

Programme for Government [Northern Ireland Executive]

(Response from Fermanagh and Omagh District Council)

Introduction

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Northern Ireland Executive in relation to the public consultation on the 'Programme for Government' (PfG).

The Council acknowledges that the Programme for Government provides an exciting opportunity, as well as a huge challenge, for future service planning and delivery in Northern Ireland. The PfG should also provide the overarching strategic framework to guide the development of other Executive Strategy documents such as the Investment Strategy, the Economic Strategy and Social Strategy.

The Council also welcomes the 'citizen first' approach to the PfG, which places the needs and aspirations of citizens at the centre of everything it does.

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council's previous consultation response to the 'Draft Programme for Government Framework' (submitted in July 2016), commented extensively on the 'Outcomes and Indicators' (then referred to as lead measures), and it is noted that there has been little change to the original document following this consultation process.

However, the Council does acknowledge the inclusion of a number of additional considerations in the current draft of the Programme for Government, such as:

- The potential impact of Brexit.
- Change in terminology from "lead measures" to "Indicators".
- References to Community Planning.
- Increase in the number of indicators relating to the environment.
- Specific reference to 'Accountability', as well as having between 3 and 7 indicators per outcome.
- A substantial number of references to regional balance.
- Including information which gives more clarity on certain indicators at 'Local Government District' level.

It is also worth noting that although the Council's previously submitted consultation response commented significantly on the 'Outcomes and Indicators', there are comments included within this response specifically looking at the outcomes and indicators which the Council feels were not adequately dealt with following the previous consultation process.

Brief Background to the Fermanagh and Omagh District Council Area

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 is the smallest in terms of population. As a result, the population density of approximately 41 people per km² is the sparsest in Northern Ireland. This is a key feature of the district but presents challenges in terms of accessibility and service delivery.

Outcomes and Indicators

The Council welcomes that the term 'Indicator' is being used as opposed to 'Lead Measure', as well as there being a number of additional 'Indicators' being introduced to include:

- Biodiversity.
- Usage of online channels to access public services.
- Overall performance assessment (NI Water).
- Gap between the number of houses we have and the number of houses we need.
- Percentage change in the energy security of supply margin.
- Percentage of water bodies at 'good status'.

The Council also acknowledges that most Indicators now have a 'Senior Responsible Officer' assigned to lead. However, there is a concern that, even at this late stage, there are two Indicators which do not have a Senior Responsible Officer assigned, namely: Indicator 30: Total spend by external visitors and Indicator 40: Nation Brands Index.

Role of Local Government and Community Planning

The Council is concerned that in some areas of the Programme for Government, particularly within the Delivery Plans, there does seem to be a confusion over the role of Local Government. This may be partly attributable to the fact that there are different authors involved in each delivery plan. However, it is important that there is a clear understanding should across all Departments (including each Senior Responsible Officer) of the exact and critical role Local Government can assume in assisting with the successful implementation of the PfG.

For example, through the Council's Community Planning function (and any subsequent partnership working) Councils can assist in achieving some of the Programme for Government indicators, aims and objectives.

As there is a shared common purpose between the PfG and Community Plans, there is a need to ensure an alignment between strategic outcomes, performance indicators and evolving delivery plans.

Local Government, particularly through its Community Planning Partnerships, is now in the unique position of being able to support the Executive in co-designing and co-delivering the PfG and should be regarded as a 'Partner of Equals' as opposed to a 'Delivery Partner'. However, the Council is particularly disappointed about the recent decision to retain Powers of Regeneration centrally. The transfer of these powers are vital to delivering synergistic effective services at a local level.

Impact of Brexit

In the Council's previous consultation response, the Council raised the issue of Brexit and the potential impact that this may have on the delivery of the Programme for Government, and not just in the development of the Programme for Government.

The Council also notes that although Brexit is mentioned within the Consultation Documents, it is only a very soft mention and does not fully explore the potential issues.

The Council recognises that the Executive does not share a single view of the outcome of the referendum on 'Membership of the European Union', however it is vital that there is a commitment to consider the impact of future political and constitutional changes which will arise. The Council also believes that there should be a review of the PfG, once there is greater certainty of the impacts arising from leaving the European Union.

It is also vital that the Northern Ireland Executive secures the financial support, previously guaranteed from the European Union, from other sources including the UK Government in Westminster.

Regional Balance

The Council acknowledges the substantial number of references to 'Regional Balance' within the current PfG draft. However, when referencing Regional Balance, the major emphasis is placed upon improving (or strengthening) the linkages between Belfast and Derry/Londonderry, with occasional references to Newry.

The Council is keen for the PfG includes a commitment to improve across and between all District Council areas, especially the Fermanagh and Omagh District which is one of the most westerly areas in Northern Ireland, and also contains some of the most sparsely populated areas.

It is vital that the PfG deals specifically with the entirety of the regional imbalance across Northern Ireland, addressing the disparities in development between the East and West of the region. The existing infrastructure in many of these rural areas within our district is significantly lacking, meaning that services may not be easily accessible by local residents or businesses. The Council would like to see a firm commitment to the progression of vital road infrastructure in the area including the duelling of the entirety of the A5, the A4 (including a Southern bypass to the town of

Enniskillen) and the A32. This would result not only in improved connections between Omagh and Enniskillen, but would also improve north/south and east/west transport corridors.

