

NIPSA Submission

to the Consultation on the Draft
Programme for Government
(PfG) Framework 2016-2021



July 2016

Introduction

1. NIPSA is the largest trade union in Northern Ireland representing over 43,000 members, employed across the whole of the public service, in organisations such as the Northern Ireland Civil Service and its Agencies, Local Government, Education, Health and Social Care, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive as well as a host of Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDBPs). NIPSA also represents a significant number of members in the community and voluntary sector.

A flawed foundation

2. The Draft Programme for Government (PfG) Framework 2016-21 document is founded on the Stormont House Agreement (SHA) and “Fresh Start” document which the Programme states the Executive will implement. NIPSA has previously presented a detailed analysis of this Agreement/document¹ which we will not re-iterate at length here. In summary we warned against the trajectory and ideological underpinning of the public finance elements of the “deal” (public sector job losses, sale of public assets, bogus claims of a £2bn stimulus package that in reality included very little ‘new’ money, etc.). We stand by this critique and the fear expressed by the Equality Coalition that “the most likely outcome of the package of proposals in the Stormont House Agreement (SHA), its financial annex and ‘A Fresh Start’ is that inequality between the two communities will increase in a range of ways. If austerity in its current form is implemented without rigorous attention to its impact in terms of equality, the approach does in effect guarantee deepening inequality.”²
3. A key difficulty we have, therefore, is that the PfG takes the contentious, ill-conceived and, in equality terms, untested foundation (discussed further below) of the SHA and treats challenges to it as “old news” that’s been “dealt with” as it looks, uncritically towards 2021.

Deliberately imprecise?

4. The breadth of the Programme for Government’s (PfG) scope and the timelines to which it alludes (“generational in nature”) are considerable. The very title of the document

¹“A failure of Imagination: The Stormont House Agreement and Budget Choices for Northern Ireland” [On line] Available: <http://www.nipsa.org.uk/NIPSA-in-Action/Policy-and-Research/A-Failure-of-Imagination> September 2015.

² [On line] Available: [http://www.caj.org.uk/files/2016/03/15/A_FRESH_START_FOR_EQUALITY_-_FINAL_\(2\).pdf](http://www.caj.org.uk/files/2016/03/15/A_FRESH_START_FOR_EQUALITY_-_FINAL_(2).pdf).

however as “draft” and “framework” with “detailed plans” not developed until the end of 2016 may lead to the impression that what is actually being consulted on at this stage is *deliberately* imprecise. We can take one individual outcome to exemplify this breadth. Outcome 8 (“we care for others and we help those in need”) ‘covers’ – historical institutional abuse, the needs of victims/survivors and other issues associated with our past. No-one would claim dealing with these issues is easy or quick to resolve but there is a danger that an outcome this broad presents no *immediate demands* of the Executive, beyond facing the consequences of these issues in a long list of desired “improvements”, as it continues to “govern”.

Outcome-based policy making (OBPM)

5. This concern is not eased by the fact that, as early as the Foreword, the PfG stresses that the different approach the Executive will take focuses on “impact” rather than the actions “we take within Government”. NIPSA believes this approach runs the risk of diluting the fullest accountability (see below in relation to Statutory obligations/monitoring data etc.), shifting attention to final long-term “outcomes” rather than the very levers of Government that are responsible, at a strategic level, for delivering them more urgently. In short, by re-stating positive change may be generational, it lets Government, in the broadest sense, off the hook.
6. In addition the uncritical embracing of the “outcomes based” approach implies that it is either new or its merits uncontested. It is clearly neither.³ In particular this approach risks making an artificially created indicator or proxy more important than the real target and, as opposed to the problem of thinking that is too long-term, creates a difficulty by doing the opposite in a search for easy “wins” at project level. As a consequence “making organisations accountable for results which are beyond their control means that organisations learn instead to manage what they can control – the production of data.”⁴ Instead of caution in relation to this approach, or outlining how international, academic criticism of this methodology will be addressed in the Executive’s use of it, however, the

³ See discussion [On line] Available: <http://sluggerotoole.com/2016/07/05/soapbox-the-sorry-tale-of-outcome-based-performance-management/> or [On line] Available: <http://viewdigital.org/2016/07/01/dr-toby-love-dissenting-voice-outcomes-based-approach/>.5/7/2016.

⁴Ibid.

PfG adopts a faddish advocacy of OBPM, uncritically plugging the Mark Friedman book with cultish certainty.

