



Building a Better Future

Draft Programme for Government 2008-2011



Northern Ireland
Executive

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BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE

NORTHERN IRELAND EXECUTIVE

PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT 2008-2011

INTRODUCTION

We are entering a more optimistic and promising era. As an Executive, we are determined to seize this unprecedented opportunity to deliver a better and more sustainable future for all of our people. We aim to build a prosperous, fair and inclusive society, supported by a vibrant and dynamic economy and a rich and sustainable environmental heritage.

We have much goodwill and support both at home and abroad – including from the United States and the European Union – to help us realise the opportunities and address the challenges we face. We will seek to build on this goodwill and support to create a confident and vibrant region that plays its full part in North/South and East/West relations. We will strive to also ensure that all parts of our region share in sustainable economic and social development and are able to contribute to and benefit from a better future.

Working together we can build a better future for all – a society which is at ease with itself and where everyone shares and enjoys the benefits of this new opportunity. This is our commitment to you.

In this, our first Programme for Government, we have set out our strategic priorities and key plans for 2008 - 2011. The Programme for Government has been used in determining our Budget and Investment Strategy, which we are publishing at the same time. Together, these demonstrate how we will allocate our resources and capital investment in support of our priorities.

PRINCIPLES

We are conscious that you have put your trust and confidence in us as an Executive to deliver a better future for you. We will repay your trust by:

- **providing good leadership and working energetically in the interests of everyone.** We are determined to make a difference and will work strenuously to tackle the challenges we face and seize the opportunities open to us.
- **working in partnership** as an Executive, and across the public, private and voluntary sectors, to harness the ideas, energy and commitment of all the sectors.
- **raising standards** across Government, both in terms of the openness and accountability of the Executive, and in driving improvements in our essential public services.
- **delivering fair outcomes and social improvements** in terms of the implementation of our policies and programmes.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

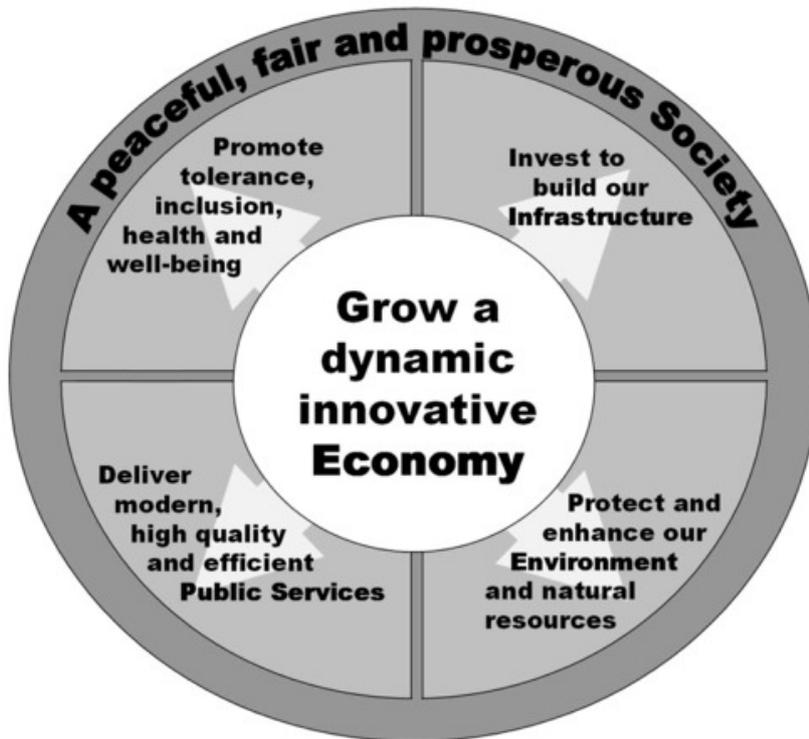
Our over-arching aim is to build **a peaceful, fair and prosperous society in Northern Ireland, with respect for the rule of law** and where everyone can enjoy a better quality of life now and in years to come.

To achieve this we need to pursue an innovative and productive economy and a fair society that promotes social inclusion, sustainable communities and personal health and well-being. We must also do this in ways that protect and enhance the physical and natural environment and use resources as efficiently and sustainably as possible.