These links have major implications for the Economy, the Environment, Transport and Connectivity, and clearly indicate a requirement for investment in modern transport infrastructure in the area, provided on a cross-border basis. It is important that there is joined up working with the National Roads Authority in the South. Whilst there is an understanding of the implications of the recession in relation to spending on the roads, it is also important that the improvements already achieved are consolidated and that plans continue to reflect longer term needs.

In addition, within Outcome One, the Department states that it aims to work with local Councils to develop strategies to address regional imbalance. Although the Council acknowledges that this is a positive step, it is important that there is a truly synchronised approach to their development to ensure that there are effective linkages between the strategies. There is also the concern that if there is a strategy being drafted for each area (11 District Strategies) then this could take a considerable amount of time. It is unclear what impact, if any these strategies will have on the Rural Development Strategy and what status these will have.

Council recommends that the Department creates a single 'Working Group', with representatives from each Council tasked with drawing together one Northern Ireland Strategy, with a section dedicated to exploring the issues within each District area.

Rural Disadvantage

The Council believes that the current strategies (including the Regional Development Strategy) do not adequately address disadvantage in rural areas, such as those within the Fermanagh and Omagh District. As outlined above, there are some distinct disadvantages to rural communities (i.e. infrastructure and access to services) and the PfG should recognise this, addressing any shortcomings. None of the Central Government Departments have been given responsibility for supporting regeneration initiatives which will begin to tackle the disadvantages faced by rural communities and this represents a significant policy gap.

The Council strongly recommends the Northern Ireland Executive to review, and renew, the Regional Development Strategy in order to align it with the final Programme for Government, specifically targeting rural disadvantage.

The Council is concerned that the Programme for Government has not been subjected to a robust Rural Proofing exercise. The Council believes that effective rural proofing is essential to support isolated rural communities, businesses, groups and individuals and demonstrates a commitment to ensure rural circumstances and needs become an integral part of policy, no longer seen as an add-on or after-

thought. The building of community capacity and village renewal are important factors in maintaining strong and vibrant communities, as is the need to encourage community and social enterprise.

Over the last number of years, the Council believes there have been a number of decisions which have been made that are detrimental to rural communities including the extension of Broadband in urban areas, the absence of consideration of non-farming rural dwellers in Strategic Planning Policy Statements.

Performance Improvement

Part 12 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014 details the framework to support continuous improvement in the delivery of council services. Council notes with concern that within the PfG, there is no mention of Performance Improvement for either the Executive or Government Departments.

The Council believes that there should be a visible commitment to performance improvement included within the PfG, similar to that required of Local Government. Not only would this give Central Government Departments more accountability, which was noted in the previous consultation process as 'lacking', but it would also assist in the overcoming the disparity of systems between Local and Central Government.

Together: Building a United Community Strategy (TBUC)

The Council welcomes the commitment to the delivery of the Together: Building a United Community Strategy, focusing on the seven headline actions and particularly the direct reference made to the TBUC Strategy in outcomes seven, nine and ten.

Delivery Plan Issues

The following sections relate to feedback on individual Outcomes and Delivery Plan actions.

Outcome One: We prosper through a strong, competitive, regionally balanced economy

The Council notes that the Consultation Document includes details on building relationships and increasing 'engagement and collaboration between business, academia and the public sector in Northern Ireland and further afield'.

This is already happening at Local Government District level. Some examples include the introduction of the SMART Region and the introduction and continued work of the Community Planning Partnership.

The Council also wishes to clarify, that in relation to Business Startup, this is a function which has already transferred to Local Government and it is now up to Councils to shape this. It would also be worthwhile, to link any regional strategy

development work (between the DfE and local Councils), with an opportunity to identify local economic issues which require specific focus and intervention.

Furthermore, Outcome One refers to improving 'connectivity to enhance the movement of people, goods, energy and information between places'. The Council notes that this does not reference public or rural transport provision. Council has concerns about the lack of any direct reference to supporting community based rural transport schemes. It is important to ensure that the problems of immobile socially excluded groups are not analysed or tackled in isolation from mobile people included within a wider canvass of growing sustainable rural communities that balances environmental, social and economic sustainability.

The reality of rural transport in Northern Ireland as experienced by many rural people on a daily basis is that a quarter of the rural population currently receives a minimal level of service from conventional bus services. Only 4.2% of Northern Ireland's rural population choose to or are able to use public transport to commute to work.

Outcome Two: We live and work sustainably - protecting the environment

With regards to this outcome there are a number of Delivery Plan areas which the Council would like to comment on, including:

- Promotion of Greenways.
- Specific reference to 'Gas to the West of NI'.
- Biodiversity and Natural Capital Index.

In addition, the Council suggests that Outcome Two should make reference to, and place a particular focus on, building skills and knowledge of sustainable construction methods as well as energy efficient construction. This focus should also be placed on promoting the benefits of such construction methods.

Greenways

This relates well to the draft 'Fermanagh and Omagh Community Plan 2030'. Greenways were mentioned during the extensive consultation with the local community, the Community Planning partners, as well as during the District-wide consultation events.

Within the draft 'Community Plan 2030' document there is a proposed strategic action to: 'Develop and promote the Fermanagh and Omagh area as a world class outdoor activities destination (to include greenways, blueways and other outdoor activity provision)'.

