

Public Document Pack

**Democratic Services Section
Legal and Civic Services Department
Belfast City Council
City Hall
Belfast
BT1 5GS**

22 October, 2024

MEETING OF STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Dear Alderman/Councillor,

I enclose a copies of the reports for the following items to be considered at the meeting to be held at 9.30 am on Friday, 25th October, 2024.

Yours faithfully,

John Walsh

Chief Executive

AGENDA:

2. Restricted Items

- (h) Living With Water Programme Update (Pages 1 - 22)
- (i) Update on programme of support for the business owners impacted by the August attacks (Pages 23 - 28)

5. Belfast Agenda/Strategic Issues

- (a) Belfast City Council response to NI Executive's draft Programme for Government (Pages 29 - 156)
- (e) Modern Slavery Act 2015: updated Modern Slavery Statement and update on corporate action plan (Pages 157 - 168)
- (i) Womens Night Safety Charter (Pages 169 - 172)

6. Physical Programme and Asset Management

- (a) Physical Programme (Pages 173 - 182)

9. Operational Issues

- (f) Minutes of the Meeting of the Language Strategy Working Group- 18.10.24
(Pages 183 - 188)
- (g) Minutes of the Meeting of the All-Party Working Group on the City Centre
(Pages 189 - 192)
- (h) Aisling Awards (Pages 193 - 196)

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6
of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

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Subject:	Belfast City Council response to NI Executive - Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most - Draft Programme for Government 2024-2027
Date:	25 October 2024
Reporting Officer:	John Walsh, Chief Executive
Contact Officer:	John Tully, Director City & Organisational Strategy Kevin Heaney, Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty Geoff Dickson, Strategic Planning and Policy Manager

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.	
Insert number <input style="width: 40px;" type="text"/>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information relating to any individual 2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) 4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter 5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained 6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction 7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime 	
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision After Council Decision Sometime in the future Never	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	To purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with a proposed draft Belfast City Council response (Appendix 1) to the NI Executive - Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most - Draft

	Programme for Government 2024-2027, which is provided at (Appendix 2) for your consideration.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	<p>The committee is requested to note and agree:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. the draft Belfast City Council response to the Northern Ireland Executive's draft Programme for Government and agree to submit this response subject to any amendments of additional comments that the committee wish to provide. ii. to share this corporate response with the Northern Ireland Local Government Association, to inform their response which is being submitted on behalf of the wider local government sector. iii. to note that alongside providing this response to the Programme for Government unit in the Executive Office, officers are continuing to develop approaches to maximise the strategic positioning of the city within the context of the emerging Programme for Government and other strategies. iv. that a letter is sent to the TEO to accompany the response from Council to the PfG.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	On 5 September 2024, the Executive agreed a draft Programme for Government 2024-2027 'Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most'. Subsequently the Executive launched an 8-week public consultation on this draft Programme for Government, with the deadline for submissions 4 November 2024.
3.2	<p>The content of the draft Programme for Government 2024 – 2027 is set out below for the committee's information. The programme's priorities and commitments are divided into three core sections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doing What Matters Most - Focuses on the Executive's immediate priorities aimed at taking care of you, supporting our businesses, and improving the lives of our workers, families and communities. • Building New Foundations - Commits to upgrading infrastructure and improving services to better connect our communities, meeting your needs today and supporting your ambitions for tomorrow with the high-quality public services you deserve. • Shaping a Better Tomorrow - Focuses on three main missions: People, Planet, and Prosperity, all rooted in a commitment to Peace. These missions are dedicated to improving life for you, your families, and our communities.
3.3	<p>1. Doing What Matters Most Today</p> <p>This part of the draft Programme for Government sets out the NI Executive's immediate priorities, which include:</p>

- Immediate priorities for this year and throughout our mandate will be achieved by providing better support for our children and young people, enabling affordable childcare, growing our economy, increasing housing supply and tackling homelessness, taking care of everyone by improving Health and Social Care services, protecting our environment and cleaning up our water, and making our communities safer, including a particular focus on women and girls.
- Continue to grow a globally competitive, sustainable, and inclusive economy which benefits everyone.
- Focus on high-potential sectors, where there are established strengths, and the potential to be globally competitive. In areas such as outstanding sectors like cyber security, net zero, screen, financial technology, regulatory technology and health and life sciences already thriving, the NI Executive aim to build on this success, upgrade our infrastructure, grow our economy, and protect our environment.
- £150 million will be invested in the new *Enhanced Investment Zone* and we will continue to progress UK Shared Prosperity projects.
- Make sure everyone has the best possible opportunities regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, disability, who they are, or where they live, and to enable people to live with dignity in safe communities.
- Opening doors through proposed initiatives to deliver more affordable childcare, new skills funds, and apprenticeship programmes.
- Support the delivery of high-quality education for all children and champions better support for children and young people, especially those with special educational needs, so that all children are happy, learning and succeeding.
- Public services need urgent reform. Rapid growth in both the cost and demand for public services is placing a huge pressure on public finances and is undermining service provision. Reform and Transformation programme underpinned by new structures, external expertise, and a £235 million Transformation Fund to make our public services better, more easily accessed, and more efficient.

3.4

2. Building New Foundations

In this draft Programme for Government the NI Executive also recognised that to achieve their outcomes they need to build the right foundations and have the right infrastructure in place; therefore, they plan to:

- Upgrade our public sector infrastructure to strengthen our communities and create opportunities for businesses, entrepreneurs, communities, and innovators.
- Deliver upgrades to our sports stadia and increase opportunities for local sports.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve our transport infrastructure for safer, more active and sustainable travel, connected communities and inclusive economic growth. • Deliver an ambitious programme decarbonising all housing stock in NI. • Reducing carbon emissions in existing and new homes, engaging with consumers throughout the transition, while supporting various initiatives for energy efficiency and affordability. • Fresh thinking and new ideas that deliver the high-quality public services you deserve and pursue opportunities to improve and grow our public infrastructure, such as water services and planning.
3.5	<p>3. <u>Shaping a Better Tomorrow</u></p> <p>The Northern Ireland Executive also recognise the importance of shaping a better tomorrow by building a foundation for the longer-term. This will be focused on three main missions: People, Planet, and Prosperity, all rooted in a commitment to Peace.</p>
3.6	<p>Programme for Government Missions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. People: Working to support everyone at all stages of their life to ensure they have the chance to succeed by improving life opportunities. 2. Planet: Harnessing the potential of a green growth economy while ensuring we provide an equitable transition to a sustainable and affordable society as we take responsibility for decarbonising our economy and society. 3. Prosperity: Improving our economic productivity while making sure that we have an economy that works for everyone, and our story continues to be an inspiration to others.
3.7	<p>In addition to these three Missions, the NI Executive also have a cross-cutting commitment to a fourth underpinning mission of Peace which is intended to make sure that everyone feels the benefit of a growing economy, improved environment, and a fairer society.</p>
3.8	<p><u>Doing What Matters Most Today</u></p> <p>The NI Executive have also set out nine immediate priorities which they will work to this year and throughout the duration of this mandate, these are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Grow a Globally Competitive and Sustainable Economy 2. Deliver More Affordable Childcare 3. Cut Health Waiting Times 4. Ending Violence Against Women and Girls 5. Better Support for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs 6. Provide More Social, Affordable and Sustainable Housing 7. Safer Communities

	<p>8. Protecting Lough Neagh and the Environment</p> <p>9. Reform and Transformation of Public Services</p>
3.9	<p>Strategic Positioning</p> <p>The Committee is invited to note that as officers considered the corporate response to the NI Executive's draft Programme for Government and other emerging strategies such as the recently published Sub-Regional Economic Plan, they recognised the need to maximise opportunities so that both the regional priorities and the ambitions of the Belfast Agenda can be realised. A further report on this work will be presented to the Committee in due course.</p>
	Financial & Resource Implications
3.10	There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.
	Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment
3.11	There are no equality or rural needs implications arising directly from this report. However, the Committee is invited to note that alongside the public consultation on the draft Programme for Government.
3.12	The NI Executive are also undertaking associated consultations in relation to the Equality, Childs Rights and Rural needs. These are open for twelve weeks and officers are currently considering these and will bring a further report to this Committee on the impact assessments next month.
4.0	Appendices - Documents Attached
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Appendix 1 – draft Belfast City Council response to NI Executive Draft Programme for Government 2024-2027 ▪ Appendix 2 - NI Executive - Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most - Draft Programme for Government 2024-2027

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NI Executive - Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most - Draft Programme for Government 2024-2027

Draft Belfast City Council Response

Consultation Deadline: 4 November 2024

1.0 Introduction

Belfast City Council (“the Council”), welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Northern Ireland Executive’s Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most, the draft Programme for Government 2024-2027 (“PfG”).

The response is set out in two parts; the first is an overview of the key strategic and cross-cutting issues which the Council would recommend be considered when finalising the PfG. The second part sets out detailed comments in respect of immediate priorities, future commitments and missions set out by the NI Executive.

(i) A time of challenge but also opportunity

The Council believes that the draft Programme for Government is presented at a time of both exciting opportunity and huge challenge for Northern Ireland. Given the growing trend towards greater globalisation and the uncertainties which exist, there is a need to develop new integrated approaches to ensuring the region remains competitive on a national and international scale, ensure we continue to attract investment and connect economic growth and social wellbeing.

