

## Committee for the Executive Office

The Executive Office has responsibility for two delivery plans which cover five indicators as follows:

- Increase Respect for Each Other; Increase Reconciliation; Increase Shared Space
- Total spend by external visitors; Nation Brands Index

To inform its consideration of the Programme for Government as it applies to the Executive Office, the Committee took evidence from the Senior Responsible Officers for the above delivery plans. Oral evidence was taken from the following arm's length bodies:

- Commission for Victims and Survivors
- Victims and Survivors Service
- Strategic Investment Board
- Equality Commission NI
- Community Relations Council

The Committee also issued a request for written submissions to a range of stakeholders. The responses have been published on the Committee's website and will be shared with TEO.

While much of the Committee's discussions on the PfG is reflected in the main body of this report, key points relating to TEO are set out below in line with the format suggested for statutory committee responses.

### Views on Outcomes and Indicators

The Committee notes the concerns that were expressed by the Commissioner for Victims and Survivors and members of the Victims' Forum that the PfG does not specifically include an outcome for dealing with the past. In his written submission, the Commissioner for Older People (COPNI) also expressed concern at the lack of a specific outcome for the older sector. The Committee acknowledges the views of the First Minister and deputy First Minister that those sectors are accommodated within the PfG. The Ministers also emphasised the priority placed on the victims' sector, pointing to the recent funding announcement of over £30m for the sector.

A number of stakeholders were of the view that some of the indicators were too narrowly-focused. The primary indicator for Shared Space, for example, is

*Proportion who think leisure centres, parks, libraries and shopping centres in their areas are 'shared and open' to both Protestants and Catholics.*

The Community Relations Council referred to the indicator as "extremely limited". In their view, human interaction in leisure centres, shopping centres etc. tends to be relatively limited. CRC recommended additional indicators on education, housing and interfaces. ECNI recommended that the shared space indicator was not limited to community background but "should consider the degree to which public areas are

shared and open for all Section 75 groups.” ECNI emphasised the lack of available disaggregated data for Section 75 groups across a number of indicators.

The Committee would urge TEO to remain aware of the perception that some groups feel left out because they are not explicitly referenced in the PfG and take the steps necessary to ensure they understand how their needs are addressed in the delivery plans.

### **Whether the outcome of the first consultation has been taken into consideration as appropriate**

The Committee recognises that the points made by the Commissioner for Victims and Survivors and the Commissioner for Older People about the absence of specific outcomes for their respective sectors were not reflected in the Consultation Document; however, members accept the rationale from Ministers as set out above.

The Committee heard that some of the issues raised by stakeholders had been taken into consideration. Although concerns remain for ECNI, the Chief Commissioner noted that “some of the comments that we have made about enduring inequalities, section 75 groups, and data collection are there.” In their evidence to the Committee, CRC advised of disappointment that their input in respect of the principal indicators has not been reflected but went on to say that “the Department is probably doing the best that it can in a fairly new way of developing strategy and policy.”

The Committee welcomes the First Minister’s and deputy First Minister’s assurance that full consideration will be given to the responses to the second consultation.

### **Views on departmental action plans**

The Committee understands that the non-inclusion of CRC in the delivery plan relating to Respect, Reconciliation and Shared Space is a genuine oversight. Members recognise that it is early in the process of developing the delivery plans and more work will be required with key stakeholders and delivery partners. In general, the Committee was content with the delivery plans for TEO at this stage, but asks the Department to monitor how well aware stakeholders are of how delivery plans are “live documents” that will be changed online.

The Committee welcomes the positive comments from stakeholders, including the Commission for Victims and Survivors, ECNI and CRC, regarding their engagement with senior TEO officials on the delivery plans. However, Members note with concern that COPNI has indicated that the Commissioner’s office has not been involved in discussion about the delivery plan on Respect, Reconciliation and Shared Space despite being listed as a ‘key delivery partner’ through its statutory responsibilities. The Committee would ask that officials engage with all key delivery partners to ensure that they have the opportunity to contribute to the development plan and are fully aware of expectations and responsibilities within the plan.

The Committee also recommends that the Department learns from and incorporates existing good practice into the delivery plan.

## **Opportunities and challenges presented by cross-departmental working**

The Committee recognises the scale of the cultural challenge presented by the switch to Outcome Based Accountability, especially coming at a time when the Northern Ireland Civil Service is experiencing its biggest ever reduction in head count through the Voluntary Exit Scheme.

The Committee recognises the challenges that departments will face in working out of silos and across boundaries and this is reflected in the main body of the report. While each indicator has been assigned to an SRO from a particular department, no outcome can be delivered by a single department. Actions within the delivery plans will require to be delivered by other departments or indeed delivery partners outside the NICS. The Committee would ask that TEO sets out clearly how it proposes to meet this challenge.

## **Proposed Departmental reporting arrangements**

In line with its recommendation elsewhere, the Committee recognises that further work needs to be done to determine how the Assembly can best support joined up scrutiny of the PfG. Nonetheless, TEO has overall lead on the delivery of the PfG with the Head of the Civil Service (HOCS) as overall SRO and a senior TEO official as deputy SRO. The Committee therefore expects to retain the lead in overall scrutiny of the PfG. In that regard, the Committee notes that the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister endeavoured to hear from the First Minister and deputy First Minister at least annually on the PfG, and would welcome the continuation of this practice in the new mandate.

At present, written information considered by a committee that is of relevance to other committees is shared as a matter of routine. It may well therefore be the case that the Committee will receive – almost by default – updates on actions by other departments that contribute towards indicators or outcomes for which TEO has responsibility via another statutory committee. The Committee formally requests, however, that, where TEO is working with another department on delivery, that department should provide written papers when required or make officials available to join TEO colleagues giving oral evidence to the Committee. Similarly, the Committee expects that officials from TEO will join colleagues from other departments in giving evidence to other statutory committees as required.

Finally, the Committee agreed to ask TEO delivery partners for regular updates on their involvement in the delivery plan, actions or programmes they are responsible for or share responsibility for, and their views on progress towards the outcomes.