Economic uncertainty

7. The real test of the sincerity and long-term commitment underlying the PfG's intent will be when a future budget is attached to its objectives. Prior to seeing such a budget, it is clear that in the context of the repercussions of "Brexit", uncertainty will dominate economic discussion. While we cannot predict how national or international policy decisions will affect the local economy, what is clear is the need to reinforce and enhance any economic "certainty" that can be secured. This can be done by the Northern Ireland Executive and its PfG strengthening the planning, leverage and reach that public services as the "spine" of society provide. Nothing to weaken this spine – in terms of funding, staffing, ownership or delivery should be undertaken in a future PfG and/or on advice from the OECD Review of Public Governance.
8. In the fortnight after the EU referendum result alone, for example we have seen the abandonment of the absurd, self-imposed plan for a surplus by 2020⁵ and a further declaration of reckless ambition re UK levels of corporation tax.⁶ Both of these signals and the uncertainty of what a 2016 Autumn Statement from the UK Government under a new Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer will look like, should give the Northern Ireland Executive pause for genuine and profound reflection on the nature of its own economic ambitions.
9. In particular, it should revisit the case the Trade Union Movement made to rebut the economic rationale and unethical concept of lowering Northern Ireland's corporation tax rate.⁷ At a time when individual tax avoidance and national/regional operation of "off-shore" tax havens rightly attracts censure, for Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and the UK to be in a "race to the bottom" of who will ask corporations to pay *least* tax on their profits is a ludicrous proposition. This economic model has only one certain loser – the populations reliant on public services funded from a progressive taxation system. For example, even without the off-setting arrangements required by EU membership (and we

⁵[On line] Available: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-36684452_1/7/2016.

⁶[On line] Available: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-36699642_4/7/2016.

⁷[On line] Available: <http://www.ictuni.org/download/pdf/corpotaxlores.pdf>

are clearly a number of years away from such arrangements being set aside), who realistically thinks that the Treasury, as an ever-more enthusiastic supporter of lowering corporation tax for the purposes of the City of London, would wish to cede advantage to a regional parliament? The initial response to the latest developments on this issue from the new Finance Minister is far from encouraging.

Meeting statutory obligations

10. A general and worrying point about the document and its approach is that it is written as if we are starting from a post-Stormont House “blank sheet” when, in fact, we have “sheets” filled with evidence of underwhelming performance since the establishment of the devolved institutions, particularly in the context of how Section 75 obligations have or have not been met. The real starting point, therefore, should have been an audit of this far from “finished business”. For example, analysis⁸ of the 2011-5 PfG claimed that of the 82 policy pledges made in this document, 45 were “achieved”, 19 “failed” and achievement on 18 was “unclear” or only “partially” met. Even if the Executive do not accept this analysis in its entirety, should a new PfG not assess more explicitly how such under-performance/the appearance of under-performance could not happen again?
11. Similarly at the time the PfG was being written, it took a legal challenge to push the Executive to meet its legal duty to “tackle poverty, social exclusion and patterns of deprivation based on objective need” under S28E of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (as amended). This again raises the question of why the responsibility of meeting statutory obligations are not more explicitly outlined and properly timetabled within the PfG (despite the reference to “social” and other strategies that will deal with previous Executive Commitments). Will this reference mean, for example, that statutory duties re ethnic and linguistic minorities are addressed, that the Sexual Orientation Strategy promised within the “Together: Building a United Community” document of May 2015⁹ is advanced?

⁸ See [On line] Available: <http://www.thedetail.tv/articles/stormont-fails-to-deliver-nearly-half-of-its-government-commitments> 27/4/2016.

⁹ [On line] Available: https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/ofmdfm_dev/together-building-a-united-community-strategy.pdf May 2016.

