Open
Government
Network

Northern Ireland

Making government work better for people through transparency, participation and accountability

Open Government Network Northern Ireland

Annual Report 2015-2016

The NI Open Government Network is funded by:

Open Government Network Northern Ireland

Annual Report 2015-16

Contents

Address by Building Change Trust

Building Change Trust established the NI Open Government Network as part of its 'Creative Space for Civic Thinking' work which is about highlighting and promoting the role of civil society in Northern Ireland as a democratic intermediary – connecting citizens voices with those taking decisions. The Trust is also resourcing some grassroots-level experiments in civic engagement through its Civic Activism Programme, however the particular need for the NI OGN arose from the fact that there are structural blockages to a more participatory democracy in Northern Ireland arising from the way in which Government and the associated political institutions function. Furthermore, there was a lack of cohesion and solidarity across civil society in engaging Government around a democratic reform agenda. It was in this context that the Trust became aware of the global Open Government Partnership initiative. The OGP seemed an ideal vehicle to bring together diverse organisations and individuals around a reform agenda, because:

- Both the UK and ROI Governments had already signed up, indeed the UK was one of the founding countries

- The first UK OGP action plan contained no commitments directly related to Northern Ireland and there was an acknowledgement from the UK Government that this needed addressed

- There was already an active UK OGP civil society network, led by Involve which was also conscious of its need to diversify its membership to include devolved regions

- Partnership was central to the OGP approach and as such it lent itself well to the Northern Ireland context

Consequently in early 2014, the Trust began raising awareness and stimulating dialogue around the OGP in Northern Ireland. We organised an NI delegation to participate in the OGP Europe conference in Dublin in May 2014 and thereafter organised a series of seminars and workshops, as well as commissioning some exploratory research into the potential of the OGP to deliver reform in Northern Ireland.

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This work generated a lot of interest and enthusiasm amongst local civil society and consequently the Trust launched the NI Open Government Civil Society Network in November 2014 at an event addressed by then Finance Minister Simon Hamilton MLA as well as the UK Cabinet Office. In the following months the Trust provided further facilitation support which resulted in the formation of an independent steering committee and an initial action plan.

The Trust then awarded the NI OGN a 2 year funding package in June 2015 and through an open tender process appointed the NI Environment Link as Network Secretariat for this period. Since then the Trust has continued to support the NIOGN and participate in key events and activities. We are delighted with the progress that has been made so far by the network along the undoubtedly long road to a more open government in Northern Ireland and are excited to see what further progress the coming 12 months will bring.

Paul Braithwaite
Programme Leader – Building Change Trust

Chairperson's Report

When asked *'What is Open Government?'* I have to think and decide if I want to give the quick answer *'It is a way of increased citizen participation and collaboration with government'* or whether to deeply explore the concepts and the vision of what Open Government can be, for the Annual Report though I will stick to the quick answer!

Open Government has the opportunity to make Government more transparent, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance to the citizen. In Northern Ireland we cannot deny that we have structural deficiencies and differences, but through the Open Government Network and the National Action Plan process, citizens can help deliver change. The opportunity is now; we have been working with the Department of Finance to create Northern Ireland specific open government commitments which will become part of the UK Open Government National Action Plan. We will be continuing to work with the Executive to ensure we play a key role in its delivery.

In this report you will see the width and breadth of work we have been involved in so far, in such a short time I am proud of how far we have come. There is much more we want to achieve though, we want to see more from our Government on how they will fully engage with citizens and how we as citizens can play a more active role in holding Government to account.

In Northern Ireland we have the added opportunity to build momentum with partners in civil society England, Scotland, and Wales. The Scottish and Welsh Governments will also be putting forward specific commitments for the UK action plan; and, when joined by

Northern Ireland, this will send a strong message that elected representatives are willing to work with citizens to build more transparent, engaging and accountable government right across the UK.

We will also be working with civil society in the Republic of Ireland by collaborating with the Irish Open Government Partnership process and to learn from the work that they have been involved in.

I would like to thank the Steering Committee members for their work and support and NI Environment Link and in particular Jonathan, David, Carol and Craig as well as Building Change Trust and Paul Braithwaite.