There is little doubt that the scale and complexity of policy issues facing local government is ever increasing. The role of local government and councils as place-based representatives and civic leaders, require Councils to play key an active role in advocating for and influencing wider responses and solutions to these pervasive policy issues. There is no doubt of the improved effectiveness and positive impact of central and local government working together to deliver the level of public services are citizens deserve or in responding together in times of emergency.

ii. Working together to deliver

By challenging the traditional ways of working and breaking through silos, the draft PfG provides an ideal platform to roll out a ‘whole system approach’, strengthening the relationship between regional and local government and creating an environment which facilitates the joint provision of services. The Council acknowledges the challenges embedded in this new way of working and the time it will take to successfully evolve as a ‘normal’ pattern of working. The Council welcomes the commitment made by the NI Executive in page 4 of the PfG that *‘Our Plan is an ambitious agenda for change for Northern Ireland. We will make it happen by working in partnership’*.

The Council is therefore fully committed to working alongside colleagues in the NI Executive, Voluntary and Community sector, our universities and academic institutions, businesses and the private sector to co-design and support the delivery of specific programmes of work required to achieve the ambitions set out in the PfG. The duty of community planning and local development planning has provided an overarching framework for Councils to work with statutory partners to enhance the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of their areas and deliver sustainable improvements for all.

The Council believe that to deliver on the ambitions and priorities contained in the PfG it is essential that both tiers of government work together in partnership to develop the policy and delivery frameworks by which to address the major challenges being faced by our citizens. There is a real opportunity to maximise the synergies and linkages between regional and local outcomes and together design impactful programmes and initiatives which will help address many of the entrenched societal and economic issues impacting upon local communities across Northern Ireland.

The Council has a strong track record of working in partnership with the NI Executive to implement national and regional policies and programmes at a local level and delivering positive outcomes for local communities, including, for example, the Urban Villages programme, Labour Market Partnership, supporting vulnerable individuals in need through Complex Lives initiative as well as securing the transformational £850million Belfast City Region Deal (BRCD). The BRCD involves an integrated programme of investment that cuts across the responsibilities of local councils, the Northern Ireland Executive and UK Government and will deliver 20,000 new jobs over the next decade.

Our intention to continue a genuine partnership approach is one that recognises that we are not solely seeking to deliver for Belfast, but the wider region, as in our view the two are mutually dependant.

Having reviewed the PfG the Council believe there are a number of key strategic opportunities for cross-cutting collaboration between The NI Executive and the Council in areas such as:

- **Developing a place-based approach to regeneration** which ensures that future investments and interventions into local areas is informed by an improved understanding of local assets, needs and priority outcomes.
- **Delivering housing programme at scale** – helping to unlock innovative funding models and land to deliver housing developments at scale as well as delivering wider environmental benefits including energy efficiency through development standards or retrofitting. Belfast has established a cross-sectoral Retrofit Hub to help move towards the goal of retrofitting housing stock in Belfast with more efficient energy usage, to reduce carbon emissions and energy demand.
- **Delivering critical infrastructure** – exploring and identifying innovative financing and/or delivery models to bring forward investment to unlock critical infrastructure challenges including Water and Waste.
- **Responding to the climate crisis** - the Council has been at the forefront of accelerating climate action through collaboration, blending research and intelligence with statutory and community action. The Council has appointed a Climate Commissioner and co-designed with partners an ambitious climate action plan and roadmap to net-zero. There are significant opportunities around Green Growth which we are seeking to realise through cross-sectoral delivery partnerships.

- **Proven delivery partnerships** - the Council would also be keen to use **Community Planning** in its broadest sense to support the delivery of the ambitions set out in the PfG on the basis of a proper partnership model approach, and believe this existing vehicle provides an opportunity which could be highlighted more within the PfG.
- Belfast City Council strongly advocates the need for informal and formal structures for effective dialogue and working between layers of government – including mechanisms like the Northern Ireland Political Partnership Panel.

iii. Financing the Programme for Government

The Council recognises the **significant pressures on public finances** faced by the NI Executive and the challenges this presents on the deliverability and sequencing of implementing the commitments set out in the PfG. The Council would welcome further detail on the financial strategy which will support delivery of the PfG, and significant priorities contained therein (for the example water infrastructure, climate). The Council would commend that active consideration be given to exploring alternative financial models and/or delivery models and partnerships and would highlight the recent work on securing City Deals being a demonstrator of what is possible. We would welcome the opportunity to have further discussions with central government on any potential to **establish joint funds** that can be used to co-invest in shared priorities.

It is important to highlight some of the recent challenges experienced by local government in terms of delivering in partnership with NICS Departments resulting from budgetary pressures and absence of a multi-year funding model. Significant and high impact programmes, such as Good Relations, Animal Welfare and supporting people suffering from hardship have been developed and jointly funded with NIHE Departments. Yet after the initial success of such programmes of work funding has been either reduced or removed and the Council has had to seek to source alternative funding which has not always been possible. We are keen to see the introduction of a **long-term sustainable funding model** to deliver public services and the strategic priorities of both central and local government.

The Council welcomes the proposed **£235 million Transformation Fund** earmarked to support the Reform and Transformation of Public Services and would welcome further engagement with NI Executive colleagues on the role of local government in the design and implementation of this fund.

The Council would also welcome further details being included within the PfG as to how through partnership and collaboration, central and local government can work together to achieve better outcomes. Examples of positive collaboration include Complex Lives, Wider University and Lower Ormeau, City Deals, Seamless Pathways and Inclusive Pathways to Good Employment in Health and Social Care. The Council are keen to continue working on this multi-agency basis, and over and above funding being provided to deliver programmes of work, the Council would prefer to be involved in earlier interactions with partners during the co-design process, along with partners in the Community and Voluntary Sector to deliver a true co-design approach to addressing the often complex and inter connected challenges

that we face. The Council has recently designed a co-design model in conjunction with the Community and Voluntary Sector which can provide a basis for a new way of working which could help deliver the Programme for Government and transformation of Public Services.

So, whilst the Council are a willing partner to help deliver solutions to the complex and cross-cutting issues that we as a society face, we need to be fully involved in understanding and designing the delivery solutions to these issues.

iv. Place-Based Regeneration

As referred to above, the Council believe there is a real opportunity to work across government and with local communities to transform local places. Sustainable development and regeneration provide the basis for transformational change and wide-ranging benefits, inclusive opportunity, equality, and stronger links between people and places. A placed-based approach is needed to ensure buy-in, engagement and appropriate delivery of social value, economic and environmental benefits in a sustainable way for individual residents, communities and potential investors including central and local government and the private sector.

There is no doubt local government has a pivotal role in supporting a place-based approach and understanding the local challenges and opportunities which exist. It is important that councils are provided with the appropriate powers and resources to respond to and help unlock the potential of their places and communities. This resonates with the growing call from the Core Cities group which Belfast is a member.

In relation to further devolution of powers to local government. Belfast City Council still believes further powers should be provided to local government including regeneration related functions. These additional powers will provide councils with the tools required to serve the needs of their communities, reduce inequalities and provide a tailored place-based response to the major policy issues of the day.

Our view of the role of local government is illustrated in the City's community plan, the Belfast Agenda 2035, which is focused on inclusive economic growth and connecting neighbourhoods and people to the opportunities it creates. This Plan has also demonstrated that the city has huge potential to create resilience and sustainability in terms of the economy, jobs, skills, tourism, and culture, with a focus on using innovation to tackle the city's challenges including climate change, Brexit, legacy of conflict and economic inactivity.

v. Role of Cities and Towns

The Council would welcome the opportunity to engage further with central government regarding the potential of cities and towns across Northern Ireland to work together based on their unique set of strengths that make them worthy of focus in a plan to regenerate and transform our public services. The current approach to city deals across Northern Ireland is an excellent example of how cities and towns are more transformative as a collective as opposed to when operating within silos.

There are strengths that local cities and towns have in common, but also exhibit individually and which can be combined in complementary ways to operate as a regional collective or network. This approach aligns to established research undertaken by OECD and RSA for the Core Cities network which highlights the place-shaping strength of cities and towns to play a key role in delivering the ambitions of central government.

The Council believes that rebalancing the economy by encouraging private sector investment and supporting market diversification, as well as promoting inclusive growth, is essential for generating sustainable growth, increasing productivity and creating diverse and well-paid jobs not only in Belfast but across the region. Central to this is improving the skills and employability levels. It is important that as many people as possible benefit from growth and the city's success, extending well beyond the city boundaries.

Northern Ireland's cities and towns already have considerable strengths. The question is how these can be most effectively identified and deployed, including in complementary ways with other cities and towns. This is more complex when we look to the future and consider strengths that may still be emerging but offer significant promise for innovation and growth.

Beyond the usefulness of these insights for individual cities and towns, this approach can inform a more collaborative – rather than competitive – approach to unlocking the region's future opportunities. By working together to identify sources of investment and other enablers (such as skills), our local cities and towns can unlock benefits that are more than the sum of their parts.

