

Response ID ANON-C6MZ-ACC1-R

Submitted to Draft Programme for Government Consultation 2024-2027

Submitted on 2024-11-04 13:02:27

About you

Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation?

On behalf of an organisation

About you - Organisation

Please provide your organisation's contact details below:

Organisation name::

Royal Town Planning Institute

Organisation email address:

Joanna.Drennan@rtpi.org.uk

Which of the following best describes the sector you work in?

Charity

Other (please specify):

Can we contact you to discuss your response to this consultation?

Yes

Can we contact you in future about the draft Programme for Government?

Yes

To support transparency in our decision making process, we will publish a summary of the consultation feedback on the PfG webpage. This will sometimes include the responses themselves and may mention names of the responding organisation (if applicable). However, names of individuals responding on a personal capacity will only be published where consent has been given. Please note we will not publish contact details.

Yes, I consent to my name being published with my response

Doing What Matters Most Today: 'Grow a Globally Competitive and Sustainable Economy'

How much do you agree that the priority 'Grow a Globally Competitive and Sustainable Economy' should be included in the Programme for Government?

Competitive_Economy - Grow a Globally Competitive and Sustainable Economy:

Strongly agree

The draft Programme for Government has set out actions that we plan to take under the priority 'Grow a Globally Competitive and Sustainable Economy'. How much do you agree that these are the right actions to take?

Grow_Competitive_Economy_Actions - 'Grow a Globally Competitive and Sustainable Economy' Actions:

Agree

Please provide any other comments you have in relation to the 'Grow a Globally Competitive and Sustainable Economy' priority:

Please enter any comments in the box below:

RTPI Northern Ireland supports the priority for building a globally competitive and sustainable economy, which shows a balanced approach to partnership working across sectors to support businesses and innovation, tapping into further education. It appears to be strategic as well as flexible in addressing local challenges and maximising opportunities. The planning system is key to growing a competitive and sustainable economy, and an economy that is also inclusive. A well-resourced, Plan-led, positive and transparent planning service, which is proactive in engaging local communities, can bring together objectives across services and help achieve inclusive and sustainable development. A strong and engaged plan-led system is essential if developers and communities alike are to have confidence that development will be successful and sustainable.

Doing What Matters Most Today: 'Deliver More Affordable Childcare'

How much do you agree that the priority 'Deliver More Affordable Childcare' should be included in the Programme for Government?

Childcare_Priority - Deliver More Affordable Childcare:
Neither agree nor disagree

The draft Programme for Government has set out actions that we plan to take under the priority 'Deliver More Affordable Childcare'. How much do you agree that these are the right actions to take?

Childcare_Actions - 'Deliver More Affordable Childcare' Actions:
Neither agree nor disagree

Please provide any other comments you have in relation to the 'Deliver More Affordable Childcare' priority:

Please enter any comments in the box below:

We support proposals to enable parents who want to work to be economically active, whilst ensuring quality childcare to ensure young people have the best start in life. Nevertheless, this priority is focused on a very specific issue and fewer, but more strategic and cross-cutting priorities would provide assurances that Government departments will not be acting in silos, but rather contributing to multiple strategic outcomes. To create a better future for our citizens we need strategic direction on development, climate change and infrastructure, as well as urban and rural sustainable development. There is no reference in the document to Community Planning, which has traditionally been recognised as the local delivery of PfG priorities. This is an unfortunate omission as Community Planning is vital to ensure that the needs of parents/carers and children are met at the local level. The planning system plays an important role in meeting these objectives. Access to a safe, warm home and to green space are particularly important for childhood development; having high access to green space in childhood can reduce the risk of developing mental health diseases later in life by up to 55%, a study by Aarhus University in 2019 found. The decrease in the quantity and quality of independent play in children has been linked to increased inequality and a looming skill crisis. We would welcome the recognition in the PfG of the importance of play areas for all children, including usable green spaces. Placemaking embeds the provision of quality, well-located and usable green spaces and play areas within developments, including childcare settings, underlining the importance of the planning system to childhood development. The planning system is also vital to ensuring that goods, services and employment opportunities are located within walking or cycling distance of residential areas, reducing the need for car trips and car ownership, whilst ensuring equality of opportunity for all communities.

