

A practical guide to  
**Policy Making**  
in Northern Ireland



Northern Ireland  
Executive

[www.northernireland.gov.uk](http://www.northernireland.gov.uk)



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# Welcome to the NICS Policy Making Guide

Guidance to help those developing or reviewing policy to identify the issues they need to take into account to produce effective policy which will make a difference to and improve the lives of people living in Northern Ireland.



## CHAPTER 1:

# Introduction

## Policy Making for the 21st Century

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Policy making is the process by which governments translate their political vision into programmes and actions to deliver ‘outcomes’ – desired change in the real world.

Policy can take a range of different forms, including non-intervention; regulation, for instance by licensing; or the encouragement of voluntary change, including by grant aid; as well as direct public service provision.

Policy development is the process by which decisions are taken about how resources of various types are allocated and used. These processes take a variety of forms. They can be wholly informal, or highly structured, but where they are effective, they draw on our best thinking about what works and include contributions and evidence from many partners.

## The need for a policy making guide

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The Northern Ireland Civil Service has a long history of supporting Ministers in the development of policy, whether under Direct Rule or devolution. Equally, there is considerable policy development experience and expertise in the wider public service. The advent of devolution and the institutions established by the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement has however considerably changed the context for policy making in Northern Ireland. In particular, there is more opportunity - and a desire by Ministers - to design policies specifically to meet the needs of the Northern Ireland population, rather than primarily adapting policies developed in Whitehall, as was often the approach in the past under Direct Rule.

This guide seeks to provide a starting point to help those working on developing or reviewing policy identify what issues they need to take into account to ensure that policy is evidence-based, focused on outcomes, forward looking, ‘joined up’ and meets Northern Ireland requirements.

It aims to provide you with tools, skills and advice that will help you to develop high quality and effective policy.

It sets out a number of common elements of policy development processes. These do not occur in a particular order, nor are they always clear-cut, independent pieces of work. They are interdependent and in some instances all may be developed at the same time. Decisions about how to address each of these elements will be informed by the circumstances in which you are developing policy.

## Outcomes Based Accountability

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This guide introduces you to the concept of Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA) - encouraging policy-makers to focus on the desired outcomes and to use the OBA process to help them achieve those outcomes.

Case studies have been included to show how OBA has been used to good effect by many different types of service providers worldwide.

However, this guide cannot be fully comprehensive and is not a substitute for consulting detailed guidance on aspects of the institutional framework, legislative and financial processes and statutory obligations. However, it seeks to cover the basic essentials and includes appropriate contact details and web links to make it easier to track down more specialised assistance.



## CHAPTER 2:

# Policy Making Process

## What is good policy making?

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The process of policy making is not a high science, but it is difficult to do well. As in any process, there are tools and techniques that can help in doing the job more effectively. Public policy operates in an extremely wide environment. Governments have obligations to, and are answerable to, every part of civic society. Policy making often requires a department or the administration as a whole to strike a balance among a wide range of competing interests without losing sight of the desired policy outcome.

The world for which policies have to be developed is becoming increasingly complex, uncertain and unpredictable. Citizens are better informed, have rising expectations and are making growing demands for services tailored to their individual needs. Key policy issues, such as social need, low educational achievement and poor health, are connected and cannot be tackled effectively by departments or agencies acting individually. In addition, devolution introduces a system of government which is designed to be more joined-up and responsive than in the past, and better able to judge Northern Ireland's needs because of the shorter lines of accountability to the public.

At the same time, the world is increasingly interconnected and interdependent. National and global events and trends can very quickly become major issues for a regional administration - for example, a pandemic or rapid adoption of new information and communications technology and a wide range of interests needs to be co-ordinated and harnessed.

In parallel with these external pressures, Ministers expect a focus on solutions that work across existing organisational boundaries and on bringing about real change. Civil servants must adapt to this new, fast-moving, challenging environment if public policy is to remain credible and effective.



# The TEN features of good policy making

## 1. FORWARD LOOKING

The policy making process clearly defines outcomes that the policy is designed to achieve. Where appropriate, it takes a long-term view based on statistical trends and informed predictions of social, political, economic and cultural trends, for at least five years into the future of the likely effect and impact of the policy. The following points demonstrate a forward looking approach:

- a statement of intended outcomes is prepared at an early stage;
- contingency or scenario planning;
- taking into account the Executive's long-term strategy; and
- use of the Foresight programme (details at <http://www.foresight.gov.uk/>) and/or other forecasting work.

## 2. OUTWARD LOOKING

The policy making process takes account of influencing factors in the regional, national, European and international situation; and draws on experience in other regions and countries. The following points demonstrate an outward looking approach:

- makes use of OECD, EU mechanisms, etc;
- looks at how other countries have dealt with the issue; and
- recognises variation within Northern Ireland.

## 3. INNOVATIVE, FLEXIBLE AND CREATIVE

The policy making process is flexible and innovative, questioning established ways of dealing with things, encouraging new and creative ideas; and, where appropriate, making established ways work better.

Wherever possible, the process is open to comments and suggestions of others. Risks are identified and actively managed. The following points demonstrate an innovative, flexible and creative approach:

- uses alternatives to the usual ways of working;
- defines success in terms of outcomes already identified;
- consciously assesses and manages risk;
- takes steps to create management structures which promote new ideas and effective team working; and
- brings in people from outside into the policy team.

## 4. EVIDENCE-BASED

The advice and decisions of policy-makers are based upon the best available evidence from a wide range of sources; all key stakeholders are involved at an early stage and through the policy's development. All relevant evidence, including that from specialists, is available in an accessible and meaningful form to policy-makers. Key points of an evidence-based approach to policy making include:

- reviews existing research;
- commissions new research;
- consults relevant experts and/or uses internal and external consultants; and
- considers a range of properly costed and appraised options.

## 5. INCLUSIVE

The policy making process takes account of the impact on and/or meets the needs of all people directly or indirectly affected by the policy; and involves key stakeholders directly. An inclusive approach may include the following aspects:

- consults those responsible for service delivery/implementation;
- consults those at the receiving end or otherwise affected by the policy;
- carries out any relevant impact assessments; and
- seeks feedback on policy from recipients and front line deliverers.

## 6. JOINED UP

The process takes a holistic view; looking beyond institutional boundaries to the administration's strategic objectives and seeks to establish the ethical, moral and legal base for policy. There is consideration of the appropriate management and organisational structures needed to deliver cross-cutting objectives. The following points demonstrate a collaborative approach to policy making:

- cross cutting objectives clearly defined at the outset;
- joint working arrangements with other departments clearly defined and well understood;
- barriers to effective joining up clearly identified with a strategy to overcome them; and
- implementation considered part of the policy making process.

## 7. LEARNS LESSONS

Learns from experience of what works and what does not. A learning approach to policy development includes the following aspects:

- information on lessons learned and good practice disseminated.
- account available of what was done by policy-makers as a result of lessons learned; and
- clear distinction drawn between failure of the policy to impact on the problem it was intended to resolve and managerial/operational failures of implementation.

## 8. COMMUNICATION

The policy making process considers how policy will be communicated with the public. The following contribute to effective communication of policy:

- communications/presentation strategy prepared and implemented; and
- Executive Information Service involved from an early stage.

## 9. EVALUATION

Systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of policy is built into the policy making process. Approaches to policy making that demonstrate a commitment to evaluation include:

- clearly defined purpose for the evaluation set at outset;
- success criteria defined;
- means of evaluation built into the policy making process from the outset; and
- use of pilots to influence final outcomes.

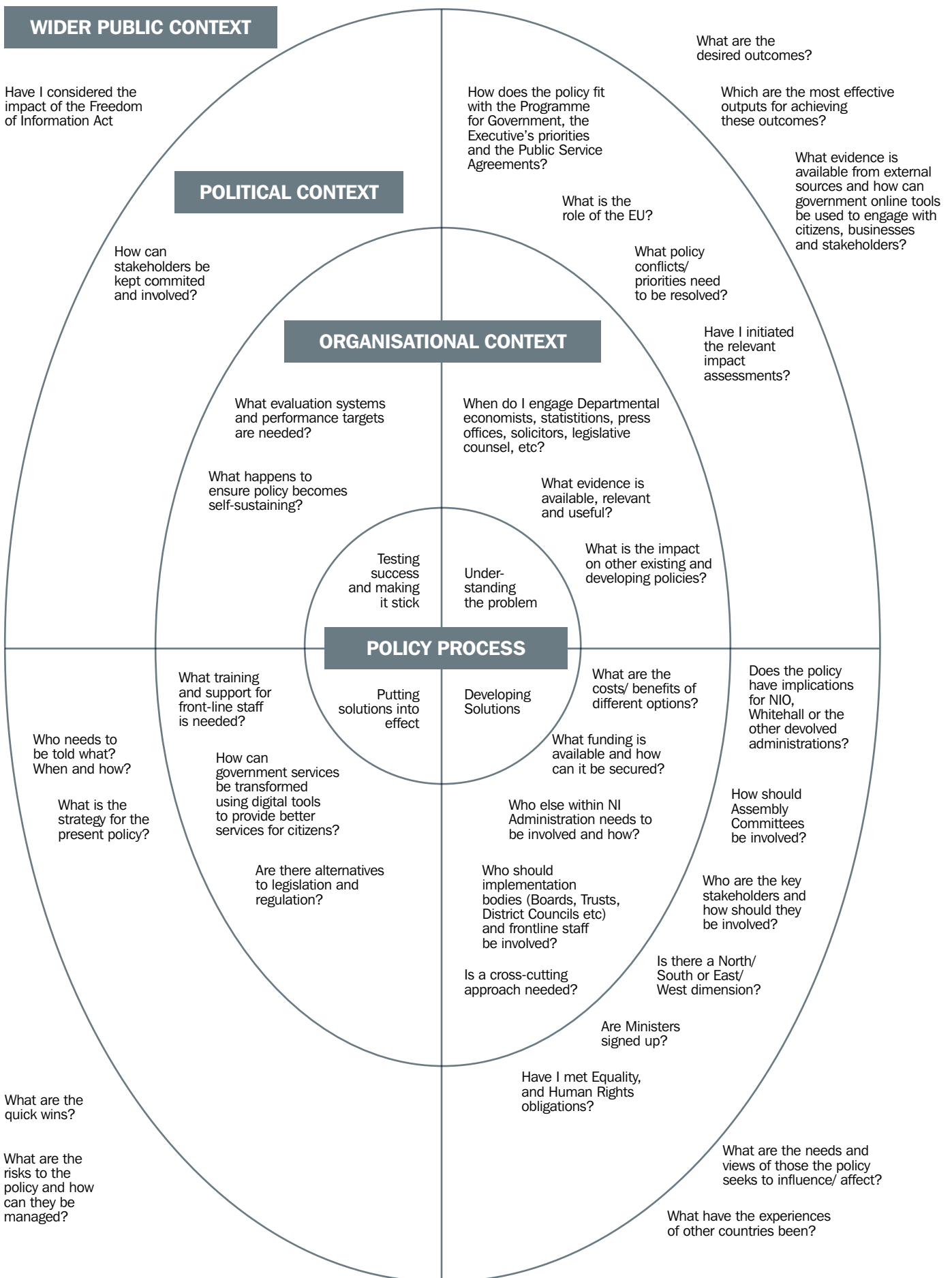
## 10. REVIEW

Existing/established policy is constantly reviewed to ensure it is really dealing with problems it was designed to solve, taking account of associated effects elsewhere.

Aspects of a reviewing approach to policy making include:

- ongoing review programme in place with a range of meaningful performance measures;
- mechanisms to allow service deliverers/customers to provide feedback direct to policy-makers set up; and
- redundant or failing policies scrapped.

# The policy process in context



## Before you start

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Before embarking on any policy programme or project, it is important to give adequate consideration to how it will be managed and resourced. Some aspects of the policy making process are very time-consuming, and effective planning is essential. For example, it is important to take a realistic view of timescales for consideration of policy proposals by Ministers, especially where a policy needs to be considered by the Executive. The recommended period for a public consultation exercise, especially one involving an Equality Impact Assessment, is eight weeks. And when legislation is required to implement a policy, this can add considerably to the time taken from initial idea to implementation. It is very easy to underestimate the time and effort which will be required to introduce a new policy or review an existing one, and inadequate planning can lead to failure to deliver. Early engagement with key stakeholders is essential - this will help shape the policy and ensure buy-in from the stakeholder community. [See the section on making lives better](#) - digital transformation of services for citizens below which should also be considered at this stage.

This relates not only to the branch or team responsible for the programme but also to the potential involvement of professional advisors such as statisticians, economists or lawyers. Such specialists need to be alerted early so that their work programmes can take proper account of the department's needs.

It is important to ensure that implementation issues are integrated into policy development from the start.

It is also important to identify information requirements. Good policy making will be based on evidence setting out what the need is and potentially evidence surrounding how best to intervene to meet the need also. This is particularly important when policies come forward for consideration by the Executive, which must decide among a wide range of competing priorities for funding from a limited budget. The Executive has agreed that it should be provided with the appropriate supporting analysis, including economic analysis, before endorsing policy proposals and decisions. It is therefore important that all policy papers coming before the Executive address this issue explicitly, and that those working on policy development anticipate this need early on and arrange for the necessary information to be gathered.

## Planning the Policy

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To minimise the risk of a policy project failing to deliver on time and on budget, it is advisable to establish a project team to take it forward. In this way, those involved in the project have more control over their priorities and can focus clearly on delivering on time. It is also good practice to establish a Project Board at senior level to ensure that the project keeps on schedule and to help resolve issues outside the direct influence of the project team. Where legislation is required, it is essential that the necessary resources are also put in place to carry this work forward, usually by the establishment of a Bill team.

Below sets out some programme or project start-up questions which help in mapping out the various steps that need to be completed in a policy programme or project, taking as the starting point the vision which it is setting out to achieve. These questions should be of use to policy-makers embarking on a project of any scale.

## Project or programme start-up questions

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1. Why are we doing this?
2. What is the Minister's vision?
3. Who are the stakeholders?
4. What outcomes do the stakeholders want?
5. What mechanisms, systems, processes and changes does the vision suggest?
6. What's the scope of this initiative? What are we prepared to do?
7. What are the success criteria?
8. What are the pre-conditions of success?
9. What are we going to have to produce?
10. Who needs to participate in the project?
11. What do we need from others?
12. How big are these tasks?
13. What sequence do they need to be done in?
14. What resources do we have available eg staff, funding, research, statistics etc?
15. What assumptions are we making?
16. What are the constraints?
17. What are the barriers to success?

