



Northern Ireland
Executive

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OUR PLAN:

Doing What Matters Most

Programme for Government
2024-2027

Analysis of Responses to Consultation





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Executive Summary

1. This report provides a summary of the consultation process conducted on the draft 'Our Plan' Doing What Matters Most: Programme for Government (PfG) 2024-2027, which aimed to gather views and insights on the draft document from individuals, communities, businesses, organisations, and stakeholders here.
2. The consultation ran from 9 September until 4 November 2024 and over 1,500 participants took part through surveys, focus groups, public meetings, and written submissions. 1,390 responses were received from all sections of society, and from both organisations and individuals. A separate survey, closing on 2 December, was conducted to gather views on the impact assessments that accompanied the PfG.
3. The consultation process represented a key opportunity to engage with organisations and individuals here. The consultation process was led by the Executive Office, but its success depended on the work of the other Executive Departments, and other public sector, private sector and statutory organisations who hosted events and provided valuable feedback and support during the process.
4. Key findings from the consultation included:
 - **Support:** Respondents generally welcomed the publication of the draft PfG and there was overarching support for the nine priorities, Missions underpinned by a commitment to Peace, and the importance of improving our infrastructure. That the draft PfG was agreed by the whole Executive and represented a partnership approach was welcomed.
 - **Measurement:** Respondents often expressed a desire to understand what actions would be taken to deliver the priorities and when delivery would happen and were keen that this information was made available to the public. There was also an appetite for clearer links between the actions in the Programme for Government, Wellbeing Domains, and the budget.



- **Identity:** Some sectors and groups felt that they could not see themselves within the PfG and wanted more clarity on how the PfG would support them. These included older people, mental health, poverty, arts, disability, culture, social care, LGBTQIA+, rural areas, the community, voluntary and social enterprise sector, the business sector, minority ethnic and Irish Language groups.
- **Healthcare and Poverty:** While waiting lists are important, people wanted to ensure the Executive focused on strengthening the entire health and social care service. The fundamentals around managing individual and family health, access to GP services, primary care, social care and other critical services was of concern to many who responded to the consultation.

Likewise, poverty and the need for a coordinated response to it were highlighted repeatedly at consultation events and in formal responses to the consultation.

- **Expectations:** Many people were concerned that the absence of a particular policy from the PfG meant that it would not happen. It was felt that realities around on-ongoing delivery of departmental portfolios as part of the wider PfG framework could be more clearly represented.

5. The feedback set out in this report will inform the next steps in the development of the PfG, including in revising the draft document for agreement by the Executive. Once the finalised Programme is agreed by the Executive and the Assembly, it will be published.



Section 1: Process

6. The purpose of the consultation was to understand the views of individuals, organisations and stakeholders regarding the draft Programme and encourage feedback through completion of a bespoke online survey or in writing. A separate survey was made available to ascertain views on the various impact assessments relating to the PfG.
7. Seven in-person public consultation events were held in Belfast, Lisburn, Ballymena, Enniskillen, Cookstown, Newry, and Derry/Londonderry. Ten online public events also took place. An online registration and feedback process was implemented to help us ascertain demand and adapt the events as necessary. This process was very successful and resulted in additional online and in person events being scheduled to reflect demand from stakeholders. In total, 184 people attended in-person and 318 attended online events during the consultation process.
8. In total, over 70 events were attended by over 1,500 participants. These events included representatives from all Section 75 categories. Meetings took place with groups advocating for the interests of young people, minority ethnic communities, older people, the LGBTQIA+ community, the Irish Language community, business, education, disability, carers and others.
9. The First Minister and deputy First Minister, along with the Head of the Civil Service (HOCS), played a significant role in promoting the consultation process. In total they attended 18 events over the course of the consultation. These included the First Minister and deputy First Minister attending the All Party Group on Older People, NICON Conference and CBI Breakfast, and HOCS attending the SOLACE NI Forum event with senior leaders and the Chief Executives' Forum.
10. Other departments promoted the consultation through their own channels, hosted consultation events, and scheduled engagement with key stakeholders and public bodies.
11. In total, the consultation cost £17,184. The use of online and digital resources minimised potential costs and allowed staff at The Executive Office to attend multiple events in a day. Costs were further limited by prioritising sharing the PfG



digitally where possible, reducing publishing costs. The use of emails and digital presentations, and other innovations provided a low-cost delivery model for the consultation.

12. The consultation process was in general well received. Many organisations and individuals who attended public and bespoke engagement events commented on the quality of the events and the value of being acknowledged and listened to during the process. Many attendees noted the quality of the presentations used, the positive engagement from TEO officials, the quality of facilitation and presenting at events, the flexibility of timings and the number of events delivered in the time available. Of those attendees who completed a questionnaire on the quality of the consultation events themselves, the average score awarded was 4 out of 5 (very useful).
13. The subjects discussed during the consultation process were emotive and often elicited strong responses from attendees. We are grateful to all who attended and shared their opinions and lived experience and have sought to represent all views reflected in an objective and accurate manner.



