

Inquiry: New Decade, New Approach Agreement

The Carnegie UK Trust welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee's inquiry into the New Decade, New Approach Agreement. The Trust works to improve the lives of people throughout the UK and Ireland, by changing minds through influencing policy, and by changing lives through innovative practice and partnership work. Our [Strategic Plan \(2016-2020\)](#) takes a holistic approach to wellbeing and outlines our work as focusing on '[Enabling Wellbeing](#)'; '[Flourishing Towns](#)'; '[Fulfilling Work](#)'; and '[Digital Futures](#)'.

EVIDENCE BASE

The Carnegie UK Trust has been actively involved in promoting wellbeing in policy since the establishment of the first [Carnegie Roundtable on Measuring What Matters in Scotland](#) in 2010. Since 2011 we have published [case studies](#) of how governments and civil society organisations measure wellbeing in France, the USA, and Canada; made recommendations on [next steps for the Scottish National Performance Framework](#); set out steps for developing a [wellbeing framework in Northern Ireland](#); produced [guidance on wellbeing frameworks for cities and regions](#); convened an [international roundtable discussion](#) on the successes and challenges of developing high-level strategies based on wellbeing and translating this to policy action; and developed a UK-wide programme on the [Enabling State](#) which explores public service approaches which give citizens and communities more opportunity to shape the services that they receive and to contribute to their own wellbeing. Our project [Embedding Wellbeing in Northern Ireland](#) is providing financial and in-kind support to Community Planning Partnerships in the local authority areas of Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council; Derry and Strabane District Council; and Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council to implement a local wellbeing outcomes approach through their Community Plan.

NEW DECADE, NEW APPROACH AGREEMENT

The Carnegie UK Trust welcomes the New Decade, New Approach Agreement and the renewed commitment to put wellbeing at the centre of the Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government. While recognising the significant work undertaken to develop the Agreement, we believe that the Executive has the potential to go further through the development and implementation of the new Programme for Government. We have chosen to respond only to the parts of the New Decade, New Approach Agreement on which we have evidence, experience, and relevant policy learning from other jurisdictions of the UK, and internationally. While we appreciate that the new Programme for Government has been delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic, we hope that our reflections help to inform its development in the medium-term.

Multi-year budgeting and an outcomes-based approach

We welcome the proposal for a multi-year Programme for Government, underpinned by a multi-year budget and legislative programme from 2021/22, and the NICS Outcomes Delivery Plan providing the basis for the Executive's work programme in the short-term. However, to progress a wellbeing approach to government, a more considered approach to budgeting is required. We acknowledge that transforming budget decisions from departmental silos to an outcomes-based approach will take time, however, the Executive can [learn](#) from governments in New Zealand, Scotland and Wales on this approach, and from local government and its partners locally on pooling resources on projects delivered through Community Planning.

We support the Executive's plan to take forward the outcomes-based approach through the new Programme for Government. Wellbeing outcomes were enshrined in legislation for local government in 2015, and the time is now right for the outcomes-based approach to be placed on a statutory footing for all public services. Embedding a framework which improves societal wellbeing in law safeguards the approach against interruptions in governance and electoral cycles, and protects it from external shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic which shift governments' focus in the short-term. It would also recognise the progress made by local government and its Community Planning partners on improving wellbeing outcomes; signal a long-term change in approach to the planning and delivery of public services; and ensure long-standing co-ordination with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Citizen engagement and co-design

The introduction of citizen engagement mechanisms, and a commitment to co-design and public consultation at the heart of policymaking is also welcome. This approach can be transformative for decision-making, and the Executive can learn from the success of Participatory Budgeting on a District Electoral Area basis, as in [Newry, Mourne and Down](#), or by demographic, as planned in [Derry and Strabane](#) with young people. It is important that this work feeds into the Executive's understanding of the wellbeing outcomes that the citizens of Northern Ireland want and their views on how best to achieve these outcomes.

The [leading role played by the community and voluntary sector](#) during the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the sector's knowledge of, and ability to respond to, the needs of communities. There is now an opportunity to develop a new, mature working relationship between the Executive and the community and voluntary sector, and for the sectors to co-deliver and manage public services.

Reporting on progress and communicating with the public

The Trust welcomes the proposals to monitor progress against each of the Programme for Government outcomes; to establish an Assembly Committee to monitor progress; and to develop a dedicated Programme for Government monitoring and reporting website.

To help improve accountability in the progress made towards the outcomes, and to maintain the momentum and commitment to the wellbeing approach, the Executive should ensure that all Ministers are accountable for the delivery of the outcomes-based approach and the Programme for Government. This will require long-term consideration of societal outcomes, and Ministers and civil servants should learn from Community Planning in doing so. The Assembly Committee members with oversight of monitoring progress should be encouraged to focus on outcomes rather than inputs; to change the political discourse accordingly at Stormont and in the media; and to campaign locally on issues as they pertain to wellbeing outcomes.

However, the publication of data and ensuring Ministerial and Assembly Committee oversight is insufficient for engaging the public with the Programme for Government and the progress being made towards the outcomes. The Executive should learn from [international examples](#) of communicating about wellbeing frameworks and build on the good practice of using innovative visualisation and communication methods by the Community Planning Partnerships in the [reporting of their Statements of Progress](#) to the public. Utilising platforms on which citizens routinely consume news and information will ensure that the public remains informed and engaged as to the progress being made to improving societal wellbeing.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

We hope that you find these comments helpful. We would be delighted to speak with you further on our experiences in Northern Ireland and internationally.

Yours faithfully,

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