Northern Ireland Open Government Network

**Written Briefing for
NI Assembly Committee for the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister**

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The Open Government Partnership

The Open Government Partnership is a global initiative that aims to secure commitments from governments to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance.

The OGP has grown to 69 participating countries. To join OGP, countries must commit to uphold the principles of open and transparent government by endorsing the Open Government Declaration. All participating countries, which include both the UK and Ireland, are required to co-create a National Action Plan with civil society.

The Northern Ireland Open Government Network

Aligned with the UK Open Government Civil Society Network, the Northern Ireland Open Government Network is an alliance of individual citizens and representatives of voluntary/community organisations with the following vision:

> *To contribute to delivering more open, transparent and accountable government that empowers citizens to shape decisions that impact on their lives*

The Network is funded by the Building Change Trust and Northern Ireland Environment Link provides the secretariat to the Network. The NI Network, which has nearly 200 individual members, represents a diverse coalition of individual citizens and representatives of voluntary and community sector organisations.

The UK Open Government National Action Plan and the Sub-National Dimension

The Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) has been requested by the Cabinet Office to work in collaboration with civic society to propose NI specific commitments for the Third UK Open Government Action Plan. The Third Action Plan is being developed around six overarching open government themes: civic participation; public accountability, anti-corruption; open data; technology & innovation; access to information.

The NI Network has been involved in a collaborative process with DFP officials to develop commitments at an NI level. A set of commitments (see Appendix 1), as forged through a process of co-design have since been passed to senior DFP officials and the Minister's Office for review. A Paper should soon be passed to the Executive for consideration.

Other proposed commitments fall within the remit of the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Network has engaged the Director of Parliamentary Services to shape these commitments. The Network would like the NI Assembly to formally adopt The Declaration of Parliamentary Openness, an international declaration which sets out 44 principles for advancing parliamentary openness.

The Northern Ireland Assembly has a good record on Parliamentary openness and many of the 44 principles are already enshrined in the workings of the Assembly. However, we hope the Declaration can be formally adopted as a demonstrative commitment to the OGP initiative.

The OGP Sub-national Pilot Programme

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) is looking for sub-national governments and energetic partners in civil society to take part in an exciting new pilot program designed to advance open government reform. Up to 10 subnational governments that are pioneers in open government will be invited to take part.

The Pilot is intended to: create opportunities (locally and internationally) to share ideas and experience, test new methods of citizen engagement and improve the impact of the Partnership. It is primarily about exploring ways to make governments more transparent, responsive and effective; delivering greater civic participation in public affairs; and achieving greater prosperity, well-being and human dignity in our own country and in an increasingly interconnected world.

The Pilot Programme provides an exciting opportunity for us to pioneer deliberative civic engagement and democratic innovation in a way that has real value for policy makers as well as citizens.

The Network has been working with DFP on potential commitments around the creation of a Citizens Budget & pilots for Open Contracting and Participatory Budgeting. We would like OFMDFM to consider working with us to develop and deliver some further opportunities for deliberative civic engagement.

Deliberation can be most useful when: the policy in question involves complex issues, uncertainty or conflicting beliefs, values and understanding; the decision requires trade-offs between differing policy options; it's difficult for the decision-maker to make and implement a decision alone and there needs to be buy-in from others.

Common engagement methods include: policy juries, consensus conferences, deliberative polling, crowd-sourcing policy ideas, participatory budgeting and open contracting. One particular engagement method that we are already considering for use in a potential pilot programme is the deliberative workshop or innovation lab - where participants carefully examine a problem and arrive at a well-reasoned solution after a period of inclusive consideration of information, experiences and diverse points of view.

We welcome the opportunity to ask for your thoughts and advice regarding policy areas where deliberative civic engagement could prove most useful.

Conclusion

Northern Ireland is already pioneering open government practice at the sub-national level, but political support is now imperative. The Open Government agenda, which complements much of the rationale evident in the *Fresh Start Agreement*, presents an opportunity for NI to become a shining light at the forefront of this global initiative. In addition to raising Northern Ireland's global credibility, endorsement of, and support for, the open government principles will also enhance the credibility of government and the political institutions at local level. The Network therefore hopes that the Executive will embrace the Open Government initiative by supporting the sub-national pilot and endorsing the open government commitments proposed.

Appendix 1

OPEN DATA

Commitment one Implement the NI Open Data Strategy and work towards its adoption by all public sector agencies.

Commitment two DFP to identify a pilot project to publish a number of key datasets as 4-star or 5-star linked Open Data as defined by W3C

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Commitment one Ensure that Government departments proactively publish the same performance data externally which they are internally held to account for.

Commitment two Ensure greater coordination and collaboration between government Departments in the delivery of FoI requests to ensure all government Departments adhere to FoI processes and requirements as laid out by the ICO

Commitment three The Executive Office (OFMDFM) to set standards and oversee implementation of 'Open by Default' procedures for all Government departments and Arms-Length Bodies.

ANTI CORRUPTION

Commitment one Deliver fiscal transparency through the timely publication of essential budget documents and make them available in a user friendly easily accessible format.

Commitment two Create a citizen's budget that provides a summary and explanation of basic budget information; and present it in an accessible format using simple, clear and understandable language.

Commitment three DFP/CPD to explore a pilot project implementing the Open Contracting Data Standard and visualisation tool with contracts data from CPD as part of the Open Data Strategy.

TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

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

Commitment two Explore opportunities for exemplar projects using data analytics to address public and private sector needs

Commitment three Develop a proposal for a Data Analytics and Research Exploitation Centre

Commitment four Work with ODI Belfast to encourage innovative uses of open data for new products and services
Commitment five In line with the NI Innovation Strategy Scope the potential for a NI SBRI Challenge Fund to support public sector innovations
Commitment Six Explore opportunities for public sector innovation under the Horizon 2020 programme
Commitment Seven Explore opportunities for NI Executive for projects under Space for Smarter Government Programme
Commitment Eight Develop and promote web design standards for use across all regional and local government websites –

PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY

Commitment one The Northern Ireland Executive Ministers to publish diary information about departmental business in an open data format (cvs) on a yearly basis.
Commitment two Deliver greater lobbying transparency by introducing a statutory register of lobbyists covering those engaging with NI Executive Ministers
Commitment three Establish a Forum of cross-Departmental representatives and Civic Society representatives to monitor the delivery of open government commitments.
Commitment four Provide a transparent means of evaluating the success of the public sector in achieving its shared purpose by establishing shared, high level strategic outcomes for achievement.

CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Commitment one Adopt Open Policy making principles in NI
Commitment two Implement pilot projects, at central and local government level, using innovative and effective engagement mechanisms, such as participatory budgeting, open contracting, open policy making etc. to involve a greater number and a wider diversity of participants in a named policy or legislative development process
Commitment three Make NI Direct a more effective consultation hub for all public bodies To include: a.   Links to all government, arm's length bodies and council consultations b.   A consultation toolkit to help citizens fully participate in the consultation process c.   Consider ways of exploring consultation impact.

d.	Reports of evaluations of consultations against 'Open and Accessible Impact Assessment'