Doing What Matters Most Today: 'Cut Health Waiting Times'

How much do you agree that the priority 'Cut Health Waiting Times' should be included in the Programme for Government?

Health_Waiting_Priority - Cut Health Waiting Times:
Strongly agree

The draft Programme for Government has set out actions that we plan to take under the priority 'Cut Health Waiting Times'. How much do you agree that these are the right actions to take?

Health_Wait_Times_Actions - 'Cut Health Waiting Times' Actions:
Disagree

Please provide any other comments you have in relation to the 'Cut Health Waiting Times' priority:

Please enter any comments in the box below:

Possible prevention of illness should be a part of the conversation and needs to be included in the actions. The quality of the built environment is a determining factor for mental and physical health, with noise, pollution levels, access to quality green space, services and leisure facilities all playing a part, especially for those who experience barriers because of age, mobility difficulties or neurodiversity (including dementia). Well-planned places, particularly those with access to green infrastructure, support community cohesion and are important for supporting the mental and physical health of residents. Planning decisions can have a positive impact on mental health and wellbeing of all so it is important to support planners and the planning system in Northern Ireland in order to improve our health outcomes via preventative measures.

Doing What Matters Most Today: 'Ending Violence Against Women and Girls'

How much do you agree that the priority 'Ending Violence Against Women and Girls' should be included in the Programme for Government?

Ending_Violence_Women/Girls_Priority - Ending Violence Against Women and Girls:
Agree

The draft Programme for Government has set out actions that we plan to take under the priority 'Ending Violence Against Women and Girls'. How much do you agree that these are the right actions to take?

Ending_Violence_Women/Girls_Actions - 'Ending Violence Against Women and Girls' Actions:
Neither agree nor disagree

Please provide any other comments you have in relation to the 'Ending Violence Against Women and Girls' priority:

Please enter any comments in the box below:

Creating an accessible, inclusive built environment that enables everyone to play an equal role in society is important in protecting and enhancing the well-being of all communities. The 2020 World Bank Handbook for Gender-Inclusive Planning & Design reported that: "In general, cities work better for heterosexual, able-bodied, cisgender men than they do for women, girls, sexual and gender minorities, and people with disabilities. Key aspects of the built urban environment – related to access, mobility, safety and freedom from violence, health and hygiene, climate resilience, and security of tenure – create disproportionate burdens for women, girls, and sexual and gender minorities of all ages and abilities, thus exacerbating and reinforcing existing gender inequities".

As planners, we recognise the need to prioritise inclusive design in enhancing our built environment. The planning system presents a crucial opportunity to ensure that our public spaces are futureproofed and resilient against the threat of violence towards women and girls. Public space plays a large role in increasing perceptions of safety and belonging, and planners and the planning system are intrinsic to embedding gender sensitive design.

However, focusing only on safety in urban design further perpetuates limiting views on the experience of women and girls. Women and girls, when surveyed, are as keen to talk about the design of streets and public spaces as they are to discuss provision in parks, biodiversity, opportunities for children to play, the harms caused by high levels of pollution and the fact that they would like greater opportunity to socialise in parks and outdoor spaces. Feeling safe is important, but, perpetuating the narrative that women and girls are potential victims and limiting discussions about gender inclusivity to safety, is missing an opportunity to think about the big picture changes that can happen when places are designed by and for everyone. Gender mainstreaming is an approach to policy-making that takes into account both women's and men's interests and concerns. Gender mainstreaming at policy level through design guidance can, over time, help to shift the culture of a place, the aspiration being to create something new that is of benefit to all people of all backgrounds and genders.

Doing What Matters Most Today: 'Better Support for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs'

How much do you agree that the priority 'Better Support for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs' should be included in the Programme for Government?

Support_Children_SEN_Priority - Better Support for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs:

Agree

The draft Programme for Government has set out actions that we plan to take under the priority 'Better Support for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs'. How much do you agree that these are the right actions to take?

