

Making Change
with Government



**Response to
Consultation on Programme
for Government Draft
Outcomes Framework**

March 2021

Sci

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Introduction

The Social Change Initiative (SCI) was formed in 2015 with the aim of securing progressive social change so that communities become fairer, more inclusive and peaceful. SCI welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Draft Programme for Government (PfG) Outcomes Framework. Our response is informed by: the lessons from the Atlantic Philanthropies/Delivering Social Change partnership¹; our research and cross-sectoral engagement on public service transformation in NI²; interaction with our network of social change activists and funders; and international policy research on good practice in public services.

We believe that there is an opportunity through PfG to deliver a fairer and more inclusive society, enabled by more effective public services. This requires a change in how public services are delivered to citizens - we all need to work differently.

SCI recommends:

1. A stronger focus on reducing inequalities, reflected across all the outcome areas in the PfG.

2. Placing public values and a commitment to reducing inequality on a statutory footing.

3. Embedding new ways of working that centre collaboration, improving accountability and supporting a whole system approach.

Recommendations

1. A Stronger Focus on Reducing Inequalities

Covid 19 has brought into sharp focus the depth and scale of inequality that exists within Northern Ireland and addressing this needs to be central to everything government does. Our analysis of the indicators from the previous Outcomes Delivery Plan suggests limited progress to date on tackling inequalities - fewer than one-third of the 16 indicators of Outcome 3, 9 and 12 show positive changes, and 6 of the indicators aimed at capturing 'a more equal society' show no change at all, typically from 2014-15 onwards.

Whilst welcoming the focus of PfG Outcome 3 we believe that **there should be a wider embedding of reducing inequality as a principle that applies to all the outcomes**. There is a danger that in identifying 'an equal and inclusive society' discretely in PfG it becomes locked into one specific outcome. In our view, **the system of outcomes and supporting indicators should enable identification and action to address inequality wherever it emerges**. Examples of how this can be done exist and should be actively considered.

¹Atlantic Philanthropies (AP) invested some £25.5m in three Delivering Social Change (DSC) signature programmes: *Shared Education Signature Programme*, *Early Intervention Transformation Programme*, *Dementia Together NI and Dementia eHealth and Analytics Pathfinder Programme*. SCI was established with support from AP as it concluded its work in Northern Ireland in 2015 and one aspect of its work is to extract the lessons from the AP/DSC partnership.

²<https://www.socialchangeinitiative.com/shifting-gear-accelerating-public-service-transformation-opportunities-for-northern-ireland>

Finland guarantees financial, social and cultural rights which are, in turn, protected by other regulations to ensure fundamental rights including equality. Central government and municipalities in Finland have committed themselves to reducing health and welfare inequalities, and promoting social inclusion, and efforts made to reduce inequality must be visible at all levels.

We also think public services should be designed to intervene early in order to avoid and minimise disadvantage, so we recommend **wider embedding of prevention and early intervention across all outcome areas** (currently only explicitly referenced against mental health and offending). The Early Intervention Transformation Partnership provides valuable insights on embedding this concept³.

2. Committing to Public Service Values

The publication of the draft PfG Outcomes Framework marks an important step forward but it gives only limited insight and commitment to the Executive's overall vision for embedding an outcomes approach to improve the wellbeing of current and future generations in Northern Ireland.

There is an opportunity via the development of the PfG to **engage in a more vibrant public conversation around the values that should underpin our public services and shape their future design, planning and delivery to improve the wellbeing of all citizens.**

These cross-cutting values would permeate decision making, policy implementation and public services delivery.

Whole of government public values have been successfully implemented in Australia's public sector.⁴ In both Australia and New Zealand, the implanting of public service values as the guiding light for designing and delivering services and structures has been enabled by the opening up of a national debate and discourse.

We would suggest the following values:

- Accessible, inclusive, integrated public services
- Reducing inequality and targeting those in greatest need
- Collaborative, whole system approach across society
- Open, transparent, accountable

We would advocate that new public values and Northern Ireland's vision for improving wellbeing and reducing inequality should be put on a statutory footing.

³<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/EITP-infographic.PDF>

⁴The Australia Government have adopted the following public values: service; professionalism; trust; respect; collaboration and engagement; honesty and integrity; courage and tenacity; and sustainability. <https://www.anzsog.edu.au/resource-library/news-media/south-australia-public-value-thinking>

3. Introducing New Way of Working

A. Collaboration

Cross-boundary collaboration is critical to the transition to an outcomes approach in Northern Ireland – not just working across departments but also cross-sectorally.

