Policy delivery in Northern Ireland

pivotal

Effective delivery of policy is a core function of government, but also a long-standing challenge. This research aims to explore this issue in Northern Ireland and bring together recommendations for change. It seeks to contribute to improved policy delivery and so to better outcomes that benefit people day-to-day.

Executive summary

Pivotal carried out 30 semi-structured research interviews with former ministers, senior civil servants, special advisors and MLAs, as well as business and voluntary sector representatives and other public sector leaders (see anonymised list on page 43). The thoughts and analysis that emerged from those conversations with the participants, all of whom have close experience of policy delivery in Northern Ireland, are central to our findings. We are very grateful to all involved for their participation, openness and insights.

This report collates and analyses the main issues and ideas raised in the interviews. Most of these relate to the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS), but there are strong messages too for Ministers and MLAs. On page 08-09, we provide high-level observations about good delivery. In the rest of the report, we group the interview findings under seven themes which are summarised on the following page.

At the end of each section, we offer recommendations for change, based on suggestions made in the interviews. These are summarised on page 40-41.

The seven themes in this report

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1. **Clear leadership from Ministers, civil servants and MLAs is essential for delivery.** Too often, Ministers do not follow through on previous policy announcements or are pulled away on to more immediate issues. Participants said that political disputes are a huge impediment to effective and timely delivery here, as are unstable or absent government. NI's politicians have a tendency to avoid big decisions, rather than take them on with drive and ambition. In parallel, civil servants should prioritise improved outcomes over needless processes. MLAs should have a renewed focus on robust scrutiny and proper challenge to ensure policy makes a difference in the real world.

2. **The NICS needs to build up its skills** in specialisms including commercial, digital, AI and data expertise. There is too much reliance on buying in external knowledge at present. Movement of staff in and out of the civil service should be encouraged, along with connections and learning from those who have first-hand experience of policy delivery. Civil servants who build up deep knowledge and expertise in a particular policy area should be valued.

3. Interviewees told us that NI civil servants are "intelligent and capable people" (Interviewee Y) but that there are **deep cultural issues reducing their effectiveness.** Risk aversion, in particular, hampers delivery and stifles innovation. Internal processes seem to prioritise tracking how money is spent rather than whether outcomes are improved. There is often a reluctance to involve service users and service providers in policy design, delivery or review.

4. Politicians and civil servants are hampered by some aspects of the **structure of government in Northern Ireland.** Departments work in silos rather than together, a pattern that is exacerbated by the complexities of mandatory coalition. There is an absence of collective responsibility and common purpose. The lack of a strong 'centre of government' at either ministerial or civil service level makes it difficult to lead cross-cutting policies or drive change.

5. **Good use of data is essential** to policy design and delivery. Data collection is common in policy delivery here but there was strong feedback, particularly from voluntary and community sector interviewees, that data processes have higher priority than monitoring whether outcomes improve. Similarly, appropriate targets can be useful for focusing action, but often they are used in a way that hinders more than it helps.

6. **Evaluation and review** processes are often burdensome, with an overwhelming focus on how public money is spent rather than whether outcomes are achieved. Monitoring and evaluation are not routinely used during the life of a policy, sometimes only happening at the end of a programme and often not at all.

7. The Programme for Government commits to **setting up a new Delivery Unit** in The Executive Office. It faces significant challenges, so must have a clear remit, skilled staff, and a focused determination on improving outcomes. The final section of the report gives some suggestions for how to make this unit as effective as possible.

Introduction

Politicians often talk about delivery, which generally means ensuring that policy goals are achieved. Delivering improved outcomes for people in Northern Ireland should be the primary goal of MLAs and civil servants but, time and time again, we see that policies and projects are left partially done, or simply not delivered at all. This report aims to identify the causes of this problem and offer some ideas for positive change.

Northern Ireland is burdened with many examples of strategies and policies which were announced but never had the impact that was anticipated. Poor delivery can mean not just a failure to improve outcomes, but also reduced confidence in the Assembly and Executive to provide for the people of Northern Ireland. This report looks at the impediments to delivery, focusing mainly on issues within the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS), which is tasked with much of this work. This subject has received some attention in recent years, through the RHI Inquiry, the NI Audit Office report into the capacity and capability of the NICS, and other NIAO reports looking at particular policy areas. Our research found that while there are many dedicated, talented and diligent civil servants in Northern Ireland, delivery – defined by Interviewee W as the "realisation of outcomes" – is hindered by numerous structural, cultural and systemic hurdles. This makes it much harder to implement policies that make a real difference to people's daily lives.

Northern Ireland is in a period of relative political stability for the first time in several years. The Assembly and Executive have been restored since February 2024, a Programme for Government (PfG) and Budgets have been agreed, and it is two years until the next scheduled Assembly election. The recent announcement of a multi-year funding settlement from Westminster provides an opportunity to plan ahead and address some of Northern Ireland's long-standing structural issues. The PfG commits to tackling many of these problems, assisted by a new Delivery Unit in The Executive Office.

For this project we conducted 30 in-depth, semi-structured research interviews with former senior civil servants, former ministers, former special advisers, business representatives, community and voluntary sector representatives, research organisations, and other public servants. We requested access for interviews with current civil servants, but this was declined. Interviews were recorded and transcribed into more than 1,000 pages of research evidence. Interviewees have been anonymised, offering those with experience and expertise the opportunity for greater candour, and their responses categorised across six core themes: Leadership, Skills, Culture, Structures, Data and Targets, and Evaluation and Review, as well as findings about the role and usefulness of delivery units. The interviewees' responses, coupled with academic and research resources, inform our findings.

As with all Pivotal reports, we offer this independent analysis and these ideas as a contribution to improved policy making in Northern Ireland.

10 features of good delivery

In the interviews, people told us about what was important for effective policy delivery. This diagram illustrates the top ten features.

01
Strong leadership from Ministers and the Senior Civil Service

Good leadership from both the Minister and the Senior Civil Service emphasises commitment and prioritisation from the top.

"A good minister and good senior civil servant will make things happen"

Interviewee DD
Community and Voluntary Sector Representative

02
Policy making based on evidence

Evidence-based policies are more likely to result in improved outcomes. Unfortunately this is not always the model in Northern Ireland, where policy decisions are sometimes taken for other reasons.

"it's not just research or statistics or data, stakeholders have a lot of valuable inputs"

Interviewee W
Research Organisation

03
Dedicated funding in place

Without proper funding, delivery becomes much less likely. Funding that is protected will help ensure impact from programmes.

