



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for the Executive Office

Report on the Executive's Draft Programme for Government 2016-21

This report is the property of the Committee for the Executive Office. Neither the report nor its contents should be disclosed to any person unless such disclosure is authorised by the Committee.

Ordered by the Committee for the Executive Office to be printed 07 December 2016

Report: NIA 14/16-21 Committee for the Executive Office

Contents

Powers and Membership.....	4
List of Abbreviations and Acronyms used in the Report	5
Introduction.....	6
Summary of Findings and Recommendations.....	8
The Committee's Approach.....	10
Outcomes based accountability.....	11
Committee consideration:	
Consultation.....	11
Outcomes.....	12
Indicators and data.....	15
Delivery and Governance.....	16
Transparency.....	17
Scrutiny.....	18
Funding and Resources.....	19

Links to Appendices

Printable version of Report

Minutes of Proceedings

Minutes of Evidence

Statutory Committee responses

Stakeholder responses

Research Papers

Powers and Membership

Powers

The Committee for the Executive Office is a Statutory Departmental Committee established in accordance with paragraphs 8 and 9 of Strand One of the Belfast Agreement and under Assembly Standing Order No. 48. The Committee has a scrutiny, policy development and consultation role with respect to the Executive Office and has a role in the initiation of legislation. The Committee has 11 members, including a Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson, and a quorum of 5.

The Committee has power to:

- consider and advise on Departmental budgets and Annual Plans in the context of the overall budget allocation;
- approve relevant secondary legislation and take the Committee Stage of relevant primary legislation;
- call for persons and papers;
- initiate enquiries and make reports; and
- consider and advise on matters brought to the Committee by the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

Membership

The Committee has 11 members, including a Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson, and a quorum of five members. The membership of the Committee is as follows

- Mr Mike Nesbitt [Chairperson]
- Mr Danny Kennedy [Deputy Chairperson]
- Mr Cathal Boylan
- Mrs Pam Cameron
- Mr Stewart Dickson
- Mr William Irwin
- Mr Phillip Logan
- Mr Seán Lynch
- Mr Philip McGuigan
- Mr Richie McPhillips
- Mr Christopher Stalford

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms used in this Report

HOCS	Head of the Civil Service
NICS	Northern Ireland Civil Service
NISRA	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
OBA	Outcomes-based Accountability
PfG	Programme for Government
RaISe	Research and Information Service
SRO	Senior Responsible Officer
TEO	The Executive Office

Introduction

The Committee for the Executive Office has the lead in co-ordinating the responses of Assembly statutory committees to the draft Programme for Government (PfG). The *PfG Consultation Document* was published by the First Minister and deputy First Minister on 28 October 2016. This is the second phase of consultation following the publication of the draft PfG Framework earlier in the year and will run until 23 December.

The stated purpose of the PfG Framework is to “Improve wellbeing for all - by tackling disadvantage, and driving economic growth”. It moves from focusing on inputs and outputs to focus on the outcomes that the Executive wishes to achieve. These are:

- We prosper through a strong, competitive, regionally balanced economy
- We live and work sustainably – protecting the environment
- We have a more equal society
- We enjoy long, healthy, active lives
- We are an innovative, creative society, where people can fulfil their potential
- We have more people working in better jobs
- We have a safe community where we respect the law, and each other
- We care for others and we help those in need
- We are a shared society that respects diversity
- We are a confident, welcoming, outward-looking society
- We have high quality public services
- We have created a place where people want to live and work, to visit and invest
- We connect people and opportunities through our infrastructure
- We give our children and young people the best start in life

Each of the 14 high level strategic outcomes is supported by a range of indicators to help measure progress towards the achievement of the outcomes. Delivery plans will be developed for each indicator, with indicators grouped where appropriate, and draft delivery plans form part of the consultation.

The consultation on the *PfG Framework* noted the intention to “finalise and agree the Programme for Government, the Budget, a refreshed Economic Strategy, a new Investment Strategy and a Social Strategy by

the end of 2016". However, the PfG consultation document notes that work is ongoing to develop these strategies.

