



# Draft NI Commitments for inclusion in the UK National Action Plan

## Discussion Paper

### *September 2015*

#### **Theme 1: Access to Information**

**Challenge:** Ensuring timely and accessible provision of all information relating to policy development and implementation.

##### **Context**

Access to information is essential to the spirit and practice of open government. Full and effective citizen engagement cannot be achieved without access to all information relevant to all stages of government policy development and implementation, including identification of need, delivery and evaluation

##### **Actions:**

1. Protect the right to Freedom of Information and ensure government compliance with the FoI legislation
2. Ensure that citizens have the right to attend, report on and broadcast the proceedings of their representatives
3. 3. Strive for 'maximum disclosure', i.e., a situation in which information is only withheld from the public where absolutely necessary to prevent harm to a legitimate interest

**Commitment:** Pass access to information law that guarantees the public's right to information and access to government data

#### **Theme 2: Anti- Corruption (Transparency as Regulation)**

**Challenge:** Restore trust, integrity & accountability in government

##### **Context**

Fiscal transparency – the timely publication of essential budget documents forms the basic building blocks of budget accountability and an open budget system.

Political party donations - disclosures related to elected or senior public officials, i.e., rules that require public disclosure of income and assets for elected and senior public officials, are essential to anti-corruption and open, accountable government. There is a lack of transparency around political party donations in Northern Ireland.

##### **Actions:**



1. Provide full transparency & disclosure with regard to political party campaign funding and donations to political parties.
2. Deliver fiscal transparency through the timely publication of essential budget documents

**Commitment:** Promote legislation that requires disclosure of information about political donations

### **Theme 3: Civic Participation (Citizen Engagement & Participatory Democracy)**

**Challenge:** To create more opportunities for civic society and individual citizens to shape decisions that impact on their community and on their lives

#### **Context**

Open government requires openness to citizen participation and engagement in policy making and governance, including basic protections for civil liberties. The benefits of engagement include: better policy outcomes; better service delivery; more engaged & empowered citizens; and greater trust in & better understanding of government.

#### **Actions:**

1. Implement a policy pilot between DFP/DoE/NILGA on participatory budgeting within councils
2. Implement a pilot project using innovative and effective engagement mechanisms to achieve a greater number and a wider diversity of participants
3. Open Policy making processes to include processes with children and young people.

**Commitment:** Encourage innovative forms of participation, engagement and collaboration

### **Theme 4: Open Data**

**Challenge:** Ensure that government is open by default, not exception

#### **Context**

Open data is the raw material of open knowledge. Accessible, usable and shared data creates knowledge and innovative processes.

#### **Actions:**

1. Develop a protocol and best-practice guidance for implementing open data principles across all Government Departments and agencies
2. Issue a Local Authorities Data Transparency Code requiring local authorities to publish key information and data and ensure local authorities commit to open data principles
3. Ensure that Government departments proactively publish the same performance data externally which they are internally held to account for.
4. Encourage & support projects that promote data literacy.

5. Support open data by matching UK government commitments, particularly in terms of spatial and transport data.
6. Support open government by making annual versions of the Land and Property Service pointer data freely available as well as providing access to a broad range of (currently licensed) Ordnance Survey NI products which are vital for spatial and infrastructural planning.
7. Identify, document and publish core reference data for Northern Ireland, as per the UK government's National Information Infrastructure project.

**Commitment:** Take action to ensure that government is open by default, not exception

### **Theme 5: Public Accountability (Government Accountability to the Public)**

**Challenge:** Ensure Government is more accountable to citizens

**Context:** Lobbyists are paid to influence government decisions; whether it's the private healthcare lobby pushing for NHS reforms; or banks lobbying against reform of the financial system; or the construction industry seeking to develop land, the activities of lobbyists affect our lives in countless ways. There is a growing accountability gap for outsourced services the public have a right to know who is delivering government contracts including contract management and performance reporting mechanisms.

**Actions:**

1. Establish a statutory NI register of lobbyists; and publish registers of interest as open data
2. Require Ministers, MLA's and local councilors to publish their diaries for public viewing
3. Establish a Forum of cross-Departmental representatives to implement open government commitments/reforms
4. A commitment to increase the availability of public information on the performance of public procurement.
5. Extend Freedom of Information Act to extend freedom of information coverage to contractors of services from Government.

**Commitment:** Develop legislation to ensure fair and transparent lobbying

### **Theme 6: Technology & Innovation**

**Challenge:** To harness technology to provide innovative ways to improve our democracy

**Actions:**



1. Research & experimentation to create new tools or utilise existing tools and platforms that empower users to be fully active citizens.

**Commitment:** Explore & develop new ways to harness technology to improve our democracy

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