"the funding envelope has been far too occasional, that makes life quite challenging"

Interviewee K
Former Public Servant

04
Costed delivery plan with specific and realistic timelines, scope and goals

A realistic and achievable roadmap for delivery is vital. Allocated finance, key milestones, and a focused remit makes delivery much simpler.

"Policy development tends to be aspirational. Implementation tends to be what can actually be delivered on the ground"

Interviewee L
Former Minister

05
Good programme and project management

Planning, assigning roles, governance, budgeting, and keeping track of delivery help ensure projects remain on track.

"good project management was demonstrated during COVID"

Interviewee F
Former Senior Civil Servant

06
Build a team with the right skills and the right people

Involving the right people with the necessary skills will make policy much more effective. Sectoral specialist expertise and generalist skills can both be beneficial.

"Make sure you have got that coalition of people, of interests, of stakeholders that are committed to making this work"

Interviewee B
Former Senior Civil Servant

07
Break down silos

Cross-departmental working is an issue in most governments, but particularly in Northern Ireland. Co-operation across departmental lines makes delivery more effective.

"disrespect departmental boundaries because the outcomes generally involve more than one department"

Interviewee G
Former Senior Civil Servant

08
Positive relationships with delivery bodies and partners

Lots of delivery is done by Arm's Length Bodies, the Community and Voluntary Sector or other organisations, so the NICS should ensure constructive relationships that offer support and guidance.

"if we're not strategic partners with the ALBs, how will we be sure objectives and policies are being achieved?"

Interviewee C
Former Senior Civil Servant

09
Involve those delivering a policy and those impacted by it in design and review

Those targeted by a policy will know what needs done, and those tasked with delivering will know how to do it. These groups should be involved throughout development.

"being close to the people you're serving, having the passion and the energy, and understanding the impact… for example [the Strategy to end] Violence Against Women and Girls"

Interviewee Z
Local Government Representative

10
Regular review and delivery of the policy is required

Delivery is an ongoing and dynamic process, and so there should be times factored in for evaluation and review of the policy, with the option to learn and change course if needed.

"If things aren't working, it's ok to change along the way"

Interviewee X
Public servant

01

Leadership

Policy delivery requires strong and clear leadership from both ministers and senior civil servants. However, ministers' behaviours can delay or even halt delivery, particularly when political disputes or local issues get in the way. A lack of attention on implementation from senior civil servants can also stall progress. The Assembly should play a more challenging and attentive role in scrutinising and supporting delivery.

Political Leadership

"A vital foundation for better delivery is recognition that hammering out political agreement on important issues is essential if we are to move forward. Too often, disagreements have chipped away at the ambition to implement a policy."

Leadership from Ministers is central to policy delivery. Interviewee C, a former Senior Civil Servant, said Ministers definitely want to deliver improved outcomes: "I have never worked with anybody who didn't really care". However, they tend to "get pre-occupied by the day-to-day," (Interviewee F). One former Minister, Interviewee L, recognised that ministers can fall victim to the speed of events, leaving little time to focus on previous commitments.

Clear ministerial leadership empowers the Civil Service. With so much to focus on, strong ministerial leadership drives culture from the top – "A good minister and good senior civil servant will make things happen" (Interviewee DD). Interviewee T, a former Civil Servant, said political leadership can "unlock all the other things" needed to ensure delivery, such as funding, resources, and the ability to overcome obstacles. According to Interviewee E, "if the Civil Service is given clear steering and direction it can, and in many cases has, made good progress in delivery", adding that good relationships and trust between ministers and civil servants are essential. Such leadership was credited with the recent progress made on the expansion of Ulster University's Magee campus.

Ministers can be more interested in 'new' announcements rather than delivery of past commitments. Interviewee L told us that ministers are sometimes keener to get credit for new initiatives rather than working through mundane details of ongoing implementation. Interviewee A highlighted the issue of "New minister, new strategy", where a minister freshly in post abandons previous progress in order to put their own stamp on a policy, generating a repeated cycle of "start all over again" when ministerial roles change.

Political disputes can be a significant impediment to delivery. Many interviewees pointed to political disagreements that slowed down delivery of important policies, whether those disagreements were about policy design, who would benefit, or local impacts. Interviewee E described "fudges and compromises" arising from mandatory coalition resulting in a lack of clear policy direction. A vital foundation for better delivery is recognition that hammering out political agreement on important issues is essential if we are to move forward. Too often, disagreements have chipped away at the ambition to implement a policy. Moreover, Northern Ireland's ministers are well known for avoiding difficult or unpopular decisions, resulting in "policy paralysis" (Interviewee R) or, at best, moving at "a glacial pace" (Interviewee L, a former Minister). Health service transformation and the redevelopment of Casement Park both came up numerous times. Interviewee D said Project Stratum was quick and effective partly because "there was no minister to get in the way" of its management.

There is a lack of urgency and ambition in political decision-making – and politicians have too many priorities. Several interviewees criticised Northern Ireland's political leaders for the time taken to make decisions, such as the delayed publication of the recent Programme for Government. "Other governments have much more urgency to get things done. In NI, time always slips" (Interviewee T). There is also a failure to choose priorities - "We give a little bit to a lot of good things, and don't improve many outcomes as a result," said Interviewee Q adding, "They are in government but not in power". Another constraining factor is that "Certain things are off limits", such as water charges (Interviewee Y, former Public Servant).

The role of Special Advisers (SpAds) – Interviewee I told us that SpAds are "where a lot of the policy detail comes in". The bridging role of the SpAd between the minister and department is central for communication, understanding and action. Interviewee AA, a Community and Voluntary Sector representative, stated that SpAds drive much of the action in departments, and questioned why the NICS couldn't act more like SpAds in terms of their pace, drive and determination.

The Assembly has a poor track record of holding ministers to account for policy delivery, which is a key role of any legislature. Unfortunately, many interviewees reported "conflict and scapegoating [in the Assembly and Committees] rather than actual help with delivery" (Interviewee H). Several pointed to an overall lack of proper scrutiny and accountability around delivery – Assembly Questions are seen as repetitive and Committees dominated by political point-scoring. Interviewee Q went further, saying "The Assembly wastes too much time on debates saying not much more than 'good things are good, bad things are bad'." Interviewee H queried whether MLAs understand how best to help with delivery – "The Assembly has not worked out what its role is yet". Interviewee M, a former Minister, said ministers are not particularly worried about Committee appearances, with the exception of civil servants faced with the Public Accounts Committee where evidence can reflect badly on a minister. Questions were raised about whether the structuring of Committees by Department means that scrutiny of cross-cutting policy delivery falls between the cracks – "there needs to be more joined up scrutiny at Assembly level" (Interviewee M). One suggestion is the formation of a new Committee looking solely at policy delivery.