This report sets out the Committee for the Executive Office's consideration of the outcomes-based approach (OBA) to the Programme for Government. The views of statutory Assembly committees are included in the appendices to the report.

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

1. The Committee urges Executive Ministers to give full consideration to the views of their respective Assembly Committee.
2. The Committee notes that there has been widespread support for the outcomes-based approach taken by the Executive for the 2016-21 Programme for Government.
3. The Committee welcomes the assurance that consideration will be given to the responses to the consultation. The Committee recommends that, where concerns have been raised, the final Programme for Government clearly sets out how specific sectors will be accommodated.
4. The Committee welcomes the outcomes-based approach to the Programme for Government and the 14 high level outcomes set out. While acknowledging that some concerns have been raised, it is clear to the Committee that the outcomes-based approach has been widely welcomed and there is genuine enthusiasm across sectors to engage in the process.
5. The Committee recognises that the move to outcomes-based accountability will present a further challenge for the NI Civil Service but is heartened that all evidence it has heard suggests that officials in government departments will rise to that challenge.
6. The Committee welcomes confirmation from Executive Office officials that a website will be set up to report publicly on progress against the indicators on a regular basis.
7. The Committee recommends that the Executive Office examines the use of data visualisation techniques to ensure that information is presented in an easy-to-understand and informative format that is accessible to all.
8. The Committee commits to taking the lead in bringing forward recommendations on how to best achieve joined-up scrutiny of the Programme for Government. In doing so, the Committee will be mindful of the need not only to scrutinise but to actively contribute to the continuous improvement process. The Committee welcomes the First Minister's and deputy First Minister's commitment to work with the Committee and the Assembly to come to a determination as to how this can best be done.

9. The Committee asks that its role in leading on the Programme for Government on behalf of the Assembly is recognised in this process.
10. The Committee recommends that the Executive leads an annual take note debate on progress against the indicators and delivery of the high level outcomes.
11. The Committee recognises that it is early in the new process and a one-year budget is unlikely to be completely aligned to the Programme for Government. The Committee considers it important, however, that the Programme for Government priorities are reflected in future budgets and recommends that the Executive moves to do so at the earliest opportunity.
12. The Committee recommends that statutory committees give full consideration to alignment with Programme for Government priorities in their examination of departmental budgets and monitoring rounds.

The Committee's Approach

1. In preparation for its consideration of the Programme for Government at the second consultation phase, the Committee commissioned *research* on outcomes-based government and on scrutiny of outcomes-based government. The Committee *heard* from Mark Friedman, author of "Trying Hard is Not Good Enough", whose techniques were drawn on in the development of the PfG, together with a number of proponents of outcomes-based governance. Evidence was also taken from Dr Toby Lowe, Newcastle University, who offered a different view of outcomes based government. *Written submissions* were invited from a range of stakeholders including Carnegie UK Trust, whose work on wellbeing was cited in the Consultation Document.
2. At a strategic level, officials from the Executive Office (TEO) gave evidence on the outcome of the consultation on the draft PfG Framework and again when the second consultation was subsequently launched. The First Minister and deputy First Minister attended Committee on 30 November to discuss the PfG. The Committee also heard from Departmental officials and a number of arm's-length bodies on TEO's specific responsibilities under PfG.
3. The Committee sought the views of other statutory committees in respect of their Departmental responsibilities under PfG. The following themes were identified to aid committees in their consideration of the consultation document:
 - views on the outcomes and indicators relevant to their department;
 - whether the outcome of the first consultation on the draft PfG Framework was taken into account as appropriate;
 - views on departmental action plans;
 - opportunities and challenges presented by cross-departmental working; and
 - proposed departmental reporting arrangements.
4. Responses received from statutory committees are available in the *appendices* to this report. Those not available at the time the report was agreed will be published at the earliest opportunity thereafter.
5. Regrettably, time constraints have prevented the Executive Office Committee from undertaking a detailed analysis to determine any emerging themes from those responses, but **the Committee urges**

Executive Ministers to give full consideration to the views of their respective Assembly Committee.