I was lucky enough to be invited to the Open Government Summit in November last year to speak about the opportunities that we have in Northern Ireland through this network; and in my concluding remarks I highlighted the importance of our work:

"Through the Open Government Partnership and the National Action Plans citizens can help deliver change. While the focus of National Governments should be to enable the citizen, the subnational focus should be to empower the citizen. Sub-national activity is vitally important because Councils, local authorities and in the case of Northern Ireland, regional Assemblies, have direct impact on citizens."

Colm Burns
Chairperson, NI Open Government Network

Background

The Open Government Partnership was launched in September 2011 at the United Nations General Assembly with eight founding countries – the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Mexico, Brazil, Norway, Philippines, Indonesia and South Africa. As of June 2016, there are 69 participating countries.

Following a piece of exploratory research and a series of events facilitated by Peter Osborne with the support of the Building Change Trust, the Northern Ireland Open Government Network was established in November 2014.

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 now has over two hundred and sixty individual and organisational members. The purpose of the network is to actively engage a broad and diverse group of citizens and organisations in advocating for more open government in Northern Ireland. In association with the global Open Government Partnership initiative, the Network aims to contribute to broadening participation in government; increasing transparency and the availability of, and access to, data; enhancing accountability; improving policy making; delivering better service provision and increasing confidence in government. The Network aims to work in genuine collaboration with the Northern Ireland Executive and Government Departments.

Northern Ireland Environment Link was appointed to act as secretariat to the Network in 2015. The secretariat was appointed to provide practical, technical and human resource support to the Steering Committee and members of the NI Open Government Network to deliver the two year action plan.

Get Involved

Those interested in becoming a member of the network should sign up to the UK Open Government Forum, and to the specific Northern Ireland mailing list. This forum provides regular progress updates, news and notes of meetings, and points of view from members of the Open Government Network, as well as relevant links and events. To sign up, please click here.

Follow us on Twitter here.
Follow us on Facebook here.
Visit the UK Open Government Network website here.

Activity in 2015-2016

The priorities driving the NI Open Government Network in its first two years were agreed as follows:

- Developing a knowledge about, and a vision for, open government in Northern Ireland

- Increasing civic participation in decision-making and in developing services in Northern Ireland

- Increasing transparency, openness, availability of information and open data availability in Northern Ireland

- Improving standards of integrity in public, political and civic life in Northern Ireland

For the purposes of reporting, the work delivered under these priorities in 2015-2016 are detailed under the following headings – Knowledge; Membership; Transparency & Participation and Operational.

1. Knowledge

Increasing civil society knowledge about open government is a central priority for the NI Open Government Network. To achieve this, a range of events, seminars and workshops have been delivered engaging a diverse audience and have served to develop the knowledge of the Committee and engage new members with the network. The events have also provided a platform for network members to collaborate and to learn from best practice elsewhere.

1.1 Open Government for the Common Good
16 March 2016, Belfast City Hall

The annual event in the NI Open Government calendar was run as part of the Imagine Belfast Festival and provided a whistle-stop tour of some of the key issues under the open government umbrella. Almost 90 delegates attended the event which was hosted by Quintin Oliver from Strategem. The key note address was delivered by Michael Harris, founder of Guerrilla Policy, on *'Accountability, Participatory Democracy and Open Social Policy'*.

Lightning talks were also delivered by the following contributors:

- Dean Blackwood (Director, Faughan River Anglers) on Access to Information
- Kathryn Torney (Deputy Editor, the Detail) on Open Data
- Glenn Jordan (Director, the Law Centre) on Anti-Corruption
- Daniel Holder (Deputy Director, CAJ) on Public Accountability
- Lorraine Boyd (Regional Project Manager, NEET Strategy Forum) on Civic Participation

This was followed by workshops on each of the themes and rounded off by a panel discussion and Q&A session. A blog on the event is available here.

1.2 Could Participatory Budgeting Work In Northern Ireland?

18 March 2016, The Mac

Participatory Budgeting (PB) is a process of democratic decision-making, in which ordinary people decide how to allocate part of a public budget. Done well, PB gives citizens real decision making power over how public money is spent, which can lead to the better allocation of public resources, help identify and utilise new resources within communities, improve the quality and impact of initiatives, increase the transparency and accountability of public bodies, and improve levels of trust, engagement and empowerment. While PB has been used extensively in other parts of the UK, particularly Scotland, and around the world, the concept has yet to be adopted in Northern Ireland.