12. Similarly, in relation to the Children Services Co-operation Act (NI) 2015, while some of the Children's Outcomes in this legislation (such as learning and achieving) are directly represented in terms of the governmental Outcomes and Indicators chosen (Outcome 14 – We Give Our Children and Young People The Best Start In Life and the indicators used to support this), the other high level Outcomes are more tenuously related, reflected either in the body of text for Outcomes or connected to specific indicators in the 2015 Act e.g. 'living in safety and with stability' or 'the enjoyment of play and leisure'.
13. The same point can also be made about the PfG's relationship to the Children (NI) Order 1995 that embeds definitions and a framework of legal duties and responses to both Children and Families into the responses of Health and Social Care and the wider governmental apparatus. Where and how will the PfG 2016-2021 meet these requirements? How will it ensure appropriate attention is given to the sub-population of children and families in need particularly without indicators that specifically focus on the sub-set of families impacted upon by multiple adverse experiences e.g. born in areas of deprivation, impacted upon by poverty and lack of educational attainment etc.?
14. In this way, given the Children's Services Co-operation Act is **in force** and that this Act imposes an overarching statutory duty on all Assembly Departments and Statutory Agencies to co-operate on issues that contribute to the well-being of children and young people, it is clear that, unless revised, the current PfG framework will be a missed opportunity to deliver on the outworkings of this Act.
15. Not unique to this Act, therefore, the questions of reporting, resource allocation and delivery on existing statutory obligations and the potential both for confusion in terms of operation of two Outcomes frameworks - one grounded in legislation the other at a policy level - is not addressed in the PfG and will clearly be subject to future legal challenge.
16. Again, the fear in this regard is that by not dealing properly with existing statutory responsibilities, a new mandate is being treated as a license to "plough on" regardless. The suspicion that this may be the real process being undertaken is not helped by the decision to adopt the limitation of the consultation period on the PfG from twelve to eight weeks as recommended by "Fresh Start" or the decision to merely publish a screening exercise of

the decision to adopt the OBPM approach, not the likely impact of the strategic policies themselves and how *they* have been screened in relation to the Section 75 implications.

17. We believe that to properly address “Outcome 3: we have a more equal society” we should begin with an examination of how unmet obligations to equality will be addressed and underpin future Executive action. This is the standard against which the PfG should be measured. In this regard, the risk of working from agreements (Stormont House and “Fresh Start”) that were not “equality-proofed” is a serious one. As the Equality Coalition state:

The threat is therefore clear – the SHA approach has decoupled equality from ‘peace’. Underlying the SHA is an assumption that the peace process will remain secure despite increased inequality or poverty. History does not bear this out. It has been well accepted from all political sides of the conflict that addressing inequality was critical to addressing the root causes of the conflict.¹⁰

The need to follow the statistics and then *act*

18. The distance between this huge challenge on equality and the PfG’s lead measure that seeks progress on “reconciliation” through changes within the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey on cultural/community “respect” could not be greater. Its narrowness places no responsibility on the Executive to deliver on substantive issues, indeed may give an excuse for caution in case subjective and possibly unsatisfiable survey findings on community respect are adversely affected. This is an invitation to fail, a refusal on the Executive’s part to follow where the deprivation statistics lead and then act:

If the GFA commitments on equality between the two communities in horizontal terms remain ‘unfinished business’, this is true also of vertical inequalities framed by *the Joint Declaration by the British and Irish Governments April 2003* as, ‘those many disadvantaged areas, including areas which are predominantly loyalist or nationalist, which have suffered the worst impact of the violence and alienation of the past’. These communities have still not experienced a ‘proportionate peace dividend’ and while the most deprived remain disproportionately Catholic, it is the failure to address disadvantage and objective need *rather than the failure to focus on sectarian differentials* that most obviously characterise continuing inequality in terms of life chances.

This demographic transition provides a key challenge for any contemporary equality agenda. More specifically it is the context in which we need to assess the potential equality impacts of the SHA. But this does not, of course, mean that Northern

¹⁰[On line] Available: [http://www.caj.org.uk/files/2016/03/15/A_FRESH_START_FOR_EQUALITY_-_FINAL_\(2\).pdf](http://www.caj.org.uk/files/2016/03/15/A_FRESH_START_FOR_EQUALITY_-_FINAL_(2).pdf).

Ireland is becoming a ‘Catholic state’. Rather it is *a state of minorities* – in which three defining elements of its contemporary ethnic demography – Catholic, Protestant and a multifarious BME/‘Other’ – are all in different ways vulnerable and subject to inequality and disadvantage. From this perspective, the current situation provides more opportunities for equality than threats. It is possible to envisage - or perhaps re-envision - an equality agenda in Northern Ireland – premised on the commitments made by the two governments and other parties to the GFA – which protects the interests of *everyone* in Northern Ireland.

It is profoundly dangerous to swap the universal principles of justice and equality grounded in international law that were embedded in the GFA for pork barrel politics at Stormont.¹¹

19. This discussion on “reconciliation” therefore, should state explicitly how the Executive will **deliver** on, for example, legacy issues, deal with “traditional” division *and also* look to how a multi-cultural society would be created/facilitated by specific Executive action. Action should be dictated by the fundamental, statutory aims of promoting equality of opportunity and good relations not reduced to a narrow, subjective “indicator” that itself reduces delivery to ‘sharing out’ not ‘sharing’.

