

Programme for Government: Draft Outcomes Framework consultation response

By the Chartered Institute of Housing Northern Ireland

This is a response to the consultation by the Northern Ireland Executive on the draft outcomes framework for the programme for government.

CIH commends the Northern Ireland Executive for driving forward an outcomes-based accountability model that first and foremost centres on the needs of people and communities. Covid-19 has exposed the flaws in traditional models and approaches to delivering public services and at the same time has opened up opportunities to develop renewed and innovative ways of working.

CIH would like to take this opportunity to recognise the dedicated work of housing professionals across Northern Ireland who met the challenges thrown up by the covid-19 pandemic with compassion and commitment. The flexible and creative approach adopted by organisations across the sector to deliver services in these unprecedented times, without comprising the needs of the tenants and communities they serve, illustrates that a step-change in the way we deliver public services is possible in the immediate term and should act as a model going forward.

Comments

CIH would like to state from the outset our concern regarding the absence of a specific housing outcome in the draft outcomes framework document, despite the [commitment](#) set out in the New Decade, New Approach (NDNA) deal which stated that 'the Programme for Government outcomes framework will be augmented with a new outcome and indicators to provide specific focus on ensuring every household has access to a good quality, affordable and sustainable home that is appropriate for its needs'.

It is our firm view that housing should be prioritised as specific outcome, with indicators and definitive targets that is reflective of the chronic level of housing need in Northern Ireland. At this point, there remains a feeling of frustration among our members that despite the referencing of the NDNA document in the

draft outcomes framework, which set out the process and approach of the programme for government, a specific housing outcome was nonetheless omitted. This omission will do nothing to build confidence within the sector that housing remains a priority for the Executive.

CIH notes the predilection that exists that housing is an enabler and should therefore exist as a key priority area under a number of outcomes. CIH wants to make clear that housing can only act as an enabler for those who have access to a good quality, affordable and sustainable home. Regrettably, our extensive waiting lists for social housing demonstrate this not to be the case, notwithstanding those living in inadequate housing and those struggling to meet their housing costs. Without a specific housing outcome in any forthcoming programme for government (PfG), we will continue to fail those who do not have a home appropriate to their needs.

[The PfG Draft Outcomes Equality Impact Assessment](#), states that housing “is not included as a standalone Outcome in the draft Framework as it is a single-issue subject that could unduly focus on the activity of building houses rather than on the benefits that flow from people having access to suitable housing.” CIH disagrees with this statement. A specific outcome with appropriate indicators can easily avoid an undue focus solely on the activity of building houses. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the Executive to develop appropriate indicators in order to ensure any specific housing outcome captures these complex, cross-departmental issues and provides a focus on the benefits delivered.

Given the inter-relation of housing to many other aspects of life, it is welcome that housing is included as a key priority area under a number of outcomes, that said, we fundamentally believe it would be best served as a stand-alone outcome.

Building back better

In the context of the covid-19 outbreak and the subsequent economic impact felt by many communities and sectors, we believe that the potential exists to focus on a housing-led economic and social recovery programme. A specific housing outcome, with appropriate key priority areas and ambitious targets, has the potential to alleviate chronic housing shortages and those impacted by them, as well as driving economic growth through construction and associated industries.

Outcome: we live and work sustainably protecting the environment

CIH welcomes the inclusion of housing as a key priority area under this outcome. As climate change continues to threaten our planet - the homes we live in, how we heat them and the way in which they are built, is an integral factor in reducing our carbon emissions and should be a priority for the Executive going forward. The cross-departmental responsibility placed on the Department for Infrastructure, the Department for Communities and the Department of Finance to deliver this outcome is welcome.

However, it is our view that the Department for the Economy, as the department with the statutory responsibility for developing and delivering Northern Ireland's [new energy strategy](#), be also named as a department with oversight on this matter, to ensure the attainability of this outcome.

