



The Belfast Agenda

Statement of Progress

Nov 2023 – Nov 2025

WORKING DRAFT

V.1 September 2025



The Belfast Agenda

Statement of Progress

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Foreword from Belfast's Community Planning and city partners

"Belfast will be a city re-imagined and resurgent. A great place to live and work for everyone."

First published in 2017 and refreshed in 2024, our community plan "The Belfast Agenda" sets out our shared vision for the city we hope to see in 2035.

This fourth Statement of Progress covers November 2023 to November 2025 and reports on our collective progress towards realising the long-term ambitions, outcomes and actions we have agreed in partnership with our residents and statutory and non-statutory partners in Belfast.

It's a hugely ambitious body of work which requires the active and coordinated participation of many diverse organisations and individuals across many sectors to deliver, the efforts of which are demonstrated here.

Supported by the Belfast Community Planning Partnership (CPP) comprised of public, community and voluntary and business sector partners, we've navigated through challenging circumstances to deliver real improvements for our all our citizens, particularly those who are most vulnerable. This has required new thinking in terms of collaborative planning, financing, data collection, performance management and delivery at a city and neighbourhood level, all of which we continue to develop to deliver better outcomes for people who live, work or invest here.

This Statement of Progress highlights significant partnership successes, such as tackling homelessness, vulnerability and poverty, delivering over 850 new social homes, establishing a Bolder Vision for city revitalisation, and the Belfast Business Promise engaging 68 organisations committed to adopting ethical practices such as the living wage. These efforts are underpinned by our commitment to a compassionate city: welcoming, caring, fair, and inclusive, where no one is left behind.

We are proud of our collective achievements, such as securing £230m for innovation centres of excellence through Belfast Region City Deal, launching Go Succeed for enterprise support, and completing landmark projects like Belfast Grand Central Station, but recognise much remains to be done to realise the full scale of our ambition.

As we focus on achieving our bold ambitions, outcomes and strategic priorities this Statement of Progress, alongside the supplementary data insights report, charts our journey and will help inform future priorities. Together, we'll continue building a confident, inclusive and prosperous Belfast for everyone.

Community planning and city partners



The Belfast Agenda and the community planning process is a significant catalyst for the city, bringing together partner organisations, regional government departments and agencies, the council and local communities to work collaboratively to deliver our shared vision. It's about creating real, sustainable improvements in people's wellbeing and quality of life in our city.

"Our Vision for Belfast in 2035..."



**Belfast will be a
city re-imagined
and resurgent.
A great place to
live and work
for everyone.**

**Beautiful, well connected
and culturally vibrant, it will
be a sustainable city shared
and loved by all its citizens,
free from the legacy of
conflict.**

**A compassionate city
offering opportunities for
everyone.**

**A confident and successful
city energising a dynamic
and prosperous city region.**

**A magnet for talent and
business and admired
around the world.**

A city people dream to visit.



Focusing on outcomes

As a Partnership we are committed to our vision for the city. To help us achieve this vision, the Belfast Agenda has outlined:

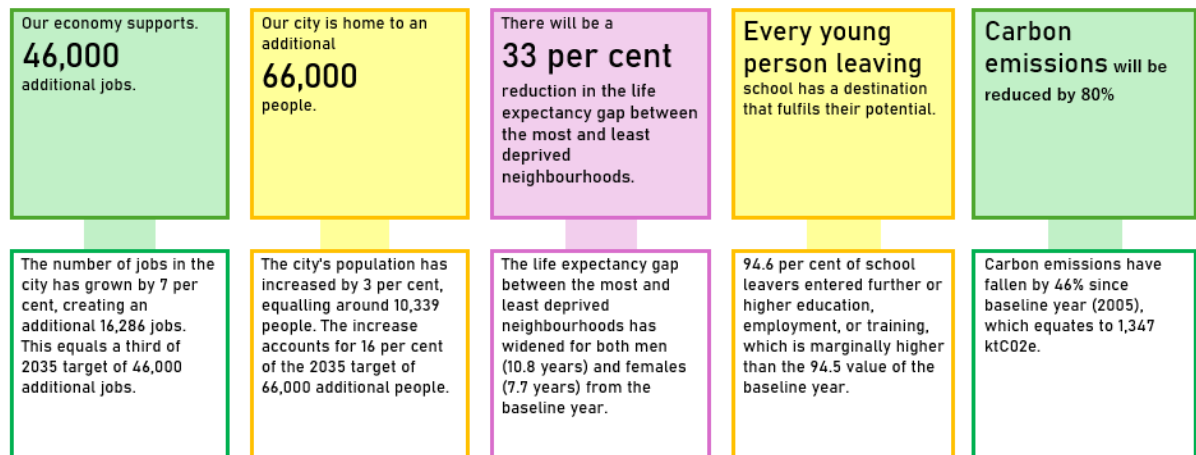
- ❖ **Five bold ambitions**, which include key targets to be achieved by 2035 to make our vision a reality.
- ❖ **Five strategic outcomes**, which contain a range of population indicators to monitor the progress of the plan. Belfast is a city:
 - where everyone benefits from a thriving and prosperous economy.
 - that is welcoming, safe, fair and inclusive for all.
 - that is vibrant, attractive, connected and environmentally sustainable.
 - where everyone experiences good health and wellbeing.
 - where everyone fulfils their potential.
- ❖ **Five strategic themes** across the plan, which include:
 - Our people and communities
 - Our economy
 - Our place
 - Our planet
 - Compassionate city

Within the 5 themes partners have identified over 15 priorities and 100 strategic intents and collaborative actions for delivery between 2024-28. This Statement of Progress outlines our journey so far in delivering against these ambitious commitments and should be read in conjunction with the supplementary Data Insight Report.



Our ambitions

There are many things that we need to do to make our vision a reality. We've set ourselves five very bold ambitions to be achieved by 2035 - our progress against these longer-term targets is detailed below and has been benchmarked against agreed baselines. Further information on the data behind the ambitions is located in the supplementary Data Insight Report.

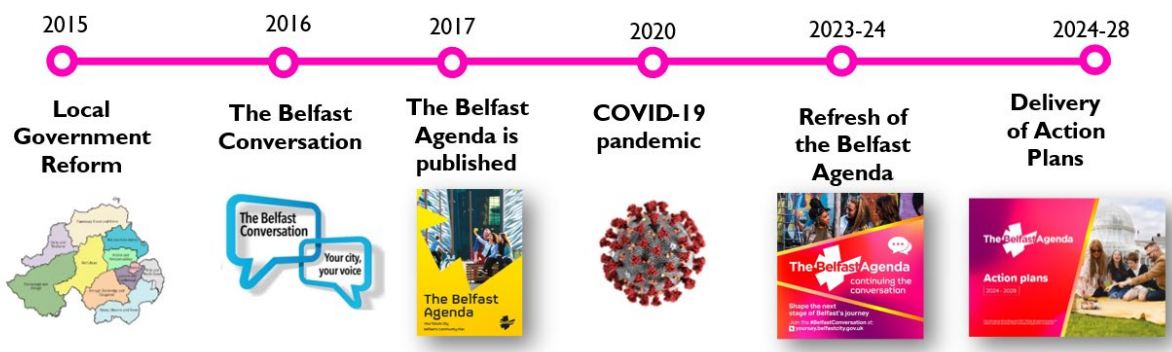


KEY: Change from baseline position Improving No significant change Worsening No Update

Our Community Planning Journey

Our first formal review of Belfast's 2017 community plan found us in challenging circumstances. However, it proved a timely opportunity to check in with partners as we picked up "The Belfast Conversation," engaging residents, statutory and non-statutory partners and the voluntary and community sector to sense check the city's vision, priorities and outcomes still provided the right focus for Belfast.

Apart from recognising the climate crisis needed as a clear priority, our vision and long-term outcomes remained largely unchanged. In the second phase of engagement, we worked closely with stakeholders to create strategic intents, stretch goals and detailed action plans outlining partners' contributions to achieving the city's ambitions. The third phase included a full public consultation on the refreshed strategy and action plans, incorporating valuable feedback into our refreshed Belfast Agenda 2024-2028. The Community Planning Partnership would like to thank every person who attended our workshops, contributed online or submitted a survey.



Call to action: Addressing challenges through deeper collaboration

No one could have predicted how much the world would have changed since the publication of our first Statement of Progress in November 2019. From emerging from a global pandemic, responding to an on-going climate emergency, and a cost-of-living crisis adversely impacting upon the health and wellbeing of our citizens and widening existing inequalities across the city. We've been through a lot!

Throughout these difficult times, the strength of Community Planning partners has been central to helping us act quickly and effectively in a crisis, creating a 'sense of can do' and innovating how we work together. The call to action created by these circumstances has forged new innovative approaches to critical city challenges and delivered proof of concept interventions which informed wider whole system changes to how we support vulnerable people affected by homelessness, addiction or poor mental health. Through initiatives such as 'Complex Lives' we have established a multi-agency model and provided coordinated support for vulnerable people.

While this Statement of Progress showcases many positive partnership outcomes, we acknowledge the need for sustained, deeper cross-sector collaboration to address the city's most pressing challenges.

For instance, insufficient capacity in critical infrastructure, such as water and wastewater, hinders new developments for housing and businesses and impacts growth ambitions. Substantial investment is required to upgrade infrastructure and support our vision for a sustainable, connected urban future.

Linked to infrastructure but influenced by shifting household patterns, we face a growing gap between housing supply and demand, straining social and private sectors. While the Housing Supply

Strategy and action plans are positive steps, a whole-systems approach is needed, examining policy changes, new funding models, and innovative land use to deliver mixed-tenure developments at scale and pace.

Significant health challenges persist, with widening inequalities, lower life expectancy, and higher rates of chronic disease and mental health issues varying by location. We will continue promoting collaborative efforts, with a stronger focus on helping the most vulnerable live healthier, happier lives.

The cost-of-living crisis has highlighted poverty’s scale and impacts, with increasing numbers struggling to cover essentials. Despite anti-poverty & employability initiatives, child and in-work poverty remain persistent. We must collaborate more effectively to improve outcomes for these groups.

Together, we are committed to continuing to strengthen our networks and partnerships across the city, bringing a greater focus on developing place-based solutions and understanding how resources and future commissioning of services can support these. We will create an environment which encourages innovation and new collaborative approaches.

No single sector or intervention can achieve lasting change alone. A 'whole-system approach' has emerged as a key theme. Through community planning we will continue to facilitate and advocate for this to deliver meaningful benefits for everyone.

Collaborative Delivery

The Belfast Community Planning Partnership (CPP) was established in February 2018 with the shared aim to improve the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of our communities. The partnership continues to lead and provide collective oversight on delivery of the Belfast Agenda. This work is supported by four thematic delivery boards, a number of operational delivery groups and a refreshed voluntary, community and social enterprise panel who drive work on actions and seek to problem solve and innovate.



Connecting with the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (VCSE)

In Spring 2020 a **VCSE Sectoral Advisory Panel** was established to recognise Belfast's vibrant and active voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector, and to further strengthen the sector's involvement in the community planning process. During its first term the VCSE Panel has helped to drive forward the Belfast Agenda.

Recognising the unique role of our VCSE organisations within community planning and in supporting effective community engagement members of the VCSE Panel were actively involved in a cross-sectoral Steering Group to oversee the development of a **Co-design Framework**. The process of developing the co-design framework highlighted the importance of adopting a broader approach to civic participation and community engagement. The CPP and VCSE Panel is committed to enhancing how we listen, engage and work collaboratively with our residents, communities and our partners. It is anticipated that the practical framework will become just one element in a more joined up approach to involving people and communities in community planning. The framework is already being tested in relation to developing a 'Whole Systems Approach' to Healthy Weight.

Membership of the VCSE Sectoral Advisory Panel was refreshed in April 2025 through an independent nomination and selection process led by NICVA.

As the Panel enters a second four-year term (2025-2029) membership has doubled from 15 to 30 representatives to better reflect Belfast's large and diverse voluntary, community and social enterprise sectors. Panel members reflect a balance from across areas of the city, neighbourhood renewal partnership areas, Belfast agenda themes and priorities, Section 75 and minoritised voices and large and small organisations.

The VCSE Panel aims:

- to ensure that the diverse voices of the sector are represented in the community planning process
- to develop and improve cross sectoral relationships and partnership working
- to promote ongoing and effective community engagement.



Belfast's Local Development Plan

As we continue to work together to shape a thriving, inclusive city, the Local Development Plan (LDP) provides a vital framework to help realise the ambitions in the Belfast Agenda

The first part of the LDP, the Plan Strategy, was adopted in May 2023 and sets out the growth strategy of the city and the spatial framework for that growth, including the operational policies against which planning applications are assessed. The second part of the Plan is the Local Policies Plan which focuses more on the allocation of lands necessary to enable the city to grow and develop in a sustainable way. It contains local policies and site-specific proposals in relation to the development and use of land and opportunities consistent with the Plan Strategy.

