



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Committee for The Executive Office

# OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

New Decade, New Approach Work Streams:  
The Executive Office

20 January 2021

# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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**Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Mr Colin McGrath (Chairperson)  
Mr Doug Beattie (Deputy Chairperson)  
Ms Martina Anderson  
Mr Trevor Clarke  
Mr Trevor Lunn  
Mr George Robinson  
Mr Pat Sheehan  
Ms Emma Sheerin  
Mr Christopher Stalford

**Witnesses:**

Ms Siobhan Broderick	The Executive Office
Dr Mark Browne	The Executive Office
Mr Geoffrey Simpson	The Executive Office
Mr Chris Stewart	The Executive Office

**The Chairperson (Mr McGrath):** From the Executive Office, we have with us Chris Stewart, the director of Programme for Government (PFG) and Civil Service of the future; Mark Browne, who is back with us; Siobhan Broderick, the assistant secretary of strategic policy, equality and good relations; and Geoffrey Simpson, the head of Programme for Government and Civil Service of the future. The session is live and is being recorded, and Hansard will produce a transcript. Chris, if you want to take the lead and make a presentation, we can then open it up to questions from members.

**Mr Chris Stewart (The Executive Office):** Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon, members. I am happy to kick off and then perhaps Mark and Siobhan will come in on a couple of issues that they cover in New Decade, New Approach (NDNA). Chair, if it meets with your approval, I will begin with a very brief outline of the overall position on NDNA, touching on PFG, and then run through a number of the actions that fall to my side of the Department: ministerial codes; ministerial standards; the Brexit subcommittee of the Executive; the compact civic advisory panel; the graduate entry medical school, which I will mention in passing in order to clear up a little bit of confusion; and the PFG itself.

I will begin with the overview. My goodness, NDNA has just had its first anniversary, which snuck up on all of us. It is a complex and challenging agreement. We viewed it from the outset as requiring more than one mandate for delivery, and the PFG is one of the key delivery mechanisms. As members will know, much of the planning for delivery, particularly in the early days, was extremely disrupted by COVID. We will say a little more about that when we come to the PFG specifically.

Overall, there are three mechanisms for the governance of delivery of NDNA. First, there is the joint board, which is convened by the Secretary of State and involves the First Minister and deputy First Minister. That has met twice so far, and I understand that it will meet again later this month.

**Mr Stalford:** Stupid thing. Something popped up on my computer. Sorry.

**The Chairperson (Mr McGrath):** It is OK. Something came up on Christopher's screen. He was not calling you stupid, Chris *[Laughter.]*

**Mr Stalford:** Oh, no. Sorry. Absolutely not — not yet.

**Mr Stewart:** He would not be the first, Chair, and many would agree, but it usually comes at the end of the presentation rather than in the middle *[Laughter.]* The key focus of the joint board is on assurance on the funding associated with NDNA, particularly the funding streams around transformation in health and education. The second mechanism is the party leaders' forum, which is a political mechanism, so officials are not involved. It has been established, and I understand that it has met a number of times in recent months. Thirdly, there is the formal implementation review. Those were envisaged to be quarterly but, again, have been disrupted by COVID. There has been only one so far, last week or the week before, convened jointly by the UK and Irish Governments.

The key NDNA work stream that falls to my side of the Department is the PFG. As members are aware, the Executive agreed just before Christmas to commence public consultation on a new draft outcomes framework. In line with NDNA, we will seek to build on the outcomes-based approach that we have been following since 2016. There will be a new set of outcomes that picks up on the lessons learned and takes account of the priorities identified in NDNA and through the talks process that led to it.

It will not surprise members to know that work on the PFG was disrupted to a very great extent by COVID, which had two major effects. We had to divert all our available resource. Geoffrey and his team, until relatively recently, have been working on COVID matters and not on the PFG, and, of course, the Executive had their bandwidth largely used up by COVID matters. In fact, we have really got back to the day job on the PFG only within the last couple of months. That means trying to compress a 12-month timetable into about six months. That is very challenging, and we are a bit behind, but we think that we are just about on course to publish the Programme for Government before the summer.