SEN_Actions - 'Better Support for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs' Actions:

Neither agree nor disagree

Please provide any other comments you have in relation to the 'Better Support for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs' priority:

Please enter any comments in the box below:

Several of the priorities mention the needs of children and young people. The planning system plays an important role in meeting these objectives. Access to a safe, warm home and to green space are particularly important for childhood development; having high access to green space in childhood can reduce the risk of developing mental health diseases later in life by up to 55%, a study by Aarhus University in 2019 found.

The decrease in the quantity and quality of independent play in children has been linked to increased inequality and a looming skills crisis. We would welcome the recognition in the PfG of the importance of play areas for all children, including usable green spaces. Placemaking embeds the provision of quality, well-located and usable green spaces and play areas within developments, underlining the importance of the planning system to childhood development.

In addition, the requirement for Changing Places in all new major publicly accessible buildings such as shopping centres, leisure centres and sports venues is very important to give dignity to older children and young adults and support their parents/carers.

Doing What Matters Most Today: 'Provide More Social, Affordable and Sustainable Housing'

How much do you agree that the priority 'Provide More Social, Affordable and Sustainable Housing' should be included in the Programme for Government?

Affordable_Housing_Priority - Provide More Social, Affordable and Sustainable Housing:

Strongly agree

The draft Programme for Government has set out actions that we plan to take under the priority 'Provide More Social, Affordable and Sustainable Housing'. How much do you agree that these are the right actions to take?

Affordable_Housing_Actions - 'Provide More Social, Affordable and Sustainable Housing' Actions:

Strongly agree

Please provide any other comments you have in relation to the 'Provide More Social, Affordable and Sustainable Housing' priority:

Please enter any comments in the box below:

Housing investment is to be welcomed, and more direction is needed on the provision of affordable housing as well as social housing. As noted elsewhere in the document, house building will be restricted without the appropriate infrastructure to support it. This includes funding for affordable

homes, a solution to the NI Water capacity issue, and a properly resourced planning system. Consideration must also be given to creating communities with access to daily services and affordable, accessible transport to connect to amenities and employment opportunities. It is important that quality places are created in well-connected, sustainable locations, rather than simply a focus on the number of homes. The planning system is intrinsic to the delivery of more social, affordable and sustainable housing. Emerging LDPs provide the longer-term tool to ensure homes are delivered in the right places, with the right infrastructure to support them. Planners are vital to ensure the delivery of housing which is well connected with access to vital goods and services, as well as open spaces. Housing cannot be delivered in isolation. In addition, planners are also vital in ensuring the protection and promotion of the historic environment in any development scheme.

Doing What Matters Most Today: 'Safer Communities'

How much do you agree that the priority 'Safer Communities' should be included in the Programme for Government?

Safer Communities_Priority - Safer Communities:
Strongly agree

The draft Programme for Government has set out actions that we plan to take under the priority 'Safer Communities'. How much do you agree that these are the right actions to take?

Safer Communities_Actions - 'Safer Communities' Actions:
Neither agree nor disagree

Please provide any other comments you have in relation to the 'Safer Communities' priority:

Please enter any comments in the box below:

Planners and the planning system have a critical a role in delivery of many of the priorities listed in the PFG, including this one. Creating an accessible, inclusive built environment that enables everyone to play an equal role in society, without fear, is important in protecting and enhancing the well-being of all communities.

As noted in the priority of violence against women and girls, public space plays a large role in increasing perceptions of safety and belonging, and planners and the planning system are intrinsic to embedding gender sensitive design and gender mainstreaming practices in public policy.

Doing What Matters Most Today: 'Protecting Lough Neagh and the Environment'

How much do you agree that the priority 'Protecting Lough Neagh and the Environment' should be included in the Programme for Government?

LoughNeagh_Env_Priority - Protecting Lough Neagh and the Environment:
Disagree

The draft Programme for Government has set out actions that we plan to take under the priority 'Protecting Lough Neagh and the Environment'. How much do you agree that these are the right actions to take?

LoughNeagh_Env_Actions - 'Protecting Lough Neagh and the Environment' Actions:
Disagree

Please provide any other comments you have in relation to the 'Protecting Lough Neagh and the Environment' priority:

Please enter any comments in the box below:

The environmental priority is disappointing in that the wording suggests that it focusses only on Lough Neagh and not on wider ambitions such as tackling the climate and nature crises across our nation. Whilst Lough Neagh is important and the recent Action Plan is welcomed, the priority should be wider than the (important) single issue of Lough Neagh. More emphasis needs to be placed on the nature crisis and the biodiversity crisis in Northern Ireland.