Immediate priorities, future commitments and missions

1. Grow a Globally Competitive and Sustainable Economy	
The Issue	Our economy continues to grow, and we now boast a growing reputation on the world's economic stage, backed by our leadership in key sectors and underpinned by our skills and technology. But not everyone here is feeling the benefit of that growth and there is still a long way to go.
Proposed Action:	<p>Through a series of multi-million-pound committed investments, we will make this a more vibrant and inclusive place to live, work, invest and visit. Central to every part of our plan for a globally competitive and sustainable economy will be employers and workers. Supporting them to build the skills needed both now, and in the future, will be vital if we are to harness our economic potential. Focused on the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Productivity • Good Jobs • Decarbonisation • Regional Balance
Belfast City Council Response	
<p>Belfast City Council welcomes the inclusion of this priority and wishes to highlight the city's role as the regional economic driver, recognising that continued growth for Belfast and the wider city region has broader benefits for the entire region.</p> <p>The PfG recognises that our economy continues to grow, and we now boast a growing reputation on the world's economic stage. The Belfast economy has performed well over the last two decades, in particular:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 30,000 net additional jobs since 2012 (BRES, NISRA) - almost 1 in 4 of all jobs created over that period. ▪ Average annual economic growth rate of 5% between 2012 and 2022. ▪ The Belfast economy has grown by £6.4 billion or 58% over the last decade (Regional GDP by all ITL regions, ONS 2024). ▪ Unemployment sitting at a low of 2.4% (Labour Force Survey, NISRA 2023) ▪ £16.1bn of GVA in 2022, ⅓ of the Northern Ireland economy (Regional gross domestic product all ITL regions, ONS)- £32.6 bn for the Belfast region, ⅔ of the NI economy. ▪ 236,476 jobs in the city and 504,692 in the wider region, representing 30% and 64% of all NI jobs respectively. 	

- Business base – there are 11,300 active enterprises in the city and 40,015 enterprises in the Belfast region; 1 in every 7 NI businesses are based in Belfast and 1 in 2 in the Belfast region (Inter Departmental Business Register, NISRA 2023)
- Globally competitive location with well-established strengths in key growth sectors:
 - Number 1 inward investment globally location for US FDI cyber security projects (FDI Markets 2020).
 - Number 1 location globally for FinTech inward investment (FDI Markets 2023).
 - Number 1 location in Europe for new software development projects (FDI Markets 2023).

The council wishes to further emphasise that this strong economic performance drives growth across the whole region.

- Belfast is the region's key population centre: it has a population of 348,005, and the Belfast region (based on the TTW area) is home to a population of over 1.13 million people (around 60% of the total regional population).
- Belfast is a new job creator for all adjacent areas – particular those around the city. Almost half of those that work in Belfast do not live in the city and Belfast City Council residents account for only 53% of total workplace employment in the city. This is indicative of the City's role as an employment hub for NI, attracting a high proportion of in-commuters.
- Incomes in neighbouring council areas (Lisburn & Castlereagh, Ards & North Down, Antrim & Newtownabbey) are on average higher than for Belfast residents. Average earnings for residents in Lisburn & Castlereagh are 6% higher than Belfast citizens; Antrim & Newtownabbey residents have earnings 3.4% greater than Belfast (ASHE, NISRA 2023).

However, as the PfG identifies, not everyone is feeling the benefit of this growth and there is still a long way to go. This is particularly the case within the Belfast city council area, as evidenced by:

- Average earnings of Belfast residents lag behind that of its workforce: those living outside of Belfast but working in the city earn on average £3,474 a year more than Belfast residents.
- While Belfast supports proportionately more higher-level jobs than other areas, it also has a disproportionate level of deprivation in many neighbourhoods: 6 of the top 10 most deprived wards in NI are in Belfast while the top 15 most deprived wards for the Education, Skills and Training domain are all in Belfast.
- The employment rate in Belfast varies greatly by local area – and is significantly lower in areas of deprivation. The employment rate of those living in the most deprived areas of Belfast is 22 percentage points less than those living in the least deprived areas (55% v 77%)
- There is a significant gap in life expectancy between most and least deprived areas – this equates to 11 years for males and 8 years for females.
- A significant proportion (43%) of all Belfast residents have skills levels not higher than level 2 (5 GCSEs equivalent) – with 16.5% (1 in 6) of all residents having no formal qualifications (Qualification level by Local Government District, TblIFS2338, Labour Force Survey 2022). By contrast, the skills demand for the coming period shows that fewer than 1 in 10 jobs will

require skills levels below level 2. This suggests that future growth in Belfast will continue to be serviced by those living outside the city.

We welcome the Executive's plans to work with councils and local partners to deliver the Sub-Regional Economic Action Plan. While we understand the objective of regional balance this should not be at the cost of further developing the Belfast economy, which represents $\frac{1}{3}$ of the Northern Ireland economy. Research also shows that cities drive productivity:

- In OECD countries, cities (which are home to 50% of total population) have contributed 60% of total employment creation and GDP growth in the past 15 years.
- OCO Global suggests that cities are magnets for FDI as they are home to 3 in 4 of all highly skilled jobs.
- Belfast and the wider region possess many of the assets that direct FDI decisions (The Productivity Institute) including its skilled workforce, universities and researchers, vibrant cultural scene, industry clusters and transport infrastructure.
- These assets are also critical in positioning the city as a base for fast-growing, globally focused businesses. We need to grow more innovation-focused businesses to drive our competitiveness. This also helps address a reliance on FDI – with local businesses more likely to “stick” to their home location – even when they ‘go global’.
- Regional productivity performance has been linked to investment in research and development (R&D) and other innovation activities (Cozza et al., 2012; Vieira et al., 2011). The Belfast Region City Deal presents a unique opportunity to develop clusters of high-growth industries and innovative businesses, providing agglomeration benefits and ‘knowledge spillover’ effects. Concentrating economic activity in a small city such as Belfast increases the productivity of that activity.
- Belfast came 5th overall in the FDI Intelligence Magazine's Top 10 mid-sized European Cities of the Future 2024
- The battle for investment is a global not a regional one: comparing only against adjacent districts is a zero-sum game. Whilst there has been much progress there continues to be significant areas for improvement in our productivity performance.

The challenge in Belfast is that we need to maintain focus on continued improvement and ensure more of our citizens benefit from good jobs.

- Haven't yet reached our potential – and the competition is strong. More than 41% of the working age population on the NI side of Dublin-Belfast economic corridor are skilled at level 2 and below: in ROI, this is 28%. (Dublin Belfast Economic Corridor Skills Research Project, UUEPC 2024)
- Belfast needs more new businesses – there were 29.7 business start-ups per 10,000 population in 2022 – the worst performance of all 63 urban areas in the UK (Core Cities)
- We accept the argument around the need for targeted investment – we have that at a micro level within our city. We need to maintain a focus on a growth agenda – while putting in place targeted activities to support inclusive and more sustainable growth.

- We have taken the lead on developing solutions that can drive productivity and support local economic growth across the wider region and city region e.g. BRCD and NIESS.
- In order to raise productivity, future policy should aim to help places achieve their productivity potential, which will differ from area to area, rather than trying to get every council area to achieve the same level of productivity.
- Investment decisions are taken on a global level: so, Belfast is not competing with its neighbouring towns and cities for FDI investment in particular – we are competing against other global cities, who are all continuing to invest.

The Council are keen to understand the outworkings of the Sub-Regional Economic Plan recently published by the Economy Minister and will work with partners to ensure that this Plan helps to promote economic growth for the city and wider region.

The Council support and welcome the focus on creating 'Good Jobs' and are willing through our economic development portfolio, to assist government partners and businesses to achieve jobs within a good jobs framework to support inclusive and sustainable economy.

The Council is also willing to share experiences in relation to tackling climate issues across the city and help identify and explore opportunities around Green Growth and the creation of job opportunities which will allow the green economy to grow and prosper.

The Council welcome the commitment of the NI Executive in relation to its £150 million investment to a new enhance Investment Zone. However, we would welcome further detail in terms of the Executive wishes to utilise this funding and how this proposed Investment Zone would operate in practice.

The Council wish to explore how we can work with partners to use the information we have to plan better around skills needs and training provision to meet these needs with the objective of supporting inclusive economic growth for all and in particularly pre-identified cohorts.

The Council believe that **Good Relations** enables people to be able to achieve their potential and access jobs wherever they are located. Thus, requiring Good Relations to be a key underpinning principle to a sustainable economy. Promoting Good Relations is key to improving the quality of life for everyone in the city and these are central to economic regeneration, attracting talent, sustaining inward investment, generating tourism and tackling poverty. As such, Good Relations is essential to growing a globally competitive and sustainable economy.

The Council believes that harnessing innovation can support future economic growth. At a city level we have established a new partnership, Innovation City Belfast, which brings together Belfast City Council, Belfast Harbour, Catalyst, Queen's University and Ulster University. Our Smart Belfast urban innovation programme stimulates collaborative innovation between businesses, industry, academia, public sector, private sector and communities, and provides a catalyst for a step change in the digital and innovation capabilities of our region. It will drive investment in research and development and help embed a culture of innovation to act as a driver for increased productivity.

2. Deliver More Affordable Childcare

Issue	We need to make childcare more affordable for parents to support employability and ease financial pressures. This must complement existing support available through Universal Credit and tax-free childcare. We also need to ensure that our childcare sector is stable and sustainable.
Proposed Action:	<p>We have already started to develop a long-term approach which will make childcare more affordable and help parents stay in or return to work. We know support cannot come soon enough, and that is why we are taking steps to introduce a balanced package of measures this year. This has the interests of children at its core and will ease current financial pressures on providers and families. It will also lay the foundation for an Early Learning and Childcare Strategy. Focused on the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investing Today • Early Learning and Childcare Strategy

Belfast City Council Response

The Council fully support the inclusion of this priority with the NI Executive's draft Programme for Government and is willing to engage and explore opportunities for supporting the NI Executive in achieving this PfG priority.