That follows on from a fairly intensive round of engagement with stakeholders, which we completed at the back end of last year. As we move ahead, the intention is for that public consultation and engagement on the revised draft outcomes framework to commence next Monday and last for eight weeks. We are glad that we are able to get that draft outcomes framework to you now because we very much welcome the opportunity to engage with the Committee alongside the public consultation. We are more than happy to come back, Chair, for the oral evidence session that you suggested and look forward to doing so.

A number of other strands of NDNA fall to my side of the Department as well, and I will run through those. The work on ministerial codes is split between TEO and colleagues in the Department of Finance. On the Executive Office side, the guidance governing the operation of the Executive remains substantively current, although certain aspects have had to change to recognise the change in practice in relation to the frequency of meetings and their virtual format. We will take a further opportunity at an appropriate point to review that guidance and consolidate any lessons learned or, indeed, permanent changes that have to be made. Associated with that, the revised ministerial code of conduct was agreed by the Executive in March 2020. As a statutory code, that needs to be reflected in amendments in Westminster legislation, which will also deal with some other aspects of NDNA.

For completeness, on the Department of Finance side, members are probably aware that special adviser codes were agreed and published in January 2020. The requirement for publication of ministerial meetings and special adviser gifts and hospitality has been met. Those have now been published. In addition, a Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) code of ethics has been revised to include a requirement on officials to maintain accurate written records, including minutes of ministerial meetings. The rights and responsibilities of civil servants under the code have also been revised to make clear the obligation to give proper consideration to concerns raised by colleagues and those outside the service: that is longhand for whistle-blowers. We expect the final draft of the code of ethics to be taken to the Executive shortly.

Some work on ministerial standards falls on our side. The Executive adopted guidance for Ministers in the exercise of their functions in March, and that supports the ministerial code of conduct. There will be further recommended amendments describing the role of a Minister, and we expect those to go to the Executive for agreement in the near future.

Alongside that, a specification for the appointment of members to the ministerial standards panel has been prepared, and some discussions have taken place with the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments to initiate the competition for that panel in the near future. There have also been discussions with the Assembly Commissioner for Standards on her proposed role.

Other issues that fall to us include the proposal for the Executive Brexit subcommittee. The Executive have agreed that the subcommittee should be replaced with a slightly different mechanism known as the Executive committee considering EU exit matters. The terms of reference for that committee have been placed in the Assembly Library.

Work on the compact civic advisory panel has also been affected by COVID. We are running a bit behind with that work. However, preliminary scoping work has been undertaken on a specification for a public appointments competition. On foot of that, we need to consider how and at what point the forum could best contribute effectively to public engagement and the key aspects of the Executive's policy agenda, particularly in the current circumstances.

The graduate entry medical school is listed in our paper as a TEO action, but that is no longer the case. The Executive Office role in that is now complete, and the lead falls to our colleagues in the Department for the Economy and the Department of Health. On the DFE side, the good news is that its view is that it has been achieved or is substantially on target. Following the Executive's approval of the funding on 9 July 2020, Ulster University has commenced the recruitment process for students. The intention is that that will get under way in September this year.

Chair, that is a very quick run-through a number of issues. I am happy to pause and take questions, particularly on the PFG, or to hand over to Mark and Siobhan as you see fit.

**The Chairperson (Mr McGrath):** Chris, thank you very much. It is a very wide-ranging area, and there are plenty of topics and issues. I will begin with a few questions, but, if any member wishes to ask a question, they should indicate by raising their electronic hand on the system.