18. What are the likely consequences and side-effects of our success?
19. Who/what is likely to be disadvantaged by our success?
20. What are they likely to do that would cause problems?
21. What is the likely probability and impact of each risk?
22. What should we do to reduce the probability and/or impact?
23. What contingency arrangements do we need?
24. What's the plan?

In OBA terms the questions to ask at this stage are the [7 Population Level Questions](#)

## Joined-up government / cross-cutting issues

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The need to achieve cross-cutting outcomes presents a major challenge to policy-makers. Actions of one Northern Ireland department can have a major impact on others. Policy-makers from related policy areas in different departments should keep each other informed and consulted, both formally and informally, about developments of common interest from an early stage, in order to help promote joined-up outcomes for the citizen. Policy making must be built around shared outcomes, not around organisational structures or existing functions.

A project approach to promoting joined up policy making and implementation, will include the following characteristics:

- collaboration between key departments;
- specific terms of reference linked to outcomes;
- responsible for the development of policy and implementation;
- rigorous implementation dates and a fixed shelf life;
- senior responsible owner;
- project planning, monitoring and control methods;
- ring fenced funding where possible;
- clearly identified responsibilities for all staff involved;
- only meeting as a group when absolutely necessary and using alternative communication methods; and
- regular review of performance.

But joining up is not just about shared approaches to cross-cutting issues. Horizontal joining up between organisations needs to be supplemented by better co-ordination among policy staff within departments and by better ‘vertical’ joining up with service deliverers and those who implement policy. It is not an end in itself but should be undertaken where it adds value.

Common reasons for not joining up include incompatible IT systems, differences of culture and organisational structure and lack of time. All of these are real barriers to successful joining up that require sustained effort and collaborative approaches to overcome.

## The timescale for policy making

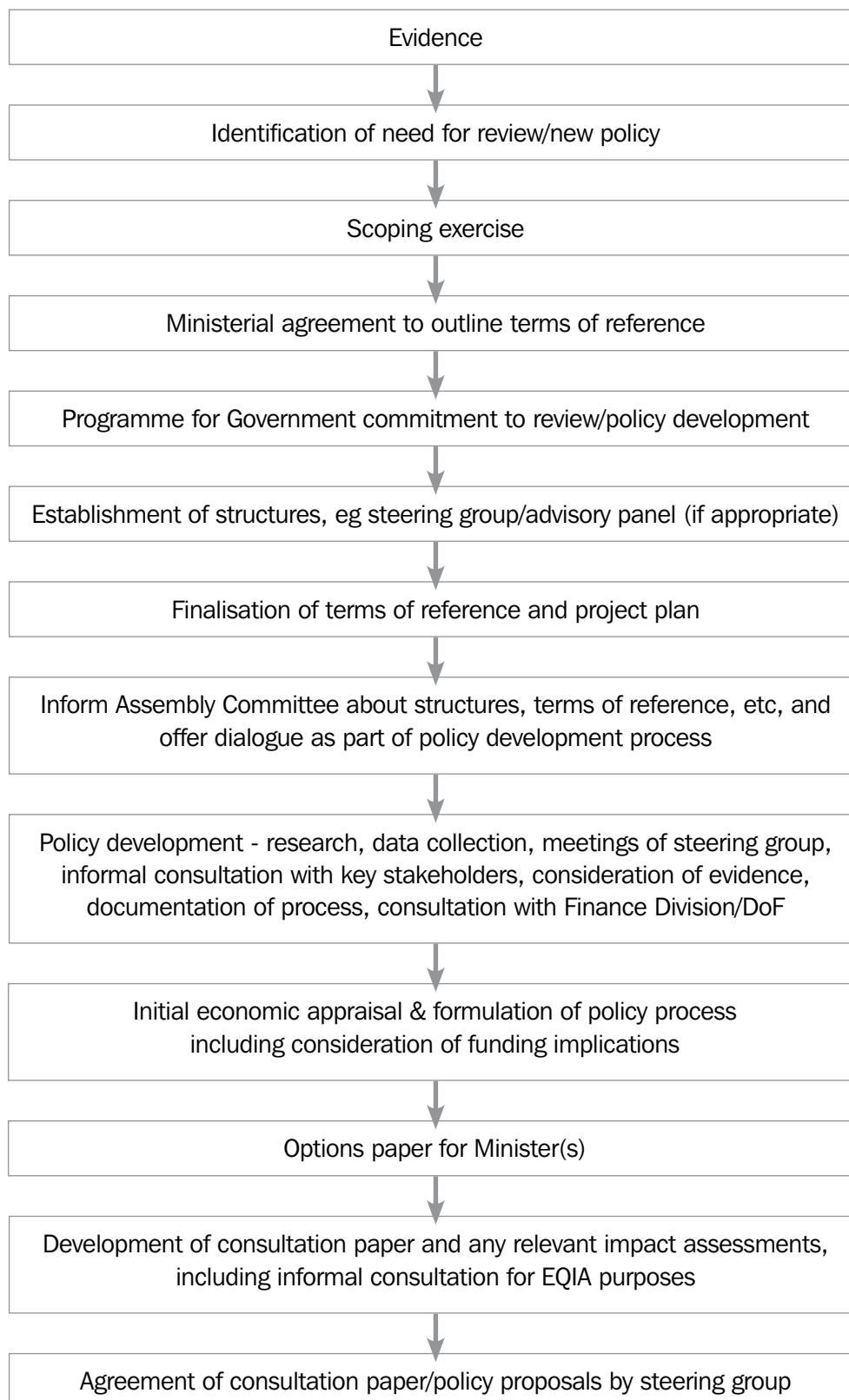
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The overall timescale for development and implementation varies depending on a range of factors, including the urgency or political priority of the issue, whether legislation is required and the methodology adopted. The diagram below shows the key stages which need to be completed in a typical policy review and, where possible, gives an indication of required timescales. However, it is important to note that every policy development exercise is likely to have its own distinctive characteristics. For example, in some cases, policy development may have to be taken forward urgently and stages of the process which would normally take weeks have to be taken forward in days (usually involving redeployment of staff), or omitted. The timescales set out in the diagram below are intended to be typical of planned policy development.

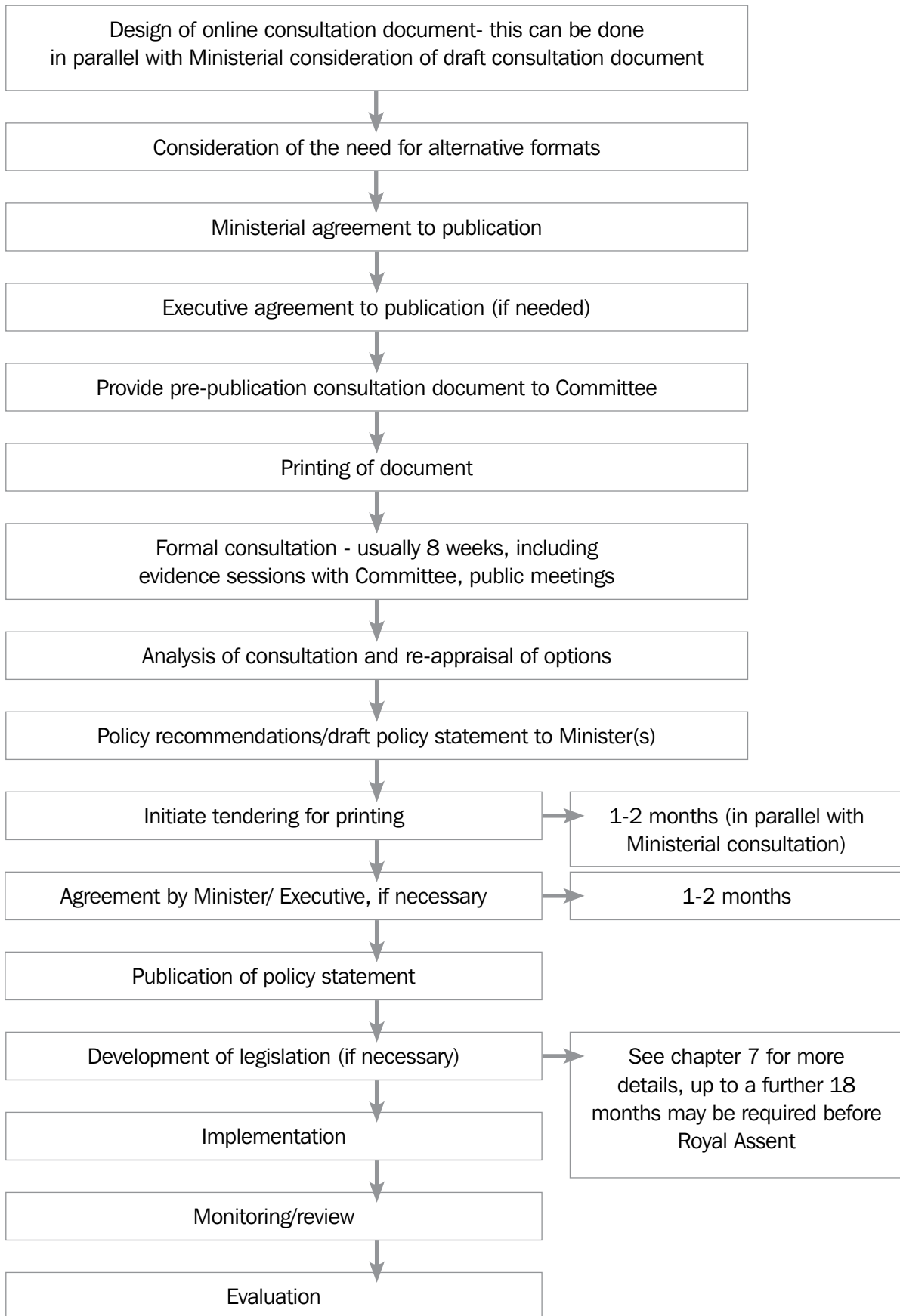
It should be noted that the policy development process is considerably longer when legislation is required: the passage of legislation, particularly Primary legislation, can add up to a further 18 months to the overall process from when the policy is established, although with careful planning and consultation arrangements this can be substantially reduced.

## Key stages in the Policy Making Process

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## Key stages in the Policy Making Process





## CHAPTER 3:

# Looking at the Evidence

This chapter looks at the various sources of evidence for the development of policy. These include professional advisors within the Civil Service, statistics and research published by the Northern Ireland administration and official sources elsewhere, and academic research. But one of the key messages of the guide in general is the importance of using evidence from the 'front line' of service delivery, both from potential customers and from those directly involved in service management and provision.

It is also helpful to bear in mind that looking at evidence has two primary purposes - to help identify and clarify the problem which is being addressed; and to help identify potential solutions. In order to achieve the latter, it is unlikely to be sufficient to look at evidence from Northern Ireland alone.

## Evidence-based policy making - What evidence is available, relevant and useful?

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It is crucial that policy decisions should be based on sound evidence. Good quality policy making depends on high quality information, derived from a variety of sources - expert knowledge; existing local, national and international research; existing statistics; stakeholder consultation; evaluation of previous policies; new research, if appropriate; or secondary sources, including the internet. To be as effective as possible, evidence needs to be provided by, and/or be interpreted by, experts in the field working closely with policy-makers. The first port of call is likely to be professional advisors within the NI Civil Service: for example, statisticians, economists, medical officers, inspectors, technical and professional officers, scientists, and social researchers. These professionals should know what relevant published statistics are available and be in touch with the latest research evidence and best practice internationally in the relevant policy areas. They can also advise on commissioning new research and generally point policy-makers in the right direction.

A list of likely sources of information and expertise on evidence to support policy making [can be accessed here](#). The list covers internal Government sources, government-funded independent bodies and non-Governmental organisations. In addition to this general list, in each policy area there is likely to be a range of organisations with a particular interest in the policy field, some of which may commission or have access to information of particular importance or relevance.

## Evidence from the ‘front line’

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However, evidence is not something that is only generated by external research. In any policy area there is a great deal of important evidence held by both front line managers and staff in departments, agencies, schools, hospitals, etc, and the citizen, customer or consumer to whom the policy is directed. Very often these groups will have a clearer idea than the policy-makers about what the problems are, why the situation is as it is and why previous initiatives did or did not work. They are also well placed to advise on how a new policy can be put into practice on the ground and what pitfalls need to be avoided. Gathering that evidence through interviews, surveys or focus groups can provide a very valuable input to the policy making process and can often be done much more quickly than more conventional research. It may well also help to avoid expensive mistakes later.

In addition, it is important to consider implementation of policy from the outset. It is often easier to implement change when those directly affected understand the reason for it and have some sense of engagement or ownership over the nature of the change or the way it is to be introduced. This provides another set of reasons for considering engaging with the staff and customers involved in the area affected by the policy initiative.

## What have experiences of other countries and regions been?

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It is helpful to use international comparisons as part of the wider evidence base. This can contribute very positively to the policy making process, in particular helping to guide policy-makers to new solutions to problems and new mechanisms for implementing policy and improving public service delivery. It can also provide useful evidence of what works in practice and what does not work. It is of course important to take account of social, economic and institutional differences which may require adjustment to policy solutions that work elsewhere to meet Northern Ireland circumstances.

When discussing policy in other regions, it is useful to consider whether there is an EU policy/legislation in place and if not, a check on the EU websites to see if there are any proposals for one. Even on areas where they don't legislate, there are at times useful research papers which have been produced by EU policy sections.

It is not always necessary to look very far afield for policy comparisons as, for example, other parts of the United Kingdom and Ireland can provide some good examples. The [Policy Champions Network](#) leads on policy exchange across the four nations of the UK. Other useful places to look for relevant policy comparisons include the Australian states, Canadian provinces and New Zealand, which are interesting from a Northern Ireland perspective because they have long experience of operating in a similar institutional framework. For example, the development of the Strategic Investment Board was influenced by the existence of a similar organisation in Ontario.

There is a range of factors which can be helpful in identifying possible countries or regions elsewhere from which to learn: for example, regions which have successfully addressed similar social or economic issues, or which have geographical similarities to Northern Ireland. [Tables](#) published by the Office for National Statistics, include key indicators across a range of policy areas comparing all the regions in the European Union, which may help in identifying appropriate comparator regions.

It is important in many areas of public service to understand the importance of factors such as settlement patterns and population density in determining what types of provision are appropriate and where we might learn lessons from elsewhere. For example, Northern Ireland is sparsely populated by comparison with England, but its population density is around the European average and approximately twice that in the Republic of Ireland or in Scotland. Parts of Europe with broadly similar population densities to Northern Ireland include Wales, Denmark, parts of France and Germany and North West Spain. Identifying appropriate comparators will, however, depend on your own policy area.