Overall, the LDP will seek to support the development of sustainable neighbourhoods, places which are well designed and provide a sufficient supply and choice of homes that will meet the city's growing and more diverse population. The plan also supports an integrated transport network offering travel choice that minimises congestion and pollution; it encourages the expansion of green infrastructure networks for walking and cycling to encourage active travel and improve air quality and promote increased use of public transport whilst retaining appropriate provision for cars.

The LDP will also seek to develop an integrated and multi-functional green infrastructure network of high-quality open spaces, parks, and corridors to support biodiversity, encourage physical activity and improve links between the neighbourhoods, facilities, services, employment and the city centre.

Once published, the Local Policies Plan should be read in combination with the Plan Strategy and considered as a whole. These together form the basis for decision making on planning applications and unless otherwise stated all the criteria used in each policy will apply to relevant proposals and should be considered holistically.





DELIVERING TOGETHER

Our people and communities

Making life better for all our residents

188 

Supported 188 people through multi-agency partnership approach to deal with **chronic homelessness** in the city.

Established a **Vulnerability Leadership Group**

bringing together regional statutory agencies with the delivery responsibilities, levers and resources to **support vulnerable children and adults** providing collective leadership for vulnerability at a city level.



Take5
steps to wellbeing

Secured resources for a co-ordinator to drive forward delivery of the **Take 5 Steps to Wellbeing Programme** over the next two years, with **£15k** supporting citywide projects in 23/24

78

Participatory Budgeting process taken forward for the Take Five theme, funding 78 organisations and increasing citywide profile.

Progressed collaborative efforts to develop a whole system approach to **healthy weight**



Provided funding of **£2.07 million** to advice services in the city who supported over 50,000 individuals with access to free, independent advice.



£2.9m

Provided £1.8m to support Community & Voluntary sector through capacity grants and £1.4m in annual revenue grants. In 25/26 the amount of **funding awarded to revenue groups** was increased to £2.9 million through an additional one-off award from Council.

25,149

Supported 25,149 individuals through the **Social Supermarket Programme**, providing over £1.35 million to 27 projects.



An **Area Based Community Plan** has been developed in **North Belfast**, which can inform how similar processes could be delivered elsewhere.



Completion of two transformational Peace IV projects – **£7.8m Shankill Shared Women's Centre** and **£7m Black Mountain Shared Space**.

Completion of **2 community asset transfers** at Clarendon & Ulidia Playing Fields.



Installation of **two statues in City Hall** Grounds celebrating the role of women in the city – Mary Ann McCracken and Winifred Carney.



In total, some **50 projects** have been completed from November 23 to present, with a total capital investment of approximately **£48m**.

£48m

Funding has been allocated to a range of projects across the city under the **£10.28 million Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund (NRF)**.

£10m⁺



A number of **awards were won** for the transformation of St. Comgall's building (RICS National Award and RICS Regional Award); the transformation of Templemore Avenue Baths (CEF Excellence Award and RICS Regional Award) and the creation of a new Shankill Shared Women's Centre (CEF Social/Community Construction Project of the year).

Health Inequalities

Partners are focussed on addressing health inequalities and improving the quality of life and wellbeing for all people in the city. We have been working collaboratively on physical and mental health, social cohesion, isolation and community vulnerability and are committed to continue working together to narrow inequality gaps across Belfast.

Supporting vulnerable people with complex lives

The Complex Lives initiative supports some of Belfast's most vulnerable people who are experiencing a cycle of rough sleeping, addiction, poor mental and physical health, and offending behaviour. The initiative provides a multi-disciplinary 'whole system' statutory and community and voluntary partnership delivery model, pooling expertise, skills and resources focused on improving outcomes for individuals who are chronically homeless in Belfast.

Highlights and progress include:

- Established a robust operational partnership with strong governance at strategic, tactical and operational levels
- The partners are developing an outcomes framework and a shared case management system to track impact
- Identified 260 people meeting NIHE's Chronic Homelessness definition
- Actively supporting 80-90 people at any given time, including 30 in their own tenancies
- Secured funding for 6 intensive support workers, enhancing existing partner services support offering
- The Multi-Disciplinary Team has supported 188 individuals to date, with a high engagement rate of 80-88%
- A working and signed data sharing agreement - a critical step to enable effective working of a whole systems approach
- Collaborated with prison healthcare and Northern Ireland Prison Service to improve release planning and provision of wrap-around support (Pilot at Hydebank Wood)
- Alignment with City Centre Tasking – this helps outreach services better coordinate and manage both people and place

Multi-Agency Support Hub (MASH)

MASH is the development of a partnership delivery model that enables organisations, including police, health and councils to work at local level to support vulnerable people who do not meet thresholds for acute support, but whose situations are at risk of escalation and causing high demand for a range of services. This collaborative network helps to coordinate services, assess hidden needs and improve access to services and support.

MASH has 2 key areas of focus

- 1) Expand the cohort of vulnerable individuals for support
- 2) Expand the agencies involved

Vulnerability Leadership Group

Through community planning, we have established a Vulnerability Leadership Group which brings together regional statutory agencies with the delivery responsibilities, levers and resources to support vulnerable children and adults. This group involves the NIHE, PSNI, PBNI, PHA, NIAS, BHSCT & BCC, and provides collective leadership for vulnerability at a city level.

Through this group we will continue to explore opportunities to develop transformative, place based, preventative and integrated approaches to supporting people who are vulnerable to traumatic experiences and poor outcomes throughout their lives.

Improving positive mental health and emotional wellbeing

Take Five Steps to Wellbeing

This initiative promotes positive mental health and emotional wellbeing through five simple steps: connect, be active, take notice, keep learning and give. It encourages individuals and organisations to integrate these actions into daily life for better outcomes.



Celebration Event in City-Hall

Highlights and progress include:

- £15k funding supported citywide projects in 2023/24, with additional funding secured from NHS Charities Together for staffing, resourcing, and procurement until October 2026, including a 2-year BHSCT Take 5 Co-ordinator recruited in Oct. 2024
- Promoted the Take Five steps initiative across 4 settings: community, schools, youth and workplaces
- Supporting 11 post-primary schools; 8 primary schools recruited for 2025/26 academic year
- 35 youth organisations attended Belfast Health & Development Unit facilitated workshops, with 10 completed over a year-long accreditation programme
- Celebration event held at Belfast City Hall in November 2025 to acknowledge achievements in Take Five Schools and Youth Organisations programmes
- Formed Take Five Community Working Group (10 members from community, voluntary and statutory sectors) to launch Belfast Take 5 Charter; 72 Organisations signed up to expand training and initiatives. The launch of a Take Five steps to Wellbeing Charter was held in June 2025 at Belfast Castle attended by 62 community, voluntary and statutory organisations
- A Participatory Budgeting initiative facilitated through the Belfast Health Development Unit, incorporated the Take Five theme in 2024/25, increasing citywide profile and funding 78 organisations; a celebration event held in City Hall in November 2025 showcasing project impacts



Take 5 Charter Launch



Take 5: Participatory Budgeting

Improving physical health

Partners are committed to promoting physical activity and nutrition to enhance health and wellbeing, reduce obesity, and encourage active lifestyles across Belfast. Initiatives like Active Belfast and the Whole System Approach to healthy weight engage communities through targeted programmes, training and partnerships.

Active Belfast Partnership

This partnership delivers physical activity and nutrition sessions in 26 community centres, focusing on children, young people, adults, families, and older people to build skills, improve inclusion, and foster social connections.

Highlights and progress include:

- Delivery of 589 sessions from January to February 2025, engaging 1,460 participants in 4–10-week programmes combining exercise, nutrition education and cookery
- Upskilled Community Development Officers in December 2024 and January 2025 with physical activity and nutrition training, plus signposting to further opportunities.
- Supported ongoing Jog Belfast programmes citywide, with 844 participants over 2 years
- Delivered Participatory Budgeting Phase 2 (September 2023–October 2024) under "Move More, Eat Well – Feel Better," and "Your Voice, Your Choice" (August 2024–October 2025) for emotional wellbeing via Take Five steps.
- Implemented Physical Activity Referral Care Pathway to connect individuals to tailored support, with 3,589 people completing the referral programme.

Cycling for health

We have delivered programmes promoting cycling for health through accessible, inclusive activities in outdoor spaces and community hubs.

Highlights and progress include:

- Co-ordinated minimum 8 programmes via Whiterock Active Travel Hub in locations like Falls Park and Comber Greenway; purchased and serviced 1 e-bike and 1 e-bike tandem (April 2025 onwards)
- Supported groups to June 2025: St Galls Men's Shed (4 weeks), USDT HLC (4 weeks), and USDT Addiction Support Group (4 weeks)
- Commissioned citywide: 16 balance and bike skills programmes (8 each, max 16 participants per group), plus 8 family community bike rides and inclusive bikes awareness at Ormeau Park
- Engaged 155 participants in 2024/25: 30 in inclusive bikes sessions (April–June 2025)

Whole system approach to healthy weight

This collaborative effort unites statutory, voluntary, and community agencies to address obesity causes and drive system changes, targeting higher rates in deprived areas (20% of P1 children, 27% of Year 8 children, and 65% of adults in NI).

Highlights and progress include:

- Completed Phases 1 (setup) and 2 (local picture): Secured senior support, established governance via Active Belfast Partnership, created statistical profiles, asset/hazard maps, and action overviews
- Initiated Phase 3 (system mapping): Appointed mapper, trained in co-design, integrated lived experience representatives, and procured an animated video for stakeholder engagement
- Presented to Belfast Community Planning Partnership and People & Communities Board; managed by Belfast Health Development Unit as part of NI WSA Shared Learning Network
- Phases 4–6 (action planning and implementation) progressing in 2025

Investing in our communities and local assets

Community & Neighbourhood Regeneration

Partners have been working towards developing a joined-up approach to neighbourhood regeneration, connecting people, places and services at a local level through partnership. We are committed to helping our people and places achieve their full potential and working collaboratively to meet the needs of each area of the city.

Community Support Plan

In June 2025, following extensive consultation and engagement Belfast City Council ratified a new Community Support Plan. This plan includes as one of its underpinning principles a commitment to ‘contribute to tackling poverty through community support services through proactive measures / activity which seek to positively change the life experiences of local communities and their residents’.

The Community Support Plan is the delivery plan for a number of different initiatives that provide services that support those in poverty such as Advice Services and Social Supermarkets.

From April 2023 to 31st March 2025, we have supported 25,149 individuals through the Social Supermarket Programme, providing £1,350,439 to 27 projects.

These community-led models offer affordable food alongside wrap-around support, such as benefit checks, debt advice, training, employment guidance and childcare. Delivery models are tailored to meet local needs, from shop-style setups in community organisations to specialised support for groups like domestic violence survivors or people with disabilities.

From April 2023 to 31st March 2025, Belfast City Council provided funding of £2.07 million to advice services in the city who supported over 50,000 individuals with access to free, independent advice.

Investing in our communities and local assets

Partners are committed to enhancing community infrastructure through investments in local assets, delivering sustainable benefits for residents across Belfast. We work with community groups, organisations and funding agencies in the delivery of the Council’s Physical Programme, encompassing streams such as the Belfast Investment Fund, Local Investment Fund, Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund, Social Outcomes Fund, Urban Villages Programme and others. These initiatives support a diverse range of capital projects citywide, boosting health, wellbeing, connectivity and other economic opportunities.

Highlights and progress include:

- Progressed the £10.28m Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund to deliver neighbourhood tourism, social economy and environmental sustainability projects across the city; one project on site in West Belfast – The Michael Davitt's Community Heritage Centre
- Secured Shared Prosperity Funding in 2024/25 for pitch and playground improvements, the Vacant to Vibrant scheme and feasibility studies for key sites and assets.
- Completed Local Investment Fund projects including Mercy Primary School, Star Neighbourhood Centre, Women's Tec and Mercy Primary School.
- Completed Urban Village projects at Pitt Park and Hosford Community Homes; on-site works ongoing for Sandy Row Arts & Digital Hub, ABC Trust Phase 2, and Titanic People Exhibition Centre; additional starts planned for Ballysillan Playing Fields, Coffee Culture, and the Lockhouse
- Delivered multi-million-pound improvements to parks and open spaces for better health and wellbeing, including progressing Cathedral Gardens (state of the art city centre open space), major park upgrades like the £6.9m Urban Villages Ballysillan Playing Fields, and ongoing Greenways development for enhanced connectivity
- Continued engagement to help shape the next phase of leisure transformation

Creating safe and shared spaces

Partners are dedicated to fostering safe, inclusive, and shared spaces across Belfast through the Good Relations Strategy and collaborative actions via the Shared City Partnership. By securing investments from the now-closed Peace IV Programme and the new PEACEPLUS Local Action Plan, we are building vibrant, connected places that promote community cohesion.

