



Department for

Communities

www.communities-ni.gov.uk

The Concordat
between the
**Voluntary &
Community Sector**
and the
**Northern Ireland
Government**

Annual Report - June 2016

<u>Contents</u>	<u>Page</u>
Joint Chairs' Foreword	5
Executive Summary	7
Introduction	8
 Section 1	
Delivering the Concordat through the Joint Forum	8
❖ Partnership Working	8
❖ Expanding the network	9
❖ Review of Public Sector Group	9
❖ Procurement	9
❖ 2015/2016 Achievements	10
❖ New activities for the Joint Forum	11
 Section 2	
Commitment Action Teams	12
❖ Reporting on Progress to the NI Executive and Assembly	12
❖ Structural Reform	13
❖ Influence and Examine the Impact of Government Policy	13
❖ Outcome-Focused Approach to Funding	14
❖ Concordat Compliance Monitoring	14
❖ Communications	15
 Section 3	
Addressing Bureaucracy: Tackling bureaucracy in government grant funding to the Voluntary and Community Sector	16
 Section 4	
Voluntary and Community Sector's comments	18

Appendix A - Public Accounts Committee Recommendations

20

- ❖ Recommendation 3
- ❖ Recommendation 5
- ❖ Recommendation 11

Appendix B - Joint Forum member organisations

24

Further information

Joint Chairs' Foreword

On behalf of the Joint Government/Voluntary and Community Sector Forum, we are pleased to present the fifth annual report on the “*Concordat between the Voluntary and Community Sector and the Northern Ireland Executive*”.

The annual report highlights progress towards implementing the Concordat Agreement over the preceding year and looks forward to the year ahead.

During the past year our operating environment has witnessed significant change with the successful implementation of central and local government reform programmes. More recently, the election of a new NI Executive and Assembly and the Fresh Start Agreement and launch of a new draft Programme for Government for public consultation incorporating the move to an outcome based approach present challenge and opportunity for all those involved in the development of policy and the delivery of public services. Our report on our achievements and the Forum's view about how we see the joint partnership arrangement between Government and the Sector contributing effectively in this new environment is timely.

Five years ago the focus was on addressing past issues which prevented the Sector from engaging with Government on an equal footing. The situation is much different now with many of the ‘government/sector’ issues rectified and a strong, well structured, proactive Joint Forum in place and recognised as a key mechanism for Government to engage with the Voluntary and Community sector on a wide range of issues. The social, political and economic environment has changed dramatically since the launch of the Concordat: successive (and ongoing) Comprehensive Spending Reviews and a prolonged global recession resulted in drastic reductions to public sector funding with direct impact on the voluntary and community sector; the biggest shake-up in the history of the Welfare State is underway creating a greater need for the services in a shrinking Voluntary and Community Sector; and there is a greater emphasis on value for money, transparency and accountability.

The Department for Communities, which came into effect on 9 May 2016, now has lead policy responsibility for the Voluntary and Community Sector.

Striving to find new and better ways to meet the needs of our citizens and disrespecting organisation boundaries in this quest will characterise the approach required by all sectors and partners to ensure the effective delivery of the Programme for Government outcomes. The Joint Forum provides an ideal vehicle to share strategic thinking, exchange ideas and develop and agree new approaches and looks forward to contributing positively to improving the quality of life for all our citizens. In this context the outcome from the review of the future support arrangements for the Voluntary and Community Sector will be of particular importance for the Joint Forum.

The latest position on the progress made in relation to recommendations made by the Northern Ireland Audit Office¹ and the Public Accounts Committee 2012² are included in this report.

Finally, this Annual Report complies fully with the spirit and letter of the Concordat in that it provides a full and frank report of progress against commitments made by all participants and highlights the challenges and opportunities for the Voluntary and Community Sector.