The Council as both an organisation led by elected representatives and as an employer recognises the financial burden and pressures faced by local families in relation to childcare places across the city and its staff.

The Council's interest in this area is illustrated by a number of Notices of Motion proposed by elected members in recent years, relating to Early Learning and Childcare Strategy, pressures of high costs of childcare, Childcare Provision and Childcare Strategy which highlights the understanding of elected members of the pressures in relation to this immediate priority.

Therefore, the Council commends the inclusion of this issue as an immediate priority for the NI Executive, and welcomes the Executive's commitments to:

- Invest up to £25 million this year
- Introducing a 15% childcare subsidy for parents in receipt of tax-free childcare who have children below primary school age
- Support existing childcare and early years programmes
- A standardised provision of 22.5 funded pre-school hours per week

- Build a skilled, valued and happy workforce including a new Skills Academy
- Develop an Early Learning and Childcare Strategy

3. Cut Health Waiting Times

Issue	We have the longest hospital waiting times in the UK, with people struggling to get the treatment they need. In recent years, pressure has increased due to both a rise in demand but also the impact of the pandemic on the Health and Social Care system. These have combined adding to the backlog of patients awaiting care. This backlog is unacceptable.
Proposed Action:	<p>The need to improve performance, increase productivity, and improve the quality and consistency of care is well understood. We know that we need to accelerate the transformation and reconfiguration of services to deliver that, and progress has and is being made to tackle the backlog of patients waiting. For example, through the development of elective care centres, rapid diagnosis centres, service reviews, and mega clinics.</p> <p>In addition, officials are working with Trusts to increase productivity and efficiency through a wide range of best practice service improvements, and the Social Care Collaborative Forum is working across all social care sectors to reform the commissioning and delivery of adult social care.</p> <p>Focussing on reforming Health and Social Care will be instrumental in increasing efficiency to improve our waiting times. This coupled with actions that help people remain healthy and tackle health inequalities will improve the lives of all our citizens and relieve pressures on the Health and Social Care System.</p>

Belfast City Council Response

The Council fully support the inclusion of this priority with the NI Executive's draft Programme for Government and is willing to engage and explore opportunities for supporting the NI Executive in achieving this PfG priority.

The Council recognises the significant scale of the challenge in relation to tackling waiting times and wider issues across the Health and Social Care system. The Council wish to offer our knowledge and local intelligence to provide local solutions which can help to reduce the current burdens being experienced in Health and Social Care.

One vehicle in which solutions can be explored is through the existing community planning system where local organisations including councils, departments and health trusts work together to address local issues and need. There are community plans in place across the 11 council areas and we believe this forum provides an opportunity to progress programmes and interventions to help address some of these issues.

The Council is surprised to note that the Integrated Care System Model is not referenced within the PfG and feel that this model and its relationship with community planning provides a mechanism to explore and address Health and Social Care issues at a local level and this should be explored further.

Currently the Council hosts a co-located team of staff from Council, PHA and BHSCT who work to address health inequalities. This approach recognises the importance of partnership working to align key approaches. We encourage the Executive to invest in health improvement, prevention and early intervention to reduce the pressures on primary care. We also commend this partnership model approach for addressing such issues as given the complexity and inter-connected nature of these issues these cannot be addressed in isolation.

The Council also are aware of the Health Minister's announcement in the summer of the first strand of Live Better initiative which is designed to target health inequalities and bring targeted health support to those communities that need it most. The Council welcome this area-based approach to tackling health inequalities as we are aware that across the city health inequalities and outcomes can change for one community to the next, and would look forward to working with partners in Department of Health, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust and Community and Voluntary sector to address these issues.

4. Ending Violence Against Women and Girls

Issue	<p>We must work together to end the epidemic of violence, abuse, and harm against women and girls.</p> <p>Despite the work undertaken to date, there have been over 20 domestic homicides with a female victim since January 2020 and these numbers continue to rise. Evidence shows that most women and girls here have experienced at least one form of gender-based violence, ranging from everyday misogyny and sexual harassment to extreme physical and sexual violence.</p>
Proposed Action:	<p>This year we will launch our first delivery plan. The delivery plan will strengthen existing, and mobilise new, partnerships and networks across government, and all sections of our society. It will drive and enable the necessary change, embracing the vital roles of our community and voluntary sector and grass roots organisations. Focused on the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raising Awareness • Change Fund • Challenge Fund • Joined-Up Approach

Belfast City Council Response

The Council fully support the inclusion of this priority with the NI Executive's draft Programme for Government, as this is a key priority for Elected Members and the city is willing to engage and explore opportunities for supporting the NI Executive in achieving this PfG priority.

The Council welcomed and strongly supported the development of the recently published Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) Strategic Framework and associated action plan. The Council fully recognises, given the number of related incidents of death and violence against women and girls that has occurred in Belfast, the seriousness and systemic nature of this issue and the need for everyone to work together to tackle this blight on our society.

The Council is a willing partner in relation to these issues and will happily support colleagues in The Executive Office and across the public sector, to raise awareness of these issues through campaigns, and delivery programmes on behalf of central government at a local level to help provide appropriate interventions and programmes that will help to reduce and hopefully eradicate these issues.

Currently Council officers are engaged with TEO officials to bring forward proposals whereby councils would have a direct role in supporting the implementation of the EVAWG action plan on a phased basis:

- **Building momentum and readiness** - Intention for the Council to work with local community groups/partners to bring forward some capacity building interventions in-year potentially by expanding on existing good work by council and communities which can contribute to EVAWG during this current financial year.
- **Implementation** – the Council to establish and deliver a Change Fund (Local Grant Scheme) to equip community and voluntary sector organisations within Belfast to develop and implement interventions to prevent violence against women and girls.

As highlighted through current discussions with TEO in relation to rolling out programmes relating the EVAWG strategy the Council is demonstrating its willingness to work with government partners and local community partners to affect positive change in relation to this issue and welcome the opportunity to continued collaboration in this area.

However, the Council would recommend that continuing funding in this area of work is discussed to ensure that funding is allocated based on a strategic plan of delivery to ensure appropriate resources are in place longer-term.

5. Better Support for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs

Issue	<p>Over the last decade, the number of children identified with Special Educational Needs (SEN) has risen steadily to almost one in five pupils alongside an increasing level of expenditure on SEN provision, not always matched by a demonstrable improvement to the outcomes for children and young people with SEN and disabilities.</p> <p>The current education system is struggling to keep pace with the changing pupil profile and the model of support for children and young people needs significant transformation which requires additional investment. Over 200 recommendations exist from various reports evidencing the need for systemic reform, a focus on early intervention, and prompt access to effective supports to improve the experience of children, their families, and the educational workforce.</p>
Proposed Action:	<p>We will work to transform the Education system to provide high-quality, efficient and sustainable services for children with SEN and disability. Systemic transformation will take time, but it is vital that we respond meaningfully to make sure our education system works for all learners. Focused on the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enabling Actions • The Right Support from the Right People, at the Right Time, in the Right Place
Belfast City Council Response	
<p>The Council fully support the inclusion of this priority with the NI Executive's draft Programme for Government and would be keen to explore opportunities for supporting the NI Executive in achieving this PfG priority.</p> <p>As a Council we are fully aware of the pressures being faced by local families in getting the appropriate support for children and young people with special educational needs. We believe that opportunities exist within the community planning process for relevant organisations to work together in gathering local data and evidence which can help to inform the Department of Education in addressing these issues, and therefore helping to develop a successful transformation implementation plan which ensures the right support from the Right People, at the Right Time and in the Right Place.</p> <p>The Council recognises the increase in the number of children across local communities with Special Educational Needs and needs requiring additional support. The Council this year allocated additional funding to enable local enhanced provisions at summer schemes across the city to provide summer schemes for children with additional needs. Therefore, this is an issue that we are aware of and keen to provide any necessary support in bringing this priority forward.</p>	

6. Provide More Social, Affordable and Sustainable Housing

Issue	Good housing is essential to our health and wellbeing. We want everybody to have access to affordable, sustainable and quality housing that meets their needs within thriving and inclusive communities. The challenge we face is evidenced by the social housing waiting list, which currently stands at over 47,000 households, including 35,000 experiencing housing stress.
Proposed Action:	<p>We will unlock the combined skills and resources of government, the private and third sectors, finding solutions and creating opportunities to transform supply and improve quality across the whole housing system.</p> <p>We will ensure that the planning system supports the delivery of the appropriate supply of housing, creating sustainable and inclusive spaces, and work with NI Water to help facilitate housing growth.</p> <p>We will deliver a Northern Ireland Housing Supply Strategy to provide a long-term framework for the policies and actions required to increase the supply of homes across all tenures and reduce housing stress.</p>

Belfast City Council Response

The Council fully support the inclusion of this priority with the NI Executive's draft Programme for Government, as this is a key priority for Elected Members and the city, the Council is willing to engage and explore opportunities for supporting the NI Executive in achieving this PfG priority.

