, of communities, and of place. That's particularly important here in New Zealand, and I would say even more so for Christchurch. This country has volcanoes, earthquakes and significant flooding on a fairly regular basis, but communities are incredibly active and step up in every single crisis.

The lesson is grasping the opportunity and building relationships between local and central government.

Presentation 3:

Ciaran Martin, Professor of Practice in the Management of Public Organisations at Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford

Ciaran was asked whether the British government and the devolved governments are serious about wellbeing and levelling up agendas. From his perspective, the levelling up agenda features much more prominently in the current UK government rhetoric than the wellbeing agenda. However, levelling up seems to be a driving passion.

When reflecting on the levelling up agenda, it tends to be a much more complex task than other government interventions which in the past would be solutions to a very specific problem. In Ciaran's experience as a cybersecurity expert, they were able to say "*what should we do? There are structural problems with the regulation of the internet that reduces our defences – we can do something about that*". However, when you ask the government to rebalance an economy with different economic and social factors that this task involves, the system finds it difficult.

He identified two main problems in carrying out levelling up agendas. The first obstacle is the way the government is planning to do this – as he says, It is quite interventionist and involves money which puts public finances under greater pressure. The second obstacle is distractions, from the crisis in Afghanistan to the looming threat of a major cost of living crisis.

Ciaran fears that the government's levelling up plan is built on the example of England, where local government is rather weak, and resources are centralised. Here, the government is able to ask for detailed plans and distribute funds based on these.

However, this might prove problematic in other areas. He fears that in other devolved administrations only large cities will be empowered, leaving more rural areas out of the levelling up agendas and exacerbating inequalities between urban and rural regions.

He sums up that while the levelling up agenda is a serious one, it is fraught with difficulty, and there are some really interesting, and in his view, tricky, constitutional challenges in the way.



Presentation 4:

Pétur Berg Matthiasson, Director General for Iceland, Iceland's journey towards a shorter working week

Iceland's journey towards a shorter working week has been a process that has taken several years. It is an integral part of enhancing the wellbeing of employees working both in the public sector and the private sector.

From the offset, it was considered as a partnership between employers and the employees which started almost 10 years ago. Critically, though the initiative shortens the work week, the aim was also to make certain strategic and structural changes in the workplace which would keep productivity at the same level. The approach was not to just shorten the week, the idea is to get more out of the people within the hours that they are at work.

Following several trials, the main benefits which were identified were:

- Less stress and more energy
- Community improvements – caring for others and for health
- More time with family and pursuing hobbies

- Happier staff = better work
- Higher efficiency in operations
- Mutual flexibility
- Increased living standards

While there are more lessons to be learned from Iceland's example, Pétur's presentation shows a great case study of a way in which wellbeing can be enhanced by government policy.



Presentation 5:

Ann Watt, Director at Pivotal

Making good policy decisions is underpinned by having effective government in place. If we want good policy choices that lead to better outcomes and improved wellbeing, we need a properly functioning government which tracks progress towards its goals.¹

In Northern Ireland, a lack of long-term policymaking, a tendency to avoid difficult choices, and an absence of common purpose across the Northern Ireland Executive have stood in the way of progress.

To address challenges such as these, we need a government that functions properly together, rather than one characterised by instability and strained relationships. There are some positive examples at present, such as increased focus on climate change, with two bills currently going through the Assembly.

What should the Northern Ireland Executive do differently?

1. The Executive must agree on a Programme for Government. For this to be effective, it will mean Executive ministers working together towards joint

1 Pivotal, 2021. Good Government in Northern Ireland - Pivotal Public Policy Forum (pivotalppf.org)

priorities, not just operating as individual departments.

2. The Programme should be supported by multi-year budgets, giving departments and the Executive time to plan for investment and reform.
3. The Executive must prioritise working together on Northern Ireland's long-term social and economic challenges, like the need for public sector reform, particularly in health, but also right across public services. Low skills, low pay, climate change, and other issues.

We need far more focus and priority putting on Northern Ireland on track for the future.

Presentation 6:

Suzanne Wylie, Chief Executive of Belfast City Council

Belfast City Council is a democratic organisation and has more parties than the Northern Ireland Executive. It requires consensus politics to get big policy and investment decisions across the line.

Since Local Government Reform and the RPA (Review of Public Administration) Belfast City Council has really stepped up, looking at all the opportunities that exist at a place-based level, all of the issues and problems that also have to be addressed, to think about the longer-term.

They became the community planning authority, very similar to the legislation that exists in Scotland, for local government. This gave the Council the power to convene with all of the stakeholders in the city, along with our central government colleagues, and start to plan for the future. A long-term approach is critical to both addressing challenges and building opportunities.



Case Study: The Belfast Agenda & Belfast Conversation

The Belfast Agenda is a 20–35-year plan that was signed by all of the political parties across Council. It was unique in that we had a Belfast conversation right across the city involving local communities, local stakeholders, and delivery partners.

The targets in the agenda are like a micro programme for government, at a local level, with outcomes and an ambition. It has targets and is broken down into a four-year plan. [The City Deal](#) is a good example of how the system actually works against that kind of local delivery.

Progress on delivering the City Deal, with buy in from all involved has taken a long time. It demonstrates that we do need to become much more agile. Seriously addressing wellbeing issues requires a more streamlined way of working and increased trust based on a mutual and mature relationship. Furthermore, we also need a more sophisticated understanding about how we consider 'place' and the local economic footprints, which are multifaceted.

Participants may be interested to read our recent report, which considers the work of Belfast City Council towards the wellbeing agenda and provides some international perspectives². It highlights that we need to focus on climate, our citizens and our children and young people. We can do that at a UK level, at an all-Ireland level, at an Executive level, but very much at a city level as well.

What needs to change? We need trusted relationships and systemic change to the system as well as change to our joint

2 Belfast City Council, 2021. Its Time to Press the Reset Button. Available at: <https://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/News/Global-and-local-experts-say-it-s-time-to-press-the-reset-button>

aspirations. We need to be more innovative in how we use our collective resources, which also changes accountability. We need to have a better risk appetite and to look more often at good practice. There is a lot of available information and data available. We need to start to implement this change and look at the long-term.



Presentation 7:

Denis McMahon, Permanent Secretary in the Executive Office

The Executive's aim is to improve wellbeing for all. The [outcomes framework](#) – which was opened to consultation in 2021 – is important to consider in this respect. Government, political leaders, and wider society have clearly begun to adopt some of the ideas on wellbeing that have been coming forward through Carnegie UK, specifically:

There has been widespread engagement on the outcomes framework, including 27 online events, 600 people, 450 organisations. There were 423 responses to the consultation and 23 responses to the Children and Young People's consultation.

The Executive has greater understanding about joined up working as a result of the emergency COVID-19 response which showed the interconnectedness of society as the pandemic progressed. This now needs to be embedded within the NICS culture.

New ways of working – Northern Ireland needs to understand its place in the world and look outwards.

We can work together when we can, when we want to, and when we need to. That has happened during COVID, and it must happen again.

Discussion

Participants raised the following thoughts and questions for speakers to reflect on:

- There is certainly a strong sense about the centralization-decentralisation agenda. The question that arises on this is, *“How can trust be built up across all sectors so that there is better, more effective collaboration between central government, local government, and other sectors, particularly the third sector?”*

According to **Denis**, what needs to happen is building trust and communication. Listening to our Executive leaders and really understanding what we are trying to do. Our colleagues from wider civic society must reflect back what they want to see, encouraging the things that are working, as well as critiquing and challenging the things that are not.

From **Dawn's** perspective, it is important for the third sector to be proactive and not wait to be asked to participate.

- How do we change culture, how we change embedded practices. Have you any sort of thoughts on how leaders go about that or need to go about that?