PEACEPLUS Local Action Plan

This initiative has secured £15.1m to support revenue and capital projects that enhance peaceful, thriving communities, cultural diversity, and shared spaces.

Highlights and progress include:

- 16 revenue projects comprising 22 elements across three themes (Thriving and Peaceful Communities, Celebrating Culture and Diversity, and Building Positive Relations).
- Contracted delivery partners for 8 elements in the Thriving and Peaceful Community theme, with community-level implementation underway.
- Contracted partners for 5 elements in the Celebrating Culture and Diversity theme; two additional projects under assessment.
- Funded five new capital projects: LGBTQIA+ Hub at 2 Royal Avenue, Annadale Open Space (south Belfast), Distillery Street Redevelopment (west Belfast), Access to the Hills (north Belfast), and Sanctuary Theatre (east Belfast).
- Additional funding for Reconnected Belfast – Waterworks and Alexandra Park [details on project deliverables pending]. Launched in April 2025, with five design information sessions held, design team procurement underway, and planning application in progress.

Peace IV Programme

In 2024, we completed two landmark projects under the EU's Peace IV Programme, managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), with support from the Department for Communities, the Department of Rural and Community Development in Ireland, and Belfast City Council. These developments promote community cohesion, inclusivity, and sustainable spaces.

Highlights and progress include:

- **Shankill Shared Women's Centre (£7.8m):** A vibrant hub providing tailored services for women and families from diverse backgrounds, in partnership with Clonard Women's Group, creating an inclusive environment for connection and growth.
- **Black Mountain Shared Space (£7m):** Removed over 30 metres of peace wall at the former Finlay's factory site on Ballygomartin Road, establishing a welcoming space with essential services and activities to bridge divides and foster social cohesion.

Case Study: Shankill Shared Women's Centre – Empowering Women and Families

This £7.8m centre serves as a supportive hub for women and families from varied backgrounds. Partnering with Clonard Women's Group, it offers vital programmes and networks in a warm, shared space designed to help women from different communities connect, thrive, and build stronger futures.

Case Study: Black Mountain Shared Space – Bridging Divides and Building Futures

This £7m project marks a reconciliation milestone by removing over 30 metres of peace wall, transforming the former Finlay's factory site into a safe, interactive space. It provides essential services and activities to encourage dialogue among diverse groups, promoting unity and long-term community bonds.

Area Based Community Plans

Through the Belfast Agenda we are committed to collaborating with government departments and community partners to develop area-based community plans. These plans reflect local needs and priorities, enabling targeted actions to drive meaningful change at a neighbourhood level and are developed by engaging communities to identify local needs, challenges and opportunities.

Supported by the Executive Office and Department for Communities, Neighbourhood Renewal Partners in North Belfast conducted extensive engagement and action planning, resulting in a comprehensive Area Plan for North Belfast. We are committed to exploring opportunities to deliver the North Belfast plan and to support similar processes in other parts of Belfast.

Wider University & Lower Ormeau (WULO)

In the Wider University & Lower Ormeau area, partners have collaborated to tackle systemic societal challenges, tailoring resources, projects or interventions to improve outcomes for residents.

Following extensive engagement, a multi-Agency action plan was created to address crime, community cohesion and well-being. Funded by the Public Health Authority, South District Policing and Community Safety Partnership and Belfast City Council, an Area Intervention Manager has been appointed to lead on the delivery of the action plan and serve as a community champion on behalf of partners.

Our economy

Creating inclusive, innovation and sustainable growth, learning and opportunity

£20m £20m has been allocated to the Department of Education RAISE Programme and two associated programmes, **Creative Connections** and **T-Rex**, over the next 2 years to address educational disadvantage and increase attainment.

4,885  4,885 people accessed **Belfast Employment Academies** via Belfast Met and Belfast City Council.

2,100  people have accessed apprenticeships and 1,815 individuals have been supported through **English for speakers of other languages programmes (ESOL)** via Belfast Met.

27,113 **RSA Cities of Learning Digital Badging** programme has increased from 3,753 to 27,113 issued digital badges and skills passports. 

 Supported over 120 Social Enterprises through Social Enterprise Fund, allocating **£150,000**.

£250k Digital Transformation Flexible Fund supported 17 businesses, with over **£250,000** awarded

G2C
1,913 Supported over 1,913 people through **Gateway to Choices**, a triage service directing individuals to tailored employability and skills provisions.

 **Go Succeed**
NI Business Support
2,600 Launched **Go Succeed** in **November 2023**, supporting **2,600 new start** and existing businesses with support, mentoring and advice. **300 new businesses established**, and **400 jobs created**.

 **75** Through Invest NI's export support services 75 Belfast based companies were **assisted to sell outside Northern Ireland** for the first time with a further 161 assisted to sell into New Markets.

£94m  Secured **£94m** in investment for Belfast's SME's through Invest NI's access to finance schemes.

£1billion Continued delivery of **Belfast Region City Deal projects** which aim to deliver **£400m GVA**, **£1billion** of private sector leverage and **20,000 jobs**. Key progress made at Studio Ulster's advanced virtual production facility at Giant's Park, Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Centre, iReach Health, Momentum One Zero, Augment the City, Belfast Stories, Lagan Bridge and BRT2. 

70 organisations have signed up to the Belfast Business Promise and **172 pledges** awarded, with **23** progressing to Member status and **11** achieving ambassador status. 

Educational inequalities

Partners recognise the fundamental contribution of education to improving the wellbeing and life opportunities of children, as well as the wider benefits to our communities and economy. We're committed to working to ensure that every child and young person is supported in their wellbeing and learning so that they develop the skills and capabilities to fulfil their potential and progress into a positive destination, such as employment or further and higher education.

RAISE:

‘A whole community and place-based approach to tackling educational disadvantage’

Announced in May 2024 by the Minister of Education, the RAISE Programme (Raising Achievement to Reduce Educational Disadvantage) is a whole community and place-based approach to tackling educational disadvantage in 18 localities across Northern Ireland including four in Belfast, supporting the Department of Education’s vision that “every child is happy learning and succeeding.”

It focusses on two objectives:

- Raising aspirations through a whole community approach to education; and
- Raising achievement and addressing educational disadvantage

Highlights and progress include:

- Established four Locality Reference Groups across Belfast, involving schools, community groups, statutory bodies and other stakeholders to help inform and to shape strategic area plans
- Submitted plans to the Department for review, with the first call for locality-led projects advertised in September 2025

Whole community approaches to education

Collaborative programmes build connections between schools, families and communities to support attainment and transitions. We are committed to enhancing the scale of the impact of our work and identifying opportunities for partnership delivery with community partners.

EastSide Partnership

Eastside Partnership have delivered a number of whole community approaches to education, supported with funding received from Department of Education’s WRAP Programme & The Executive Programme on Paramilitarism & Organised Crime (EPPOC).

Highlights and progress include:

- EastSide Early Learning Community in partnership with Save the Children has a community of 93 partners including the statutory, community and voluntary sectors. The partnership aims to create a long-term impact on outcomes for children aged 0-8 from.
- STEM Camp including a visit to Ulster University Engineering Department for P5-P7 pupils.
- Between 2023-2025, ESL hosted 5 ABC Clubs in partnership with local primary schools, with 113 pupils (P5-P6) participating
- Reading Fair held in March to support Reading and Literacy for children and adults.
- An Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance Programme was delivered to improve school attendance
- Summer learning programmes with local community summer schools were hosted
- Count on Dad’s programme to encourage learning and sharing with fathers and children.

Seamless Transition Through Education (STEP)

STEP is a bespoke early intervention programme developed with funding received from the Department of Education’s WRAP Programme & EPPOC. STEP seeks to build a positive whole community approach to education in South Belfast and works to develop the education infrastructure by connecting schools and five community-based partners.

The consortium of community and voluntary sector organisations working on STEP is led and co-ordinated by Forward South Partnership and consists of community partners- South Belfast Sure Start, Barnardo's, Sólás and Belfast South Community Resources.

Together the partners deliver a holistic, place-based early intervention programme specifically designed to provide support to families and children, helping them get the best start in life. The underlying ethos is that children will fail to thrive if the wider family unit of which they are a part of is not thriving. Through focusing on community connectedness, STEP contributes to peace building and tackling paramilitarism, raising aspirations, improvements to emotional wellbeing, and empowerment.

There are seven key strands to this work:

- Perinatal support
- 2/3-year-old loving learning programme
- Transition programmes for nursery to P1 and P7 to post primary
- Family support and parenting programmes
- SEN family support & reach programmes for post-primary
- Emotional wellbeing & resilience interventions in schools and community settings
- CPD for teachers and those working with young people across South Belfast

Each year, around 2,300 children and 800 parents are engaged in STEP in South Belfast. It works with a core network of 7 primary schools and 6 nurseries, but programmes can work across a larger number of schools. The project has resulted in improved emotional wellbeing, increased confidence and a stronger sense of community connectedness. A strong collaboration has been built between the partners, and the programme has helped build community capacity in the area.

Greater Shankill Partnership

Greater Shankill Partnership have developed a whole child, whole family, whole community a whole system approach to transforming the lives of children and young under the umbrella of the Greater Shankill Children & Young People Zone. This work has been supported from DE funding. Working in partnership with Queen's University, 8 local Primary and 3 post-Primary schools, a bespoke Teacher Professional Learning guide-sharing best practice has been co-designed and delivered to cohorts at leadership level, senior management and at induction of new teachers.

This approach led to the 8 Primary schools forming the first Area Learning Community (ALC) at Primary school level in Northern Ireland. In February 2024, Queen's University and Greater Shankill Partnership signed a Memorandum of Understanding to continue this and other work.

Belfast City Council Funded Programmes

In a partnership between West Belfast Partnership Board and other Area Partnerships, we've delivered a GCSE Support Programme, providing targeted tuition in Maths and English for students predicted low grades, supporting 680 students over two years and increasing the percentage of school leavers progressing into a positive destination.

We have also supported an accelerated reader programme for 1,055 pupils as an early intervention, conducting over 3,216 assessments to improve comprehension and encourage independent reading

Addressing severe to chronic pupil absence.

Addressing chronic pupil absence is recognised in our community plan as essential action in the journey towards helping reduce educational inequalities. In 2023, the Education Authority's (EA) School Development Service launched a post-primary attendance programme in the Belfast area, aimed at supporting schools to improve pupil attendance. Attendance in all participating schools improved and the pilot programme left schools with tools and approaches to sustain this improvement. Key learning from this initiative has been incorporated into the joint attendance guidance from the Department of Education and Education Authority.

Supporting children with Special Educational Needs

As a compassionate city, partners are committed to maximising access, opportunities and choices for children with special educational needs and disabilities, both at school and in their communities.

Highlights and progress include:

- Established 69 new specialist provision classes in mainstream schools, catering for 604 nursery, primary and secondary school pupils, enabling inclusive learning for children with SEN within mainstream settings
- Opened Deanby Centre Special School as part of a £1m refurbishment, which offers educational opportunities for 72 nursery/primary school children with SEN, including classrooms, sensory, therapy and hygiene facilities
- Opened Fleming Fulton School Hydrotherapy Pool in June 2025 for ages 3-19, benefitting pupils and neighbouring schools by aiding movement, relaxation, flexibility, confidence and emotional wellbeing

Fleming Fulton Principal, Karen Hancock has commented:

“Hydrotherapy offers incredible benefits for all children including those with disabilities. The buoyancy of the water allows for movements that may not be possible on land, reducing pressure on joints and muscles while encouraging strength, promoting muscle relaxation, flexibility and coordination. The benefits of hydrotherapy go far beyond the physical – it builds confidence, fosters independence and provides moments of fun and freedom that are essential to a child’s emotional wellbeing.

...The hydrotherapy pool is more than just a facility, it represents a step forward in our commitment to ensuring every child, regardless of ability, has the opportunity to thrive, grow and experience the joys of learning and development in an environment that supports their unique needs. ”



- Launched an immersive classroom at W5 in 2025 developed in partnership between the Education Authority, BT and W5. This 5G-enabled space offers sensory and visual interactions, to stimulate learning using cameras and HD projectors to bring content to life with lights, sounds and smells. The classroom is prioritised for Special Schools and specialist provisions are available free of charge, supporting learners with additional needs.

- Piloted Deaf Classroom Assistant and upskilling academies via the Labour Market Partnership to provide additional support to children with SEN in school settings. The Academy has supported 10 people who are deaf and who sign BSL/ISL up to Level 6 to complete Level 3 Classroom Assistant. This Academy is unique in Northern Ireland.

Supporting learners in Irish Medium schools

In 2024/25 the Education Authority facilitated the first bespoke programme for Early Career Teachers in Irish with 10 Irish-medium schools in Belfast participating. In August 2024, the Education Authority, in partnership with St. Mary's University College, Belfast, facilitated a professional learning programme for Irish Medium educators on the use of Digital Technology to support immersive pedagogy. 17 educators in Belfast availed of this capacity building opportunity. The Labour Market Partnership have funded upskilling Irish medium Academies in partnership with GaelChúrsaí for 115 people to become Level 3 or Level 5 qualified Classroom Assistants.