"Senior Civil Servants should work to engage with partners on the ground, to better understand their needs, and create and deliver better policy on that basis."

Civil Service Leadership

Effective civil service leadership greatly benefits project delivery. Carrying the authority of a Senior Civil Servant helps to open doors and push tasks forward. As with good leadership in any organisation, it guides and inspires staff and creates a more effective environment. Interviewee D said "good practice comes from those at the top" of the NICS and Interviewee S, a former Minister, told us that the most successful policies delivered in their time in the Executive came when their Permanent Secretary was committed fully to the project, and drove innovation and solution-focused thinking within the Department.

But Senior Civil Servants provide leadership in a political context that is often unstable and sometimes absent. The fragile and complex nature of the institutions is a barrier to effective delivery that other civil services do not experience. Officials face the double challenge of helping sustain the institutions (Interviewee T described this role as working "just to keep the damn thing going") while still leading policy delivery. Interviewee N said a Senior Civil Servant has to be "a political priest, diplomat, firefighter" in their support for ministers. Time, resources and energy are used up "just surviving," and "Stability is the number one priority" (Interviewee Y). Interviewee E, a former Senior Civil Servant, said "just muddling through" can be considered enough.

Sometimes, delivery doesn't get the attention or senior sponsorship it requires. Many interviewees, particularly those in the community and voluntary sector and former civil servants, cited the importance of having the sponsorship of someone at or above Grade 3 level to ensure a policy remains a priority. The welfare mitigations package was highlighted for its strong senior support leading to implementation, whereas attempts at an economic inactivity strategy lacked this so, in the words of Interviewee C, "it remained a document".

Some external stakeholders feel that civil service hierarchies can be given greater importance than policy delivery, but the whole NICS needs to be alert to and focused on delivery and performance. Interviewee V, a VCS representative, said the Civil Service is "a class system. People come into meetings and they talk about their grade. They're not a person", adding that the "NICS is very hierarchical and deferential to senior people. Certain grades don't talk to each other". Interviewee I, a business representative, compared the NICS to the private sector, saying "in the business world, people talk to you if they think they can help you, they don't care who you are... they're not always about the greater title".

Senior civil servants are too far removed from the realities of delivery and Interviewee E warned "if you dream something in an ivory tower, that's not practical if you haven't listened to practitioners. You're bound to make mistakes". Interviewee P said, "the closer you are to delivery, the more you understand, the more you put your trust in the people responsible." Interviewee V's experiences with the NICS while working in the community and voluntary sector suggested that "the real lived experiences and voices are nowhere to be seen". Senior Civil Servants should work to engage with partners on the ground, to better understand their needs, and create and deliver better policy on that basis.

Concerns have been raised about morale in the NICS. Several of our interviewees highlighted the impact of a decade of dealing with Brexit, Covid, tight budgets and long periods without the Executive - "many civil servants are fatigued and dejected" (Interviewee G, a former Senior Civil Servant) and "jaded" (Interviewee T). Deloitte's recent 'State of the State' report, which surveyed 30 public sector leaders in NI, found that some high-potential civil servants declined promotion opportunities because of the pressure of the roles, raising questions about where the next generation of leaders will be found.

Recommendations
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01.   Executive Ministers need to be clear about their shared priorities for policy delivery, including a commitment to resolve difficult issues rather than putting them off.

02.   Create a Delivery Champion in the NICS to promote and emphasise the importance of good delivery, together with a Senior Responsible Officer and outcome-based accountability for each policy.

03.   MLAs to take more responsibly for scrutinising delivery, including enhanced training about the role of Assembly Questions and Committees.

02

Skills

The NICS must move away from 'generalists' towards more 'specialists', especially if it wants to drive digital transformation. There is no established pattern of secondments or learning from other sectors. In addition, frequent job moves by civil servants can disrupt relationships with stakeholders and hinder policy delivery aims.

Insufficient expertise in specialist areas - many of those interviewed, particularly from outside the NICS, felt that the skills needed to deliver policy are lacking. "There are not enough people with the right skills in the right places anywhere in the NICS" (Interviewee K). Interviewee T pointed to people being put into roles based on their grade rather than their skillset, adding that, "Getting the right people into the right jobs rather than a body into a post is crucial". At the same time, some interviewees emphasised the commitment and talent of many civil servants, including some who are "surprisingly entrepreneurial" when it comes to solving policy delivery problems (Interviewee N, a business representative). Changes in recent years to recruit more specialists in HR, IT and Finance were acknowledged, but big concerns remain about the current shortage of commercial, digital, AI and data skills. It was noted that the GB Civil Service has made significant progress in developing professional skills in the last 15 years, but that this has not happened to the same extent in the NICS. The new NICS People Strategy aims to address this, as did its previous iteration.

An over-reliance on generalists - the long-standing issue of the civil service having an imbalance that favours generalists rather than specialists was raised repeatedly. "The NICS is dominated by the mandarin generalist" (Interviewee A). The current leadership cohort appears to be perpetuating this model since it is how most of them reached a senior level. "The Civil Service has a reluctance to admit that it lacks appropriate skills," (Interviewee F, a former Senior Civil Servant). The key point, according to Interviewee W, was "knowing when and how to involve a specialist, and not just specialist knowledge but also specialist skills". Participants with experience of working in the NICS placed emphasis on the value of cross-cutting and transferable 'generalist' skills, recognising the need for leaders who could see the big picture. It was noted that Permanent Secretaries with specialist skills have been recruited recently in the Departments of Finance and Health, as well as a new Chief Scientific and Technology Advisor. Interviewee E pulled these two perspectives together - "NICS needs both breadth (the ability to see the big picture) and depth (specialist skills)", with Interviewee T agreeing that "A mixed economy is needed".

Civil service relies on private sector consultants rather than building skills of existing staff. The lack of specific expertise in the civil service means specialist skills are often bought in from the private sector, with the amount of public funding being spent in this way causing alarm amongst some interviewees. "Consultancies are making millions out of the NICS" (Interviewee R). This was referred to as "creating middle class industries" by Interviewee J, who also said that buying in external advice was sometimes used to "provide cover for the civil service" on difficult issues. Interviewee F agreed that it could feel unnecessary – "Consultants borrow your watch and tell you the time". Interviewee B's view was that "the Civil Service needs to develop its own people rather than bringing in consultants". Interviewee K recommended that external expertise is "engendered" into the NICS and becomes an ordinary part of working.

