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**MEMORANDUM E (20) 170 (C)**

**FROM: FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER**

**DATE: 22 JULY 2020**

**TO: EXECUTIVE**

**FINAL EXECUTIVE PAPER: PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT AND  
APPROACH TO COVID-19 RECOVERY**

**Introduction**

1. The purpose of this paper is to seek Executive agreement to a way forward on the development of a Programme for Government (PfG) in the context of the Executive's ongoing response to and recovery from the COVID-19 crisis.
2. PfG is the highest level strategic document of the Executive. It determines the direction of travel and it provides the basis of working of every government department.
3. Over recent months, the Executive has deployed a significant range of initiatives and interventions in its response to COVID-19 based around economic, health and societal priorities. It is now considering its approach to recovery, which includes as a first step, the relaxation of certain restrictions in the Coronavirus Regulations. As we move away from these relaxations and the emergency response to the pandemic, the status and progress of the PfG is becoming increasingly relevant. It is therefore critical that the Executive is clear as to how the recovery work aligns with the PfG.

**Background**

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4. In February 2020, the Executive agreed a two-stage process to the development of a PfG in line with the step approach set out in New Decade, New Approach (NDNA).
  - Firstly, the development of an outcomes-focused PfG for 2020/21, to be ready by April 2020 based on an enhanced version of the Outcomes Delivery Plan and updated to reflect the Executive's agreed immediate priorities and actions; and
  - Secondly, the development of a new strategic PfG, reflecting agreed longer-term priorities, to be ready by April 2021, informed by citizen and community engagement and co-design and aligned to a multi-year budget and legislative programme.
5. The Executive further agreed that the PfG should have built-in flexibility – to make it a responsive document, adaptable to changing circumstances where new actions can be added and ineffective, old ones removed in response to societal needs.
6. PfG structures are firmly established across the NICS and wider public sector – Outcome Owners, Indicator SROs, Outcome teams and a central PfG Team are all in place. Outcomes-based working practices are now firmly embedded and understood and stakeholder engagement/collaborative working are now regarded as key elements to PfG development and delivery.
7. Previously, extensive civic engagement and consultation processes have drawn out very clearly that there is significant (almost universal) support for an outcomes-based PfG as the basis for government working more collaboratively, within its own structures and with partners and citizens, through a commitment to genuine collaboration, partnership and co-design of public services to deliver change and improvement in the things that matter most to people.

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8. Whilst the Executive commitment to publish PfG 2020 in April was missed due to COVID-19, an intensive stakeholder engagement process had begun and good progress had been made towards preparation of a draft document using the outcomes-based approach. Stakeholder expectation is that engagement will recommence at earliest opportunity.

### Current Position

9. It is clear that the ongoing response to and recovery from the COVID-19 crisis will dominate the Executive's work programme for the remainder of 2020/21. However, there are many other fundamental challenges and priorities to be mindful of – addressing long standing economic and societal problems, the promotion and protection of rights and identity, tackling paramilitarism, ending sectarianism, housing supply, hospital waiting lists and the need transform the delivery of the health services. There is also the range of commitments contained in NDNA, most of which have not yet been actioned.
10. In addition, there are challenges in the management and delivery of statutory services across every sector – in education, justice, infrastructure, agriculture, delivery of welfare and other social services. These lists are not exhaustive, but they help illustrate the wide range of routine business that must continue under the direction and control of the Executive and which form the substance of a Programme for Government.
11. Therefore, **in the first instance, you are invited to agree that the plan should remain to deliver a revised, strategic PfG (aligned if possible to a multi-year budget and legislative programme) to commence from April 2021.** This will require significant preparatory work in 2020/21 and is discussed further in paragraphs 15-19 below.

### PfG 2020/21 and Recovery Framework/Plan

12. The challenge now for the Executive is to determine a way of bringing together the targeted, shorter-term COVID-19 recovery actions with the

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broader public service delivery programmes for the remainder of 2020/21, pending the development of a longer-term strategic PfG for April 2021 and beyond. There are essentially three options for how this might be achieved, as follows:

**Option 1: Production of separate plans for recovery and PfG for 2020/21, consisting of an activity-based COVID-19 recovery framework/plan separate from but in parallel with an outcomes-based PfG.**

### **Benefits:**

- Flexible and responsive to immediate and changing COVID challenges.
- Helps to maintain momentum with outcomes-based working practices and continued focus on wellbeing.
- Keeps open engagement channels with key stakeholders.
- Eases the transition into the strategic PfG.
- Would incorporate those NDNA commitments that need to be taken forward in 2020/21.