Supporting people into employment

Partners have been working to drive enhanced productivity and create better jobs through investment in innovation and skills. Within the work of the Economy theme, developing inclusive pathways to good employment has been identified by partners as a key area of focus

Belfast Labour Market Partnership

The Belfast Labour Market Partnership (LMP) focuses on improving Belfast's employability outcomes and labour market conditions by working with a range of partners, helping connect employers and employees and being responsive to meet local need. Convened and developed by Belfast City Council with funding from the Department for Communities and Department for the Economy, the following key achievements are a snapshot of what's been delivered throughout the reporting period:

- Issued 27,113 digital badges as an RSA City of Learning since November providing credentials and skills passports matched to real time job vacancies
- Convened a Belfast Health & Work Steering Group to design a joined-up employability and skills ecosystem, promoting a more inclusive labour market
- Supported over 1,913 people through Gateway to Choices, a triage service directing individuals to tailored employability and skills provisions
- Built a provider network with over 450 members from more than 200 organisations, including community groups and Jobs & Benefit Offices staff
- Placed 1,695 people in Belfast employment academies from November 2023 to August 2025 with 896 completing so far and 699 still participating on an academy. Of those successfully completing, 745 (83%) have secured a new or better job
- Delivered Irish Medium Employment Academies for 154 people and Upskilling Academies for 115 people working as Classroom Assistants to gain the Level 3 or Level 5 qualification were developed and delivered
- Supported 1,380 people through the "Multiply" numeracy programme (UKSPF – funded by Department for the Economy), targeting those with no Maths GCSE, across 17 projects worth approximately £420,000

Belfast Metropolitan College

Belfast Met supports learners through diverse programmes, fostering skills development, apprenticeships and pathways to employment. Over the past two years the college has supported 12,098 individual learners across 20,554 enrolments, with 92% reporting satisfaction and 88% of both FE/HE leavers progressing to further learning or employment. An impressive 2,100 learners have undertaken an apprenticeship (Level 2/3) or a Higher level apprenticeship (Level 4/5).

Highlights and progress include:

- **Step-up programme** - aimed increasing access and participation from under-represented individuals supported 609 participants, with 76% progressing into further training or employment
- **Skills fund programmes** – Funded by the Department for the Economy, these four 2025 initiatives helped reduce barriers to returning to employment:
 - i) **Back to Business:** 12 women returners completed 14 weeks of Level 2 Business Administration training plus 4 weeks' placement at Falls Women's Centre, focusing on digital tools, communication, project management, and employability
 - ii) **Digital Marketing:** In partnership with Shankill Women's Centre, 10 women completed 8 weeks to achieve OCN Level 2, covering core principles, confidence-building workshops, and industry insights for workplace readiness
 - iii) **Career Reboot:** In partnership with Women in Business NI, 28 women (not in paid work or working under 16 hours a week, often with caring duties) completed 5 weeks of blended learning on CV development, interviews, confidence, resilience, and OCN Level 2 Customer Service
 - iv) **Breaking Barriers:** In partnership with Ulster Supported Employment Ltd and Belfast Met's inclusive learning team, 20 participants completed 10 weeks on soft skills (communication, teamwork, job-seeking), with themes in IT, digital literacy, employability, graphic design, digital creativity and employment regulations

Back to business participant quote:

“After a career break due to family responsibilities, found it challenging to re-enter the workforce. Completing the course significantly boosted my self-esteem. I not only gained a qualification but also improved my digital literacy, communication, and time management skills.”



Breaking barriers participant quote:

“It has been a great stepping stone to getting the confidence to start back to employment, and with the ever-changing computer systems, it has definitely helped me feel less overwhelmed.”

Belfast Digital Skills & Employability Programme

Supported by Bank of America, this delivers 30 Digital Skills Academies over 3 years for targeted groups like women returners, adult learners, those with disabilities (including neurodivergent) and newcomers.

Highlights and progress include:

- Launched in October 2023 at Springvale Campus; 235 participants enrolled in 13 academies to date
- The participant retention rate is 86% and overall positive progression rate is 93% with learners progressing onto further training, apprenticeships or employment
- Participants have progressed into work with employers such as EE, Citi, Concentrix, Health Service, CCEA and NI Civil Service



Skill Up Programme

The programme has successfully supported over 2,048 learners and provides upskilling/reskilling through accredited qualifications in priority areas like Health & Social Care, Childcare, IT, Green Skills, Advanced Manufacturing, Engineering, Hospitality, Tourism and transversal skills (leadership, management, business, marketing).

Through the Skill Up Programme, Belfast Metropolitan College has tailored its course offerings to meet the diverse needs of its learners. This included Cybersecurity Skills courses designed specifically for neurodiverse learners and a Level 2 Coaching and Mentoring programme aimed at women in the Renewables sector. The college also continued its commitment to supporting the Hospitality and Tourism sector by collaborating with industry partners to develop targeted courses that address existing skills gaps, particularly through its Get into Hospitality initiative.



Assured Skills Academies

The college delivered 15 Assured Skills Academies to 235 participants delivering qualifications and employment in key growth sectors such as data analytics, software development, professional business services and childcare.

Highlights and progress include:

- First Early Learning and Childcare Collaborative Assured Skills Academy (Nov 24): 13 learners completed 12 weeks of training and hands-on experience, with 10 securing jobs with 4 childcare employers
- Department for Infrastructure (DfI) Skills Academy (September 2024): As part of a collaboration to support workforce development in the civil service, the programme provided full-time and part-time pre-employment training in civil engineering, with 29 participants securing roles in the Department for Infrastructure

Supporting local business and enterprise

Over the past two years, we have worked with our city and regional partners across the public and private sectors to understand the issues facing businesses and to develop support interventions to address key areas of concern.

In November 2023, delivery began on “Go Succeed,” a new approach to business start-up and growth support available across Northern Ireland.

In Belfast, significant numbers of budding entrepreneurs and existing businesses have engaged with the service since its inception.

Highlights and progress include:

- Almost 1700 early stage and new start businesses are accessing business advice, guidance and mentoring support to help establish their business or move it forward with a focus on growth
- Almost 900 existing businesses are accessing support to develop new markets, introduce new processes and grow their workforce to meet the demand for their products or services
- More than 300 new businesses have been established
- More than 400 new jobs have been created

Given the importance of the social enterprise sector in Belfast, we have put in place targeted support to help place these businesses on a more sustainable financial footing, including increasing the value of earned income outside of public sector investment. Over the last two years, we have supported more than 120 social enterprises by providing specialist mentoring, advice and guidance. We have also supported 24 social enterprises through our Social Enterprise Investment Fund – allocating almost £150,000 over that period.

Digital Transformation Flexible Fund

The Digital Transformation Flexible Fund aimed at supporting micro and small businesses with digital transformation projects supported 17 Belfast businesses with over £250,000 awarded in March 2025. A peer support network and wraparound support was established through Go Succeed to support businesses with their application and to help them apply the technologies within their business once successful.

Invest NI Support

Invest NI promotes innovation, exports and funding to help local businesses grow competitively on a global scale.

Highlights and progress include:

- Supported 203 Belfast based companies through Innovate NI, to complete the Innovation Recognition Assessment, guiding them through a structured process to test, develop and commercialise ideas for value creation
- Supported 75 Belfast companies to export outside of Northern Ireland for the first time and 161 to enter new markets via export services
- Hosted ongoing business breakfasts and drop-in clinics with partners to foster collaboration
- Secured approximately £94m in investments for Belfast companies from April 2023 to March 2025 through access to finance schemes. These target SMEs, which are the backbone of our economy providing three-quarters of all private sector jobs and turnover
- Invest NI's commitment of £100m across three funds is expected to unlock at least £150m in private investment, managed by independent FCA approved fund managers who provide decisions, guidance and mentoring. Funds include NI Small Business Loan Fund, Techstart and Co FundLoan & Equity funds.

Securing Investment & Creating Jobs & Opportunities

Belfast Region City Deal

The signing of the Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD) in December 2021 was a key milestone for the city and wider region as it secured a financial commitment of the UK Government, NI Executive and BRCD partners, to work with industry to deliver a £1bn programme of investment that offers a 'once in a generation' opportunity to accelerate inclusive economic growth for the region.

- Over the lifetime of the deal, the following benefits are anticipated:
- Support the creation of 20,000 new jobs.
- Connect local people to new and better jobs.
- Place the region at the top table of digital innovation.
- Deliver £400 million in GVA directly on-site and within the region.
- Target delivery of almost £1 billion of private sector leverage
- Create compelling world class visitor attractions.
- Help to regenerate major towns and cities.

Over the past two years we have made significant strides forward in progressing the BRCD.

Highlights and progress include:

- Studio Ulster launched at the Belfast's Giants Park
- The Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Centre is well into construction and anticipated completion by Jan 2026
- Construction has commenced at the clinical health focused iREACH Health

- Construction has commenced at the AI & Data focused Momentum One Zero located at the Titanic Quarter. The connected health focused CDHT project has an Outline Business Case approved, has now signed its funding agreement and commenced demolition works on site
- **Four skills assessments have been completed** in the following sectors: construction, advanced manufacturing, creative industries and digital. The Life and Health Sciences is currently underway and anticipated to be completed by the year end.
- The **UK Digital Twin Centre** is being delivered by Digital catapult and was officially launched in May 2025.
- The Innovation Challenge Fund pilot project, **Augment the City**, is now successfully progressing into its final phase and three companies have been awarded £100k each to develop prototypes for innovation tourism experiences and over the next six months will turn their concepts into prototypes to be trialled in real-world settings.
- The Outline Business Case for Belfast Stories, a £100m visitor destination, public space and creative hub close to Cathedral Gardens, has been developed and following Departmental review and approval, the Contract for Funding will be signed in early 2026.
- The **Lagan Pedestrian and Cycle bridge** is progressing towards appointment of a design and build contractor in Autumn 2025, with construction anticipated to commence in Spring 2026. Once completed the bridge will offer a quicker and safer route for pedestrians and cyclists between Belfast City centre and the south and east of the city and encourage a shift towards sustainable transport modes.
- The infrastructure minister has announced the next steps for Phase 2 of the Belfast Rapid Transit (BRT2) project in February 2025, which will see the Glider service extend to north and south Belfast, with an additional £13 million allocated from the Department for Infrastructure to deliver a park and ride on the O'Neill Road. The OBC is being finalised and following approval, work is expected to begin on this first phase in 2026.

Belfast Business Promise

Belfast Business Promise is our new membership and accreditation initiative for employers committed to inclusive growth and improving best-practice standards in Belfast. Built around eight pledges, such as providing fair wages and supporting the local and social economy, the scheme sets aspirations for excellence and its flexibility makes sure all employers can take part, regardless of size and sector.

To date, 70 organisations have signed up to the Belfast Business Promise and 228 pledges awarded across our business community; 23 organisations have progressed to Member status, and 11 have achieved Ambassador status.





Belfast is the first council to become Living Wage accredited in the region, Belfast Business Promise is a lever in addressing this issue with 20 organisations becoming LW accredited.

Highlights and progress include:

- 9 Promise Learning Days have been hosted, with 80% attendance rates
- 4 Peer Support Networks / workshops convened
- 45 businesses supported with implementation of an 'Outreach Action Plan'
- 33 businesses supported with the development of a 'Climate Action Plan' and access to resources supporting carbon reduction goals whilst embedding a culture of sustainability across the community of organisations.
- 40 organisations have achieved 'JAM Card Friendly' status.

Our place

Creating a liveable and connected, vibrant and competitive city

Since 2020-21 (baseline year), a total of

2,657 

homes have been completed in Belfast

with 586 completed in 2023-24

(Source: Belfast HousingMonitor)

854 

new social homes

were started over the reporting period until March 2025, exceeding the annual target of 400.737 social homes were completed.

Public sector strategic site assessment of Belfast City Council, Housing Executive and DfC lands has been completed with **initial opportunities for collaborative placemaking** projects at agreed sites.



Belfast Grand Central Station opened to the public for train and bus services in September 2024.



Translink are now operating an hourly cross-border Enterprise service and reporting an uplift of

31% in passengers compared to 2023.



Construction is underway on the landmark Dargan House scheme at Loftlines, the first major Build-to-Rent led development of its kind in Northern Ireland, delivering **778** homes, including **151** affordable housing units.



Sustrans continue to deliver the Active School Travel programme, with

25 new schools recruited to join in Belfast for the 2025/26 academic year.

As part of the **Leading the Way project**, delivered by Sustrans and funded by Translink, DfI and the Public Health Agency, Belfast Active Travel Challenge programme ran in 2024 and 2025, encouraging people to try walking, wheeling or public transport as a cleaner, healthier option for their everyday journeys.