A key area that caused the collapse of the institutions was the Irish language Act. The whole issue of identity was fleshed out and discussed as part of NDNA. There are still some reputational matters to be considered, insofar as that issue brought the place down for three years. In reality, we have not heard very much about any of that stream in the past year. The detail in your report, which we received before Christmas, is a bit vague. We have previously put questions to the Ministers and have been told that there will be some elements of that in 2021-22, and it will happen during this mandate. Can we nail down the exact timelines for the introduction of that package of identity legislation? Can you give me a flavour of any of the interactions that have been taking place thus far? For example, you will be engaging with organisations such as the Human Rights Commission. Has the engagement in preparation for the legislation already taken place, is it taking place now, is there a timetable, and when might the Committee see the First Stage of the legislation make its way to the Floor of the Assembly?

**Mr Stewart:** Chair, with your permission, I will defer to Mark and Siobhan on that question.

**Dr Mark Browne (The Executive Office):** Thanks, Chris.

**Ms Siobhan Broderick (The Executive Office):** Thank you.

**Dr Browne:** I will make some initial comments, and Siobhan can come in with the detail.

New Decade, New Approach has a commitment to establish an office for identity and cultural expression. There is also a commitment to bring forward the appointment of an Irish language commissioner and a commissioner to develop the language, arts and literature that is associated with Ulster-Scots and Ulster-British traditions here. Draft Bills were appended to that agreement.

Of course, that is a substantial additional aspect of work for the Executive Office. We established a division to put some resource towards taking all that forward and to try to make progress on it.

Siobhan was moved over to head that up. We have staffed that as best we can to ensure that progress can be made. Siobhan can give you more detail about the nature of the engagement. However, we are continuing to do the preparatory work around that to legislate for the core elements of the Irish language and identity proposals. The Ministers' intention is to progress the legislation during this mandate — the First Minister and deputy First Minister have made that clear on a number of occasions to the Committee and in response to Assembly questions — and then to create the relevant bodies as soon as possible thereafter. That is the current position. Siobhan, you may want to say a little bit more about some of the engagement that there has been on aspects of that.

**Ms Broderick:** As Mark said, Ministers have said on a number of occasions, most recently, I think, before the Committee last week, that they are committed to bringing forward during this mandate the three Bills that were appended to NDNA. As Mark said, TEO has set up a small division, which I lead and which has other responsibilities apart from rights, language and identity (RLI). During that time, we have been doing preparatory work, which has involved preliminary assessments of the impact of the proposed Bills — regulatory, equality and rural issues and so forth; and preparing the supplementary documentation that you need to introduce Bills such as the explanatory and financial memoranda. We have engaged with the Departmental Solicitor's Office (DSO) and the Office of the Legislative Counsel (OLC) in respect of the processes that we need to follow. We have engaged with the DFC language branches. As you know, language policy is led by the Department for Communities. It is, obviously, bringing forward the strategies for the Irish language and Ulster Scots. We have liaised with it in respect of *[Inaudible]* early engagement *[Inaudible]* engagement with the Equality Commission. Our focus, with a relatively small team that has been impacted by COVID over the past few months, is on doing the work that we need to have in hand for the Bills to go into the Assembly.

**The Chairperson (Mr McGrath):** We lost a little at the end of what you said, Siobhan.

**Ms Broderick:** Sorry.

**The Chairperson (Mr McGrath):** That is OK. We heard the majority of what you said. I suppose that there was a bit more information in there about the preparatory work. As you rightly pointed out, last week, the First Minister and deputy First Minister said that it is their intention to deliver it during this mandate and that that work is ongoing. However, the concern is that we heard that from them six or seven months ago. Therefore, there has been no change in the information that has come from them, which does not instil an awful lot of confidence that something is moving forward. Some of the information that you gave us about engagement and preparatory work being done hopefully highlights the fact that there will be movement and that those Bills will soon be introduced. We talk about identity, for example, and it is always considered in a binary sense in Northern Ireland, yet, when we look at our communities, we see that identity is certainly not binary; it is much more than that. I hope that, as those Bills develop, we do not put too much emphasis simply on two identities and traditions and miss the fact that society has many more identities, all of which need to be recognised and supported.