### **Risks/disadvantages:**

- Likely to be confusing and complicated to deliver in the timescale available.
- Overlap and duplication between the two Plans.

**Option 2: A single outcomes-based PfG, with an additional COVID-19 recovery element under each Outcome.**

### **Benefits:**

- Continuity of approach based on Outcomes Framework, which was extensively consulted on in 2016 and refined and developed for use in the Outcomes Delivery Plans 2018 and 2019.
- Continues to put wellbeing agenda to the fore.
- There are established PfG/Outcomes delivery structures.

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- Would incorporate those NDNA commitments that need to be taken forward in 2020/21.

### **Risks/disadvantages:**

- Loss of flexibility and responsiveness as a consequence of having to combine short-term emergency activity with evidenced-based actions for delivery towards longer-term outcomes.
- Potentially conflicting aims of recovery activity and wellbeing actions.

### **Option 3: An activity-based Recovery Framework/Plan which acts as the 'de facto' PfG for 2020/21**

#### **Benefits:**

- Provides a sharp focus on COVID-19 recovery.
- Straightforward and quick to introduce.
- Easily attuned to sectors/areas of greatest need.
- Provides continuity by aligning with the Executive's approach to the response/relaxations phase of the pandemic.
- Aligns with the approach to the EU Future Relations programme.
- Would incorporate those NDNA commitments that need to be taken forward in 2020/21.
- Provides time and space for development of strategic level PfG 2021, and to incorporate the learning from the response and recovery phases.

#### **Risks/disadvantages:**

- Would not cover the complete range of other Executive priorities
- Loss of momentum with outcomes-based practices and the risk of losing focus on wellbeing.

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- Potential criticism from stakeholders as not in line the approach to PfG outlined in NDNA.
13. **Our assessment is that Option 3 represents the preferred approach in the current circumstances**, as it provides a flexible, responsive and targeted approach to the dynamic nature of the recovery phase, which is aligned to the Executive's approach to the Response phase and the EU Future Relations programme. It also recognises the contribution of NDNA to recovery, whilst not losing sight of the longer term aim of 'improving wellbeing for all by tackling disadvantage and driving economic growth'. **It is therefore recommended that you agree that Option 3 is the preferred approach.**
14. As part of this approach, the Executive has scheduled a specific meeting on 22 July to discuss its approach to Recovery.

### Strategic PfG 2021/22 – development process

15. A significant amount of work will be required in 2020/21 to prepare for and develop a new strategic PfG for 2021/22 and beyond. In practice, in order to have a strategic PfG in place by April 2021, work would need to commence at the earliest opportunity, and in earnest by September 2020 informed by:
- Stakeholder engagement – extensive engagement would continue throughout autumn period;
  - Executive away-day events arranged to discuss the strategic level framework with input from appropriate experts; and
  - Outcome Owner input and broad perspective of PfG central team.
16. Close cooperation will be required with DoF to ensure the development of the PfG and the budget move forward together.

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17. It is anticipated that an outline of a draft PfG could be ready in early October. A joint PfG/budget public consultation would be launched in October with a view to having Version 1 PfG ready in time for the December budget statement.
18. Work to refine the draft PfG would continue in early 2021, with a possible second public consultation process ahead of new PfG launch in April 2021.
19. A summary of these steps is outlined in **Appendix 1**. It should be noted that this is an ambitious and extremely challenging timetable and will require a significant effort from all stakeholders and contributors in order to deliver against it.

### Recommendation

20. It is recommended that the Executive:
- a. Agrees that a strategic PfG is developed for implementation in April 2021 (per paragraph 11 above) and that work is taken forward in line with the timetable in **Appendix 1**; and
  - b. Agrees that the Executive's Recovery Framework/ Recovery Plan will form the basis of its programme of work for 2020/21, in line with paragraph 13 above.

**The Rt Hon Arlene Foster MLA**  
**First Minister**

**Michelle O'Neill MLA**  
**deputy First Minister**

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## KEY STEPS AND OUTLINE TIMETABLE FOR 2021/22 STRATEGIC PFG

Date	Step
August 2020	Begin planning for development of new strategic level PFG 2021 and beyond.
September 2020	Executive away-day events to consider new PFG framework.
	Stakeholder engagement on possible content of new PFG framework and PFG actions.
	Liaison between TEO and DoF on alignment of PFG and budget.
	Preparation for joint PFG/budget public consultation.
October/November	Extensive public consultation.
December/January	Consultation analysis and report.
January 2021	Executive review of PFG following consideration of consultation.
January – March	Revise PFG and consider need for further consultation ahead of PFG finalisation and publication in April 2021.