As outlined in the PfG document the Council, like the NI Executive, wants everybody to have access to affordable, sustainable and quality housing that meets their needs within thriving and inclusive communities. However, the Council recognise that this ambition does not reflect the reality of the significant challenges being faced in terms of housing waiting lists, housing stress and lack of housing stock.

The total number of applicants on the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) waiting list (with no existing NIHE/housing association tenancy) on 31 March 2024 was **47,312**. Of these applicants, **35,464** households were in 'housing stress'.

Belfast's social housing waiting list was at **12,726** households, with **10,307** of those households considered to be in housing stress. This is an increase of **243** households from the end of 2023. (DfC Northern Ireland Housing Bulletin - January - March 2024)

The Council welcomes the commitment of the NI Executive to unlock the combined skills and resources of government, the private and third sectors, finding solutions and creating opportunities to transform supply and improve quality across the whole housing system.

The Council also welcomes the commitment to ensure that the planning system supports the delivery of appropriate and sustainable supply of housing. Given Councils are the local planning authority we anticipate that the view of Councils will be sought in developing how the planning system can be used to deliver the housing needed, cognisant of the significant issues such as wastewater infrastructure challenges which is inhibiting much needed housing development across the city.

We would also be keen to work central government in developing a Northern Ireland Housing Supply Strategy. During the development of the Belfast Agenda numerous stakeholders highlighted that addressing housing need and driving housing-led regeneration are key to enhancing quality of life. The Council is committed to creating a more vibrant, more inclusive and more liveable city. Investment in quality homes, placemaking, connectivity and social infrastructure lies at the heart of that vision.

While public sector investment in social housing has been sustained in recent years, the rate of output of residential development has not kept pace with demand. As it stands, Belfast and the wider region are recording increasing numbers of households living in housing stress. We have committed to working in partnership to address this urgent issue and ensure that everyone will have access to a high quality, affordable and sustainable homes.

Unlike many other cities of a similar size, the residential population of Belfast city centre is low. To achieve real vibrancy, it will be important to facilitate a sustainable mix of people living in the city centre, including families, elderly people and young professionals.

While our housing targets primarily focus on new builds, it is critical that we strike the right balance between investment in new stock and maintenance of our existing homes, including a need to ensure that homes are energy efficient and resilient to the effects of climate change. It is also important that housing-led regeneration considers the need to respect the historic and natural heritage of Belfast, as bestowed in its listed buildings, conservation areas, green spaces and waterside location.

In line with the commitments set out the PfG, the Council have committed through the Belfast Agenda to:

- Increase housing supply across all tenures. This will include private homes (both home ownership and private rental), social homes and intermediate homes for rent and sale (such as shared ownership and other intermediate rental arrangements) as they are developed across the council area.
- Reduce social housing projections by increasing the provision of social homes through the Social Housing Development Programme.
- Increase the number of people living in the city centre across all tenures.

The Council would also support the Executive as they seek Treasury agreement for appropriate treatment of borrowing to enable the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) to increase investment in its homes, improve energy efficiency and contribute to new supply. Recognising the need to commit significant investment to bring forward schemes of scale

We continue to service a divided society, where a duplicated service delivery model has been virtually impossible to transform. The additional costs of servicing a segregated society runs to upwards of £1.5b per annum, depending on what is included in the analysis.

Housing is one example of where a binary or segregated system has been in place and needs transformed if we are to have a truly inclusive society. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) itself accepts 90% of social housing is segregated in Northern Ireland as a whole, rising to 94% in Belfast – more than before the conclusion of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement.

The Council welcomes the on-going work to transform the private rented sector and continues to work with Department for Communities to support this programme. As part of this programme the Council wishes to highlight that the statutory fitness standard remains out of date and is not fit purpose to ensure that homes are maintained in accordance with modern day standards. The Council would welcome the introduction of a new standard which brings Northern Ireland into line with the rest of the UK for this standard.

Complex Lives model

The Council agrees that good housing is essential to our health and wellbeing. We want everybody to have access to affordable, sustainable and quality housing that meets their needs within thriving and inclusive communities. However, we recognise that in some cases, supports need to be in place to enable those who are most vulnerable within society and face complex challenges to be able to avail of opportunities that come with increasing the supply of housing. As such, the **Belfast Complex Lives model** is an example of a collaborative new delivery model dealing with an important and complex challenge for the City.

The Complex Lives model has been created to provide joined up support for some of Belfast's most vulnerable people who have fallen into a cycle of rough sleeping, addiction, poor mental and physical health and offending behaviour. These are people who meet the definition of Chronic Homeless as defined by Northern Ireland Housing Executive, estimated at around 200 people at this point.

The multiple disadvantage and acute needs of people caught in this cycle cannot be met by any single agency. The Complex Lives model provides a 'whole system' partnership delivery model that joins up support services across the statutory, voluntary and community sector and that enables changes in the way support works where that is needed. This is a product of the Belfast Community Planning approach and delivery of the Belfast Agenda, which promotes partnership working.

The model produces 'wrap around' support for outreach & engagement, supporting people into accommodation/housing, treating addictions, meeting physical and mental health needs,

and helping people to reduce offending and re-offending, amongst other support that can be needed.

The Complex Lives model is not a new layer of support service or a replacement for existing services. It is a collaboration model that enables a range of existing services in to join up their work more effectively. Given the nature of the complex and inter-connected challenges highlighted in the PfG. The Council believe that the NI Executive and its departments can look towards the Complex Lives model as the type of partnership arrangement which need developed at a local level across Northern Ireland to address the societal challenges.

The Council also welcomes the Commitment to launch a new Fuel Poverty Strategy by 2025, to support those struggling with the cost of living. This approach aligns with ongoing programmes managed by Belfast City Council in relation to Anti-Poverty, Hardship Funding and Cost-of-Living support. The Council would therefore welcome any future opportunities to engage and collaborate with departments in developing this strategy.

The Council also welcomes the commitment to review the NIHE Private Sector Grants, including the Disabled Facilities Grant to ensure that these grants effectively support our most vulnerable citizens.

The Council would also wish to stress the importance of the transfer of key regeneration functions to local government. The transfer of Comprehensive Development Powers and the ability to acquire land for regeneration purposes, when used alongside community and land use planning, would help to strengthen and enhance our ability to drive strategic regeneration activity, unlocking and realising the potential of major/flagship schemes and reinvigorating key areas in the city, and increasing housing supply.

7. Safer Communities

Issue	A central role of government is to protect its citizens. By keeping communities safe we enable them to have the confidence they need to live productively and engage fully in society.
Proposed Action:	<p>We are committed to keeping our communities safe and to making sure you feel confident and secure to live your life to its fullest.</p> <p>Acknowledging the levels of trauma in our post-conflict society, we will work across the Executive to embed trauma-informed, responsive systems; systems that help people to easily navigate and access the support they need, when they need it, and for however long they need it for. Focused on the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Speeding Up Justice Programme• Investment in digital capabilities• Sufficient number of police officers in line with NDNA commitments• Necessary prosecution resources

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-governmental strategy to reduce offending and reoffending • Strategic Framework for Youth Justice
Belfast City Council Response	
<p>The Council fully support the inclusion of this priority with the NI Executive's draft Programme for Government and would be keen to explore opportunities for supporting the NI Executive in achieving this PfG priority.</p> <p>The Council agree that a central role of government both central and local is to protect its citizens by keeping communities safe and enabling them to have the confidence they need to live productively and engage fully in society.</p> <p>Addressing issues impacting on the sense of safety and creating community confidence happens at a local level. The Council and the Policing and Community Safety Partnerships have a key role to play in delivering these outcomes including supporting placed-based approaches and early intervention programmes which are preventative rather than remedial in nature.</p> <p>The Council support the proposed actions put forward by the NI Executive as a means for creating safer communities, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Speeding up Justice Programme ▪ Digital Transformation across Criminal Justice ▪ Cross-governmental strategy to reduce offending and reoffending ▪ Strategic Framework for Youth Justice <p>The Council find it concerning that the issue of tackling hate crime is not referenced in the issue and proposed actions within the PfG. Sectarian and racist hate crime continues to blight our society, as evidenced by PSNI statistics and what was witnessed in Belfast in August 2024. Tackling such hate crime must be a priority for the new Programme for Government, through prosecutions and through a meaningful programme of education and engagement.</p> <p>The Council believes that its Good Relations approach of building relationships between people from different religious, political and ethnic backgrounds needs to be front and centre in tackling issues such as hate crime, as it is the primary means of preventing such crime in the long-term. As such, the reductions in funding for Good Relations projects and programmes runs counter to the clear need to tackle hate crime and the Council would ask that the funding of Good Relations projects is reviewed and allocations as a minimum are restored to ensure a sustainable funding model for this critical area.</p> <p>The Council also note that there is no reference to Modern Slavery in the Programme for Government or indeed within this section. This is a growing area of concern, and all government departments should be committed to ensuring that modern slavery does not</p>	

exist within their supply chain or any part of their business, and we believe it would be helpful if this was referenced within the PfG.

The Council would also request that greater emphasis is placed on supporting **newcomer communities** to transition and integrate into local neighbourhoods as a means of creating safer communities. Again, this is particularly important for Belfast in light of public disorder and unrest in August 2024, and we believe that the issues of tackling hate-crime, and integration for newcomer communities is a growing issue of concern for city and wider region and should be reflected within the PfG.