Chris, you mentioned the compact civic advisory panel. Again, I appreciate that COVID is there. However, that panel was to be populated through an open process to get people on board and involved. Can you tell me again about the timescales? In companies, the Civil Service and right around society, people have been able to go out and recruit. They have adjusted to COVID in the way in which they needed to in order to move forward. Many conferences are held online; people are able to get involved and participate. The COVID issue as an explanation for something not happening is starting to lose its currency somewhat. When COVID regulations and rules have come in, civic society has been able to say, "We do not like this", "We do like that" or "We want to see the other"; there has been great engagement with communities and individuals. The compact civic advisory panel could do a great deal of work to deal with many issues that we face here in the North. Will you give me some sense of the timescales for the processes? We should not use COVID as an excuse; we should, as best we can, find ways to work around it to engage with people.

**Mr Stewart:** Chair, your point is a fair one. Apologies if I gave you the impression that I was offering COVID as an excuse for not engaging. You are absolutely right: here we are meeting virtually today. We did all the stakeholder engagement on the Programme for Government before Christmas virtually. We now regularly have appointment processes and job interviews using virtual platforms. You are absolutely right: COVID is not a reason for not engaging. Perhaps I was not clear about what I meant: the disruption was simply the additional workload on TEO around COVID. The part of TEO that will take forward the work on the advisory panel is the Executive secretariat; as you can imagine, its workload has increased dramatically with the increased frequency of Executive meetings and

everything that goes on around that. It was simply a workload effect. It was not the nature of COVID that prevented or prevents engagement; it certainly does not.

We are still under pressure resource-wise, but Ministers have indicated that the issue is important and is a priority to them. I cannot give you a firm timescale at the moment, but you are right: we do not have an excuse or a reason to delay for much longer. We need to get it under way, certainly within the next month or two and not much beyond that.

**The Chairperson (Mr McGrath):** My final question is about the Magee medical school. It appears, since its NDNA commitment, to have been treated like a hot potato; it has been moved between various Departments. It was initially expected to be in Health. It was then taken in to the Executive Office, and now we are hearing that it is moving from the Executive Office to Economy and Health. We have seen the absolute need for us to have a skilled medical workforce; the health service needs those personnel. We understand the absolute need for a Magee medical school; we send too many of our young people and professionals away to get trained and then only a certain percentage come back again. The capacity and ability are there, and the people are there. Why did it move from Health to TEO, stay for a short period in TEO and then go back to Health and Economy? What was that transit for?

**Mr Stewart:** That move was more apparent than real, Chair. It was never really formally ours; TEO did a bit of coordination and facilitation work around it in the early days. Your fundamental point is the important one: the medical school is needed, and the Executive have decided that it is going to happen, so it is going to happen. Wearing one of my other hats, one of the things that we, as the NICS, need to do is become more adept at working across departmental boundaries and recognise that we all work on behalf of the Executive, and we have a shared responsibility to deliver the Executive's decisions and agreed priorities. The Executive have decided that that is going to happen, so departmental boundary disputes between civil servants ought to be a moot point or irrelevant. It is incumbent on all of us now to put our shoulder to the wheel and get on with it. The good thing is that that is happening. As I said, it has been well advanced by colleagues in Economy and Health; they feel that they are on target for the first intake to be in September this year.

**The Chairperson (Mr McGrath):** That is certainly welcome. It landed in TEO long enough to be announced, which, for some, might be the priority.

**Mr Beattie:** Thank you, Chris, for your brief. To try to save a bit of time, I will put two questions into one. The question is for you, Chris. We talked about the ministerial codes. The present ministerial code is at odds with the new Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill. When are we likely to see amendments to the code or a new ministerial code brought to the Floor of the Assembly so that we can have a chat about it?

Where do we stand with regard to the fiscal council? It might become a Department of Finance issue, but it is one that affects the Executive, as per part 2 of NDNA, the Northern Ireland Executive formation agreement.