When looking at international comparators, it is important to do so objectively. Officially published material tells the story which the promoters of a policy or project wish to tell publicly. It is important to explore beyond that: to find out what criticisms are made as well as ways in which arrangements are successful; to find out the views of service users as well as providers; to find out the extent to which a policy has actually achieved its intended outcome and whether there have been any unintended or unforeseen drawbacks or benefits; and to explore potentially crucial differences in context which might mean that a policy which was successful elsewhere would not work in Northern Ireland. Face-to-face contact will reveal more than looking at a website alone, but given the costs associated with study visits, it is essential to do adequate research in advance to be sure that a comparator is really relevant.

## Benchmarking

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International and inter-regional comparisons are also important for benchmarking Northern Ireland's performance against that of other regions. [Regional Trends](#) provides statistical comparisons among the regions of the UK of a wide range of indicators across most policy areas. It also includes tables of key indicators comparing all the regions in the European Union.

However, caution must be used in making comparisons: for example, Northern Ireland's population is the youngest of any region in the EU, with 19.5% of the population aged under 15 in 2011, compared to an EU average of 15.4%. This is in itself an important factor for policy-makers to bear in mind, but it can also distort other comparisons: for example, it can make some health comparisons appear more favourable than they are.

## Forward-looking policy making

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Ensuring that policy making is forward-looking is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, it must be based on a long-term strategy, aimed at achieving defined intended outcomes. The Programme for Government sets out the outcomes to be achieved mainly within the next 5 years, but it is important in most areas of policy making to take a view at least 5 to 10 years into the future. Indeed, in many cases, policy decisions taken now will have implications well beyond even this time horizon. For example, the educational experience of school children now will have an impact on the skills of the workforce until the 2070s! Policy-makers in all areas should therefore have in mind the top-level strategic vision and goals to which they are contributing.

It is also important when developing policy to ensure that it is sufficiently robust to deal with change in the outside world, whether predicted or unpredictable. There are some specific techniques designed to assist policy-makers in thinking about future challenges. For example, contingency or scenario planning can be used to provide a structure for considering how policy-makers need to respond if the world develops in various possible ways in the future. The UK Government Foresight programme developed a range of scenarios, Foresight Futures 2020, which are available for organisations, whether in the public, private or voluntary sectors, to use in developing their future strategies. The point of such an exercise is not to predict the future but to help determine what should be priorities for the organisation under any of the possible scenarios. A synopsis of key drivers and underlying assumptions is given alongside the storyline for each scenario. In addition, Snapshot 2010, which can be found at the end of the report, provides key performance indicators for each of the scenarios. The indicators were chosen to cover a wide range of economic, social and environmental issues and relate to commonly-used statistics, such as the [National Well-being Indicators](#) or the [OECD Better Life Index](#).

Forward-looking policy making also needs to take a long-term view based on statistical trends and informed predictions of social, political, economic and cultural trends, for at least five years into the future of the likely effect and impact of the policy. NISRA produces a range of statistics such as population projections which are helpful in this regard.

## Conclusion

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The figure below sets out a number of key questions to address in assessing evidence requirements to assist policy making. The questions are primarily relevant to consideration of external research evidence but can be adapted for other types of evidence.

## Key questions in assessing evidence

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Some key issues that you need to think through before deciding whether to use a piece of evidence are set out below. Policy-makers will need to consider drawing on specialist expertise and knowledge to help assess evidence (e.g. advice from researchers, statisticians and economists).

### Is it relevant?

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- Does the study address the key policy issues and questions?
- Is it appropriate to use evidence collected in a different context?  
i.e. How far can results of local or national studies inform a regional policy?  
Is the social, cultural and economic context for an overseas study similar to that in Northern Ireland?
- Was the study undertaken recently - have things changed since it was done?  
(NB This does not mean that research evidence can be ignored just because it is old - in some policy areas, research can remain relevant for a long time.)
- Does the study clearly identify implications for policy and/or practice?

### Is it good quality?

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- Are the research methods used appropriate to the key questions being asked?
- Does the study consider the issues from a range of perspectives e.g. involving service users/ other stakeholders?
- Has the study been conducted properly - is there information on how the methods were implemented e.g. response rates for surveys?
- Does the individual or organisation which undertook the study have previous experience of research on the issue and/ or the methods used?
- Has the study been undertaken, commissioned or funded by individuals or organisations with views or vested interests which may favour particular conclusions?

## CHAPTER 4:

# Sources of evidence to support policy making

This chapter provides a range of suggested sources of evidence and expertise to support policy making. It covers internal Government sources, government- funded independent bodies and non-Governmental organisations. It includes organisations based within Northern Ireland, at UK level, in the Republic of Ireland, and international organisations. In addition to this general list, in each policy area there is likely to be a range of organisations with a particular interest in the policy field, some of which may commission or have access to information of particular importance or relevance.

## Sources within Northern Ireland

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The website of the [Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency](#) includes a list of statistical and research publications produced by some NI departments in recent years and, in most cases, links to online versions of the documents. Other departments publish research only on their own websites, although in general more social research than economic research is undertaken directly or published by the administration.

The departments which display best practice in this area allocate their research budgets on a competitive basis. They decide on areas where they particularly need research to be undertaken and invite bids from the academic community accordingly. However, there is also scope for academics to bring forward proposals of their own, and the bids are prioritised on the basis of quality and policy relevance.

[The Assembly](#) has a considerable research capacity and, through the Committees, a role in policy making under the Agreement. Inquiries undertaken by the Committees usually consider evidence from a wide range of witnesses and will be very relevant to future policy making. The reports are available on the Assembly website.

## UK and Irish sources

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It is rarely sufficient to look only within Northern Ireland for evidence to support policy making, but in some more specialised policy areas, there has been little or no published research undertaken in Northern Ireland. Some NI departments are therefore likely to rely heavily on research evidence undertaken at UK level or in RoI. As well as relevant Whitehall departments, the [Cabinet Office](#) website provides a wide range of other useful resources on good practice in policy making. These include a set of guidance notes for social researchers on methods for evaluating policies, programmes and projects, entitled [The Magenta Book](#).

The [Economic and Social Research Council](#) is the main UK research funding and training agency addressing economic and social concerns, including the effectiveness of public services and policy. The websites of the Economic and Social Research Institute and the National Economic and Social Council hold a range of research evidence from the RoI context. It may also be desirable to engage directly with relevant academics at the universities in Northern Ireland or elsewhere where there is particular expertise in your policy area.

The [What Works Network](#) uses evidence to make better decisions to improve public services. The network is made up of 7 independent What Works Centres and 2 affiliate members. Together these centres cover policy areas which receive public spending of more than £200 billion. What Works Centres are different from standard research centres. They enable policy-makers, commissioners and practitioners to make decisions based upon strong evidence of what works and to provide cost-efficient, useful services.

The centres help to ensure that thorough, high quality, independently assessed evidence shapes decision-making at every level, by:

- collating existing evidence on how effective policy programmes and practices are
- producing high quality synthesis reports and systematic reviews in areas where they do not currently exist
- assessing how effective policies and practices are against an agreed set of outcomes
- sharing findings in an accessible way
- encouraging practitioners, commissioners and policymakers to use these findings to inform their decisions

**Nesta**

Nesta (formerly NESTA, National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts) is an independent charity that works to increase the innovation capacity of the UK. The organisation acts through a combination of practical programmes, investment, policy and research, and the formation of partnerships to promote innovation across a broad range of sectors.

Nesta was originally funded by a £250 million endowment from the UK National Lottery. The endowment is now kept in trust, and Nesta uses the interest from the trust to meet its charitable objects and to fund and support its projects.

**Carnegie UK Trust**

The Carnegie United Kingdom Trust was founded in 1913 to address the changing needs of the people of the United Kingdom and Ireland. It is one of the oldest and most respected charitable trusts in the British Isles.

The 2016 – 2020 strategic plan outlines the role of the organisation as an operating Trust that makes proactive decisions about its projects and activities. The Trust no longer takes unsolicited grant applications, but seeks to build partnerships with other organisations for specific pieces of work.

The Carnegie UK Trust continues to work to improve the lives and wellbeing of people throughout the UK and Ireland by changing minds through influencing policy, and by changing lives through innovative practice and partnership work.

To change minds, the Policy Team seeks to develop objective, evidence-based policy to improve lives. The Trust's work over the next five-year period will be focused on a set of three themes which all have the potential to contribute in a positive way to the wellbeing of people in their communities, in the regions and in the nations of the UK and Ireland. The three themes are

- 1.** Be a recognised leader in wellbeing and its links to public policy
- 2.** Be a champion for sharing learning between all jurisdictions of the UK and Ireland
- 3.** Make working across the public, private and voluntary sector more normal and valued.



**The Institute for Government** is an independent charity working to increase government effectiveness.

It works with all the main political parties at Westminster and with senior civil servants in Whitehall. It provides evidence based advice that draws on best practice from around the world.

It undertakes research, provides development opportunities for senior decision makers and organises events to invigorate and provide fresh thinking on the issues that are relevant to government.

**The Policy Library** is a website which aims to provide on-line access to a comprehensive range of policy and research papers, from universities, independent research institutes and government departments. Its coverage includes resources in the UK, the wider English- speaking world, and Europe.



## CHAPTER 5:

# From desired outcomes to possible solutions

This chapter looks at some of the key internal processes which need to be undertaken in developing policy.

Having weighed up the available evidence, it should be possible to start developing a broad outline of what policy interventions, if any, might be appropriate to address the issues you are dealing with. Where possible, you should develop a range of options, including costings. Management of risk is also a key consideration.

It continues to be important to keep professional advisors and others within your department involved in policy development as you move from initial consideration of the evidence towards formulating policy solutions. At the very least, all those disciplines within your department with an interest should be copied into key papers at a senior level to keep them informed and involved. However, it is likely that you will also need to keep them engaged in a more proactive way, for example through a Project Board.

## Appraisal of options

Consideration of alternative options is an important part of the policy making process. It is about identifying the range of possible courses of action, and comparing their relative merits, including the costs, benefits and risks that are associated with them, in order to inform selection of the best policy implementation option. This often involves an option appraisal, also known as an 'economic appraisal'.

Substantial guidance is available on option appraisal in [The Northern Ireland Guide to Expenditure, Appraisal and Evaluation \(NIGEAE\)](#). This is consistent with the Green Book, the Treasury's authoritative guide to appraisal and evaluation, but is more detailed and tailored to Northern Ireland's circumstances.

Option appraisal is a flexible tool and needs to be tailored to the circumstances. However, a typical appraisal will cover the following steps:

- establish the policy need - Identify target populations, quantify problems/demands to be addressed, show how policy intervention will contribute to strategic aims;
- define the policy objectives - broadly enough that a range of policy options can be identified. Measurable targets should normally be developed, to provide for detailed appraisal and subsequent measurement of the policy's success;
- identify and describe the policy options - a "status quo" or "do minimum" baseline option and a suitably wide range of alternative policy options for consideration;
- detail the costs, benefits, risks and other [relevant impacts](#) - for each policy option. Consider screening and impact assessment requirements;

- spell out the funding implications, including the relative priorities for funding - particularly important when appraising a policy with several components, some of which could be taken forward in advance of others;
- summarise the findings and recommend the preferred policy option comparing the relative merits of each option in turn; and
- make recommendations for managing, monitoring and evaluating the policy.

Plans for option appraisal should be considered early in the policy making process. It may be appropriate to conduct an initial appraisal and then develop it or re-visit it at various stages, e.g. following consultation. Specialist advice may be required - departmental economists can advise on the design and conduct of option appraisals, and can assist with other forms of economic analysis such as relevant economic research.

## Funding and how to secure it

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Ensuring any necessary resources are available is key to making policy happen. When developing a policy you must always be aware of the cost implications of policy implementation and the need to achieve best value for money.

Where policies do not involve significant public expenditure, there may still be implementation costs for the administration and compliance costs for individuals and organisations, which need to be considered and justified.

The project planning process will help you to judge whether you have the necessary resources to support the development of policy. However, the cost of the policy implementation can often be many times more than the cost of the internal resources.

Departments' Finance Divisions are the first port of call for advice on financing policy solutions. They should be involved in policy development at the earliest possible stage and kept up to date throughout the process. Early engagement with Department of Finance (DOF) through the Departmental Finance Division is in turn important, given DOF's approval role in relation to new or contentious proposals. The key point, however, is that the business case for a policy must stand up on its own terms. Funding should follow policy, rather than policy being skewed, for example, by the availability of funding from external sources. If a policy is decided to be of sufficient priority by departmental Ministers and subsequently by the Executive on the basis of the evidence, the resources will be found. Conversely, as there will never be sufficient funding to do everything that is desirable, Ministers and in turn the Executive need to be in a position to take strategic decisions about policy priorities (involving both new and existing policies). That could mean ending existing activities which are no longer necessary in order to allow new priorities to be taken forward.

It is important for policy staff to be aware that there is no automatic read-across from additional funding allocations made in England to comparable programmes in Northern Ireland. While additional funds come to the Northern Ireland block under the ‘Barnett formula’, the Executive determines the allocation of the overall budget on the basis of the competing priorities from all the departments, in tandem with the development of the Programme for Government. Nonetheless, in many cases there will be a public expectation that the Northern Ireland administration will respond to funding increases or new programmes in England. It is therefore important to keep in touch with counterpart Whitehall Departments to monitor their policy developments and assess how to respond.

## Legal advice

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As your policy making process proceeds, it becomes important to start thinking about whether there is sufficient legislative basis for the policy solutions you are considering and you need to engage in dialogue with [Departmental solicitors](#).

Departmental solicitors will also be able to advise on any [human rights](#) or EU aspects which you have identified. If you are considering establishing a new body as part of the implementation of your policy, solicitors can advise on the options for establishing the body and their involvement will be important throughout that process. If legislation is required, it is important to engage too with the Office of the Legislative Counsel.

## Engaging Ministers

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This guide has already noted that Ministers are likely to be engaged in initiating or agreeing the initiation of policy work. As the policy process develops, it is essential to give Ministers regular updates on progress, highlighting in particular the key issues for decision and retaining a focus on the overall progress of the policy project. In preparing papers, it is helpful to consult with Ministers’ special advisors from the outset.