Outcomes based accountability

6. Outcomes-based accountability starts at the end by setting out what it is that is to be achieved - what Mark Friedman, author of "Trying Hard is Not Good Enough" referred to as "quality of life conditions" - and the indicators by which those conditions could be measured. As the Committee *heard*:

"OBA then prescribes a simple and clean way of thinking and working through the progression from the indicator to the story behind the indicator to the partners who have a role to plan in doing better to an action plan to get better. It is as simple as that."

7. The OBA Framework makes a distinction between two different types of accountability - population accountability and performance accountability. Population accountability relates to a geographic area. In the case of the PfG, Mr Friedman advised the Committee that "population accountability, broadly writ ... is to all people who live in Northern Ireland". Performance accountability looks at the performance of programmes and the impact on specific customers or service users. Three key categories are identified by Mr Friedman for measuring performance: how much did we do; how well did we do it; is anyone better off? In his view the latter category is the most important as "what you are trying to do with most government services ... is to make a positive difference in the lives of the people who receive that service." The PfG Consultation Document notes the intention to measure performance by considering those three categories.

Committee consideration

8. Details of the key themes that arose in the Committee's discussions with Ministers, Departmental officials, expert witnesses and stakeholders on the PfG are set out below.

Consultation

9. As noted in the introduction, this is the second phase of consultation on the PfG. An initial consultation was held on the

draft PfG Framework from May to July 2016, which the Committee *heard* included a series of public meetings organised both by TEO and by individual departments. TEO officials also attended over 30 events or meetings of particular groups or interests. Over 810 responses were received, which the deputy First Minister *confirmed* was the largest ever response to a PfG consultation.

10. The Committee understands that a number of issues raised in response to the Framework consultation have been reflected in the document issued for consultation in October 2016. For example, the number of indicators increased from 43 to 48. In addition, steps have been taken to streamline and set out clearer linkages between the outcomes and indicators.
11. The current consultation offers an opportunity to see more detail on the PfG, including the delivery plans, and offer suggestions on how they could be improved. The document was made available in different formats, including an easy-read document for children. The Committee also *heard* on 30 November that officials had committed to over 40 meetings as part of this consultation phase. The Committee notes that the NI Commissioner for Children and Young People has expressed disappointment that the easy-read version was not available until 3 weeks into the consultation period. The Commissioner is also not aware if any of the events or meetings specifically apply to children.
12. While this is the second formal consultation, the Committee understands that there has been ongoing engagement between officials across all departments and key stakeholders and delivery partners on the development of the draft delivery plans. In terms of TEO, for example, the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland *informed* the Committee of ongoing engagement with TEO officials and advised that they “see good evidence in their work of recommendations that we made.”

Outcomes

13. The Committee notes that there has been widespread support for the outcomes based approach taken by the Executive for the 2016-21 PfG. This was reflected in both the oral evidence and the written submissions received by the Committee. In its submission to the Committee, *Carnegie UK Trust* congratulated the Executive on “its meaningful commitment to the process of developing a Programme for Government with a focus on citizen wellbeing at its core.”

14. Before the launch of the second consultation Mark Friedman *confirmed* to the Committee that he viewed the 14 outcomes in the draft PfG Framework, published in May 2016, as a version of the quality of life conditions referred to at paragraph 6 above. In their evidence to the Committee, TEO officials *advised* that those draft outcomes had been informed by a process of engagement with focus groups, research and surveying members of the public. The Committee heard that, overall, the responses to the outcomes were “overwhelmingly very positive”. The high level outcomes included in the Consultation Document are therefore unchanged to those in the preceding Framework.
15. Although the evidence the Committee received was broadly supportive of the 14 outcomes some concerns were raised, particularly with regard to specific groups. The Commissioner for Victims and Survivors and members of the Victims and Survivors Forum *told* of their disappointment that the draft PfG does not include a specific outcome for legacy issues; though the Commissioner still believed that there is an opportunity for the sector to make a broad impact on the PfG. In his written submission, the *Commissioner for Older People* highlighted “ongoing serious concerns about the absence of older people from the Programme for Government”. The Commissioner went on to say that

“the absence of older people in the document badly reflects the nature of society in Northern Ireland and gives ... doubts that the PfG will have any demonstrable impact on the lives of older people in Northern Ireland”.