**Mr Stewart:** Thanks, Doug. If you do not mind, I will take those in reverse order. You have partially answered your own question. The fiscal council is, indeed, a Department of Finance matter. I understand that there is a proposal at a fairly advanced stage in the Department, but it has not yet come to the Executive. That is a consequence of the COVID pressures that the Minister and officials are under. However, it is recognised as a priority, and the intention is to bring it to the Executive as soon as possible. The Secretary of State presses very hard on this, and it has come up a couple of times already at meetings of the NDNA joint board.

I apologise. I do not know the answer to your first question. With your indulgence, I will take it away, get an answer and come back to you today.

**Mr Beattie:** That is good enough, Chris. I do not want to be hammering what the Secretary of State is hammering, but we are talking about a fiscal council that was agreed in the Stormont House Agreement, the Fresh Start Agreement and in the NDNA document. I cannot see how the Executive Committee can just knock it off to the Department of Finance to deal with without holding to it account.

**The Chairperson (Mr McGrath):** Have you any comment on that, Chris, or are you happy enough to leave it?

**Mr Stewart:** I absolutely recognise the point that Doug is making and am more than happy to convey it to DOF colleagues.

**Mr Beattie:** Thank you, Chair.

**Ms Sheerin:** Thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon. I do not want to duplicate or go over old ground, but I had planned to ask about Acht na Gaelige as well. Last week, we had a presentation from the First Ministers, and that was one of the questions that I asked. The deadline set for it has fallen away because of COVID. Following on from what the Chair said, I recognise that we are in an unprecedented year and that cognisance must be taken of that. We cannot, in all reality, expect, given the pandemic, that things that had been a priority will be prioritised over responding to the health crisis. That said, we still have to recognise that a year has passed, and we want to see these big ticket items progressed. We do not want them to be completely removed. Therefore, thank you for your answer on that, and I take note of it. I have been engaging with some groups on Acht na Gaelige, and it is a pressing concern for them.

I have another question, this time on the bill of rights. I declare an interest: I am the Chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Bill of Rights. There was a TEO commitment, part of NDNA, to set up a panel of experts. The Ad Hoc Committee's consultation will close on 29 January. Anyone who has not yet responded should do so. A panel of five experts was to be appointed but it has been at a bit of a standstill for several months. Have you any update?

**Ms Broderick:** If you do not mind, Emma, I will take that. It is under consideration, and, hopefully, a decision will be forthcoming in due course.

**The Chairperson (Mr McGrath):** Are you happy enough, Emma, or do you have another question?

**Ms Sheerin:** No, that is 100%. A list of strategies in NDNA had a three-month time frame or deadline, and that has passed. I assume that the reason is the same, which is that other things have taken priority. I appreciate that. Thank you.

**The Chairperson (Mr McGrath):** Full marks for the ability to get unashamed advertising for that consultation in there, Emma. That is great. Well done for that. I echo that. When another Committee is consulting, we should encourage everybody to take part in that consultation.

**Mr Lunn:** Thanks, Chris, for your presentation. I see that the Brexit subcommittee has changed its name to the Executive Committee dealing with EU exit matters. The terms of reference for the newly named Committee have been placed in the Assembly Library. Is there any substantial difference between the activities proposed for the Brexit subcommittee and the activities proposed for this new one? Will the chairmanship be different? Was the old Committee chaired by the First Minister and deputy First Minister or by their representatives? Will you clarify?

**Mr Stewart:** I do not think that there is any substantive change. Being candid, I think that the change of title is perhaps the most significant aspect. I think that it just reflects the passage of time. We are now beyond Brexit and beyond the transition period, and the feeling was that the title and some of the detail in the terms of reference could be brushed up a bit to reflect where we are.