## Involving the Executive

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As the development of a policy initiative proceeds a department needs to help fulfil its Minister’s duty under the Ministerial Code. In this regard and in relation to policy initiatives, the following are examples of matters that should be brought to the Executive for prioritisation, consideration and agreement:

- significant policy issues which cut across the responsibilities of two or more Ministers;
- issues on which it is desirable that the Executive should adopt a common position;
- matters involving conflict with, or not provided for within, the priorities and actions contained in the Programme for Government; and

- all primary legislation proposed to be presented to the Assembly.
- unlike primary legislation, subordinate legislation does not require prioritisation by the Executive. However, individual pieces of subordinate legislation should be brought to the attention of the Executive where this is required under paragraph 2.4 of the Ministerial Code (eg where the legislation cuts across the responsibilities of two or more Ministers).

This list is not exhaustive and [Executive & Central Advisory Division](#) in The Executive Office will advise on proposals to table issues in any other categories. Departments should refer to the Ministerial Code for fuller guidance on the matters which are to be brought to the Executive.

Any issue which has particular implications for the Minister's constituency should also be brought to the Executive for consideration as should any other significant policy issue or proposed decision which is novel or contentious, or is of particular importance or interest to the public.

The views of the Executive should be sought at an early stage and to ensure that sufficient time is allowed for an Executive paper to obtain timely approval and circulation to the Executive, departments should allow for a 4-week period in their planning timetable for this stage of the policy making process. It may facilitate the subsequent handling of such papers to share early drafts of Executive papers with other interested departments and the First Minister and deputy First Minister. It is also useful to include in any Executive paper details of consultations with other Ministers and how the outcomes of such consultations have been reflected in the paper.

## The legislative process

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Many new or revised policies require the passage of legislation in order to give departments and others a legal basis for action. The legislative process is complex and resource intensive: even after the policy has been agreed, it takes considerable time and effort to produce a Bill and get it onto the statute book. Because legislation is a time-consuming process (it can take 18 months or more from policy agreement to Royal Assent), it is important to get it right and in particular to consider all the implementation issues fully.

When considering any proposed changes of policy that may require legislation, the guidance requires departments to consult widely with interested groups both inside and outside government. Consultees will include, for example, Assembly Departmental Committees, the Human Rights and Equality Commissions and may also include consultation on an Equality Impact Assessment as provided for by departmental Equality Schemes. It is also crucial to consult the Office of the Legislative Counsel at an early stage, and to work closely with that office throughout the process.

When the policy proposals for primary legislation have been formulated the departmental Minister will present these to the Executive for endorsement. This is in line with the Ministerial Code (paragraph 2.4 ) which requires Ministers to bring matters to the attention of the Executive Committee.

Later in the process when a Bill has been drafted and cleared by the Executive it may be used for a public consultation exercise mentioned at end of paragraph. Departmental Committees will normally expect to be afforded the opportunity of pre-legislative scrutiny of a Bill before its introduction to the Assembly. In addition there are opportunities throughout the Assembly process for Members to examine and debate the policy that the Bill would implement, to question the responsible Minister on the policy, and to table amendments to the Bill.

For subordinate legislation, again the policy implications have to be carefully assessed from the outset and this can also lead to public consultation. Human rights and equality considerations also must be taken into account and, like primary legislation, the departmental Committee will have an opportunity to consider the policy at an early stage. The Executive only becomes involved in a small number of policy papers relating to subordinate rules. These are Rules that are subject to affirmative or confirmatory resolution which, because of their Assembly procedure, have a higher profile than the majority of rules.

Detailed guidance on the actions required from policy consideration through the various legislative stages in the Assembly can be obtained [here](#) and Guidance on the legislative process is also available from departmental Legislation Liaison Officers and from the [Legislative Programme Secretariat](#) in Executive and Central Advisory Division in the Executive Office.

The key stages of the legislative process and approximate associated timescales are set out in the following table:

## Timescale for development of primary legislation

	Stage	Time required (in months)	Comment
<b>A</b>	Scoping		Identification of potential requirement, resourcing, planning
<b>B</b>	Policy development		Including impact assessments up to clearance by Minister
<b>C</b>	Policy consultation clearance	1	With Committee and Executive
<b>D</b>	Policy consultation	3	
<b>E</b>	Policy finalisation		Including impact assessments and clearance with Minister
<b>F</b>	Policy clearance	1	With Committee and Executive
<b>G</b>	Legislation drafting	6-12 (or more)	Including preparation of instructions to Office of the Legislative Counsel. Considerably longer required for large Bills
<b>H</b>	Legislation clearance	1	With Executive
<b>I</b>	Legislation consultation	3	Including pre-legislative scrutiny with Committee
<b>J</b>	Legislation finalisation		Including clearance with Minister
<b>K</b>	Bill: clearance	1	With Executive
<b>L</b>	Bill: introduction	1	Including clearance by the Speaker and (if appropriate) Secretary of State
<b>M</b>	Bill: second stage		
<b>N</b>	Bill: committee stage	3 (say)	Six weeks minimum but add time for extension, report print, etc. (Can be extended by a further 2-3 months if it coincides with the Assembly's summer recess)
<b>O</b>	Bill: consideration stage	1-2	
<b>P</b>	Bill: further consideration stage		
<b>Q</b>	Bill: final stage	2	Including clearance by the Attorney General (six weeks from Final Stage)
<b>R</b>	Bill: Royal Assent		
<b>S</b>	Act: operative date		
(Note: the following stages only apply if subordinate legislation is appropriate, in which case stages T to V can be carried out in advance of the operative date of the Act)			
<b>T</b>	Subordinate policy development		At least SL 1 (a letter advising of the proposal for a Statutory Regulation) to Committee, but public consultation if required
<b>U</b>	Subordinate policy clearance		With Executive if affirmative or confirmatory procedure
<b>V</b>	Subordinate drafting		
<b>W</b>	Subordinate (making) printing & laying		
<b>X</b>	Subordinate affirmation (if applicable)		Allow sufficient time between laying and debate
<b>Y</b>	Subordinate operative date		Allow 21 days from laying if negative procedure
<b>Z</b>	Subordinate confirmation (if applicable)		

## CHAPTER 6:

# Engagement

For more detailed information, click [HERE](#) to access the Policy Champions Network Effective Stakeholder Engagement Good Practice Guidelines.

In its simplest sense engagement and consultation is about talking to people, particularly those who are to be affected by the policy or intervention. Government has faced criticism in the past for treating consultation as a tick box exercise where a near final policy document is circulated to ‘the usual suspects’ for comment.

Engagement is at the heart of the Executive’s commitment to openness and inclusivity. It is firmly embedded in the culture of the public service in Northern Ireland and is particularly important in the context of the statutory duties on equality and good relations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Engagement is not an end in itself. The most fundamental reason for engaging in formulating policy is to help develop solutions which will work and gain acceptance in practice. Early informal engagement with key stakeholders and in particular those involved in front-line service delivery and service users is therefore of key importance. Proceeding with no or token engagement may appear to save time in the short term, especially in a context of limited resources, but it can result in problems later. For example, correspondence campaigns due to lack of buy-in to the policy from key opinion-formers; Assembly questions and debates where Ministers have to be very much on the defensive; or policies which simply do not work effectively and have to be put right, possibly at considerable expense.

The strongest forms of engagement are those which happen regularly throughout the entire policy cycle. Not only does this provide important feedback, leading to more effective policy development, it can help secure the buy in and a sense of ownership from key stakeholders that are crucial to the success of any policy or intervention. The emergence of social media has created new avenues for engagement. This has led to there being different expectations on how government should engage. People are now able to comment on issues in an instant and, as a consequence, expect a response to their views instantly too.

However, it is important to ensure that any engagement is tailored to the groups trying to be reached.



## Guidance on Consultation

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[Machinery of Government guidance:](#)

[NI Direct guidance on public consultation:](#)

[Citizen Space:](#)

[National Archives guidance on consultation:](#)

## Community Planning

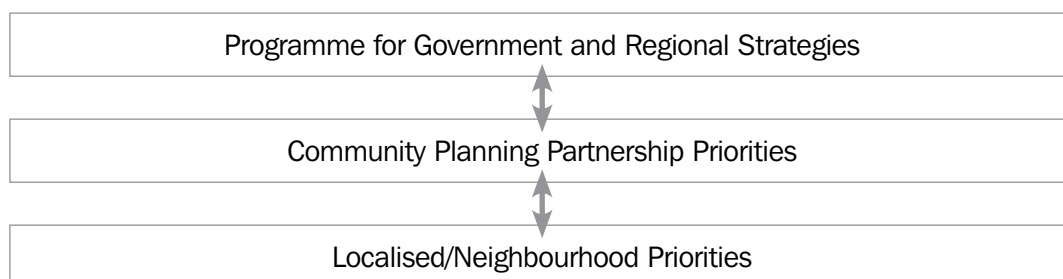
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With the advent of Community Planning, it is essential that policy-makers fully engage with the relevant local councils. Community Planning came into operation on 1st April 2015 as part of the full implementation of local government reform.

The new duty of community planning requires councils as the lead partner to be responsible for making arrangements for community planning in their areas. They will work with statutory bodies and their communities to develop and implement a shared vision for promoting the well-being of an area, community cohesion and improving the quality of life of its citizens.

The Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 provides the high level framework for the operation of community planning. All organisations involved in community planning must have regard to their legal obligations and the potential impact on the community planning process.

As can be seen from the diagram below community planning is the key over-arching partnership framework helping to co-ordinate other initiatives and partnerships and where necessary acting to rationalise and simplify a cluttered landscape. It has the ability to improve the connection between national priorities and those at regional, local and neighbourhood levels.



For more information on Community Planning, go to the [Guidance on Community Planning](#).

## Making Lives Better - Digital Transformation of services for citizens - Government Digital Services E-government

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Digital transformation of public services is about making lives better through delivering better outcomes for society and is a Programme for Government imperative. Government aspires to embrace 'digital' in everyday public services to deliver better outcomes, with citizens and businesses digitally enabled to better engage with government in their time and at a location of their choice. Under the NICS digital first mandate, public services are being transformed by applying a 'digital by design' principle. This means that core systems and processes are being transformed to enable efficient and effective delivery and the citizen and businesses get a better service.

Digital services are being offered online through NI Direct. NI Direct is the primary source of information for central Government in Northern Ireland and the primary place where citizens can transact services with central government. 'Digital' enhances sustainability, facilitates user friendly interactions, enables self service and drives citizen engagement /behaviour as well as maximising choice and convenience. 'Digital' is also connecting businesses so that government services are easier to use and red tape is reduced. As well as promoting a 'digital first' approach one of the key principles of the NICS Citizen Contact Strategy is that transactional services should be 'accessible and inclusive'. This means consideration should also be given to using alternative channels to communication with service users, such as SMS/text, webchat and social media. Digital inclusion initiatives should also be considered so that all citizens regardless of their skills, access or motivation have the appropriate support to access online public services. When considering digital platforms, policy-makers should take note of the Equality Commission Initiative, ['Every Customer Counts'](#) which provides a free self-assessment tool to help assess how accessible the proposed service would be to people with limited access to technology. Also see the good practice in the public sector publication: [Promoting Accessible Services - Good practice in the public sector](#).

Citizens should not need to know how government is organised in order to transact his or her business. Where more than one part of government is involved in completing a transaction consideration should be given at the outset to building service delivery through a collaborative working approach across Departments in a way that is invisible to the citizen and provides a better, 'joined-up' service as well as a better citizen experience. A collaborative approach to policy problem solving, for example through Innovation Labs, could provide opportunities not only for departments to be more joined up but also to be truly innovative.

All parts of government, including policy, delivery and IT, have an important role to play in the delivery of digital government in creating a digital environment for those who wish to engage with us digitally. Services need to be delivered in more innovative and collaborative ways with more emphasis placed on the delivery channels used to consult and engage with citizens and businesses in order to inform public policy development.

Online consultation and digital engagement as a means of facilitating pre-consultation feedback are tools that can be added to the wider policy development toolkit. Online consultation will help to engage wider audiences, including audiences that are harder to reach, as well as help increase Civic Participation across the board. Crucially online consultation ensures robust standards, compliance and security of any data captured. [NI Direct 'Citizen Space'](#) is the NICS online consultation and survey portal and is available for all departments to use. 'Citizen Space' supports an end to end online consultation process, for policy-makers and users, through an intuitive browser-based interface. 'Citizen Space' also adheres to UK government standards regarding cybersecurity and accessibility and is compliant with the Data Protection Act (DPA).

Departments should increasingly be looking to improve choice in the way in which the citizen can access government services. Access might be via the NI Direct telephone contact centre, online via the internet or across a counter, but perhaps not one solely dedicated to a particular department. The potential for using digital approach technology should be a central key criterion in all policy reviews.

## Co-design/co-production

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Here are some definitions which will help to explain the difference.

**Co-design:** is an approach to design attempting to actively involve all stakeholders (e.g. employees, partners, customers, citizens and users) in the design process to help ensure the result meets their needs and is useable. A design is a plan or method for doing something. The person who discovered that rubbing sticks over tinder can make fire was a designer, and the process was the design. Equally, a person who produces architectural drawings for an office block is a designer, and the plans are the design. Co-design, therefore occurs when more than one person is involved in drawing up a plan for doing something.

**Co-production:** production is what happens when the raw materials needed to do something are brought together and combined to generate something new. Working out what to do is design work, doing it is production. So the person who invented airplanes is a designer, but a person who assembles them is a producer. Co-production occurs when more than one person is involved in making something happen.

**Co-creation:** is a term being used to encompass the entire process of design and production.

Policy is not developed in isolation. To ensure that the partnership approach outlined under [population accountability](#) is established and maintained, policies should be developed in partnership with stakeholders, with voluntary and community groups, charities etc, as well as the people who are most likely to be impacted or otherwise affected by the implementation. In this way there is real buy-in to the policy intervention being proposed, through a genuine co-design or co-production process.

People feel a sense of understanding of what is planned, why it is being done in a certain way, and what the proposed/expected outcomes will be. In this way there is a shared sense of ownership in the policy. People and organisations are invested in it, and will be more likely to make it a success.

Click [HERE](#) to read a case study of the OFMDFM Summer Camps Co-Design process.

## CHAPTER 7:

# Evaluation

## Have we achieved what we set out to achieve?

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This should be the starting point for evaluation. Additionally, evaluation should be seen as a continuous process – very few policies are ever ‘achieved’ in the sense that the reason for the intervention ceases to be a problem. What happens instead is that the reasons change over time to reflect the successes and the failures of previous attempts to get the policy intervention right. In other words it is a process which requires continual assessment, refinement and adaption, before the policy cycle starts again.