The Council has also been recently in receipt of a grant from the Department for Infrastructure to develop concept design options, through a feasibility study for the two proposed Greenway Schemes within the District:

1. Enniskillen to Clones Greenway.
2. Omagh to Carrickmore greenway.

This action outlined within the PfG has already been initiated among a number of Councils across Northern Ireland, and Fermanagh and Omagh District Council would urge the Executive to secure appropriate funding to allow these schemes to go ahead. It would be another key example of co-operation between Local Government and Central Government.

Gas to the West of NI

Within the PfG Consultation Document, and associated Delivery Plan, there is a specific mention of 'Expanding the natural gas network to the west and south-east of Northern Ireland.

The Council recognises the importance of this being included within the PfG. It also features strongly within the draft Community Plan. The Council does suggest amending the wording slightly within the PfG document to replicate that within the Community Plan:

'Expanding the natural gas network to the west and south-east of Northern Ireland, as well as working in partnership with District Councils to promoting uptake across these regions'.

Biodiversity and Access to the Countryside

The Council appreciates that a draft indicator has now been included for biodiversity, however this indicator should go further.

Currently, the largest threat to the loss of native biodiversity is 'Invasive Alien Species'. The Council believes that the PfG documentation should have deliverable targets with accountability placed on both Local and central Government, in order to ensure a collaborative approach to protect our native biodiversity. It is therefore essential that the PfG contains a proactive plan to stop the introduction, and spread, of invasive species.

Following, the recent referendum on the membership of the European Union (Brexit) there is a high level of uncertainty surrounding the integrity of the protections afforded to environmentally protected sites. The Council believes that it is vital that any progress that has been made to date is not lost, therefore there should be more acknowledgement, as well as specific performance targets, introduced to address biodiversity loss and improvement of the condition of protected sites.

The Council would also support the introduction of a new initiative for providing access to the countryside. This type of initiative would provide outcomes to include: Sustainable Access to Green Space and Sustainable Use of the Outdoors.

Current legislation within Northern Ireland, in relation to liability currently in place for countryside access, is archaic. Therefore, Northern Ireland is lagging behind other areas of United Kingdom for the provision of access.

Improved access to the countryside could:

- Assist in addressing some of the rural disadvantage faced in some areas of the District.
- Help support local tourism and economic development.
- Generate an increased understanding and respect for the farming industry, stimulating an improved symbiosis between sustainable farming and the natural environment.

Natural Capital Index

Whilst there is reference within the PfG to National Capital, the Council stresses the need to develop a Natural Capital Index to provide a robust and consistent framework for monitoring changes in the region's natural capital. This can lead to better informed decisions, based on an awareness of the relationship between nature and economic activity.

Flood Risk Management

An area of the PfG Consultation Documents, and subsequent Delivery Plans that requires further consideration is Flood Risk Management. The Council believes, following the Community Planning consultation process, that there is a need to develop sustainable infrastructure to assist with flood risk management.

Flooding has been an issue faced by some isolated rural communities within the Fermanagh and Omagh District. There is a distinct need to identify and prioritise appropriate means of mitigating against flooding, as well as responding to it effectively should it occur.

The Council believes that measures to alleviate flooding should also feature in the Delivery Plan for Water Quality.

Reducing Greenhouse Gases

It is noted that the Delivery Plan for reducing Greenhouse Gases refers to the delivery of both the Affordable Warmth Scheme and the Boiler Replacement Scheme. The Council believes that there should be a more encompassing action of 'Reducing Fuel Poverty' through the delivery of these schemes, and relevant others.

Outcome Three: We have a more equal society

With regards to the Educational and Health inequalities, there seems to be an emphasis on 'overall' data. The Council is concerned that a reliance on data at this level could leave certain pockets, or gaps, which go unnoticed and more importantly ignored. For example, at the Local Government Data level for Fermanagh and Omagh, 'Free School Meal Entitled (FSME) Boys' are a key grouping that needs to be addressed and targeted. Council is concerned that an emphasis on "overall" data could result in certain areas within various Districts going undetected. It is vital that the PfG commits to delivering initiatives aimed at re-engaging pupils (such as FSME Boys) who may find themselves disengaged from education and/or training. It is also worth noting that each District Council area may have differing groups which need to be targeted, therefore it is vital that a regional approach is taken with the flexibility to deliver local outcomes and actions.

Effective links between education and business and the increased integration of education and work can go some way to mitigate against the "brain drain" which affects our area. Funding of initiatives or plant within the schools and the provision of work placements increases the educational attainment of students and provides them with the option of obtaining sustainable and highly skilled employment in the future.

In relation to 'Reducing Health Inequalities' there should be information included to include the 'Delivery of the Home Accident Prevention Strategy for Northern Ireland (2015-2025)'. This strategy could have a big impact on individuals who are at most risk within society as they are the group most likely to be involved in an accident within the home.

Outcome 4: We enjoy long, healthy and active lives

Mental Health

The Council acknowledges the importance of working towards a 'Parity of Esteem' for Mental Health Services. This also provides a direct link to the Council's draft 'Community Plan 2030' which contains an outcome that aims to ensure 'our people have improved physical health and mental wellbeing'. There should be a specific emphasis on removing any stigma around mental health issues and on suicide prevention.

Within this outcome, the Council and its Community Planning Partners have proposed the strategic action to 'provide early intervention and mental health promotion/improvement programmes'.