As part of the Imagine Belfast festival, Jez Hall of the UK Participatory Budgeting Network led a workshop exploring the potential for PB in Northern Ireland and whether the citizens of Belfast could really influence how money was spent by Belfast City Council.

Drawing by Brian John Spencer [@brianjohnspencr](https://twitter.com/brianjohnspencr)

Blogs on the event by Jez Hall and Ann Allan are available [here](#).

1.3 Northern Ireland Assembly Elections

6 & 7 May 2016, Northern Ireland

The Elections NI Open Data project involved a collaboration of people who wanted to produce datasets and visualisations of the 2016 Northern Ireland Assembly elections, led by ODI Belfast and the NI Open Government Network.

The aim of the project was to generate live (or as close to live as possible) coverage of all of the Assembly constituencies.

The proposed format was akin to a 'post-match' analysis of the election data followed by a production of a full open data set that others can use.

The purpose of this initiative was to generate a better understanding of the elections process by the general public, and an opportunity for politicos to analyse the data.

The initiative will also be used to encourage the electoral office to produce structured, open and usable data in future. The NI Open Government Network contributed to this initiative by actively recruiting OGN members to provide live coverage of the election data at the 8 count centres located throughout Northern Ireland.

Details are available on the website http://www.electionsni.org and on Twitter: @ElectionsNI

1.4 Renewing Democracy & Rebuilding Peace – The Ecology of Transparency

28 Jan 2016, Queens University Belfast

Director of Friends of the Earth in Northern Ireland, James Orr delivered a seminar on the 'Ecology of Transparency'. American academic Seth Kreimer developed this phrase as he was trying to find a way of explaining how transparency should work in a complex, interdependent and changing world.

James produced a blog on the event which was published as a soapbox on Slugger O'Toole. It is available here.

This event was one in a series of seminars hosted by the NI Open Government Network in partnership with the QUB School of Law & School of Politics and the University of Ulster.

1.5 Open Data Vs Transparency

11 February 2016, Farset Labs

Image by opensource.com

Brian Cleland from Ulster University gave a sceptical perspective of the uneasy relationship between open government and open data.

The primary message was that transparency advocates should not take it for granted that the push for open data will naturally lead to more accountable public administrations. He highlighted three main weaknesses in the political hype around open government data.

Firstly, the assumption that policy statements inevitably lead to meaningful engagement by public servants was not borne out by the evidence. While the aim might be to establish an 'open-by-default' culture in the public sector, it was not yet clear how or even whether this could actually be achieved.

Secondly, it was increasingly obvious that publishing data did not in itself guarantee greater accountability. Data could be made open without enhancing democracy in any way. It could be argued that the meaning of 'open government" had been so diluted so that any public sector use of open technologies could qualify, regardless of whether accountability was actually improved.

Thirdly, the assumption that transparency was an intrinsic good was questioned. Inappropriately applied, transparency could cause serious problems such as inadvertent release of data, defensive thinking, and political correctness.

Despite these problems, it was recognised that the problem of 'information asymmetry' between governments and citizens needed to be addressed, and that open data could play an important role in this regard.

1.6 Northern Ireland Assembly Outreach
7 December 2015, Stormont

This workshop aimed to increase awareness, understanding and active involvement with Parliament. It looked at issues including: how the NI Assembly & Westminster work; engaging with legislation and Select Committee inquiries; All Party Parliamentary Groups and how to campaign and lobby effectively.

Image by The Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

1.7 Rules on Campaigning
7th January 2016, NI Environment Link

The Electoral Commission delivered a seminar explaining the new rules on non-party campaigning at the 2016 Northern Ireland Assembly election. Topics covered included an overview of the campaigning rules; hustings, joint campaigns, attributed spending and registering with the Commission.

1.8 NI Environment Week

September 2015, Long Gallery Stormont

The NI Open Government Network hosted a seminar during NI Environment Week to brief members of the eNGO sector on the Open Government initiative.

Dr Peter Doran offered his perspective on the relevance of Open government to the Environment. And members of NICVA's Detail Data project team (Andrea Thornbury, Bob Harper and Cormac Campbell) briefed attendees on the Detail Data Project and the significance of open data to the environmental sector.

