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Dear Karen

Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: Inquiry into Building a United Community

The Carnegie United Kingdom (UK) Trust welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister's Inquiry into Building a United Community. We have chosen only to respond to the terms of reference where we have experience and relevant evidence. Further information on our work is available on our website www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk.

Evidence base

The Carnegie UK Trust has been actively involved in promoting wellbeing measurement since the establishment of the first [Carnegie Roundtable on Measuring What Matters in Scotland](#) in 2010. The Trust's new discussion paper [Measuring Wellbeing in Northern Ireland: A new conversation for new times](#) reports on the outcomes of the [conference](#) the Trust hosted in Autumn 2013 in Belfast on measuring economic performance and societal progress in Northern Ireland. To progress this work, we are now convening a Carnegie Roundtable on Measuring Wellbeing in Northern Ireland with our Carnegie Associates at the School of Law at Queen's University Belfast, Dr Peter Doran and John Woods. The Roundtable will seek to raise awareness of the importance of measuring wellbeing and the positive impact that this has on policy development. It will also explore the next steps necessary to develop a wellbeing framework in Northern Ireland focused on achieving wellbeing outcomes. We are pleased to have the support of Finance Minister, Simon Hamilton MLA and the Assembly Finance Committee Chair, Daithí McKay MLA, for our work in Northern Ireland.

To engage different groups in Northern Ireland with the Roundtable process, the idea of wellbeing and how it should be measured, focus groups were conducted with women, young people, ethnic minorities, and older people - groups which are traditionally under-represented in consultation exercises - and semi-structured interviews were held with sixteen key stakeholder groups. We have drawn on our own research and contributions from our conference attendees, Roundtable members, focus group participants and stakeholder interviews to inform our response.

The challenges to good relations

Exploring how the concept of wellbeing can be used to promote social change has a special urgency in Northern Ireland as communities emerge from generations of conflict. More than fifteen years after the Good Friday Agreement, some of the most enduring post-conflict challenges are, we believe, at their heart, questions of wellbeing.

This appears to have been confirmed by our focus group participants who, despite a range of backgrounds, identified three common challenges to their subjective wellbeing:

- **Social isolation or loneliness.** Participants across the focus groups spoke of the general breakdown of communication across society, a lack of family support or traditional family relationships, a lack of peer support or friendships or physical isolation.
- **Mental ill-health.** Mental ill-health and the stigma surrounding it were identified by each focus group as a key challenge. At the first meeting of the Roundtable, the close correlation between Troubles-related trauma and suicide was recognised, along with the fact that there is limited understanding of this correlation, and little meaningful action on issues such as addiction and depression. It was raised that there have been nearly as many suicides in Northern Ireland since 1998 as there were deaths during the Troubles. Therefore, any strategy to improve good relations and societal wellbeing must acknowledge that many of the barriers to progress are rooted in the experiences of people during the Troubles.
- **Fear.** Representatives from ethnic minority communities, older people and women in particular highlighted fears for personal safety as a significant challenge to wellbeing. Fear for the future in terms of uncertainty over job and economic prospects and quality of life generally, particularly in the continuing period of austerity, was also a challenge common to all the focus groups.

Overall, the challenge for wellbeing and good relations in Northern Ireland is to address multi-generational deprivation, which cannot be addressed by project scale interventions; this requires systemic change.

How division can be addressed

The above challenges to good relations undermine the wellbeing of citizens and a united future in Northern Ireland with a strong sense of common purpose. In such challenging times, it is important for the Northern Ireland Executive to design policies in way that improves the personal circumstances of citizens, and also builds community resilience, economic activity and political stability.

Below we have outlined four ways in which the concept of wellbeing can help to address division in Northern Ireland:

- **Focus for government.** In our Roundtable meetings, focus groups and stakeholder interviews, there was overwhelming support for the idea of wellbeing as a useful and important focus for the Northern Ireland Executive, local government and partners. A focus on wellbeing was seen as having a potentially important impact on inequality and poverty, providing a unifying vision across government, and a shift away from an overriding focus on economics. Our participants believed that the vision for government is currently limited to a general aspiration to improve the economy, and that a focus on wellbeing would provide a more holistic and inclusive agenda and approach to policymaking. Leadership from the Northern Ireland Executive is critical for the wellbeing agenda to prosper and to be embraced across the public sector.
- **A shared narrative.** As with a vision for government, our participants also believed there to be a limited shared narrative across government, focusing only on the economy and job creation. The prospect of a shared narrative across government based on improving the wellbeing of people in Northern Ireland was universally welcomed. This was based on the premise that a focus on wellbeing could enable people to have discussions which they may not otherwise have, such as the human and economic costs of division, and shift the focus away from the zero-sum game of resources between communities. The concept of wellbeing is therefore a useful tool to address a number of legacy issues such as low educational attainment and health inequalities, and for cross-community work. A shared narrative based on wellbeing has the potential to help the Northern Ireland Executive get beyond the concept of a divided community to one that embraces diversity and includes a politics that re-engages groups which are currently alienated, such as women and young people. An early indication of support for a shared political narrative based on wellbeing was provided by Finance Minister, Simon Hamilton MLA and the Assembly Finance Committee Chair, Daithí McKay MLA, at our conference in Belfast last autumn.

- **Political institutions.** Our participants were of the view that a shared narrative on wellbeing could, in turn, help to form a coherent Programme for Government which would achieve joined up working across government departments and the public sector. There are significant opportunities to embed the wellbeing agenda across the Northern Ireland administration in the context of a range of on-going government initiatives, including the creation of a Public Sector Reform Division within the Department of Finance and Personnel, in the development of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister's Delivering Social Change framework and within the Northern Ireland Executive's core commitment to equality, good relations and prosperity. An outcomes-based performance framework based on improving wellbeing was welcomed by our participants, if the outcomes set by government were meaningful and realistic. Such a framework could provide transparency and a tool for scrutiny for the Northern Ireland Assembly, the media and the general public on progress being made towards achieving wellbeing outcomes, facilitate working across government departments and the public sector and lead to more efficient resource allocation.
- **Public engagement.** A new national conversation with the public and the voluntary sector about what matters in Northern Ireland across all communities would help to inform a wellbeing framework focusing on achieving wellbeing outcomes. Embedding public engagement for setting outcomes into the reform of community planning and building on existing good practice in a number of councils could help secure meaningful engagement with a wellbeing performance framework. Communities could also be empowered to help measure wellbeing through the network of clubs, groups and forums in Northern Ireland and their significant reach into communities.

We hope that you find these comments helpful. If you would like to discuss our response, or would like to find out more about our work please contact my colleague Lauren Pennycook, Policy Officer at lauren@carnegieuk.org or by telephone 01383 721 445. We would also be pleased to provide oral evidence to the Committee on this inquiry.

Yours sincerely,



Martyn Evans
Chief Executive