There is a particular urgency to build digital skills. Many interviewees showed concern about a lack of digital skills in NICS, with Interviewee F going so far as to say "people don't know what they don't know". Digital transformation in public services is urgently required but doubts were raised about whether the NICS has the technical or leadership skills needed to drive this forward. Interviewee G said that current tech employees do not have the capacity to drive the transformation needed, so there is an urgent need to invest in digital leaders who could lead change across a wide remit. The creation of an Office for AI and Digital is therefore welcome. A closely connected challenge is the civil service's inability or unwillingness to pay the going rate for digital and AI skills, making it difficult to recruit the people needed (Interviewee O).

"Many of those interviewed, particularly from outside the NICS, felt that the skills needed to deliver policy are lacking."

The Civil Service would benefit from more secondments in and out. Several interviewees, particularly from the voluntary sector, were critical of civil servants' lack of experience of real world delivery or of work outside NICS. "NICS staff need frontline experience to inform their policy making," (Interviewee V). "Civil servants are motivated but lack understanding," (Interviewee Z). Secondments in and out could be a valuable way to improve specialisms within the NICS, but these are not particularly encouraged or valued. Some civil servants are reluctant to go on secondment because of fears they will lose out on opportunities if they are not in the department day-to-day. Participants even said that secondments were discouraged because of the fear of losing good staff from the NICS, while others feel there is a "reluctance to bring in external people" (Interviewee O). Several interviewees from business backgrounds said that the private sector was willing to help, but that these offers had not been taken up – "The public sector could get a lot more out of the private sector". One participant went even further, saying that this was because there is a "hesitancy toward disruptors". Interviewee S sees secondments as "a really healthy thing that should be weaved into how everything operates".

Frequent job moves put policy delivery aims at risk. Deep frustration was expressed by many interviewees, particularly those in the voluntary sector who "rely heavily" on relationship building (Interview BB), about the frequency with which civil servants move job roles. This churn has a negative impact on both policy delivery and relationships with stakeholders. "There is no consistency and there is no continuity," said Interviewee V, a VCS representative. This frequent movement is understood to be the result of NICS career development pathways encouraging staff to gain experience in a range of different roles in order to be promoted. Interviewee N said this gave the impression that the "alternative warfare" of promotion was a bigger motivator than delivery. Many felt that NICS should do more to encourage and reward staff who stay in one policy area in order to develop deep expertise.

Recommendations
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01. Expand specialist professions in the NICS, with a strong emphasis on commercial, digital, AI and data skills. Provide both training for existing staff and recruitment of new staff with these skills.

02. Establish a structured programme of secondments in and out of the Civil Service, as well as opportunities for cross-sectoral peer networking and mentoring between the public, private, and voluntary sectors.

03. Recognise the value of civil servants developing deep knowledge of a particular policy area, and reflect this in performance management and reward systems.

03

Culture

Civil servants are broadly committed and enthusiastic, but they are held back by a burdensome system. Risk aversion acts as a brake on progress at every stage, and this seems to have got worse in recent years. Innovation is not always encouraged and change is often resisted. While delivery is a priority in principle, it doesn't always translate into practice.

Risk aversion acts as a serious brake on progress. This was the cultural issue mentioned most often by participants. Civil servants often make decisions based on a fear of being criticised in a NI Audit Office report or a Public Accounts Committee hearing, or being the subject of a Judicial Review. The fear of media scrutiny can also cause many civil servants to be overly cautious. A culture of "carefulness" therefore prevails (Interviewee N), which has a strong influence on behaviours. Many see this as getting worse since RHI – their "risk appetite is in the gutter," said Interviewee G. Interviewee U suggested there are too many checks and controls, lots of which could be automated. Difficult or controversial decisions are often avoided, with further time-consuming work on options being commissioned instead, sometimes from external consultants (Interviewees O and P). Private sector interviewees were particularly critical of this stasis, saying that the NICS "was hamstrung by process" (Interviewee Q) and emphasising that in business "You can't de-risk to zero" (Interviewee R). Several interviewees noted that during the Covid period a lot of the usual checks were set aside because of the need for urgent action, but these processes quickly returned afterwards.

Everything moves at a slow pace. Partly as a result of burdensome processes aimed at reducing risk, the Civil Service moves at a "glacial pace" (Interviewee L, a former Minister). "It shouldn't take years to get an innocuous policy delivered" said Interviewee N. Interviewee Q summed the situation up as, "Pace is not what civil servants do well. They do process well". There is an unwillingness to promptly change existing ways of work and/or reassign staff to different roles because of changed priorities. Interviewee R, a business representative said "nothing strikes me as agile or pacey" in NICS delivery. Many people pointed to a tendency for current workplans and practices to prevail. "Departments do what they have always done," said Interviewee A, and the "NICS is incrementalist – decisions are based on what happened last year," (Interviewee T).

Lack of focus on outcomes - interviewees were shocked at the lack of attention given to whether a programme's aims are achieved, which stood in clear contrast to the private and voluntary sectors. The "hunger for much better outcomes is not there," and there is a "focus on 'keeping ourselves right' rather than on significant policy interventions with higher stakes," (Interviewee P). Interviewee N concluded that the "[System] needs to be turned on its head and see the reason for doing this is not just the pound notes, it's actually about changing the place". Interviewee Y said "talk is cheap... it's actions and outcomes that count" and that translating that "talk" into delivery is where the NICS struggles.

Innovation is not always encouraged. A common view amongst interviewees is that "the status quo prevails in terms of what people do and working practices" and that "the system can thwart change easily" (Interviewee A). Interviewee J, a former SpAd said, "The concern of the system was as much finding their people something to do as it was having them doing something productive". They added that the NICS has "a culture of management rather than transformation or change", which they and some others attributed to habits developed under years of direct rule. In contrast, Interviewee N said, "Every day a business will ask 'How do I make my business better - quicker, stronger, better?' There is very little of this in NICS," adding that, "The system stops things happening and opportunities are lost". There was particular criticism of the NICS being slow to adopt new technologies, particularly when it meant people's jobs would change.

