

**Programme for Government
Northern Ireland Executive
(Consultation Response from Fermanagh and Omagh District Council)**

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council (Council) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the public consultation on the Draft Programme for Government Framework 2016-2021. This document is laid out as follows:

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1. Brief Background for Fermanagh and Omagh District Council

The District Council area is home to 114,992 people, approximately 52,500 jobs and 7,175 businesses. The District Council area is Northern Ireland's largest region in terms of land mass - approximately 3,000km², or 20% of NI - and the smallest in terms of population. As a result, the population density of approximately 41 people per km² is the sparsest in NI. This is a key feature of the district but presents challenges in terms of accessibility and service delivery.

The District has grown by 9,241 people since 2001 and continues to receive a net inflow of migrants. Tourism performance is strong, with over £63m of expenditure in 2014, the highest level outside Belfast and the Causeway Coast and Glens. Entrepreneurship levels remain well above average, as does educational attainment. The rich and varied environment is an asset to the District.

However, challenges persist. The absence of dual carriageway or motorways in the District is a constraint, as is the limited digital connectivity, particularly in rural areas. Businesses, although plentiful, tend to be micro in nature: 85% employ less than 5 people and 45% have a turnover of less than £50k per annum. There is also considerable concern regarding the potential impact of Brexit, particularly in the context that 50% of NI's land border with the Republic of Ireland stretches across the District. Additionally, local dairy farmers will face another negative impact with regards to income - on top of the previous, and recent, reductions in income.

2. Introduction Consultation Feedback

The Council acknowledges that the Draft Programme for Government Framework (PfG) provides an exciting opportunity, as well as a huge challenge, for the future planning of Northern Ireland and is broadly welcomed as the first step in a much longer-term exercise of strategic planning.

As in the approach to the development of the Community Plan, Council stresses that it is vital that cross-cutting issues are fully considered. These issues must be explored fully, along with all partners and relevant stakeholders, in order to ensure that the outcomes are achieved with the best possible results. Council trusts that the allocation of responsibility for outcomes to Permanent Secretaries and measures to Deputy Secretaries will inevitably result in cross-departmental joined-up approaches going forward.

The feedback provided within this response document will essentially offer the Council's view on the outcomes, indicators and measures, alongside a series of overarching concerns. The response will look at some of the outcomes in detail, but it may not cover all of the outcomes. The Council response will also include some relevant information gathered through its Community Planning procedures, as well as information gathered from consulting with other agencies, organisations, stakeholders and groups.

The Council fully endorses the comments contained within the response provided by the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA), and will also emphasise some of these points further within this response document.

3. Northern Ireland Executive Approach

The Council believes that the Northern Ireland Executive should take a very 'individual centred' approach to developing the PfG. The NI Executive should strive to attain an effective, efficient and cooperative society that will benefit all citizens equally and fairly.

The Draft PfG document is very aspirational, and the Council welcomes the 'outcomes based' approach to the Draft PfG, as well as the development of the overarching work, strategies and action plans that will accompany the finalised PfG document.

Ideally, the Council believes, that it would have been beneficial to conclude consultation on the framework prior to the development of delivery plans, but recognises the time constraints in place. The Council strongly asserts that local government should be a key delivery partner for much of the content within the PfG, and as such, must have an opportunity to influence and develop the detailed actions that will underpin the delivery of the outcomes.

4. Overarching Concerns

4a. Potential Impact of Brexit

The Council believes that, in developing the PfG, an assessment of the implications of the recent EU Referendum must be undertaken, particularly in relation to funding from the European Union which may not be in place for the duration of the full period of the final PfG.

The Council believes it is vital that the NI Executive works to ensure that the support previously received from the European Union is secured from other sources, including the UK Government in Westminster. Funding and support such as this is vital to ensure that programmes and projects, which may benefit local communities greatly, proceed and are continued. Some examples of such projects may include the local Enniskillen Southern Bypass Project, the A5 Western Transport Corridor, local cross-border/cross-community projects, and the Ulster Canal Project. These examples are not an exhaustive list by any means, but are just included to give an example of local projects which are important to the local community within the Fermanagh and Omagh District.