Equality is an important issue for the Executive and for society. Inequalities exist, and we must strive to eliminate all forms of inequality.

There are many challenges facing the new Executive as we seek to deliver the type of future we all want. In order to address these challenges and realise the opportunities available to us

we will focus our time and energy towards achieving five key strategic and inter-dependent priorities – as follows:



Growing the economy will be our top priority over the lifetime of this Programme for Government. This is vital if we are to provide the wealth and resources required to build the peaceful, prosperous, fair and healthy society we all want to see, supported by the public services and infrastructure which people expect and deserve.

But the priority areas are interconnected, and we recognise that we cannot grow

the economy in isolation from determined efforts to transform our society and enhance our environment. Building a strong economy requires a healthy, well educated population, high quality public services, a commitment to use prosperity to tackle disadvantage and a tolerant, inclusive and stable society if we are to attract the investment and skills needed to promote growth. It is also imperative that economic growth and wealth creation are taken forward in a manner which is fair and sustainable if we are to meet the needs of today, as well as those of future generations.

CROSS CUTTING THEMES

In light of this, our approach to delivering our priorities will be underpinned by two cross-cutting key themes:

A better future: fairness, inclusion and equality of opportunity will be watchwords for all of our policies and programmes.

This places an overarching responsibility on the Executive to proactively change the existing patterns of social disadvantage by using increased prosperity and economic growth to tackle ongoing poverty.

This is the challenge for all of us today — to develop new and innovative measures that will address existing patterns of socio-economic disadvantage and target resources and efforts towards those in greatest objective need.

Sustainability: building a sustainable future will be a key requirement for our economic, social and environmental policies and programmes.

We will ensure that the principles of sustainability – development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs – underpin our approach to all our activities.

As an Executive, we will demonstrate our commitment to sustainability through the decisions and actions that we take and will work in partnership with others outside government to promote a wider understanding and knowledge of the issue.

SPENDING COMMITMENTS

Over recent years, health and social care and education and learning have together accounted for a growing share of Government spending in Northern Ireland. Their share in 2007-08 will account for 67% of the total. Given the importance of a healthy, well-educated and highly skilled population to the achievement of our strategic priorities, the spending committed to these areas over the three year period covered by this Programme for Government will be maintained at the same high level, rising to almost 70% of the total by 2010-11.

PRIORITY AREAS AND KEY GOALS

We have set out below an overview of our **priority areas** and the **key goals** we propose to take forward in pursuit of our over-arching aim. The priorities provide a framework to address the key social, economic and environmental challenges we face and take advantage of the very real opportunities which devolution has presented. They highlight our commitment as an Executive to work together to address those challenges and build a better future.

PRIORITY: GROWING A DYNAMIC, INNOVATIVE ECONOMY

Our primary focus over the lifetime of this Programme for Government will be on growing the economy. Sustainable economic growth and increased prosperity will provide the opportunities and means to enhance quality of life, reduce poverty and disadvantage, increase wealth, health and wellbeing and build stronger, more sustainable and empowered communities.

A successful economy is characterised by high productivity, a highly skilled and flexible workforce and employment growth. We have much to do in terms of building our skills base, increasing prosperity and improving our productivity. We also need to address problems of economic inactivity and ill-health amongst the working age population and promote greater employment opportunities in rural areas and disadvantaged communities. At a time when the potential for economic growth is at its greatest, it is crucial that we use this growth to tackle inequality and use prosperity to end poverty.

To these ends, we will address the structural weaknesses in our economy and focus on growing the private sector including small and medium indigenous enterprises. We will focus on increasing productivity and supporting growth in well-paid high skilled jobs. Our workforce needs to be better qualified and more flexible; our companies must become more innovative and invest more in research and development; and a culture of enterprise and business growth has to be encouraged.