Disconnection from the realities of policy delivery - many interviewees commented that civil servants were very good at analysing problems, but much less good at coming up with solutions. External experts could help with this, but NICS is seen as inward looking and reluctant to engage with outsiders. Civil servants "would rather talk to each other rather than external people" (Interviewee Q, a business representative) and "were not inclined to engage in difficult conversations with people outside" (Interviewee F). The understanding of how policy is delivered in practice is undervalued, with experts not sought at the policy design stage, effectively rendering some work "conceptual". "NICS is delivering policy without real understanding of people, place and problems" according to Interviewee Z. Their relationship with the voluntary sector is "like lip service" (Interviewee V), with civil servants who genuinely listen to and value those outside the exception rather than the norm (Interviewee DD). Consultation is often "tick box" rather than substantive. Frequently there is time pressure to launch a new policy which means, despite cumbersome processes, delivery design can be rushed (Interviewee W).

'Partly as a result of burdensome processes aimed at reducing risk, the Civil Service moves at a "glacial pace".'

Interviewee L
Former Minister

Recommendations
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01. Enhanced guidance and training on managing risk in practice, with a particular focus on not letting risk assessment delay policy delivery.

02. Explore how other places recognise, encourage and support policy innovations and new ways of working, and learn from good examples.

03. Renewed focus on connecting policy design to the reality of policy delivery through active involvement with service users and service providers outside NICS.

04

Structures

Northern Ireland Departments tend to operate separately rather than as 'one government', making cross-cutting policy delivery very difficult. There is little sense of collective responsibility or common purpose. There is a lack of a strong centre of government to coordinate, control and lead, both at ministerial or civil service level.

Departments act in silos rather than together - this was a very strong message from all the interviews. 'Siloed' working is a challenge for most governments, but in Northern Ireland it is made worse by the allocation of ministerial roles between parties and the lack of collective responsibility. Civil servants in departments are responsible to their minister only, despite the New Decade New Approach commitment to the NICS's "wider obligation to the Executive as a whole." Interviewee O, a former public servant summed up the result - "Cross-departmental delivery is very difficult and it's particularly difficult in Northern Ireland due to independence of departments and compulsory coalition", adding that "any cross government working relies on goodwill". As Interviewee N put it, "they're not one government, they're a series of departments", which only feels joined up when working with ministers from the same party. More negatively, Interviewee C said that depending on the issue or political agenda, in some circumstances "cross-departmental working would get you into trouble". Many of the most long-standing and complex policy problems are cross-cutting in nature, with

Interviewee G encouraging civil servants "to disrespect departmental boundaries because the outcomes generally involve more than one department" and Interviewee Y promoting "systems-based thinking". The "next generation" of policy problems, like climate change, will be even more cross-cutting, highlighted Interviewee Y. Interviewee T said "Working collaboratively is difficult but it would make delivery more effective", with Interviewee X adding that this would also make better use of budgets. There are some impressive examples of breaking down silos, but these often rely on an individual taking the initiative to reach out and build relationships across sectors: "The weight of success is dependent on the individual" (Interviewee W). Interviewee P described this kind of cross-government working as happening "off the side of the desk" rather than in a systemic way. Many good examples, such as the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy, are driven from the ground up, with front-line service providers leading the way by building connections between different delivery bodies, rather than government departments making joint working happen.

The structure of government means there is no formal central leadership, control or coordination. Despite the titles, there is no hierarchy in ministerial roles. The First and deputy First Minister have no authority over other ministers, who are each accountable separately to the Assembly for their own Department. Interviewee F set this out: "If the UK Prime Minister really wants something, they can use their authority over the Secretary of State. The power base is more diffuse here." There is no formal leadership, control or coordination from the centre, unlike in most systems of government. There is a requirement in the Good Friday Agreement for the Executive to collectively agree an annual budget and programme for government, and it can come together in other ways to agree to take forward particular joint actions. However, there is no formal obligation to do so.

The Head of the Civil Service has no formal authority over departmental Permanent Secretaries. Similar to the above point, the Head of the Civil Service (HOCS) does not have any formal authority over departments' Permanent Secretaries, who instead are accountable to their minister and to the Assembly only, and to the Department of Finance for their spending of public money. In practice, HOCS leads the Permanent Secretary Stocktake Group and is responsible for the civil service as a whole, and does have some influence through relationships with all Executive Ministers and a role in managing transfers at the top level. But in a system where departments are headed by ministers of different political parties, this puts a further limit on central leadership, coordination and control. Interviewee

G said there could be ways to create new accountabilities, for example HOCS was the Senior Responsible Officer for the Programme for Government in 2011-16, meaning that HOCS did have authority over Permanent Secretaries when it came to PfG delivery. Interviewee E, a former Senior Civil Servant, went further, suggesting the HOCS should be the Accounting Officer for all NI Departments. They said this would "copper-fasten connectivity" in the NICS, helping break down silos and build trust and co-operation between departments.

There can be a lack of trust between the departments and their delivery bodies. Delivery is often the remit of Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs) rather than the department itself, so this relationship must be a constructive one. On the whole, however, these relationships vary and can be fraught with tension. Departments use ALBs to remain a step removed from delivery, giving them someone to "scapegoat," (Interviewee L). Rather than working together, the sponsor department often hands an ALB a policy and does not provide adequate support (Interviewee C). A number of participants noted that ALBs don't get the financial, resource, or strategic support they need, which has a dire impact on delivery. On the other hand, Interviewee D told us that the relationship has blurred so that departments influence operational decisions and ALBs inform policy creation. Both these extremes are caused by insufficient trust and a lack of clear leadership, to such an extent that Interviewee D, a former Senior Civil Servant, said, "I have never seen a sponsored body arrangement that's worked well".

"Cross-departmental delivery is very difficult and it's particularly difficult in Northern Ireland due to independence of departments and compulsory coalition... any cross government working relies on goodwill"

Interviewee O
Former Public Servant

Recommendations
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01.	Embed NDNA commitment to have the NICS working for the Executive as a whole as well as their departmental minister, with Permanent Secretaries and other Accounting Officers subject to HOCS' formal authority on the delivery of expenditure.
02.	Make HOCS Senior Responsible Officer for the whole Programme for Government.
03.	New Delivery Committee to hold Executive to account for delivery of PfG priorities and other cross-cutting issues.

05

Data and targets

Good use of data is essential for effective policy delivery. While the NICS collects a lot of data, it often fails to use it effectively to inform or improve implementation, instead just creating what are seen as burdensome processes. Using data to create meaningful and achievable targets can help to drive delivery but also risks becoming a distraction if not set up properly.