In **Dawn's** experience, the underlying philosophy is creating a win-win conversation. It is about going in from a strengths-based approach that looks at that from the perspective of what the system is like, what is happening, and where the gaps are – and how I can bring my skills, my organization's skills, my politician's skills, my community's skills, to enable the government to deliver its agenda at the same time as meeting our own.

Suzanne provided her perspective of local government and stated that including other stakeholders is often a challenge. She says it is a leadership issue because you have to challenge the system. You have to think about where the barriers and the blockages are in the system. While having a high number of stakeholders adds difficulty to the process, it also makes the end result better. Being accepting of input, even critical one, is not comfortable, but it is enlightening.

According to **Ann** one thing that would help would be more interchange between the NICS, local government, third sector, and business. There should be a culture of spending part of your career in a sector, but then going out maybe for a few years, getting experience somewhere else, and bringing that experience with contacts and networks back.

Sir John remembered a phrase that he thinks encapsulates the obligation on leaders who talk about cultural change: "what you permit, you promote". He added that culture change is real when it feels most uncomfortable for the most senior people in the organisations as they need to step out of their comfort zone the most.

Denis noted that culture change needs to happen. If we are serious about outcome-based approaches, we need to tightly define the outcome and how we achieve it. For the Treasury, the first requirement is value for money. If you can establish a programme which would be really good value for money or have people in the real world who know how to get things done, then there is a chance to actually make things move more quickly when resources become available.

Jennie Barugh (Scottish Government) asked about the relationships between the different entities and in what ways accountabilities were helping or hindering the focus on improving outcomes. Her second point was on COVID recovery versus long-term policy goals – the importance of avoiding competition and rather achieving an alignment of the short term actions with the longer term goals.

Suzanne responded that if local government or a third sector partner is delivering on behalf of central government, the accountability framework around that in terms of spend is really onerous, and it does not necessarily need to be like that. It drives a focus on not on the outcomes, but on the process – and we should be getting away from that. She thinks that the answer is that we should find a framework for collective accountability, and we should look at best practice in other areas and try to adopt that, and also learning if things have not gone right in those other areas.

Sir John concluded the discussion with a quote he thinks is important to remember: **"It is easier to ask for forgiveness than for permission"**. We often hide behind apparent constraints and say that we do not have permission to do something that is clearly the right thing. Actually, we need to be brave and take the risk.

Session 5:

Net Zero in Northern Ireland: what do we need to do, how quickly can we get there and will it be enough?

Date: 8 October 2021

Chair: Sir David Sterling, Chair of Chief Executives' Forum

Panel:

- Terry A'Hearn, Chief Executive of the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency
- John Gilliland, Director of Global Agriculture and Sustainability at Devenish Nutrition
- Dr. Annika Clements, Director of Nature, Climate, and Environment at Ulster Wildlife
- Kirsty McManus, National Director at the Institute of Directors
- Colin Breen, Director of Environmental Policy Division at DAERA

The Northern Ireland Assembly declared a climate emergency on February 3rd 2020, in recognition of the urgent and transformative change needed to stop human-induced global warming causing irreversible environmental damage.

The chair asked each panellist to set out what needs to change in NI, and what their leadership role and responsibility is as leaders working across the public, private, and third sector to help address climate change?

Presentation 1:

Terry A'Hearn, Chief Executive of the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency

Terry A'Hearn started by calling for fundamental changes in mindsets. He compared the scale of the seismic shift needed to the change from using typewriters to smartphones and acknowledged that innovation also involves risk.

As well as bold, courageous and innovative actions being needed, Terry acknowledged the need for cooperation to help tackle the climate emergency. As climate change is a systemic issue, we cannot create solutions without all the people on the system cooperating.

Terry gave a practical example of [Prosperity Agreements](#). He spoke about an occasion when he worked at the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, and large supermarkets were looking to shift all of their chicken sourcing to within the UK. Northern Ireland has the biggest poultry producer in the UK, but was already over the nitrates limit. The Agency suggested that a cement factory in Northern Ireland tested taking chicken waste as an alternative fuel source, to reduce the waste problem in one part of the system and help reduce greenhouse gases at the cement factory. The regulator could bring two companies together who would never have met otherwise.

He also gave the example of the whisky industry in Scotland – an important, iconic industry. There is a huge energy use in producing whisky, and in exporting it (about 90% of whisky produced in Scotland is exported). While the industry is extremely compliant with environmental laws, they are being encouraged to innovate and take risks. For example working with bottle manufacturers to make the bottles lighter weight, encouraging barley growers and distillers to speak to work out how to be more water efficient.

Terry finished by calling for a change in the mindset that pits environmental regulation against the business community, and to create new partnerships that are genuine about radical change, “not just coming up with a joint document or a few initiatives that do some nice things.”

Upon being asked what the government needs to do to create an environment in which mindsets change across the community. Terry suggested that no minister should be able to bring a proposal to the cabinet unless it would benefit at least two other portfolio core objectives, therefore encouraging co-creation. For example, an Environment Bill in Northern Ireland would need to help create health, education, or economic benefits before it would be put on the agenda. This would fundamentally change the way the government works.



Presentation 2:

John Gilliland, Director of Global Agriculture and Sustainability at Devenish Nutrition

John Gilliland talked about the role of the farming and food sector in Northern Ireland in creating a sustainable future. He defined sustainability as where we are meeting our own needs today without compromising the

ability of future generations to meet their needs. To achieve sustainable farming, John said that there is a need to understand and focus on systems-based solutions, delivering multiple goods, not just single agendas.

Sustainable Farming – Delivering Multiple Goods:

- Producing nutritious food and tackling malnutrition
- Delivering soil improvement – both fertility and health
- Accelerating carbon sequestration, both above and below ground
- Improving water quality by reducing over land flow
- Optimising biodiversity, understanding trade-offs
- Managing our landscape heritage

He spoke first about the poor soil health in Northern Ireland and asked about how the existing tools on the carbon agenda can be used to speed up sequestering of carbon in soil, trees, and hedges. He then outlined how decisions around sequestration involve careful management and balances – in the sector, they have to deliver multiple public goods. What they need are regulations and policies to help them do that. Instead of focusing on 'silver bullets', solutions that offer multiple wins should be prioritised.

For the farming and food sectors, John advocated for measurement of carbon emissions to be benchmarked on 'net' rather than 'gross' emissions. Reporting on what the sector could do if it took mitigating actions simultaneously to accelerate the route to net zero would get real farmer buy-in to positive change.

“Baselines are fundamental. How can you measure if the sector is changing its behaviour if you do not know where they started from?”

John also spoke about the digital technologies used by the sector, such as LiDAR surveys which use an airborne laser to scan the ground below and produce a highly detailed image of the ground surface.³ Using LiDAR will pick up change in the natural capital better, allowing farms to measure change in their above ground biomass. John also emphasised the importance of having baseline this data to measure change from.

John moved on to speak about the livestock industry and making changes to what these animals graze on. While the monoculture of perennial ryegrass is the norm across Ireland and much of Scotland, a European trial with Wageningen University and Research and University College Dublin showed the following results from switching to multispecies land coverage in one year using SRUC's [Agrecalc](#) calculator:

- Greenhouse gas intensity per kilo beef and lamb reduced by 26% in one year.
- A 65% reduction in nitrogen
- A 20% improvement in annual daily live weight gain
- A 300% increase in earthworms
- 14 times faster water infiltration into the soil.

That is delivering multiple wins, including enhancing profits for farmers as well as dramatically reducing greenhouse gas emissions intensity per kg of meat.