Arthur Scott

Joint Forum Chair
Voluntary and Community Division

Anne O'Reilly

Joint Forum Chair
Voluntary Sector Group

1 'Creating Effective Partnerships between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector in September' 2010

2 'Creating Effective Partnerships between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector January 2012'

Executive Summary

1. The Commitment Action Teams covering ‘Outcomes-focused Approach to Funding’, ‘Concordat Compliance Monitoring’ and ‘Communications’ have concluded their activities. The work of Outcomes-focused Approach to Funding has proved to be timely given the launch of the draft Programme for Government 2016-2021. Using such approaches creates an opportunity for more collaborative working between government and the voluntary and community sector to improve people’s lives in areas such as employment, education and health.
2. The *Code of Practice for Reducing Bureaucracy in Grant Funding to the Voluntary and Community Sector*³, and associated *Financial Systems and Controls Assessment (FSCA)*⁴, was issued as a *Dear Accounting Officer (DAO)* letter by Department of Finance and Personnel on 15 June 2015. The DAO was effective for new funding, or extensions to existing funding awarded from April 2016. A number of awareness sessions were held with Departments to facilitate the introduction of the Code and there is an ongoing demand from a number of Departments for further awareness sessions. No significant or widespread issues have been reported to date and the Project will not close down until early summer 2016 to provide a mechanism to deal with any issues that may arise.
3. The findings and recommendations of the review of the implementation of the Concordat from 2011-2015 are currently under consideration and it is planned to take this to the next Joint Forum scheduled for autumn 2016.
4. The Joint Forum has been seeking to strengthen its relationship with Councils following the establishment of the eleven new Councils from 1 April 2015. Both the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) and the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) which represents all eleven Councils are presently represented at Public Sector Group and at the Joint Forum. A review is underway to ensure the eleven new Councils, as well as SOLACE and NILGA, continue to be represented at both Public Sector Group and the Joint Forum.
5. Local government reform remained on the agenda for the Joint Forum. With the reform programme now complete local government representatives are working with the Voluntary and Community Group to develop a new, issue based engagement with the Joint Forum.

3 www.finance-ni.gov.uk

4 www.finance-ni.gov.uk

Introduction

This is the fifth report from the Joint Government/Community Sector Forum (Joint Forum) on the Concordat between the Voluntary and Community Sector and the Northern Ireland Executive.

The Concordat contains an annual undertaking for the responsible Minister to formally present a report from the Joint Forum to the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly which provides an update on progress on issues impacting the Voluntary and Community Sector. With the recent restructuring of the NI Executive Departments responsibility for reporting on progress now lies with the Minister for the Department for Communities.

Section I

Delivering the Concordat through the Joint Forum

Partnership working

1. The role for the Joint Forum is to regularly review critically the implementation of Concordat principles and values, approve additions and report on progress. Key to the success of this is partnership working, openness and trust. These critical success factors are firmly embedded across the public sector and between the public and the voluntary and community sectors.
2. Projects commissioned by the Joint Forum and taken forward by Commitment Action Teams facilitated operational-level partnership working as members are drawn from Departments, Councils and the Voluntary and Community Sector organisations.
3. The Joint Forum is strengthening its relationship with Councils following the establishment of the eleven new Councils in 2015. Both SOLACE and NILGA, which represent all eleven Councils, are presently represented appropriately at Public Sector Group and at the Joint Forum. A review is underway to ensure the eleven new Councils, as well as SOLACE and NILGA, continue to be represented at both Public Sector Group and the Joint Forum. The review is under consideration.

Expanding the network

4. Expanding awareness of the joint Government/Sector relationship became a priority as the activities being undertaken by the Joint Forum gathered momentum. Several measures were employed to highlight the Forum's activities such as guest speakers to deliver presentations on topics of interest to members, inviting external observers from organisations with similar professional interests and utilising IT.
5. A 'Communications' project team developed a 'Joint Forum' portal to provide a central information point for all Joint Forum material. As the Department with lead responsibility for the Voluntary and Community Sector the portal was positioned on the Department for Social Development's website. The Department for Communities will retain ownership of the portal and continue to provide the secretariat for the Forum.
6. The diverse nature of government and the Voluntary and Community Sector means effective communications is crucial in sharing information and keeping abreast of projects, programmes and initiatives being taken forward in other arenas. 'Communications' will be revisited by the Joint Forum with the restructuring of Departments.

Review of Public Sector Group

7. A report on the review of Public Sector Group was published in June 2015. It contained 18 recommendations, 8 of which were in operation by February 2016. The remaining recommendations have been partially implemented or were on hold pending the introduction of the new departmental structures in May 2016, and the wider review of the Joint Forum currently underway.