16. The *Consultation Document* has sought to allay concerns regarding older people, stating

“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 has stated that he would welcome more detail on this aspect of the operation of the PfG.

17. In their *evidence*, the First Minister and deputy First Minister were of the view that those groups are considered within the PfG; for example, along with other outcomes, outcome 4 (we enjoy long, healthy, active lives) particularly accommodates the older sector;

while outcomes 8 (we care for others and we help those in need) and outcome 11 (we have high quality public services) impact on the victims' sector and, indeed, the older sector. However, the Ministers reiterated that the consultation is ongoing and they will "listen to what people have to say to us."

18. The Committee welcomes the assurance that consideration will be given to the responses to the consultation. The Committee recommends that, where concerns have been raised, the final Programme for Government clearly sets out how specific sectors will be accommodated.

19. The *Consultation Document* also notes that, in his response on the Framework consultation, Mr Friedman considered that the PfG had the "potential to place NI in the front ranks of governments using outcomes-based plans". Notwithstanding that, Mr Friedman sounded a note of caution on the scale of the approach in his evidence to the Committee when he *suggested* that

"...the main problem that people often have with implementation - is that they try to do everything all at once. That is a huge mistake. You are not going to make progress on all those outcomes, all at the same time and all at the same pace. There will have to be some process of setting priorities at the population level".

20. In response, TEO officials *acknowledged* this as a

"useful warning, and it is useful that we take heed of the fact that what we are trying to do is extremely ambitious and extremely challenging. I do not accept that it is not possible to make progress."

21. In *evidence* to the Committee, the First Minister and deputy First Minister pointed to the positive response that has been received to this approach to the PfG. The deputy First Minister suggested that Mr Friedman's comments do not "cater for our ambitions" and advised:

"as we go forward we may find that there are areas where we have to adjust and review. It is about being flexible and recognising that, as in all things, if mistakes are made, we learn the lessons from them, but it is right for us to be ambitious."

22. The Committee welcomes the outcomes-based approach to the Programme for Government and the 14 high level outcomes set out. While acknowledging that some concerns have been raised, it is clear to the Committee that OBA approach has been widely welcomed and there is genuine enthusiasm across sectors to engage in the process.

Indicators and data

23. The increase in the number of indicators from 43 to 48, and the change in some of the indicators, was reflective of the response to the initial consultation. The *Consultation Document* aims to make the links clearer between the high level outcomes and the indicators, with each outcome supported by 3-5 indicators.
24. Much of the data for the indicators originates from national statistics and the Committee was *advised* that detailed work had been undertaken with professional statisticians in the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) to identify indicators “on which there can be confidence in reporting and integrity of figure work behind them”. However, data relating to a number of the measures is not currently available. Rather than use an indicator that is currently available but may not be the most appropriate, work is being undertaken on a ‘data development agenda’ to develop the necessary baselines and data sets. The Committee heard that this will be done by a process of co-design between officials with knowledge of the policy area and professional statistician colleagues; this should again should ensure the robustness of indicators and data.
25. In his book, “Trying Hard is Not Good Enough”, Mr Friedman notes that
- “By using common sense measures, we can be honest with ourselves about whether or not we’re making progress. If we work hard and the numbers don’t change, then something more or different is needed”.*
26. However, in his evidence to the Committee, Dr Toby Lowe *suggested* that the translation of high level outcomes into a “very fixed set of metrics” may work against the achievement of an outcome. Using a high level outcome relating to obesity as an example, Dr Lowe stated that “it encourages a worker only to do things that meet the metric, not what is necessary to tackle obesity. Anything that needs to happen that is outside the metric will not be

done". A similar point was made by the Community Relations Council, who *suggested* that a focus on principal indicators may mean losing sight of other indicators.