The response to the Covid-19 pandemic has seen greater than usual levels of joint working within and between sectors, and practical experience of ‘putting the rhetoric into practice’ in co-design and delivery of services. There are new relationships and capabilities to build upon, but it is also easy to revert to the status quo ante.⁵

The outcomes based PfG needs a **clear vision and pathway towards a one service and whole-system approach**, based on collaboration across public services, other sectors and citizens on the co-design and delivery of effective public services.

Public sector reforms in Ireland through the initiative Our Public Service 2020 clearly illustrate this whole of Government approach.⁶ NICVA’s draft Manifesto for Change⁷ highlights the contribution that action delivered through community and voluntary organisations has to make.

As a next step, we recommend that government agrees with partners and citizens how they will collaborate on subsequent stages of the PfG’s development and implementation. For example, we suggest that in order to build shared understanding and ownership of the outcome and indicator framework, **each of the proposed outcomes has an advisory group which draws on a breadth of expertise from the public, private and voluntary-community sectors** reflecting the key priority areas nested in each outcome. Scotland has championed this collaborative approach in all of its OBA work.⁸

B. Whole System Approach

There should be a shift towards outcomes-based budgeting. It does not make sense to have functional (vertical) budgets when tackling cross-cutting outcomes aimed at addressing disadvantage and driving economic growth. In advance of (required) more radical reform of the department-aligned budget mechanism, there should be more pooling of funds (from NICS departments and beyond) around outcomes. **Multi-year budgets with flexibility are also essential to support long-term planning the shift to an outcomes based model.**

⁵<https://www.socialchangeinitiative.com/back-to-normal-or-back-to-better-building-on-positive-responses-to-covid-19-in-northern-ireland-fcb135ff-5df0-4f79-bcd9-63c8e1b785f4>

⁶*Our Public Service 2020*: <https://www.ops2020.gov.ie/what-is-ops2020/overview/>

⁷https://www.nicva.org/sites/default/files/d7content/attachments-articles/nicva_a_manifesto_for_change.pdf

⁸Justine Geyer, Scottish Government (2019): Reflections on the What Works Scotland initiative. <http://whatworksscotland.ac.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2019/10/WWSReflectionsOnTheWhatWorksScotlandInitiative.pdf>

The Atlantic/DSC Programme had a flexible funding model with contributions from each partner, and in EITP, 5 departments contributed funding that was pooled around a shared outcome ('Giving the best start in life to children and young people') without any expectation that funds would be spent in their domain. Seamless, cradle-to-grave services designed around life cycle touchpoints such as birth, retirement, early years, caregiving and ageing have been found to be highly effective in supporting whole-system responses. In New Zealand, interdepartmental boards tackling priority issues are run by chief executives from multiple agencies, reporting to a single Minister. They have combined budgets and statutory powers, and the authority to employ staff and enter into contracts.

C. Accountability and Meaningful Participation

The current OBA approach within NICS is too loosely conceived and those responsible for delivering population outcomes are the same people who devise the outcomes, indicators and targets therein. Putting the outcomes approach on a statutory basis, as recommended above, would mean **greater accountability for the achievement of population outcomes reflected in law.**

The link between population accountability and performance accountability is also under-developed. The work of all publicly funded bodies, and the services they provide, should contribute to one or more population-level outcome.

One way of **forging a much stronger link between population accountability and performance accountability** could be to take a sub-population such as one or more of the 11 local councils and make a direct measurable link between OBA outcomes and cross-cutting services under the rubric of community planning, a statutory power now vested in councils.

SCI's "*Communities and Covid*" report⁹ captured the stories of people's efforts to address the new realities and consequences of COVID-19, particularly within communities already experiencing the harsh impacts of inequalities in their everyday lives. The collaborative working between government, public bodies and communities during this crisis has been both remarkable and essential to empowering communities and helping government and its agencies to better understand and meet people's different needs.

We believe that there is an opportunity for government to build on this trusted partnership working with communities to target and tackle deep-seated inequalities and marginalisation.

⁹<https://www.socialchangeinitiative.com/communities-and-covid>

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