In terms of carbon sequestration, John stated that a knowledge gap exists, but that it is necessary to have it as part of the toolbox to create a sustainable future for farming. An EIP Innovation Grant allowed John and six other farmers to run [ARCZero](#), a programme taking seven farms in Northern

Ireland and accelerating them to net zero, both by reducing greenhouse gases and by increasing sequestration. By measuring carbon in the soil in various parts of the same farm, the farmers were able to look at the potential for changing how the land is used and managed.

What they discovered pointed to the importance of integrating livestock – grass-covered areas had the highest soil carbon sequestration where animals were able to graze on the grass compared to areas where the grass was cut. At the same time, deciduous woodlands proved best for carbon sequestration. Therefore, practices like silvopasture which combines agroforestry and livestock, are the best of both worlds if done correctly.

This survey allowed the team to look at the potential of land management. For example, one farmer would be able to store another 5,000 tons of carbon by changing his land use. Examples like this demonstrate how a systems-based approach can deliver multiple wins.

John expressed frustration that the role of the innovation pipeline is ignored in the public conversation about mitigating greenhouse gasses (GHGs). According to [CSIRO](#), there are many ways to innovate how GHGs are mitigated, such as using energy capture, biochar charcoal, or vaccines. However, according to John, what really stands out to him are solutions centred around the tropical *Leucaena* tree, which fixates nitrogen and when animals graze the leaves, and algae. Both have great methane-reducing potential with algae reaching 60-90% methane reduction in trials.

3 <https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/services/woodland-heritage/woodland-heritage-light-detection-and-ranging-lidar-surveys/lidar-surveying-and-mapping-historic-environment/>

John finished by talking about the need to tackle climate change and improve human health, and how this can be done simultaneously. Currently, when looking at the GHG footprint of certain foods, meat and dairy have a large footprint in comparison to fruit, but there is no indication of the human health benefits of these foods. Finding a new metric to measure both the environmental footprint and nutritional value of food would allow for a more well-rounded idea of a food's impact.

John cited the research from *Drewnowski et al*, who have created a basket of the 15 key micronutrients needed for a healthy life. They then compare the nutrient density of this basket of 15 key micronutrients against their greenhouse gas footprint. Plant-based foods have low greenhouse gas emissions, however without a sophisticated balance of plant-based food, there is not the same nutrient density and diversity without some ruminant or livestock products.

As a research company, [Devenish's](#) agenda is to do two things. One is to take the livestock production system and lower its footprint. The second is to make livestock production more nutritiously diverse and dense to aid a balanced diet for healthy human life while delivering environmental goods at the same time.

John was asked what he thinks the government should be doing to change the narrative around the impact of farming. He spoke about the need for behavioural change and cultural shifts, but that this needs is to involve farmer engagement rather than 'talking at farmers.' If we empower farmers with good quality information, and educate them, they change their behaviour positively.

Presentation 3:

Annika Clements, Director of Nature, Climate, and Environment at Ulster Wildlife

Annika started by outlining why the Paris Agreement is important. By trying to limit global warming to a maximum of two degrees (ideally to 1.5 degrees), we are trying to prevent a crisis where the Earth becomes inhospitable.

Annika explained the global situation in May 2021 and where we need it to be to keep global warming below 2 degrees. Current policies would lead to warming of around 3° C, while the optimistic targets being pledged currently might get the globe to two degrees. However, there is a long way to go to remain safely in that zone.

She went on to talk about [Fair Share](#), where developed nations step up to support others, including less developed countries, to make adequate changes in order to meet the two degree target. She stressed the interconnected nature of the situation – if some are able to do something locally, but others are not, then we still face a crisis. Those that can do more, should do more.

Annika showed results from the most recent climate change risk assessment, with two scenarios for the 2050s and the 2080s. One scenario is at two degrees or below, and the other is nearer the three-degree mark.

The best case-scenario for 2080 projects:

- an annual temperature rise in Northern Ireland of 1.2 degrees,
- a 10% decrease in summer rainfall, with long periods of drought,
- an increase in winter rainfall of 7% and
- very significantly, a sea level rise in Belfast of 27 centimetres.

At the extremes, the percentage increase of very heavy rainfall is alarming.

Climate change poses specific problems for nature, such as flooding, wildfires, erosion and ocean acidification, which will have a big effect on different food webs connected to the sea.

Although Northern Ireland has only 3% of the UK population, it emits 4% of the UK's greenhouse gas emissions, so per capita emissions are actually higher than any other part of the UK. There have been reductions of 18% compared to 1990, but there have been no significant emission reductions since 2014.

Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK where the land use sector acts as a net emitter.

This is partly through conversion of grassland to settlements, but it is also due to the degradation of peatlands. Degraded peat in Northern Ireland accounts for 6.5% of greenhouse gas emissions in the region, and peatlands make up 18% of the land. This is a huge opportunity. If we can deal with the degraded peatlands, we can deal with a lot of our emissions.

“Healthy peatlands capture CO₂ from the atmosphere through photosynthesis. Because the plants that grow on peatlands do not fully decompose under wet conditions, they do not release carbon which would otherwise be returned to the atmosphere as CO₂.” – [UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology](#)

Annika presented **nature-based solutions**, and how they can have positive actions for climate change. According to the recent [Nature-based Solutions In UK Climate Adaptation Policy](#) report, nature-based solutions can lock away carbon or reduce

emissions, as well as helping to adapt through minimising flood risk or heatwave risk.

These solutions can either reduce emissions or positively impact air quality or reduce flood risk. Some of these areas are well-researched, such as peatlands or forestry, while others are only just getting into the fore and gaining more attention in research – this applies especially to coastal and marine nature-based solutions (blue coloured in the above table). However, it is important to remember that nature-based solutions do not happen overnight – they need investment soon in order to maximise the benefits in 30 to 40 years in the future when the systems are working best following speedy restoration in the present.

She finished by speaking about the importance of having as much diversity as possible to ensure resilience. **Nature recovery networks** are a way to tackle both the biodiversity crisis and the climate crisis. It looks at smarter ways of managing land and habitats to make the most of the potential that nature has to tackle climate change. She also pointed out that urban environments, as well as rural environments, can provide a big opportunity to make a difference through nature-based solutions, as well as rural environments.

 **Presentation 4:**

Kirsty McManus, National Director at the Institute of Directors

Kirsty McManus talked about the role of the business community in addressing climate change, and how the private sector can shift towards a greener future.

She spoke about how to engage the SME and micro-SME economy in the debate, particularly in the challenging

environment caused by COVID and Brexit. She is encouraging these businesses to see sustainability as more than a trend, with customers expecting businesses to take actions. She cited recent surveys showing that 88% of consumers want brands to help them to be more sustainable. She also identified opportunities for reducing costs, taking advantage of new product development and innovation.

The IOD is aiming to increase climate and sustainability literacy within its membership, directors and boards, and encouraging businesses to engage in the debate. They have a green energy forum, professional development courses around responding to the climate change emergency and are encouraging businesses to consider how prioritising sustainability can help them to attract and retain talent – 66% of millennials said they would not work for a company that does not prioritise sustainability.

Similarly, businesses found that focusing on sustainability and net zero journey actually allows them to save money, innovate, and strengthen relationships with suppliers and stakeholders. The private sector will be important in the journey to achieving net zero and decarbonising the economy. There are now great funding opportunities and in Northern Ireland, it is imperative that businesses have access to this funding.

She finished by identifying the opportunities for businesses – by companies saving energy and material costs, that can create new relationships with their customers, enhance their reputation. And better attract and retain talent, all as a consequence of working to reduce their emissions. Climate change is the burning platform for the greatest era of innovation.

Presentation54:

Colin Breen, Director of Environmental Policy Division at DAERA

Colin was asked what DAERA (the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs) is intending to do, both through the Climate Bill and more generally, to lead actions in tackling the climate crisis.