Section 2: Analysis

14. In total, there were 1,390 responses to the main document consultation. Of these, 874 responded using an online survey and 516 provided written responses. There were 30 responses to the impact assessment survey. There were significantly more events, event attendees, online survey responses and written responses than any other previous consultation process relating to the PfG.
15. The two online surveys were developed and managed by TEO. They were hosted on the citizen space platform and were designed to allow both organisations and individuals to share their views on the draft PfG and the associated impact assessments. The surveys provided a structured way for views to be submitted, although written responses in the form of email and postal submissions were also accepted. Responses were also welcomed in writing and by telephone.
16. The draft PfG document survey contained 39 questions. The majority of questions were designed to facilitate quantitative analysis, and users were asked to rank levels of agreement with the contents of the document on a five-point scale.
17. In addition to the quantitative questions, respondents were also invited to submit qualitative data via comment boxes, in order to allow them to qualify their answers or to provide further information. In total, over 6,000 comments were analysed, and a summary of each recorded in a database searchable using a series of themes denoting which sections of the document the response related to, and what sorts of issues were highlighted in the response.
18. Respondents to public consultations are self-selecting and therefore results may not be representative of the wider population. As such, responses have not been weighted. However, feedback received as part of the consultation has been used to understand the range of views in relation to the PfG and its proposed contents.
19. A copy of the online survey analysis report is available on our website. We will be publishing all written consultation responses once a redaction process is complete; this is to avoid putting any personal information into the public domain.



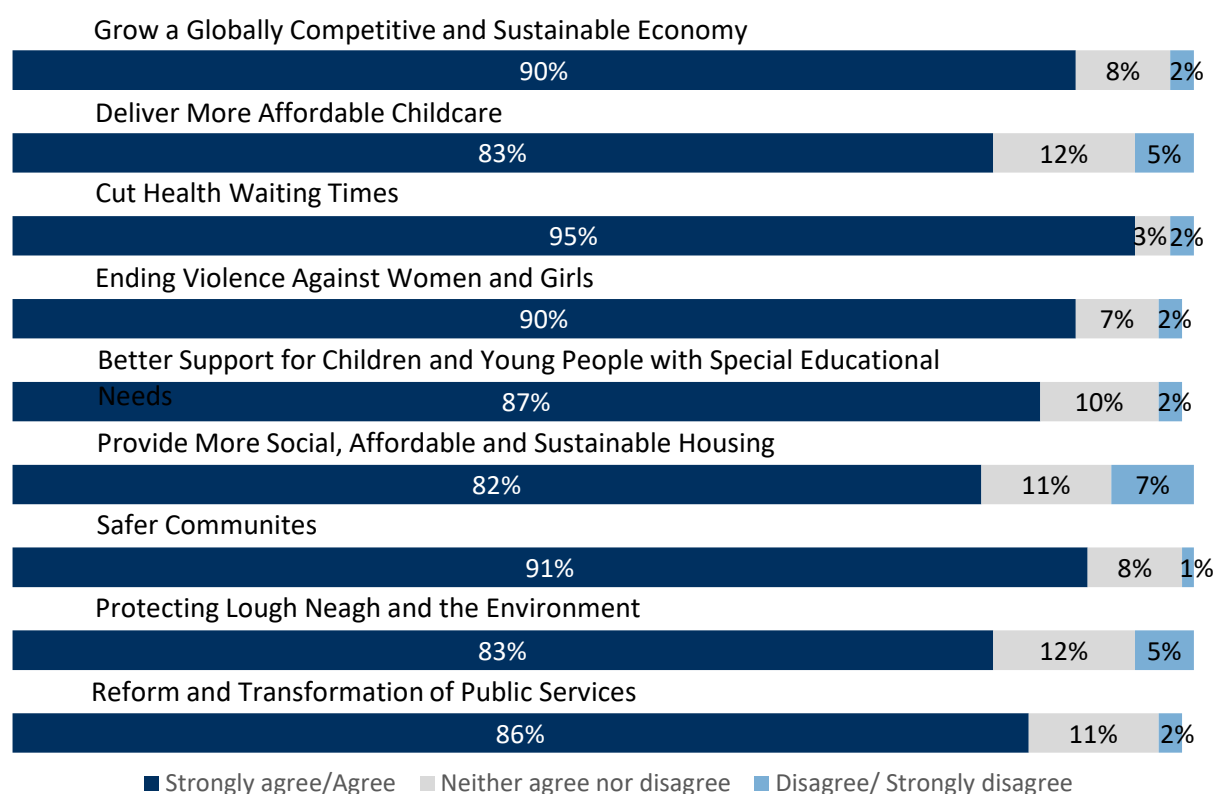
Section 3: Consultation Findings

20. The findings of the consultation have been collated into sections below. The sections mirror the layout of the draft Programme itself – Priorities, Building New Foundations and the Missions. There is also a section on key and emerging issues from the overall consultation.

3.1: Priorities

21. The nine priorities contained within the draft Programme represent the immediate priorities for the Executive this year and throughout the current mandate, including supporting the wellbeing of people here and their families. A range of actions are included to provide a summary of the strategies and policies being implemented under each priority.

Figure 1: How much do you agree that the following priorities should be included in the Programme for Government?¹



¹ Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding. This is applicable across all charts within the report.



22. There were strong levels of agreement with each of the nine priorities. In general, it was felt that priorities reflected the most significant current issues to be addressed, while remaining cognisant of resource and other pressures on delivery. One respondent noted “We appreciate the work that has gone into formulating the comprehensive Programme for Government and agree that the overall approach identifies key issues and priorities while retaining a sense of realism about what can be achieved in the shorter term.”
23. Alongside high levels of agreement, many respondents suggested that the draft PfG would benefit from more clarity as to what would happen by when, how actions linked to the wellbeing framework, and what the impact of policies would be. There was also an interest in understanding how the PfG would link to the budget, and many respondents were concerned that delivery would not take place as planned.
24. The strong relationship between and within priorities was well understood, recognised and the importance of Reform and Transformation to ensuring delivery was clearly recognised. One respondent noted “The nine priorities are all relevant, interconnected and important in building a better place to live and work”.