Image by Muíread Kelly

1.9 International Open Data Day

5th March 2016, Dark Horse, Belfast

On Saturday 5 March 2016 the NI Open Government Network sponsored an unconference style event as part of the International Open Data Day.

Open Data Day is a gathering of citizens in cities around the world to liberate data, create visualizations and publish analyses using open public data to show support for and encourage the adoption of open data policies by the world's local, regional and national governments.

The event was hosted by ODI Belfast at the Dark Horse in Belfast City Centre and was aimed at anyone with an interest in open data. A 10 minute slot was allocated to each of the contributors – giving them the opportunity to highlight what's happening across the different sectors and to talk about their open data ideas and projects. NI Open Government Network representatives provided an update on proposed National Action Plan commitments related to open data. This unconference approach which attracted approximately 30 attendees worked really well and created a space for peer-to-peer learning, collaboration and creativity.

1.10 Other Events

NI Open Government representatives attended and contributed to a number of other events throughout the year including:

- 4th June 2015: UK National Action Plan event, London
- 10th June 2015: Open Government Toolkit event at TASC, Dublin
- 30th June 2015:Detail Data Launch at NICVA
- 14th July 2015: OGP NAP consultative event, London

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- 14th July 2015: OGP consultative event, Dublin
- 6th Sept 2015: Open Data in a Day, Detail Data/NICVA
- 14th Sept 2015: DFP Innovation Lab
- 18th Sept 2015: Preparing for the PfG, NICVA
- 2nd Oct 2015: NI Civil Society Network
- 7th Oct 2015: DTNI Conference
- 27th-29th Oct 2015: The OGP Summit, Mexico
- 26th Oct 2015: PB conference, Birmingham
- 5th Nov 2015: Open data in a day
- 13th Nov 2015: OGP Action Plan update, London
- 16th Nov 2015: EU Brexit Debate QUB
- 12th Nov 2015: Alliance Party Manifesto event, NICVA
- 19th Nov 2015: SF Party Manifesto event, NICVA
- 26th Nov 2015: UU Party Manifesto event, NICVA
- 26th Nov 2015: Open data Portal Launch Stormont
- 3rd Dec 2015: DUP Party Manifesto event
- 10th Dec 2015: SDLP Party Manifesto event, NICVA
- 7th Jan 2016: Rules on Campaigning, NIEL Jan 7th
- 13th Jan 2016: Open Data Advisory Panel
- 25th Jan 2016: Independence of the Community & Voluntary Sector Report
- 17th Feb 2016: SCVO Conference and Scottish OGN session
- 2nd March 2016: RCN/Community Places NIMBYISM project
- 9th March 2016: NI Assembly KESS, Stormont, March 9th
- 10th March 2016: Media Training, NICVA March 10th
- 14th March 2016: The State of Democracy in NI, BCT, 174 Trust
- 14th March 2016: Randomocracy, Imagine Belfast
- 18th March 2016: Dramatising Political Ideas, Imagine Belfast
- 21st March 2016: BCT event, Stormont
- 7th April 2016 NICVA Brexit event
- 11th April 2016: Open Contracting Partnership meeting in Edinburgh
- 18th April 2016: PfG Budget event
- 21st April 2016: UK Steering Committee meeting, Whitehall
- 26th April 2016: PRCA Lobbying event
- 11th May 2016: Tackling Corruption Together Conference, London
- 24th May 2016: HRC EU Referendum event, NICVA May

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1.11 Engagement with UK Open Government

Efforts were made throughout the year to connect with relevant partners in the rest of the United Kingdom. The Network has maintained regular contact with Tim Hughes, Coordinator of the UK Open Government Network. An NI Open Government representative addressed the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) conference in Glasgow where the Scottish Civil Society Network was formally launched.

Follow up meetings were also held with Lucy McTernan (SCVO), Kaela Scott (Involve Scotland) and Ruth Marks (Wales) to discuss the OGP sub-national pilot and future synergies.

Engagement with Nuala Haughey from Think-tank for Action on Social Change (TASC) in the Republic of Ireland is ongoing regarding the possibility of a joint North/South event during Year 2 to provide updates on progress in the neighbouring jurisdictions.

This networking raises the profile of the NI Open Government Network and encourages collaboration with OG initiatives in other jurisdictions.