The city centre saw an increase in footfall of

182,221

(33%) from baseline of 553,939 (2021)



Belfast made a successful bid to host the **Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann** in 2026.



Council invested £1million in the city centre **Vacant to Vibrant scheme**, supporting 48 capital projects.

Housing- led Regeneration

Addressing housing pressures remains a priority for the city and supports our ambition to grow the population. Since November 2023, progress has been made across a range of areas, both at a strategic and delivery level.

In December 2024, the NI Executive published a 15-year Housing Supply Strategy (2024-39). Developed by the Department for Communities (DfC), it focuses on delivering the right homes in suitable locations to meet future and current needs, ensuring everyone has access to good quality, affordable and sustainable housing in thriving and inclusive communities.

Guided by the Local Development Plan, Housing-Led Regeneration Group partners, including the Housing Executive, DfC and City Council, continue to work together to remove development barriers and increase supply across all types of housing (social, intermediate, owner-occupied and private rental).

Social housing is delivered in a tri-partite arrangement between DfC, the Housing Executive and participating Housing Associations, with grant funding from DfC. This model continues to underpin delivery across Belfast, supporting both new build and rehabilitation of existing properties.

Highlights and progress include:

- Public sector strategic site assessment of Council, Housing Executive and DfC lands has been completed by the Housing-Led Regeneration group to identify opportunities for mixed tenure housing on public sector lands. Initial opportunities for collaborative placemaking projects have been identified at agreed sites. This work has been supported by detailed feasibility studies to inform inclusive, sustainable development and act as catalysts for wider regeneration.
- Partners have exceeded their target to deliver a minimum of two placemaking projects; Additional potential pilots are now being developed across multiple locations, with further opportunities expected to emerge from a growing pipeline of public sector land.
- As part of the on-going LDP Local Policies Plan, a 'Call for Sites' consultation exercise was undertaken between December 2023 – March 2024 to provide an early opportunity for individuals, landowners and developers to suggest sites within the Council area for new development up to 2035.
- A Place-Based Growth Proposition is being strategically presented to both the UK Government in Westminster and the NI Executive advocating for parity in regeneration funding and powers for Belfast in line with other UK cities.
- Inputting into Shaping Sustainable Places consultation which proposes a regional fund to drive inclusive, resilient regeneration across Northern Ireland.
- Over £187million of investment in social housing new build.
- £63.5million investment in Housing Executive homes is supporting essential upgrades, modernisation and energy efficiency improvements across the existing stock, helping to enhance living standards and extend the lifespan of vital social housing assets.
- 745 social homes retrofitted by the Housing Executive, saving on heating bills, reducing carbon and creating a healthier living environment.
- Affordable warmth installations into 983 properties have helped improve energy efficiency, reduce fuel poverty and enhance comfort for households across the city.
- On-going delivery of the Housing Executive's Ending Homelessness Together Strategy and Social Housing Development Plan
- Partners continue to work together to overcome systemic barriers to residential development in Belfast to unlock sites, accelerate delivery, and maximise collaborative gain in creating inclusive and sustainable communities.

Highlights of progress in the city centre include:

- Council has appointed GRAHAM as its private sector partner to deliver a £630 million residential-led programme across the city. The initial phase focuses on four housing-led regeneration catalyst sites on council owned land in the city centre with a development value of around £280 million.
- The Housing Executive have established Belfast's first City Centre waiting list for new build social housing to identify the specific needs and preferences of the growing city centre population demonstrating a strong need across all household types.
- Council and the Department for Communities have appointed Clanmil Housing to deliver a mixed-use, residential-focused development in Belfast's inner northwest; situated on jointly held land, the project aims to boost city centre living, rejuvenate the area and strengthen connections with surrounding communities.
- In addition, Council-owned assets have been utilised to support a development scheme at the Gasworks site which will be constructed by Radius Housing Association. The project aims to deliver a mixed-tenure residential scheme of 94 homes that promotes city centre living, enhances local connectivity and contributes to the on-going regeneration of the area.
- Council is exploring a Homes on Upper Space for Everyone (H.O.U.S.E) programme to repurpose upper floor spaces in the city centre for residential living.
- The ambition for a shared and inclusive community is recognised through commitments from the Housing for All Programme for Dargan House at Loft Lines which will see the first homes allocated in late 2025.

The Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations notes a high volume of on-site and programmed units in Belfast suggesting readiness for scale and delivery. Overall, significant progress has been made despite a challenging funding landscape.

Partners remain committed to delivering innovative solutions that address housing needs, ensuring inclusive and equitable outcomes citywide.

Connectivity, Active and Sustainable Travel

To thrive, cities must have transportation systems which allow the maximum volume of people to travel whilst doing the least possible harm to the environment, with active and sustainable choices bringing health benefits to all. Since November 2023, significant progress has been made on strategic initiatives, projects and programmes that support and encourage people to make more sustainable and active travel choices

Eastern Transport Plan

The Department for Infrastructure is continuing to progress the Eastern Transport Plan in an integrated manner with the Local Development Plan and other stakeholders.

Grand Central Station

Grand Central Station opened its doors to passengers in September 2024, offering seamless connections between bus, coach, rail, and active travel. This regional hub is the largest on the island of Ireland with the capacity for 20 million journeys per year. With eight rail platforms and twenty-six bus stands, it enhances opportunities for people to live, work and visit in Belfast and the wider region. Achieving 96% user satisfaction rating, indicating strong public approval and driving

increase in patronage compared to 2023, mostly notably an uplift of 12% in passenger numbers on local rail services and 31% increase on Cross border Rail Travel.



York Street Train Station

Opened in April 2024, this station provides modern, accessible facilities to support North Belfast regeneration and provides connectivity to the Ulster University and Cathedral Quarter.



Public Transport

In February 2025 the Minister announced the next steps for the Belfast Rapid Transit (BRT2) project, which will see the Glider service extended to north and south Belfast. Translink continue to work to improve public transport journey times and reliability. In financial year 24/25 Metro/Glider passengers have increased by 4% year on year carrying 30 million passengers.

Translink Future Ticketing System

Contactless “tap and go” payments are now available across all Translink services, boosting usage by simplifying fares, removing barriers to travel and providing passengers with best value fares through daily capping. Next steps include installing ticket vending machines across the city centre and introducing account-based ticketing (ABT) where users tap on/off with cards or smartcards for automatic daily fare calculation and capping.

Zero Emission Fleet

With 50% of the Metro fleet now zero emission, the commitment to achieve a net zero fleet by 2030 is well on target. New buses feature high-spec e-leather seating, USB charging, free Wi-Fi and dedicated wheelchair spaces ensuring comfort, accessibility and sustainability for all passengers.



Better On Board

Translink launched its Better on-Board Charter in November 2024 as part of a movement to encourage modal shift to buses, trains and active travel, reducing congestions, improving air quality and creating a more sustainable future for everyone. To date, 16 anchor organisations representing over 100,000 people have signed up across Belfast and Derry-Londonderry where the need is most urgent to tackle traffic congestion. Better on Board has recently aligned with the Belfast Business Promise as part of Pledge 3, Protecting Our Environment.

Walking, Wheeling and Cycling

Belfast Healthy Cities piloted a Key Stage 2 Teaching Resource called “Healthy Transport” which educates students on topics such as air pollution and active travel, and links in with the Northern Ireland Primary School Curriculum. The resource includes a 5-step toolkit, templates and worksheets to allow students to be directly involved in the design and delivery of a “Walking Bus” – a supervised group of children walking to school with designated ‘stops.’ Walking buses are a safe, social and environmentally sustainable way for children to travel, promoting exercise and road safety awareness.

The Healthy Transport Teaching Resource and Walking Bus Toolkit will be made available to all primary schools in Northern Ireland starting in the upcoming 2025-2026 school year.



Highlights and progress include:

- Expanded the number of Belfast Bikes to 400 available at 60 docking stations across the city. Council have appointed a new contractor and have introduced new pedal and e-bikes to the service
- Sustrans Active Travel Challenge programme (funded by Translink, DfI, PHA) ran in 2024/25 encouraging people to try walking wheeling or public transport as a cleaner, healthier option for their everyday journeys
- Sustrans Active School Travel Programme recruited 25 schools to join in Belfast for the 2025/26 academic year
- Finalised designs for phase two of the Lagan greenway (Lagan Lands East to Belvoir Forest Park) as part of DfI’s Belfast Cycling Network, with continued work progressing on Sydenham, West Belfast and Blackstaff greenways
- With support from the Department for Infrastructure, Council has improved public cycle parking; The Bike Yard in Castlecourt Shopping Centre can house 24 bikes and offers all-day on-site security. Schemes have also been completed at Finaghy Primary School, Queen’s University and Titanic Quarter. Covered cycle stands with green roofs to help improve air quality and encourage biodiversity are also available at nine sites.
- Council accredited as a Silver Cycle Friendly Employer
- Work is now progressing to design and deliver the majority of schemes in the Belfast Cycling Network Delivery Plan’s short-term list

Future City Centre and wider regeneration and investment

Since November 2023, Belfast continues to make tangible progress towards our shared ambition of making our city centre a vibrant, attractive and welcoming place to live, work and visit with good connectivity to our surrounding neighbourhoods. Work continues on a number of strategic projects such as the delivery of the 'Bolder Vision' strategy, the refresh of our Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy and Place-Based Growth Proposition. Partners have continued to work together on a range of projects with multiple social, economic and sustainable benefits felt across the city and beyond.

A City Imagining

Evolving from Belfast's European Capital of Culture aspirations and delivered through the city's cultural strategy, "A City Imagining," Belfast hosted the city's largest year of creative and cultural celebration ever in 2024.

The **Belfast 2024** cultural programme recorded over 155,000 people participating in 1400+ events and other activities which were hosted across the city; 97% of attendees surveyed reported feeling proud that this was happening in Belfast, with 36% from outside the city.

In March 2025, it was announced that Belfast City Council in partnership with Ards Comhaltas Cheoil na hÉireann will deliver the **Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann** in 2026. It's estimated that this diverse celebration of music, dance and language will attract over 650,000 visitors and generate approximately £50 million in economic impact. This international exposure will help boost the city's reputation as a thriving global cultural capital which is welcoming, dynamic and inspirational.

A City Exploring

In January 2025, the Department for the Economy launched a Tourism Vision and Action Plan aiming to grow the tourism sector and increase tourism expenditure to over £2 billion by the end of our Belfast Agenda ten-year plan in 2035 from a baseline position of £1.2 billion recorded in 2023. Despite the severe impact of Covid-19 on the visitor economy, Belfast maintains its appeal as a fantastic city break destination with high levels of visitor satisfaction. We've attracted business events that have delivered demonstratable social and economic benefits for the City and wider region.

Highlights and progress include:

- An estimated £539 million spend on overnight trips in 2023, up from the 2019 baseline of £424 million; this represents almost 45% of tourism revenue for Northern Ireland in 2023 (Source: Visit Belfast)
- Total number of overnight trips to Belfast in 2024 was 1,452,849, with 51% of visitors taking a holiday, 31% visiting friends or relatives and 18% coming for business or other reason (Source: NISRA)
- Belfast had the highest number of overnight trips of any Local Government District during 2024 (1.5M or 31% of all NI overnight trips); The total spend during overnight trips was £469,643,365 in 2024 (Source: NISRA)
- City centre hotel occupancy achieved 79.2%, with 1.4million rooms sold (Source: Visit Belfast)

Visit Belfast industry sustainability survey (2024-25) was completed by 160 tourism businesses. Key findings include:

- £1.4 million raised for charitable and social causes
- 30% of respondents have a Corporate Social Responsibility Strategy
- 61% of respondents had sponsored a local community event
- 77% of respondents had supported a charitable or social initiative
- 96% of respondents have adopted sustainable practices
- 51% of respondents are measuring all or some of their carbon emissions

Visit Belfast also commissioned the city's first dedicated resident sentiment survey to measure attitudes towards tourism in 2024-5 which found that Belfast enjoys strong support for tourism amongst its residents. Key findings include:

- 92% agree that tourism is beneficial for Belfast
- 93% agree that tourism allows people to learn about Belfast's culture and history
- 91% agree that tourism supports local businesses
- 87% agree that tourism helps to create a more vibrant Belfast with more things to see and do
- 84% are interested in taking part in more tourism activities

Visit Belfast handled 14,555 enquiries for neighbourhoods in North, South, East and West of the city in 2024-25, an indicator of the increasing interest in tourism that benefits our communities.

The city ranked **9th out of 100 international destinations on the Global Sustainability Index in 2024; the city also received a number** a number of other accolades, including:



Waterfront Taskforce

The Belfast Waterfront Taskforce (2021) launched Belfast Waterfront Framework in 2023, an agreed vision for 10km stretch of connected waterfront promenade. Since launching, public and private sector partners have invested over £12million into public realm projects on the waterfront and a further £650,000 has been secured to undertake feasibility on transforming areas under the M3 Bridge into health and wellbeing opportunities, a new bridge from Titanic Quarter to Sailortown and Blueway accreditation for the River Lagan. New footfall counters installed along the promenade in March 2024, have recorded 6.4million trips up to July 2025.

