



Draft Programme for Government 2016-2021, Response to the Committee for the Executive Office

General Comments on the 14 Outcomes

The Commissioner appreciates the letter from the Committee and the opportunity to provide a written response to it highlighting ongoing serious concerns about the absence of older people from the Programme for Government including the associated Indicators and measures. Issues relevant to older people span a wide range of the Delivery Plans, and as such the Commissioner's comments outlined do not reflect concerns or issues across the range of Delivery Plans which would be of relevance to older people, but are confined to those specific indicators to which the Committee's correspondence referred.

The Commissioner is disappointed that his key comments made in the response to the first consultation on the Programme for Government (PfG) Outcomes Framework do not appear to have been fully addressed by the new consultation on the Programme for Government and Delivery Plans.

In the response to the first consultation about the Draft Framework, the Commissioner particularly noted that it contained no specific outcome for older people, and indeed did not reference older people. The absence of older people in the document badly reflects the nature of society in Northern Ireland, and gives the Commissioner doubts that the PfG will have any demonstrable impact on the lives of older people in Northern Ireland. The Commissioner also identified specific issues with Indicators proposed to support each Outcome, as some of those proposed would be inadequate in terms of evidencing the experience of older people.

Examples of these were Indicators 16, 17, 32, and 34, which only quote economic activity and employment for 16-64's. This would completely miss any information on increasing numbers of older people working and starting their own business and the existing measure does not even fully overlap the now rising State Pension Age. Indicators 23 and 24 rely on absolute numbers for key journey times and Internet Connectivity. By relying on absolute numbers they would tell us little about accessibility, which is an important issue and barrier for older people.

Given the fact that the draft framework does not adequately reflect the position or future of older people, the Commissioner suggested that a bespoke Outcome for older people be introduced, emphasising that the Executive should commit to 'Respect,



Value and Protect our Older People'. This outcome could be supported by Indicators COPNI has identified which would all be available during the term of the Programme for Government.

The Commissioner is further disappointed to note that this Outcome has not been included in the revised PfG documents. The Commissioner would contest the statement of a representative of the Executive Office (Katrina Godfrey) before this Committee previously that *"when you lift an OBA up to population level, you find that the needs of individual groups can be very clearly accommodated in the outcomes framework that we have."*¹

As comments by the creator of the Outcomes Based Approach to Government, Mark Friedman, to this Committee indicate, for the Framework to operate effectively, there needs to be a process of setting priorities within the agreed outcomes.² The Commissioner particularly highlights this point because other 'Age' groups have a specific Outcome. If older people are not in the high level outcomes, and are missing from the Indicators, it will significantly lessen the chances of their issues being prioritised when choices need to be made between Outcomes as implementation begins and resources are allocated.

A PfG For An Ageing Population?

Over the term of this Programme for Government NISRA population projections forecast that the older population will increase from 396,000 to 445,000, an increase of 10%, making up nearly a quarter of the population.³ Older people will be the largest number of users of many services, contributing more, and must be represented in the high level part of the Programme for Government.

The latest version of the PfG states that *"Some considered that the Programme was not explicit enough on respecting, valuing and protecting older people. The wellbeing of older people is of huge importance to the Executive, and we are determined that they, along with all other groups in our society, should share in the progress towards each of the outcomes.....We intend to provide for this by ensuring that data on performance is gathered and reported on across all Section 75 categories wherever possible. This will allow the impact of programme delivery on older people to be clearly identified."*

The Commissioner would welcome further detail about this aspect of the operation of the programme for Government. While the additional detail in the main documents and

¹ Committee for the Executive Office/Northern Ireland Assembly, 'Official Report (Hansard), Draft Programme for Government Framework 2016-2021: Executive Office', 14th September 2016.

² Committee for The Executive Office/Northern Ireland Assembly, 'Official Report (Hansard), Outcomes-Based Approach to Government: Fiscal Policy Studies Institute, Clear Impact, National Children's Bureau, State Representative Diana Urban', 11th October 2016.

³ NISRA, 'Northern Ireland Level Projections', <http://www.nisra.gov.uk/demography/default.asp20.htm>

the Delivery Plans produced for this version of the consultation is welcome, COPNI has seen no changes in the Indicators which were highlighted in the first consultation response which could have made them more effective at reflecting the experience of older people, and 'allow(ed) the impact of programme delivery on older people to be clearly identified'.

Delivery Plan – Indicators 26, 31 and 35

The Commissioner notes that the current version of the documentation cites that COPNI, along with the other Commissioners, as a 'key delivery partner' through 'statutory responsibilities'. At no point has the Commissioner's office been involved in discussions about this and COPNI would welcome more information in order to consider how this can link into the operation of this Delivery Plan, as well as co-aligning with the Commissioner's emerging Corporate Plan for his term of office.

The Commissioner agrees with the Delivery Plan statement that it is *"important that all public services and shared spaces are seen as accessible to the whole community."* However the Commissioner would welcome a wider definition of accessibility than facilities such as leisure centres, parks, libraries and shopping centres being 'shared and open' to both Protestants and Catholics. Accessibility issues can also be created by a number of design factors, including poorly maintained pavements, location of traffic lights or a lack of accessible public toilets. ⁴ Accessibility should be for all older people, especially those with reduced mobility.