It is vital that the forthcoming PfG includes an ambitious programme to decarbonise housing. The implementation of a wide-scale retrofitting programme for our current housing stock, coupled with ambitious targets to heat homes using clean energy sources, as well as building new homes at speed using modern methods of construction, has a central role in achieving decarbonisation. Such

commitments are an efficient way to create jobs in the construction and associated industries, as well as ensuring Northern Ireland plays its part in reaching the UK net zero carbon ambition by 2050.

Moving forward, our members will require significant investment from the Executive to ensure the cost of increasing energy efficiency in our new and existing housing stock does not financially fall on the shoulders of tenants through disproportionate rent increases. Likewise, any policy formulation designed to meet climate change targets through new energy sources within our homes must not compromise fuel poverty targets.

Outcome: we have a caring society that supports people throughout their lives

CIH welcomes that tackling homelessness is a key priority area for the Executive. The current covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns have shown how effective the sector has been in meeting the needs of people who are homeless when the provisions and finances are made available to do so. The swift actions by the sector to ensure those experiencing homelessness had access to accommodation during the first lockdown, resulting in zero cases of rough sleeping in Belfast, is evidence that homelessness is not inevitable. Similar resources should be made available on a recurring basis to ensure this becomes the new normal.

It is our view that placing this key priority area under the remit of the Department of Communities (DfC) alone is insufficient and fails to recognise the cross-cutting nature of homelessness and those who find themselves homeless. It is important to note that whilst DfC is the statutory body responsible for social and affordable housing in Northern Ireland, the provision and maintenance of new social and

affordable homes requires the cooperation of the Department for Infrastructure, especially given the barriers facing new social and affordable housing developments due to the ongoing difficulties with wastewater infrastructure. Therefore, we feel it appropriate that the Department for Infrastructure, alongside DfC and the Department of Finance be named as a responsible department.

It is well-evidenced that poor housing costs. Covid-19 has brought this actuality into stark focus, clearly displaying the inter-relation between health and housing. Therefore, it is critical that the Department of Health be named as a department responsible for achieving housing outcomes where key priority areas appropriately fall under its remit. Cross-departmental co-operation is vital if we are to achieve a whole-system approach to delivering good quality, affordable and sustainable homes.

Outcome: people want to live, work and visit here

CIH believes that housing is more than simply the quantity of homes that we build – quality is equally important. The Executive must ensure that housing is not viewed in isolation, but that extensive community planning coupled with the creation of appropriate infrastructure is necessary to ensure that we are not just building houses but more than that, we are building sustainable communities.

It is our view that in order to effectively tackle the issues that prevent people from accessing good quality, affordable homes, the housing selection scheme revisions under the fundamental review of social housing allocations must be implemented without delay. Failure to do so will mean a failure to guarantee accessibility to social housing for all those who need it. It is our view that any further delays will only serve to stigmatise social housing and compound the residualisation of

communities further as noted in our [Rethinking Social Housing: The Next Steps report](#).

CIH maintains that housing has a key role in increasing the longevity of a shared society. We believe that this can be achieved without compromising the needs of perspective tenants and in keeping with the objectives of the allocation system. The Executive should match their stated ambitions regarding the building of a shared future with the necessary funding to ensure shared social housing targets exceed those from the Together: Building a United Community strategy from previous years, in line with the increasing desire for mixed religion neighbourhoods as highlighted by the [2019 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey](#) which recorded that 77 per cent of respondents would prefer to live in a mixed religion neighbourhood.

About CIH

The Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) is the independent voice for housing and the home of professional standards. Our goal is simple - to provide housing professionals and their organisations with the advice, support, and knowledge they need to be brilliant. CIH is a registered charity and not-for-profit organisation. This means that the money we make is put back into the organisation and funds the activities we carry out to support the housing sector. We have a diverse membership of people who work in both the public and private sectors, in 20 countries on five continents across the world. Further information is available at: www.cih.org.

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