Procurement

8. Discussions on specific areas of concern regarding procurement had been ongoing with the Sector and Central Procurement Directorate for some time. In May 2015 a working group was set up to consider these issues, including problems faced by Sector organisations who lacked the skills or capacity to compete in a tendering process. The group consisted of Voluntary and Community Sector representatives, Councils, Departments and officials from the Department of Finance and Personnel's Central Procurement Directorate.
9. In February 2016 draft guidance was produced. The guidance will be published once agreed.

2015/16 Achievements

10. Achievements over the past year include conclusions to the projects on **Addressing Bureaucracy in grant funding; Developing an Outcome-Focused Approach to Funding; Concordat Compliance Monitoring;** and progress on developing guidelines on **Procurement.**

Addressing Bureaucracy in grant funding

11. A major achievement reached through government and voluntary and community sector partnership working was the implementation of measures to reduce bureaucratic working practices in government grant funding. The recommendations from the *Addressing Bureaucracy Report* have been formalised in a *Code of Practice* and *Financial Systems and Controls Assessment* manuals and are now standard operating practice across Departments.

Developing an Outcome-Focused Approach to Funding

12. This project concluded in February 2016 with the production of a report outlining the development of impact/outcomes-focused awareness methodologies and measurement tools. Further development of outcomes-focused approaches will be taken forward by the Joint Forum.

Concordat Compliance Monitoring

13. Development of a compliance monitoring tool reached a natural conclusion with agreement by the Joint Forum to adopting a more positive approach to monitoring the implementation of the shared values and principles in the Concordat. This will be taken forward by the Joint Forum in light of recommendations from the review of the operation of the Concordat.

Procurement

14. The growing trend for Departments to procure services rather than grant fund core activities resulted in guidance on **'The Use of Grant Procurement'** being drafted by the Department of Finance. This guidance will be issued in due course.

New activities for the Joint Forum

Review of the Operation and Implementation of the Concordat

- 15.** The review of the operation and implementation of the Concordat was commissioned in late 2015. The purpose of the review is to assess whether the shared vision of Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector working together as social partners to build a participative, peaceful, equitable and inclusive community in Northern Ireland has been achieved through the activities of the Joint Forum.
- 16.** The report and recommendations will be circulated to members at the scheduled meeting of the Joint Forum in autumn 2016.

A new Commitments Programme

- 17.** The Joint Forum will be developing a new series of Commitments aligned to current issues. Relevant findings and recommendations from the Concordat review will be considered in determining how new commitments will be addressed.

Section 2

Commitment Action Teams

Background

1. Small working groups or 'Commitment Action Teams' using project management techniques and reporting on progress to the Joint Forum were considered to be the most effective means of addressing individual commitments listed in the Concordat. These teams comprised of public and voluntary and community sector members from the Joint Forum with external representation requested to provide specialist expertise as and when necessary.
2. Dedicated teams addressing individual commitments was a successful approach but was not without practical difficulties. Initial meetings often had to focus on establishing the core of the issue and how best to proceed. With frequent meetings required to progress each project it was difficult to maintain a consistent level of representation and this often made the process unnecessarily protracted. The composition of Commitment Action Teams will be considered in light of the recommendations from the review of the Concordat.
3. The Concordat listed twelve key issues to be addressed to ensure effective delivery of the Concordat. The following paragraphs outline all activities undertaken by Commitment Action Teams on behalf of the Joint Forum since the launch of the Concordat and while some have been fully addressed, Structural Reform and Communications will be revisited in light of the Public Sector Group and Concordat reviews:

Reporting on progress to the NI Executive and Assembly

4. A standing commitment in the Concordat is:

"To formally present to the NI Executive and Assembly a yearly report from the Joint Forum through the DSD Minister on issues impacting on the Voluntary and Community Sector."
5. The Annual Report is also the mechanism for providing assurance to the Public Accounts Committee on relevant recommendations on *"Creating Effective Partnerships between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector"*.
6. The report on progress on issues impacting on the Voluntary and Community Sector and the updates on the PAC recommendations are compiled with each year with the presentation of this report to the NI Executive and Assembly.