4b. Community Planning

The Council is disappointed in the fact that Community Planning is not referenced within the Draft PfG. It is recognised that partnership working is referenced throughout and local government is often referenced as a key partner (amongst other key stakeholders), yet Community Planning itself is not referenced either within the strategic hierarchy or as a potential delivery mechanism.

Community Planning, and the established Community Planning Partnership (which includes representation from a range of government agencies) is a key delivery mechanism that will support the partnership-working approach, and as a function in its entirety across all Councils is a desirable method for working towards balanced regional growth.

To promote this joined up approach, the Council has ensured synergy between the Fermanagh and Omagh Community Plan and the PfG process where possible during the former's development. This includes the embracing of an Outcomes Based Approach and a variety of work streams to ensure the outcomes are matched and the indicators / measures consistent where possible.

4c. Regions and Sub-Regions

Whilst the desire for balanced growth across the region comes across strongly throughout the Draft PfG the Council is disappointed with the lack of additional detail regarding what balanced regional growth looks like, what it means for delivery and how it will be achieved. The Council recognises that balanced regional growth has its limitations, but stresses that these should be clearly spelled out to manage

expectations and ensure a transparent, agreeable definition of 'balanced regional growth'.

In particular, the lack of a clear definition of the 'sub-regions' within NI, and how progress will be measured, is particularly disappointing. For example, the lead measure under Indicator 34 is the employment rate by geographic area however it notes that this area is to be defined. The fact that the geographic areas have not yet been definitively agreed defined is disappointing and concerning; the 11 Local Government Districts are a very prominent geographic sub-category within NI.

The Draft PfG should also reflect the regional balance of Northern Ireland and address the existing disparities in development between the East and the West of the region.. Although there are some large urban settlements within NI, there are large areas which are rural based, and where infrastructure is lacking and services are not easily accessible.

4d. Environment

Reference to the environment, in terms of outcomes, indicators and measures is grossly underrepresented. Throughout the Council's work, it has strived to be supportive of the three pillars of sustainability - Economical, Societal and Environmental. This has been a fundamental aspect of the development of the Community Plan.

It is extremely disappointing that the PfG Framework does not make any significant reference to the environment and is presenting a significant concern to Fermanagh and Omagh District Council going forward. The one outcome that is relevant (Outcome 2: *We live and work sustainably – protecting the environment*) is very limited, and Indicator 29: *Increase environmental sustainability* is extremely lacking and used against only one outcome. This requires significant revision.

The balance between the 'economic gains' to which the Draft PfG aspires and the need for environmental conservation will need to be addressed firmly within the final PfG as well as the supporting strategies and plans.

4e. Accountability

The Council believes, that although the new 'Outcomes Based Approach' is to be welcomed, it is vital that there is full Accountability showing the effect that the NI Executive (and the PfG) is having on the population.

The Council is also concerned that the Outcomes with the higher number of indicators (e.g. those with around 20 indicators) may take priority over those with a smaller number of indicators. It is important that a hierarchy of outcomes is not created inadvertently by design, as each should be considered as of 'key importance' to the success of the PfG.

4f. Rural Issues

The Council believes that there are many rural issues which are not adequately represented within the Draft PfG. One such example would be the issue of transport within rural areas.

Indicator 23, 'Improve Transport Connections for People, Goods and Services', is being measured on the average journey time on the key economic corridors, namely:

- A5 Londonderry – Aughnacloy
- M2/A6 Belfast – Londonderry
- A8/A1 Larne – Newry
- M1/A4 Belfast – Enniskillen
- A26/A2 Londonderry – Belfast

Whilst the Council welcomes the inclusion of roads within local areas (i.e. A5 and A4) this measurement is not reflective of the transport connection difficulties faced by people living in rural areas of the Fermanagh and Omagh District. Council would suggest that a more meaningful measurement may be to measure journey times within each District, for example to and from the larger urban centres from various rural locations. Within the Fermanagh and Omagh District this could be journey times to and from Enniskillen and Omagh, from various rural locations within the District.

Indicator 25, 'Increase the use of Public Transport and Active Travel', is to be measured by the percentage of all journeys made by walking, cycling and public transport. In response to a query at one of the Draft PfG consultation events, it was stated that Community Transport services would not be included within this measure. The Council would like to take this opportunity to stress the importance of Community Transport which provides almost 250,000 passenger trips per year. This is a hugely significant figure, and within the Fermanagh and Omagh District the very fact that public transport services are quite limited (along with the fact that rural areas are not ideally equipped for walking or cycling) Community Transport plays a huge role providing a service to people living in rural areas – especially those in isolated rural areas.