1.12 Promotional Material

Considerable emphasis was placed on developing communications and branding in Year 1 as a basis for spreading information and knowledge. A range of promotional material was developed throughout the year to raise awareness of the NI Open Government Network.

A Communications & Membership Strategy was developed and a Communications and Membership Task & Finish Group was established to drive its implementation.

1.13 Branding

An OGN logo was created for use in all correspondence and NI OGN information leaflets and pop-ups were produced.

1.14 E-bulletins

Quarterly e-bulletins are produced to keep Network members up-to-date with developments, articles of interest, new blogs and upcoming events.

1.15 NI Open Government Video

Whitenoise Studios was commissioned to produce a promotional video for the Network. The video will be promoted across a range of platforms to promote the messages of the network and to grow the membership. The production which will be launched at our annual members meeting in June 2016 can be viewed here.

1.16 Open Government Factsheets

A series of factsheets were produced as a knowledge resource on the following Open Government themes and can be viewed here:

- Open Data
- Access to Information
- Public Accountability
- Anti-Corruption
- Technology & Innovation
- Civic Participation

1.17 NI Open Government Website

A dedicated NI Open Government Website page was developed in 2015 as part of the wider UK Open Government website. The page holds a wealth of information on the activity of the NI Open Government network including events, factsheets, blogs, meetings, consultation responses and e-bulletin resources. Plans are underway to develop the website as the key information hub for the NI Open Government Network, to be delivered in 2016.

1.18 NI Open Government Blogs

A series of blogs were written on behalf of the NI Open Government Network throughout the year with contributions from Ann Allan, David McBurney, Colm Burns, Jonathan Bell, Dean Blackwood, Jez Hall and Paul Braithwaite.

The blogs are available here:

- May 2016 – ODI Belfast: How the elections went down #AE16

- March 2016 – Jez Hall: Could Participatory Budgeting work in Northern Ireland?

- March 2016 – Ann Allan: Imagine!Belfast and Opengovni

- March 2016 – Ann Allan: Participatory Budgeting

- February 2016 – David McBurney and Jonathan Bell: Open Government: People can re-engage with politics. And politicians may be able to break the deadlock

- November 2015 – Dean Blackwood: Citizen Perspective on the Value and Importance of Freedom of Information

- 15th October 2015 – David McBurney: Transparency is Secrecy. Accountability is Costly. Openness is Optional – Freedom of Information Under Attack

- September 2015 – Colm Burns: Chairperson's Quarterly Perspective – Lobbying and the Northern Ireland Assembly

- 23rd September 2015 – Ann Allan: Open Government Meets The Environment – NIOGN Seminar at NI Environment Week

- 6th August 2015 – Colm Burns and Paul Braithwaite: The OGP must be deep as well as wide if it is to have meaningful impact for citizens

NI Open Government articles also featured in Building Change Trust communications, NICVA News, Co3 Ezine, Community NI, Transparency International, Voluntary Arts Ireland ebulletin and Scope Magazine. The Network hopes to build on this to establish an enhanced media presence in 2016.

1.19 NI Open Government Social Media

The NI Open Government Network Twitter and Facebook platforms were developed to keep members informed of activities and to reach a wider audience. Resources were used to run a series of targeted social media campaigns for the events programme – this proved beneficial and will be used in the future to promote membership.

The number of Twitter followers rose significantly to 668; and an OGN Facebook page was created as a means for appealing to a wider audience and maximising the profile of the Network.

This social media resource is connected to the wider OGP network, the Northern Ireland Assembly, relevant Government Departments and key media outlets to ensure that the network is aware of emerging news.
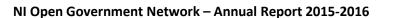
2. Membership

A focus over the past year has been to grow the NI Open Government etwork and enhance the credibility of the initiative. Membership increased from 90 to 260 by June 2016.

A range of activities are ongoing to grow the NI Open Government Network membership:

- A target list of potential OGN members was compiled and correspondence was sent requesting interested organisations to contact the OGN secretariat.

- Leaflets were distributed at the NIEL Annual Conference, as well as several NICVA and party policy officer events.

- Membership and event information was also circulated via a range of communication channels.

- The Network has engaged with a range of organisations and networks including University of Ulster, Queens University Belfast, Trinity College Dublin, NEETS Forum, Human Rights Consortium, Rural Community Network, Young Influencers, Fermanagh Trust, Age Sector Platform, Arts & Business Northern Ireland, Voluntary Arts Ireland, Northern Ireland Environment Link, NICVA and others in a bid to increase membership.