Structural Reform

“To review the Terms of Reference and membership of the Joint Forum, which includes the Voluntary and Community Sector Panel and the Inter-Departmental Group, to reflect this new agreement and emerging public sector structures and responsibilities.”

7. The Concordat Agreement provided an opportunity to establish new ground rules and to refresh the roles and responsibilities of the Joint Forum and its members. With many of the original members on the Forum from the days of the ‘Compact’ it was important that they understood that the Concordat brought a change to the relationship between Government and the Sector and their role within the ‘new’ Joint Forum. All members were now expected to be proactive in delivering change.
8. ‘Terms of Reference’ were developed for both partner groups setting out roles and responsibilities and a revised structure for the Joint Forum. These documents reflected the operation of the Joint Forum at that time. The Public Sector Group (formerly the Inter-Departmental Group) reviewed its ‘Terms of Reference’ in 2015 and created guidelines for membership. These Terms of Reference and guidelines will be reviewed in light of Departmental restructuring and the recommendations from the review of the Concordat. The Voluntary and Community Group panel is also currently under review.

Influence and Examine the Impact of Government Policy

“To provide opportunities for the Voluntary and Community Sector to influence and examine the impact of government policy.”

9. The Commitment Action Team on ‘Policy and Influence’ concluded its work having successfully mainstreamed contemporary policy issues into the discussions of the Joint Forum. Significant time is now set aside at each meeting to discuss key policy issues which can be suggested by members or by outside departments/groups via a Joint Forum member. When the topic has been agreed both sides of the secretariat work together to secure speakers and facilitate the debate.

Outcome-Focused Approach to Funding

'To work together, to implement an outcome focused approach to funding'

10. 'Outcomes-based funding' was not a new concept: outcomes-focused measurement tools were readily available and in use by some funders and funded organisations. What was needed however, was an understanding of the challenges in properly specifying 'outcomes'; appropriate skills training; and information sharing to facilitate learning within the Sector, and between the Sector and funders. The Commitment Action Team set out to identify best practice policy and/or legislation on outcomes-related investment and good practice models of outcomes-related investment.
11. At the initial stages of their work the team was approached by Building Change Trust which was part of a coalition of eight organisations across the UK, and lead partner in Northern Ireland for developing "*Inspiring Impact*", an initiative that aimed to make impact (outcomes) the norm for charities and social enterprises. Building Change Trust recognised that they had the same goal in mind and that they could complement the work of the action team. The Joint Forum was content that Building Change Trust had the resources to pursue this programme and agreed to suspend the activity of the Commitment Action Team pending development of '*Inspiring Impact NI*'.

Concordat Compliance Monitoring

"To explore and develop processes whereby Concordat non-compliance can be addressed."

Enshrined in the Concordat are the shared values and principles for positive interaction between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector and for both sectors to work as social partners in order to achieve the best outcome for everyone in the community.

12. A mechanism to monitor compliance with these principles was developed for the purposes of identifying good practice and/or issues which may warrant further consideration. The first pilot exercise to test the monitoring process identified the need for a number of refinements. While a further trial of the process underpinned the proposed approach, the pilot subject was considered limited in the 'challenges' it offered. It was agreed that a more cross-cutting policy or policies should be identified to ensure that the process was sufficiently robust to be rolled-out across government.
13. Alongside this however, were growing concerns among the team that monitoring

'compliance' with the Concordat was always going to be perceived in negative terms. Recognising that the commitment to develop a 'compliance tool' did not reflect the improved working relationship between Government and the Sector the team sought agreement from the Joint Forum that 'compliance monitoring' was not in the best interests of partnership working.

14. The Joint Forum agreed that this commitment had been fully considered by the Commitment Action Team and found to be no longer an issue to be addressed. It was proposed instead, that interactions between government and the voluntary and community sector would be sought through canvassing government and sector groups. This will be taken forward in the context of the recommendations from the Concordat review.