Colin began by outlining the rationale for the targets within the Climate Change Bill, which are at least 82% emissions reductions by 2050. The advice and evidence DAERA has given to date states that NI cannot credibly set net zero by 2050 at this moment in time. Therefore, by using the analysis of what is realistically achievable, the target bar has been set at the current level – a stretch, but a credible achievement to aim for, and then progress, review and update regularly.

He spoke of the importance of ensuring targets are realistic to get maximum buy-in. Unachievable targets can demotivate people, and lead to a feeling of it being pointless to try to reach them.

In achieving at least an 82% reduction in emissions, all sectors and all departments will be required to make radical changes, take unprecedented actions and take calculated and managed risks. Northern Ireland has some issues to address to help reduce emissions, with a greater reliance on oil heating in NI, with more dispersed rural communities there are impacts, such as how people move around the country and transport and NI has more limited capabilities to use engineered greenhouse gas removal technologies.

Colin spoke about food security in the context of the Paris Agreement. Article 2.1 of the Paris Agreement references the importance of protecting food production

while reducing emissions. The current evidence for Northern Ireland is that shrinking the agri-food sector in order to get further emissions would only move production elsewhere, which is effectively offshoring carbon emissions.

DAERA is aiming to tackle the global challenge of climate change in a way that considers local circumstances. This means working towards an at least 82% reduction in emissions rather than net zero, which would be highly damaging to the NI economy with no global benefit in reducing emissions.

"The cost of NI net zero has been estimated at tens of billions of pounds more than us playing an equitable part in UK net zero."

Colin echoed other speakers in stating the need for major systemic changes throughout society. As an official, his role is to deliver on the [New Decade, New Approach](#) commitment for climate change legislation to drive these essential changes, and give the actions to tackle climate change a strong legal underpinning.

He set out many things that will need to change, such as the way people travel and heat their homes, and that collective action across the public and private sector is needed. To do this, genuine buy-in from all who live and work in NI is needed.

He outlined the actions DAERA is already taking, such as:

- Committing additional departmental resources to take forward work on climate change adaptation and mitigation, and on preparations for COP26.
- The Minister has prioritised the development of the cross-cutting [Green Growth Strategy](#), led by DAERA on behalf of the Executive.

- The Minister is taking forward [Forests for our Future](#), tackling plastics, the recent publication of the [Future Agri-policy Framework](#), and climate change mitigation and adaptation criteria has been included in the Environment Fund.

For DAERA, the best outcome is to support UK net zero, and to bring all of the major players along on the journey. Colin closed by encouraging everyone to grasp the opportunities and take them forward in a positive way.

Discussion

Participants were encouraged to discuss in groups and raised the following thoughts and questions.

John Martin from the RSPB commented that the RSPB's organisational position across the UK is net zero by 2045. He also shared concern around there potentially not being legislation at the end of the Assembly mandate, and the lack of funding for restoration of peatland in Northern Ireland in comparison to other parts of the UK and Ireland.

- *He asked the panel what a just transition would look like for NI and other parts of the UK, and how all sectors could benefit from that transition going forward.*

Colin Breen responded that although a just transition is not mentioned in the DAERA Bill, the evidence and advice behind the bill is based on delivering a just transition. He sees the Green Growth Strategy as instrumental in helping to deliver a just transition.

Tracey Teague (DAERA) came into the conversation to speak about work on the Green Growth Strategy, which is balancing the climate change agenda with the

economy and the environment. The Strategy aims to ensure future decisions will be about protecting the environment as well as delivering for climate change and the economy.

She mentioned that there are a number of projects around sustainability and net zero, as well as other available programmes – but they often do not get the visibility they need. She spoke about the need for the public to see action on the ground, because once it is seen, people think differently and then act differently.

She outlined how the government is working across departments to ensure actions have the biggest impact going forward. She sees innovation, and research and development as a key plank going forward. Changing how we access funds, changing the funding model will be a key element in this, with the private sector already leading in a number of ways, the government also needs to support.

John Gilliland spoke about the need to look outside Northern Ireland when talking about a just transition, to see what solutions are working. He gave the example of the Just Transition Commission in Scotland, which has brought in rural and farming populations to the discussion and allowed for discussion. He agreed with Tracey's comments about how seeing action on the ground can be used as a platform for discussion, leading to behavioural change.

Terry A'Hearn's comments on a just transition were that in order to make seismic radical change, everything needs to be thrown at it. To have a just transition, national law and policy is needed, but localism is also important.

He gave the example of a sustainable growth agreement signed in Leven, in Fife, Scotland. There are around 15 signatories, including the local council, the local college,

Diageo (a major drinks manufacturer), Keep Scotland Beautiful and NatureScot, The agreement has become a force for creating a just transition in Leven. It began to reduce water pollution, but it has broadened out into a large partnership. By bringing people together, they have a stake in transitioning to something better.

Sir David Stirling stated that this theme also came through the Zoom chat, with participants calling for better engagement, and perhaps citizens' assemblies.

- *He asked whether the business community would support the idea of a citizens' assembly.*

Kirsty McManus spoke about how public engagement as part of an infrastructure commission can help to achieve net zero, including having a young person's commissioner. She pointed out that when decisions are being made about the future, young people need to be engaged in the debate.

Ian Humphreys (Keep NI Beautiful) also supported the idea of a commission, stating that in the South of Ireland it helped politicians get difficult issues dealt with effectively. He also stated that it is important that everyone feels they have something to gain from the process, other than protecting the planet, the future and future generations – they need to feel something personal in the present as well.

He finished by calling for a citizens' assembly on climate change to happen sooner rather than later.

Colin Breen referred to the large UK [citizens' assembly](#) which took place on climate change facilitated by the Climate Change Committee, with overrepresentation of people from Northern Ireland on it. He questioned whether it would be better to

start delivering the actions of that Citizen's Assembly before bringing people together again for another Assembly

Rebekah McCabe (Involve NI) outlined how citizens' assemblies are fundamentally different from a consultation or another way of hearing people's views. They involve a representative sample of people in the room with different views, different levels of awareness or understanding of the climate emergency and allowing them to hear a whole range of evidence and opinions on the matter, and then come to an agreement about what should be done. She highlighted the value of citizens' assemblies as the only method for public engagement that facilitates consensus from a whole segment of the general public, not just top minds in the field.

She shared an example Involve has just launched with some partners: [Our Zero Selby](#), a small former mining town in Yorkshire which illustrates what public deliberation can look like at a local scale when it is focused on a just transition. The benefit of such projects lies in showing people that net zero does not have to be an imposition, that there are economic and social opportunities and projects like this are accelerators. They can lead to decisions happening more quickly due to the public buy-in and once you have this, you also have political will and the political motivation to move more quickly.

Paul Braithwaite (Community Foundation) highlighted the Scottish Government's climate assembly, as well as others in various UK regions and cities such as Wales or Bristol. He stated that a climate assembly is a great tool for bringing the public and government closer together and collaborating around solutions.

Tracey Teague confirmed that the government is putting citizens at the heart of their actions, and future generations. They are open to ongoing engagement and discussion around climate action. She also gave the example of how the government engaged with young people (aged 16-22) for their input into the Green Growth Strategy.

Sir David Sterling asked for final observations based on the morning's discussion.

- **Colin** stated that the biggest change needed is for electrification to be from renewable sources, as well as wanting to see more action.
- **Kirsty** spoke about the need to seize opportunities, and all having a responsibility to increase climate change and sustainability literacy.
- **Annika** urged for the role of nature in tackling climate change not to be underestimated, and for it to be embedded in everything we do.
- **John** spoke about the need to make sure that pioneers and early adopters taking action currently not to be penalised for being at the front of the race in terms of when baselines are set.
- **Terry** finished by setting the objective of having everyone doing at least one thing that is radically different from the way they've always done it.