Belfast Stories

Belfast Stories will be a unique destination that will unlock almost 100 years of heritage at the 1930 Art Deco Bank of Ireland and surrounding site on the corner of Royal Avenue and North Street. Set to open by 2030, Belfast Stories is the flagship project in the tourism and regeneration pillar of the Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD) programme of investment which aims to drive inclusive economic growth, deliver more and better jobs, a positive impact on the most deprived communities and help balance the spread of benefits across the region. Belfast Stories threads together a public space where people can gather, a visitor attraction communicating the spirit of the city and a creative hub for writers, musicians, artists and filmmakers to collaborate

Highlights and progress include:

- In 2023, following an international design competition, Oslo-based architect Snøhetta, in partnership with Belfast-based Todd Architects, were appointed to lead the architectural design of Belfast Stories, working with Gillespies on landscape design.
- In early 2024, Ralph Applebaum Associates along with Barker Langham were appointed to develop the Interpretive masterplan and Experience Concept Design up to RIBA stage 2.
- The first public consultation took place in November 2022 to inform the project brief in advance of appointing design teams. The second public consultation (November 2024 to March 2025) aimed to raise awareness and gain buy-in; ensure Belfast Stories is for everyone; and gain feedback on concept designs and proposed facilities to inform the next phase of the project. The consultation reached over 4,900 people with 84% saying they would visit Belfast Stories and 82% likely to recommend Belfast Stories to family or friends
- Positive consumer testing took place with audiences across NI, RoI, GB, USA, France and Germany. 74% of survey respondents would consider visiting Belfast Stories and 83% felt Belfast Stories was exciting.
- The Outline Business Case (OBC) was approved at Council in May 2025 and subsequently submitted to the Department for the Economy (DfE) for BRCD funding.

Vacant to Vibrant – City Centre and Citywide

In 2022, Council allocated £1 million to the Vacant to Vibrant capital grant programme designed to incentivise property owners and potential occupiers to bring vacant premises in the city centre back into active use.

The fund was fully exhausted in 2025, having supported 48 projects across Belfast city centre to revitalise vacant properties and enable new and expanding local businesses, social enterprises, and cultural organisations to activate spaces and improve streetscapes. It has also supported investment in shop front improvements, signage, internal fit-outs, accessibility upgrades, and more, helping to bridge the viability gap of reactivating vacant space in the city centre. In addition to the capital grant, applicants were also offered a free matchmaking service helping those seeking the right vacant spaces to meet their needs and wraparound business support from Council's Economic Development Unit

It is anticipated that for every **£1 invested, at least £3.98** will be returned in rates income over the term of the leases due to the activation of vacant properties.

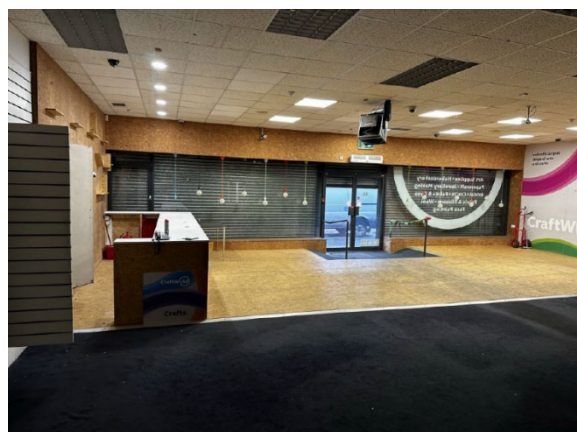
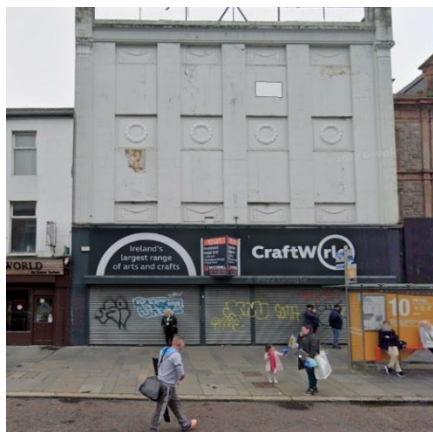
Council secured £500,000 of capital funding from the Department for Communities and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to extend the scheme beyond the city centre in November 2024.

The Vacant to Vibrant scheme was recognised by the Institute of Place Management (IPM) as exemplary in terms of inception and design; it was promoted as a UK High Street Task Force Best Practice Case Study for the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The scheme has also received extensive coverage in the media, for example, High Society Cut Club were recognised for opening their unique business in a property that had been vacant for 20 years; Bodega Bagels were featured in BBC news coverage and ‘Beau’ a sister restaurant establishment of EDO, led by Great British Menu chef Lottie Noren, received acclaim in The Times.

Golden Thread Gallery

The owner of this once vacant unit on Queen Street availed of Vacant to Vibrant funding to restore the historic building, with a view to securing a long-term occupier. Works to the property included new metal framed ‘Crittal’ windows, installation of new lighting and flooring, internal fitout and redecoration internal and external of the building. These works helped the property owner to secure a tenant in the form of award-winning Golden Thread art gallery. Set across two floors, the venue includes large galleries, a projection room, a community participation and engagement hub, and NI’s first visual art library and archive. The Gallery was shortlisted as a top five UK museum by The Art Fund Museum of the Year, 2025.

Before: LEJA Properties Ltd (Queen Street)



After:



The Entries Programme

The “Entries Programme” and reopening of the historic Sugarhouse Entry was completed in the city centre (managed by Council, funded by the Department for Communities), improving connectivity, attractiveness and preserving the historic heart of the city.

Clean, Green, Inclusive and Safe city centre

The Clean, Green, Inclusive and Safe (CGIS) City Centre strategy and action plan responded to the findings of a public consultation; benchmarking exercise; and Strategic Stakeholder Engagement Study, involving a wide range of stakeholders.

Key achievements include the procurement of new power washer to improve street washing and cleansing capabilities with plans in place to recruit new staff to create a power washing team; Council-led anti-litter campaigns in the city centre and beyond; on-going operation of 2 Royal Avenue as a curated, welcoming public civic space in the city centre.

The Department for Infrastructure have established a multi-agency task and finish group to continue the focus on city centre and functionality; Council have also established a Future City Centre Leadership Coordination Group Work to raise and expedite issues relating to place keeping, management and development in the city centre.

Work also continues on the delivery of a Cleanliness Charter for Belfast.

An Innovation Destination

Belfast continues to have a strong focus on innovation, with several key initiatives and partnerships driving its development as a leading innovation hub.

Highlights and progress include:

- Secured £3.8 million from Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, and leveraged a further £1.7 million of partner co-investment to deliver eleven 5G adoption projects across transport, logistics, creative industries, and advanced manufacturing.
- Delivered the Augment the City programme that provided £575,000 directly to ten creative SMEs to collaborate with Belfast Stories to develop augmented reality innovations to enhance the visitor experience.
- Opened and Augmented Reality (AR) Experience as part of the City Hall exhibition, attracting thousands of weekly visitors and making Belfast the first UK/Ireland city to host AR in a civic building. The project attracted £1 million of private sector R&D support.
- Established a global innovation partnership between Belfast and South Korea’s smart city of Sejong to support business and university collaborations in areas such as cybersecurity and med tech.
- Delivered the Hubs of Innovation programme with Maritime Belfast Trust and provided over £100,000 to support grass-roots innovation projects in AI and Augmented Reality between creative entrepreneurs and local community organisations.



DELIVERING TOGETHER

Our environment

Creating a net zero emissions
and climate resilient city

Re-naturing the city and increasing resilience to climate change

148,173

trees and **3599m** of hedgerow planted and **6,285** people engaged in the programme across Belfast.



Achieved **bronze sustainable food award** through participation in the UK and NI Sustainable Food Places initiative.



Delivery of nature-based solutions via the **UPSURGE Community Garden** at Lower Botanic Gardens.



Developed a Sustainable Food Strategy for the City.



Held Belfast's first '**Living Lab**' project to help build climate resilience.

Completed the **£33m Belfast Tidal Flood Alleviation Scheme**, providing enhanced protection for over **3,000** homes and businesses by constructing flood defences along **8.5km** of the River Lagan.

£33m



Creating a sustainable circular economy



38.9%

Achieved a **38.9% Recycling Rate for Belfast**, generating the lowest waste per capita in NI.



Commenced the expansion of the **kerbside glass collection scheme** to approximately 70,000 households which will result in city wide provision of kerbside glass collections by March 2027.

Since 2020 Belfast has

9/100

moved from 47th out of 48 destinations to 9th out of 100 destinations in the **Global Destination Sustainability Index (GDS)**. It is the highest-ranking destination in UK & Ireland.



Commenced work to develop a **low-carbon heat network** within central Belfast.

Established the **Belfast Retrofit Delivery Hub** to help accelerate retrofit activity across public and private buildings, engaging 120 representatives from 66 organisations.



Innovating to Net Zero

Launched the **Belfast Local Area**



Energy Plan (LAEP), to provide a roadmap for Belfast to achieve net-zero carbon emissions and transition to a sustainable, affordable energy system. It outlines pathways and steps for decarbonisation, supporting wider socio-economic goals like job creation and prosperity for residents.

£1m



Delivery of **22 climate projects** costing almost £1m, including energy audits, installation of metering and monitoring in Belfast City Council buildings and the development of a digital twin for City Hall, recycling pilots, baselining of species rich grasslands and other initiatives.

Achieved an '**A**' Rating for the third year in a row in the **Carbon Disclosure Project**.



35%

Belfast Harbour has witnessed a **35% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions** in 2024 and has electrified 30% of its fleet.

NIHE has been appointed the **HEARTH Advisory Board**. Led by Oxford Brookes University, this research project is examining the benefits to vulnerable populations of transitioning to net zero.



Re-Naturing the city and increasing resilience to climate change

We are committed to shaping a green, transformed and healthy city that is resilient to climate change, attractive for green investment and offers a high quality of urban life for residents.

Highlights and progress include:

- Planted 148,173 trees and 3599m of hedgerow planted, with 6,285 people engaged in the programme across Belfast
- Achieved bronze sustainable food award through participation in the UK and NI Sustainable Food Places initiative
- Delivered an urban agroecological garden, demonstrating sustainable agricultural practices and investing in sustainable soil management to promote benefits in terms of food security, nutrition, poverty reduction, provision of ecosystem services, climate change mitigation, habitat restoration and sustainable urban land development.
- Continued to coordinate the climate elements of the Belfast sustainable food partnership and establishment of two city-wide working groups dedicated to food access and community growing
- Worked with community groups to develop an urban growing and an urban greening project to demonstrate opportunities for biodiverse cities
- Completed the £33m Belfast Tidal Flood Alleviation Scheme constructing flood defences along 8.5km of the Lagan from Stranmillis Weir to Belfast Harbour

UPSURGE Project

A major highlight is the UPSURGE Community Garden at Lower Botanic Gardens, funded through the EU Horizon programme. This tests nature-based solutions (NBS) to mitigate air pollution and reduce the impact of climate change stressors. The project started in September 2021 and is due to be completed in February 2026. It promotes shared learning and good practice on the management of green spaces for pollution alleviation, supporting citizen health and climate resilience.

Delivered by Belfast City Council and Queen's University, working in partnership with 24 partners, the demonstrator site features research trials which measure the transmission of contaminants to food and plant matter, a community garden and a resilience garden. The installation of environmental sensors is also planned for the site which will measure temperature, humidity, pressure, ozone, Nitric Dioxide (NO), Sulphur Dioxide (SO₂), Particle Matter (Dust) and noise levels. Other exciting additions have included the installation of solar panels on the roof of the shipping containers and an innovative water pump and compost toilet.

The project is intended to serve as a 'lighthouse' to accelerate, transfer and upscale the use of nature-based solutions and mainstream them into the urban agenda through co-design processes with citizens and stakeholders.



TALX2 Project

TALX2 establishes an innovative 'living lab' approach, engaging communities, government agencies, and stakeholders as equal partners to plan and adapt for an uncertain future. Belfast is one of three living labs across the island of Ireland (alongside Dublin and Mayo). Launched in March 2024, the TALX team has collaborated closely with local authorities in these locations.

Highlights and progress include:

- Held first Belfast Living Lab Workshop in June 2025, gathering cross-departmental Council officers to map current and planned projects building climate resilience.
- Conducted early-stage activities: literature review on successful partnership principles; development of an All-Island Climate Action Database; Community Collaboration workshop at Mary Robinson Climate and Nature Conference in May 2025.