- Articles and blogs were aimed at attracting new members and promoting upcoming events.

- Targeted social media campaigns have been employed to raise awareness of the network and to encourage members from a wider audience.

- A promotional video for the NI Open Government Network has been developed to recruit new members.

- The NI festivals calendar was used to identify opportunities for engaging with new audiences; and plans were put in place for the annual membership event held in March 2016 to increase awareness of OGN and to grow the membership base.

The OGN Membership database was established and all existing members received the agreed Terms of Reference for the NI Open Government Network which is available here.

By the end of May 2016 Network numbers had risen from 90 to 260 members. Growing the membership will continue to be a priority in Year 2.

3. Transparency & Participation

The development of the 3rd UK OGN Action Plan coincided with the establishment of the NI OGN Network and presented a good opportunity for early engagement government.

A Political Engagement Task & Finish Group was established to focus on initiating engagement with government and the development of a number of specific NI commitments to be included in the UK National Action Plan. This was a major area of work for the Network in Year 1.

3.1 Government Engagement & The Cabinet Office

Meetings were held throughout the year with the then Department of Finance & Personnel (DFP), renamed the Department of Finance in May 2016, focused on the NI input to the UK National Action Plan. The plan was to identify areas of convergence between the NIOGN and DFP vision for open government and to secure Ministerial support for agreed commitments for submission to the Cabinet Office.

A raft of commitments under the six key themes of the National Action Plan were developed by Network members for Northern Ireland and formed the basis of the engagement with government. These draft commitments have been shared with Government officials with the expectation that the commitments will be reviewed and endorsed by the Minister, passed to the Executive for ratification and submitted to the Cabinet Office in June 2016.

This process coincided with the Northern Ireland Assembly elections and the Network has yet to receive feedback from the relevant Government Department. In an attempt to progress this work, the Network has sought early engagement with the newly appointed Minister for Finance urging him not to miss the opportunity for NI to join the other nations in signing up to Open Government commitments. Work will continue on this throughout Year 2.

The NI commitments were developed under the following six thematic headings:

I.   Open Data

Open data, i.e. accessible, usable and shared data, creates open knowledge and improves innovative processes.

The challenge here is to develop a protocol and best-practice guidance for implementing open data principles across all Government Departments and Agencies; to ensure that government data should be open by default not exception; and to encourage and support projects that promote data literacy.

The outcome would be to increase public choice; drive efficiency; and offer economic potential – better decisions and lower service costs; and it will provide the building blocks for open knowledge, which is what open data becomes when it's useful, usable and used.

II.   Access to Information

Access to information supports good governance, effective and efficient public administration, compliance with laws and regulations, efforts to combat corruption and greater government transparency and participation in decision-making; and it is essential to the spirit and practice of open government.

The challenge is to ensure access to all information relevant to all stages of government policy development and implementation, including identification of need, delivery and evaluation.

Improved awareness and implementation of freedom of information legislation and processes; greater transparency, knowledge, innovation and progress; and more effective citizen engagement in policy development and implementation.

III.   Anti-Corruption

Transparency is the key way of guarding against corruption; it helps increase trust in government and enables the public to hold public officials to account.

The challenge here is to ensure we have fiscal transparency - the timely publication of essential budget documents that forms the basic building blocks of budget accountability - and an open budget system. Public contracting rules which recognise the right of the public to access information related to the formation, award, execution, performance, and completion of public contracts is also sought.

The outcome would be restored trust, integrity and accountability in government, and enhanced citizen participation.

IV.   Technology & Innovation

Digital technology and innovation can transform civic life into something far more participatory, transparent & engaging, allowing us to share values and creativity, put new issues on the agenda and transform consultation into something much more dynamic. The challenge is to harness technology to provide innovative ways to improve accessibility and openness/our democracy.

The outcome would be a deeper democracy and improved public services, the stimulation of innovation, research and development, and a culture within NI that embraces digital capability. Citizens become more knowledgeable about government and political issues.

IV.   Public Accountability

Public Accountability is an umbrella term that covers distinct concepts like democracy, efficiency, responsiveness, responsibility, and integrity. It involves transparency and trustworthiness and it holds strong promises of fair and equitable governance.