27. Although pointing out the risk regarding loss of focus, the Community Relations Council stressed that they were not suggesting that "people are manipulating or there is any effort to do that." In their evidence to the Committee, the Commission for Victims and Survivors also *confirmed* that they had no fears that data would be manipulated, and suggested that there would now be a "big opportunity for ... groups to demonstrate the impact that they have."

Delivery and governance

28. Included as part of the consultation are the draft delivery plans, which set out proposed actions by which progress towards the outcomes will be achieved. Not all draft delivery plans were available when the Consultation Document was launched. The Committee *heard* that those delivery plans not available relate, in the main, to additional indicators that were added as a consequence of the consultation on the draft PfG Framework. The Committee understands that the delivery plans are 'living documents' and will be subject to development and refinement, not only in the consultation phase but throughout the lifetime of the PfG.
29. One of the key elements of OBA is its focus on partnership and collaborative working; as *noted* by Celine McStravick from the National Children's Bureau, "government must work beyond government." This is evident in the draft delivery plans which include a range of delivery partners from across Northern Ireland Departments, councils, statutory bodies and the community and voluntary sector. The *Consultation Document* also refers to "many encouraging comments from voices in the private sector" and notes that "acting together all of us can secure benefits that none of us will enjoy if we are fragmented in our approach". TEO officials *confirmed* ongoing engagement will also be required to ensure that "we do the right things and that it has the effect that it is designed to have." The First Minister *advised* that "it is not just about what the NICS is doing; it is about what everybody else is doing to help us to deliver. That is why it is so different. It is a huge culture change."

30. It is also recognised that a change of culture will be required within the NICS to move out of 'silos' and work across boundaries. In evidence to the Committee, the deputy First Minister *pointed* to other recent changes in the NICS such as the reduction in the number of government departments combined with the Voluntary Exit Scheme which presented a "massive challenge for the Civil Service, but I believe it is a challenge that it has risen to." **The Committee recognises that the move to OBA will present a further challenge for the NICS but is heartened that all evidence it has heard suggests that officials in government departments will rise to that challenge.**
31. In terms of *governance*, the Head of the Civil Service (HOCS) has been appointed as the overall Senior Responsible Office (SRO) for the PfG, with a senior TEO official as the deputy SRO. HOCS chairs the NICS Board which is comprised of all departmental permanent secretaries and will ensure oversight progress towards delivery of the outcomes. Each permanent secretary has been allocated responsibility for specific outcomes
- "wearing a board hat rather than a departmental permanent secretary hat... That is very deliberate and reflects the cross-cutting nature of the outcomes which...cannot be delivered in isolation by any Department working on its own."*
32. Accountability for each indicator has also been assigned to named SROs, who are responsible for developing the delivery plans designed to turn the curve.

Transparency

33. The Committee heard that transparency of data is essential to the OBA process. A *research paper* produced by RalSe for the Committee examined approaches to OBA in Connecticut, Virginia and Scotland. It notes that both the *Virginia Performs* website and the *Scotland Performs* website include a wealth of data relating to performance against indicators. The Committee welcomes the *acknowledgement* by officials that

"The transparency point is well made, and one of the hallmarks of this process is that, by putting the indicators out there right at the outset and by having a commitment to making sure that the information on progress is very openly available, there will be transparency not just for Ministers and

the Assembly to be able to monitor the progress of the Executive but for citizens, taxpayers and those with key interests to do so”.