Belfast Tidal Flood Alleviation Scheme (BTFAS)

Completed in December 2024, the BTFAS helps Belfast manage tidal flood risks from climate change, providing enhanced protection for over 3,000 homes and businesses. The flood defences account for climate projections to 2080 and are designed for further adaptability. Thoughtfully integrated with the landscape, the scheme preserves the River Lagan as a vibrant, welcoming space for communities, visitors, and investors. It includes earth embankments, brick-clad reinforced concrete walls, floodgates, glass defences, and demountable barriers that blend with existing streetscapes.

Key partners welcomed the project's completion, with the Minister for Infrastructure touring the works in early 2025 to emphasise its role in long-term resilience. This £33m investment by the

Department for Infrastructure better prepares the city for future tidal events, safeguarding people and infrastructure while promoting sustainability. The scheme features demountable and temporary defences to seal access points and roadways during alerts.

Post-completion, the Department is collaborating with multi-agency partners to update the Belfast Coastal Emergency Response Plan. Beyond flood protection, the scheme supports economic growth by securing homes, businesses, and infrastructure, attracting investment, and enhancing Belfast's reputation as a resilient city. It reduces economic and social impacts, with estimated flood damage avoidance benefits exceeding £168m over its design life (based on 2018 figures).

HEARTH Project

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive has been appointed to the External Advisory Board of the HEARTH Project (The National Hub on the Net Zero, Health and Extreme Heat). This research project, led by Oxford Brookes University is examining how the transition to net zero emissions can benefit vulnerable populations by improving health outcomes, such as reducing heat-related illnesses and enhancing living conditions during extreme heat events over a five-year period from 2025-2030.

Met Office – Belfast Heat Packs

Belfast City Council collaborated with the Met Office to create Heat Packs for the city. This work addressed information gaps at city and sub-city levels, using high-resolution climate projections for urban heat hazard estimates.

Highlights and progress include:

- Conducted 'heat walks' citywide to identify vulnerabilities to rising temperatures and urban heat island effects
- Applied findings to the Belfast Tree Equity Study to guide future tree planting based on heat projections
- Integrated the Belfast Heat Vulnerability Index into the Climate Change Risk Assessment for Belfast City Council

Creating a Sustainable Circular Economy

It is our aspiration to transform our throwaway economy into one where waste is eliminated, resources are circulated, and nature is regenerated. We are committed to working with partners to deliver local solutions and bring together the right people to ensure a just transition.

Highlights and progress include:

- Achieved 38.9% Local Authority Collected Municipal Recycling Rate
- Generated the lowest household waste per capita in NI (399kg per annum compared to 458kg per annum NI average)
- Moving materials up the waste hierarchy through new and improved reuse initiatives; bikes, furniture, laptops and paint.
- Commenced expansion of kerbside glass collection scheme to 70,000 households, which will result in city wide provision of kerbside glass collections by March 2027.

- Completed a feasibility study, market readiness assessment and business model analysis, reviewed delivery models and developed a community opportunities assessment for a low carbon heat network.
- Supported the development of a neighbourhood retrofit pilot (led by social housing providers) through the Belfast Retrofit Delivery Hub.
- Since 2020 Belfast has moved from 47th out of 48 destinations to 9th out of 100 destinations in the Global Destination Sustainability Index (GDS). It is the highest-ranking destination in UK & Ireland. Belfast is also one of the few cities to have completed a carbon baseline of its tourism sector.
- Completed the Horizon Europe funded UP2030 Horizon Europe funded UP2030 project which aims to embed net zero in urban planning in Linen quarter BID, Sandy Row, Market, Donegall Pass and Barrack Street areas.
- Developed a draft city-wide Sustainable Food Strategy, with associated delivery and monitoring arrangements
- Commenced development of a sustainable food policy for the Council that addresses waste, sourcing, packaging, emissions measurement and an events protocol.
- Conducted a feasibility study with Dublin City Council on circular economy opportunities in the Dublin-Belfast economic corridor.
- Published “Segregation and the Environment; Breaking Down Barriers” report, highlighting the continued links between segregation within the city and the impact on our environment and Belfast’s unique challenge in meeting climate targets.

Heat Network

The council have commissioned several work streams linked to developing a low-carbon heat network within central Belfast. The evidence presented within the Local Area Energy Plan demonstrates that heat networks are one of the key projects to help Belfast progress towards net zero emissions.

Highlights and progress include:

- Completing a technical feasibility study with Aecom for a low carbon heat network in the City centre.
- Developing innovative business models with the Energy Systems Catapult to help scale the deployment of rooftop solar.
- Working with Bird & Bird on legal and commercial considerations and developing a route to market.
- Working with AtkinsRéalis to assess opportunities for communities to engage and benefit from decarbonisation projects.
- Participating in knowledge sharing activities across UK & Ireland with local authorities at different stages of their heat network journey.
- Participating in a study trip to Bradford and Glasgow funded by SEAI for Irish Heat Network stakeholders, along with representatives from DfE, Invest NI, SIB and DGB Consulting.

Belfast Retrofit Delivery Hub

Established in September 2022 following the Belfast Net Zero Carbon Roadmap, which identified buildings and transport as the city's top carbon-emitting sectors, the Hub adopts a consortium approach to accelerate retrofit activity across public and private buildings. It engages stakeholders from the construction supply chain, funders, academics, public bodies, housing providers, and consumer groups, informed by the Construction Leadership Council's National Retrofit Strategy.

Highlights and progress include:

- Engaging 120 representatives from 66 organisations, with core group of 12 lead agencies.
- Sharing best practice through site visits and case studies, drawing on established initiatives across the UK & Ireland.
- Undertaking a survey of typical Belfast properties to understand the costs of retrofitting these types of housing.

Innovating to Net Zero

Our aim is for Belfast to become an exemplar low carbon economy creating opportunities for training, employment and green growth. We will develop and implement city-wide testbeds for innovative solutions to decarbonisation leveraging on existing and planned assets and investment through place-based interventions.

Highlights and progress include:

- Launched the Belfast Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP) in 2024, provides a roadmap to achieve net-zero carbon emissions and transition to a sustainable, affordable energy system. It outlines pathways for decarbonisation that support wider socio-economic goals like job creation and prosperity for residents. The LAEP prioritises energy and heat projects within the city to achieve the City's net zero targets including heat networks. Rooftop solar and building retrofit.
- Across our estate and operations, we developed a Climate Action Plan and delivered 22 internal climate projects including energy audits, installation of metering and monitoring in our buildings and the development of a digital twin for City Hall, recycling pilots, baselining of species rich grasslands and other initiatives.
- Achieved an 'A' rating for the third consecutive year in the Carbon Disclosure Project

Belfast Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP)

In September 2024 Belfast City Council launched the Local Area Energy Plan – the first to be developed in Northern Ireland. Recognised as the leading method for translating net zero targets into action, the LAEP marks a milestone moment in the city's transition towards a resilient, low-carbon economy for everyone. Developed using cutting-edge whole-system modelling and extensive stakeholder engagement, the comprehensive road map capitalises on the city's unique geographical characteristics and assets. Sitting on top of Sherwood Sandstone, the city has huge geothermal potential while an abundance of rooftops can generate solar energy. Led by Council and developed collaboratively with key stakeholders, the Belfast LAEP presents a pipeline of priority projects including a district heat network, large scale retrofit of buildings, transition of oil households to low carbon heating and the deployment of rooftop solar panels.

As a primer to collaboration and a catalyst for future investment across the sector and beyond, the transformational LAEP sits alongside other net zero investments such as Translink's net zero bus

fleet, Northern Ireland Housing Executive's retrofit programme and the Energising Belfast project. With electricity and gas network operators gearing up to decarbonise at scale, the plan charts a path to net zero that is affordable, and if properly resourced, will create new opportunities for jobs and businesses.

Belfast Harbour – green port

Belfast Harbors' integrated ESG strategy places human capital and sustainability at the heart of all activities and aligns with the Trust Port mandate to operate, maintain, and enhance the Belfast Harbour Estate. In 2024, the Harbour invested £325,000 in local communities and a further £3.6million was invested in City Quays Garden, a One Planet Living Public Space.

The Harbour has achieved a 35% reduction in GHG emissions in 2024 alone and has electrified 30% of its fleet. All marine gas oil has now been fully replaced by Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO). The Harbour is committed to developing a stronger more sustainable future for everyone, driving economic growth, making positive contributions to our local communities, protecting the environment and inspiring positive change.



DELIVERING TOGETHER

Compassionate City

Leaving no one behind - making Belfast a welcoming, caring, fair and inclusive city.

Supported over
97,000

individuals and families through a **£2.2m** Hardship Programme, providing food and fuel vouchers and a range of anti-poverty projects to help vulnerable residents.

Hosted the first Anti-Poverty support services networking event held in City Hall in October 24, with over **100 anti-poverty organisations in attendance.**



Distributed over
30,000
cost-of-living support guides,
with support also available online

Just A Minute (JAM)

Card bursary established with NOW Group for micro, small and VCSE Belfast Business Promise supporters to achieve JAM Card Friendly status.

Developed the 'Belfast Child' blueprint to create a seamless developmental journey for children aged 0-8, with the aim of creating a supported eco-system around each child and help them fulfil their potential.



Belfast Learning Festival

delivered 9 to 13 April 2025 - it brought together 65 partners to delivery 119 free learning events.

Joined the UK network of **UNESCO Learning Cities** in January 2025 and continued participation in the Irish Network.



Hosted Belfast UNESCO Learning Festival in April 2025 with **119 free events** promoting inclusive access to lifelong learning for all.

954

Visits to the Grapevine older people's hub between **April 2024 to July 2025.**

Volunteering Never Gets Old campaign

on adshels and buses to promote volunteering and its benefits for older people.

30

Young people are actively participating in the **Belfast City Youth Council.**

£15.1m investment

for the **PEACE PLUS** Local Action Plan received.



Delivery of a Good Relations Action Plan

and programmes for refugee integration, asylum dispersal and community recovery fund.



Embedding Inclusive Growth

We are acutely aware that inclusive growth challenges tend to present as inequalities across different geographies and/or communities of interest, and that turning the dial on inclusive growth requires analysis of the specific circumstances for Belfast and a bespoke approach to tracking inclusive growth which is mindful of local needs. This requires an evidence-based approach as well as proactively considering inclusive growth in the development, design and delivery of projects, programmes and plans.

In developing an **Inclusive Growth Index** we will have a mechanism to collectively understand and track our progress as a city and enable us to examine how we can deliver a more inclusive approach to opportunities and growth. Council has completed the pilot phase to test the **Inclusive Growth Toolkit**, with recommendations for implementation agreed. An implementation plan will be put in place to help embed inclusive growth in decision-making processes in Council, with further engagement with Community Planning partners planned for 25/26.

Addressing poverty and responding to the cost-of-living crisis

We are dedicated to supporting Belfast residents facing financial pressures from the cost-of-living crisis and experiencing poverty. Through collaborative efforts with inspiring anti-poverty organisations, we provide advice, resources and initiatives to help individuals and families in need, enhancing access to essential support and building community resilience.

Hardship Programme

Over the past two years we have provided over £2.2M to support over 97,000 individuals and families in need. The hardship programme has enhanced the capacity of organisations with expertise in the field of anti-poverty and working collaboratively with them we have delivered initiatives that have supported children and families, people in emergency need and older people.

Highlights and progress include:

- Engaged 139 schools in a Schools Hardship Programme, enabling support like breakfast clubs, free hot meals, food packs, uniforms, stationary and period poverty initiatives
- Provided 26,000 free hot meals to 2,236 children via Belfast Health & Social Care Trust's Sponsored Day Care, easing pressure on families
- Supported over 2,570 families through 11 Family Support Hubs with vouchers for food, gas, oil & electric and wrap around services
- Assisted 2,174 children and families via Save the Children with food, fuel and toy packs through their early years grant programme
- Helped over 2,600 families in emergency need (including 5,000 children) through St Vincent de Paul
- Provided food parcels to 4,508 individuals via Trussell Trust Foodbanks
- Delivered over 100 tonnes of free food to 42 community food member organisations via FareShare, supporting over 10,500 individuals and saving 173 tonnes of CO2 emissions
- Aided over 1,884 households through National Energy Action's Warm & Well Programme with advice and energy vouchers
- Supported over 757 older people with fuel vouchers via Age NI
- Provided 1,500 winter warmth packs for vulnerable older people during colder months.
- Delivered tailored programmes for older people across 26 council community centres and 7 independent facilities

“This initiative has given us the opportunity to provide additional warm nutritious meals to the children that attend our afternoon sessions. Children who have access to a hot healthy meal every day can focus better, connect with their peers, and helps them reach their full potential. This funding also helps families who are struggling financially and in greatest need.”

“This grant really helped me and my family as I was able to get food and other essentials from the supermarket which meant we had plenty to eat, and there was less pressure with paying oil and electric as less money had to be spent on groceries.”

