



# Response to the Consultation on the Programme for Government Draft Outcomes Framework

The Programme for Government Draft Outcomes Framework sets out an ambitious vision for society, guided by the aim of improving wellbeing for all people in Northern Ireland. It sets out a framework of nine strategic Outcomes. Together, they are intended to form a picture of the NI Executive's aspirations for an inclusive society.

Our consultation response calls for an additional tenth outcome to support achieving that vision; we make the case for public participation to be at the heart of how government designs, implements, and evaluates its policies and practices.

According to the Draft Outcomes Framework:

The 'New Decade New Approach' (NDNA) document set out the process and approach for developing the Executive's Programme for Government (PfG). The key points being that the Programme should:

- be developed through engagement and co-design, using an Outcomes-based approach;
- focus on prosperity and wellbeing for all;
- establish a shared and ambitious strategic vision for the future;
- provide for accountable and transparent monitoring and reporting arrangements.

For all the welcome ambition of the PfG Draft Outcomes Framework, and its openness to public and civil society input, there is very little detail of how the government will engage citizens in its implementation.

The Executive will face many challenges in achieving the aspirations outlined in the PfG, not least as a result of Covid-19 and the long-ranging impact the pandemic is likely to have on society in Northern Ireland. We welcome the statement that the PfG is a live document and part of an ongoing conversation with the public; to support that promise, we call on the NI Executive to commit to making public participation one of the strategic outcomes for this Programme for Government, to embed that approach at the core of its work, and deliver on the commitment to civic engagement in NDNA through a structured approach.

The opportunity to participate in a meaningful way in decision-making is a fundamental component of a healthy democracy and an essential pillar of societal wellbeing<sup>1</sup>. When done right, structured public participation also has many benefits for decision makers.

Among those benefits are<sup>2</sup>:

1. **Improved governance**, including increased democratic legitimacy for institutions because of close links with citizens, improved reputations for public bodies, increased opportunities for active citizenship, and greater accountability of public bodies because of more effective information dissemination and better dialogue.
2. **Greater social cohesion** etc, including bringing diverse and sometimes hostile communities together, bringing 'hard to reach' and 'disadvantaged' groups into discussions, building relationships within and between different communities and social groups ('bonding' and 'bridging' social capital), strengthening and creating new networks that enable different interests to work together as a result of building more positive relationships based on a better knowledge of each other, and increased equality of access to policy and decision-making processes.
3. **Improved quality of services, projects and programmes**, including ensuring public service investment is based more on people's expressed needs, reducing management and maintenance costs by reducing vandalism and misuse as a result of engendering a sense of ownership, enabling faster and easier decisions (e.g. on new developments or protective designations) by reducing conflict between different parties and increasing trust through better communications, and enabling people to share in the responsibility for improving their own quality of life (e.g. health and well-being, or the local environment).
4. **Greater capacity building and learning**, including raising awareness and increasing understanding of public institutions and the way they work, enabling citizens to better access the services they need, and to understand the boundaries and limitations of different public bodies, building confidence and optimism among citizens who then go on to other civic activities or learning, supporting the voluntary and community sectors by recognising their vital role in building the capacity of community and specific interest groups (especially

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<sup>1</sup>[https://d1ssu070pg2v9i.cloudfront.net/pex/carnegie\\_uk\\_trust/2021/03/04161846/v4-4823-CUKT-EWNI-NI-PfG-consultation.pdf](https://d1ssu070pg2v9i.cloudfront.net/pex/carnegie_uk_trust/2021/03/04161846/v4-4823-CUKT-EWNI-NI-PfG-consultation.pdf)

<sup>2</sup><https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/knowledge-base/what-impact-participation/benefits-and-costs-public-participation>

disadvantaged and excluded groups), and increasing the skills among the staff running participation and those taking part (especially interpersonal skills).

As the Draft Outcomes Framework states, governments cannot respond to the challenges they face by acting alone; they need to engage diverse groups of people in constructive dialogue to make trade-offs, develop solutions, and find consensus or compromise on a wide range of complex, contentious and challenging issues. A public participation approach would embed within NI Executive a range of tools and practices that enables the whole societal approach set out in the programme for government.

To capture these benefits, public participation needs to be included as an outcome in its own right; one that supports the delivery of the other outcomes, and that is core to the work of government.

## What would a Public Participation outcome look like?

This outcome is about ensuring that everyone in Northern Ireland can influence the decisions that affect their lives.

It commits the NI Executive to using the spectrum of participation<sup>3</sup> to inform a detailed participation strategy, with the aim of widening and deepening participation across a range of issues and throughout the decision making process, and involving diverse publics,.

### Key priority areas

**A public participation strategy** for NI that puts public participation on a statutory footing, promotes frequent use of a range of methods, and encourages public input into policy development throughout the decision making cycle, from ideation to appraisal.

**Development of a public participation unit** to act as a centre for excellence within the NI Civil Service, that provides resources to enable the commissioning of participatory processes, guides good practice across government, and supports continuous cross-departmental innovation and learning in the field of public participation.

**Embed the practice of public participation** in policy making guidance, so that policy makers across the civil service are enabled, resourced, and supported to maximise opportunities to work with civil society, communities, and citizens in the development of policy and service delivery.

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<sup>3</sup> [https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/pillars/Spectrum\\_8.5x11\\_Print.pdf](https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/pillars/Spectrum_8.5x11_Print.pdf)

# Who we are

We're the UK's leading public participation charity, on a mission to put people at the heart of decision-making.

We're a small but passionate team focused on giving people more power over the decisions that affect their lives. We want to build a stronger democracy that works for everyone – that gives people real power to bring about change in their lives, communities and beyond.

Involve was founded in 2003 to “to create a new focus for thinking and action on the links between new forms of public participation and existing democratic institutions”. We've been promoting and practising participatory and deliberative decision-making ever since. We have worked with governments, parliaments, civil society organisations, academics and the public across the UK and internationally to put people at the heart of decision-making.

We believe that decision-making in the UK needs to be more:

- **Open** - so that people can understand, influence and hold decision-makers to account for the actions and inactions of their governments;
- **Participatory** - so that people have the freedom, support and opportunity to shape their communities and influence the decisions that affect their lives; and,
- **Deliberative** - so that people can exchange and acknowledge different perspectives, understand conflict and find common ground, and build a shared vision for society.

Find out more about our work: [www.involve.org.uk/our-work/](http://www.involve.org.uk/our-work/)

## Our values

- **Collaboration** – because change comes when broad coalitions of people work towards a common vision.
- **Equality** – because everyone in society has an equal right to be listened to and participate in decisions that affect their lives. No one should be held back by societal divisions or prejudice.
- **Purpose** – because participation must have an impact. We reject tokenistic or ineffectual engagement.

## Contact details

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