Communications

15. An objective set for the Joint Forum was the promotion of the work of the Joint Forum and its value and relevance. The Public Sector Group was also tasked with facilitating increased collaboration and improved coherency across the Public Sector on voluntary and community sector matters in order to build effective partnerships between Government and the Sector for the delivery of Government priorities.
16. Both objectives required an effective means for communicating with a range of stakeholders. While the Voluntary and Community Sector had a central point for Concordat/Joint Forum information on the NICVA website, Government Departments relied on their Intranet and Internet facilities. These facilities not only operated independently of each other but also had different procedures and timescales for publishing information.
17. A dedicated website for the Concordat was deemed unsuitable due to financial and time resources to set up and maintain so it was agreed that a 'Joint Forum' portal, hosted by the Department for Social Development on its Voluntary and Community website, should be created to provide a central point for all Joint Forum information. This portal was formally launched by the Minister for Social Development in February 2015.
18. Publicity for the Joint Forum remains limited however, 'Communications' will be reviewed following the restructuring of Departments and in light of any recommendations from the review of the Concordat.

Section 3

Addressing bureaucracy in government grant funding to the Voluntary and Community Sector

Addressing Bureaucracy – Implementation of Recommendations

1. A major issue impacting the Voluntary and Community Sector was the bureaucratic processes associated with public sector grant funding. The disproportionate levels of administration and the requirement for Sector organisations to often have to comply with multiple requests for the same information was an unnecessary drain on resources and diverted staff from their primary business. This matter was highlighted by the Public Accounts Committee in their report on *‘Creating Effective Partnerships between Government and the Sector’*⁵.
2. A Commitment Action Team was initially set up to take forward a commitment:

“To work together to remove duplication of services, systems or overheads where this exists.”
3. The complex nature of the issues were soon apparent and the Joint Forum realised it did not have the authority to investigate or to make recommendation on possible ways to address these matters.
4. Early in 2012 the Department for Social Development’s Permanent Secretary took the lead to address this and a range of other process-related monitoring and verification activities related to government funding. Senior staff from the Department of Finance and Personnel, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the Northern Ireland Audit Office and the Voluntary and Community Sector were invited to participate in key roles in a Steering Group and Project Board on what became known as the ‘Addressing Bureaucracy Project’.
5. The project produced a report in March 2013: *Addressing Bureaucracy: A report on tackling Bureaucracy in Government funding to the Voluntary and Community Sector*, with nineteen recommendations to address the issues. The majority of these recommendations were incorporated into the *Addressing Bureaucracy Code of Practice for Reducing Bureaucracy in Grant Funding to the Voluntary and Community Sector*.

5 ⁵ ‘Creating Effective Partnerships between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector January 2012’

6. The *Code of Practice* and associated *Financial Systems and Controls Assessment (FSCA)* were issued in June 2015 as a *Dear Accounting Officer (DAO)* letter by the Department of Finance and Personnel. These instructions are now applicable to all central government funders within Northern Ireland on new or extensions to existing funding awards with effect from April 2016.

7. A number of awareness sessions were held with Departments to facilitate the introduction of the Code and there is ongoing demand to continue with these briefings. No significant or widespread issues have been reported to date and the Project will not formally close until early summer 2016 to provide a mechanism to deal with any issues that may arise.

Section 4

Voluntary and Community Sector's comments

1. The 2015 – 16 year presented new challenges and opportunities for the voluntary and community sector following on from the 2015 – 16 budget and within the context of the departmental restructure. The Sector welcomed *The Fresh Start Agreement* reached by the NI Executive; stability is crucial for Northern Ireland and for the sustainability of the NI economy and the voluntary and community sector.
2. The Panel welcomed the renewed focus on information sharing on issues that overwhelmingly affect the Sector and the people organisations work with. The information updates on welfare reform, Syrian refugees and continued updates on the reform of local government (specifically the transfer of regeneration powers) were all found to be helpful. The Panel was encouraged by the new policy discussion section on the agenda in recognition of the opportunity that the cross-departmental representation of the Joint Forum presents.
3. The Panel welcomed engagement from the new Department for Communities programme board and the sharing of information on the new Department's structure. The Panel hosted Ian Maye, the Deputy Secretary for Community Cohesion in NICVA in April 2016, and welcomed Ian's overview of his role and his commitment to raising the profile of the Voluntary and Community Unit across government. This also provided an excellent opportunity for the Sector to hear more about the work of the Joint Forum and understand the Forum's role in the Sector's engagement with government.
4. In moving forward, continued stability for the Sector is key. The Panel is encouraged by the outcomes-based approach the Executive has adopted in developing the *Programme for Government* and the Sector will look forward to working in partnership with the new Departments in the development of the action plans.
5. As outlined in the Comprehensive Spending Review, Northern Ireland is to expect a reduction in Westminster funding over the next three years with more cuts to public services inevitable. It is vital the government is strategic in how these cuts are distributed and ensures that programmes delivering demonstrable outcomes are protected. Furthermore, providing Sector organisations that are successful in funding bids with a degree of long-term funding will greatly enhance funding security and organisations can plan effectively to ensure their service users are not adversely affected. When funding is