Evaluation is an objective process of understanding how a policy or other intervention was implemented, did it have any effect, for whom, how and why. By comparing intended outcomes to those actually achieved, good quality evaluations play a significant role in determining the effectiveness of the policy on achieving priorities and objectives, demonstrating accountability and providing defensible evidence to independent scrutiny. They also contribute valuable insight and knowledge to the policy evidence base, feeding into future policy development and as such have a crucial role in the policy cycle.

Not evaluating or poor evaluation makes it difficult to show that an intervention had the desired effect. It will also undermine or hinder attempts at future policy development.

Past experience shows that delivery of policy is rarely a one-off task. It is best understood not as a linear process - leading from policy ideas through implementation to change on the ground - but rather as a more circular process involving continuous learning, adaptation and improvement, with policy changing in response to implementation as well as vice versa. It is therefore important to undertake effective appraisal of policy options initially, and to build ongoing monitoring and review mechanisms into the delivery of policy from the outset.

Equally, formal evaluation has a crucial role in assessing whether policies have actually met their intended objectives. To be effective, policy making must be a learning process which involves finding out from experience what works and what does not and making sure that others can learn from it too. This means that effective ex ante evaluation or appraisal should be carried out as part of the policy development process; new policies must have evaluation of their effectiveness built in from the start; established policies must be reviewed regularly to ensure that they are still delivering the desired outcome; and the lessons learned from evaluation must be available and accessible to other policy-makers. Good evaluation should be systematic, analytical, study actual effects and judge success.

The principal mechanism for learning lessons is through evaluation of new policies and by monitoring and regular review of existing policies. Systematic assessment of policies, programmes and projects helps to improve the design and delivery of current and future policies. It also reinforces the use of evidence in policy making by helping policy-makers find out 'what works'.

The evaluation process can be broken down into 10 key parts outlined in the following figure. This framework should be flexible in recognising that circumstances differ within and between programmes. However, the items listed are the essential ingredients of policy or programme evaluation and will permit a consistency of approach across evaluations.



- i. Planning an evaluation** - Programmes to be evaluated should be prioritised on the basis of importance, openness to influence and adequacy of information. Evaluation should be planned before a programme starts. It is necessary to decide what questions the evaluation will address and who should undertake it, and to ensure that the costs of evaluation are outweighed by the lessons to be learnt.
- ii. Establish the scope and purpose of the evaluation** - This might depend on whether the objective is to identify weaknesses which need to be addressed (a process evaluation) or to assess the overall success of a programme with a view to continuing, expanding or reducing it (an outcome evaluation).
- iii. Establish the rationale, aims and objectives of the policy or programme** - These should be clearly defined prior to programme implementation, but if not, the evaluator should determine them. Is the policy instrument the most effective to address the rationale? This stage also involves identifying indicators of need and establishing the more specific targets which underlie the objectives.
- iv. Specify measures and indicators** - Effectiveness and efficiency measures, and input, output and outcome/impact indicators, in order to assess the value for money of policies. As far as possible, these should allow international comparisons to be made.
- v. Establish the base case for comparison** - What would have happened if the programme had not been implemented? It may be possible to set up a control group for comparison with a group affected by the policy. Alternatively, 'before and after' comparisons can be made.
- vi. Define assumptions** - These may involve assumed causal relationships between a policy and outcomes, or may relate to the external environment.
- vii. Identify side effects and distribution effects** - Effects (beneficial or otherwise) beyond those originally envisaged for the policy; equality/equity impacts and impacts on voluntary activity and the voluntary sector.
- viii. Analysis** - This will depend on whether it is a process or outcome evaluation. Both quantitative and qualitative analysis may be important. The key measure is net additional output. Cost Benefit Analysis provides a useful framework.
- ix. Evaluation outcome** - Recommendations such as programme continuation, modification, succession or termination. This leads into reappraisal and appraisal of new proposals. Sensitivity analysis should be carried out.
- x. Presentation and dissemination of results** - The evaluation process and outcome should be adequately documented. The report must reach senior management and be widely disseminated to staff concerned with future project design, planning, development and management. Seek advice on the use of data analytics and graphics when considering the format of the document.

More detail on taking forward appraisal and evaluation can be found in the [Northern Ireland Guide to Expenditure, Appraisal and Evaluation](#); and

the [Treasury Green Book](#).

CHAPTER 8:

# OBA - Outcomes Based Accountability

**We all want to know if we are making a difference.**

**We all want to improve the lives of our customers/citizens.**

Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA) helps us do that. It is an outcomes based approach that enables services to understand their impact on customers'/citizens' lives.

Developed by Mark Friedman and described in his book, 'Trying Hard is Not Good Enough,' OBA is being used throughout the world, to produce measurable change in people's lives.

**At its heart, OBA asks us three questions:**

- **How much do we do?**
- **How well do we do it?**
- **Is anyone better off?**

If we can answer those three questions we will be well on the way to knowing our impact. We can use OBA's 'Turning the Curve' tool to understand trend data and construct strategies for improving our outcomes.

NICS has chosen OBA because it is easy to use, provides a common language, is outcomes focused and it is a framework that staff can embrace. For example, the current Programme for Government has been developed using an outcomes based approach.

Click [HERE](#) to watch a Powerpoint presentation outlining OBA.



## So, what is OBA?

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OBA is a framework that provides step-by-step methods that turn data into action. Starting with quality of life conditions (called “outcomes”), agencies and cross-agency partnerships identify indicators, produce trend lines, consider best practice, and develop strategies, action plans and budgets that are then implemented, monitored and continuously improved.

When considering outcomes there are some fundamental issues to consider:

- The starting point for any planning process should be a clear statement of the conditions of well-being desired (ie the outcomes);

OBA is a conceptual approach to planning services and assessing their performance that focuses attention on the results - or outcomes - that the services are intended to achieve.

It is also seen as much more than a tool for planning effective services. It can become a way of securing strategic and cultural change: moving organisations away from a focus on ‘efficiency’ and ‘process’ as the arbiters of value in their services, and towards making better outcomes the primary purpose of their organisation and its employees.

Further distinguishing features of the approach are

- The use of simple and clear language;
- The collection and use of relevant data;
- The involvement of stakeholders, including service users and the wider community, in achieving better outcomes should be measured by the use of appropriate data (indicators);
- Having the data and knowing the historical trends and likely forecast for the chosen indicators is necessary to develop understanding of what is driving them (the ‘story behind the baseline’);
- This in turn is essential to inform what could be done to improve the situation (the Action Plan); and
- Any strategy to improve quality of life indicators for people in communities should be simple, based on common sense, written in plain language and, most importantly of all, be useful.

## The Northern Ireland Context

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To develop effective policy it is necessary not only to understand what policy is and how to develop it but also to understand the context in which it is being developed.

Following an election, the Executive agrees a Programme for Government (PfG) that sets a strategic direction for the work of Government. This is the Executive's articulation of the shared aspiration of society, and the ultimate purpose of public sector activity. It is developed through a process of engagement with stakeholders, citizens, representative organisations, businesses, and community and voluntary organisations. By allocating a budget and agreeing an annual work programme the Executive manages the delivery of the Programme drawing collaboratively on the resources of all of those with a contribution to make, with the aim of achieving better outcomes, and greater wellbeing, for everyone in society.

The current PfG has been developed using an outcomes based approach. It starts by expressing clearly the desired end result or outcome and works back to ascertain and deliver what needs to be done to achieve it. It asks two simple questions:

- What quality of life conditions do we want to create for people?
- How will we know if we're making progress towards these?

This encourages us all to focus on the difference that we make and not just on the inputs and processes we control. Success for the Executive and its Public Bodies is about achieving outcomes and it is right that it should be held to account for creating real improvements to the quality of people's lives, whilst also reflecting that public services have a cost to citizens through taxes, duties and charges.

The overarching vision of the PfG will be achieved through the implementation of many different interventions, programmes and services, focusing on improving the quality of life of individuals, groups and families. The cumulative effect of all these interventions will enable progression towards the achievement of outcomes, and the overarching PfG vision.

The development of interventions is where policy development occurs - whether relating to a single service or a wider programme. Not all policy development will result in new interventions – decisions to modify, combine or stop existing interventions are equally valid.

Similarly, not all policy development arises in pursuit of PfG goals. Sometimes specific issues will arise that were not anticipated, but which require a policy response. Equally, individual Ministers will often have policy agendas related to party positions that they will wish to implement.

A wide variety of agencies and organisations in the public, private, community and voluntary and social economy sectors are doing things, or could be doing things that have the potential to contribute to the delivery of better outcomes for people. In line

with OBA methodology, engagement must take place with these stakeholders to determine what interventions could and should be implemented to improve population outcomes.

Two of the key ways to promote adoption among stakeholders is to provide bespoke guidance to stakeholders commensurate with their role in the overall OBA process and highlighting the internal benefits to stakeholders in adopting the process in terms of using the evaluation of outcomes achieved to inform future strategy planning and delivery.

Effective policy development acknowledges this complexity – and uses the influence of government to move towards better outcomes – based on the best available information and evidence.

Generally, although not exclusively, the primary purpose of public policy development is to support the achievement of the vision set by the Executive. Doing this successfully will require navigating a complex environment and fostering more effective connections between the many agencies active in society.

This guidance follows the outcome-focused approach adopted in the Programme for Government, and seeks to support effective alignment between policy development and the strategic direction set by the Executive.

## OBA Definitions:

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**Language Discipline:** OBA starts with language discipline. If we are not disciplined about language, then we are not disciplined about thought. There is an appalling lack of language discipline in social enterprises around the world. Five definitions are necessary for clear communication about the very complex content of social change. What is important about these definitions is the distinction between the five ideas and not the particular words used to label these ideas.

**“Outcomes”** (or “Results”) are conditions of well-being for children, adults, families and communities. Outcomes include such things as Safe Communities, Socially Included Families, Clean Environment, Prosperous Economy.

**“Indicators”** are measures that quantify the achievement of results. So, for example, the unemployment rate helps quantify Prosperous Economy. The rate of homelessness helps quantify Socially Included Families.

**“Performance Measures”** are measures that tell if a programme, agency or service system is working well. OBA uses a simple three part categorisation scheme for performance measures: How much did we do? (e.g. # served), How well did we do it? (e.g. % timely service), Is anyone better off? (e.g. % showing improvement)

**“Turning the Curve”** means turning the baseline or trend line in the right direction.

**“Strategies”** are coherent sets of actions that have a reasoned chance of turning the Curve.

# OBA in a Nutshell 2-3-7

## 2 Kinds of Accountability

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- Population-or Community-Level Quality of Life
- Performance-or Programme-Level

## 3 Kinds of Performance Measures

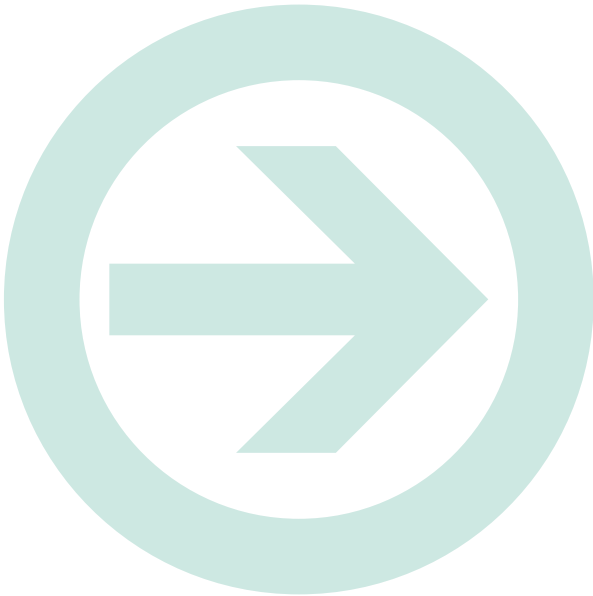
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- How much did we do?
- How well did we do it?
- Is anyone better off?

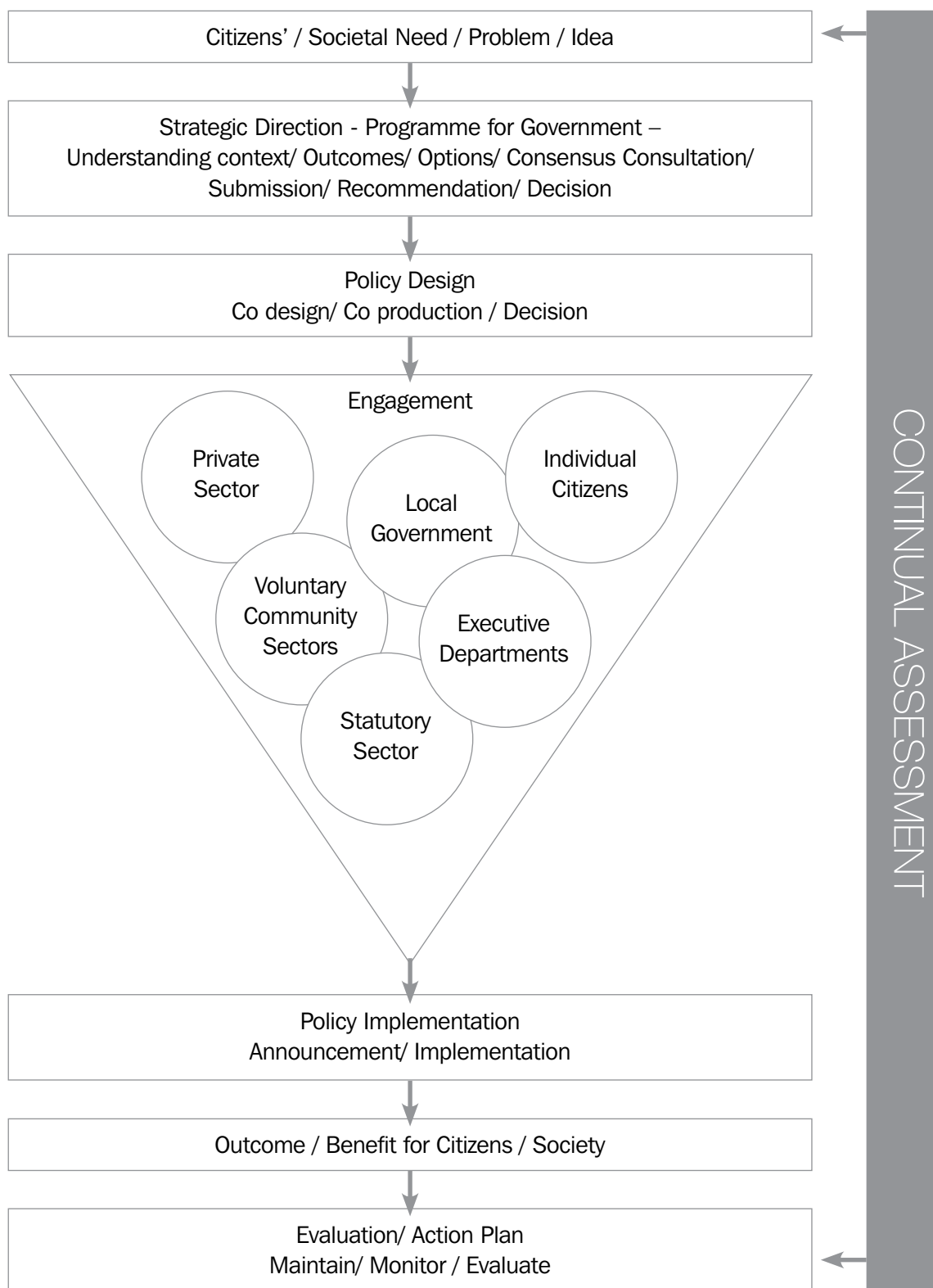
## 7 Questions

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- From Ends to Means (In less than an hour)



## Outcomes focused approach to policy making



Click [HERE](#) to read a case study from Leeds which sets out the OBA process they used to make Leeds a child-friendly city.

