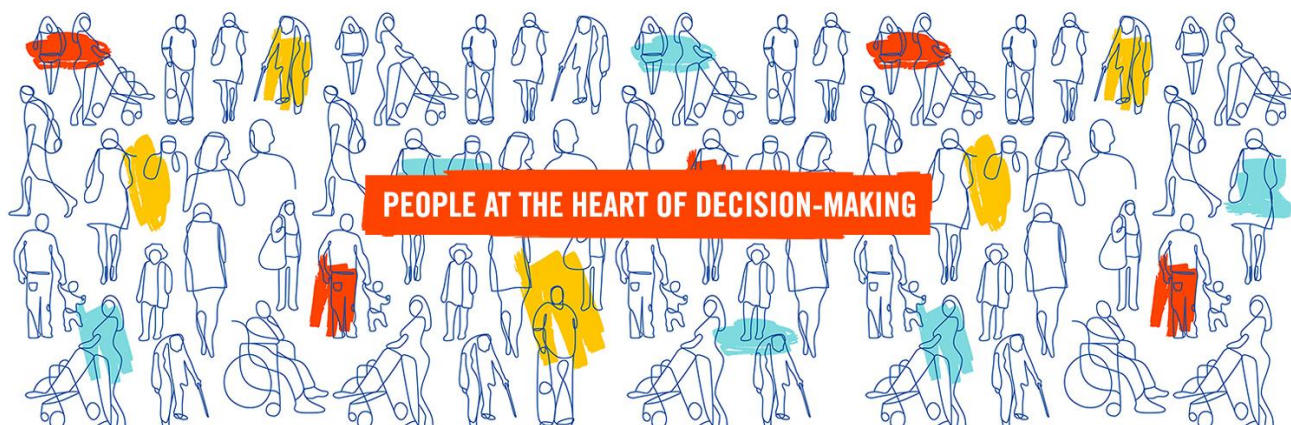




Draft Green Growth Strategy

CONSULTATION RESPONSE



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INTRODUCTION

We would like to congratulate the Northern Ireland Executive on the publication of its ambitious Draft Green Growth Strategy.

Our response to the public consultation is focused on Executive Commitment 4:

“PEOPLE FIRST We commit to putting citizens at the heart of our Green Growth policy development and delivery by ensuring ongoing engagement with young people and other key groups, including a Citizen Assembly Panel.”

Involve is a leading public participation charity, with a mission to put people at the heart of decision making. We have been involved in the delivery of many citizens’ assemblies across the UK, including the first and, so far, only one to happen in Northern Ireland ([Citizens’ Assembly for Northern Ireland, 2018](#)). We have been the lead partner in the delivery of the [Climate Assembly UK](#), [Scotland’s Climate Assembly](#), and several local authority level [climate assemblies convened in England since 2019](#). We have been engaging with the NI Executive on this issue since 2020, particularly on the New Decade, New Approach commitment to an annual citizens’ assembly and a renewed approach to civic engagement, and we gave [oral evidence](#) to the Committee for the Executive Office on this topic in June 2021.

We are strong advocates for a democratic response to the climate emergency - one that is more open, participative, and deliberative. Citizens’ assemblies are an important tool in achieving that vision. We welcome the reference made in the draft strategy to putting people first through ongoing engagement, including a citizens’ assembly. However, in this consultation response we make the case for a deliberative approach to ‘putting people first’ that goes further than a citizens’ assembly; a truly just and equitable transition will require society-wide public deliberation in the planning, implementation, monitoring and scrutiny of the strategy.

We will begin by responding directly to the question of the suitability of a citizens’ assembly to contribute to the development of Green Growth policies, setting out a rationale for their use, and a set of standards any citizens’ assembly should meet. We will then make a case for a deliberative systems approach as a way of ensuring that the Green Growth Strategy is both just and democratic.

Is a citizens’ assembly the right approach?

The headline Executive Commitment 4 mentions a Citizens Assembly Panel as one method of engaging with the public around the strategy. However, this is not referred to anywhere else in the document, and what is meant by a Citizens Assembly Panel is not defined, despite being a specific question in the online consultation form. We have concerns that this question is being asked without providing the information the public would need in order to be able to answer the consultation question of whether ‘it is the right approach’.

This detail aside, we would like to support the idea that a citizens' assembly could be a suitable tool to develop Green Growth policy development and delivery. A citizens' assembly is a randomly selected group of people, demographically representative of the general population (also referred to as a mini-public), who come together to hear about and discuss an issue of public importance, before coming to a collective conclusion, usually in the form of recommendations for action by elected representatives. It is used [internationally](#) to bring informed public judgement to important topics, which are usually either highly complex, contentious, moral or constitutional (or all of these).

Citizens' assemblies have been used by parliaments across Europe and around the world to develop strategies that respond to the climate emergency. Climate Assembly UK informed the Climate Change Committee's Sixth Carbon Budget, and was referenced as a valuable insight into public preferences (p.41).