Session 6:



What does a better economy look like for Northern Ireland?

Date: 28 October 2021

Chair: Richard Johnston, Deputy Director, Ulster University Economic Policy Centre

Speakers:

- Graeme Roy, Dean of External Engagement in the College of Social Sciences at the University of Glasgow
- Dr Victoria Winckler, Director of the Bevan Foundation
- Angela McGowan, Director for Northern Ireland at CBI
- Cathy Gormley-Heenan, Commissioner to the Independent Fiscal Commission for Northern Ireland
- Michelle Scott, Director of Business Interventions in the Department for the Economy NI
- Sir David Sterling, Former Permanent Secretary in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Department of Finance; Former Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

The legacy of the pandemic will have long-lasting, possibly irreversible, effects on the economy that the government will have to face over the coming years. There are likely to be calls for those who benefited most from the lockdown to contribute most to pay for it. What should economic recovery look like as we step forward? Who should pay for the national debt?

Presentation 1

Lessons from Scotland: Graeme Roy, Professor and Dean of External Engagement in the College of Social Sciences, University of Glasgow.

Scotland has had more devolved powers than Northern Ireland for some time now. How would you assess progress there towards a better economic and social future?

Taking Scotland as a case study, in the last few years, more powers have been devolved to Scotland – for example around tax and social security. The type of economy that Scotland is seeking to build is distinct from the UK. However, there is a difference between the rhetoric or debate, and practical action: the two are not the same.

There have been five economic strategies in Scotland, and it is interesting to look at how they have evolved over time. Away from **'growth at all costs'** to a different kind of growth: **overall wellbeing**. The 2015 economic strategy is particularly interesting and marked a turning point.

The Scottish Government had always talked about growing the economy, looking at the characteristics of growth: sustainability, cohesion, regional equality, and issues around solidarity and inequalities. In 2015, they started thinking much more about the distribution of growth, and how the type of economy you create in turn shapes the overall economic picture.

The conversation about social progress is quite sophisticated and developed in Scotland. Many people talk about outcomes, inclusive growth, and wellbeing. The nature of the debate has advanced a lot and there is a much greater understanding of these issues. However, we might ask whether Scotland has actually made the changes in policy to create a fairer economy? It has been 10 years since a major report in Scotland called the [Christie Commission](#) was published, which looked at reforming public services. Many have reflected that while we have talked the talk for the last 10 years, there are few concrete examples where we have actually made the changes that are needed.

Northern Ireland and Scotland still share similar problems in terms of inequality and pockets of severe deprivation. Looking at the tools, we can ask whether there are any new approaches or policies that have been deployed in Scotland that really did make a difference?

We are much better at understanding now that if you are thinking about the type of economy that you want to create, you have got to think about all the different aspects of public policy and how businesses operate and interact.

One example is housing. There is much more recognition that the quality of the housing matters. It is about the connectivity of communities to where employment opportunities exist, the level of education and closing the attainment gap. It is not just good for tackling inequalities, or improving education standards, but crucial to building the type of high-skilled economy you want to have in the long run.

There is also much greater focus on thinking about public health. We have seen in the last 18 months how connected economy and society is to public health. As we

emerge from this crisis, thinking about the value and the importance of public health initiatives as an economic tool and a tool to think about the type of economy we are trying to create is absolutely crucial. There is also an increased recognition of the role of anchor institutions and large public bodies or business institutions, and their role within the communities that they serve, and operate in.

Issues around tax redistribution, and the social security system are significant challenges. The government has taken quite a different approach to this in Scotland than the rest of the UK. It is more about engaging with the individual. It is less about people having to prove their eligibility for certain benefits and having extensive checks. It will be interesting to see how a more collaborative approach drives behaviours and better outcomes over the longer term.

We cannot separate the fact that the economy is an essential part of our society, and **our society is our economy**. When we are talking about a vibrant economy, we are really talking about **a vibrant society that achieves all the objectives we have around well-being and provides sufficient resources for all**.

We can get into quite a technical debate about whether growth is good or bad. We need to avoid trying to put conversations about the type of economy we are trying to create into simple categories: either focusing on growth in the economy or focusing on wellbeing.

Growth in itself should never be an objective. It should be about using that as one aspect of how you can create a more prosperous economy and a more prosperous society in its broadest sense. We need to think about the type and the quality of the economy that we are creating.

Our economy can grow essentially for two key reasons. From a technical perspective, looking at metrics like GDP, it can grow by producing more 'stuff', or it can grow by producing better quality things. It is that focus on quality and improvements that are ultimately crucial: the quality of the jobs that we are creating, the quality of the investments that we are making, the quality of the housing, the quality of the infrastructure we are developing, as well as environmental sustainability and tackling inequalities. Once we start to think about it in that way, we can have a more informed conversation about the type of economy that we are trying to create.

Northern Ireland wants to create a quality economy that is focused on wellbeing and improving standards across the board, rather than simply creating an economy that is bigger for the sake of it.



Presentation 2:

Lessons from Wales: Dr Victoria Winckler, Director of the Bevan Foundation

Wales' economy has transformed in the last 30 years. It has lost its coal and steel jobs, and there has been a huge loss of manufacturing over that period. Instead, Wales has seen growth of service industries (cafes, retail, holiday accommodation, and a small amount of financial services). This has had an impact on economic output. Wales has moved from the high-output, high-value production, to a lot of much lower-level output activity. The gap between Wales' and the UK's GDP or GVA has grown over the last 30 years.

Jobs have changed, too. There has been a shift from 'traditional' full-time employment largely occupied by men, to a lot more women in work and more part-time

employment. With this, there has been a big shift in skills and pay. This has contributed to a change in poverty. Not so much in terms of the headline figures, which has been worryingly static, but a big shift under that headline from out-of-work poverty to in-work poverty.

Wales has also seen changes in political settlements. There are new institutions, most obviously the Senedd, but we have also lost our Regional Development Agency. The early focus in Welsh policy was on raising GDP and helping people into work. Then, in the middle years, there was a focus on priority sectors, and a heightened interest in semiconductors and on city deals: a more conventional approach to economic change. More recently, there has been a shift to what is called a foundational economy, and a big interest in fair work.

Wales – much like the rest of the UK – faces huge challenges in the context of COVID-19. With shutdown sectors and a third of jobs furloughed, there has been a large impact on household finances. Recovery is only partial. Though it is true that there are more jobs available than previously in Wales, many sectors, from accommodation and food to manufacturing, are not back to their pre-pandemic levels. Some places still have a long way to go before they get back to their pre-pandemic number of jobs. Hours of work are down, which may or may not be a good thing.

We have got some big political challenges, too, as most other parts of the UK have. There are constraints on the Welsh Government's expenditure. Not all powers are devolved, and they have fewer devolved powers than in Scotland.

The opportunities are in three broad areas:

1. Within renewables and energy-efficient housing. However, Wales still has a lot of carbon-intensive industries, particularly

within steelworks and power stations in West Wales.

2. Within the development of greater work-life balance strategies. The Welsh Government has a 30% work from home target. However, it is not yet clear how they are going to deliver it.
3. Within fair work. Although the Welsh Government has limited powers, employment is not a devolved matter. There is a positive focus on procurement as a lever of commitment to the Real Living Wage, at least in the public sector, and an emerging social partnership approach where employers and trade unions come together to work collaboratively on the issues on a sectoral basis. The social care forum is one such example.

Fair Work is a good thing. Almost three quarters of the population get their main income from employment. Jobs halve the risk of poverty, and have other positive outcomes, including around health. Reducing barriers for job entry through into-work programmes should be seen in the context of a wider, inclusive approach to the labour market. The terms and conditions of a role, job security, progression, and making sure there are opportunities for adjustment when the economy changes, all need to be all considered.