Grow a Globally Competitive and Sustainable Economy

25. 90% of survey respondents agreed that this priority should be included in the PfG, and just over three quarters (76%) agreed with the list of actions contributing to it. Thoughts centered around the need to focus on innovation, the role of training and upskilling, balance at regional level and creating pathways to employment at all ages. Planned investment in research was positively received: “We particularly welcome the proposed investment in research and development, increasing links between universities and business, and attracting funding from European and UK projects.”
26. Respondents were clear on the benefits of working with all relevant partners where this would have a benefit: “We would also expect that further cross-border initiatives would enhance economic development, improve transport and assist in



employment, health and education initiatives.” In support of plans to work with and across councils, it was noted that “Regional balance is key”.

27. Some areas of concern were also reflected by respondents. The importance of ensuring that rural areas were not left behind their urban counterparts in these issues was reflected in a large number of respondents. Another key issue raised was the need for adequate infrastructure, including water infrastructure, to enable the desired level of house building and other economic activity to take place.

Deliver More Affordable Childcare

28. 83% of respondents agreed that this priority should be included in the PfG, and just under three quarters (74%) agreed with the list of actions contributing to it, although the need to prioritise delivery was highlighted: “The concern is the speed it will roll out”. The need for improved pay for childcare workers was raised. A key issue was the sense that affordable childcare was only one element of ensuring that our children get the best possible start in life, and it was important that a holistic view was taken on the issue.

29. The linkage between Childcare and other priorities was prominent, as was the need for progress in the quality of jobs to ensure more people can afford a childcare provider: “There needs to be clearer links between the priorities, households that cannot afford to feed or heat their households, are unlikely to be able to access childcare if the other financial barriers they are facing are not addressed first”. There was some suggestion that childcare could be implemented as “a core wraparound support service in community and adult education settings”. A strong and repeated sentiment was that affordable childcare “enhances employability for parents” and provides an “appropriate environment for young people to learn”.

Cut Health Waiting Times

30. 95% of respondents agreed that this priority should be included in the PfG, and eight out of every ten respondents (80%) agreed with the list of actions contributing to it. This priority attracted significant feedback during the consultation process – it was seen as a key element of the draft PfG. There was strong support for the



overall underpinnings of the strategy in this area: “The draft PfG sets out an ambitious vision for improving health and wellbeing”.

31. Equal access to all aspects of healthcare, including primary care, emergency general surgery, maternity services and social care was very important to many people. Many respondents framed their concerns in the context of the specific impacts on rural communities, and feedback at the public event in Fermanagh was heavily focused on rural issues in respect to health care, and specifically referenced issues relating to healthcare provision in South West Area Hospital.

32. It was acknowledged that the draft laid out “the groundwork for addressing the current mental health crisis. The focus on wellbeing, early intervention, and cross-departmental collaboration is especially welcome”. However, many respondents felt that mental health and actions to address issues associated with it could be represented in more detail in the document, with one noting that they were “concerned about the lack of discussion around mental health & waiting lists”.

Ending Violence Against Women and Girls

33. 90% of respondents agreed that this priority should be included in the PfG, and eight out of every ten respondents (80%) agreed with the list of actions contributing to it. Actions around collaborative working were welcomed: “the suggested approach of mobilising existing and new partnerships across government and all sections of society is the correct one”. “From a gender equality perspective, there are several positive aspects of the Draft PfG.”

34. The complexities around addressing the issue were also highlighted: “it can be increasingly difficult for carers to remove themselves from violent situations”. A noted positive was the “focus on education from the earliest age and stage to promote respectful and appropriate relationships.” One respondent reflected: “education is key - children need to learn about respect for each other and healthy relationships.”

35. Many noted the role of the community, voluntary and social enterprise sector organisations and other statutory agencies in addressing gender based violence,



and the need to ensure that such bodies received appropriate support to continue their work. The importance of student, LGBTQIA+, disabled and minority ethnic voices in tackling this issue going forward was also noted.

Better Support for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs

36.87% of respondents agreed that this priority should be included in the PfG, and over three quarters (77%) agreed with the list of actions contributing to it. Many felt a focus on, and investment in, young people with SEN was justified, positive, and to be welcomed. It was considered that such an investment would lead to better outcomes for the young people, their parents and guardians, and contribute to the economy by enabling more young people with SEN to take up jobs and avail of other opportunities available to them. Some felt that the priority was too restrictive, and that it was important to do more for people transitioning out of formal education. Others highlighted the need to strengthen the education sector as a whole. Many felt that other issues for young people, including mental health and poverty, should also be a focus going forward.

Provide More Social, Affordable and Sustainable Housing

37.82% of respondents agreed that this priority should be included in the PfG, and just under three quarters (74%) agreed with the list of actions contributing to it. Given the linkages of housing to issues such as homelessness, there were a range of positive responses from both individuals and organisations operating in this space: “Great to see Housing as a priority in the draft PfG”.

38. Issues around housing and older people were noted by many respondents, particularly in the context of pressures on housing costs for older people, exacerbated by ongoing rises in service costs and the reduction in winter fuel payments. It was also noted that adaptations and modifications are needed with respect to housing for those with disabilities.