Mental Health and Mental Wellbeing appear throughout the draft Community Plan document, and as such it is recognised that a possible area for data development could be to provide an improved indicator for Mental Health. This could be another area for partnership working between the Department of Health, local Councils and

relevant Community Planning Partners. This would not only ensure that there is collaboration, but also that indicators are relevant and measurable at a local level.

Healthcare System and Increase Training of GPs

Both (the Healthcare System and Training of GPs) are of major importance to rural areas, particularly the many rural areas of the Fermanagh and Omagh District Council area. Outcome four, within the PfG Consultation Document refers to 'developing a quality healthcare experience framework' and 'increasing the first year intake for GPs'.

The Council feel that it is vital that there is a substantial investment in the provision of new GPs within the District. Over the last 12 months there has been a number of issues raised with regards to the number of GPs in rural areas within the District, as well as difficulty with recruiting GPs for specific rural areas. An examples of this would include a local surgery in Ederney which was unable to recruit a GP, and resulted in the GP Practice being amalgamated with a Practice in Castlederg. This Practice, at a time, was also providing interim support to GP Practice in Rosslea.

There are grave concerns within the District (as referenced by the Community Planning consultation process) about the future access to rural GP services, and there needs to be a strategic plan to address these concerns and ensuring that these vital rural services are secured going forward.

The Council would also encourage the Department of Health to develop the South West Acute Hospital into a 'Speciality Service Provider'. Not only would this help to attract additional GPs to the District, but it would also have huge benefits for the local Fermanagh and Omagh Community as well as raising the public profile of the South West Acute Hospital and assist in addressing the shortages of doctors in training positions which are currently being experienced.

The recent Bengoa Report, following on from other reports such as Hayes, Compton and Donaldson, states that the current configuration of health care service is not sustainable. It will be necessary to rationalise the provision of health care services in Northern Ireland and this could be one method which would take full advantage of a newly built hospital within the District Council area, in the westerly parts of Northern Ireland.

Alcohol and Drugs Misuse

The PfG refers to a focus on 'prototype substance misuse courts as part of a problem solving justice approach'. This needs to be offset with the inclusion of a commitment to a more supportive and preventative approach in terms of reducing alcohol and drug misuse.

Active Healthy Lives

One of the most effective methods of contributing to healthy and active lives is to increase the proportion of the population participating in sport and outdoor recreation.

The current PfG document undermines the value of access to green spaces, as well as the intrinsic link between a healthy natural environment contributing to the social and mental well-being of residents.

It is essential that a specific indicator included within the PfG to help address the lack of participation in sport, and/or outdoor recreation. The health benefits, in particular the mental health benefits, associated with access to green spaces should be recognised, with its importance being represented within the PfG.

At present, Northern Ireland is a society where the 'Natural Deficit Disorder' is a very real phenomenon. Therefore, the PfG should include a specific outcome to help address the ever increasing lack of connection the residents (in particular younger generations) have with the natural environment.

Delivery Plans for Outcome Four

There is no reference within the delivery plans to the totality of the issues, involved in 'Reducing Preventable Deaths'. There is specific reference made to improving road safety, however on an average week in Northern Ireland two people die as a result of accidents in the home. As mentioned in Outcome Three, the statistics demonstrate that these deaths tend to come from those who would be considered to be most at risk (i.e. those aged under 5 years or over 65 years, and those in social deprivation). Between 2009 and 2015, there have been more people killed in their homes (666 people), than the road and farm accidents combined (543 combined).

During the last decade Northern Ireland's Road Safety Strategy has delivered an ever decreasing number of fatalities, with the trend continuing to improve. In direct contrast fatal Home and Leisure Accidents have increased to record levels, with numbers set to continue increasing. The Council feels it would be worthwhile for an Executive-led Strategy to target these accidents in a similar way to the strategy targeting Road Safety.

Within the Delivery Plans for Outcome Four, there should be more of a focus on older people. Council acknowledges that the growing number of older people will represent increasing demands on health and social care services and we need to have services in place that can both meet such demands and peoples aspirations for good quality care when they need it.

The traditional approach to commissioning services has been to see individuals as eligible recipients of welfare services provided from a limited range of options as identified by professionals. Council sees older people and their carers as citizens,

with a full array of rights, choices and responsibilities. Council stresses that the majority of individuals needs can be met through ordinary, everyday services, accessible to all. The role of community health and social care can then be focused on supporting people with the most complex needs who require added specialised and tailored services. Therefore, within Outcome Four there is a need to consider strategies such as Age Friendly Strategies, and Dementia Friendly Strategies.