There is an interesting approach in Wales, through the [Well-being of Future Generations Act](#). This is a piece of Welsh legislation that places duties on public sector bodies to have regard to several goals stated within the Well-being Act. The ones that are relevant to the economy, are around being more equal, healthier, resilient, globally responsible, and also being prosperous. The Act has generated a lot of support and a lot of enthusiasm, but many people are quietly asking questions about how it is implemented on the ground.

Presentation 3:

Angela McGowan, Director for Northern Ireland at CBI

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, businesses have demonstrated a huge amount of resilience. Companies have been asked to close their doors, they have had difficulty accessing workers, they have faced logistics difficulties with regards to supply chains, and their ability to get products into their companies. They have faced huge uncertainty. During the pandemic we have realised that we just cannot switch off and switch on the economy like a tap.

The interventions that we saw were very positive. We learned from the financial crisis, for example, that liquidity is key in a crisis: cash is king and there were huge moves by Government and by the local Executive to make sure that liquidity, cash did not dry up.

Looking to the future, we need to agree on what kind of economy we would like. We need to have a vision of an economy where we can bring the most deprived people in and make sure that they are included in the benefits of economic growth.

Presentation 4:

Cathy Gormley-Heenan, Commissioner to the Independent Fiscal Commission for Northern Ireland

The [Independent Fiscal Commission for Northern Ireland](#) was established in March 2021 by the Minister for Finance to consider the case for increasing fiscal powers.

It seeks to focus on ways to raise revenue to support local public services, and ways that they could reduce or reform taxes to

increase the net income to certain categories or groups of people. It also looks at the ways in which we could use tax devolution to improve incentives to work or incentives to invest here. It also examines how that might create changes to societal behaviour for the greater good. The largest part of the job is to give evidence-based advice on the options for the possible devolution of taxes from Westminster, similar to Scotland and Wales.

If Northern Ireland wish to have increased fiscal devolution, which taxes would be the most appropriate, and what would be the cost and the benefit of doing so? What are the risks, and what are the rewards?

After stakeholder engagement and ahead of two reports due to be published shortly⁴, the overriding message is that our work needs to be educational. They hope – through the publication of these forthcoming reports – to stimulate debate, for people to interrogate their findings and to engage with the Commission to ensure that the Northern Ireland context is right.

Presentation 5: Michelle Scott, Director of Business Interventions in the Department for the Economy NI

The [Economic Delivery Plan](#) has now been in place for a number of months. The first guiding principle for our [10X strategy](#) is to address those issues that really matter and will make a lasting and positive difference to people's lives. The first guiding principle is about the people in the economy, and not about a statistical measure of productivity, GBA, or the unemployment rate. It is about making a real difference to people's lives.

4 The 'More Fiscal Devolution for Northern Ireland' Interim Report was published on 13 December 2021 and is available here: https://www.fiscalcommissionni.org/files/fiscalcommissionni/documents/2021-12/fcni-more-fiscal-devolution-for-ni-interim-report-accessible_1.pdf

Discussion

Participants raised the following thoughts and questions for speakers to reflect on:

- *"It struck me in the conversation that we were having about the economy being society and society being the economy. In the environment in which I operate, which is supporting independent living and homelessness, there are base-level failings right across society. It can be anything from Bangor where we are waiting for four or five hours for an ambulance to attend a person with a disability, to the whole benefits issue. If you think about that intrinsic link, if we do not get people in a place where they are content, where they are happy, where they feel good about themselves, then the contribution of the future economy has to be impacted. I'm just wondering what the panel's view on that are."*

Cathy answered that she thinks there is a pressure on ministers and civil servants to deliver a steady flow of initiatives to keep having the next new thing and the next launch. There is a short-termism – people are looking at the next election, not 10 years into the future. There are initiatives after initiatives without having that very honest and hard conversation about how long it will actually take to really address the basic needs of many of our society, and that there is no quick fix, and we cannot put another sticking plaster on things.

Vicky concurred that there is a huge disconnect between the kinds of economic policies that exist at different levels, and what people want when you talk to them on the street. They talk about wanting to have a secure home, a secure income, look after their families, have enough food on the table: those very basic needs that Sam described.

She thinks it is important to focus on getting that connection between policymakers and ordinary people and developing strategies that deliver on what people want around their standard of living and how they live.

Angela agreed that delivery on basic needs is a real issue. According to her, health is a bottomless pit in terms of where the money and where the resource can go, and we need to address how we pay for it. We need a new funding model through better taxation which supports those that need it. She believes that people on higher incomes are prepared to pay extra through private medical insurance so that those who cannot afford it would have the space to get better care.

*Summary remarks from Sir David Sterling,
Former Permanent Secretary in the
Department of Enterprise, Trade and
Investment and the Department of Finance;
Former Head of the Northern Ireland Civil
Service*

The Northern Ireland protocol is of relevance, particularly the access that Northern Ireland has to the GB market and the EU market is a unique selling point. Northern Ireland could exploit that opportunity going forward, albeit that further mitigation is going to be required to round off the rough edges of the protocol.

Secondly, if we want public services that are of the highest possible standard, we need to recognize that there are many of us who are going to need to pay more. When we look at the household taxes and charges that we pay here, they are about half of what people in Cardiff, or Edinburgh, or Glasgow pay. We cannot realistically expect to get the same quality of services if we are not paying the same sort of levels as people elsewhere in the UK. This is one of the big challenges of the future.

Session 7:



What does a society focussed on better mental health look like?

Date: 18 November 2021

Chair: Jennifer Neff, co-founder of Elemental

Speakers:

- Mary Boyle, Emeritus Professor of Clinical Psychology at the University of East London
- Karen Taylor, ex RMN nurse, Director of Working to Recovery, and Director of Deepness Dementia Media and Ron Coleman, Director of Working to Recovery, Director and Chair of Deepness Dementia Media
- Michael Crilly, Director of Social Inclusion and Participation at Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust
- Jennifer Wallace, Director at Carnegie UK Trust; Chair of the What Works Centre for Wellbeing Advisory Panel
- Nichola Rooney, Non-Executive Director the Public Health Agency; Senior Professional Advisor to the RQIA; Associate Consultant with the HSC Leadership Centre
- Alex Bunting, Group Director of Inspire's Mental Health and Addiction Services
- Oscar Donnelly, Co-Chair of the Department of Health's Mental Health Strategic Advisory Panel and Chair and Regional Lead for the Northern Ireland Towards Zero Suicide, Mental Health Patient Safety Collaborative

Jennifer Neff opened the event, noting the recent publication of the [Mental Health Strategy for Northern Ireland](#). This has provided a 10-year roadmap and a vision

for mental health. Pre-pandemic, Northern Ireland had the highest prevalence of mental health challenges in the UK and the pandemic has exacerbated the mental health crisis.

Presentation 1:

Mary Boyle, the Emeritus Professor of Clinical Psychology at the University of East London

Professor Boyle examined our understanding of the connections between mental health and society. She described mental health problems as highly meaningful responses to adversities and traumas rather than symptoms, disorders or illnesses.

She described that the most common causes of mental health problems include issues such as child abuse and neglect, gender-based violence, poverty and poor housing, racism, war and conflict, and pressure to meet unrealistic social expectations. Each is also a marker for inequalities in or abuses of power. She stated that we cannot understand the links between society and our individual experience without talking about power.

There are mitigating or protective factors which make it less likely that you will experience a mental health problem, even in the face of adversity. These 'positive power resources' include supportive relationships,

physical health, having qualifications, having a valued identity and having links to the natural world. A high number and severity of adversities with few mitigating factors can lead to a more extreme response which is more likely to be labelled as mental illness.