39. Housing affordability, stress, and homelessness were all raised repeatedly, with many respondents raising the need to ensure quality housing was affordable and widely available.

Safer Communities

40. 91% of respondents agreed that this priority should be included in the PfG, and just under eight in ten respondents (79%) agreed with the list of actions contributing to it. There were many comments advocating for safer communities as a key priority and recognizing the positive effect on wider society when people can live and work in a safe environment. There were comments to the effect that “young people often feel voiceless” when it comes to talking about safer communities in the context of the youth experience, and they “must be given a platform to express their concerns regarding safer communities and paramilitary influence.”

41. Many respondents felt that it was important for vulnerable people to be considered during the delivery of actions contributing to this priority, as many “vulnerable people continue to struggle with their finances, they are sadly susceptible to criminals who seek to exploit them with, for example, predatory money lending practices.”

Protecting Lough Neagh and the Environment

42. 83% of respondents agreed that this priority should be included in the PfG, and just over seven in ten respondents (72%) agreed with the list of actions contributing to it. It was felt to be “Important that our carbon budgets and our first Climate Action Plan are implemented in a way that prioritises and protects energy consumers on the transition to net zero”. Some respondents were concerned that a “distinction is being made between Lough Neagh and the environment, when this PfG should be considering the environment as a whole”. One respondent noted that it was “positive to see the inclusion of the Climate Action Plan” in the wider document.

43. The complex nature of the issues involved in this priority are highlighted by a response urging the Executive “to implement measures that effectively tackle the



pollution in the Lough, while also protecting the cultural and economic interests” of local communities and businesses.

Reform and Transformation of Public Services

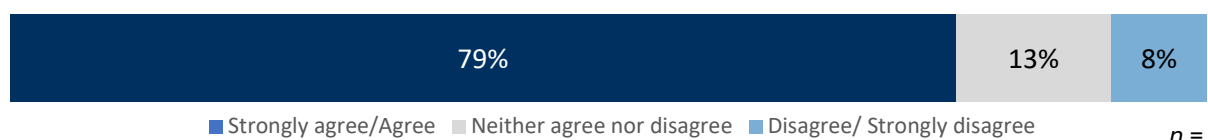
44. 86% of respondents agreed that this priority should be included in the PfG, and just over seven in ten respondents (71%) agreed with the list of actions contributing to it. Many saw the focus on collaborative working and funding support as a significant positive, with one respondent noting that they were “pleased to see a commitment from The Executive to focus on more interconnected funding models for partnerships in the voluntary sector.”

45. The Reform and Transformation Unit was seen as very important. Many felt that it was critical that the community, voluntary and social enterprise sector, district councils and other relevant stakeholders were involved in the design and development of the Unit.

Building New Foundations

46. The key focus of the Building New Foundations section is on the upgrade of local infrastructure to strengthen communities and create opportunities for businesses, entrepreneurs, communities, and innovators to thrive.

Figure 2: How much do you agree that these are the right commitments in relation to the plans for investment in infrastructure?



47. 79% of respondents agreed that a focus on building new foundations should be included in the PfG. They felt that cross-border collaboration in this area is to be welcomed and encouraged. Ensuring that the planning process was fit for purpose was seen as very important, as “a streamlined, efficient planning system would



facilitate business growth and expansion.” The linkages between solid infrastructure, good environmental practices and positive outcomes for society when the two are progressed in tandem were frequently made.

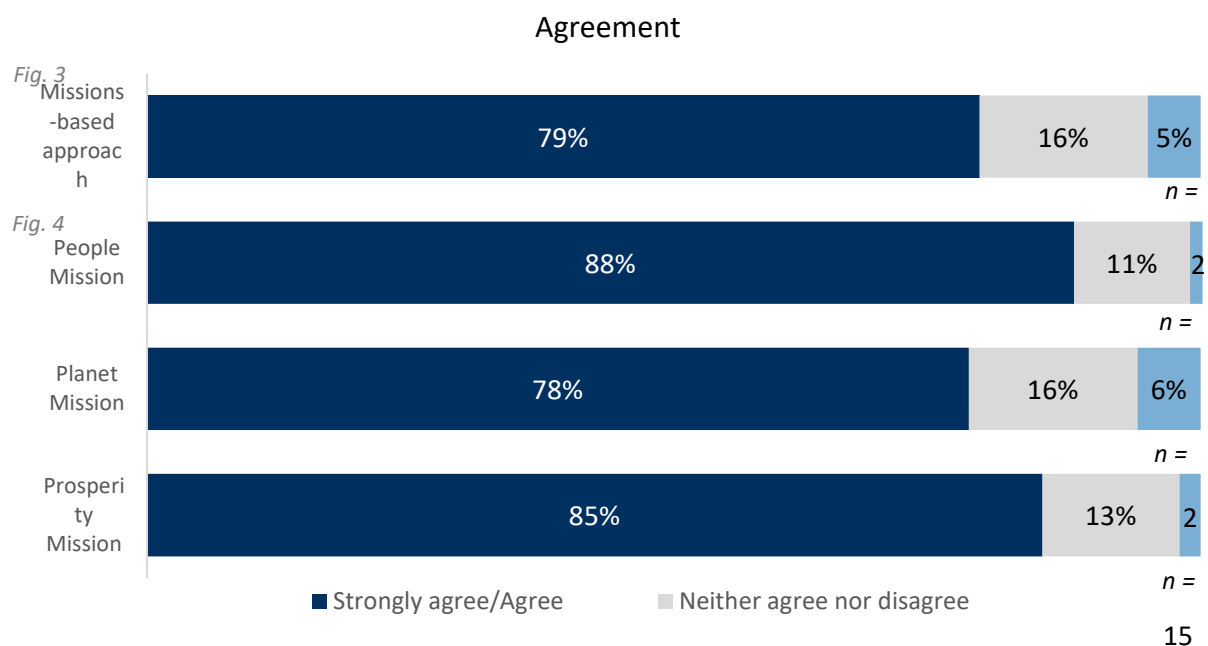
48. There was also a call for “economic infrastructure investment to include community transport services particularly in rural and underserved areas”, which noted that “Community Transport facilitates access to employment, healthcare, provides accessible SEN transport, combats social isolation and requires prioritisation of driver training and long-term funding”. Another respondent noted “we really need to increase the connectivity of those within rural areas, giving people a choice of travel methods”.