Belfast City Council recognises its critical role in addressing inequalities across the city and within its communities. This is an area in which our elected members are highly engaged to explore initiatives to tackle inequalities with other relevant public bodies. As a Council we aim to tackle inequality, create more and better jobs, equip people with the skills to take them, and give citizens more control over the decisions that affect their lives and their communities.

Much work has taken place in the last number of years to ensure that the Council builds up its information and data knowledge of those who live, work and invest in the City. It is fundamental for local government to understand the nature and scope of the inequalities and where they exist before we can plan to develop programmes to target and reduce these inequalities for the greater good. We believe that this rich source of information can be shared with central government colleagues to ensure a co-designed and informed approach to delivery of the PfG outcomes.

In recent years, Belfast City Council, has developed new and innovative service models to ensure inequality and diversity issues are properly addressed within its communities. The most pragmatic approach is to develop council-wide strategies for provision of services and grant funding e.g. leisure centres, play parks, community grants initiatives. A new system area-based planning is being developed to foster area-based working on appropriate issues, and we would be keen to engage further with government departments as we continue to develop this approach.

It is vital that local government, the closest form of government to the community, works with that community to empower them and increase their participation to create safer communities in line with the NI Executive's vision. Rather than doing 'for...', or 'doing to...' it's important that councils 'do with...' communities, and in this vein, the principles of co-production are vital.

Shared Space – The Council is committed to working with the Shared City Partnership to deliver an integrated plan to improve good relations and developing a sustainable, transferable, and scalable approach to the management of shared space. We welcome the PfG commitment to bringing forward flagship transformational programmes to increase shared space and create multi-use places in local neighborhoods. We would be keen to work alongside the Executive to maximise potential opportunities for the city and explore potential synergies with other emerging physical investment schemes.

The Council welcomes the opportunity to work with NICS Departments to deliver the recently secured £15million PeacePlus Local Action Plan which will help build a compassionate cultural vibrant and inclusive city.

8. Protecting Lough Neagh and the Environment

Issue	Lough Neagh is one of our most important natural resources and is of huge economic significance for those who depend on it for drinking water, its fishing and eel industries. It is also of growing importance for recreation and tourism.
Proposed Action:	<p>The proposed action in relation to protecting Lough Neagh and the Environment will focus on the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our First Environment Strategy • Climate Action • Interagency Protocol • Lough Neagh Action Plan • Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI)

Belfast City Council Response

The Council fully support the inclusion of this priority with the NI Executive's draft Programme for Government. and would be keen to explore opportunities for supporting the NI Executive in achieving this PfG priority, particularly within the field of Climate Action where the Council has been a forerunner on addressing these issues at a city level.

In autumn 2019 Belfast signed its climate emergency declaration aiming to reach net-zero emissions. Belfast City Council facilitates a Belfast Climate Commission which was established in 2020 to support more intelligent choices in the city on issues related to energy, carbon, weather and climate.

In its report later that year, *A Net-Zero Carbon Roadmap*, the Belfast Climate Commission recognised that the Covid pandemic and subsequent lockdown had reduced the carbon footprint in the city and has changed some behaviour, but also suggested the city needs a "more positive way of addressing the climate challenge in the context of a healthy, inclusive and vibrant city".

While the city had achieved a 42% reduction in its carbon emissions from 2000-2020 the Commission has set a target of 66% reduction by 2025, 80% by 2030, and 100% by 2050.

The Commission identifies that currently 39% of Belfast's emissions come from the domestic housing sector, 24% from public and commercial buildings, 20% from transport, and 18% from industry.

In identifying key activities within the sectors, within the public and commercial sector it identifies work on improving the fabric of buildings, improved cooling and lighting, and heating improvements as having significant impact. This is aside from the major impact that could be realised from improvements in domestic housing.

We welcome the planned publications of a Circular Economy Strategy for Northern Ireland, with responsible production and consumption at its core. We note that the Strategy will have three key principles of designing out waste, keeping products in circulation at their highest value for as long as possible and regenerating natural systems. We anticipate that the Strategy will include clear and measurable targets and goals going beyond (the current) weight-based approaches to waste reduction and application of the waste hierarchy.

It is disappointing that, apart from the Circular Economy Strategy, there is no other reference to waste management or waste treatment within the PfG Consultation document, including potential infrastructure requirements to deal with waste generation in Northern Ireland. Specifically, there is no reference to the (now delayed) publication of a Waste Strategy for Northern Ireland. The previous strategy, published in 2013, only outlined and set the policy framework until 2020. The eagerly anticipated new Waste Management Strategy will be of significant importance for Northern Ireland moving towards a target of Net Zero by 2050.

Waste has a potential major role to play within the Government plans referenced (within the consultation document) to decarbonise our economy and become self-sufficient in affordable renewable energy. For example, CHP plants, EFW and other technologies, that could transform waste into other energy products, all have the potential to contribute towards renewable energy targets.

Within the PfG Consultation, we would have welcomed a commitment from Government to address other waste streams in Northern Ireland, other than household waste – e.g. commercial, industrial and construction and demolition waste. It is noted that within the recently published NIAO review of Waste Management in Northern Ireland that around 90 per cent of the waste produced in Northern Ireland is not being robustly monitored, and this will create considerable challenges for future waste management planning and forecasting. (It is worth also noting that the report also highlights that, overall, councils have been successful in achieving their landfill and recovery targets, with a 2020 target for 50 per cent recycling rate for household waste being met in 2019.) As per our earlier comment, we are still awaiting publication of the new Waste Management Strategy and such issues might be addressed with that.

There no longer appears to be a plan, within the PfG, to establish an independent Environmental Agency for Northern Ireland, despite the environmental challenges faced by the country and in particular the protection of one of our most valuable natural assets, Lough Neagh.

Belfast City Council welcomes the development of Northern Ireland's first Environmental Improvement Plan but would emphasise that the Plan needs to be robust and adequately resourced. The Plan should include SMART targets and a detailed action plan to deliver these.

The Council is pleased to see acknowledgement within the PfG that "unless we look after our natural environment, we are likely to see many more environmental crises, like Lough Neagh" with associated economic, social and reputational consequences for NI.

The Council stresses the need to invest in protection of the natural world and supports that "the EIP in conjunction with other strategies will provide a coherent response to the global challenges of biodiversity loss and climate change". The Executive has a key leadership role in environmental protection and the Councils commends the importance of developing a new NI Biodiversity Strategy for public bodies to work towards.

9. Reform and Transformation of Public Services

Issue	We recognise the many compounding factors, set out below, which have resulted in the unsustainability of many of your public services and the need for urgent Reform and Transformation.
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Proposed Action:	<p>We know that fiscal and service sustainability will require brave decisions, collaborative working, and a relentless focus on innovation and efficiency in service delivery. This can only be achieved through partnership working, and a willingness to accept change, challenge the status quo, and make long-term strategic decisions.</p> <p>The proposed action in relation to Reform and Transformation of Public Services will focus on the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unsustainability of Public Services • Service Delivery Transformation • Productivity and Digital Transformation • Innovation and Research Transformation
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Belfast City Council Response

The Council fully support the inclusion of this priority with the NI Executive's draft Programme for Government and is extremely keen to work with NI Executive and partners across the public sector to undertake the necessary reform and transformation of public services to ensure that our citizens benefit from the public services that they required.

The Council as a public body fully recognise the unsustainability of public services if we continue to operate in the current way and understand the critical need of investment and reform to ensure the quality and efficiency require in delivering public services.

The Council agree for the need to bring forward innovative and transformative approaches to deliver public services. The Council welcomes the commitment of the NI Executive that fiscal and service sustainability can only be achieved through partnership working, and a willingness

to accept change, challenge the status quo, and make long-term strategic decisions. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further and provide case studies and examples where the Council has led or participated in partnership model that have affected significant and transformational outcomes.

By way of example, for the last number of years the Council has been a partner on Innovation City Belfast (“ICB”). The ICB partnership is made up of the leaders of Belfast City Council, Belfast Harbour, Belfast Met, Catalyst, Queen’s University Belfast and Ulster University, with Invest Northern Ireland as an advisory partner.

The Council believe that partnerships such as ICB demonstrate how with the right willingness to collaborate across the public, private and university sectors we can work together in drive innovation and attract investment for the city and region. This approach could be replicated across Northern Ireland as a means of ensuring local partners work together to reform and create a sustainable system of public services reflecting the local areas where they are located.

The Council also note the proposed action to maximise any potential funding sources and would be interested to know if the NI Executive intend to develop a funding strategy to set out its approach to maximising funding opportunities. The Council would keen to support any future approach between central and local government where we can seek to maximise impact by aligning resources and leveraging additional funding and resources for NI. We would be keen to engage with departments to identify joint solutions to maximise the benefit of the capital investment.

The Council understand that the NI Executive propose to set up a new Reform and Transformation Unit. While this appears a sensible approach to dealing with these difficult issues, the Council would welcome further to details to understand the detailed approach that the NI Executive proposes to tackle this significant challenge and we would be keen that this Unit is representation of the wider public sector and the Community and Voluntary Sector. The Council have a strong desire to play its role in this area and be a part of this approach and we fully appreciate the difficulties for our residents of terms of accessing the public services they should expect.