A citizens' assembly is a powerful and robust democratic tool. It should be convened under the right conditions, for the right purposes, and in the right circumstances. In those cases, it will make a significant contribution to the problem at hand, but it requires skill, resourcing and institutional support to do so. As citizens' assemblies have become more widely used, there has also been a growing body of expertise in the practice of their design and delivery, and an emerging set of standards for their set up and implementation. Involve has led in the development of these standards, and we would like to submit them here as part of our response to this consultation¹.

Draft standards for citizens' assemblies

The standards below are organised into "essential" and "desirable" features of ten criteria:

1. Clear purpose
2. Sufficient time
3. Representative
4. Inclusive
5. Independent
6. Open
7. Generative learning
8. Structured deliberation
9. Collective decision-making
10. Evaluated

We consider the essential features to be the fundamental things that make a citizens' assembly a citizens' assembly. The absence of any one of these features would require detailed justification and would only be warranted in exceptional circumstances. The desirable criteria are the additional features that we consider to be current good practice.

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Criteria	Essential	Desirable
1. Clear purpose	<p>There is a clear question / set of questions for the assembly to address, which has / have a range of different possible solutions</p> <p>The scope for making a difference to the policy or decision is explicitly declared at the start and things that are out of scope or cannot be changed are clearly outlined</p> <p>Decision-makers make a public commitment to consider and respond in detail to the recommendations</p>	<p>There are a clear set of trade-offs for the assembly to address</p> <p>There is support for the citizens' assembly from across key political divides</p> <p>The assembly is commissioned by a public authority with responsibility for the issue in question</p>
2. Sufficient time	<p>The time available is proportionate to the question / purpose</p> <p>There are multiple meetings with time between for reflection</p> <p>There is sufficient time for each of the three phases of the citizens' assembly: learning, deliberation and decision-making</p> <p>The assembly lasts for at least 30 hours (4 days) in total</p>	<p>The assembly lasts for 45 hours (6 days) or more</p>
3. Representative	<p>40 or more assembly members are recruited</p> <p>A pool of potential assembly members is created through random selection, using a recognised market research recruitment methodology</p> <p>Assembly members are selected from this pool using random stratified sampling based on demographic criteria to ensure that they are broadly representative of the wider population</p>	<p>100 or more assembly members are recruited</p> <p>The pool of potential assembly members is created through a full civic lottery / sortition process</p> <p>Where relevant, assembly members are selected using attitudinal sampling (as well as demographic sampling) to ensure that they are broadly representative of the wider population</p>

<p>4. Inclusive</p>	<p>Assembly members are reimbursed for all reasonable expenses</p> <p>A gift of at least £50 per day is given to assembly members</p> <p>The accessibility requirements of assembly members are met on request</p> <p>Carers of assembly members are welcomed and provided for</p> <p>There is a ratio of max 9 assembly members per group facilitator</p> <p>Presentations by witnesses are accessible, avoiding jargon and not assuming prior knowledge</p>	<p>A gift of at least £75 per day is given to assembly members</p> <p>Information / materials are provided in a range of different formats</p> <p>The care costs of any assembly members are reimbursed and/or caring facilities are provided onsite (e.g. a creche)</p> <p>The accessibility requirements of assembly members are anticipated and met</p> <p>There is a ratio of max 7 assembly members per group facilitator</p>
<p>5. Independent</p>	<p>The assembly is impartially facilitated (both lead and group facilitation)</p> <p>Key decisions about the citizens' assembly agenda and design are reviewed by an independent advisory group to ensure their balance and impartiality</p>	<p>The assembly is run at an arm's length from the commissioning body</p>
<p>6. Open</p>	<p>The recruitment methodology, advisory group membership, speaker lists, agendas and briefing materials are published in full</p> <p>The process plan / design is published</p> <p>The assembly's conclusions are published in full</p> <p>Decision-makers publicly respond to the recommendations</p>	<p>All evidence sessions are live-streamed</p>

7. Generative learning	<p>Assembly members hear balanced, accurate and comprehensive information and evidence</p> <p>Assembly members hear from diverse witnesses with a range of views</p> <p>Assembly members determine their own questions for witnesses and have sufficient time to question them</p> <p>Witnesses are briefed so that they clearly understand that their role is to stimulate and support discussions among the assembly members, not to lead or direct them</p> <p>The learning phase supports the subsequent deliberation and decision-making phases, enabling assembly members to arrive at informed and considered judgements</p>	Assembly members select at least some of the evidence and/or witnesses they wish to hear
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<p>8. Structured deliberation</p>	<p>Assembly members are supported through a facilitated process to consider and weigh-up different perspectives</p> <p>Assembly members are given time to discuss issues with as many of their fellow participants as possible</p> <p>The assembly process is well structured, with a clear progression through learning and deliberation, to decision-making</p> <p>The assembly process is designed and led by professional facilitators</p> <p>The assembly process allows time for plenary feedback and summing up, so that assembly members can hear views from across the assembly</p> <p>Facilitators are well briefed and provided with any necessary training ahead of the citizens' assembly</p>	<p>Small group discussions are facilitated by professional facilitators, with experience of deliberative processes</p>
<p>9. Collective decision-making</p>	<p>A defined decision and/or set of recommendations is reached as an integral part of the process</p> <p>Assembly members consider all key trade-offs and their decisions / recommendations are internally consistent</p> <p>Decisions and/or recommendations are agreed collectively by assembly members</p> <p>Reports of the assembly outline the rationale behind decisions / recommendations</p>	<p>Assembly members are given a variety of ways to express their views – both collectively, through the discussions, and individually through other methods, such as voting, post-it notes, postcards or flip charts</p> <p>Where relevant, a minority report with dissenting opinions is produced</p> <p>Assembly members are involved in writing the report of their recommendations</p> <p>Assembly members are involved in presenting their recommendations to decision-makers</p>