granted, government can and should issue contracts with as much notice as possible so that organisations again can effectively plan. These issues have significant negative impacts for Trustees of charities and more government support for Trustees would be encouraged.

6. The Panel was greatly encouraged by the closure of the Commitment Action Teams and the successes that arose from them, particularly the bureaucracy project. Panel members are keen to ensure the outcome of the bureaucracy project is effectively disseminated across government and organisations in the Sector can see a positive impact from it.

Public Accounts Committee Recommendations on ‘Creating Effective Partnerships between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector’

1. The Public Accounts Committee which had met on 12 October 2011 to consider the Comptroller and Auditor General’s report on ‘*Creating Effective Partnerships between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector, September 2010*’, made recommendation on:
 - managing the relationship with the Voluntary and Community Sector;
 - the policy process;
 - the Government Funding Database;
 - support services and ICT strategies; and
 - Funding

2. The Committee made eleven recommendations following a presentation of evidence by Department for Social Development officials. Three of these recommendations are relevant for inclusion in this report and are detailed in this Appendix.

Public Accounts Committee Recommendation 3

“The Committee welcomes the plans to present an annual report to the Assembly on the working of the Concordat. The Committee recommends that this report includes:

- A. Information on concerns raised by funders and funded bodies and on the actions taken to address these;
- B. Annual assurance statement on the operation of the Funding Database;
- C. Progress being made by the working groups established under the Concordat;
- D. Assurance that good practice guidance is being applied by all public sector bodies, in particular in relation to prompt payments, appointment of lead funders, proportionate monitoring and audit and focus on outcomes.”

2016 Update

A. Information on concerns raised by funders and funded bodies and on the actions taken to address these.

1. The current position on the Concordat commitments has been included in the 2016 Concordat Annual Report.

B. Annual assurance assessment on the operation of the Funding Database.

2. All Departments have confirmed that compliance with the Government Funding Database is tested on a regular basis and that assurance is provided through their Internal Audit work plan. The Department for Communities will continue to seek assurance that compliance is being applied by Departments and their sponsor bodies.
3. The Government Funding Database continues to be widely used across central government Departments and their Non Departmental Public Bodies, local Councils and Health Trusts to record detail of funding support provided to the Voluntary and Community Sector in Northern Ireland. Funding to the Voluntary and Community Sector totalling £430m (to date) was recorded onto the database during 2015/16.
4. The Voluntary and Community Division in the Department for Communities continues to provide support and monitor progress.

C. Progress being made by the working groups established under the Concordat.

See section on 'Delivering the Concordat Commitments through Commitment Action Teams' above.

D. Assurance that good practice guidance is being applied by all public sector bodies in particular in relation to prompt payments, appointment of lead funder, proportionate monitoring and audit and focus on outcomes.

5. Departments have provided assurance that they take cognisance of, and apply where possible, existing good practice guidance in their relationships with the Voluntary and Community Sector, particularly in relation to prompt payments, appointment of lead funders, proportionate monitoring and audit. They are also all committed to the new Code

of Practice on Reducing Bureaucracy in Grant Funding to the Voluntary and Community Sector, which will further strengthen good practice being applied by all public sector bodies.

Public Accounts Committee Recommendation 5

“The Committee recommends that greater emphasis is given to evaluating and demonstrating the outcomes being delivered by the Sector and the sustainability of Sector organisations providing services. This will assist funders and the Sector itself to assess the quality and value of the work being done and ensure that scarce resources are properly targeted and used effectively. It is important that Government and the Sector work collaboratively to develop output and outcome measures.”