## CHAPTER 9:

# Accountability: Population and Performance

OBA makes a fundamental distinction between Population Accountability and Performance Accountability.

Population Accountability is about quality of life in a geographic area such as a community, city, county, local or regional council area, state or nation. Making progress on population quality of life requires the participation of a wide range of partners. No single agency or level of government can bear sole responsibility for quality of life. Quality of life partnerships require new ways of working together that bridge across different systems and different cultures. In many countries, such partnerships have now successfully used OBA to turn the curve on critical quality of life indicators.

For example, the Connexions Council in Newcastle UK has used these methods to make dramatic progress on the percentage of young people “Not in Education, Employment or Training.” Click [HERE](#) to read this case study.

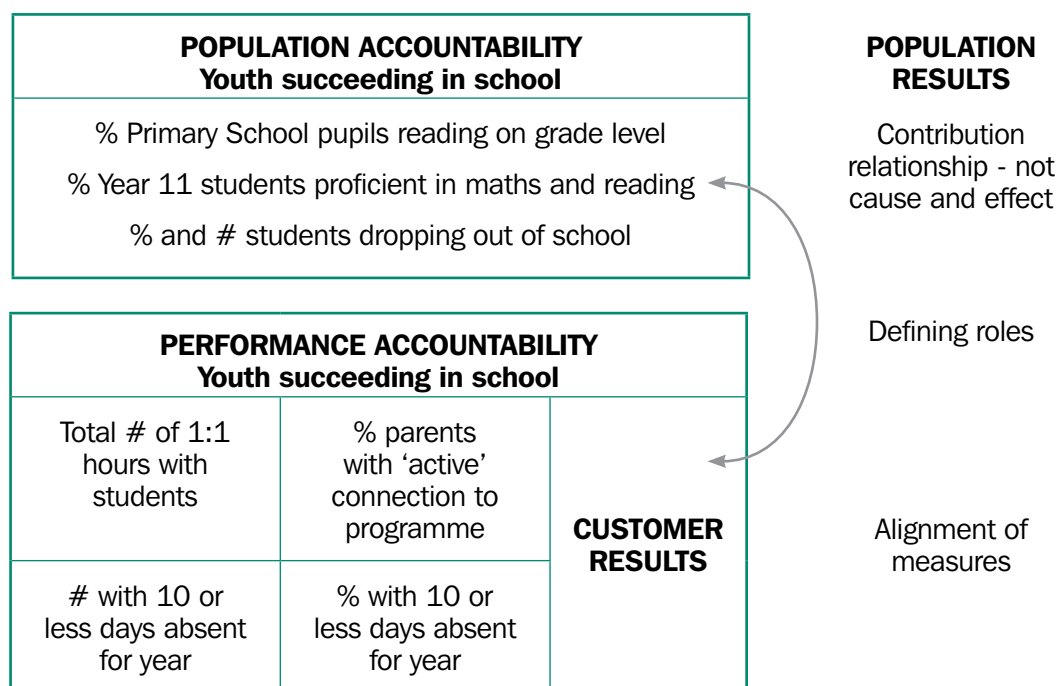
Performance Accountability, by contrast, is about how well government and nongovernmental services are delivered and whether they are making a difference to the lives of their customers. OBA provides a five step method for identifying the most important performance measures for any service. Trend lines are then prepared for these measures. Agency managers and executives use seven OBA questions to monitor and improve performance on a monthly or quarterly basis. For example, in North Lincolnshire, UK, staff from Social and Housing Services used OBA methods to produce a significant increase in the occupancy rate for public sector housing.

OBA has been used successfully in countries around the world, including Australia, Canada, Chile, Ireland, Israel, Moldavia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway and the UK. It can provide OECD countries with a common way of working across geographic boundaries, across service systems and across cultures to make a difference to the lives of their citizens. Where data has been seen as the domain of specialists, OBA shows that data is something everyone can understand and use.

## Linking population and performance accountabilities together

By linking population and performance accountabilities together, we can see how client results, delivered by agencies, programmes and service systems, contribute to quality of life results for a whole population.

### The linkage between population and performance



For example a six week “parenting teens” programme that improves parenting skills and knowledge, contributes to “young people being healthy and safe”, which is a quality of life condition for a population group (a population result / outcome).

The next diagram shows the clear lines of accountability for an individual programme (youth mentoring programme) that is only responsible for its own clients and not for keeping all young people healthy and safe. But the results it achieves for its clients contribute to the wellbeing of the whole youth population.

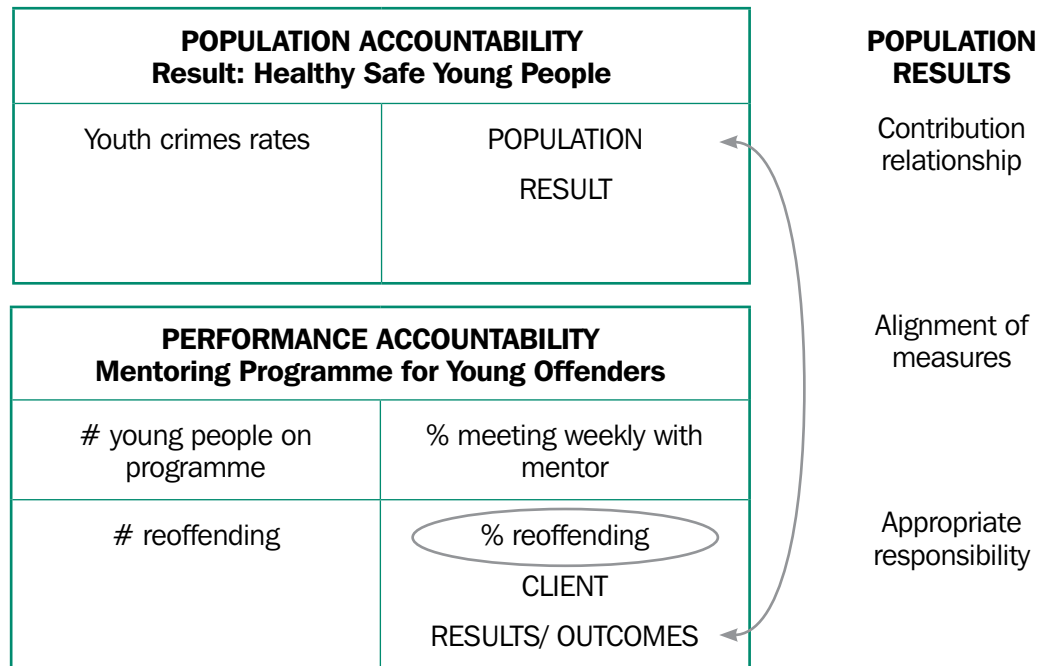


Diagram explanatory text: The diagram shows the relationship between population accountability and performance accountability. It provides an example of how the performance measure in the bottom right quadrant for client outcomes from a youth mentoring programme for young offenders, contributes to the population result (healthy safe young people) and the population indicator (rates of youth crime). The diagram shows that the programme is only held responsible for the outcomes of its clients – not all young people. It also shows how OBA helps align performance measures, population indicators and results - creating a clear line of sight between these measures.

There is a difference between attribution and contribution. No single programme can improve a population results, but a programme can show how it has contributed to a population result through measuring client outcomes.



## CHAPTER 10:

# The 7 Questions

Here is the 7 step thinking process that can be used at the national, regional, council, city or neighbourhood levels **to improve quality of life:**

## The 7 Population Level Questions:

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1. What are the quality of life conditions we want for the children, adults and families who live in our community?
2. What would these conditions look like if we could see or experience them?
3. How can we measure these conditions?
4. How are we doing on the most important measures? (baselines[\*] and causes)?
5. Who are the partners that have a role to play in doing better?
6. What works to do better, including no-cost and low-cost ideas?
7. What do we propose to do?

When addressing these steps, always include the associated Statutory Equality and Human Rights considerations. See the section on [Policy Scrutiny](#) for more information.

[\*] Note, the word “baseline” has many possible definitions. The definition used in OBA comes from the field of budgeting and finance, where both historical data and a policy neutral forecast is shown. The word baseline and trend line are often used interchangeably.

Here is the 7 step thinking process that can be used by government and non-government managers **to improve the performance of their services:**

## The 7 Performance Level Questions:

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1. Who are our customers, clients, people we serve? (e.g children in a child care programme)  
  
Many programmes have more than one customer group. A complete inventory of who these groups are will need to be developed. Sometimes it might seem that some groups have little in common so it might be helpful to distinguish between direct and indirect customers, or primary and secondary, or internal and external.
2. How can we measure if our customers/clients are better off? (performance measures about client results – e.g. percent of children with good literacy skills)
3. How can we measure if we are delivering services well? (e.g client staff ratio, unit cost, turnover rate etc.)

These are the second most important measures to develop. They are usually about what staff do and how well the functions of the programme are performed. Think about the most meaningful measures and whether sufficient data exists.

4. How are we doing on the most important of these measures? Where have we been; where are we headed? (baselines and the story behind the baselines)
5. Who are the partners who have a potential role to play in doing better?
6. What works, what could work to do better than baseline, (including no-cost and low-cost items)?

Each cause or problem points to actions that could be taken to address it and each partner has something to contribute. Consider undertaking fresh research; if possible adopt examples from elsewhere. What is already being done? What is working? What is not working? Why might it not be working? Be creative. Take advice from Research and Statistician colleagues about what different types of resource are possible. Discuss with stakeholders to find out about best practice, existing interventions that work (evidence based) and what actions can be taken. This can be supplemented/verified by research from statistical colleagues.

7. What do we propose to do? (multi-year action plan and budget.)

This is the most important question. It is the part where we move from thought to action. Organise these actions into a plan that specifies the person responsible for each task, the start and end dates and necessary resources. In the early stages of the process this plan will include partners to contact, data to gather and other actions identified through the questions.

These questions should be used in monthly meetings or planning sessions. All 7 questions should be asked and answered at every meeting, so that the overall coherence of the process is maintained. As managers and partners repeat this process, their answers will get better. Each set of 7 questions leads to an action plan (what we propose to do.) which should include no-cost and low-cost elements that can be acted on immediately

See <http://raguide.org/index-of-questions/> for more on this.

See below for practical guidance on identifying performance measures.

## How to identify Performance Measures

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The 5 Step Process below will help you identify performance measures, select the most important ones and identify a data development agenda.

### **Step 1. HOW MUCH WE DO (Upper Left):**

Draw the four quadrants on a big piece of flip chart paper. Start in the upper left quadrant. First put down the measure “# of customers served.” in the upper left quadrant. Ask if there are better more specific ways to count customers or important subcategories of customers, and list them. (e.g. # of families served, # of children with disabilities served etc.). Next ask what activities are performed. Convert each activity into a measure (e.g. “we train people” becomes # of people trained.) When you’re finished, ask if there are any major activities that are not listed.

### **Step 2. HOW WELL DO WE DO IT? HOW WELL DO WE PERFORM THESE ACTIVITIES? (Upper Right):**

Ask people to review the standard measures for this quadrant that apply to most if not all programmes, services or activities (e.g. unit cost, staff turnover, etc.) These are shown on the [Performance Matrix](#) in the upper right quadrant under “common measures”. Write each answer in the upper right quadrant. Next take each activity listed in the upper left and ask if there are measures that tell whether that particular activity was performed well. If you get blank looks, ask if timeliness matters, if accuracy matters. Convert each answer into a measure and be specific (e.g. the timeliness of case reviews becomes “percent of case reviews completed on time” or “percent of case reviews completed within 30 days after opening.”

### **Step 3. IS ANYONE BETTER OFF? (Lower Left and Lower Right):**

Ask “In what ways could clients be better off as a result of getting this service? How we would know if they were better off in measurable terms?” Create pairs of measures (# and %) for each answer (e.g. # and % of clients who get jobs above the minimum wage). The # answers go in the lower left; the % answers go in the lower right.

There are two ways to state these kinds of measures: point in time and improvement over time (e.g. % of children with good attendance this report card period vs. % of children whose attendance improved since the last report card period).

This is the most interesting and challenging part of this process. Dig deep into the different ways this can show up in the lives of the people served. Explore each of the four categories of “better-offness”: skills/knowledge, attitude, behaviour and circumstance. If people get stuck, try the reverse question: “If your service was terrible, how would it show up in the lives of your clients?”

Look first for data that is already collected. Then be creative about things that could/ should be counted and the ways in which data could be generated. It is not always necessary to do 100% reporting. Sampling can be used, either regular and continuous sampling or one time studies based on sampling. Pre and post testing can be used to show improvement in skills, knowledge or attitude. Surveys can be used which ask clients to self report improvement or benefits.

NOTE: Every performance measure has two incarnations: a lay definition and a technical definition. The lay definition is one that anyone could understand (e.g. Percentage of clients who got jobs) and a technical definition which, for percentages, exactly specifies the numerator and denominator (e.g. the number of clients who got jobs this month, divided by the total number of clients enrolled in the programme at any time during the month).

**Now you have filled in the four quadrants with as many entries as you can. Next we select the most important measures and a data development agenda. Here's a SHORT CUT way to do that:**

**Step 4. HEADLINE MEASURES:** Identify the measures in the upper right and lower right quadrants for which there is (good) data. This means decent data is available today (or could be produced with little effort). Circle each one of these measures with a colored marker. Ask "If you had to talk about your programme with just one of these circled measures, which one would it be?" Put a star by the answer. Then ask "If you could have a second measure... and a third?" You should identify no more than 4 or 5 measures. And those should be a mix of upper right and lower right measures. These choices represent a working list of headline measures for the programme.