3.2: Missions

49. To support the Executive in setting its priorities, a Missions based approach has been developed based on an in-depth view of life here. These Missions are People, Planet and Prosperity and they are underpinned by a cross-cutting commitment to Peace.

Figure 3: The Executive have set out a long-term strategy to deliver three Missions, People, Planet and Prosperity, as well as a cross-cutting commitment to Peace. How much do you agree with a Missions-based approach?

Figure 4: How much do you agree that these are the right Missions to focus on?





50. Nearly eight in ten (79%) respondents agreed with the Missions based approach to the draft. There were a range of positive comments around the Missions as a whole. It was felt that “missions and cross-cutting themes are appropriately identified, relevant and prioritised, recognising many of the challenges and opportunities facing government.”

51. Many felt that the overall purpose the Missions could be made clearer. One respondent felt “It is slightly confusing to run these alongside the other objectives for the Executive - do they interlink and relate, or which takes precedence.” In common with feedback on the priorities, many noted the need to be able to assess and measure progress against the Missions. One respondent noted “that it is good to see People and Planet amongst the missions”, but that the PfG needs “more detail and specific targets showing what government plans to deliver.”

People Mission

52. 88% agreed that this mission should be included in the PfG. 77% agreed with the proposed actions. One respondent noted “The People mission is critical for ensuring equal access to opportunities across all stages of life, fostering a society where everyone has the resources to thrive”. It was felt by many that importance should be placed on ensuring that everyone here could see themselves in this Mission, that it should “include a stronger focus on reducing inequality”. It was also noted that the People Mission should include clear reference to poverty, and ways to address poverty here. There was disappointment “that the reduction of poverty, particularly child poverty, is not clearly defined as a mission”.

Planet Mission

53. 78% agreed that this mission should be included in the PfG. 72% agreed with the proposed actions. The Mission covers a range of environmental actions and plans, many of which drew positive responses: “Greener homes are safer and more



affordable homes” and ideas for making further progress: “non-recyclable waste that we produce should also be recognised as resource”.

54. The importance of Planet as a Mission underpinning all that we do was also recognised, including “the principles of sustainable development at a critical time for nature and climate”. The key role of technological innovation in this area was also noted: “achieving better outcomes with the same (or fewer) recyclable materials in the years ahead will help in the delivery of the Programme for Government”

Prosperity Mission

55. 85% agreed that this mission should be included in the PfG. 73% agreed with the proposed actions. A common issue raised was that prosperity should not be at the expense of greater inequality in society. A number of comments identified the need to ensure no one is left behind and that prosperity should be inclusive of all groups in society. One respondent noted “The prosperity mission should prioritise social inclusion, ensuring that economic growth strategies benefit individuals with disabilities and other marginalized groups.”

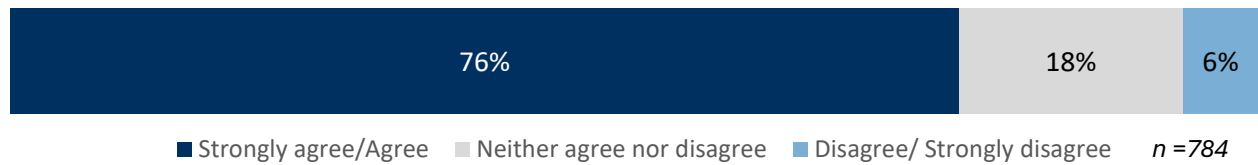
56. Many respondents felt that the Prosperity Mission should have a key focus on poverty, and held the view that bringing people out of poverty was a significant contributing factor to achieving a prosperous society. Potential future drivers of economic growth, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), were also mentioned. One respondent noted that “The PfG should ensure the necessary enablers are in place to foster an environment where AI can flourish as it will be a driving force behind economic prosperity and societal wellbeing in the future”.

Cross-cutting Commitment to Peace

57. 69% agreed with the structure of Peace as a cross-cutting commitment, rather than a mission. 76% agreed with the actions proposed under the commitment to Peace. Many also felt that Peace should be a separate Mission.



Figure 5: A commitment to Peace will underpin the three missions (People, Planet and Prosperity). A series of actions have been proposed under this commitment. How much do you agree that these are the right actions?



58. The relationship between the actions and delivery agents such as councils, statutory agencies and the community, voluntary and social enterprise sector were noted. It was felt that it was important to ensure that funding and support for these stakeholders was provided in a consistent manner as part of a long term commitment in this space, to ensure that organisations had the freedom and confidence to progress difficult and sensitive work.