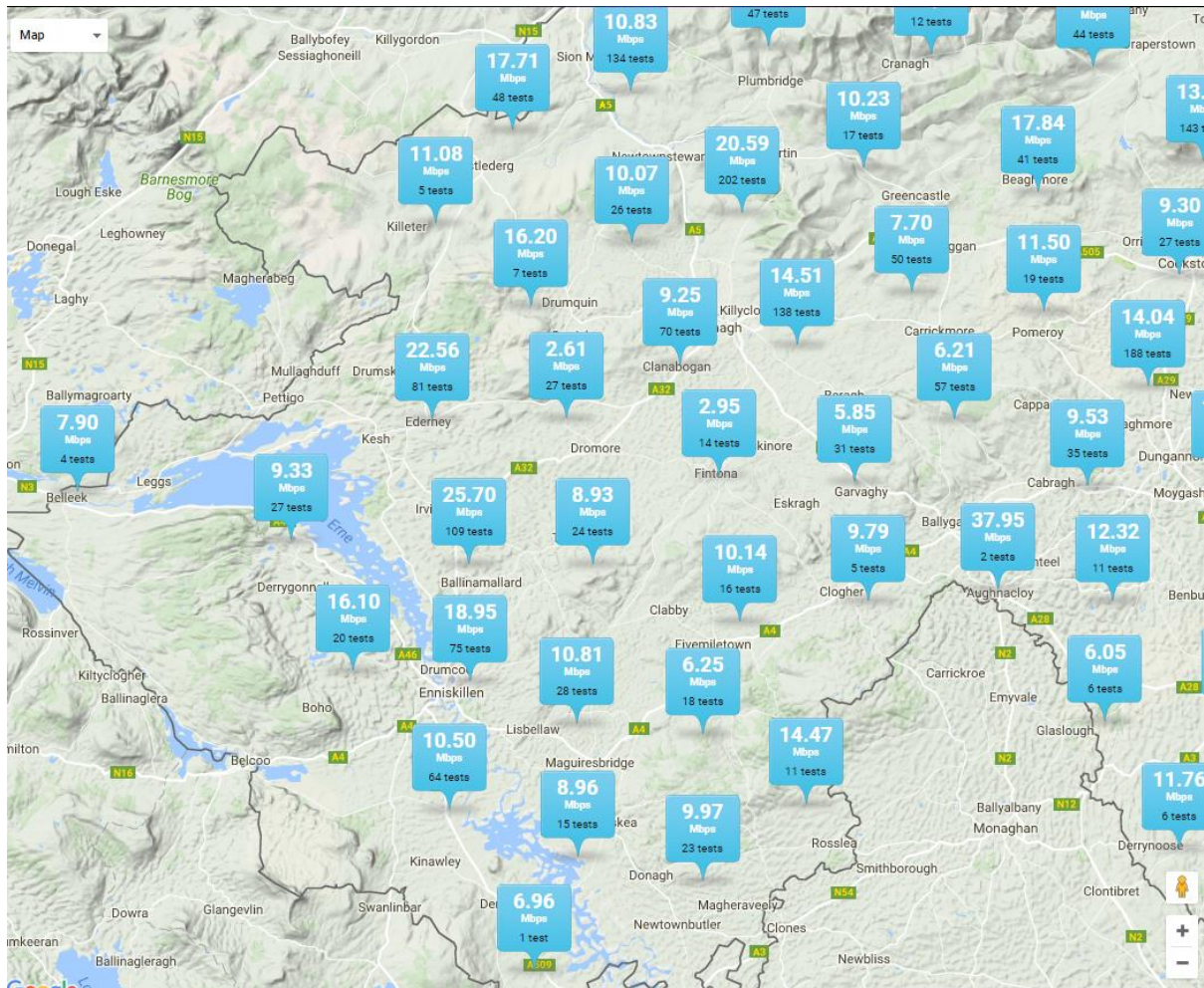
Outcome 5: We are an innovative, creative society, where people can fulfil their potential

The Council acknowledges the importance of the 'Knowledge Exchange Systems' which are mentioned within the Consultation Documents, as well the need to strengthen these systems between the universities, college and businesses.

The Council recommends that these systems are strengthened not only in the two major cities, but within all Districts Council areas. Within the Fermanagh and Omagh area, there are South West College campuses in both Omagh and Enniskillen. This College can play a key role in knowledge exchange, and transfer, between local business as well as universities and colleges elsewhere in Northern Ireland.

Digital Infrastructure

Within the District, this is an area which needs some major investment. In March 2016, the average speed for broadband within the UK was 28.9 Mbps (increasing from 22.8 Mbps the previous year). From the map, it is clear that there is no area within the Fermanagh and Omagh District that is receiving a broadband service close to the UK average. Not only does this have a discriminatory effect on local residents, but it puts local business at a distinct disadvantage to other areas of Northern Ireland, the UK and the Republic of Ireland. It is important that any potential programmes and initiatives are sufficiently future-proofed to reflect the reality of a rapidly changing environment.



(Source: Thinkbroadband [UK Independent Broadband Organisation])

It may be worthwhile to explore the model used in the Republic of Ireland in relation to Broadband provision (i.e. a Public Private Partnership). There are other similar models which could also be explored, for example those utilised in Spain, with any good practice being replicated in Northern Ireland.

The Council is adamant that the PfG should provide a formal commitment to improve broadband throughout the District, particularly in rural areas. It is no longer sufficient to recognise there is an issue with broadband availability and provision, the commitment for improvement should be made.

The provision (and availability) of broadband within the District will also have a major impact upon Outcome 11, and the aim to increase the digitisation of public services.

Active Ageing Strategy 2020

The Council welcomes the inclusion of the new Active Ageing Strategy 2020 within the PfG consultation documents. However, it is vitally important that all aspects of its delivery are appropriately and sustainably resourced and integrated into local

services, as well as linking to the Age Friendly Initiatives and the Council's Community Plan.

Outcome 6: We have more people working in better jobs

The Council welcomes the reference made to establishing Employability Forums in each Council area but stresses the need for more information on these Forums and how they will function at a local level. The Council would be eager to be involved in the development of these forums, shaping and tailoring them to ensure they meet the specific needs of the District.

