

Building Change Trust

Response to the Northern Ireland Executive consultation on the draft Programme for Government

20 July 2016

Introduction

The Building Change Trust is a charitable foundation (NIC 103379) endowed with £10 million from the Big Lottery Fund in Northern Ireland which is to be spent by 31 December 2018 as an investment for community capacity building and the promotion of the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland.

The Trust has been operational since the 1 January 2009 and has a single corporate Trustee, Building Change Trust Limited, which has 9 Directors made up of people drawn from across the VCSE (voluntary, community, social enterprise), private and public sectors.

Since 2009 the Trust has developed its thematic areas and programmes of work through a process of research, consultation and dialogue with the VCSE and other sectors and has identified 5 key thematic areas of work where the targeted use of resources can make a difference.

These are

Collaboration

Between 2011 and 2016 we will have invested £1.7 million of our funds in supporting more and better collaboration amongst NI VCSE organisations so they can deliver better outcomes for people and places. Our main investment has been in commissioning the CollaborationNI support programme from a consortium of NICVA, CO3 and Stellar Leadership. Through this programme a significant body of knowledge and practice has been developed in respect of supporting collaboration of all kinds between VCSE organisations and others.

Social Finance

By 2018 we will have invested £2 million of our funds on the social finance theme. We've supported the development of Charity Bank in Northern Ireland with a £1 million capital grant and commissioned the Community Shares Ready programme with approximately £300,000 over a 5 year period to support the development of new enterprises raising finance through public share offer. We've supported research into the supply and demand of social finance locally and looked in detail at the concept of investment readiness both generally and more recently specifically in both the arts and environment subsectors through collaboration with Arts and Business NI and the

Northern Ireland Environment Link. We are planning to capitalise a small experimental fund to provide small and unsecured loans to VCSE organisations

Inspiring Impact

We are members of the UK wide Inspiring Impact partnership which is a collaborative programme developed by New Philanthropy capital (NPC) , working with the charity sector to help organisations know what to measure and how to measure through development of their impact practice

For the last 3 years we've developed and resourced, along with some support from the previous Department for Social Development the Inspiring Impact Northern Ireland programme, alongside our strategic partner Community Evaluation NI (CENI). The programme has worked to develop impact practice in the VCSE sector and amongst funders with a particular focus on the statutory sector. In our development and delivery of the Inspiring Impact programme in Northern Ireland, we've taken a tools neutral approach , believing that our role should focus on supporting organisations develop their practice and providing the support and resources for that which in turn equips them to select and use the most appropriate measurement/evaluation tools to their circumstances.

Creative Space for Civic Thinking

We recognise and support the crucial role of the VCSE sector as a democratic intermediary, facilitating the influence of citizens' voices in decision-making processes at all levels of society.

We are supporting the NI Open Government Network to engage with government around structural challenges, resourcing creativity and innovation at local level through our Civic Activism Programme and have commissioned research from Ulster University into the independence of the VCSE sector.

Social Innovation

We have provided funding and practical support to VCSE organisations seeking to pioneer innovative approaches to some of NI's major societal challenges, including through Amplify NI, Social Innovation Camp and Techies in Residence.

We are working on the creation of Social Innovation NI as a cross-sectoral group of funders and support providers to collaborate under one umbrella and work to assist VCSE organisations and others with developing new solutions to social problems in a changing society.

Response to consultation

The Trust welcomes the outcomes based approach as advocated within the draft framework Programme for Government. We believe an outcomes-based system of government, if properly implemented can bring considerable advantages in terms of improving decision making, collaboration, resource allocation and demonstrating public benefit. We are aware of the work of the Carnegie Roundtable on Wellbeing and engaged with it as it developed its thinking and action to influence the adoption of an outcomes approach focused on wellbeing here.

However we have some concerns over the actual outcomes, some of the indicators and what appears to be the singularity of approach through which these outcomes and their related indicators will be monitored and measured.

We recognise the complex task government has set itself in developing and proposing to deliver progress against these outcomes via progress on the measures and indicators.

We suggest that the framework needs presented in such a way as to represent more clearly and easily the linkages between the outcomes, indicators and measures in order to reflect the complexity and the inter relationships between them

Whilst we have made some comments on the individual outcomes and measures below, we are also concerned as instigators of the Inspiring Impact programme in Northern Ireland about the practical application of the approach

We make our comments and suggestions on this draft framework in the context of constructive criticism and will continue to engage in a constructive and positive way as the framework develops.

1. Operationalising

The proposed move towards a focus on outcomes will have implications for how government works, particularly vis a vis its relationships with those it has grant aided, commissioned or procured to help deliver better outcomes for people and places.

Our particular emphasis is on the VCSE sector and it seems to us, through the lessons from our Inspiring Impact programme, that whilst there is appetite within government and the VCSE to change the funding relationship to one focused on outcomes, there is a lack of clarity around how that should be done and a huge challenge if it is tried to be done within a system which heretofore has been geared to and focused on monitoring expenditure and activities. Much work therefore needs done to support the development of better impact practice within government and key delivery sectors and there are lessons from the work of our Inspiring Impact programme managed by CENI that may be helpful.