Section 4: Wellbeing and Measurement

59. The PfG and the Missions are intended to support the improvement of a range of wellbeing indicators, each of which is a high-quality official statistic. Each project and programme contained within the draft PfG can be linked to a wellbeing domain.

60. A Wellbeing Dashboard has been designed to help people assess the progress being made. There will be ongoing development and iteration of these indicators to identify and address any potential gaps, and to improve or replace existing measures as necessary.

Figure 6: The draft Programme for Government outlines how it will measure progress through a Wellbeing Framework. How much do you agree with the proposed approach?



61. Seven out of ten (70%) respondents agreed with the proposed approach to measure progress through a Wellbeing Framework. It was noted that “the proposed Wellbeing Dashboard represents a progressive and inclusive approach to measuring progress.” The importance of having up to date and readily available data across a range of sources, as well as the need for regular review, were also mentioned by respondents.

62. Respondents also felt that the relationship between the Wellbeing Dashboard and the actions in the draft PfG should be clarified, and that the Executive should be more explicit about how the Framework will be used to inform future decisions.



Section 5: Draft Impact Assessments

63. Alongside the draft PfG, three draft impact assessments were published on 9 September for consultation:

- Draft Equality Impact Assessment
- Draft Rural Needs Impact Assessment
- Draft Child Rights Impact Assessment

64. Broadly the impact assessments showed that, as there were so many elements within the draft PfG, there was potential for impact on many different groups. Overall, it was expected the draft Programme for Government would mostly have positive effects and could help address many existing inequalities.

65. The consultation on these impact assessments ran for 12 weeks and closed on 2 December. An effort was made during the consultation process to engage with a range of groups representing different Section 75 groups, those in rural areas and those representing children and young people. This was the case during consultation events for the draft PfG, and efforts continued at meetings and events in the four weeks after the draft PfG closed.

66. As well as a relatively small number of both survey responses (30) and written responses referring directly to one or more of the draft impact assessments, many other responses referenced relevant groups such as children and young people, or those living in rural areas, or spoke about the needs of people in certain Section 75 breakdowns. This has been seen in other sections of the consultation report but the below paragraphs attempt to explicitly highlight some of the relevant issues raised.

Draft Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)

67. The draft EQIA attempted to assess the draft PfG's potential for impact upon equality of opportunity between people in certain Section 75 groups (i.e. of different religious belief, political opinion, gender, race, disability, age, marital status, dependents and sexual orientation).



68. It also noted that many proposals were in early stages of development, and that further detail and further assessments would be considered within future screenings and individual EQIAs for initiatives and projects, as and when appropriate.

69. Following consultation, next steps will include updating of the draft EQIA and reflection on stages 6 and 7 in the EQIA process. In a number of the written and survey responses, there was an appetite for more detail on how each commitment would be delivered and implemented.

70. When asked to describe the impact they thought the draft Programme for Government would have on Equality of Opportunity, a majority of respondents to the online survey felt there would be a positive impact for most breakdowns, apart from marital status, where a majority felt that there would be no impact. In the comments received online a common theme was that there could be potential negative impacts for some groups due to perceived omissions from the draft PfG with older people, people with disabilities, people from minority ethnic groups and school-aged children being specifically mentioned.

71. When asked about the potential for impact on Good Relations, a majority of respondents to the online survey felt there would be a positive impact on people of different religious belief, political opinion and racial group. Key themes among responses on how we can best promote Good Relations included a need to promote integrated and inclusive communities, and a need for engagement and communication with stakeholders.

72. Among written responses, the Executive's commitment to tackle inequalities was welcomed as were specific elements likely to impact positively on for example women or children

73. There were also wide-ranging remarks including but not limited to a desire to see.

- an explicit 'equity based' approach
- gender budgeting



- intersectional and collaborative approaches
- more specific actions and resources clearly addressing key inequalities, eliminating prejudice, and advancing good relations
- explicit references to and centering of equality, inequality and Section 75
- an emphasis on commitments made in New Decade New Approach, on all four social inclusion strategies, a racial equality strategy, and a rights-based framework
- an assessment in the EQIA of excluding certain policies and commitments
- acknowledgement of the community and voluntary sector and ongoing community engagement
- due regard for disability, minority ethnic communities, and an ageing society
- consideration of health inequality and mental health, older people and adult social care
- an Anti-Poverty Strategy and objectives to tackle socio-economic inequality and poverty
- race law reform, protection from age related discrimination, hate crime legislation, fulfilment of Windsor Framework Article 2 commitments
- measurement to track impact across each of the S75 grounds

Draft Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA)

74. The draft RNIA attempted to assess the draft PfG's potential for impact upon the needs of those living in rural areas.

75. Similarly to the draft EQIA, it found potential for impact, and certainly potential for positive impact, but also noted that individual assessments would need to be considered as policies were further developed.

76. When asked about the potential for impact on the needs of people living in rural areas the response among online responses was very mixed. Eight respondents felt the draft PfG would have a positive impact, seven felt it would have a negative impact, and five felt there would be no impact. Some responses felt a range of issues were not adequately addressed including (but not limited to) access to



services, education matters, and issues with pollution. There was a desire for engagement on rural issues with all departments.