As an Executive, we will support business, and create the conditions in which enterprise can flourish. We will work to grow the economy and private sector to generate high value jobs. This will include amongst other things a focus on increasing private sector investment in innovation and on improving the strength of our tourism sector. This will require investment in our infrastructure and driving forward social transformation and environmental improvement to

We will:

- From today, decide all large scale investment planning proposals within 6 months, provided there has been pre-application consultation.
- Increase by 300 the number of PhD research students at local universities by 2010.
- Introduce a new programme to increase the commercialisation of university and college research by 2010.
- Work with the business sector to deliver widespread access for businesses to a next generation Broadband network by 2011.
- Invest £45.0m by 2013 to improve the competitiveness of the agricultural sector.

create a region which offers a high quality of life to those who wish to live and work here. The development of the science base is vital to delivering an innovative economy which will create new opportunities for higher value-added employment. This is essential if we are to retain our young people, our existing highly-skilled employees and attract the people and investment required to drive the increasingly knowledge-based economy.

Key Goals

We will work to develop the economy by:

- 1) Aiming to halve the private sector productivity gap with the UK average (excluding the Greater South East) by 2015.**
- 2) Increasing the employment rate from 70% to 75% by 2020.**
- 3) Supporting 45 new businesses and 600 existing companies to become exporters for the first time by 2011.**
- 4) Securing inward investment commitments promising over 6500 new jobs by 2011 and ensuring that at least 75% of these provide salaries above the local private sector average.**
- 5) Securing £120m of private sector investment commitments in innovation and 300 companies engaging in R&D / innovation for the first time by 2010/11.**
- 6) Growing the creative industries sector by up to 15% by 2011.**
- 7) Increasing the number of tourists visiting each year from 1.98m to 2.5m by 2011 and increasing tourism revenue from £370m to £520m each year by the same date.**
- 8) Ensuring by 2011 that 70% of school leavers achieve 5 or more GCSE passes at A* to C.**
- 9) Ensuring by 2015 that 80% of the working age population is qualified to at least GCSE level or equivalent.**
- 10) Increasing the number of adult learners achieving a qualification in literacy, numeracy and ICT skills by 90,000 by 2015.**
- 11) Increasing by 25% the numbers of students, especially those from disadvantaged communities, at graduate and postgraduate level studying Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM subjects) by 2015.**

PRIORITY: PROMOTE TOLERANCE, INCLUSION AND HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Advancing social transformation and the inclusion of all of our people is essential if we are to deliver the peaceful, prosperous, fair and healthy society we all want. Doing so will help to create the conditions for economic growth and deliver real improvements in health and wellbeing. Real progress has been made in recent years and our society is continuing to be transformed. But significant challenges remain to be addressed if everyone is to be given the opportunity to contribute to and benefit from a better future.

Too many of our people, particularly the most vulnerable, continue to live within communities which experience high levels of poverty, disadvantage and exclusion. They are more likely to suffer from poor health and low educational attainment and experience unemployment and more limited lifetime opportunities. For such communities the benefits of recent progress are not always clear and many feel marginalised or excluded.

Addressing disadvantage and exclusion will require co-ordinated action to support the most vulnerable and to create strong, vibrant sustainable communities which enhance quality of life and which encourage everyone to realise their potential. We must regenerate our urban and rural areas, build community capacity and leadership, remove the barriers to employment and independent living for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged, and address significant inequalities in health and educational outcomes.

We will:

- Extend free public transport during 2008 to everyone aged 60 and over.
- Introduce in 2008 a new Employment and Support Allowance to enable those unemployed due to ill-health or disability to return to work.
- Put in place by 2010 a careers advice service to meet the needs of people with disabilities.
- Introduce a screening programme to improve survival rates from bowel cancer by 2009.
- Bring forward a £10.0m package to combat rural social exclusion and poverty.
- Host at least 10 countries at training camps for the 2012 Olympics or Paralympics.

We also recognise the need to provide more social and affordable housing as a cornerstone of sustainable communities. We have work underway to identify how, in partnership with developers, we can more effectively address this requirement.

The overall health status of our population needs urgent attention. We continue to have higher than average mortality from coronary heart disease, cancer and stroke, while obesity levels, particularly among our children, are rising at an alarming rate. Waiting times for treatment are still too long and the outcomes from treatment should be better. In mental health and learning disability, we are over-reliant on long-stay hospitals and the range of primary and community services is limited. All of this places a considerable strain on public services, and impacts on the social and economic wellbeing of those affected. We must take action to prevent illness and improve physical and mental health, promoting healthier lifestyles and changes in physical activity.