Raising awareness and networking

To raise awareness and signpost residents to essential support and advice services, we have developed an annual cost-of-living support guide. Over the past two years 30,000 copies have been distributed citywide, complemented by an online webpage for easy access.

To foster partnerships and collaboration within the anti-poverty ecosystem, we hosted an inaugural networking event at City Hall in October 2024, attended by over 100 organisations. This annual event aims to highlight available services, strengthen cross-sector relationships, amplify the voice of service users, create valuable networking opportunities and inspire collective action toward eradicating poverty in Belfast.

Develop Belfast's status as a learning city

Festival of Learning in Belfast

The Belfast Learning Festival was launched on 2nd April at City Hall (40+ organisations across multiple sectors attended). The festival ran from 9th – 13th April. The festival brought together 65 partners to deliver 119 free learning events to promote inclusive access to lifelong learning for people of all ages and backgrounds. £23,548 was awarded in small grant funding to assist not for profit organisations' involvement and participation in the festival week.

Summary of impact data (based on survey data among participants and event hosts) shows:

- 93% of event hosts agreed the festival helped them to reach new audiences
- 80% of event hosts agreed that the festival enabled their organisation to pilot a new idea or event
- 89% of participants agreed they felt inspired to access learning opportunities across the city following their attendance at a festival event
- 83% of participants agreed they felt more connected to other people or groups in their community following their attendance at a festival event
- 73% of participants agreed they felt more aware of the learning providers and opportunities across the city following their attendance at a festival event

Irish Network of Learning Cities

Belfast Learning City continues to liaise with the Irish Network of Learning Cities.

Belfast attended Cork's International Learning City Exchanges in April 2025 and shared learning on the city's Digital Badging approaches. Delegates from across the world were in attendance and the event was opened by Director of UNESCO Ms Isabel Kempf.

UK Network of Learning Cities

In January 2025, the city joined colleagues in Bristol, Birmingham, Derby, Kirklees, Manchester, Nottingham and Swansea to form a UK Network of Learning Cities, committed to improving lifelong learning opportunities.

Global Network of Learning Cities

The Learning City Coordinator along with Professor Mark Tully, Ulster University presented at the UNESCO webinar for global network of learning cities about how Belfast is embedding age friendly, lifelong learning initiatives across multiple settings in our city. There were 100 participants in attendance from across the world.

Good Relations and Shared Future

Partners continue to look at innovative approaches to build peaceful and thriving communities in Belfast. We are committed to building an inclusive city and delivering programmes such as PEACEPLUS to continue our journey of reconciliation.

Highlights and progress include:

- Secured £15.1M for Belfast PEACEPLUS Local Action Plan
- Continued delivery of a good relations action plan for refugee integration and asylum dispersal
- Established and commenced delivery of a Community Recovery Fund; a UK Government initiative providing £600,000 to local authorities to rebuild trust and cohesion between communities in the aftermath of public disorder events in July-August 2024
- Opened consultation on a draft Irish Language policy; A Language Strategy Action Plan has been agreed, and work is beginning on implementation

Delivery of Age-Friendly Belfast

Partners are committed to delivering an Age-Friendly Belfast, with our Age Friendly Plan in its third year of delivery. This plan focuses on supporting those specific groups of older people who are more vulnerable to losing social connections, or whose physical activity levels are below what is recommended for good health and wellbeing and who face additional challenges in keeping strong and active.

Highlights and progress include:

The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust's Older, Active programme works to increase physical activity levels in older people and address loneliness and isolation

- Developed and led by older people, the Connection Hub now known as "The Grapevine" has been established in the city centre in 2 Royal Avenue
- The Active Ageing Partnership has supported procurement of equipment to facilitate physical activity sessions aimed at later years to be distributed to 26 community centres and to support the new older people's hub, The Grapevine
- A tiered suite of Loneliness & Isolation training has been coordinated, promoted and delivered
- A video presentation to increase awareness of recommended physical activity levels in older people has been developed with partners from SEHSCT area

- 46 people attended an online housing webinar delivered by Dr Mark Hammond senior lecturer from Manchester School of Architecture to increase awareness of ageism in housing design and look at ways more age friendly housing designs can be utilised
- On-going development of dementia friendly cafes across city.
- Volunteering Campaign aimed at older people ‘Volunteering Never gets old’ was launched.
- Research to understand the landscape of interventions to support older people to live healthy and socially connected lives completed
- Currently in the process of submitting proposal to Older, Active and Connected Group for funding for pilot project aimed at changing the mindset of individuals who have become chronically lonely through psychological techniques.
- 700 winter warm packs were delivered to vulnerable older people’s organisations across Belfast. These packs included items such as blankets, hats and scarves which help to keep older people warm in their homes and outside

The Grapevine

Launched in April 2024, The Grapevine is an Older People’s Connection Hub based in 2 Royal Avenue, The Grapevine is currently staffed by two Age Friendly Volunteers with supported from Age Friendly and Volunteer Now staff. The number of older people dropping in each week is approximately 15-20 and to date there have been approximately 954 visits recorded. Funding received from BHSC Loneliness Network has enabled the continuation of the Grapevine and development of a toolkit, so that similar projects can be replicated across other areas.

Tea Dances

Tea Dances are held on a regular basis in venues across the city including Belfast Castle and 2 Royal Avenue with an average attendance of around 100 people per event. A recent evaluation was completed and out of the 97 people who completed the questionnaire, 78 people said they attend them on a monthly basis. People were asked if they felt less lonely as result of attending the tea dances and 59 people strongly agreed and 18 agreed that they do feel less lonely. (79% in total). A sample of responses from the evaluation include comments that events are “Very enjoyable and very good for my mental health” and “so glad you have the Tea Dances- just great to meet and chat with different people- helps me get out from four walls” and “It has given me a lifeline.”

Volunteering Never Gets Old

In partnership with Volunteer Now, Age Friendly Belfast developed a Volunteer Campaign called ‘Volunteering never gets old’ to encourage older people to volunteer in an effort to increase connections and wellbeing. Supported by funding from Public Health Agency a number of adverts with older volunteers were placed on ad shells, buses and radio and a volunteer Fair, attended by 120 people was held at 2 Royal Avenue on 25th March.

Children and Young People

Partners aim to create a seamless developmental pathway for children in their early years (8 and under) as well as increasing the resilience, empowerment of children and young people across all cohorts.

The Belfast Child

Produced by Belfast Area Outcomes Group partners, comprised of the city's early interventions and family support delivery bodies, "The Belfast Child" blueprint document presents a child-centred approach to aligning services and activity to ensure that every child in the city aged 0-8 can be supported to thrive. This provides a roadmap which aspires to deliver more equitable outcomes for all children.

We aim for this work to create a supported eco-system around each child, where the players at each stage of the journey know their part, families, communities and support services in one shared mission. This represents a shared commitment to a whole child, whole family, whole community and whole system way of working that aims to ensure all Belfast children can thrive and reach their full potential.

Youth Council

The Belfast City Youth Council (BCYC) continue to meet on a fortnightly basis since launching in January 2020. The Council welcomed new members April 2025 taking their membership to 30.

Highlights and progress include:

- Facilitated a presentation on lowering the voting age to 16 at a recent special People and Communities committee meeting; young people concluded in favour of lowering the age
- Participated in QUB's RADICAL programme residential in July 2025, exploring how children and young people experience dis/respect generally. Young people worked on research methodology such as critical dialogue and created literature through the medium of poetry to articulate their views and opinions. This innovative work aims to advocate on behalf of young people for the protection of the UN Convention rights for children and young people through the lens of respect and disrespect
- Developed the mental health ELPH campaign (Enjoy, Learning, Positive, Health)
- The Chair of the BCYC represented Belfast City Council at the One Young World Summit in Munich in November 2025
- Supported the Lord Mayor with civic engagements, including meeting with the Harvey Milk Foundation
- Engaged the Climate Commissioner to discuss climate change in Belfast

Our Outcomes

Understanding the City's populations indicators – our City Dashboard

To enable the Community Planning Partnership to understand Belfast's changing dynamics and identify where to bring shared focus, we have developed a Data Insight Report, published alongside this Statement of Progress. The report tracks our 5 bold ambitions for 2035 and 53 population indicators.

This comprehensive report helps us understand how we are delivering against the strategic outcomes for citizens, allowing the community planning partnership to reflect on the city's evolving conditions and pinpoint areas needing collective attention. Our population indicators reflect the conditions of the whole population within the city and take account of wider societal, environmental, or economic shocks.

While this Statement of Progress highlights where the work of community planning partners has advanced Belfast Agenda ambitions and priority action plans, we recognise that shifting population indicators requires more than community planning alone. It demands time, sustained commitment and collaboration across all levels of government and society to achieve lasting impact.

Further information on the data behind the table below can be located in the supplementary Data Insight Report.

Everyone in Belfast benefits from a thriving and prosperous economy	Belfast is a welcoming, safe, fair and inclusive city for all	Everyone in Belfast fulfils their potential	Everyone in Belfast experiences good health and well-being	Belfast is a vibrant, attractive connected and environmentally sustainable city
City productivity levels	Number of victims of any crime	Proportion of working age population who have attained Level 4 or above	Life expectancy at birth	Air Quality
Investment into Belfast	Number of hate-motivated crimes	Proportion of school-leavers achieving Level 2 or above including English and Maths	Gap in life expectancy by deprivation	Percentage of household waste that is reused, recycled or composted
Size of the Belfast Economy	Proportion of people who feel safe	Gap between percentage of school leavers entitled to free school meals achieving at least Level 2, including English and maths, and their peers	Proportion of babies born at a low birth weight	Percentage of all journeys which are made by walking, cycling or public transport
Total number of businesses	Number of ASB incidents	Proportion of school-leavers entering employment, education or training	Preventable deaths	Visitor numbers
Number of business start-ups	The number of people who agree that people from different backgrounds get on well together	School attendance rates	Adult obesity rate	Engagement in culture and arts activities
Number of business deaths	Proportion of population who believe their cultural identity is respected by society	Volunteering	Children obesity rate (P1)	Number of miles of cycle lanes, footways and footpaths
Absolute Poverty	Proportion of young people who think that local facilities are shared and open to all	Self-efficacy	Children obesity rate (Year 8)	Proportion of homes that are energy efficient
Relative poverty		Proportion of Working Age Population with no qualifications	Proportion of population who smoke	Satisfaction with Belfast as a place to live
The total number of jobs in Belfast			Proportion of adults drinking above sensible drinking guidelines	Carbon Emissions
Working-age employment rate			Proportion of people who rank themselves as having high levels of wellbeing	
Employment rate by deprivation			Proportion of adults who undertake at least 150 minutes of physical exercise per week	
Economic inactivity rate (ex-students)			Number of households in housing stress	
Average earnings			Number of people in treatment for problem drug or alcohol misuse	
Total spend by external visitors				
Supply of housing				
Disability employment rate				

KEY: Change from baseline position

Improving No significant change Worsening Data development change

Next steps

Whilst this Statement of Progress highlights the key areas where Community Planning Partners have contributed and made strong progress, we acknowledge those areas where progress has been slower, requiring continued effort to achieve positive change. We will remain agile in delivering our action plans and will refresh and consolidate them early in 2026. This will enable concentration of effort on areas of greatest need and where we can have greatest impact.

This Statement of Progress serves as a shared focus and catalyst for future work. At its core will be an inclusive community planning approach that re-energises and mobilises communities, fostering deeper collaboration across sectors. By working together as city partners, we can tackle the city's challenges more effectively, prioritise high-impact initiatives, and drive meaningful outcomes for everyone in Belfast.

There is a strong leadership commitment and shared focus across the Community Planning Partnership to address the big challenges facing our city and shift the curves we wish to change. The Belfast Agenda provides the catalyst and call to action for all stakeholders on issues where more must be done. Our long-term vision, ambitions and outcomes aim to improve the lives of everyone in Belfast. Together, we have the opportunity to build a more resilient, inclusive and prosperous city. Let's take it!

Thanks to our Community Planning Delivery Partners



**Belfast
City Council**



**TOURISM
NORTHERN
IRELAND**



**Belfast Health and
Social Care Trust**



**South Eastern Health
and Social Care Trust**



**Public Health
Agency**



CCMS
Council for Catholic
Maintained Schools



**Housing
Executive**



**Northern Ireland
Fire & Rescue Service**



**Education
Authority**



**QUEEN'S
UNIVERSITY
BELFAST**



**Ulster
University**



**BELFAST
CHAMBER**

**visit
Belfast**



VCSE
Advisory Panel and
Citywide Network



**WEST BELFAST
PARTNERSHIP
PÁIRTÍOCHT
FEIRSTE THÍAR**



**Health and Social
Care Board**

Strategy, Programmes and
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Access to information

As part of our commitment to promoting equality of opportunity and good relations, we want to ensure that everyone is able to access the documents we produce. This document is available in alternative formats such as Braille, easy-read, audio, large print and also in other languages on request by contacting 028 9027 0234.



Belfast
City Council