The challenge is to provide a democratic means to monitor and control government conduct, prevent the development of concentrations of power, and enhance the learning capacity and effectiveness of public administration.

Lobbying is an essential part of our democracy. In order for governments and legislatures to work effectively they need to engage with those potentially affected by their decisions. Some lobbying is not limited to the Public Affairs industry it includes charities, Trade Unions, businesses, industry and civic society.

The outcomes would include legislation that ensures fair and transparent lobbying, improved opportunities for authorities to provide information about performance, to explain decision making, and to justify conduct and more possibility of debate, of public questions and governmental answers and eventually of judgment by citizens.

V. Civic Participation, Citizen Engagement & Participatory Democracy

Citizen participation in policy making, planning and governance, is a necessary condition for wellbeing, democracy and social justice.

The challenge is to create more opportunities for civic society and individual citizens to shape decisions that impact on their community and on their lives.

The outcome and benefits of citizen engagement will include better policy outcomes, better service delivery, more engaged and empowered citizens as well as better understanding of and greater trust in government.

3.2 Open Government National Action Plan:
Draft Northern Ireland Commitments

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 (formerly 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'

3.3 Engagement with Assembly Committees

Representatives from the NI Open Government were invited to give a verbal and written briefing to the Assembly Committee for the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (now referred to as the Executive Office and a written briefing to the Finance & Personnel Committee (now referred to as the Finance Committee).

The briefings provided an opportunity to share information on the background, aims and vision of the NI Open Government Network, the proposed open government commitments and outlined a few project proposals involving civic deliberative engagement using the innovation lab methods and tools.

The NI Open Government Network briefing to OFMDFM is available here.

The NI Open Government Network briefing to the Department of Finance & Personnel is available here.

3.4 Northern Ireland Programme for Government

In order to gain traction with political representatives and influence the party manifestos in advance of the upcoming election, NI Open Government Representatives met with the policy officers of all the main political parties.

Mark Ovens (UUP), Ben Lloyd (Alliance), George Dorrian (DUP), Donal Lyons. (SDLP) and Eoin Rooney (Sinn Fein) were all given an oral and written briefing about the NI Open Government Network and proposals for inclusion in their respective manifestos and the new Programme for Government.

Letters were also sent to the leaders of the main political parties outlining the Network's PfG 'Asks' ahead of the publication of the Draft Framework for the Programme for Government. This is available here.

3.5 Declaration of Parliamentary Openness

The NI Open Government Network has actively engaged with the Director of Parliamentary Services, and work continues to seek the adoption of the Declaration of Parliamentary Openness.

3.6 Innovation Lab

A number of topics that may form the basis of a future Innovation Lab were explored throughout the year. Topics included *'Rules of Engagement'* and a *'Citizens Budget'*. Work will continue to progress the Innovation Lab proposal in Year 2.

3.7 FoI Commission Response

A NI Open Government Network response was submitted to the Independent Commission on Freedom of Information Call for Evidence relating to the review of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The submission is available here.

3.8 OGP Sub-national Pilot

Work was undertaken to gauge interest in the OGP sub-national pilot but efforts to secure buy-in were unsuccessful. The NI Open Government Network engaged with the Department of Finance but there no was appetite for NI to submit an expression of interest to become a sub-national pioneer. Work will continue to seek NI involvement in the pioneer strand of this programme.

3.9 Government Responsiveness

The response to the NI Open Government initiative from officials, politicians and other decision-makers has been positive.

From our discussions with the various party policy officers there seems to be a willingness and desire to re-engage with the public, noting also

that the Fresh Start document has an appendix dedicated to citizen engagement.

At a recent presentation to the OFMDFM Committee, one member described the open government initiative as *"timely, relevant and essential"*; another agreed with the need for more measurement of progress and accountability with regard to the Programme for Government; and a third supported the idea of greater fiscal transparency and access to key budgetary information.

In response to a question in the Assembly, the First Minister explained that the Department of Finance and Personnel was working with the Open Government Network to develop a contribution to the UK open government action plan. She commented:

"Open government principles have the potential to support the aims of the current reform agenda, in particular by supporting greater Executive accountability for the delivery of outcomes and by fostering greater collaboration across government and across sectors. Those developments are, therefore, timely, as we look forward to the restructuring of the Executive Departments and the transition to a more outcome-focused Programme for Government."