One of Michael Barber's (2015) rules of 'deliverology' is that "data makes a job do-able". Without good data, it is difficult to decide, design or deliver policy, or to find practical, workable solutions that make a difference. Interviewee T told us that the NICS is good at collecting data but falls short at using it to benefit delivery through creativity, innovation, or solution-focused thinking. Sometimes data is collected without a specific purpose in mind, which only serves to create more complicated and slow systems of governance. The culture of data collection can be summarised in the quotation used by Interviewee E, a former Senior Civil Servant: "In God, we trust. All others, bring data". There have been occasions where data collection and analysis has worked, such as with the plastic bag levy, which had effective analysis of the problem and data-driven solutions-thinking, but these are exceptions to the rule.

In order to be effective, data must be up to date and reliable. Lengthy processes and checking of information mean that "all the data we have is so out of date that it becomes almost irrelevant" (Interviewee N). Interviewee W said it is important that the NICS has an understanding of "what the need is on the ground now, not what it was three years ago", which is made more difficult without timely and rigorous data.

Departments should use data wisely. Interviewee P asked "Is data used in an intelligent way? To make a change? To know where delivery is effective?" and found the answer to these questions was, "No". An effective use of data would be to share it with departments, to speed up processes of collation, avoid duplication and decrease the administrative burden on the state. Pre-existing data should be used where possible to make policies, particularly public services, more accessible, harmonious and interconnected. While there are some positive examples of data sharing in a collaborative, cross-sectoral way, such as the community-based THRiVE programme in Newtownabbey and the Complex Lives partnership in Belfast, overall it is too siloed (Interviewee CC). These information silos are driven by the leadership, with Interviewee K telling us, "data analysis was welcomed to a point. The question was who controlled it".

The use of targets in delivery can be helpful in setting clear goals and providing a means of accountability. Many interviewees see the value in targets to give civil servants and delivery partners something to work towards, for example saying, "Targets are effective. They concentrate minds," (Interviewee Q) and "If there's no targets, no one's ever going to work towards anything," (Interviewee I). Clear targets with good data mean that progress can be measured, enabling reporting, scrutiny and accountability.

Effective targets will measure outcomes and be focused on policy objectives. It was suggested that senior civil servants should be incentivised and held accountable for delivering improvements to targets. Interviewee C asked, "Where are the outcome owners in the new Programme for Government?"

Poorly designed targets can distract from achieving the policy objectives, where civil servants feel the need to choose whether they "hit the target or meet the outcomes" (Interviewee DD). Interviewee H explained this as the result of choosing "some largely irrelevant measure [as a target] and ending up in a system where it's all gamed", possibly because of problems with the availability of data that can be easily measured. Interviewee S, a former Minister, said that departments tend to pick targets that paint themselves in the strongest light rather than ones which benefit delivery and improve outcomes. A further problem is unrealistic targets, as explained by Interviewee B: "whenever you set targets which people don't believe are deliverable, then you're almost guaranteeing failure". Interviewee C, a former Senior Civil Servant, recalled the fear of targets becoming "hostages to fortune" adding there is a general reluctance to set them. In Interviewee T's experience, missing deadlines or targets in the NICS were rarely met with any sanction, a sentiment echoed by Interviewee V.

'Poorly designed targets can distract from achieving the policy objectives, where civil servants feel the need to choose whether they "hit the target or meet the outcomes".'

Interviewee DD
VCS representative

Recommendations
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01.	Use SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) outcome-based targets as much as possible.
02.	Provide incentives for the Senior Civil Service to deliver improved outcomes.
03.	Ministers and Permanent Secretaries should sign up to a comprehensive Data Sharing Agreement providing a clear framework for the effective use of data within and across departments, including reviewing current data sharing practices.

06

Evaluation and review

Many of our interviewees believed that evaluations have become tied up in processes to check how public funding is spent, rather than monitoring whether outcomes are improved. They also said the possibility of NI Audit Office and Public Accounts Committee reviews increasingly creates risk aversion in the NICS.

The "endless checking" processes are burdensome (Interviewee U), taking time and energy away from focusing on delivery. Interviewee P highlighted a culture of "going around the checking system until everybody has run out of steam". Interviewee O called this "bureaucracy gone completely mad". Expansive webs of checking spread risk so thin that accountability barely exists. This can create what Interviewee M called a "dashboard culture" where lots of data is collected but isn't used to inform decisions or improve delivery.

It is not clear what impact the data has on evaluation. Many interviewees discussed the amount of data that is collected, and the lengthy processes in place, but cannot find the connection between the two that results in better outcomes. Rather than systematically being used to refine and improve policy delivery, evaluations have become "box ticking" exercises (Interviewee L, a former Minister). Interviewee H said that evaluations are "insufficiently developed" in the NICS, and are focused on "undigested data", which makes it much more difficult to "take forward the lessons" and progress a policy.

Businesses and the Community and Voluntary Sector experience this acutely, with departmental assessments "always about trying to catch you out" rather than support good delivery (Interviewee DD). Interviewee Q, a business representative, has been told not to expect anything from an upcoming review relevant to their area as it was seen as a "distraction" from other work. Interviewee V was critical of the NICS, saying "they don't care about the impact", which is reflected in their attitude to evaluations. While Interviewee R said that evaluations do ask what makes a difference, Interviewee I couldn't think of any examples of delivery monitoring that resulted in a change in approach. Interviewee BB, from the VCS, said civil servants "ask ridiculous questions about the small things when they should be asking much more interesting questions about the policy challenges."

Departments seem more concerned about how money was spent rather than if outcomes were achieved. Interviewee V said that "some of our government departments are only worried about bums on seats" when it comes to programmes and projects, rather than anything meaningful that makes a difference. Interviewee J agreed, saying "It's all about compliance. Seeing how to improve things isn't rewarded." Interviewee R went further, saying that the NICS tends to "only evaluate the thing itself rather than the bigger package", and so loses sight of duplication of services, overall successes or potential learnings. Interviewee A neatly summarised this problem, saying:

> *"If you employ a builder to build a house, you will not evaluate his success by checking his receipts. You will only evaluate it by checking is the roof on? Is everything working right?"*

In light of this, Interviewee M called for a greater "balance between the roll-out and the count-out", and Interviewee K encouraged civil servants to ask, "What will this project do to transform the lives of people?" rather than merely checking if public money was spent properly.

"Where the lessons of evaluation are taken on board, it is much too late – policy delivery is a dynamic process rather than a fixed point, and so there should be regular evaluations scheduled throughout to take stock and assess progress."

