

# Written evidence submitted by the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NDE0007)

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## 1. Background

NICVA is the umbrella body for the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector in Northern Ireland with over 1100 members, who provide a wide range of services and activities for public benefit. These range from health, social care, and emergency services; advice and counselling, community development and peace-building; to environmental, arts, and sporting activities. NICVA's database of VCSE sector organisations hold records of over 6,100 organisations employing over 53,000 people across Northern Ireland. For further details on the VCSE sector visit NICVA 'State of the Sector' resource at - <https://www.nicva.org/stateofthesector>

## 2. NICVA's response to the NIAC Inquiry Questions

- I. Whether the UK Government's commitment of £2 billion is sufficient to transform public service provision in Northern Ireland
- II. What evidence and calculations underpin the £2 billion commitment

NICVA is not in a position to judge definitively whether £2 billion is sufficient to achieve the necessary transformation of public service provision in Northern Ireland. We do, however, believe there is ample evidence of the need for urgent public service transformation and for substantial new investment to meet growing projected public demands.

Successive reviews of Northern Ireland's health system, for example, provide extensive evidence of this need, most recently in the 2016 report, 'Systems, not Structures – Changing Health & Social Care,' produced by an expert panel led by Professor Rafael Bengoa. (See - <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/expert-panel-full-report.pdf> )

In addition, the 'Briefing on Northern Ireland Budgetary Outlook 2018-20' published by the Northern Ireland Department of Finance in August 2018 (See - <https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/publications/briefing-northern-ireland-budgetary-outlook-2018-20-0> ), made very clear when looking ahead to the period from 2018/19 – 2019/20 that –

*'the cost of delivering services is increasing more rapidly than the budget available. The budgetary pressures across the public sector, and particularly in health and education, far outweigh the budget available and continuing with the same pattern of spend as in previous years is simply unsustainable.'*

This underlying budgetary picture clearly demonstrates the need for a sustained additional investment to transform NI's public services, which does not rely on short-term or one-off injections of cash.

NICVA also believes it is vital that any consideration of how essential public services in Northern Ireland are resourced must include the services and activities provided to the public by voluntary, community and social enterprise VCSE organisations. These services are hugely wide-ranging from large-scale frontline delivery of health and social care services to thousands of NI citizens. An independent survey commissioned by NICVA in 2017 <https://www.nicva.org/resource/nicva-public-perception-survey-identifies-high-levels-of-public-usage-and-trust-in> highlighted the extent to which services delivered by VCSE organisations benefit the public in Northern Ireland with 90% of respondents having used a service provided by a VCSE organisation in the previous year and 1 in 8 reporting such services as being 'essential to their lives.'

After 5 successive years of one year budgets and stagnation in Northern Ireland, there is a vital and urgent need for long-term strategic thinking and investment, and a prioritisation of resources on what most effectively delivers societal/PfG outcomes, rather than further cross-the-board cutting and gradual degrading of all services, with those delivered by the VCSE sector often bearing the brunt of such cuts.

III. How UK Government funding should be allocated to Northern Ireland and whether it should be linked to the functioning of devolved institutions in Northern Ireland

Government funding to Northern Ireland should be appropriate to the challenges faced by, and outcomes sought for NI society and not be dependent upon the level of functioning of devolved institutions or on the nature of NI government structures.

IV. The potential merits and/or demerits of establishing an Independent Fiscal Council in Northern Ireland to assess the Executive's use of public money

Whilst NICVA has not consulted widely on this issue, it would appear on the face of it to be a positive suggestion which would both help ensure public confidence in the spending of public money in Northern Ireland and encourage and inform discussion on the issue of effective public budgeting to deliver the best outcomes for society

V. The potential effect of the New Decade, New Approach agreement on the future sustainability of devolved institutions in Northern Ireland

The New Decade, New Approach agreement has provided the basis for the return of the devolved institutions which NICVA has very much welcomed. We very much hope that the implementation of the agreement by all parties will also provide the

basis for the future long-term sustainability of the devolved institutions, which is much needed.

VI. Whether the deal excludes other measures that might improve good governance in Northern Ireland

NICVA welcomes the inclusion in the deal of proposals to increase structured civic engagement, for example through the proposed Compact Civic Advisory Panel. We believe good governance should include civic society and citizens' engagement, and would welcome the development of a range of mechanisms to secure such engagement and inform political decision-making, for example through social partnership mechanisms and citizens' assemblies.

*3 April 2020*