Professor Boyle suggested that our responses to adversity are meaningful and functional - they are strategies for protection and survival. For example, we have a very basic core need for safety and security. We might meet this core need by being wealthy, living in a low crime area, and having secure work for example. But if you lack these resources, you still have a need for safety and security and you might meet that need through hypervigilance ("Anxiety disorder"), suspicious thoughts ("Paranoia"), needy behaviour ("Dependent personality disorder") or staying at home ("Agoraphobia"). Mary highlighted the psychiatric labels that these protective strategies might attract and explained that other strategies would be counted as criminal, which emphasises the very close links between the mental health system and the criminal justice system, for example: appeasing powerful others, carrying weapons, joining a gang or aggression and violence.

This way of looking at mental health problems shows the connection to how societies are structured and how power is distributed. Mary posed three important questions to ask of society:

- How far do its institutions and its social and economic policies support people to meet their core needs in positive ways?
- How far does this society enable adults to meet the core needs of children?
- How far does this society prevent those with more power from meeting their needs in ways that damage others?

Professor Boyle explained that these questions are relevant for prevention and successful intervention. She argued that a medical framework can disempower people and make it less likely they can meet their core needs - it can increase stigma and discrimination rather than reducing it. She argued that services need to think in terms of survival strategies or 'threat responses', rather than symptoms or illnesses.

Read more: 'A Straight Talking Introduction to the Power Threat Meaning Framework' (PCCS Books). You can also visit www.bps.org.uk/power-threat-meaning-framework.



Presentation 2:

Karen Taylor, ex RMN nurse, Director of Working to Recovery, and Director of Deepness Dementia Media and Ron Coleman, Director of Working to Recovery, Director and Chair of Deepness Dementia Media

Karen Taylor and Ron Coleman showed a film of a project that they ran in Italy which was a 13-week recovery house project. This presents a microcosm of a society that supports better mental health. Most of the participants were experiencing psychosis. There was a sense of freedom and ownership by everyone. Everyone got involved in growing food, cooking and eating, and the things that needed doing around the house. People were able to use skills that they had not used for a long time such as riding bikes or even driving.

The first four weeks of the course was about deconstructing psychiatry - taking apart diagnosis and starting to look at other ways that people could view their distress. The second month worked with the stories of people's lives. That often involved bringing the families in as well. The third month

was about, "Where do you want to go from here? How do you see your future?". At the graduation, everybody was brought together including local health people, course participants, and their families.

Karen and Ron also ran a two-and-a-half-year project from their home, and they shared a success story about an individual involved in the programme, who after being rejected by the system at 17 successfully graduated and undertook a PhD in their chosen field while no longer needing medication. They argued that to change mental health services, we need to look at ways of working with people to enable them to take ownership of their lives and find a place in that world.

They also argued that the system is class-based so you are disadvantaged by being working-class, or a woman, or from a different ethnic background for example, but there is hope that this can be properly addressed. The hope is in people being able to talk about what the real issues are. For example, in their [Hearing Voices Groups](#), it is common to have conversations about sexual abuse far more than about schizophrenia. Karen and Ron asserted that there is an issue with addressing and treating trauma in mainstream services and that has to change.



Presentation 3:

Michael Crilly, Director of Social Inclusion and Participation at Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust.

Through the [Life Rooms](#) social model of health Mersey Care strives to give a voice to social approaches to health and wellbeing. In a consultation exercise, participants explained the world was not a level playing field when it came to moving on beyond mental health services or moving beyond

the reality of a diagnosis. They highlighted issues with finance, housing, benefits, debt, social isolation, and access to employment that were barriers to moving forward.

The Life Rooms model took existing services and resources and reorganised them into a new centre outside of the clinical environment and open to all. The first Life Rooms centre launched in a Carnegie library in Liverpool. Given its success this was followed by 4 additional centres. Up until the pandemic more than 5,000 people a month were using the centres. The social mission has moved on beyond recovery to the improvement of population health. This is done through a three-pillar model.

- **Learning for wellbeing:** More than 100 different learning programmes and experiences co-produced with the benefit of lived experience and professional expertise. This includes clinical involvement alongside creative preventative social connectedness programmes such as Nordic walking, confidence through drama, food and mood, and a programme with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra called the [Supersing](#).
- **Social prescribing:** moving people beyond a dependence upon statutory mental health services working closely with Elemental and many voluntary and community sector organisations.
- **Community:** supporting individuals and communities begin to engender social change within their own lives.

Life Rooms has adapted to working in remote and digital ways since the pandemic. They have some early evidence in early clinical exploration that people accessing the social model means a decrease in the clinical costs. Life Rooms has grown from a £400,000 investment six years ago into a £6 million recurrent commission business.



Presentation 4:

Jennifer Wallace, Director at Carnegie UK Trust and Chair of the What Works Centre for Wellbeing Advisory Panel

Jen Wallace presented the idea of collective wellbeing and its relevance to changing the relationship between society and mental health. Collective wellbeing is described in Carnegie UK's SEED model as social wellbeing, economic wellbeing, environmental wellbeing and democratic wellbeing. Collective wellbeing is maximised when those things are in harmony.

Jen explained that for the past 70 years, GDP has focused our view on economic wellbeing. Institutions in our society believe that if GDP rises, our collective wellbeing will automatically go up. But when put together in an index that covers social, economic, environmental, and democratic wellbeing (Gross Domestic Wellbeing) you get a split between GDP going up and Gross Domestic Wellbeing beginning to go down. Part of what is driving that is anxiety and mental health difficulties in the population at large. This phenomenon is also referred to as the [Easterlin paradox](#).

Most economists in the field believe there is a point at which you have reached a level of economic success through GDP, that it does not have the same impact on personal wellbeing. People like [Katherine Trebeck](#) talk about the need to understand that we have arrived at that point in the development of our system in the UK. There are two key reasons why this is the case. The first one is absolute poverty. In [Maslow's hierarchy](#), you cannot get to the top of the pyramid if you do not have the things at the bottom of the pyramid (meaning that your basic needs are met). This is the case for 13% of people in Northern Ireland. The second problem is inequality. Wellbeing cannot flourish

when there is inequality between people and communities. Living in a society where people are left behind creates stress and anxiety within the general population. 17% of the population in Northern Ireland are experiencing relative poverty and statistics show that a high number of people are one pay check away from poverty.

To explore solutions to this issue, Carnegie UK undertook a review of over 80 commissions for the [GDWe program](#). They identified the common factors of these calls to improve society as a whole. Common factors included an emphasis on prevention, the integration of services, participatory democracy and voice, equalities issues and localism. These are fundamentally important ways of changing government policy and government decision-making in order to improve wellbeing for all of us.

There are also some practical things people can do and invest in to improve collective wellbeing:

- **Social prescribing** works in a number of different areas of wellbeing. It works collectively as well as on a personal level.
- **Active travel**, being able to use your local environment, has a myriad of positive impacts on the environment as well as on people's health and their sense of community.
- **Community energy**, particularly community-owned energy and renewables, gives people voice and choice, and money to spend in their own communities.
- **Social housing** is massively under-invested in the UK but is significantly important for giving people a sense of stability in their lives.
- **Flexible working** to reduce the stress on people's lives as they try to balance many different things.

Jen concluded by saying that when thinking about building a society focused on mental health, it is important to think about a society where all of us can flourish and where we can all truly “be well” together.



Presentation 5:

Nichola Rooney, Non-Executive Director the Public Health Agency, Senior Professional Advisor to the RQIA, and Associate Consultant with the HSC Leadership Centre

Nichola asserted that these are exciting times for Northern Ireland given the new Mental Health Strategy. She also reminded the audience that it can be difficult to talk about mental health in NI without thinking about The Troubles. The Troubles have led to at least 25% higher psychological morbidity in Northern Ireland and yet, NI has the lowest-funded services and high levels of inequality.