**Mr Lunn:** Fair enough. Thank you.

**Ms Anderson:** Thank you for the presentation. As we move closer to the post COVID recovery phase, it is important that tackling poverty, social inequality and social inclusion become part of the outcomes development plan in the new Programme for Government. I am trying to tease out more from you about the kind of policy shifts that will help to tackle regional inequalities, meet commitments and ensure that funding is allocated on the basis of objective need. Is an equality impact assessment (EQIA) taking place as part of the Programme for Government?

I am very conscious of all the work that was done across the parties to get the medical school agreed, and that is happening. We are very keen on that in Derry, but, for TEO, it is not just about the medical school, which has now moved back to its former location. I am glad that TEO did that exercise and that the joint First Ministers were able to accelerate that work and take it forward. The point about Magee is the commitment in NDNA to its expansion. Derry has been waiting for university status since

1965, and NDNA identified bringing forward proposals for the expansion of the student number to 10,000 as a key priority. Will you give me a bit more information on that?

**Mr Stewart:** I will start with the points on Magee and then bring Geoffrey in, if I may, on the equality impact assessment. I will make a general point on the policy changes and then a specific one. One of the general points that we are trying to reflect when we finalise the new outcomes framework and the overall PFG is one that came in feedback from our engagement with stakeholders this time round and last time round, and I think that it also came through during the talks process that led to NDNA. The point was that the outcomes are good — there is very strong and solid support for the outcomes-based approach — but people want to see something more as well. I will use a phrase that Alastair Hamilton used quite often when he was in Invest Northern Ireland, which is that, "People need to see where the ropes touch the ground". In other words, they need to see the delivery that will lead to the outcomes. So, we will have quite an emphasis in the Programme for Government on the key priorities and on, as you say, the range of strategies that needs to be there to underpin and deliver the PFG. There is therefore a pyramid: outcomes are at the top; below them are the PFG and the framework; then, the key priorities that the Executive will identify; and, finally, the strategies that will deliver them and ensure that "the ropes touch the ground". One of the most important strategies, and one that featured prominently during the talks process, is an anti-poverty strategy. I have no doubt that the Minister for Communities will see that as a core part of the delivery of NDNA and the PFG.

You are absolutely right about Magee. There are two actions in NDNA, not just one. The first is the medical school, which is, as I described, well on course for recruitment this year. The larger overall expansion is not as far on, and my understanding is that it is at the business case stage but that a detailed business case has not yet been submitted to the Department for the Economy. That is very clearly in the Economy space. Clearly, the medical school is cross-cutting because it involves DOH policy input.

The more general expansion of Magee is more straightforward, in the sense that it is Department for the Economy territory because it leads on higher education. The update from colleagues is that that action is not as well advanced and that there is a bit more work to be done by the university itself to bring forward the business case. I am happy to come back on that.

You also asked about the equality impact assessment. I will ask Geoffrey to describe the approach that we are taking to that.

**Ms Anderson:** Sorry, but just before Geoffrey comes in and before you leave that point, Chris, I want to ask a question. So that I am clear and people in Derry are clear, and will therefore know whom to lobby and how best to take things forward, will you confirm that the business case for the expansion of Magee is still with Ulster University and has not yet been submitted to the Department for the Economy?

**Mr Stewart:** That is my understanding, yes.

**Ms Anderson:** OK.

**Mr Geoffrey Simpson (The Executive Office):** I will come in now and add to what Chris said about the anti-poverty strategy and the importance of the supporting strategies. You will see at the front of the consultation document that the pyramid structure that Chris described is very much up front and that the PFG will be supported by a number of strategies, including the very important anti-poverty strategy. It also emphasises the importance of building outcomes and working towards an inclusive society where people of all ages and backgrounds are respected and cared for; and that the outcomes contained in the programme are to be applied to everyone and exclude no one. In support of that, we have done an equality impact assessment. The framework has already been subject to an EQIA screening process. The EQIA will go out in parallel with the consultation. On Monday, when we launch the consultation, you will see an EQIA document on the website as well, which will be consulted on in parallel with the consultation.