77. Among written responses comments included a desire to see:

- the needs of rural citizens incorporated into all priorities
- a more thorough understanding in the RNIA of rural communities' needs around housing, poverty, employment, tourism, transport, environmental pollution, service provision, and especially around healthcare
- due regard for rurality including Rural Proofing, and consideration of issues around regional balance
- recognition of the community and voluntary sector
- more detail on proposed policies and commitments

Draft Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA)

78. The draft CRIA attempted to assess the draft PfG's potential for impact upon rights of children and young people.

79. Similarly to the other draft impact assessments, it found potential for impact, and certainly potential for positive impact, but also noted that individual assessments would need to be considered as policies were further developed.

80. When asked about the potential for impact on the rights of Children and Young People generally, a majority of online respondents felt there would be a positive impact. Comments on ways to reduce potential negative impacts included the provision of youth facilities and services, such as youth clubs or wellbeing arts initiatives for example. Engagement and communication with young people were also suggested"

81. Among written responses there was support for inclusion of some child-specific issues. Other comments included a desire to see:

- Implementation of and reference to the Children's Services Co-operation Act
- urgent actions around safeguarding and protection of children and young people
- a children's wellbeing priority and dataset



- consideration of vulnerable groups such as young carers, newcomer children, care leavers, and those with special educational needs and disabilities
- reframing of several priorities to better reflect the needs and rights of children
- objectives to address child poverty, cut health waiting lists for children, improve education and increase mental health services for young people
- support for organisations delivering youth services
- ongoing engagement with young people and consideration of children's rights in policy making
- acknowledgment of the community and voluntary sector



Section 6: Key and Emerging Issues

82. The success of the consultation, both in terms of the number of people engaged with at events, and the number who provided feedback, is very positive and a testament both to the work of everyone involved in delivering the events and the willingness of organisations and the wider public to engage in the process.

83. This success also makes the process of identifying trends from the large amounts of feedback received challenging. Intensive analysis and cross-checking between quantitative and qualitative responses has all been undertaken in order to create the lists of key and emerging issues provided below.

Support

84. The strong Executive support for the document was noted. It was felt that an important element of the draft PfG was the commitment from the Executive Ministers that, "As colleagues, we will work in common cause, respectful of each other and in genuine co-operation." It was noted that if this is achieved there is true potential to make meaningful positive change to people's lives.

85. It was felt that the priorities in the PfG were positive, aspirational commitments. Many considered that the PfG priorities have the potential to deliver substantive change for individuals and communities here. The importance of the proposed priorities were noted.

86. It was felt that the overall approach identifies key issues and priorities while retaining a sense of realism about what can be achieved in the shorter term. It was noted that if the identified priorities are delivered, they will make a very significant contribution to the improvement of the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities. The intention to achieve equity throughout the region in respect of economic development, decarbonisation and service provision was welcomed.



Measurement

87. Actionable targets and timescales should be included and should be linked to relevant budgets. Further clarity should be provided on delivery to help articulate the overall vision of the Executive regarding these matters. By specifying deliverables, timelines, and evaluation metrics, the PfG can better capture its goals, ensuring that all stakeholders are clear on the way forward and able to work together to achieve sustainable, inclusive outcomes.

Identity

88. Many sectors were keen to see a greater mention of issues central to their work in the document. These included issues relating to older people, mental health, poverty, arts, disability, culture, social care, LGBTQIA+, rural, the community, voluntary and social enterprise sector, the business sector, minority ethnic and Irish Language groups.

Healthcare

89. While waiting lists are important, people wanted to ensure the Executive focused on strengthening the entire health and social care service. The fundamentals around managing individual and family health, access to GP, primary care, social care and other critical services was of concern to many who responded to the consultation.

Expectations

90. Some responses felt that the document should include more detail on specific strategies, policies and initiatives that they were interested in. The purpose of the PfG as a means of setting the direction for the current term in government, and laying foundations for real transformation for future generations, as opposed to a detailed explanation of delivery across all departments, was not clearly understood by all respondents. The challenge for Government in this respect is to ensure that the role of the PfG as a blueprint for shaping a better tomorrow: one where everyone has a fair chance, can participate equally, and where the rights of all are



respected and upheld, is clearly articulated and understood by individuals and organisations going forward.

6.1: Other Emerging Issues

91. It was felt that the overall approach identifies key issues and priorities while retaining a sense of realism about what can be achieved in the shorter term. It was felt that an important element of the draft PfG was the commitment from Executive Ministers to work together to achieve the vision set out. It was noted that each of the nine priorities highlights a pressing issue that is impacting people's lives and each proposed action articulates an aspiration which everyone can support.
92. Issues raised included the importance for the PfG to show a clearer connection with others beyond the walls of national government, including councils and the community, voluntary and social enterprise sector. The recognition that "public services and government that operate in silos will not address the complex interconnected issues facing the population here" was seen as important.
93. It was noted that if the identified priorities are delivered, they will make a very significant contribution to the improvement of the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities here. The intention to achieve equity throughout the region in respect of economic development, decarbonisation and service provision was welcomed. Some felt that the PfG would benefit from outlining more clearly how the priorities were determined and the rationale for omitting other issues. The opportunity to provide input at an earlier stage in future would be welcomed.
94. On the specific topic of ageing, the importance of considering the potential benefits: "Population ageing is not a problem to be fixed; it is a demographic reality that brings both opportunities and challenges." The establishment of an additional priority within the PfG to strategically prepare our economy and society for the consequences of an increased ageing society was raised.
95. The limited reference within the plan to the wider suite of social inclusion strategies (i.e., Disability, Sexual Orientation, Anti-Poverty and Gender) was noted and



considered disappointing by some due to the cross-cutting importance of these issues. The intention to reduce homelessness, create good jobs and the new Skills Fund was welcomed. The new Employment Rights Legislation and Good Work Charter are also positive proposals.