The broader equality challenge

20. This broader challenge on equality would also look at barriers to opportunity within our current educational structures. Whilst Indicator 12 refers to a need to address “the structural and system-related factors that militate against an education system delivering both excellence and equity”, the PfG does not suggest any imminent challenge to the smug acceptance that persistent educational inequity/lifelong under-achievement is a price worth paying for educational attainment “at the top” and the lifelong inequalities it entrenches.

21. A wider focus would look at the structural change needed to support pupils/students from the earliest age and how this would skew resources to overcome socio-economic disadvantage. Similarly, access to further and higher education (discussed within “Indicator 14: Improve the skills profile of the population”) should again be viewed as an issue of equality of access in relation to: student places/support and socio-economic status; a fee regime that is prohibitive and provision of study grants/bursaries that make post-secondary study a realistic possibility for the greatest number of students. It is only

¹¹[On line Available: [http://www.caj.org.uk/files/2016/03/15/A_FRESH_START_FOR_EQUALITY_-_FINAL_\(2\).pdf](http://www.caj.org.uk/files/2016/03/15/A_FRESH_START_FOR_EQUALITY_-_FINAL_(2).pdf)].

this broadening of opportunity that sets the baseline within which the “innovation” (referred to in Indicator 22) can be realised.

22. Overall, therefore, on “equality” in its widest sense, the Executive should *lead*, not surrender to vested interests, march to the beat of the most regressive drum or have to be dragged to a 21st century position via the courts. If the Executive genuinely wants to be progressive, its PfG should make explicit how it will move on, inter alia, equality in relation to: childcare (see Para 35 below), same-sex marriage and reproductive rights compliant with human rights standards etc.

Trade Union role as the largest civic organisation

23. Reference is made within Next Steps to an “action plan” linked to the PfG’s desired outcomes and that this would “identify the key stakeholders and partners and the plans that will help to achieve success”. It is essential that the key role for Trade Unions is acknowledged in such development and that any plans are fully cognisant and properly supportive of existing negotiating fora. This would also make explicit that Government Departments are engaging their key resource, i.e. their workforce in the process of the design and delivery of services and that this will be central to the indicators listed against this outcome. The document should also make explicit how the fullest engagement with the trade union movement, as the largest civic organisation in society, is acknowledged and our wider policy input facilitated.

Data gaps

24. The 42 indicators’ accompanying “measures” are stated as “largely derived from existing statistics”. It is a concern, however, that there still exists a considerable statistical deficit in relation to a number of these measures and that they have been stated *before* a means to measure them has been devised. In some cases, the PfG makes explicit that a “baseline has yet to be established.”

25. Similarly, while it is of course correct to look at the “regional balance” of the economy (Outcome 1/ Indicator 34) the fact that areas are as yet undefined is troubling. The risk to any *meaningful* targeting, if targets are too loosely defined, is obvious. The experience of Targeting Social Need (TSN followed by New TSN) where funding “*adjacent* to TSN areas”

was said to be acceptable in relation to TSN “targeting” is an example of a previous, inadequate, precedent.

26. The PfG’s discussion of the importance of statistical data also requires a commitment to/investment in NISRA alongside a range of other resources to enhance the quality of the data sets available across Government. This will ensure the maintenance, improvement and appropriate use (informing resource allocation, commissioning and procurement decisions) of data essential to the successful delivery of the PfG agenda. Data sets must also be robust and responsive enough at a local level in order to inform and affect Executive decisions that impact upon the most deprived people in our society.

Public health delivered by public sector

27. In relation to No. 2 (Reduce health inequality) and the No 5 indicator (“Improve the quality of the healthcare experience”) it should be explicit that this health “experience” is within a free at the point of use National Health Service. Furthermore in terms of the “measure” on No. 5 – “satisfaction”, there is a need to disaggregate the patient experience of individual staff/treatment and the patient experience of structures/limitation within which such staff operate. It is common, for example, for patients/relatives to praise staff generosity/commitment, etc. while at the same time criticising the shortages/delays etc, over which these staff have no control. Justified discontent on the latter raises the more profound question of how we create a fuller, more democratic engagement on health outcomes (again rooted in staff experience and the public accountability of health providers) and how this would be built into a PfG.