RTPI NI would encourage the government to pursue a place-based and ecosystems-based approach, rather than a sectoral one, where policies relating to climate action and adaptation are integrated into land use policies and development decisions, as well as investment decisions, and behaviour change of all individuals in society towards sustainable choices is encouraged through the creation of environments that encourage low carbon lifestyles.

Doing What Matters Most Today: 'Reform and Transformation of Public Services'

How much do you agree that the priority 'Reform and Transformation of Public Services' should be included in the Programme for Government?

Reform_Transform_Priority - Reform and Transformation of Public Services:
Agree

The draft Programme for Government has set out actions that we plan to take under the priority 'Reform and Transformation of Public Services'. How much do you agree that these are the right actions to take?

Reform_Transform_Actions - 'Reform and Transformation of Public Services' Actions:

Neither agree nor disagree

Please provide any other comments you have in relation to the 'Reform and Transformation of Public Services' priority:

Please enter any comments in the box below:

Planners and the planning system have a critical role in delivery of many of the priorities listed in the PFG. Planners have an overarching role in setting the strategic direction for growth and delivering homes and infrastructure, balanced with environmental protection and a more inclusive society. A well-resourced, Plan-led, positive and transparent planning service, which is proactive in engaging local communities, can bring together objectives across services and help achieve inclusive and sustainable development. We urge the Government to remember that planners and the planning system must be properly resourced to do the job. This includes Council planning departments, statutory consultees, the Department for Infrastructure and the Planning Appeals Commission. Planners and planning are part of the solution, and we advocate for a more positive approach to the work of our colleagues in Northern Ireland.

While some areas of reform may be needed, the three key issues holding back delivery of an effective planning system currently are: a lack of resources, particularly in Local Authorities and statutory consultees, a lack of capital funding to deliver urgently needed social housing, and a lack of capital funding to address the NI water infrastructure capacity issue. Unless all three of those issues are addressed, the priorities for Government will not be delivered.

Doing What Matters Most Today: Priorities

Are there any other priorities that should be included in the Programme for Government?

Please enter any comments in the box below:

Building New Foundations

How much do you agree that these are the right commitments in relation to the plans for investment in infrastructure?

Agree

Please provide any other comments you have in relation to the plans for investment in infrastructure:

Please enter any comments in the box below:

We welcome the specific mention of the planning system under 'Building New Foundations', and the recognition that funding of water infrastructure is required to unlock any house building initiatives, but we urge the Government to remember that planners and the planning system must be properly resourced to do the job. This includes Council planning departments, statutory consultees, the Department for Infrastructure and the Planning Appeals Commission. Planners and planning are part of the solution, and we advocate for a more positive approach to the work of our colleagues in Northern Ireland.

The RTPI looks forward to supporting the Executive in delivering on priorities that meet the needs of our communities.

Shaping a Better Tomorrow

The Executive have set out a long-term strategy to deliver three Missions, People, Planet and Prosperity, as well as a cross-cutting commitment to Peace. How much do you agree with a Missions-based approach?

Strongly agree

Please enter any comments in the box below:

How much do you agree that these are the right Missions to focus on?

Missions - People:

Strongly agree

Missions - Planet:

Strongly agree

Missions - Prosperity:

Strongly agree

Are there any areas that are not captured under these missions?:

People Mission:A series of actions have been proposed under this Mission. How much do you agree that these are the right actions?

Agree

Is there anything else that should be included under the People Mission?:

As noted under the Priorities sections, planners and the planning system are vital in delivering the action of making sure that everyone can live a long, healthy and happy life. We support a place-based approach to health and wellbeing, with planning policy providing a strong mechanism and guide to managing development, ensuring that the local context is considered and opportunities are utilised to ensure maximum benefits for communities. Community Planning must be included in the actions under the People Mission.