**Mr Stewart:** I will add a little more to that. One of the things that we are seeking to do in the Programme for Government this time round is to change its nature a bit and make it much more accessible. We see it much less as a paper document and much more as a living document. It will exist mainly on the web, which means that we can update it regularly as it goes through; it is not fixed for five years or for all of the mandate. We can adjust it and change it as the Executive see fit. That, in



itself, has to be an engaged and engaging process and one that has the assessment of equality impact at its centre.

We will try to make the data much more accessible as well. The data will be analysed by section 75 category. As the Programme for Government moves through its lifespan, citizens and interested stakeholders will be able to see evidence of the outcomes of the delivery in relation to section 75 groups, and they will be able to feed back to us. We will do our own analysis of that as well, of course. That will allow us to adjust and change the PFG as we go along in response to that.

**Mr Simpson:** I will add to that again, Chris. The actions in the programme and any new policies as they are brought in will individually be subject to EQIA in the normal way as well.

**Ms Anderson:** My concern is that there is too much screening out with some EQIAs. I am happy to hear what Geoffrey and Chris said, because it appears that something different might be happening in this Programme for Government. The rubber hitting the road in the delivery is crucial, but we need to make sure that we are making a difference to people's lives. Chris, you talked about data. We can have all that data but it is about how you measure it to demonstrate that we are making a difference. We have all the information, but we seem to be doing the same thing over and over again to have the same outcome. The policies that we are bringing forth are not changing the outcomes. I hope that that is what this Programme for Government is driving forward.

Geoffrey, I was a bit concerned when you said that the outcomes apply equally to everyone, although that might have been my misunderstanding. Of course, if we are talking about an anti-poverty strategy, regional inequalities and targeting those most in need, they cannot apply equally. As this goes forward, I hope that we get more of an understanding of the work that will be done on the EQIA, the actions that are to be taken and the implications. Chair, I recommend that we keep more of an eye on that and get a read-out as it is happening. Chris and Geoffrey, I am keen to hear more and be more involved in and informed on all of that.

**Mr Stewart:** Sure. We are happy to do that. I can offer a couple of reassurances on the EQIA and tell you about one challenge for us. The first reassurance is that it is not screened out; it is, most definitely, screened in. Secondly, as Geoffrey said, it is not a single EQIA in which we say, "That's that done. We've done an analysis on the Programme for Government; we'll do another one in a year's time". The equality impact assessment is continuous, as are all dimensions of the delivery.

We are quite good at coming up with ideas for new policies, albeit opinions vary on how good we are at delivering them. However, the challenge for us, and for all Departments and officials — most people agree — is that we are bad at stopping things when the evidence shows that they do not work. That is not unique to us. We need to use the data and engagement to identify the policy interventions that are not working, not effective and not efficient. We need to stop doing those and redirect the resources to the things that we know do work. That needs to be an outward-facing project, not something that we do in a darkened room. The phrase that I use, although it risks sounding trite, is that the democratisation of the data in this is very important: it needs to be an outward-facing process.

**Mr Simpson:** The live web-based programme that we are developing will allow for the publication of all that data and information. That will be there for everyone to see. It will be updated almost daily as new data comes online and new statistics are published. There will also be EQIA information to view. The narrative around what is happening — whether things are getting better, whether they are getting worse, whether they have flatlined and why things are as they are — will be out there for people to see and challenge us on. That is one of the advantages of the web-based approach.

**Ms Anderson:** Thank you for all of that. Chair, I ask you to keep an account of what is said about the EQIA. I like Chris's phrase, "the democratisation of the data", because it will show the Committee that the policies that we are taking forward are making a difference to people's lives, or not, in which case the policy not making a button of difference to people's lives will have to be stopped.

**The Chairperson (Mr McGrath):** Yes, Martina. A briefing on the Programme for Government and the consultation element of it was suggested. Perhaps, we could unpack it at that stage and make sure that our views are included. Thank you very much.