28. This wider discussion of health brings us back to the question of delivery/accountability. We sometimes hear of the need to “take politics out of health” and that the health “outcome” irrespective of the sector through which it is delivered is what matters. In reality, this cliché is cover for the most political act of all - allowing the private sector to dictate the terms of their “rescue” of NHS “failings”, re-configure the NHS at their behest and do so in the most expensive, fragmented and profiteering manner.¹²

¹²See NIPSA research on Transforming Your Care [On line] Available: <http://www.nipsa.org.uk/NIPSA-in-Action/Policy-and-Research/Transforming-Your-Care> March 2014.

29. In addition in terms of Indicator 9 (“personal care at home/self-directed support”) whilst it is entirely valid that the care needs of patients are met in a manner that best suits these needs (including at home) this should not be an excuse to strip the staffing/funding from core services and reduce such ‘care’ to limited home visits or families turned into ‘employers’ of their relatives’ carers.
30. While preventative and early(ier) intervention approaches are referred to in the PfG document, there is a lack of an indicator/indicators on improving outcomes for populations living with chronic conditions. Developing such an indicator that captures the ability of public agencies to contribute to meeting the needs and improving the management of these conditions is crucial and reinforces the point that attempting change of this magnitude cannot be done in a fragmented, inadequately funded/staffed and part-privatised service.

Public housing and infrastructural investment

31. The reference at Indicator 8 to “suitable housing” should make explicit that this suitability also requires the political will to address both need and affordability. In this regard the equality dimension that necessitated the creation and operation of the Housing Executive and its reach in terms of maintenance of standards/rent setting etc. should be acknowledged. It should also establish that in terms of the necessary future accountability (including rent control) of housing we need a properly funded Housing Executive delivering high quality housing within the public sector. The changed economic situation referred to above should also lead the Executive to fully explore the opportunity to borrow and build (as our previous research has recommended)¹³ in relation to housing and other infrastructural projects. Indeed such constructive, secure and in comparative terms cheap (government) borrowing offers a dramatic contrast to the PPP/PFI arrangements that have left us the millstone of long term liabilities.¹⁴
32. The questions of “affordability” and “access” are also essential in relation to discussion of public transport (Indicator 25). The wider debate in the document about active citizenship

¹³[On line] Available: <http://www.nipsa.org.uk/Campaigns/Keep-our-Housing-Public/Campaign-launch> Sept. 2013.

¹⁴ See "The use of public private partnerships in Northern Ireland" Hellowell, M., Price, D., Pollock, A. M. Belfast: NIPSA (2009).

in the modern economy that does not explore the empowerment of an integrated transport system particularly in relation to current infrastructural imbalance¹⁵ rings very hollow in this context.

Employment law

33. In relation to Indicator 33 (“Reduce underemployment”), it should be acknowledged that the Executive has the legislative power to ban/improve protections within (devolved) employment law relating to zero-hours contracts or exclusivity clauses within such contracts. It failed to address this issue in the last mandate and should revisit it in the new term.
34. Furthermore, labour laws generally can and, as a devolved matter, should be written to the highest international standards. This is the most effective lever for raising the “equality bar” via an empowered unionised workforce securing and enhancing a raft of social protections that flow from collective action.

Rigorous environmental regulation

35. In relation to Outcome 2 – reference to “working with business to minimise its impact on the environment through intelligent regulation” gives the wrong emphasis in terms of where the power dynamic should lie in this regard, effectively allowing the “tail to wag the dog”. An Executive that genuinely seeks the outcome of “protecting the environment” would establish independent regulation that is sufficiently robust so that business compliance is swift or, where it is not, is met with meaningful consequences, not paltry fines. Any other approach surrenders independence and rigour to commercial, vested interests. In this regard we are not encouraged by the signal on regulation or independence that is sent by placing the Northern Ireland Environment Agency within the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

¹⁵ See The Detail [On line] Available: http://www.thedetail.tv/articles/stormont-s-new-era-will-give-us-real-government-or-a-real-crisis_25/5/2016.

