

## NI Leadership and Governance Conference 2024

*Silo to System | What's the Difference that will Make the Difference?*



## Summary Report and Action Agenda

### Introduction

Over 300 leaders from Local Government, Arms-Length Bodies and Central Government gathered on 6 March 2024 for the annual NI Leadership and Governance Conference and Exhibition, *Silo to System | What's the Difference that will Make the Difference?*

The purpose of the day, which was generously supported by EY and CGI, was to facilitate cross-government conversations, to share key system messages and consider how we can collectively and practically make progress.

At the event, we heard from First Minister Michelle O'Neill and deputy First Minister Emma Little Pengelly, as well as a wide range of key local system leaders. The international perspective was provided through thought-provoking contributions from author Ade McCormick on Intelligent Leadership and Gartner's Robert Stoneman who showcased examples of successful digital transformation from around the world.

The event was highly interactive. Delegates had the opportunity to participate 22 topic-based café conversations drawn from our wider eco-system, and extensive time was built in throughout the day for delegates to discuss their own views in table discussions.

These rich conversations generated over 20 feedback flip charts and 250 post-it notes, highlighting key areas of agreement, and reflecting personal commitments from individual delegates to invest personally in collaborative activities over the next year.

The detailed agenda, recordings and slides from the sessions are available on [www.nipscf.org](http://www.nipscf.org)

## Overview of the key areas and suggestions for action agenda

The key points from conference are set out below, and the potential actions suggested by delegates are listed in blue.

### **“Business as Usual” is no longer viable: we must focus on supporting transformation, renewal, and new ways of working.**

**Business as Usual’ is no longer viable** given our financial challenges and the pace of change and disruption globally. Whilst it is important to stabilise public services in the short term, our focus and investment should be on **new thinking, better partnerships, working with communities** to shape and to implement transformation. We need to take the time to understand how new approaches **both locally and from further afield** are generating better outcomes and assess how we can scale up such approaches at pace.

- i. Create space and support for creativity, innovation, new and diverse thinking across public services
- ii. Show case, celebrate and advocate for disruptive projects and people showing promise and develop better mechanisms to scale and spread pilot projects
- iii. Invest in accessing and building capability around creating technological solutions, in partnership where appropriate
- iv. Address levels of risk appetite creating a more supportive culture for trying new approaches
- v. Work together to create credible, consistent narrative for transformation, which can be harnessed by all parts of the system to help social change and new ways of working
- vi. Recognise the roles and inputs of all parts of the system on an equitable basis, moving away from hierarchical organisational relationships. Invest in collaboration, reducing competition and duplication across public services.
- vii. Stop projects that are not working; avoid excessive focus on stabilising existing ways of working that may not be sustainable in the longer term
- viii. Focus on ensuring our people have the right skills for their responsibilities and sustained support to continue delivering at their best in a fast-moving environment.

### **Citizen Engagement and an Asset-based Approach**

A key theme of conference was the opportunity to **engage citizens** much more proactively in an asset-based approach to shaping, support and deliver change and importantly build trust in public services.

- i. Research and invest in asset-based approaches, building on successful projects already in existence
- ii. Explore more meaningful consultation mechanisms, to explore problems as part of a system, and more fully involve citizens / Invest in collective on the ground engagement
- iii. Working more proactively with partners – across the public service and increase levels of collaboration with existing and potential new partners in community & voluntary sector, private sector and academia.
- iv. By working more proactively with communities seek to secure public trust to underpin and support change

## Agile and Intelligent Leadership

The keynote speaker set out that a different type of more **agile leadership** will be required in the future, as we live in times that are more dynamic and uncertain. We need to ask ourselves:

- Are we doing enough to support existing and potential leaders work in this way?
- Are we doing enough to provide cross-sector learning?
- Are we doing enough to **connect and support these innovative leaders**, supporting them become the system leaders of tomorrow?
  - i. Explore how we can support innovative and system wide leadership development and capacity building – making it fit for the future
  - ii. Invest more proactively in secondments and innovative exchange programmes and providing pathways to move across the public sector
  - iii. Challenge the status quo in recruitment and HR processes
  - iv. Invest in building in good practice in performance management systems supporting individuals to be more collaborative and innovative

## Resources and Mechanisms for Better Collaboration

Throughout conference, we considered how we can find resources and mechanisms for better collaboration, looking at some strong existing examples and other approaches we could explore in the future. These included:

- the role of community interest companies and social investment,
- engaging both the third sector and the private sector more effectively
- place-based approaches
  - i. Ensure PFG is meaningful and provides a collective and unifying shared vision / shared priorities and shared language
  - ii. Engage with political leaders to consider how best to support system wide work
  - iii. Make a this a key priority of the shared leadership forum, hosted by TEO
  - iv. Consider a community planning co-operation legislation and / or providing a vires/legal provision for pooled budgets and resources, linked to shared outcomes
  - v. Invest in better data sharing
  - vi. Invest in innovative mechanisms of finance
  - vii. Consider creating a cross sector transformation fund
  - viii. Carry out a reducing bureaucracy review – particularly in relation to the business case process
  - ix. Showcase best practice in delivery of Partnership Agreements between departments and ALBs – highlighting helpful behaviours and processes