Where the lessons of evaluation are taken on board, it is much too late – policy delivery is a dynamic process rather than a fixed point, and so there should be regular evaluations scheduled throughout to take stock and assess progress. Interviewee Q used the Energy Strategy 2021 as an example, with an evaluation scheduled every five years. However, participants noted that attention only gets paid to evaluations at the end of the process, when it is too late to change course and improve the policy or its delivery – "the only time you really got told about the performance of a policy was whenever they were talking about a new one," (Interviewee J).

The NICS should have a culture of review and learning, including from mistakes. Several interviewees pointed out a reluctance to admit mistakes and learn from them. Interviewee S said the NICS "should learn from failure, not cover it up" and Interviewee A said the "NICS doesn't admit failure, so there is no learning from mistakes". Interviewee G added that both good and bad examples should contribute to learning. Interviewee X encouraged the NICS to be more open to amending policies as they are rolled out: "If things aren't working, it's OK to change along the way."

The Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) and Public Accounts Committee (PAC) have important roles. They review how public money has been spent and assess whether this represents value for money. Concerns were raised that this public scrutiny can cause civil servants to err on the side of caution when delivering policy, "because of the fear of how they look to the Audit Office later on" (Interviewee C). This culture of risk aversion (see 'Culture' page 20) is not created, but may be exacerbated, by these bodies.

Nonetheless, the NIAO does seek to work constructively with departments. It aims to support them in innovation and managing risk rather than to unduly criticise, which was recognised by a number of interviewees. Their stated vision is to use their powers to help improve public services. Interviewee A suggested that this could be supplemented with a greater focus on "what it is a department is trying to achieve" which could help to foster a culture of learning from good practice and from their reports.

Interviewee M sees the role of the PAC as similarly going through "bad holiday snaps", but encouraged its members to move away from a "gotcha" culture towards a more constructive and supportive relationship with departments and senior civil servants. Questions were raised, however, about the PAC's ability to effectively scrutinise, with one former Senior Civil Servant (Interviewee D) saying they "wouldn't be afraid" of the Committee's "poor questioning and scrutiny skills".

Recommendations
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01.	Include regular evaluation points throughout policy delivery, with time and facility to change course if needs be.
02.	Refocus monitoring and evaluations on achieving outcomes rather than just how money is spent.
03.	Ensure a constructive relationship with NIAO and PAC to help promote innovation and measured risk taking in departments.

07

Delivery Unit

The [Programme for Government](#) commits to setting up a Delivery Unit which will "ensure [the Executive's] priorities get the focus needed to bring about lasting change and improvement". There have been many different international examples of delivery units, with varying degrees of success. Below are some ideas about what shape this one should take.

In this research there was a lot of support for the Executive's proposal to establish a Delivery Unit, as a useful mechanism to drive progress on the Programme for Government priorities, including public service transformation. However, there was also scepticism about how these models would work in a power-sharing system, particularly around whether a delivery unit could be effective without a single point of central authority. Interviewee J asked, "The work of the new Delivery Unit may be good, but will it make an impact?" For example, Michael Barber's (2015) methodology is contingent on gaining legitimacy through the support of the Prime Minister. With a multi-party coalition, and a joint office in TEO, the shared nature of leadership may make it more difficult to streamline delivery.

The Executive's plan is to place its Delivery Unit within the Executive Office (TEO) but in so doing it must ensure the Unit carries the support and authority of all departments and ministers. Without this, departments may be reluctant to engage, particularly those run by the smaller parties. A previous iteration of a delivery unit – then-Finance Minister Peter Robinson's Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit (PEDU) – was seen by other Executive Ministers as a "DUP creature" (Interviewee E, a former Senior Civil Servant). This limited trust and reduced its ability to impact on delivery. Interviewee L, a former Minister, warned that civil servants may feel "resentment" at "outsiders" marking their homework. The Delivery Unit will also require strong leadership from the Head of the Civil Service, encouraging civil servants to work with it and provide necessary sponsorship and support. Regular [stocktakes](#) with political and civil service leaders could be used to ensure accountability and progress.

The role, definition, scope, and powers of the Delivery Unit need to be clearly defined by the First and deputy First Ministers and endorsed by the Executive as a whole. Without clear Terms of Reference, it risks becoming unfocused and ineffective. Delivery Units have been used in various ways around the world, mainly to improve accountability, implementation or co-ordination, so there must be agreement on how it will operate here to avoid confusion or loss of direction. In that context, it is concerning that Interviewee S, a former Minister, criticised The Executive Office as the "department of paralysis" and worried that a delivery unit will be "suffocated" by it. Furthermore, without sufficient authority, it will be much harder to corral and challenge civil servants, which is why Interviewee G asks, "Can they wield a stick if they have to?". Another previous attempt at a delivery unit, the Delivery Oversight Group (DOG), was seen as more successful than PEDU because its authority and legitimacy was clear. The leadership of the then-Head of the Civil Service and the involvement of Permanent Secretaries ensured clear accountability and purpose.

The capacity and capability of the Delivery Unit will determine what it can and can't do. Interviewee K suggested a relatively small group of senior people, who have track records in delivering big projects, should work on a small set of priorities to a clear timescale. Interviewee F had a similar view, saying "The Delivery Unit should identify a few key aims and make sure they happen". Many interviewees said that those in the Delivery Unit needed specialist skills, with Interviewee O recommending they have even more specialist knowledge than those in the department they are working with, otherwise it is much more difficult to drive forward real change. That being said, the Delivery Unit should mirror the ideal wider NICS make-up to an extent, with some generalist skills in place as well. It would benefit from some external expertise to drive delivery, coupled with institutional knowledge of skilled senior civil servants. Interviewee F saw the Strategic Investment Board as a "variation on the delivery unit" model, bringing outside expertise and skills into the NICS to drive delivery and improve outcomes. Interviewee R would prefer the Executive put these important delivery skills in the departments themselves, rather than "condensing things down to the centre".

Much like the NICS more broadly, the Delivery Unit's actions should be data-driven, and its staff should have the skills needed to turn data, statistics and targets into meaningful change. Michael Barber's Prime Minister's Delivery Unit (PMDU) was heavily reliant on data analysis that informed effective decisions, such as on A&E waiting times and GP appointments. Interviewee K highlighted the importance of using data to benchmark against the "best in class", offering a vision for where Northern Ireland could be in certain policy areas, with clear direction and delivery to get there.

"The Executive's plan is to place its Delivery Unit within the Executive Office (TEO) but in so doing it must ensure the Unit carries the support and authority of all departments and ministers"

Recommendations
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01.

Publish clear, robust and detailed Terms of Reference which outline the role, scope and authority of the Delivery Unit.

02.

All Executive Ministers and departmental Permanent Secretaries should sign a joint declaration of support for the Delivery Unit, and commit to working constructively with it.