96. Responses referenced issues around access to health care and other services in rural areas, and particularly Fermanagh. There was a sense of frustration from some respondents, which was also reflected in the in-person and online events with people and organisations from the Fermanagh area. Respondents referenced that they felt that that the document did not address the threat to acute services for example. Other issues references included need for action on mental health, ambulance services and emergency department delays.
97. The need for equitable treatment with respect to the restoration of rail services, building social housing, spending on infrastructure or the provision of good quality jobs was raised, especially in Fermanagh. Some respondents noted that cross-border delivery and collaboration was an opportunity to pool resources and restore lost services. Rural issues around childcare provision, alternative fuels and other issues make it harder for businesses in rural areas to be competitive.
98. Other ideas included that the concept of lifelong learning should be named as a core action within the PfG, and that the Executive should pursue reform of non-domestic rates to support the high street and lower the tax and regulatory burden for retail businesses. The tight fiscal constraints under which the Executive is working were recognised. However, it was felt that attempts should be made to allocate funding to infrastructure that underpins many of the Executive's ambitions.
99. Addressing dereliction in village, town and city centres was seen as important. It was felt that taking radical steps to bring buildings back in to use, to disincentivise demolition, to punish neglect of buildings, to discourage vacant plots and surface car parks would boost the economy, support the high street, restore civic pride and reduce emissions. It was also felt that issues relating to arts, culture, and heritage here could be more strongly represented.



100. A number of responses requested that the Executive demonstrate its support for greyhound racing by including an undertaking in the PfG to extend the remit of the Horse Racing Fund to include Drumbo Park Stadium and Brandywell Greyhound Stadium.
101. Some responses noted the rights-based commitments outlined in previous Programmes are not explicitly included in the current draft PfG and that an unequivocal commitment to dismantling paramilitary organisations, coupled with sustainable economic opportunities for youth and affected communities is crucial for long-term peace and security. Shared housing, an integrated education system and removing interface barriers alongside community regeneration can play a key role in replacing outdated sectarian frameworks. Promoting environmental responsibility can also help to unify communities.
102. The need for immediate resources to address in-year shortfalls and halt the decline in police officer and staff numbers, and a sustainable, multi-year funding settlement to allow future planning in this space was noted. An effective police service was regarded as important among respondents. Sufficient funding and resourcing were seen as key to achieve effective policing, which would allow for proactive policing through the prevention of crime.
103. It was noted by some respondents that greater representation of LGBTQIA+ people within the PfG would contribute significantly to advancing equality, do justice to the diversity of our society, and present a cohesive vision for tackling the many pervasive problems facing the LGBTQIA+ community.
104. Economic inactivity was raised by some respondents, feeling the issue merited more attention because its root causes - ill health, disability, lack of skills, etc - are closely linked to the causes of poverty. Some respondents noted that without a clear strategy to eradicate poverty at the heart of the PfG, the numbers of people experiencing poverty and hardship could increase and become more persistent for those most in need of targeted support.
105. Some respondents acknowledged that the current economic climate is very challenging and requires careful and meaningful engagement with policymakers to



understand the implications for our businesses and communities. The draft PfG is a tool that can be used to build confidence and the conditions necessary for longer term sustainability and growth. Some respondents felt that artificial intelligence should be specifically mentioned in the PfG, as there are many benefits to its use.

106. Some attendees indicated that they felt that there was insufficient mention of race. It was felt that strategies developed to address issues around race have not been successful. It was felt that race, racial equality and the consideration of newcomers and refugees needed to be a key focus of any final document.

107. A number of respondents felt the need to ensure that all departments prioritise death, dying and bereavement as part of a critical need to prepare all our public services, including our health and social care services for an increasingly ageing population.



Section 7: Conclusion

108. This report provides a summary of the feedback provided by nearly 1,400 individuals and organisations on the draft 2024-2027 Programme for Government. In general the publication of the draft PfG was welcomed. There was strong support for the nine priorities, Missions underpinned by a commitment to Peace, and the importance of improving our infrastructure. The partnership approach and Executive agreement of the draft was seen as a strong positive.
109. Some respondents felt there could be greater clarity on aspects of the Programme - what actions would be taken and when to deliver the priorities, and there was also a feeling that this information should be made public. Feedback also suggested that clearer links between the actions in the Programme for Government, Wellbeing Domains, and the budget would be helpful.
110. There were sectors and groups that wanted to see greater representation in the report, including older people, mental health, poverty, arts, disability, culture, social care, LGBTQIA+, rural areas, the community, voluntary and social enterprise sector, the business sector, minority ethnic and Irish Language groups.
111. Feedback was clear on the need to ensure the Executive focused on strengthening the entire health and social care service. The fundamentals around managing individual and family health, access to GP services, primary care, social care and other critical services was of concern to many who responded to the consultation. Poverty and the need for a coordinated response to it were highlighted repeatedly at consultation events and in formal responses to the consultation.
112. There was interest in detail around particular policies – it would be helpful to clarify that Departments continue to deliver their own policy portfolios outside of the PfG.
113. The feedback set out in this report will inform the next steps in the development of the PfG, including the revision of the draft Programme for Government itself.