A supportive employment climate and genuine social security

36. Discussion of “better” jobs (Outcome No. 6) refers to “well-paid” and “sustainable” jobs but does not define what these terms actually mean. We believe that the discussion of jobs should also make clear (as we refer to above at Para 32) how employment works best for all in a supportive climate of employment rights shaped by collective bargaining that secures and protects terms and conditions including pension provision. This reinforces the point that it is a mistake to sacrifice “good jobs” in the public sector in order to move towards a model of precarious employment that fragments local service delivery and offers workers as a cheap, “off-shore” option for Foreign Direct Investment.
37. The references within Outcome 8 (“we care for others and we help those in need”) needs to address the issue of poverty – including in-work poverty in the context of austerity and the use of powers the Executive *does* possess to oppose it. It should also, as we discussed above, not facilitate its own austerity agenda as outlined in the Stormont Castle and Stormont House Agreement. We would emphasise that the case that needs to be made and currently is not is for “social security” in or out of work (including an effective Childcare strategy) not “welfare.” In addition, a full, genuine discussion of “life expectancy” requires examination of how quality of life is facilitated by the leverage of pension protection/improvement that the Executive, as the largest employer, could offer. This is also enhanced by the wider social security that properly funded public services deliver to *all* citizens.

Executive leverage on procurement

38. In this context given the enormous leverage the Executive exerts across the local economy through its departmental spends, procurement and commissioning exercises, it is disappointing that the opportunity has not been taken to include indicators that would embed best employment and social practices within the PfG’s discussion of employment. The Executive, for example, should examine the lessons from the damaging, expensive short-termism in Health and Social Care’s “race to the bottom” (in terms of the quality of workforce in domiciliary care services) which delivered some limited savings in that sector, but brought larger, long-term costs to other service users, those employed by these profiteers and ultimately, the Executive who have to provide the finance that “mops up the

mess” in the longer term, dealing with issues such as poor service, low pay and stressed families.

39. In order to avoid this scenario being replicated throughout the public services, indicators should be developed and embedded at an Executive level to ensure that all commissioned and procured services are underpinned with best practice and social protections. This would ensure investment contributes fully to the overall aims of the Executive Outcomes Framework e.g. by supporting proper social and employment practice in these areas. Without such an indicator the particular role of social economy/community sector providers (in delivering key aspects of the early help and preventative frameworks that the *Outcomes* framework is predicated upon) are particularly vulnerable to being overlooked. The Executive should also ensure that the tendering process ensures that any company to which public money will be paid has no history of tax avoidance/evasion or history of blacklisting trade unionists.

Why Public Sector Delivery Matters

40. This reinforces the point that Outcome 11’s discussion of “high quality public services” in referring to the contribution that such services make “to increasing people’s wellbeing” should also refer to the wider implications to society as a whole that these services are provided within a public sector framework with the accountability to taxpayers and service users that this entails. This is why public service delivery matters. By contrast, a privatised model means that the provider has a primary, indeed legal obligation to service its shareholders (who may not even live in the jurisdiction) not to the general public whose taxes are in fact allowing the state to generate profit for these companies. Furthermore, in terms of scrutiny and accountability in a privatised/part-privatised environment, what redress does the state have to ensure performance? A legal battle over fees after performance failure? Barring such firms from future contracts? Any and all measures of redress, however successful, long after the horse has bolted, do not address the fact that the fundamental issue of service to the public cannot be sacrificed by a delivery mechanism that places this duty in a queue behind the search for profit.¹⁶ This also reinforces the point that the staff on the ground, via the negotiating fora of their trade

¹⁶ See full discussion of this need in [On line] Available: [http://www.nipsa.org.uk/NIPSA-in-Action/Policy-and-Research/The-Daylight-Robbery-of-Privatisation-\(1\)](http://www.nipsa.org.uk/NIPSA-in-Action/Policy-and-Research/The-Daylight-Robbery-of-Privatisation-(1)). April 2013.

unions, are best placed and must be central, to any discussion of public service delivery/reform.

Assets should be used not sold

41. The importance of the public sector in delivery is also emphasised in discussion of Outcome 13 re infrastructure. Here again in terms of reach and accountability the Executive should be treating the public sector as an asset to use, not strip. Only such an asset in health, housing and social security, for example, has the possibility of the coherent delivery necessary to provide, via public services, the 'spine' of society – a 'spine' we can actually enhance and control in a centralised, coherent manner at a local level whether in the rents of social housing, the fares in public transport or in a publicly owned water service.

Conclusion

42. The PfG's stated desire to think long-term about the society we want to live in and how we might get there is welcome. This is most effectively achieved, however, from a solid foundation rooted in the obligations that grew out of the Good Friday Agreement and the equality legislation required to underpin it. On this foundation, we need: strategic investment in order to build or restore the safety net for society that public services, delivered with full accountability in the public sector, provide. Ultimately, it is against this benchmark that we will assess the next version of the PfG, its linked strategies and most importantly its budget.



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