She explained the need to move away from a person approach to a population approach. Nichola presented 5 pillars of a mentally healthy Northern Ireland as:

- Trust and safety: peaceful healthy environments
- Hope and aspiration: equity in education and employment
- Control of destiny: choice and opportunity
- Dignity and respect: accepting our differences
- Connectedness and belonging: community and identity

Nichola spoke about the context in Northern Ireland, and that work is needed around peace and healthy environments. There is also an issue of what you can control and what you cannot: Brexit being

a recent example. There need to be ways of helping people deal with a sense of learned helplessness that comes with being in a society that has huge levels of social deprivation and inequality. We need to create space where we can hear other people’s views. We need psychologically-informed policies and environments – our policies across government departments should be screened for the impact that they have on children, young people, and future populations.

Nichola echoed views of previous speakers in explaining the need to look beyond the medical model and understand the impact of inequality and adversity. She spoke about the contrast between care plans that are very diagnosis driven and the realities of what has happened to people in their life. When you focus on their stories, how they are presenting becomes much more understandable and the work becomes more about healing and working with that person on the basis of their experiences rather than a diagnosis.

She explained that there is a lot of work going on about adverse childhood experiences but there is a danger of pathologizing children rather than supporting adults to meet the needs of children. She also spoke about the need to develop community psychology and build bridges and relationships with community and voluntary services.

In terms of the effectiveness of the new 10-year Mental Health Strategy, Nichola explained that this has to be cross-departmental and that there needs to be a stronger emphasis on prevention. There is also an ongoing problem about lack of funding. Lastly there is a narrow view of what psychology is and the understanding of psychology needs to move from a person approach to a population approach. A mentally healthy Northern Ireland is a psychologically informed one.



Presentation 6:

Alex Bunting, Group Director of Inspire's Mental Health and Addiction Services

Alex explained that there has been a lack of investment in mental health services, which has resulted in problems. He explained that a society focused on better mental health would involve:

- An increase in terms of access to services, more effective stepped care and improved integrated care pathways including social prescribing;
- Cross-departmental thinking and making use of community assets;
- Mobilising of communities around health and mental health;
- Solving problems of long waiting times and 'screening out' of people due to lack of resources;
- Removal of barriers around dual diagnosis for those with co-occurring issues around addiction and mental health or mental health and physical health conditions;
- Less medicalised treatment environments e.g., recovery communities, mutual aid;
- More training and development around different approaches. Families and communities involved in training and development;
- Listening to people's stories and journeys and increased compassion and understanding;
- A reduction in discrimination and stigma – more of seeing the whole person;
- Tackling of inequalities including poverty;
- A change in the language that is used and how illnesses or issues are described;
- People with lived experience contributing to policies before they are taken forward;

- Better use of prevention and early intervention, which requires changes to governing and commissioning methods; and
- Less dependence on medication. Northern Ireland is a global leader on the use and misuse of prescribed medications in mental health. Outside of alcohol, people with prescription medication dependence are the second largest group of people with substance use issues that we deal with in services.

Alex concluded by saying that we need to review what we spend and how we spend it. We need to focus more on outcomes and outcome-based accountability. We need to invest in research and our use of data. We need to work on proving what is working, and look at how we improve it moving forward.

Presentation 7: Oscar Donnelly, Co-Chair of the Department of Health's Mental Health Strategic Advisory Panel and Chair and Regional Lead for the Northern Ireland Towards Zero Suicide

The historic level of under-investment in mental health in Northern Ireland is reflected in the Department's 10-year Mental Health Funding Plan, which outlines an investment of £1.2 billion over the next 10 years to fully implement the strategy.

A starting point for what a society focusing on better mental health would look like would be one which gives mental health and wellbeing parity in policy and funding terms compared to physical health and wellbeing. There are causes for optimism. The [New Decade, New Approach Deal](#) recognises the need to prioritise mental health. It shows that the Executive and Minister recognise that mental health needs to be a priority. Work is being done such as:

- The creation of the Mental Health Champions role;

- Recent investments in services, such as perinatal mental health care;
- £10 million Mental Health Support Fund going into the community and voluntary sector; and
- The Department's Regional Mental Health Strategy and the Regional Substance Misuse Strategy.

All of these provide a strong foundation going forward, placing mental health where it should be, at the heart of government. The World Health Organisation tells us mental wellness is shaped to a great extent by social, economic, and physical environments. Therefore, taking actions to improve the conditions of daily life provides opportunities to improve population mental health and to reduce the risk of mental health problems that are associated with social inequalities. That understanding has informed the new [Mental Health Strategy](#), which prioritises actions focused on prevention and early intervention.

There is a firm consensus of known protective or mitigating factors and risk factors for mental disorders, and a growing international body of evidence that shows effective action can be successfully implemented through cross-sectoral directed community interventions. A 'population-based approach' to mental health care for Northern Ireland is a co-designed approach involving a wide range of stakeholders, including people with lived experience. It brings together two important concepts:

Firstly, that of regional consistency and equity to address what is now and often experienced as a siloed, fragmented, and inequitable mental health care system in Northern Ireland.

Secondly, more integrated local service delivery to better meet the needs of people through a framework based on community and drawing upon community assets.

This is about what the five health and social care trusts do along with primary care, voluntary and community services, and other statutory partners working alongside people with lived experience and their carers. The strategy identifies a comprehensive range of services which should be equitably available to the population provided on a regional area and local basis.

Public bodies are increasingly seeing the importance of mental health and wellbeing. The pandemic has created both the conditions for change in how we organise and deliver mental health services because that is what is needed, but it also impresses upon us the absolute necessity for that change to take place.

Discussion

Participants raised the following thoughts and questions for speakers to reflect on:

- What is the single most important thing we can all do at a very community level, right through? What is the most important thing in terms of breakthrough?

Karen Taylor suggested that the most important thing was dialoguing – getting groups of people together as locally as you can, right from the top to the bottom, sitting in the room as equals and dialoguing, trying to understand each other rather than being defensive. In those dialogues, healing happens and hopefully, change.

Michael Crilly said that NHS organisations have to take seriously their responsibility to be anchor institutions. They have money, they have huge numbers of staff who also live in their communities. They should think about their responsibility in ensuring that smaller organisations which are reflective of the community can participate.

Mary Boyle said that one of the most important steps we can take is to move away from a medicalised approach, because as long as we use that approach, we will always think we are dealing with people who are defective or deficient in some way, rather than people who are actually actively surviving under very adverse circumstances. If we see their behaviour from this perspective, and not as an illness, we start moving upstream rather than downstream.

Oscar Donnelly said that what each of us can do individually and collectively is challenge stigma. Associated stigma is one of the biggest disabling factors of mental ill health. **Mary Boyle** added that with medicalised approaches, there is quite a lot of research that show it actually increases stigma and discrimination. One way of reducing stigma is to move away from medicalised approaches.

Further comments and questions were raised in the chat:

- Should we be talking about mental health? Or should it be emotional and spiritual health?
 - Just going to mention the elephant in the room which affects people across the world and their mental health and is intergenerational, and that is the effects of colonisation?
 - How about hubs led by experts in social determinants of health, social model of disability and participatory democracy, and those who know about cultural meanings of the community – not medics who on the whole obscure the link between threat and threat response?
-
- Chronic health problems lead to disadvantage, maybe less significantly than the social factors Ron listed? But in health we often have blinkers on for social factors in health outcomes. What about comparing outcomes for chronic health problems in different regions of the UK? – there usually are differences, linked to economics, racism, social unrest, classism, structural sexism
 - How do we in NI move the conversation on in a positive way within communities and for individuals where there is still for some the concept of a “pill for every ill” and how do we encourage all our GPs to consider how social prescribing can be a more positive intervention than prescribing or prescribing medication without review?

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