It is important that these Forums correspond and complement the work currently being carried out by the District Council's Economic Development units.

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council has been involved in various programmes designed to support local people finding work. One key example would be the ASPIRE employability programme which is part-funded by the European Social Fund and Department for Employment and Learning. Key partners include the Western Health and Social Care Trust, the Education Authority for the Western Region and Fermanagh Rural Community Initiative.

The programme operates across the District and is open to people aged 16 years and upwards who are currently unemployed or economically inactive and seeking employment. It offers the opportunity to attain:

- NVQ Level 1 Qualifications
- Funded Industry and Job Specific Training Opportunities
- Placement and Industry Experience
- ICT Training
- Personal Mentor
- Tailored Action Plans
- Health & Well-Being Workshops
- Employability Boosters (e.g. Interview Skills and CV building)

The Council strongly recommends that the spread of 'better jobs' is focused across the region and not just on the major cities within Northern Ireland.

The Executive must place an emphasis on promoting a wider access to higher level education across Northern Ireland. This can be achieved by building links with Further Education Colleges, not just universities, the public sector, private sector and the community/voluntary sector.

The PfG Document should also commit to increasing childcare provision as well as looking at ways to make this more affordable and accessible. In rural areas,

childcare issues are one of the key barriers preventing a parent from accessing employment.

Outcome 7: We have a community where we respect the law and each other

The Council notes that within this outcome there are a lot of 'urban issues' listed with very little reference to rural crime or rural interfaces.

Within the Fermanagh and Omagh District (between April and October 2016) the key offence groupings have been:

- Violence against the Person: 998 offences.
- Sexual Offences: 89 offences.
- Theft: 847 offences.
- Criminal damage: 578 offences.
- Shoplifting: 223 offences.

There has also been a 42% increase in Drug Offences (173 offences), compared to the same time period last year, whilst there were three robbery offences reported. One of these incidents was the 'robbery of business property' and two incidents were classed as being the 'robbery of personal property'. (All Crime statistics taken from PSNI Recorded Crime Statistics published on 31 October 2016).

Legal Statutory Duties

With regards to the reference made to 'developing and reviewing the implementation of legal and statutory duties for the Section 75 groups, and section 28E of the Northern Ireland Act (1998), the Council requires clarity on this and how it may impact upon the Council - for example, will it involve any additional administrative duties being placed on Council Officers? The Department must involve relevant Council Officers in any such process, as well as relevant statutory organisations such as the Equality Commission, the NI Human Rights Commission, and representatives of Section 75 groups.

PSNI Resourcing and Fear of Crime

Throughout the Community Planning public consultation process, there were a number of identified concerns in relation to 'response rates to reports of crime in rural areas'. In general, the local community felt that these response times were very slow. There was also a general concern at the apparent lack of PSNI resourcing in rural areas, i.e. the removal of Neighbourhood Policing Teams.

With these concerns, and the level of crime reported by the media, there are a number of issues within the District relating to 'Fear of Crime'. This is particularly

evident in rural areas and amongst older people. This should be referenced within the PfG Documents and the subsequent Delivery Plans.

Domestic Violence/Abuse within the Fermanagh and Omagh District

The Council believes that Domestic Violence/Abuse is totally unacceptable, and every individual should have the right to a life free from abuse/harm in any form.

Current statistics highlighting Domestic Violence/Abuse within the Fermanagh and Omagh District are concerning, for example:

- Between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016 there were 1,493 domestic abuse incidents and 685 domestic abuse crimes within the Council District [statistics taken from PSNI Quarterly Domestic Abuse Report (published on 12 May 2016)].
- Furthermore, between 1 April 2016 and 30 September 2016 within the Council District there were 884 domestic abuse incidents (an increase of 150 incidents on the same period in 2015) and 407 domestic abuse crimes (an increase of 56 crimes on the same period for 2015).

Domestic Violence/Abuse is increasing within the District and the Council feels strongly that this should be addressed within the Programme for Government and all relevant PfG Delivery Plans.

Outcome 8: We care for others and help those in need

The Consultation Document references the aim to provide an additional 9,600 social homes and support 3,750 first time buyers. The Council is concerned that all of this intervention would be within the cities and large urban areas.

In relation to Social Homes, the PfG should contain a guarantee that these will be future proofed and appropriate for an aging population. The development of 'Accessible Social Homes' which can be accessed and used by any person, regardless if they have any access requirements or whether or not they have a disability, could take the form of a Lifelong Housing Solution - suitable for any person.

The Council is also keen to emphasise the need for more Social Housing to be provided within rural areas, particularly within the Fermanagh and Omagh area.

