

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



**EXEC  
SUMMARY**

## **Acknowledgements**

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# 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.

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- 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

# Workshop Overviews

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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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.

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