The planning system has a vital role to play in the future development of the places in which we live, work and enjoy our leisure time. Particularly at this time of uncertainty, planners and the planning system are well placed to guide and encourage a positive, collaborative, and integrated approach, with the main focus on outcomes and delivery. Planners and planning are part of the solution, and we advocate for a more positive approach to the work of our colleagues in Northern Ireland.

Planet Mission: A series of actions have been proposed under this Mission. How much do you agree that these are the right actions?

Agree

Is there anything else that should be included under the Planet Mission?:

Planning plays an essential role in the climate action and sustainability conversation, with its ability to integrate energy, transport and land use planning, encourage sustainable travel, develop the best local solutions to low carbon energy, deliver well located and energy efficient housing, guide investment in integrated blue and green infrastructure and coordinate strategic resilience to the impacts of climate change. RTPI NI believes that there is under resourcing and underfunding of the planning service which often results in planners being unable to meet the current demands placed upon them. The system must have the resources it requires.

Planning policy provides a strong mechanism and guide to managing development, with a place-based approach, ensuring that the local context is considered and opportunities are utilised to ensure maximum benefits for climate mitigation. Research published by the RTPI in March 2021 on Place-Based Approaches to Climate Change showed that a place-based approach is essential to climate action, adaptation and mitigation policies, in order to avoid sectoral thinking and acting in silos, which can have a disproportionately negative impact on some communities. Local Development Plans are a significant opportunity to provide an integrated place-based approach to delivering low carbon energy supplies where the demand and opportunities are. More effective cross scale working between DAERA, DfI and Local Councils, as well as between Councils and utility providers such as NI Water, is needed to deliver local plans and policies that will support the transition to greener energy sources. This is essential to underpin the Development Management system. In addition, planning and sustainability colleagues need to work together in local authorities to develop strategies and action plans which prioritise a place-based approach.

Prosperity Mission: A series of actions have been proposed under this Mission. How much do you agree that these are the right actions?

Neither agree nor disagree

Is there anything else that should be included under the Prosperity Mission?:

Planning has an overarching role in setting the strategic direction for growth, balanced with environmental protection and a more inclusive society. Planners and the planning system must be properly resourced to do the job. This includes Council planning departments, statutory consultees, the Department for Infrastructure and the Planning Appeals Commission.

A commitment to Peace will underpin the three missions (People, Planet and Prosperity). A series of actions have been proposed under this commitment. How much do you agree that these are the right actions?

Neither agree nor disagree

Is there anything else that should be included under the commitment to Peace?:

As noted previously, planners and the planning system have a critical a role in delivery of many of the priorities and missions listed in the PfG, including this one. Creating an accessible, inclusive built environment that enables everyone to play an equal role in society, without fear, is important in protecting and enhancing the well-being of all communities.

Peace is framed as a cross-cutting commitment, rather than a mission. How much do you agree that this is the right structure?

Agree

Please enter any comments in the box below:

Understanding Missions by Tracking Wellbeing

The draft Programme for Government outlines how it will measure progress through a Wellbeing Framework. How much do you agree with the proposed approach?

Agree

Please provide any further comments you may have in relation to your response:

Additional Information

Do you have any further comments relevant to this consultation?

Please enter any additional comments in the box below:

While welcoming this Programme for Government, there are three key planning-related challenges that will need to be addressed to ensure the objectives can be realised:

1. Difficult budget decisions have seen a 38% reduction in the Department for Communities' capital budget in May 2024. Data from the Chartered Institute for Housing suggests that the number of new social homes planned for this year has plummeted by 73%, leaving only 400 new homes in the pipeline;
2. Even if more funding for affordable homes were made available, the NI Water infrastructure capacity issue means that some 19,000 'units' (private and social homes plus public and commercial buildings) currently in the planning or construction pipeline are unable to proceed. NI Water itself has advised that even if its April 2021-March 2027 PC21 programme were fully funded, only 4,500 of those 19,000 units could proceed. NI Water's business plan identifies that it needs capital investment of around £2.5bn, including the Living with Water programme;
3. Planners and the planning system must be properly resourced to do the job. This includes Council planning departments, statutory consultees, the Department for Infrastructure and the Planning Appeals Commission.