The PfG Consultation Document also makes reference to 'targeted incentives to bring buildings back into use as homes'. Whilst this is welcomed, the Council is concerned that it is only specifically referenced for cities and large towns. There are

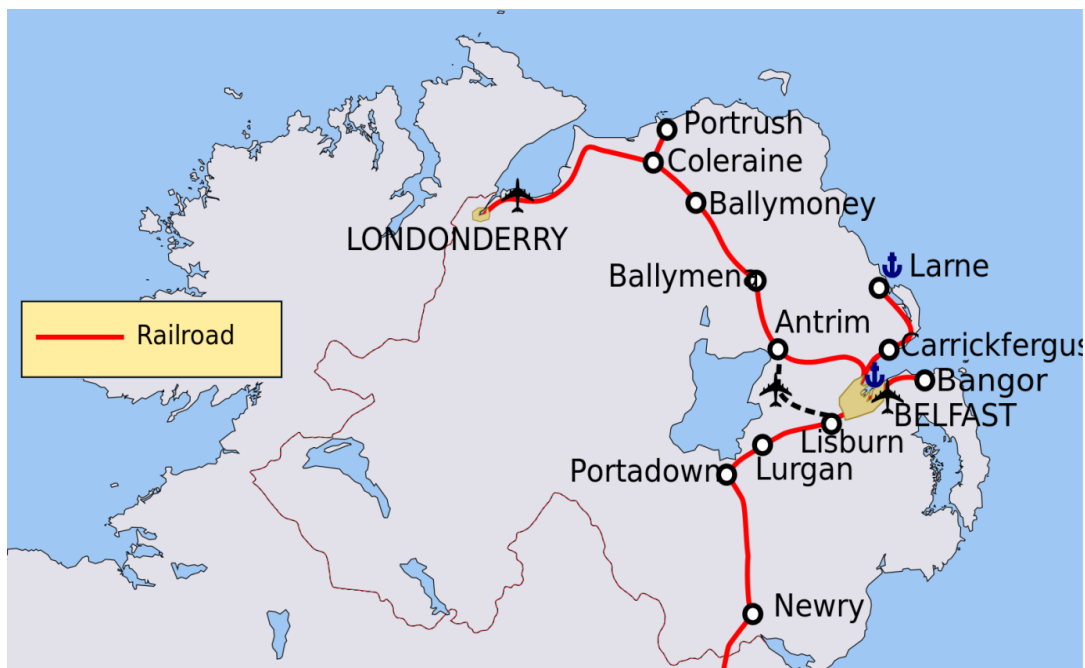
a number of smaller rural towns and villages which could benefit from such schemes e.g. renovating a disused commercial premises.

In relation to the Delivery Plans for housing and ensuring that it is of a suitable standard, there should be a specific reference to the current review of Houses in Multiple Occupation which currently seems to be omitted.

Outcome 9: We have a shared society that respects diversity

The Accessible Transport Strategy is vital for rural areas and it shouldn't focus solely on key urban projects (such as the York Street Interchange and so forth). The Strategy, and the Northern Ireland Executive, should look across Northern Ireland to improve transport for all areas.

Many of the previous Transport successes referenced (outlined in the Accessible Transport Consultation Documents) are 'urban' focused, for example the improvements of train networks, railway stations, etc. Image one (below) shows the extent of the railways within Northern Ireland and, as is clearly demonstrated, there is no railway covering much of Northern Ireland.



(Image One)

In relation to bus services and other methods of public transport, there has been a huge decrease in funding for public transport organisations due to increasing budgetary pressures, which has had a negative impact on those people who rely on public transport.

Within the Fermanagh and Omagh District there have been a number of services cut whilst others have been reduced significantly, leaving some rural communities isolated when it comes to transport provision and transport networks.

Within the Fermanagh and Omagh District there are 14 Wards within the 'Top 50' most deprived areas within Northern Ireland with regards to 'Proximity to Services', including 5 within the 'Top 10'. [NISRA Statistics]. Council recommends that further consideration is given to the definition of this measure, as many of the people who live in the rural areas are between 50-60 miles away from essential public services.

This clearly shows that within the District transport, and indeed rural transport, is a key issue for residents, many of whom would rely on rural transport and rural transport networks in order to access key services.

With regards to transport accessibility, a rural public transport system is vital for the community. There are many older people, persons with disabilities and people on low-level incomes who do not have access to their own vehicles and as such are heavily reliant on public transport. In many rural areas, if an individual has a hospital appointment in the South West Acute Hospital (Enniskillen) at 12.00noon, they may have to get a bus before 8.00am. They may then have to wait for a return bus home until after 4.00pm. Taxis and other forms of transport may not be cost effective or viable as the return journey may be 30 - 40 miles.

The Council is also concerned about the implications that the PfG will have on the Community Transport sector, on which many people living in rural areas (particularly older people and people with disabilities) rely upon. There should be a commitment to, and clarity for, the Community Transport sector in rural areas which provides a valuable service to isolated areas which may not have a regular public transport link.

Shared and Integrated Education

The Council would urge the Department for Education to provide appropriate education in local areas, so that it meets the needs of providing educational opportunities for all young people.

One key example of successful Shared Education within the Fermanagh and Omagh District is the Brookeborough Shared Education campus. Brookeborough Primary School and St Mary's Primary School have followed on their cross-community work over the last 40 years by developing plans for a Shared Education campus within the town. It is also surprising that there is no obvious reference to the Strule Shared Education Campus in Omagh.

The PfG Consultation Document should encourage the Department for Education, and all schools to assess available resources and local need, in ensuring that all pupils have the opportunity to develop a range of skills to maximise their potential.

Within the Council's draft Community Plan there is reference to 'promoting and supporting the growth and development of shared education for all through the establishment and continuation of shared education models'.

In relation to integrated and shared education models, the Council believes that there is no single model that will best suit all areas of the District, let alone Northern Ireland. The Department for Education should work in partnership with the Council and other relevant Community Planning Partners to assess the needs of individual areas and what would best meet their needs.