3.10 Challenges

Working with government has also been challenging. The NI Open Government Network wants to push for the inclusion of ambitious and meaningful commitments. But we understand the political reality that pressing for the most radical reforms might derail progress.

The Network wants to create a coherent alternative to the status quo by trying to directly influence the levers of power. But we want to avoid being co-opted and settling for minimal incremental change.

We want to maintain political traction and retain the possibility of delivering meaningful reforms.

Our chosen route as critical partner with government requires a little subtlety – mobilising champions and advocates within power structures while also experimenting outside, working within explicit political priorities to help politicians shape future programmes, but campaigning for democratic innovation and lobbying for more deliberative citizen engagement, transparency and accountability.

Much has been done in a short time. And we look forward to finding out very soon whether the NI Government will join England, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland in committing to open government principles, or find an excuse to kick the can down the road for another few years. Either way, the Network plans to continue our campaign for more transparency, accountability and citizen engagement.

4. Operational

4.1 The NI Open Government Network Committee

An interim Committee was convened in 2014 to contribute to and oversee the development of the NI Open Government Network:

- Andrea Thornbury – Detail Data, NICVA
- Ann Allan
- Anthony Soares – Centre for Cross Border Studies
- Aongus O' Keefe – Inspiring Impact
- Carol Forster – Northern Ireland Environment Link (Observer)
- Chris Nixon
- Cliodhna Rae
- Colm Burns (Chairperson)
- David McBurney
- Eleanor Brown (Vice-Chairperson)
- Felicity Huston
- Katie Hanlon
- Paula Beattie
- Paul Braithwaite – Building Change Trust (Observer)
- Peter Doran – Queens University, Belfast
- Wendy Osborne – Volunteer Now

Nominations were invited in January 2016 to elect a Committee for a two year term to oversee and deliver the NI Open Government Network Action Plan. Membership of the Committee comprises:

- Aaron McCormick – NEETS Forum (supported by Jennifer Cole)
- Andrea Thornbury – Detail Data, NICVA
- Ann Allan
- Aongus O'Keefe – Inspiring Impact
- Brendan Browne – Trinity College
- Brian Cleland – University of Ulster
- Carol Forster – Northern Ireland Environment Link (Observer)
- Ciara Gaffney – NEETS Forum (supported by Jennifer Cole)
- Colm Burns – (Chairperson)
- Helen Flynn – Human Rights Consortium
- Kevin Murphy – Voluntary Arts Ireland
- Markus Ketola – University of Ulster
- Murray Watt – Supporting Communities NI
- Paul Braithwaite – Building Change Trust (Observer)
- Pip Shea – Farset Labs

The Steering Committee meets every six weeks and is responsible for the following:

- Overseeing and supporting the Secretariat to deliver the 24 month NI Open Government Network Action Plan

- Developing strategy and policy in the interests of the NI Open Government Network as a whole and the public, putting forward ideas and constructively building on those of others

- Taking decisions about the prioritising of strategy according to the importance of the issue to the NI Open Government Network

- Monitoring implementation of policies and activities of committees at a high level and assesses the effectiveness of the agreed strategy

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- Representing the NI Open Government Network policies and views in a positive way to external Audiences

- Communicating with the membership, representing the views and policies of the NI Open Government Network and gauging the views of the wider membership

4.2 Open Government Vision & Terms of Reference

In June 2015, the services of Collaboration NI were enlisted to facilitate the first NI Open Government Network Strategy Day at which the Network's vision was debated and refined, and a draft Terms of Reference was discussed.

Over the following couple of months, the OGN secretariat worked with Collaboration NI to finalise the Terms of Reference.

The Terms of Reference agreed with the network are available here.

4.3 Committee Meetings

Committee Meetings were held on the following dates in 2015-2016:

- 12th June 2015 (Strategy Day)
- 23rd July 2015
- 4th September 2015
- 19th October 2015
- 10th December 2015
- 5th February 2016
- 23rd March 2016
- 4th May 2016 (Strategy Day)

Secretariat reports are prepared on a six weekly and quarterly basis and circulated to the Committee for information and discussion. Minutes of Committee meetings are available here.

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