<https://inspiringimpactni.org/>

2. The approach

The Outcomes Based Accountability approach is but one approach to impact practice which we define as

“ The activities that an organisation does to focus on its impact. This can include planning desired impact, planning how to measure it, collecting information about it, making sense of that information, communicating it and learning from it.”

Whilst it may be appropriate that government seeks to use a consistent approach to define outcomes and their measures and indicators at a high population level, it is important to note that there are weaknesses within such an approach to be considered and guarded against which include

- Prioritisation of quantities over qualities
- Over simplification and gaming of targets
- Barriers to innovation and development and testing of new methods and approaches to meet people/community needs

As government seeks to achieve alignment internally and externally around agreed outcomes we suggest that in respect of the relationship with the VCSE sector that the following are critical

- Outcomes at the delivery/performance level need to be co designed with delivery organisations and this will involve challenges with investing time and resources in collaboration and negotiating procurement obstacles/challenges.
- Government needs to invest in and support both its own impact practice and that of its delivery partners in the VCSE and elsewhere. Recent research through Inspiring Impact NI highlighted uncertainty as to what outcomes focused grant funding to VCSE organisations for example actually means in practice.
- There are already many existing measurement tools and techniques and a need to recognise that in respect of actual planning and measurement tools and techniques that its often a matter of “horses for courses” and therefore a pluralistic approach to evaluation where a range of methods suited to particular needs and contexts are adopted is critical

3. The outcomes

“We need a cohesive Executive working to deliver for all. We also need a system of Government that works across boundaries, organisations, groups and communities for the common good”

“One of the significant changes in this Programme is that we will be engaging outside Government to develop plans which recognise the various parts that many different organisations and sectors have to play. We want to work with local government, the private sector, voluntary and community sectors and beyond to maximise what we can achieve collectively.”

In our view this emphasis on collaboration is very much welcomed, we therefore suggest that it is also logical that there is an outcome around this itself and some appropriate indicators and measures for it.

In our experience of having supported and resourced exploration and implementation of collaboration these last 5 years, collaboration will in itself require significant resources and support and seeking to work in an outcomes focused way across boundaries will require a focus on and support for impact practice across all potential partners and sectors.

One way in which this could be achieved is that the outcomes all could be considered within a wider matrix of Open Government with specific measures and indicators around the 3 internal open government outcomes of Transparency, Participation, Accountability. Transparency, accountability and participation in the context of governance of this society is surely a key dimension of well being

The Outcomes

- 1. We prosper through a strong, competitive, regionally balanced economy**
- 2. We live and work sustainably – protecting the environment**
- 3. We have a more equal society**
- 4. We enjoy long, healthy, active lives**
- 5. We are an innovative, creative society, where people can fulfil their potential**
- 6. We have more people working in better jobs**

- 7. We have a safe community where we respect the law, and each other**
- 8. We care for others and we help those in need**
- 9. We are a shared society that respects diversity**
- 10. We are a confident, welcoming, outward-looking society**
- 11. We give our children and young people the best start in life**
- 12. We have high quality public services**
- 13. We have created a place where people want to live and work, to visit and invest**
- 14. We connect people and opportunities through our infrastructure**

We believe that

- There are too many outcomes and that they could be further rationalised and simplified without losing overall intent. For example Outcomes 9 and 10 are linked and could be merged into one stronger and clearer outcome
- Whilst collaboration within government and externally is referenced, the document appears written from the perspective of what government will do to get better scores in the target outcome areas and not so much about personal and community engagement, agency and responsibility to tackle these issues together – it is striking and anomalous that there is no outcome about citizens' participation in the life of the community – i.e. an outcome about being civically active. In comparison the Scottish government has a Communities outcome that recognises this – *“We have strong, resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others.”*

The Indicators

- There is an indicator for cultural participation – but not for civic participation. Cultural participation might be considered one way in which citizens civically participate but it is not the only way. A wider outcome around civic engagement/participation would be more appropriate .
- The economic indicators tend in their language to refer to the private sector only – nothing about economic diversification and the role of the social economy which is as big an employer in NI as the agricultural sector.

The Measures

Outcome 1: We prosper through a strong, competitive regionally balanced economy

There is no reference to social economy and social enterprise – assumption is that all economic growth and development is private sector export led

Outcome 2: We live and work sustainably - protecting the environment

There is no reference to the potential of renewable energy and the potential of new and community based responses to energy production/consumption and also in respect of community action to protect and enhance places and biodiversity

Outcome 3: We have a more equal society

This outcome lacks clarity – is it about inequality or diversity?

Outcome 4: We enjoy long, healthy, active lives

There is a failure to recognise the role of civic engagement through personal and community agency and about peoples active individual and collective participation in making their own , their children's and community healthier.