Outcome 10: We are a confident, welcoming and outward looking society

The Council is disappointed that there is no reference to the roles that District Councils have in Tourism. Within the Fermanagh and Omagh area, there are a significant number of tourist attractions including Council owned/looked after venues such as the Marble Arch Caves, the Ulster American Folk Park and the Marble Arch Global Geopark. Fermanagh and Omagh covers two of the nine designated Northern Ireland tourism destinations – Fermanagh Lakelands being wholly within the new Council area and the Tyrone and Sperrins destination being shared with a number of other local authorities.

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council and its many stakeholders can play a significant role in relation to grow tourism and tourism related jobs and wealth with the District.

Self-Efficacy

It is acknowledged that the reference to Self-Efficacy is being used as a means to measure 'increased confidence and capability of people and communities'. The Council would have concerns in relation to how this will be measured, impact upon, and reach, low capacity community groups.

Outcome 11: We have high quality public services

The Council is keen to promote the need for better access to high quality and integrated services, particularly in rural areas. New models of delivery could be explored to include using the vacant buildings resulting from rural school closures. It is important that the PfG complements the Education Authority consultation on its Strategic Area Plan. Council wishes to highlight the large and long-standing international body of evidence that documents both the positive contribution of rural schools to the preservation, support and development of rural communities, and the negative impact of rural school closures upon these same communities.

There are a number of examples of such sites including the former site for St Davog's Primary School in Scraghey which will now act as a Community Centre. Other examples include areas in England where local communities are reclaiming disused buildings and converting them into Rural Multi-Purpose Community Hubs which provide a number of services in one location.

The Council also recognises that to achieve any developments in increasing (or improving) online public services, requires this to be matched by improved broadband provision/coverage in all areas. There is a direct link therefore, between Outcome Eleven and Outcome Five in relation to improving the provision of broadband to all areas of the District, thus ensuring that rural communities and businesses are not disadvantaged by their ability to access services.

Outcome 12: We have created a place where people want to live and work, visit and invest

The Council strongly recommends that any strategy for Foreign Direct Investment or International Marketing and Investment should promote the benefits of all of Northern Ireland, not just the two major cities. There are a lot of organisations (small, medium and large) and skillsets within the rural areas of Northern Ireland, including the Fermanagh and Omagh area.

As part of the Community Planning process within the District, the issue of 'developing a compelling proposition to attract investment into the area' has been raised and is included within the draft Plan. Therefore, the Council is eager to work with its Community Planning Partners (including the Executive Departments for Communities, Economy, Infrastructure and Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to achieve additional investment.

Outcome 13: We connect people and opportunities through our infrastructure

The Council notes the inclusion of the 'Flagship Projects', however there is no reference to any projects which will have a direct impact on the Fermanagh and Omagh District. Therefore, the Council would urge the Northern Ireland Executive to make reference to the following projects in the PfG Consultation Documentation:

- A5 Western Transport Corridor (in its entirety).
- A4 - Enniskillen Southern Bypass.
- A32 - which connects the two major urban centres in the Fermanagh and Omagh District (Omagh and Enniskillen), before continuing to the Republic of Ireland border at Swanlinbar.

The above mentioned road schemes will not only benefit the Fermanagh and Omagh area, but it will also improve journey times, transport connections and NI/ROI

transport connections. At present, there is no Motorway within the Fermanagh and Omagh area, and this provides an instant disadvantage to residents and businesses within the District.

Within Outcome 13 in the PfG Consultation Documents there is also no mention of other infrastructure, such as that required for Health Services, the provision of Education, and Flood Risk Management.

Waste and Circular Economy

Council is pleased to note that the Circular Economy is referenced within the draft Programme for Government, but is concerned that it is linked only to Indicator 36 which measures the percentage of household waste that is reused, recycled or composted.

Outcome 14: We give our children the best start in life

The Council acknowledges the need to continue, and increase the momentum in, Area Planning. The Council is currently preparing a response to the draft Area Plan for the Education Authority entitled 'Providing Pathways'. It is important that the final PfG is reflective of the outworkings of this consultation process.

The draft Community Plan for the Fermanagh and Omagh area makes reference to 'developing initiatives to reduce childcare barriers, to support better access to learning'. This supports the PfG outcome and the Council will be working in partnership with the Executive Departments to achieve this (Department for Infrastructure, Department for Communities, Department of Health, Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs and the Department of Education).

In terms of the Delivery Plans for Outcome 14, there should be a specific referent made to Home Accident Prevention Strategy for Northern Ireland (2015-2025). This strategy aims to ensure that babies and children (under the age of 5 years) are targeted as an 'at risk' group for accidents. Home deaths are the main cause of death for children post-infancy. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) also acknowledges that such accidents can not only destroy families, but also diminish local communities.

The Council agrees with the key issues outlined, however reference should be made in the delivery plans to the Home Accident Prevention Strategy for NI (2015-2025) which ensures that babies and children under the age of 5 are targeted as a vulnerable group for accidents. Accidents in the home are the main cause of death for children post-infancy. RoSPA also acknowledge that accidents destroy families and diminish communities.

Conclusion

Fermanagh and Omagh welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Programme for Government Consultation.

The Programme for Government provides exciting opportunities for Northern Ireland however, there are some key issues, with particular regard to rural needs, that need to be addressed to ensure balanced and equitable regional growth and prosperity.