Indicator 28, 'Increase the Confidence and Capability of People and Communities', is going to be measured by 'self-efficiency'. Although, this is a new measurement that is to be created, it may be worthwhile to include other service measurements (such as Community Transport) which plays a huge role within local communities – building resilience and self-sufficiency.

The final PfG must demonstrate a commitment to tackling rural disadvantage and be subjected to a robust rural-proofing exercise in order to ensure that it considers the needs of all areas, whether urban or rural.

5. Outcomes, Indicators and Measures

The Council welcomes the Outcomes Based Approach adopted in the PfG; it is a bold new model for Northern Ireland with a proven track record elsewhere. However, there is some confusion as to the precise approach that has been undertaken. Friedman's Trying Hard is Not Good Enough is referenced as source material, but the approach is not the Outcomes Based Accountability as outlined by Friedman. Instead, an Outcomes Based Approach, which we understand is derived from the approach Sir John Elvidge implemented in Scotland has been preferred. A short overview of what an Outcomes Based Approach is, how it varies from previous models in N Ireland, how it differs from the *Outcomes Based Accountability* and why it has been implemented would be useful.

5a. Outcomes

The Council has no issue with the 14 Outcomes proposed in the PfG Framework, other than that the environment is grossly underrepresented, as outlined in section 4.2. Indeed, the Council has mapped the 14 outcomes against our draft Community Planning outcomes and finds that there are significant synergies.

5b. Indicators

The Council has no particular issue with any one of the 42 indicators. However, there is concern regarding the loose relationship between the outcomes and the indicators. There are too many indicators under each outcome and too much overlap, which results in the set of indicators losing focus and not reporting on the outcome.

To demonstrate this, the Council undertook a brief mapping exercise as part of this response. On average, there are 7 indicators per outcome, with a maximum of 21

Table 1: Outcomes by number of indicators

		Number of indicators
1	We prosper through a strong, competitive, regionally balanced economy	17
2	We live and work sustainably - protecting the environment	8
3	We have a more equal society	12
4	We enjoy long, healthy, active lives	14
5	We are an innovative, creative society, where people can fulfil their potential	20
6	We have more people working in better jobs	17
7	We have a safe community where we respect the law and each other	10
8	We care for others and we help those in need	21
9	We are a shared society that respects diversity	7
10	We are a confident, welcoming, outward looking society	9
11	We have high quality public services	11
12	We have created a place where people want to live and work, to visit and invest	19

13	We connect people and opportunities through our infrastructure	12
14	We give our children and young people the best start in life	20
Max		21
Min		7
Average		14

Friedman’s approach suggests between 3 – 5 indicators per outcome. Council suggests that the outcomes in the PfG would benefit from a more concise, focussed set of indicators under each outcome. Whilst recognising that this would likely require more indicators, Council feels that this is manageable. This is the approach taken with the Community Plan (3 – 5 indicators under each outcome, with much less overlap) and we would be happy to share this approach, if it were deemed useful.

It is also felt that the selection of indicators under outcomes can appear random in places, making it difficult to understand the justification or criteria applied to arrive at the decision. Whilst recognising that this is a highly subjective area, Council would point out the following examples:

- Outcome 1: We prosper through a strong, competitive and regionally balanced economy does not cite Indicator 16: Increase the proportion of people in work
- Outcome 14: We give our children and young people the best start in life includes Indicator 39: Reduce Reoffending, but omits almost all of the economic indicators and Indicator 40: Improve our International Reputation

As previously noted, this is a subjective area. However, Council would recommend a brief re-examination of the relevance of indicators under each outcome and suggest that this is less likely to be an issue if the set of indicators were shorter and more focussed.

5c. Measures

The Council is concerned at having only one lead measure for each indicator. Is one lead measure sufficient to report on progress, particularly against some of the indicators that are more wide ranging? The issue extrapolates when considering this is an issue for many indicators, which in turn raised significant issues about the ability of the indicators to report progress against the outcomes.