In addition to focusing on transformation, the Council would commend that due consideration be given to opportunities to adopt a more collaborative and cross-cutting approach across the public sector with partners in the Community and Voluntary sector. The Council believe progress and improvements in this area can happen now and does not need to wait on the outcome of this transformation work. In our view we should be building on existing relationships and multi-agency approaches in addressing interconnected and complex societal challenges, such as the reform of and transformation of public services.

The Council would also welcome the early publication of a Fiscal Framework, Sustainability Plan and Transformation Programme as part of the NI Executive’s proposed Reform Package. The Council would welcome if these plans were subject to early engagement for the Council and wider local government sector.

The Council welcome the announcement that there will be a newly created Public Sector Transformation Board. The Council believe that when this Board is been set up there should be meaningful representation from local government put forward by a local government representative body such as SOLACE NI or NILGA. Representation on the Public Sector Transformation Board and any satellite boards should reflect a place-based approach representing different communities. The Council would also welcome an opportunity to consult on the proposed Terms of Reference for this Board.

In relation to the focus on Innovation and Research Transformation, the Council believe partnerships such as the ICB are well positioned to provide information, evidence and learning on global best practices in using innovation and new technologies to improve our approaches to service delivery.

In relation to the Reform and Transformation of Public Services, the Council would ask that where additional regulatory controls that have impacts for District Councils are brought forward by the NI Executive during this assembly term, that Departments hold effective and meaningful pre-engagement and consultation Councils and undertake regulatory impact assessments to properly determine the resources needed and identify funding support from Departments before they are introduced.

In the Secretary of State's budget statement in April 2023, he said: "The Northern Ireland Budget per person is around 20% higher than equivalent UK Government spending in other parts of the UK. Yet, the level of public services offered are still not affordable and outcomes are not improving". We continue to service a divided society, where a duplicated service delivery model has been virtually impossible to transform. The reform and transformation of public services must start to address duplication and dismantle the segregated nature of such services.

The impact of the conflict places our society at a distinct disadvantage. But financing this region must face up to the fact that in order that we are able to get to a position where our region is on par with other parts of these islands, there is no doubt that our society does need additional support and investment.

It is therefore totally right that in areas such as health, policing, community and economic activity, these are given adequate investment and support, in order to enable our people to catch up with the rest of these islands; people who are already at a disadvantage as a result of the conflict and its legacies.

But in other areas of public service delivery, we are spending much more than we need to. This is partly because of how services were historically developed, during the period of conflict. Our school system, public housing, transport, road network, leisure and governance have effectively been designed to facilitate separation. Therefore, addressing this service delivery model needs to be at the core of any programme of reform and transformation of public services.

The Council notes that the PFG references the role of Voluntary and Community Sector in tackling complex issues and working with government to address interconnected problems. We also believe that local government has equally as important role to play and would welcome

further engagement on the following matters as a means to help in the reform and transformation of public services:

- Greater fiscal and financial powers to local government
- Align priorities with Medium-term financial planning to ensure adequate resourcing
- Multi-year budgets for councils
- Further devolution of functions to local government (e.g. regeneration)
- Recognising and maximising opportunity presented through community planning

It is the view of the Council that local government should deliver the majority of services that affect citizens and communities at a local level. At the heart of delivering these services should be a place-based approach. This is because only when a public body such as a council knows and understands the needs of a community that it can deliver the necessary interventions leading to positive outcomes.

In addition to focused place-based services., local government also had a broader role to play in demonstrating civic leadership on the key policy challenges faced by society relating to climate emergency, community cohesions and the need to promote inclusive growth ensuring employment and skills opportunities for all persons within their areas.

The approach set out above to addressing these policy issues through a partnership approach is best delivered under the auspices of community planning. The responsibility for community planning and the duty to produce a community plan for the was an outcome of the 2015 programme to reform local government. In this regard the Council, as has wider local government, been required to enter into and develop sustainable partnerships with statutory partners across areas such as health and social care, education and academia to provide holistic solutions to cross-cutting policy issues which affect the City.

Introducing Our Missions

Issue	The Executive is subject to significant financial constraints driven by a range of factors. In the 2024/25 financial year, demand for services far outstripped the funding available. For every £1 we had to allocate for spending on day-to-day funding of public services we had three times as many demands. Similarly, for every £1 available to spend on capital, including money for hospitals, schools, and roads, we had one and a half times as many demands.
Proposed Action:	Our Missions – People, Planet, Prosperity and Peace. Understanding Missions by Tracking Wellbeing

	<p>Wellbeing is a combination of social, environmental, economic, and democratic factors which are essential for society to flourish. These factors align to People, Planet, Prosperity and Peace.</p> <p>Our Missions have been broken down across ten strategic domains of wellbeing supported by a selection of indicators, each of which is a high-quality official statistic. Each project and programme contained within the draft Programme for Government can be linked to a Mission. Focused on the following areas:</p> <p>Understanding Performance</p> <p>Making Things Better</p>
Belfast City Council Response	
<p>The Council welcome the recognition by the NI Executive the need to plan for future generations and a focused commitment to the following long-term missions of People, Planet, Prosperity, and Peace.</p> <p>The Council welcomes the publication of the PfG Wellbeing Framework as a means of understanding individual metrics identified as measures of success for quality of life in Northern Ireland. In addition, we particularly welcome the process of disaggregating indicators by different demographic groups such as sex, age, marital status, religion, disability, ethnic group, sexual orientation, those with and without dependants, and political opinion as well as by geographic area. We would welcome an opportunity to engage with NICS colleagues in the further development of the Framework and exploring opportunities for aligning with metrics emerging through community planning processes across the region.</p> <p>We would however seek further clarification on the proposed definition and measurement of the 'Employment Rate indicator' as it appears to differ from the Economy Minister's metric included in the recently published Sub-Regional Economic Plan.</p> <p>The Council also welcome the commitment that alongside the Wellbeing Dashboard the Executive will be keeping track of delivery and publishing a delivery report each year, by which the public can assess the progress of the PfG.</p>	
Building New Foundations	
Issue	We are committed to investing in our public infrastructure and reshaping how our services are delivered.
Proposed Action:	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boost Housing Funds • Improve the Planning System • Deliver Better Public Services • Support Our Net Zero Future

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage Our Water • Upgrade Stadia and Support Local Sports • Retrofit Homes • Improve Our Transport Infrastructure for Safer Travel, Connected Communities and Sustainable Economic Growth <p>We are committed to investing £26 billion of public funding in the next decade. More detail on this will be provided in the upcoming Investment Strategy.</p>
Belfast City Council Response	
<p>The Council welcome the commitment of the NI Executive set out in the PfG, to invest in public infrastructure and reshaping how are services are delivered.</p> <p>The Council understand that without the necessary infrastructure in place to support investment and development then ambitions to transforming public services will be an empty ambition.</p> <p>The Council also welcome the commitment to invest £26 billion of public funding in the next decade to address these infrastructure deficits. The Council would have some concerns whether this funding in itself will be enough to deliver what is needed across the Region and look forward to the early publication of the upcoming Investment Plan in which we trust further details on how this funding will be allocated and sequencing of investment will be set out. Set out below is specific commentary of the proposed foundations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boost Housing Funds <p>As set out previously in our comments under priority number 6 – provide more social, affordable, and sustainable housing. The Council fully support additional funding to boost the provision of housing, given that housing is key to the quality of life for all citizens. The Council in its Belfast Agenda advocates a housing-led regeneration approach, in which housing provision is at the heart of wider regeneration of communities and places. The Council welcome further details coming forward on these housing funds.</p> • Improve the Planning System <p>Since the transfer of local planning powers to local government in 2015, the Council has developed the City's first Local Development Plan and is currently developing a suite of local planning policies to supplement its plan. It has been the experience of this Council that the Planning System in NI continues to impact on the operation and delivery of planning at a local level, affecting not only the plan-led approach but also timescales in decision making and therefore confidence in investment and communities. We therefore welcome and recognised the need to prioritise the planning reform agenda and trust that both central and local government partners can work together to create a more effective planning system, which generates investment and in turn promotes inclusive economic growth in the city and across the region.</p> • Deliver Better Public Services <p>The Council are happy to share recent programmes of work which it has undertaken in relation to developing its Social Value Procurement policy and Ethical Procurement approach to assist</p> 	

in any training departments wish to offer in terms of making smarter, greener spending decisions.

- **Support Our Net Zero Future**

The Council agree the need for Targeted Investment for a Net Zero future. The Council believe that there is an urgent need for more funding dedicated to green skills and training, including the establishment of a Green Skills Academy in Northern Ireland, to ensure the workforce is equipped for the transition to a net zero economy. Which will change the lives of our people and communities for the better.

- **Manage Our Water**

The Council is aware and has expressed its concerns recently at a number of meetings with NI Executive Ministers regarding the Living with Water Programmes and issues that have arisen due to the historic underfunding in our wastewater infrastructure.

This underfunding has brought us to the position wherein the issues facing the Living With Water programme and NI Water is having a significant impact on the city and the wider region in terms of environmental and growth implications due to continued non-investment in the required infrastructure.

The Council would therefore urge the Infrastructure Minister and the NI Executive to work with the Council to consider other funding options and creative solutions and prioritise the need to invest in the infrastructure of cities, supporting the delivery of housing and growth, noting the significant risk to delivery of city centre living and the provision of housing across the city and region.

- **Upgrade Stadia and Support Local Sports**

The Council welcomes the commitment of the Northern Ireland Executive to the programmed upgrade of stadia, including the commitment to progress with the redevelopment of Casement Park, and support for local sports.