34. The Committee welcomes *confirmation* from TEO officials that a website will be set up to report publicly on progress against the indicators on a regular basis.
35. The Committee *heard* from the Victims and Survivors Service on its use of MYMOP, an outcomes-based monitoring and evaluation tool for complementary therapies. A visual scorecard was produced which provided at-a-glance information on a range of matters, such as symptoms experienced and what was working for clients. Importantly, it highlighted the number of those for which the interventions were not working and will allow the Service to move forward with the development of better or more appropriate services tailored to their needs. *Assembly Research* also pointed to performance scorecards used to provide information to the Scottish Parliament. The Committee recommends that TEO examines the use of data visualisation techniques to ensure that information is presented in an easy-to-understand and informative format that is accessible to all.
36. Transparency of data is also an important component in the continuous improvement process and in determining the impact of programmes. As Celine McStravick *advised*, organisations
- “may find that some of the things that they do are not having an impact. Therefore, it is absolutely correct that they change what they do and their strategy. No one wants to continue on a journey if their own data tells them that what they are doing is not making the difference that they thought.”*

Scrutiny

37. Transparency and availability of data will be critical to the scrutiny of the PfG. It was *suggested*, however, a change of culture will be required whereby data is not used to pass judgement on programmes but as a continuous improvement tool.
38. Although performance against the indicators will be reported on a dedicated website, information on the delivery plans and programmes will not be reported on in the same way. The First

Minister *advised* that it will be for Ministers or officials to come to committee to discuss those matters.

39. As noted elsewhere in this report, NICS departments will be required to work out of silos and across boundaries in working towards the achievement of the high-level outcomes. However, the Assembly Committee system is configured to have a *statutory committee* “to advise and assist each Northern Ireland minister in the formulation of policy with respect to matters within his responsibilities as a minister.” The question of how the Assembly will effectively scrutinise the PfG has therefore been raised by the Committee. In evidence on 30 November, the First Minister and deputy First Minister *acknowledged* the challenge for the Assembly to scrutinise and add value to the PfG.
40. The Committee commits to taking the lead in bringing forward recommendations on how to best achieve joined-up scrutiny of the PfG. In doing so, the Committee will be mindful of the need not only to scrutinise but to actively contribute to the continuous improvement process. The Committee welcomes the First Minister’s and deputy First Minister’s *commitment* to work with the Committee and the Assembly to come to a determination as to how this can best be done.
41. The Committee asks that its role in leading on the Programme for Government on behalf of the Assembly is recognised in this process.
42. The Committee welcomes the commitment by Ministers to report annually to the Assembly on progress against the indicators. The Committee recommends that the Executive also leads an annual take note debate on progress against the indicators and delivery of the high level outcomes.

Funding & Resources

43. The Committee heard confirmation from TEO officials that there had been ongoing engagement with Department of Finance officials throughout the development of the PfG. The PfG sets out the long term ambition and aspirations and, while not all programmes require significant funding, the Budget may set the pace at which progress is made. A senior TEO official *advised* that

“It is very clear...that the intention is to make sure that the funding supports the Programme for Government and that the direction is deliberately one of aspiration and a longer-term vision.”

44. The Committee notes that reference is made in the Consultation Document to the preparation of a one-year resource budget which will, inter alia, allow departments to consider the resources that will be required in future years to deliver the PfG. **The Committee recognises that it is early in the new process and a one-year budget is unlikely to be completely aligned to the PfG. The Committee considers it important, however, that the PfG priorities are reflected in future budgets and recommends that the Executive moves to do so at the earliest opportunity. The Committee also recommends that statutory committees give full consideration to alignment with PfG priorities in their examination of departmental budgets and monitoring rounds.**

Links to Appendices

Minutes of Proceedings can be viewed *here*

Minutes of Evidence can be viewed *here*

Statutory Committee responses can be viewed *here*

Stakeholder responses can be viewed *here*

Research Papers can be viewed *here*

You may re-use this publication (not including images or logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Northern Ireland Assembly Licence. To find out more about this licence visit: <http://data.niassembly.gov.uk/license.aspx>

This Report can be made available in a range of formats including large print, Braille etc. For more information, please contact:

Committee for the Executive Office
Kathy O'Hanlon, Clerk to the Committee
Northern Ireland Assembly
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Stormont
Belfast BT4 3XX

Telephone: 028 90 521903

Email: [*Committee.Executive@niassembly.gov.uk*](mailto:Committee.Executive@niassembly.gov.uk)

Twitter: [*@NIAEOCtee*](https://twitter.com/NIAEOCtee)

ISBN 978-1-78619-274-5