It is felt that the desire to have only one lead measure under each indicator is an unnecessary constraint and should be dropped. This is likely to be beneficial for many of the indicators, but a few of particular concern are set out in the following list which also includes any wider concerns regarding the measures.

- **Indicator 1: Reduce Crime:** The prevalence rate is a good, holistic measure, but there is no reference to the perception of crime or fear of crime, both of which can have negative societal impacts.
- **Indicator 6: Improve Mental Health:** The % of population with GHQ12 scores ≥ 4 is a very specialist measure. For example, does everyone who reports mental health issues get assessed and recorded on this scale? Complementary data on the number of people reporting to / receiving treatment for mental health (and depression) through their GP surgery would be highly beneficial, understandable and a truer reflection of the situation. In addition, the number of anti-depressant drugs prescribed (in absolute terms and/or as a relative measure) would be complementary, as would a measure of alternative therapies.
- **Indicator 8: Supply of suitable housing.** The proposed NIHE housing stress indicator is strong, but only considers one segment of the market. Other types of housing supply, such as private rented and starter homes are an essential facet of the market and should be considered to provide a holistic assessment of the true market conditions.
- **Indicator 13: Reduce educational inequality:** The proposed measure considers only the gap between FSME students and non-FSME students. Other issues, such as the gap between boys and girls and Catholic-Protestant are also educational inequalities.
- **Indicator 18: A Good Jobs Index:** Although not a developed measure, it is concerning that higher wages are the only factor referenced in the supporting narrative. A Good Job is about more than high wages; for example, the ability to work the desired level of hours; the opportunity for promotion; flexible working conditions are just some of the factors that relate to a good job. These should not be overlooked as part of this index.
- **Indicator 23: Improve transport connections for people, goods and services:** The consideration of only key economic corridors is very limiting. Other routes should be included and some consideration should be given to how this varies across different modes of transport.
- **Indicator 24: Improve internet connectivity:** It is imperative that the lead measure reports at an LGD14 level. OFCOM hold this data, and despite concerns regarding robustness, it should be included in its current form with an ambition to develop it further as part of a Data Development Agenda.
- **Indicator 25: Increase the use of public transport and active travel:** Community Transport should also be included.
- **Indicator 29: Increase environmental sustainability:** Greenhouse Gas emissions offer very limited coverage of this diverse topic. It is in no way wholly representative of environmental sustainability. Issues such as biodiversity, water ecology, soil quality, woodland cover, renewable energy and flood risk need to be included. The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), will hold almost all of the underpinning information. To consider

sustainability more fully, issues such as the design of buildings to recognised environmental standards need to be considered, albeit as a separate indicator / measure.

- **Indicator 31: Increase shared space:** The question is a good one, but why are the parameters limited to Protestants and Catholics? The language is out-of-date. The issue of shared space is at least equally relevant to other cultures and ethnicities and this should be reflected in the measure.
- **Indicator 34: Improve the regional balance of economic prosperity through increased employment:** The employment rate is a good measure, but it does not cover the issue of regional balance in its entirety. Consideration should also be given to other economic factors, such as the differential in workplace wage levels, business activity and skills imbalances.
- **Indicator 38: Increase the effectiveness of the justice system:** Although not a fully developed measure, the issue of confidence in the justice system (and policing) should be taken into account.

Council welcomes the suite of previously unpublished data that this process has brought to the fore, and recognise that 12 of the lead measures have not yet been developed or published. More information on how these are being developed, the process undertaken and an opportunity to feed into the process would be further welcomed. This is particularly true in the instance of the Good Jobs Index and the Respect Index.

The Council has also reviewed the Measures Annex available through the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency website. There are currently 7 measures that are not available at LGD14 level; we support all and any efforts to make data available at LGD14 level (and below) where possible. The main concern is in accessing the underlying data for the measures that are supposedly available at LGD14 level; on more than one occasion, we have received feedback that the data are not currently available at LGD14 level, contrary to the PfG Measures Annex. We would recommend a reconciliation of this issue as a matter of urgency, particularly as it is likely that other Councils are also seeking to access this information.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council appreciated the opportunity to respond to the Draft PfG. The PfG provides an exciting opportunity for Northern Ireland however, there are some key issues, particularly with in relation to rural needs, that need to be addressed.

The Council would like the Northern Ireland Executive to take note of the comments contained within this Consultation Response document.