As the Delivery Plan indicates, in neighbourhoods, *"inadequate infrastructure (for example for pedestrians and cyclists) and transport links can prevent spaces from being accessed and shared by different communities. Planning policies and regulations, regeneration programmes and other new investments can influence design, access and use of shared spaces."* Given the reduction in routes across rural and other areas by Translink, it is important that the PfG explores ways of keeping travel access to these spaces for older people open.

The Delivery Plan states *"Respect may be experienced differently by individuals across the range of Section 75 and other groups in a range of scenarios including education, health services, public spaces, employment and communities."* COPNI agrees with the assertion that a lack of respect may be experienced by groups including older people. The Commissioner supports the commitment to *"carry out additional policy development work to develop a more thorough understanding of what is meant by respect and to consider how the respect agenda could be mainstreamed across the work of the Executive."*

⁴ International Longevity Centre, 'Getting Out and About', 2014.

COPNI attended a workshop on this Indicator during the first phase of consultation, and was part of the calls by stakeholders to see *“shared space pursued with reference to the full range of Section 75 groups and in respect of a wide range of public and private/commercial spaces.”*

The Commissioner notes with interest the commitment to delivery of a *“programme of public realm investment, to support the creation of spaces that are better used, have greater footfall, and where possible, are equally welcoming to people from all backgrounds/ Section 75 groups.”* COPNI also notes that the Programme appears to be financing schemes all around Northern Ireland, in nine different cities or towns.

The Commissioner further notes that there is a commitment to continue to develop, implement and review equality strategies for individual Section 75 groups, including the Active Ageing Strategy. In the Delivery Plan for Indicators 19 and 28, implementation of the Active Ageing Strategy is proposed as part of a programme of ‘Active Ageing Inclusion’. This programme references the full implementation of the Active Ageing Strategy, and considering *“how best to support older people and ensure their financial well being.”* COPNI has been quoted as one of the organisations involved in the implementation, where costed plans would be in place by the end of December 2016, and pilots to be in place by March 2017. These references appear to have been made in the delivery plans in the absence of any communication with the Commissioner or the Office.

COPNI, in its analysis of the final version of the Active Ageing Strategy and the Indicators proposed to support the implementation of the Strategy, expressed a number of strong reservations that appropriate data would be able to generated for all the Indicators throughout the duration of the strategy. Through the process of drafting the strategy, the previous Commissioner expressed concern that projects that are relevant to these Delivery Plans such as Dignity (Discrimination) and Transport (Improved Rural Transport) have been removed, and the Commissioner remains concerned that if implementation of policies to benefit older people is limited to the Active Ageing Strategy, the PfG will not effectively deliver for or support older people.

Delivery Plan – Indicators 30 and 40

COPNI has no significant feedback to offer in terms of the Delivery Plans for these two Indicators. In terms of their scope and suggested application, they would appear to not disproportionately affect or benefit older people. The Commissioner would agree that unlocking Northern Ireland to more international investment and tourism would be a good thing for the economy and consequently may be good for older people here.

The Commissioner does observe that the plan admits that the proposed targets for tourism and international investment are ambitious, with the targets for increasing international investment relying on an expanded, high quality skills base. The Commissioner would contend that this need for a ‘skills pipeline for investors’ must include a plan to support older people better in terms of skills development. As COPNI referred to in the *Valuing an Ageing Workforce* report, ensuring skills programmes, Apprenticeships and Adult Learning financing and programmes are also geared towards older people (as well as NEETS and younger people) as well is not just fair, but can provide the economy with the skills boost it needs.

Other Comments on Outcome 10 and Outcome 12

The Commissioner would query the close link that is drawn within Outcome 12 in reporting the views of consultation respondents, *“the role of business in creating opportunity, in particular for young people, was viewed as important, in particular in developing youth-friendly workplaces, supporting young people into employment through a range of routes.”* Business does not just create opportunity for young people, but is important in providing a route for older people out of long term unemployment (which especially impacts older people approaching or in their ‘60’s). More older people are working longer, with the State Pension Age for men and women in the process of rising to 66 by 2020.⁵

COPNI hopes the ‘proportion of people working in better jobs’ measure is constructed with this in mind, to reflect what is being done to assist older people to participate in lifelong learning and gain better jobs through their careers. Given that the associated Indicator in the same Delivery Plan for employment rates refers to 16-64’s, the Commissioner hopes that at an absolute minimum, data development on the ‘Good Job Index’ at least tracks the rising State Pension Age, even though this would still not represent the experience of most older people.

⁵ ‘State Pension Age Timetables’,

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/310231/spa-timetable.pdf

General Comments on the Outcomes-Based Approach to the Programme for Government

In the response to the consultation on the Draft PfG Outcomes Framework, COPNI welcomed the new system of Outcomes Based Accountability in principle. Two key features of the working of OBA is that it encourages collaborative working between government departments and agencies, and that it 'nudges' policymakers towards rebalancing financing to projects that deliver more in the long term. However, much depends on whether or how effectively these principles are adhered to during the implementation stage.

The Commissioner also cautioned in response to the first consultation that there needed to be more detail provided on the process when Indicators were not shown to be 'Turning the Curve', and if there would be a direct link between the budget and the content of the Programme for Government. The Commissioner would continue to emphasise these comments.