10. Evaluated	Assembly members are surveyed to collect their views on their experience and the quality of the process, including the impartiality of facilitation, the balance of evidence and the opportunities to participate	An external evaluation is completed of the process and its impact
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How else to put people first - a deliberative approach to engaging the public

While we support the idea of a citizens' assembly as a way of obtaining public input into the development of Green Growth policy, we recommend that it is just one tool in an overall deliberative approach to engaging the public and other stakeholders on this issue.

This draft strategy is attempting to address what the IPC recently referred to as 'code red for humanity' - the stakes involved in getting it right could not be higher. The changes outlined in the draft strategy will require tough and important choices that will impact on everyone. We need to make those choices as a society, with much stronger links between the public and decision makers than in our current system. This will require investment in a deliberative system to create those links, and to enable mechanisms for bridging competing interests, and developing solidarity and consensus across society to make the changes necessary.

Deliberation is an approach to decision-making that allows participants to consider relevant information from multiple points of view. It is different from other forms of public engagement in a number of ways:

- It involves discussion between participants at interactive events (which can happen online as well as in-person), providing space and time for questioning and learning.
- It includes diverse participants and a variety of information sources, including research, evidence, advocacy, and lived experiences, which are facilitated to ensure the process is inclusive and accessible.
- It has a clear task or purpose, problem to solve, or decision to be made.

Deliberation can happen at different scales from small deliberative workshops to full-scale national and international citizens' assemblies. One method is not inherently better than the other, but which approach to use should be informed by the question at hand and the kind of outcomes needed.

For issues like climate change that are complex and sometimes contentious, deliberation has a number of advantages:

- It gives the time, space, and information people need to be able to understand, weigh up, and balance the evidence against their own experience, needs, and values.
- It allows for participants to hear from people who are different from them, bringing a wider perspective to the problem, building empathy and often producing less self-interested recommendations.
- It can enable more informed public opinion more generally, because it creates a resource of balanced, accurate, and accessible information and evidence, and because the recommendations of a citizens' assembly have been shown to carry a lot of legitimacy for the general public.

- It can draw public attention to the practicalities of an issue rather than the rhetoric that can otherwise dominate complex or contentious topics, leading to better informed solutions which are more likely to enjoy public support.

A deliberative approach supports a just transition because it brings the public directly into the decision making process about what that transition will look like. It is a tool that puts different people on a level playing field with each other, as well as with politicians and experts. It enables participants to develop a shared understanding of what the issues are, constructively uses diverse public knowledge, expertise, and perspectives to find solutions, and sidesteps divisive win/lose rhetoric that could dominate if effective mechanisms for bringing people together are not created. At its most elemental, a deliberative approach to Green Growth rests on the idea that politicians and experts alone do not have all the answers; the public, defined broadly to include individuals and communities as well as organised civil society, should be included because their contributions will provide important insights, evidence, and ideas, and because the solutions can not work without their consent.

A just transition needs to be a democratic transition - it is essential that people's voices are listened to, and that robust mechanisms are in place to enable everyone to be informed and have a say. A just transition needs to be democratic transition because the fundamental changes required to our economy, society, and ways of life cannot proceed without the consent of the public, and the consent of the public can not be expected if they have not been involved in decision making. It is an approach that will inevitably be broader than any single methodology. Deliberative engagement should happen at community and local levels as well as region-wide, and should take place throughout the lifetime of the strategy, including ongoing monitoring and scrutiny.

This approach will require that both the Executive and local governments invest now to improve and expand their capability and knowledge of public engagement, including by bringing in external expertise, identifying internal barriers and enablers to involving the public, and finding ways to coordinate engagement activities across departments.

Public engagement needs to be embedded in this strategy, and planned in much greater detail than the draft strategy currently contains. There needs to be specific roles, responsibilities, budgets, and procedures put in place to enable the 'put people first' commitment to be meaningfully delivered on. These provisions need to be realistically planned and costed - genuinely involving the public is not cheap or easy to do - it requires time, money, and skill - but those costs are tiny in the overall context of a just transition, and are dwarfed both by the potential costs of the policy missteps, delays, or false starts that will occur if decisions are imposed without public input or consent.