We must also continue our efforts to address divisions within our society. Progress has been made, but sectarianism, racism and intolerance are still too evident. They mar our reputation, blight our economic prospects and have a corrosive effect on our society. For these reasons it is imperative that we all embrace the opportunity to create a better future, based on tolerance and respect for cultural diversity.

Key Goals

We will work to create a fairer society and look after our most disadvantaged by:

- 1) Reducing child poverty by 50% by 2010 and eradicating it by 2020.**
- 2) Investing over £500m in regenerating disadvantaged communities, neighbourhoods, towns and cities by 2012.**
- 3) Increasing to 125,000 the number of children and young people participating in sport and physical recreation by 2011; and by 2013 having at least a third of people with disabilities so participating.**
- 4) Ensuring that, by 2013, anyone with a mental health problem or learning disability is promptly and suitably treated in the community and no-one remains unnecessarily in hospital.**
- 5) Reducing mortality from bowel cancer by 15% and acting to reduce cervical cancer by 70% by 2013.**
- 6) Ensuring that by 2013 everyone who suffers a stroke is assessed within 90 minutes for suitability for thrombolysis and that stroke mortality rates are reduced by 15%.**
- 7) By 2013, helping people with chronic illnesses to live more active lives and reducing unplanned hospital admissions for such patients by 50%.**
- 8) Achieving a position by 2011 where 30% of school leavers entitled to free school meals obtain 5 or more GCSE passes at A* to C.**
- 9) Reducing the number of abused or neglected children on the Child Protection Register or in care by 20% by 2013.**
- 10) Reducing by 33% the overall number of people, and by 50% the number of children, killed or seriously injured on our roads by 2012.**

PRIORITY: PROTECT AND ENHANCE OUR ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES

There are recognised links between a healthy environment, a thriving economy and a high quality of life. We have a rich and varied natural heritage, which includes habitats and species of international, national and local significance. In recent years, a combination of factors has resulted in major changes to our landscape and threats to the diversity of our wildlife. Action is needed to protect and enhance our environment for future generations.

Our built heritage is equally rich with a complex array of archaeological sites, monuments and buildings reflecting the diversity of our history. These are among our most precious assets – vitally important not only to promoting the region as a place to live, work and visit, but also in enhancing well-being and the quality of life for everyone. Our economy is growing and has increased the demand for housing and land for development, with significant concerns that our environmental and architectural heritage are threatened. We must facilitate fair economic and social development, but not at the expense of our built and natural heritage.

We are becoming increasingly aware of both the global and local threats to our natural and built environments. It is clear that climate

change is one of the most serious problems facing the world. While we recognise that it requires action internationally, we are determined to play our part in addressing this challenge by reducing our impact on climate change. We have the lowest levels on these islands of electricity generated from renewable sources and our carbon footprint is relatively high and well beyond a level that is sustainable in the longer-term.

At a local level, therefore, action is needed to protect our built heritage, our landscape and marine environment and to reduce our impact on climate change.

We will:

- Deliver a fundamental overhaul of the planning system by 2011 to ensure that it supports economic and social development and environmental sustainability.
- Strengthen the protection of key habitats and species by declaring 200 new Areas of Special Scientific Interest by 2016.
- Reduce landfill significantly by creating a network of new Waste Treatment facilities at Council level by 2011.
- Increase to 50% the area of agricultural land in Northern Ireland covered by environmental enhancement agreements by 2011.

Key Goals

We will seek to protect our environment by:

- 1) Reducing our carbon footprint by at least 25% by 2025.
- 2) Ensuring that 12% of our electricity is generated from indigenous renewable sources by 2012.
- 3) Reducing by 20% the incidence of Brucellosis and by 27% the incidence of Tuberculosis in cattle by 2011.
- 4) Enabling up to 4700 farmers to comply with the Nitrates Directive by 2009.
- 5) Delivering a new sewer project for central Belfast by 2010.
- 6) Increasing by 1650 hectares the area of forest and woodland by 2011.
- 7) Halting the loss of indigenous species and habitats by 2015.