Pat was the final member to indicate that he wished to speak, unless, during this contribution, another member indicates that they want to speak.

**Mr Sheehan:** I have a couple of quick questions. First, the 14 outcomes in the original Programme for Government have been reduced to nine. What is the rationale for that, Chris?

Secondly, given the cross-cutting nature of most of these outcomes, how will we get the Departments to work together?

**Mr Stewart:** My goodness, that second question is difficult. I will come back to that.

On the first one, I will invite Geoffrey to come in behind me because he knows more of the detail than I do. Genuinely, I think that we can say that we have not dropped or deprioritised anything that was formerly thought to be very important, and that is largely driven by feedback from Departments and external stakeholders. It is not so much that people think that certain things are no longer important or that things not thought important before are important now; it is more that, in terms of clarity and ease of understanding, we have a more coherent way of presenting it now. Geoffrey will say a little more about that.

On your second question, that remains a very significant challenge for us. One of the things that we constantly emphasise is that, for the Programme for Government to have maximum effectiveness, it needs to be one leg of a three-legged stool. To deliver it, you need a multi-year Programme for Government, a multi-year Budget and a multi-year legislative programme. We will have a multi-year Programme for Government. We will have a multi-year legislative programme, or, at least, one that goes through to the end of the mandate. What we do not have yet is a multi-year Budget, and that is very difficult. This year's Budget is particularly challenging. Even if we had a multi-year Budget, we do not have budgeting by outcomes; we have budgeting by Department. There is a real challenge for permanent secretaries as accounting officers, including Mark, who is our accounting officer, because they are required to spend the budget under the control and direction of the Minister in relation to the Department's statutory functions and activities. However, to secure some of the outcomes, we really need to create incentives for accounting officers and Ministers to spend money across departmental boundaries.

We heard about lots of good examples during the engagement. For example, many who turn up in custody suites at PSNI stations have mental health issues, so the stationing of community mental health nurses in custody suites can divert a lot of those people from the justice system, given that what they really need is healthcare. That works only when we create the incentive for colleagues in the Department of Health to spend some of their hard-pressed budget in the Department of Justice's field. Likewise, the substance abuse court has been extremely effective in diverting people with substance abuse needs or needs arising from that from the judicial system to the health system, where they get the help that they need. However, that requires getting the Department of Justice to spend its scarce resources on improving a health outcome. At the moment, many accounting officers would argue that the incentives are not right and that we need to change them. We need to make it easier for people to spend their money across departmental boundaries. I cannot claim that we have an answer to that today. There is certainly further progress to be made on that.

We look a bit enviously at our colleagues in Scotland, who find that easier. That is because they do not have departmental boundaries. There is just a single Scottish Government, so it is much easier for them to overcome the boundaries. For obvious reasons, we will not be in that position here, but we need to find a way to make those barriers less of an impediment to the sort of cross-departmental working that you rightly point to.

**Mr Sheehan:** OK. Thanks for that.

**The Chairperson (Mr McGrath):** Thank you for that question and answer. Chris, it was very thought-provoking to hear about the need to find ways to encourage cross-departmental working. It may involve something akin to having a central Budget that is separate from everything else and to which Ministers, who have come together, can apply jointly to fund initiatives. Ministers like money, so, if coming together with another Minister to deliver a project was the only way to get money, that could bear some useful fruit.

No further members have indicated that they wish to ask a question. Chris, on seeing your speakers, keyboards and the microphone on your headset, I am not sure whether you want to sing us out at the end of this presentation or whether we will just move on. Thank you very much for your presentation today. We might see you in a few weeks' time for an oral briefing on the Programme for Government consultation.

**Mr Stewart:** Thank you, Chair. Given that you have been so fair and generous to me today, I shall not sing. *[Laughter.]*

**The Chairperson (Mr McGrath):** Oh, thank you. Thank you very much.