2016 Update

1. This recommendation was also listed as a commitment within the Concordat and a project team was set up to address this issue. To avoid duplication of effort with the ‘*Inspiring Impact Programme*’ being developed in Northern Ireland by the Building Change Trust the Joint Forum suspended further work by the project team pending the development of this programme.
2. The ‘*NI Inspiring Impact Programme*’ engaged on a round of information and awareness sessions with public sector stakeholders to develop a set of Funder’s Principles; establish the current practice and challenges to the applicability of the Principles; address any issues arising, such as justification of expenditure; identify Impact Leaders within the Public Sector; and conduct demonstration projects.
3. Training and support was provided to thirteen voluntary and community sector and social enterprise organisations to enable them to understand the cycle of impact practice; assess their own impact practice; access information on impact tools and resources; and plan to apply impact practice.

Key resources provided to the groups during training were developed by the wider ‘*Inspiring Impact UK*’ programme. These resources were:

- ‘*The Code of Good Impact Practice*’: which defines and codifies what impact practice means (published June 2013)
- ‘*Measuring Up*’: an on-line interactive resource designed to assist organisations to assess their impact practice needs and inform their impact planning; and

• *Inspiring Impact Hub*: an on-line platform which provides access to a comprehensive list of evaluation resources and measurement tools organised specifically to meet the needs of the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector.

4. Working in parallel with the Sector projects was a series of five impact practice pilots chosen from across Departments and other statutory bodies. Impact practice pilots were completed in March 2015 and an exchange event was held to consider users' views on the concept and how it had worked in a 'real time' environment.
5. The Outcomes-Focused action team re-grouped in May 2015 to assess the range of outcomes or impact-based planning and measuring tools currently being used by funders and voluntary and community organisations in Northern Ireland and Great Britain. A report, *'Examining Good Practice in Developing Outcome-Focused Frameworks'* was presented to the Joint Forum in February 2016.

Public Accounts Committee Recommendation 11

"The Committee recommends that the Department for Social Development reports, through the Joint Forum's Annual Report to the Assembly, on the implementation of the priority functions contained in the Regional Infrastructure Support Programme."

2016 Update

1. The Department for Social Development commenced a review of support arrangements in 2015. The review has been undertaken by way of a co-design process with stakeholders participating in workshops using Innovation Lab methodologies to determine how support should be provided. Proposals are scheduled to go to formal consultation later this year.

List of Joint Forum member organisations

Public Sector Group from 9 May 2016

- Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA)
- Department for Communities (DfC)
- Department for the Economy (DfE)
- Department of Education (DE)
- Department of Finance (DoF)
- Department of Health (DoH)
- Department for Infrastructure (DfI)
- Department of Justice (DOJ)
- The Executive Office (TEO)
- Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA)
- Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE)

Voluntary and Community Sector Group

- Age NI
- Carers NI
- Churches Community Work Alliance
- Disability Action NI
- East Belfast Community Development Agency
- Gingerbread NI
- North West Community Network
- Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action
- Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network
- Northern Ireland Youth Forum
- Rural Community Network
- Sandy Row Community Forum
- Save the Children NI
- Voluntary Arts Ireland
- Women's Resource and Development Agency
- WWF (Worldwide Fund for Nature)

Further information

For further information about the “*Concordat between the Voluntary and Community Sector and the Northern Ireland Government*” or details of the work of the Joint Forum and Commitment Action Teams contact:

Jack O’Connor

Tel: 02890 829371 (38371) Voluntary and Community Division,
Department for Communities

Email: Jack.O’Connor@communities-ni.gov.uk

Susan Hunter

Tel: 02890 829399 (38399) Voluntary and Community Division,
Department for Communities

Email: Susan.Hunter@communities-ni.gov.uk

Keith Gordon

Tel: 02890 829409 (38409) Voluntary and Community Division,
Department for Communities

Email: Keith.Gordon@communities-ni.gov.uk

Lisa McElherron

Tel: 02890 877777 Northern Ireland Council on Voluntary Action

Email: lisa.mcelherron@nicva.org

Jenny McEneaney

Tel: 02890 877777 Northern Ireland Council on Voluntary Action

Email: jenny.mceneaney@nicva.org