PRIORITY: INVEST TO BUILD OUR INFRASTRUCTURE

A modern, efficient infrastructure is an essential requirement for economic and social development. It provides a platform to allow our businesses to compete more effectively, to attract investment and skilled workers and to promote inclusion and access to services and raise the quality of life for everyone.

Considerable investment is needed in our infrastructure. Over recent decades, such investment has not been given the required priority and we now have major deficiencies in key areas, such as our roads, public transport, water and sewerage infrastructure and social and affordable housing. This limits our capacity for further fair economic and social development and undermines our ability to safeguard our environment and comply with key EU Directives. It also significantly impacts on our ability to attract investment – particularly to those areas where the infrastructure deficit is greatest.

Our small size and peripheral location has presented particular challenges in ensuring our businesses and communities, especially in rural areas, can benefit from a competitive and sustainable energy and telecommunications infrastructure and markets, both of which play a key role in facilitating balanced economic and social development across the region.

A backlog of maintenance in the health and education estates has also resulted in ageing and costly facilities. These do not enable the delivery of efficient services and are often difficult to adapt to reflect developments in education and patient care. As a result they diminish our children's learning or the experience and outcomes for patients. Government procurement can play an active and effective role in the process of tackling patterns of socio-economic disadvantage.

We will:

- Establish an international telecommunications link in the North West directly to North America and Europe by 2009.
- Improve the quality of life in rural areas by investing £100m in local development strategies by 2013.
- Invest £110m in our sports facilities by 2011, thereby ensuring a lasting legacy from the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.
- Invest £119m in our cultural infrastructure by 2011 through a programme of capital projects.
- Progress plans to extend dual carriageways on the Western Corridor (A5) and Eastern Seaboard Corridor (A8).
- Plan, develop and start work on the first Rapid Transit line in Greater Belfast by 2011.

These areas must be addressed if we are to deliver fair economic growth, improve the quality of life across the region and ensure that our rural and urban areas remain attractive places for people to live and work. Through our Investment Strategy we will take forward an unprecedented level of capital investment in key strategic areas, to improve the state of existing facilities and invest in new infrastructure where needed. This will ensure we have a modern infrastructure, fit for the 21st Century, which enables businesses to compete more effectively, thereby facilitating economic growth, tackling social inequalities and improving the quality of life across the region.

Key Goals*

Through our Investment Strategy we will put in place a modern infrastructure fit for the 21st century by:

- 1) Investing £5.6bn in our infrastructure over the next 3 years and a total of at least £18.0bn over the next 10 years.**
- 2) Investing £3.1bn in our road network by 2018.**
- 3) Investing £1.4bn in our water and waste water infrastructure by 2018.**
- 4) Taking forward capital investment of £3.5bn in our schools and youth services and £3.5bn in health and social care by 2018.**
- 5) Investing at least £1.4bn in social and affordable housing by 2018.**

* **Note:** The figures quoted above are indicative capital allocations based on the 10 year Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland.

PRIORITY: DELIVER MODERN HIGH QUALITY AND EFFICIENT PUBLIC SERVICES

We are currently taking forward the most wide ranging reform of public services for a generation. At the heart of this reform programme is a commitment to world class public services which meet the needs of the economy and wider society.

We are committed to taking forward key reform programmes in areas such as health, education, water and planning and will shortly announce our plans for the reform of local government. These will result in significant changes to both the structure and delivery of public services, reducing bureaucracy and enabling us to focus our energy and resources on frontline services. . We will ensure that the reforms and restructuring will be compliant with recognised best practice in social procurement guidelines.

Modernising the infrastructure and processes of the Civil Service is a key part of our reform programme. Our aim is to reduce costs and cut out bureaucracy by sharing key corporate services such as human resources, finance and ICT across departments. This will realise significant savings which will be redirected to delivering key services direct to the public.

A Performance Efficiency Delivery Unit will be established to examine the scope for departments to deliver savings over and above the 3% which has been set.