**Step 5. DATA DEVELOPMENT AGENDA:** Ask "If you could buy one of the measures for which you don't have data, which one would it be?" Mark that with a different colored marker. "If you could have a second measure... and a third?" List 4 or 5 measures. This is the beginning of your data development agenda in priority order.

The longer and more thorough method for selecting performance measures involves rating each measure High Medium or Low on three criteria: Communication, Proxy and Data Power.

1. Communication Power: Does the performance measure communicate to a broad range of audiences? It is possible to think of this in terms of the public square test. If you had to stand in a public square and explain the performance of this programme to your neighbours, what two or three measures would you use?
2. Proxy Power: Does the performance measure say something of central importance about the programme (agency or service system)? Can this measure stand as a proxy for the most important things the programme does?

3. Data Power: Do we have quality data on a timely basis? We need data which is reliable and consistent. And we need timely data so we can see progress – or the lack thereof – on a regular and frequent basis.

Both methods will lead to the same list. The SHORT CUT works because the “forced choice” process leads people intuitively to think about communication and proxy power. When they do this for measures where they have data, the selected measures are the Headline Measures. When they do this for measures where they do not have data, the selected measures are the Data Development Agenda.

**The headline measures are the starting point for using data to improve programme performance.**

**For more information: see [What do we do with performance measures once we have them? How can we use performance measures to improve performance?](#) and following questions.**

**Several things to keep in mind here:**

1. It is best if the programme or service, for which performance measures are developed, has some organisational identity. Performance accountability is about holding managers accountable for the performance of what it is they manage. If the thing to be measured has no organisational identity, then there is no person or persons who can be held accountable for its performance.

This does not mean that the thing to be measured must be a box on the organisation chart or a physical unit in a single geographic location. In matrix management, for example, it can be a function that cuts across organisation lines for which some person or persons has been given lead responsibility (for example budgeting or staff development, where some staff may be decentralized but the function is still managed or “lead” by someone.) It can be a programme which operates in many different locations. The notion of fence drawing is flexible enough to work with any organisational structure old or new.

2. Second thing to keep in mind: When you are trying to teach these ideas to new people start with small units which have a clear identity. Then move on to larger units and functions without physical organisational identity.
3. Third thing: performance measurement starts with the idea of customers or clients. CUSTOMERS are people who can be made better or worse off by the services of the programme.

Performance measurement is an easier discussion for organisational entities that can clearly identify their customers. So, for example, direct service programmes like child support enforcement or mentoring will have a head start on programmes or activities where this discussion is unclear.

Performance measurement of customer well-being is harder for administrative functions such as budget, personnel, general services etc. It will be necessary to spend some quality time helping these people understand/discover who their customers are. Hint: for administrative functions the customers are often the managers of the agency itself. And customer satisfaction turns out to be the most important lower right quadrant measure.

One of the best ways to teach this method is to conduct a “fishbowl” at the front of the room. Get four or five people to volunteer who know a particular programme well. Position them in chairs in a small semi-circle at the front of the room, facing forward (i.e. back to everyone else). Conduct a short session (15 to 20 minutes) using the technique above. Periodically pause to ask if the larger audience has any questions. If time permits, break the larger group into groups of 6 and have them pick a programme. One member of the group then leads the group through the 5 steps of the technique above. Depending on time, two or three rounds of this could be done. Debrief the large group. “What worked and didn’t work about this experience? What did you learn? How many think they could lead a small group of coworkers through this thinking process?”

Technical note: Some people correctly point out that client results actually have two components which parallel the difference between outcomes and indicators at the population level, i.e. a plain language statement of client well-being (clients are self sufficient) and a measurement that describes this condition of well-being (# and % of clients who get jobs and keep them 6 months or more). In practice, these two ideas are addressed in a single step in the thinking process which asks “In what ways could clients be better off as a result of getting this service? How we would know if they were better off in measurable terms?” (step 3 above). Experience suggests that when these two questions are separated as they are (and must be) at the population level (e.g. first fully answer in plain language, then take each plain language statement and identify measures that can serve as proxy) then the process loses its common sense feel and becomes unnecessarily complicated and time consuming.

One interesting and usable variation of this approach, used by the Department of Developmental Services in California, listed all client results in plain language, and then developed a set of measures for the group of client results as a whole (i.e. not condition by condition).

CHAPTER 11:

# Evaluation in an Outcomes Framework

Within the context of Outcomes based policy development it is important that the question of how a particular policy or intervention is to be evaluated is considered at the earliest stages of development. This is done through the development of the performance measures of a policy. In Outcomes based policy development evaluation of performance or intervention outcomes is based around the following simple questions:

- How much did we do?
- How well did we do it?
- Is anyone better off?

## OBA Performance Matrix

Below is a table that outlines the performance matrix and includes some example measures.

	<b>Quantity</b>	<b>Quality</b>
<b>Input</b>	<b>How much did we do? (#)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customers served</li> <li>• Activities delivered</li> </ul>	<b>How well did we do it? (%)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Common measures (e.g. % participants completing course)</li> <li>• Activity specific (e.g. % completed on time, % appointments kept)</li> <li>• Cost £ &amp; Costs per unit £</li> </ul>
<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Is anyone better off as a result? (#)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skills or knowledge (e.g. qualifications gained)</li> <li>• Attitudinal or opinion (e.g. towards school)</li> <li>• Behaviour (e.g. attendance)</li> <li>• Circumstance (e.g. in work)</li> <li>• Global metrics (see additional guidance)</li> </ul>	<b>Is anyone better off as a result? (%)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skills or knowledge (e.g. qualifications gained)</li> <li>• Attitudinal or opinion (e.g. towards school)</li> <li>• Behaviour (e.g. attendance)</li> <li>• Circumstance (e.g. in work)</li> <li>• Global metrics (see additional guidance)</li> </ul>

[< back to Step 2](#)

## Not all Measures are created equal

The most important measures will be those under the 4th quadrant “Is anyone better off as a result? (%)” as these determine the overall success of the policy as it will contribute to the overall outcomes as set out in the PfG.

The upper left is the least important. And yet we have some people who spend their whole careers living in this quadrant counting cases and activity. Somehow we have to push the discussion to the lower right quadrant, the one that measures whether our customers are better off.

## Measuring effort, effect, quantity & quality

		QUANTITY OR QUALITY	
Input Effort	<b>Least important</b>		<b>Important</b>
Output Effect	Is anyone better off as a result		<b>Most Important</b>



# Reference Section

## Policy Champions Network

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The Policy Champions Network (PCN) is a group of senior civil servants, whose role it is to build capability in policy making across the NICS.

Each of the Policy Champions has a role and a responsibility to actively engage with their Departmental policy-makers to identify needs and to promote and lead new policy development approaches in their own Department.

PCN has wide representation from each of the NICS departments, as well as the Heads of Profession in Economics, Statistics and the Office of the Legislative Counsel.

Collectively, it works to create an open and inclusive policy making process where knowledge and experience can be pooled to develop policies that deliver real and sustainable benefits. PCN has progressed a wide range of initiatives to ensure effective policy support for Departmental Boards and policymakers alike. As the NICS faces up to a challenging agenda in the coming years, PCN will work to ensure that policy-makers have the necessary skills, support, encouragement and expertise to deliver on these challenges.

PCN meets quarterly and is supported administratively by a small team based within the Department for Infrastructure.

## Case Studies

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There are a growing number of case examples where the application of OBA has produced a clear measurable improvement in the well being of a defined population. Here is one example from Newcastle, UK, paraphrased from a report by Sara Morgan-Evans, Local Connexions Manager.

### **Newcastle Council - improving the number of NEETS**

Connexions is a service tasked with providing information, advice, guidance, support and referral to all young people in England aged between 13 and 19 and up to 25 for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The key measure of success is the number of 16-18 year olds who are not accessing education, employment or training (NEET). Within the Tyne and Wear region of north-east England, the Newcastle Connexions team is tasked with delivering the Connexions service to the 30,000+ young people educated in the City of Newcastle.

In November 2003 the Newcastle NEET figure stood at 15%, roughly the same level as the previous decade. By January 2009, the Newcastle Connexions team had reduced this figure to 8.5%, the largest reduction of any comparable area in the UK. The local Connexions manager attributes much of this success to training in Outcomes-Based Accountability. After the Local Manager attended an OBA training session, she delivered OBA training first to the Connexions management team and then the whole Connexions team.

Staff began to look at their work with young people in a different way, placing less significance on how many times or how long they spent with clients and changing the emphasis to the difference that their interventions made. Staff also began to look more closely at the barriers facing young people who were NEET and the importance of networking with other agencies to support the removal of those barriers.

Managers took a fresh look at the team delivery plan and the plans delivered in partnership with other organisations such as schools. Plans were reviewed in terms of the impact that they would have rather than a matter of fixed allocation (e.g. assigning staff time based on school enrolment regardless of the characteristics of the students). New approaches were tried including linking with adult services to target workless households.

At least part of the success of Newcastle's reduction in NEETs was due to the dissemination of OBA as a way of working to all staff in the team. Practitioners working directly with young people saw that they could have an impact on individual lives and that impact on individuals could translate into an impact on the community.

Newcastle's success with OBA is not unique. Between 1995 and 2004, Vermont showed similar progress in reducing the blood lead content level for young children. Between 1994 and 2002, Santa Cruz County, California produced significant reductions in teen alcohol and drug use. Between 1996 and 2004, Dayton Ohio significantly improved elementary and secondary school attendance. Between 2002 and 2005, North Lincolnshire, UK increased occupancy rates in public housing. And more recently in 2009, Christchurch, New Zealand changed the trend on the rate of graffiti site tagging in the city.

*Reproduced with kind permission from "Turning Curves: An Accountability Companion Reader" by Mark Friedman, published by Parse Publishing 2015 ISBN-13 978-1519199355*

### **Making Leeds a Child-friendly city for Children, Young People and Families in Leeds, UK Using Outcomes-Based Accountability**

Leeds is the third largest city in the UK, with a diverse population of more than 750,000 people, including 180,000 children and young people. It is an affluent and prospering city, but also has some of the most deprived communities in the country. In July 2009, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) carried out an inspection of city services for vulnerable children and young people, as part of an ongoing high-profile national inspection programme. The inspection was extremely critical of services in the city, finding that the city failed to adequately safeguard children and young people. Subsequently the government gave the local council a 'notice to improve' and for a short time established an independently chaired improvement board to guide and support improvements.

In 2010 the council responded by making some significant changes. A new Chief Executive, Tom Riordan and a newly elected Executive Council Member for Children's Services, Councillor Judith Blake, appointed Nigel Richardson as Director of Children's Services. This appointment, along with a new leadership team, acted as the catalyst for a new 'whole system' approach to services for children and young people. From the outset, Outcome based accountability (OBA) was chosen as the means through which the Council and the wider partnership would manage and judge the effect of their collective efforts.

Working with a partnership of key service providers, a new plan for children’s services was developed and implemented. This plan centred on creating a single, unifying narrative about the ambition for children in the city: To be the best city in the UK to grow up in, and to be recognised as a Child Friendly City. At the heart of this ambition was an emphasis on adopting three fundamental behaviours to guide every aspect of work with children and families: The first centred on listening to the voice of the child so that their thoughts and feelings would guide the decisions practitioners make that affect them. The second was about using approaches, techniques and language that works with families to solve problems, rather than doing things to them, for them, or not doing anything at all. This restorative approach empowers families to safely and appropriately find their own solutions to the problems they face. The third behaviour was about using OBA to constantly and consistently question whether anyone is better off as a result of the work being done and to shape and improve services accordingly. The combination of these three behaviours, within a whole-system, city-wide approach, has underpinned the improvement journey in Leeds between 2010 and 2015.

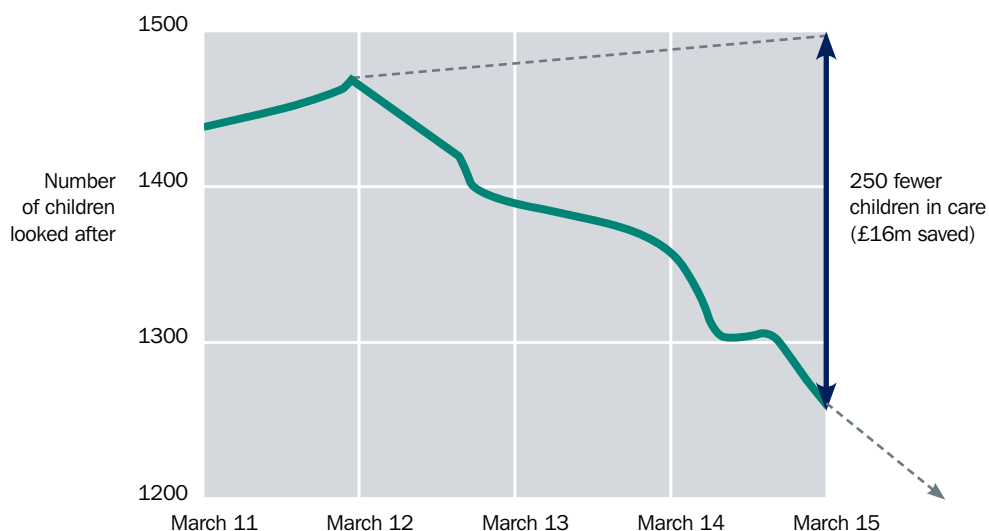
The new Children and Young People’s (CYP) Plan for the city was designed using OBA principles and practice. Under the Child Friendly City vision, it set out five outcomes and 12 priorities that would guide all work for children, young people and families. It identified the need to relentlessly focus on three areas in particular, referred to as the Leeds three ‘obsessions.’ Based on the theory that ‘anywhere leads to everywhere’, making an impact on these areas would have a positive knock-on effect right across all work with children and families.

The three obsessions are:

- Safely and appropriately reducing the need for children to be looked after.
- Reducing the number of young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)
- Improving school attendance

The OBA methodology was used to develop turning the curve ‘scorecards’ for each of the obsessions. These scorecards have been regularly employed to report progress to the city’s Children and Families Trust Board - comprising senior figures from services working most closely with children and young people. Crucially, the scorecards were used to track the effectiveness of the partnership’s collective efforts to ‘turn the curve’. The reports made it possible to visualise the difference between the likely course of events based on the historical trajectory (e.g. if the number of children in care had continued to increase in line with past trends), and the impact that the various interventions were having on helping to ‘turn the curve’ (e.g. the number of children looked after declines from its current level). By using such graphs Leeds was able to show the impact of new initiatives and investment at different times during its improvement journey.