03.

Choose a small number of Programme for Government priorities to focus on, and make sure they happen.

04.

The Delivery Unit should be provided with a realistic budget and sufficient resources, including specialist staff.

05.

Stocktake meetings should take place every 2/3 months with Delivery Unit staff, the First and deputy First Ministers, the Head of the Civil Service, and relevant Permanent Secretaries, to ensure progress is being made and targets are on track.

06.

The work of the Delivery Unit should be transparent, with regular reviews published and special Executive Office Committee sessions to scrutinise their actions. The reviews should be used by the NICS to learn from good practice and from mistakes.

Summary of recommendations

Leadership

01. Executive Ministers need to be clear about their shared priorities for policy delivery, including a commitment to resolve difficult issues rather than putting them off.

02. Create a Delivery Champion in the NICS to promote and emphasise the importance of good delivery, together with a Senior Responsible Officer and outcome-based accountability for each policy.

03. MLAs to take more responsibly for scrutinising delivery, including enhanced training about the role of Assembly Questions and Committees.

Skills

01. Expand specialist professions in the NICS, with a strong emphasis on commercial, digital, AI and data skills. Provide both training for existing staff and recruitment of new staff with these skills.

02. Establish a structured programme of secondments in and out of the Civil Service, as well as opportunities for cross-sectoral peer networking and mentoring between the public, private, and voluntary sectors.

03. Recognise the value of civil servants developing deep knowledge of a particular policy area, and reflect this in performance management and reward systems.

Data and targets

01. Use SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) outcome-based targets as much as possible.

02. Provide incentives for the Senior Civil Service to deliver improved outcomes.

03. Ministers and Permanent Secretaries should sign up to a comprehensive Data Sharing Agreement providing a clear framework for the effective use of data within and across departments, including reviewing current data sharing practices.

Evaluation and review

01. Include regular evaluation points throughout policy delivery, with time and facility to change course if needs be.

02. Refocus monitoring and evaluations on achieving outcomes rather than just how money is spent.

03. Ensure a constructive relationship with NIAO and PAC to help promote innovation and measured risk taking in departments.

Culture

01. Enhanced guidance and training on managing risk in practice, with a particular focus on not letting risk assessment delay policy delivery.

02. Explore how other places recognise, encourage and support policy innovations and new ways of working, and learn from good examples.

03. Renewed focus on connecting policy design to the reality of policy delivery through active involvement with service users and service providers outside NICS.

Structures

01. Embed NDNA commitment to have the NICS working for the Executive as a whole as well as their departmental minister, with Permanent Secretaries and other Accounting Officers subject to HOCS' formal authority on the delivery of expenditure.

02. Make HOCS Senior Responsible Officer for the whole Programme for Government.

03. New Delivery Committee to hold Executive to account for delivery of PfG priorities and other cross-cutting issues.

Delivery Unit

01. Publish clear, robust and detailed Terms of Reference which outline the role, scope and authority of the Delivery Unit.

02. All Executive Ministers and departmental Permanent Secretaries should sign a joint declaration of support for the Delivery Unit, and commit to working constructively with it.

03. Choose a small number of Programme for Government priorities to focus on, and make sure they happen.

04. The Delivery Unit should be provided with a realistic budget and sufficient resources, including specialist staff.

05. Stocktake meetings should take place every 2/3 months with Delivery Unit staff, the First and deputy First Ministers, the Head of the Civil Service, and relevant Permanent Secretaries, to ensure progress is being made and targets are on track.

06. The work of the Delivery Unit should be transparent, with regular reviews published and special Executive Office Committee sessions to scrutinise their actions. The reviews should be used by the NICS to learn from good practice and from mistakes.

Conclusions

This project has shone a light on some of the challenges standing in the way of better policy delivery Northern Ireland. Pivotal's hope is that, in highlighting these issues and suggesting ideas for change, this report will contribute to better policy outcomes in the future, in ways that bring real benefits to people in their day-to-day lives. Below are three cross-cutting conclusions to sit alongside our recommendations.

1. Executive Ministers need to provide clear leadership for the civil service by setting out policy aims, funding and timescales. Political leaders need to strive for consensus despite their differences and avoid postponing difficult or contentious decisions that allow issues to drift. Ministers need to pick priorities, accept they can't do everything, and then have a tight focus on ensuring delivery of improved outcomes. To achieve any of this, the continued stability of the Executive and constructive working between Ministers are essential.

2. The Northern Ireland Civil Service needs to do much more to focus on improving outcomes and tracking impact, together with a less burdensome approach to monitoring how public funding is used. A more proportionate approach to managing risks is required. Innovation, challenge, and cross-department working should be encouraged and rewarded, as should learning from and involving people with expertise outside the civil service. NICS needs to employ far more specialists, involving both new recruitment and development of existing staff, particularly in digital, AI and data skills. The Senior Civil Service should provide strong leadership on all of these issues.

3. MLAs should provide robust but supportive scrutiny of policy delivery, working in a detailed but constructive way. They should use opportunities in the Assembly and Committees to hold Ministers and civil servants to account, to the benefit of the public rather than being driven by party political motivations. This will likely involve renewed training for elected representatives on both the precise nature of their responsibilities for scrutiny and how best to perform this role in an evidence-led way.

Finally, we offer our thanks to the 30 people who participated in our research interviews. We are grateful for their time, honesty and insights. Their views and ideas make up the main content of this report and their willingness to speak with us, their openness, and their passion for change all underline the importance of this issue. This also demonstrates the commitment of many people from different sectors to work with our politicians and civil servants to bring about improvements to policy delivery that will benefit everyone here.

Interviewees and roles

A	Former Community and Voluntary Sector representative
B	Former Senior Civil Servant
C	Former Senior Civil Servant
D	Former Senior Civil Servant
E	Former Senior Civil Servant
F	Former Senior Civil Servant
G	Former Senior Civil Servant
H	Former Senior Civil Servant
I	Business representative
J	Former Special Advisor
K	Former Public Servant
L	Former Minister
M	Former Minister
N	Business representative
O	Former Public Servant
P	Business representative
Q	Business representative
R	Business representative
S	Former Minister
T	Former Civil Servant
U	Business representative
V	Community and Voluntary Sector representative
W	Research Organisation
X	Public Sector Leader
Y	Former Public Servant
Z	Local Government representative
AA	Community and Voluntary Sector representative
BB	Community and Voluntary Sector representative
CC	Former Minister
DD	Community and Voluntary Sector representative

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