Outcome 5: We are an innovative, creative society, where people can fulfil their Potential

Whilst all sectors of the economy are mentioned and this will include the social economy, innovation seems to be seen solely as private sector innovation to support export. There should be recognition of the role innovation can play in helping us address some of our most intractable social challenges. This is not only the role of the VCSE sector – cross-sectoral collaboration and citizen/user-led processes are crucial. Whilst cultural participation is positive, there is a striking absence of civic participation/engagement which in our view is the single most significant weakness with the framework

Outcome 6: We have more people working in better jobs

Whilst this is vitally important, there needs to be recognition that skills are only one measure of employability and the need for support for the other domains of employability which have been established through international research

- Personal circumstances
- Emotional capabilities
- Attitudes
- Employability skills
- Qualifications, education and training
- Experience and involvement

- Career management

And that innovation in job creation is also possible within for example social enterprises and cooperatives

Outcome 7: We have a safe community where we respect the law, and each Other

There are links between this and outcome 3 which we suggest need further explored and clarified.

Outcome 8: We care for others and we help those in need

We suggest that this outcome is reworked in terms of people's active individual and collective involvement in the life of the community in order to benefit themselves and others. This can be through volunteering and other community activity. As it stands this current outcome is not as clear as it needs to be, whilst there is some mention of civic activity here – it is in the narrow context of helping others in need and not more widely. We suggest again a specific outcome is needed vis a vis a Communities outcome that recognises this – e.g from Scotland *“We have strong, resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others.”*

Outcome 9: We are a shared society that respects diversity

We suggest that this outcome could be stronger – celebrates our diversity would be more positive and active than respect which suggests passivity. The aspiration to a shared society is to be welcomed although a shared and cohesive society would be stronger. This outcome could also pull some of the parts of Outcome 3 and Outcome 7 for greater clarity

Outcome 10: We are a confident, welcoming, outward-looking society

We suggest that this could be merged with 9 for greater clarity and impact

Outcome 11: We have high quality public services

We suggest that this be modified to state high quality and continually improving public services.

Outcome 12: We have created a place where people want to live and work, to visit and invest

This outcome should include more on environmental protection recognising the importance of the environment in and of itself and as a contributor to our quality of life and wellbeing.

Outcome 13: We connect people and opportunities through our infrastructure

Given the rurality of much of Northern Ireland, a reference to increasing availability of access to public transport as compared to/alongside high quality telecommunications is surely required and some emphasis could be given to the community transport, walking and cycling infrastructure. We also note that people can become more connected and more willing to use the infrastructure to travel and share leisure and work space with others and that the barriers to doing this, which also need to be tackled, aren't just physical.

Outcome 14: We give our children and young people the best start in life

This is to be welcomed, although it is noted that there is no explicit reference to child care which if properly delivered by trained and skilled staff makes a significant contribution to child development.

The indicators

We recognise the challenge in identifying individual indicators that link to the measures and the outcomes, and that these will be proxies for underlying complexity. We also recognise that others, especially those working in government departments and agencies, the private sector and the VCSE sector focused on particular thematic areas will have detailed and specialist knowledge on the appropriateness or otherwise of the indicators proposed.

However we have some comment to make on selected indicators in the context of our knowledge of the work over many years of VCSE organisations and others in mitigating the effects of and dealing with the negative outcomes of many years of conflict in Northern Ireland.

Specifically

Indicator 31 Increase shared space

% who think leisure centres, parks, libraries and shopping centres in their areas are "shared and open" to both Protestants and Catholics

We think that attitudinal change as evidenced by changes in what people think about other people and places is important. However we believe that limiting the indicator to this almost 20 years after the Good Friday Agreement and many years of devolved and increasingly government shows a poverty of aspiration in terms of the actual increase in use of space and creation of shared space. Such an indicator needs to be based on actual increased use of space by both Catholics and Protestants and others

Indicator 35 Increase reconciliation

% of the population who believe their cultural identity is respected by society

Much work has been done in Northern Ireland on defining the meaning of reconciliation most notably in respect of the various EU Peace Programmes. The definition by Hamber and Kelly as set out below was used as a selection criteria for the allocation of funding during the Peace II programme

1. Developing a shared vision of an interdependent and fair society
2. Building positive relationships
3. Significant cultural and attitudinal change
4. Acknowledging and dealing with the past
5. Substantial social, economic and political change (equity / equality)

The proposed indicator seems to be an element of point 3 but is a very narrow and in our view limited proxy for reconciliation.

Conclusion

In conclusion we welcome and commend the approach taken with a view to achieving more joined up government with a focus on making a positive difference to the people and places of Northern Ireland.

We believe that further work is needed to refine the outcomes, measures and indicators and suggest action is also needed to ensure that a plurality of measurement and evaluation approaches is maintained at the performance accountability level. Consideration also needs given to the establishment of stretching targets in order that progress can be more fully evaluated.

We commend the work and learning of our initiatives supporting the sector in respect of collaboration and impact practice in the sector in particular – Collaboration NI and Inspiring Impact NI.

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