

TOWARDS A WELLBEING FRAMEWORK FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

BRIEFING FOR NI IMPACT FORUM ON ADULT LEARNING, 16 JUNE 2016

The Carnegie Roundtable on Measuring Wellbeing in Northern Ireland reported after eighteen months of deliberation, including a detailed process of stakeholder engagement. We combined our own local and diverse experience with international evidence on designing a whole of government approach to wellbeing - to support better outcomes for citizens and communities.

The Roundtable recommended seven steps towards placing the wellbeing of citizens at the heart of government. Our key recommendation is an outcomes-based wellbeing framework that can act as a lynchpin for a far-reaching set of public sector reforms and an invigorated administration, one that is focused at all times on the impact of its work on citizens and communities.

We are delighted that this thinking is reflected in the draft Programme for Government currently out for consultation by the NI Executive. The Roundtable is being reconvened during the public consultation phase of to explore how the proposals meet the challenge of implementing a wellbeing framework for Northern Ireland.

THE SEVEN STEPS

STEP 1 is to put **wellbeing at the heart of government** and we are pleased to note that this has been taken forward as part of the *Fresh Start* agreement and the workshops convened for the design of the *Programme for Government*, with a commitment to an outcomes-based wellbeing framework. The adoption of an outcomes-based approach is a significant step that can support more collaborative approaches to policy design and delivery across departments and with key stakeholders.

STEP 2 recommends a **public conversation on wellbeing** to talk about the outcomes citizens themselves seek, individually and collectively. That conversation is – in a sense – already under way in many places and in a variety of forms: in civic spaces, in community planning gatherings, in civil society and in the business community. The task now is to connect the PfG consultation with those voices and aspirations.

STEP 3 is that civil servants need to be supported in finding **new ways of working**, breaking down old silos and reaching out to new forms of collaboration at every point in the policy cycle. New skills and practices across the 'whole of government' are required if we are to meet expectations at local government level and among stakeholders.

STEP 4 is to align the contributions of **local government** and the Executive departments so that all are working with a shared purpose while respectful of scale, diversity and place. Local Government reform and Community Planning represent a significant democratic moment in the life of Northern Ireland. Wellbeing is already embedded in place-based policy conversations tailored to the unique features of diverse communities, convened by the new local authorities. Community Planning Partnerships can provide an important mechanism for cascading ideas upwards and downwards in a mutual exchange, contributing to the formulation of some shared outcomes.

STEP 5 asks us to think more creatively about how we can **communicate social progress**. The new outcomes, indicators and measurements in the draft Programme for Government identify how we can measure social progress but we have to find innovative techniques to communicate this with the public. International examples show the benefits of investing in data visualization, live dashboards, engagement through social media and crowd sourcing experiments in data collection and display. Even these approaches will only be impactful insofar as there is a sustained high-level political commitment to civic engagement at every point in the co-design and delivery of policy and services.



STEP 6 is to use outcomes to **improve accountability**. We welcome the intensive engagement by the Assembly's Committees dealing with finance, public accounts and the First and Deputy First Minister. As the PfG moves to an explicitly outcomes focus, it will be vital for the 'value for money' strand of the audit process to be aligned with the outcomes to which public bodies commit themselves. Alongside this more enabling scrutiny culture for auditors and reporting via scorecards to Assembly Committees, the key to real accountability is citizen engagement throughout the policy cycle.

STEP 7 is to **support the outcomes-based wellbeing framework**. The new approach will require support and guidance, both for technical implementation and to ensure that it fulfils its potential to improve the wellbeing of the people of Northern Ireland. We note with interest the potential for the Compact Civic Advisory Panel (included in the Fresh Start agreement) to engage with the implementation of a wellbeing outcomes framework.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information on the Roundtable, including all our reports and videos [click here](#), and follow the Roundtable on Twitter [@NIwellbeing](#).

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