The reform programme, however, is about much more than efficiency savings. It is about bringing government closer to people, revitalising public services and responding to the increasingly diverse nature of our society. It is about ensuring that public services are more accessible, accountable and responsive to individual needs and the lifestyles that people now lead. This means changing the focus from one of administrative boundaries to addressing the needs of people and working together to deliver better experiences and outcomes.

We will:

- Reduce by 25% the administrative burden on farmers and agri-food businesses by 2013.
- Review the overall number of Government departments by 2011.
- Provide a network of one-stop shops to improve access to DARD services by 2011.
- Establish a Library Authority and an Education and Skills Authority by 2009.
- Introduce a single telephone number contact point for public services by 2009.

Improving the experience and outcomes for everyone who uses public services will ultimately benefit society as a whole. Delivering more flexible and joined up services will also ensure we are better able to respond effectively to the needs of local communities and businesses.

Key Goals

We will deliver more efficient and effective public services and bring Government closer to the citizen by:

- 1) Delivering 5% efficiency savings on administration costs each year for the next 3 years for all Government departments.**
- 2) Delivering 3% per annum efficiency savings on departments' resource budgets and using the Performance Efficiency Delivery Unit to drive higher levels of savings.**
- 3) Generating an extra £1.0bn of capital realisations by 2011 to invest in our infrastructure.**
- 4) Modernising the structure and powers of local government by 2011.**
- 5) Consolidating and streamlining 70% of Government department and agency websites by 2009.**

LINKAGES

North/South and East/West

We cannot tackle the challenges we face alone. To help us deliver on our priorities, we are committed to fostering and promoting our North/South and East/West linkages, through day to day contact between the relevant administrations, and through the North South Ministerial Council and the British Irish Council. In these contexts, we will continue to take forward mutually beneficial and practical co-operation with the British and Irish Governments and other administrations, to help us deliver real benefits, particularly on infrastructure, trade and business, tourism, agriculture and health service provision, and in tackling major issues that confront all of us, such as social exclusion and barriers to mobility, drugs and other crime, the environment and transport.

International Relationships

We need to engage positively in the European Union and to build on existing partnership and collaboration across key policies and programmes. A European Commission Taskforce, created by the EU President, José Manuel Barroso, is considering how our region can participate more effectively in EU initiatives, both financial and non-financial. The Taskforce will deal with a broad range of policy issues, including sustainable development, employment, culture, rural development, fisheries, urban development and the environment.

Of importance is our relationship with the US, which forms the largest part of our investment market. We are planning an Investment Conference for Spring 2008 which will provide an opportunity to position ourselves as a competitive business location for US companies in our key ICT, financial and business services sectors.

We will also make the most of the opportunity to participate in the Shanghai World Expo 2010, to demonstrate our innovation, creativity and enterprise to the rest of the world, and to further establish ourselves in this important part of the world.

DELIVERING OUR PRIORITIES

Public Service Agreements

To support our priorities and help realise our goal of a better future we have developed a framework of 23 Public Service Agreements (PSAs). These are being published as an Annex

to our Programme for Government. They confirm the key actions we will take in support of our priorities, and the outcomes and targets we aim to achieve over the next three years.

The framework of 23 PSAs is focused on addressing key cross-cutting issues and challenges. The PSAs therefore cut across departmental boundaries and many of the outcomes are interdependent. This will help ensure a focus across Government on the key issues and outcomes to which we are committed. Driving them forward in a cohesive manner will be essential and will require all departments to work closely together.

At a strategic level we will conduct an Equality Impact Assessment of the Programme for Government and accompanying PSAs in accordance with our statutory duties.

Conclusion

While Government can provide a lead, it cannot, however, address the challenges we face alone. All sectors, including business, the trade unions, academia, the voluntary and community sectors and individuals must play their part. As an Executive, we are committed to open and accountable government, and as we move forward we want to draw on the energy and expertise of those outside government to tackle the challenges and seize the opportunities open to us.

We will monitor and measure our performance against this Programme for Government to ensure we are delivering on our commitments to you. We will also review and consult on our priorities and performance annually to ensure that our actions remain clearly focused on addressing the challenges and opportunities if we are to deliver a better future for all our people.

Comments on the Draft Programme for Government 2008-2011
can be submitted by writing to the following address:

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