The example in the figure below demonstrates this in relation to the number of children in care in Leeds:



Although this approach provided a framework for using OBA to track progress, the bigger challenge for a city as large and diverse as Leeds was implementing and then embedding the outcome-based approach consistently across all of its work, including frontline practice as well as in ‘enabling’ services such as human resources (HR), information technology (ICT), finance, asset management. To do this, over five years Leeds consistently emphasised an outcome-based approach as one of the three fundamental behaviours that underpinned work with children and families. In addition the city developed a number of incremental steps from awareness-raising, through training and then application at a local and citywide level, to embed OBA across different areas of work. Leeds has particularly emphasised the use of OBA across local ‘clusters’ of services.

In Leeds clusters are the local partnerships between schools and the other services within a given area that must work together to provide a holistic approach to improving outcomes for children and young people. This includes children’s centres, health professionals, youth services, voluntary sector organisations and the police. Local elected members also sit on clusters linked to their ward. In total there are 25 clusters across the city.

Each cluster has completed an OBA workshop, on each of the three obsessions, drawing together partners to focus on how to make a difference at a local level. OBA has become a key tool for clusters to review and refocus their work. The clusters used OBA as a basis for developing the ‘top 100 methodology’, identifying those families causing the greatest challenges for service providers in the local area. This has then enabled a more targeted, co-ordinated and consistent approach to multi-agency support for those families.

Across its wider improvement work, Children’s Services used OBA to progress a variety of specific projects where a clear impact could be demonstrated. For example:

- OBA was used as the methodology to address school place planning across the city, providing a framework to tackle a shortage of places given a rapidly growing population. Over 1400 additional primary school places have been created through this work.
- An OBA session followed the launch of the custody pathfinder programme (which aims to reduce the need for children to be remanded or sentenced to custody). The actions implemented reduced custody “bednights” by almost one third over 18 months.
- The OBA approach has been used to launch and develop the Families First initiative in Leeds (part of the UK’s national troubled families programme). It looked at how to use data and what each partner could bring to the programme. It enabled the programme to progress quickly and with clear focus. Leeds successfully supported all 2500 families involved in the first phase to achieve improved outcomes and was nationally recognised for its approach.

In each case it was the combination of the three Leeds ‘behaviours’: using an OBA methodology; running events and planning in a way that works restoratively with people; and ensuring the voice of children and young people featured strongly in the process; that proved a successful combination for turning talk into action in a way that involved people in decisions that affected them.

OBA was increasingly adopted in Leeds not just by children’s services, but as a city-wide approach for any issue where the methodology could help find solutions.

In 2014 the city launched a series of high profile ‘breakthrough’ projects on issues such as housing need, city centre improvement, domestic violence and healthy living. These cross-cutting projects were intended to bring multi-agency partners together to concentrate attention on some of the most difficult issues facing the city. In each case an OBA launch session and methodology was used to drive the planning and development of this work and ensure consistency of approach across different partners.

With OBA established as a city-wide approach, Leeds Children’s Services sought to broaden ownership of the feedback data it generated right across the city, to ensure everyone could see how their work was contributing to a collective effort to address the biggest priorities. This work is best demonstrated by the use of a weekly [‘Obsessions progress tracker’](#), (see the example shown). It was produced in a format that enabled all staff/partners to quickly see the difference their collective contributions were making.

## Weekly obsessions tracker



Obsession	Latest position this week	Change since last week	% change over last 12 months	Change over last 12 months	12 month trend
Safely reduce the number of children looked after	1381	-8	-5.9	-86	
Reduce the number of young people who are NEET	1470	-1	-22.4	-429	
Reduce school absence: primary	4.8%	+0.4	n/a	-1.0	
Reduce school absence: secondary	7.6%	-0.2	n/a	-1.3	

The tracker, which became known in Leeds as the ‘Thing of Beauty,’ arrived weekly in people’s inbox and was used in various meeting agendas to inform key discussions and debates about the three OBA performance questions – How much did we do? How well did we do it? Is anybody better off? Leeds also broke this data down to a ‘cluster’ level. This enabled city-wide and local performance data to be considered against the three obsessions so that action could be taken quickly to target areas where progress was lagging. Mike Pinnock, who has been involved in the introduction and development of OBA in Leeds, emphasised that the tracker was an example of how feedback data could be used to engage and energise staff across the partnership, “We deliberately chose a graphical format that people would associate with the sorts of data they use in their daily lives - like a weather report or a stock market index. The intention was to bring some focus and immediacy to the partnership’s efforts. Like a weather report, the primary role of the weekly “Thing of Beauty” was to keep people’s attention on something that was important - not to explain it”.

In January 2015, the Ofsted inspectors returned to Leeds and found a transformed service.

Between 2011 and 2015, the number of looked after children had safely and appropriately reduced from 1,450 to less than 1,300. Primary school attendance and secondary school attendance increased by 2% and 2.2% respectively. The number of young people not in education employment or training declined by nearly 500 (a 22% decline). The Inspector’s final report stated... ‘The application of the outcomes based accountability approach... is facilitating a shared understanding of priorities for children... (and) the ‘three obsessions’ are providing a sharp focus for strategic and operational thinking’. The inspectors rated the services as ‘good’ overall and ‘outstanding’ for leadership, management and governance, the highest rating available for the strand, which incorporates performance management.

## Co-Design Case Study

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### **OFMDFM GOOD RELATIONS DIVISION - SUMMER CAMP PROGRAMME - STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT**

Extensive stakeholder engagement has been a key feature of the design of the Summer Camp Pilot Programme in 2015/16 and the further development the Programme for 2016/17.

In designing the Pilot Programme four co-design workshops were held in late 2015 and early 2016 with a wide range of stakeholders, including the community and voluntary sector, and this generated useful feedback which informed the design of the Pilot Programme. Running in parallel to these workshops were 4 youth engagement sessions and the feedback from these sessions also contributed to the design process.

A Co-design Forum was then established and again this included membership from the community/voluntary sector. A Youth Team worked in parallel to this and the teams considered the feedback from the engagement sessions and made recommendations regarding the detailed design/criteria for the Programme in 2015/16 including potential delivery models. These recommendations were subsequently accepted by Ministers and the 2015/16 Programme was launched.

Following the Programme in 2015/16, four Shared Learning Forums were held across Northern Ireland to gather feedback from all the Summer Camps applicants in 2015/16 and other key stakeholders. Representatives from the community/voluntary sector attended those Forums. Three meetings were also held with groups of young people, who attended Summer Camps, so their input could be included in the design of the next programme.

The Co-Design Forum was also reconvened in order to consider all the feedback and develop/design proposals for a substantive Summer Camps programme in 2016/17. Once again proposals were brought to Ministers for their consideration and were accepted.

We currently have a stakeholder list of approximately 3000 and also use social media (Twitter and Facebook pages for TBUC Summer Camps) to communicate with our stakeholders.



## Policy Scrutiny Process

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### **Overarching policy issues**

This section outlines a number of the overarching policy issues and commitments of the administration and suggests how they can be taken into account in developing a policy. These issues include Equality and Human Rights. The section also covers proofing policies in terms of aspects such as their environmental, health and rural impacts.

The key consideration here is to ensure that the approach to policy development is holistic in approach. In other words, that as the policy is being developed through the steps set out in this guide, consideration is being given at the same time to the equality and human rights implications and that the overall impact assessment process is an integral part of the development of the policy and not a last minute add-on.

### **The Statutory Equality Duties**

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires public authorities, in carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between:

- persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status, or sexual orientation;
- men and women generally;
- persons with a disability and persons without; and
- persons with dependants (ie people with caring responsibilities) and persons without.

Without prejudice to the above obligation, public authorities, in carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland, are also required to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

The Act also requires public authorities to prepare Equality Schemes stating how they propose to fulfil these duties. The core of all Schemes, in terms of the duty to have due regard to the promotion of equality of opportunity and regard to the promotion of good relations, is the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) of policies. However, not all policies or proposals for legislation require an EQIA. A policy does not require an EQIA if it has been screened out at an early stage of policy development by answering the four screening questions set down by the Equality Commission on page 36 of its Guide to the statutory duties (and reproduced in all departmental Equality Schemes). A note should be kept of the reasoning behind such assessment. Where an EQIA is required, the Equality Commission has issued helpful Practical Guidance on Equality Impact Assessment. Each Department has equality personnel who can advise on these issues.

It is essential that there is a statement in all Executive papers covering:

- a summary of the outcome of an EQIA; or
- if an EQIA has not yet been carried out, when it will be done; or
- a statement that it is the Minister's view that there are no equality issues and a brief explanation as to the reasoning behind this view. It may be useful to refer to the screening criteria used.

### **Equality Impact Assessment**

All policies need to be proofed or have their impact assessed against a wide range of criteria. All policies where screening indicates that it is necessary need to undergo Equality Impact Assessment under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Proofing is also necessary in relation to Human Rights, and there are requirements introduced either by the Executive or as a result of UK Government or international obligations for environmental, rural, regulatory, sustainability and health impact assessments.

Public authorities have obligations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act to ensure that equality of opportunity and good relations are central to policy making, policy implementation and review, as well as service delivery.

Public authorities also have employer and/or service provider responsibilities, to promote equality and good practice, not to discriminate and also have disability duties.

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland has extensive guidance on how public bodies can meet their legal obligations.

### **Some links to useful sources of information are below:**

<http://dfponline.intranet.nics.gov.uk/index/corporate-guidance/dfp-communication/staff-brief-archive/staff-brief-march-2012/section75-the-revised-arrangements-presentation.pdf>

<http://www.equalityni.org/Employers-Service-Providers/Public-Authorities/Section75/Section-75/What-is-an-EQIA>

<http://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Employers%20and%20Service%20Providers/PracticalGuidanceonEQIA2005.pdf>

## **Regulatory Impact Assessment**

The Northern Ireland Better Regulation Strategy requires all departments, arms length bodies and other public bodies to consider a Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) as part of their policy development process.

An RIA is a tool which informs policy decisions. It is designed to help with the consideration of potential economic impacts and would therefore be considered with other tools utilised to assess social and environmental impacts on policy development.

Furthermore when an RIA is deemed necessary, consideration should also be given to the inclusion of a review clause or end clause to any regulation as part of conducting the RIA.

A Regulation can be defined as: a rule or guidance with which failure to comply would result in the regulated entity or person coming into conflict with the law or being ineligible for continued funding, grants or other schemes. This can be summarised as all measures with legal force imposed by central government and other schemes operated by central government.

There is extensive guidance on RIAs available from <http://online.intranet.nics.gov.uk/bpm-ria.pdf>

## **Health Impact Assessment**

Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is already included in NICS Policy Toolkit and will continue to be a practical tool which will be used to support Health in All Policies (HiAP) by judging the potential health effects of a policy, programme or project on a population, particularly on vulnerable or disadvantaged groups. HIA can inform the decision-making process with the aim of maximising the proposal's positive health effects and minimising its negative health effects.

The Strategic Framework for Public Health, Making Life Better 2013-2023 highlights the importance of all Government and public sector policies and strategies taking account of their impact on health and well-being. HIA can be used as a tool to reinforce and influence the HiAP concept as described above and carrying out an HIA on all Departments' policies and programmes is still seen as a critical means of addressing the social determinants of health and reducing health inequalities.

HIA can help acknowledge the wide ranging health related issues which occur from the application of other policies and initiatives and helps to identify relevant stakeholders. HIA also provides an integrated perspective to policy development and encourages joined-up thinking and working. Guidance on Health Impact Assessment can be found [HERE](#).

### **Poverty**

The policy area on Poverty and Child Poverty has transferred to the Department for Communities. The Welfare Reform and Work Act amended the Child Poverty Act (CPA) 2010 to rename to 'Life Chances Act 2010';

Work to progress implementation of the Child Poverty Strategy 2016-19 will be taken forward by the Department for Communities. Work to progress the development of a strategy to tackle poverty, social exclusion and patterns of deprivation based on objective need will also be taken forward by the Department for Communities. As work continues to develop a new Programme for Government and a new Social Strategy work to tackle poverty and child poverty will be integral to this.

### **Human Rights**

Although TEO has overarching responsibility for equality and human rights policy in the NICS, Departments are responsible for equality and human rights issues that fall within their areas of responsibility. The NICS is supported in its human rights work by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC).

The introduction of the Human Rights Act 1998 on 2 October 2000 and the establishment of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission on 1 March 1999, had a significant impact on the work of the NI departments. Everyone in a department, or an agency, or in a public body, needs to be aware of the effect the ECHR might have on their work. If the policy has an impact on the rights of individuals, you will need to bear in mind the need to comply with the Convention. You will need to be aware of the possibility of your decisions, or decisions taken by Ministers acting on your advice, being challenged on ECHR grounds.

Where necessary, existing legislation must be examined to identify provisions which might not be compatible with the ECHR and future policy and legislation developed taking account of the ECHR, the Human Rights Act and the Northern Ireland Act. There must be a statement that the human rights implications of the proposed policy/legislation have been assessed and that the Minister is satisfied that the proposals are compatible with Convention Rights as incorporated by the Human Rights Act 1998. If such a statement cannot be made then there has to be an explanation.

Detailed information is available in the [Northern Ireland Civil Service Human Rights Guide](#). Each Department also has a designated 'Human Rights contact'. You are encouraged to seek further advice, particularly from departmental solicitors.

## **Sustainable Development**

The Executive Office oversees the implementation of the Sustainable Development Strategy across government. The department has responsibility for:

- the development, oversight and monitoring of the Northern Ireland Sustainable Development Strategy and Implementation Plan;
- policy co-ordination and mainstreaming sustainable development across Government;
- delivery of a number of key strategic objectives directly

## **Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016**

Section 1 of this Act places a duty on government departments, along with other public authorities, to have due regard to rural needs when developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans and when designing and delivering public services.

## **The Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland 2035**

This provides an overarching statutory strategic planning framework to address a range of economic, social, environmental and community issues, which are relevant to delivering the objectives of achieving sustainable development and social cohesion in Northern Ireland.

Importantly, it provides a framework within which choices can be made on key decisions about the infrastructural development of Northern Ireland. Transport Policy, Strategy and Legislation Division of the Department for Infrastructure will provide any additional guidance and advice as necessary.

Link to CAL catalogue:

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<http://nical.nigov.net/cal-catalogue.htm>

Web Links

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<http://raguide.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/RAPACaseStudies.pdf>

<https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/OBA02/OBA02CaseStudies.pdf>

<http://www.aecf.org/resources/turning-curves-achieving-results/>