The Council is currently developing a Physical Activity and Sports Development Strategy. While this is emerging work, it restates the long-accepted premise that moving more as part of everyday life is recognised as an essential component of our physical and mental wellbeing and supports us to learn, work and enjoy life to the full. Given that our population is ageing, and people are living more sedentary lives, health inequalities have increased.

The PfG seems to focus on Association Football and Casement Park, whilst access to other facilities such as tennis, basketball and cycling is not evident. Alongside our Physical Activity and Sports Development Strategy, council are also developing a related Pitches Strategy which looks at playing pitches but also a broad range of other outdoor sports facilities in the city.

- **Retrofit Homes**

The Council welcomes the PfG commitment to facilitating the retrofitting of existing housing stock through sustainable funding and partnership models. The Council's climate has developed a host of research into the value of retrofitting houses and have worked closely with NIHE in this area and would be happy to share any knowledge to inform the approach of departments.

The most effective way to tackle the housing crisis from a supply perspective is through a sustained reduction in market prices, which can largely be achieved by optimising the use of our existing housing stock. Therefore, there should be a stronger emphasis on retrofitting and improving current properties.

- **Improve Our Transport Infrastructure for Safer Travel, Connected Communities and Sustainable Economic Growth**

The Council note the commitment to improving transport infrastructure for safer travel, connected communities and sustainable economic growth. This is a key element within our own Belfast Agenda. While we recognise the NI Executive's future plans in this areas. We do not believe it captures the importance of connected, active and sustainable travel as a means for the region, cities and towns to thrive by allowing the maximum value of people to travel, whilst doing the least possible harm to the environment.

In 2020, the Zero-Net Carbon Roadmap for Belfast highlights that transport was responsible for 21% of the city's carbon emissions. As the regional capital and central hub of journeys into and out of Northern Ireland (by land, sea and air). Belfast has a central role to play in delivering the ambitions of the NI Executive in relation to active and sustainable and would welcome further engagement with the NI Executive on this issues.

Shaping a Better Tomorrow

Issue	<p>Our commitments are based on a recognition of our duty and drive to do better for you, your family, our communities, and this place we all call home, now and for generations to come. Our focus will centre on three long-term Missions: People, Planet, and Prosperity, as well as a cross-cutting commitment to Peace.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People: Working to support everyone at all stages of their life to ensure they have the chance to succeed by improving life opportunities. • Planet: Harnessing the potential of a green growth economy while ensuring we provide an equitable transition to a sustainable and affordable society as we take responsibility for decarbonising our economy and society. • Prosperity: Improving our economic productivity while making sure that we have an economy that works for everyone, and our story continues to be an inspiration to others. • Peace: Our cross-cutting commitment to Peace will make sure that everyone feels the benefit of a growing economy, improved environment, and fairer society.
Proposed Action:	<p>People: We are focusing on People, a long-term mission to make sure that everyone can live a long, healthy and happy life. We want everyone to benefit from a fair and inclusive society where everyone flourishes, no one is left behind, and everyone is made to feel welcome.</p>

	<p>Planet: To ensure we protect our environment and tackle climate change in a way that is fair and balanced to everyone, the Executive will develop and focus on delivering:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate Action Plan • Water Quality • Flood Risk Management • Environmental Improvement Plan • Affordable Renewable Energy • Just Transition • Renewable Electricity Support Scheme • Facilitate Net Zero Infrastructure <p>Prosperity: Our goal is to support social enterprises and businesses here to thrive and ensure that everyone, no matter where they live, can have well-paid and fulfilling jobs. We will build capacity in the Social Enterprise Sector and will prioritise areas that are vital to delivering on productivity and decarbonisation. This includes sectoral partnerships to improve pathways into good jobs, a focus on technical and vocational qualifications, and provide opportunities for those returning to the labour market.</p> <p>Peace: We will partner with international governments, investors, and philanthropists to embed a cross-cutting commitment to peace within Our Plan creating a fair and prosperous future for all, and ensuring our story continues to inspire others.</p>
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Belfast City Council Response

These missions are in broadly line with the missions we as Council have set out in the Belfast Agenda and the sustainable development agenda in general, therefore we strongly support this approach.

The Council is willing to engage with the NI Executive departments and share from our experiences in having established a dedicated Climate unit tasked with creating a sustainable nature positive city. We believe that we have a strong record in this area and could assist in supporting the deliverables which the NI Executive have set out in relation to their Mission in respect of the Planet.

Funding the PfG

Issue	The demands on our finances outstrip the funding available. That is why we have had to prioritise where we invest our money today.
Proposed Action:	We will continue to work with the UK Government to secure a fair funding settlement based on need, and to advocate for multi-year budgets which can enable planning for the future and the effective delivery of the changes set out in this Programme for Government.

	<p>After consultation is complete and a final Programme for Government is put in place, the budget process will prioritise commitments made in the Programme for Government.</p>
Belfast City Council Response	
<p>Whilst the Council welcomes the ongoing work of the NI Executive to secure a fair funding settlement with the UK Government based on need and advocating for multi-year budgets which enables planning for the future. The current draft PfG lacks detail in relation to funding and budget to deliver the priorities and missions set out within this.</p> <p>Stormont's major source of funds is the "block grant" it receives from the Treasury every year. Other options not touched upon within the PfG include the introduction of charges, e.g. domestic water charges, welfare reform mitigations, university tuition fees, concessionary transport fares and charges for domiciliary care. Bringing these more into line with UK policy would free resources to spend elsewhere.</p> <p>Along with multi-year budgeting, enhanced borrowing powers and greater flexibility over how the executive can smooth spending from one financial year to the next would enable the executive to better plan and manage its budget.</p> <p>The Council believes that the PfG provides an opportunity to partner with local governments to draw together existing interventions at a high level and offer collective recommendations on this matter, including new borrowing powers, simplified loan and borrowing regimes, government incentives for start-ups in sustainable, tax yielding industries and a common delivery framework for significant funding allocations such as Shared Prosperity Funding.</p> <p>Local political and business leadership is at the heart of this transformation, which includes cities retaining more of the taxes raised in them to spend on priorities decided by local people who know their places best. This is not just a 'more money' agenda. It is also about the freedom to align local and regional efforts to get better results, preventing problems before they arise.</p>	

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Northern Ireland
Executive

www.northernireland.gov.uk

Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most

Draft Programme for Government 2024–2027





Contents

Our Plan: How You Can Respond to Our Consultation	3
Our Commitment to You and to Each Other	4
First Minister and deputy First Minister's Foreword	6
Doing What Matters Most Today	12
Introducing Our Missions	56
Building New Foundations	60
Shaping a Better Tomorrow	64
Funding the PfG	82

Our Plan: How You Can Respond to Our Consultation

Have Your Say

Our Plan is for everyone, and we want to hear what you think about the proposals in this document. With your feedback we can agree on a clear set of priorities for action.

A public consultation on **Our Plan** runs from **9th September until 4th November 2024**.

To find out more about getting involved and making your voice heard please visit:

northernireland.gov.uk/PfG



Scan here for consultation information.



Our Commitment to You and to Each Other

Our Plan is an ambitious agenda of change for Northern Ireland. We will make it happen by working in partnership.

Working in partnership means listening to you throughout the consultation period, responding to your feedback and then delivering the final Programme for Government in collaboration with everyone in our society. It is about doing what matters most today and shaping a better tomorrow, together.

This means as an Executive, we will work across departments, in addition to our responsibilities under the Ministerial Code.

We have a shared mission and dedication to making **Our Plan** a success so that every person and every place benefits.

As colleagues, we will work in common cause, respectful of each other and in genuine co-operation. We are committed to this collective approach as an Executive, working for you.



Michelle O'Neill

Michelle O'Neill MLA,
First Minister

Emma Little-Pengelly

Emma Little-Pengelly MLA,
deputy First Minister

Aisling Reilly

Aisling Reilly MLA,
Junior Minister

Pam Cameron

Pam Cameron MLA,
Junior Minister

Andrew Muir

Andrew Muir MLA,
Minister of Agriculture,
Environment and Rural Affairs

Gordon Lyons

Gordon Lyons MLA,
Minister for Communities

Conor Murphy

Conor Murphy MLA,
Minister for the Economy

Paul Givan

Paul Givan MLA,
Minister of Education

Dr Caoimhe Archibald

Dr Caoimhe Archibald MLA,
Minister of Finance

Mike Nesbitt

Mike Nesbitt MLA,
Minister of Health

John O'Dowd

John O'Dowd MLA,
Minister for Infrastructure

Naomi Long

Naomi Long MLA,
Minister of Justice



First Minister and deputy First Minister's Foreword

**On taking up office,
we promised you
opportunity and hope.
We pledged to be on your
side and to work for you.
We said we would show
you that power sharing
could succeed and that
under our leadership this
would be an Executive of
partnership and progress.**

We have had to rethink what a Programme for Government should be, what it should achieve, and how the Executive makes it happen.

We are working in a reduced mandate of just three years and, at present, our public services remain under pressure, with funding failing to keep pace with demand. In these circumstances it is vital that we act quickly to prioritise what matters most.

We know there is not enough funding for services to meet the needs of people here, and our ability to deliver on all of our priorities is dependent on the availability of funds. So we continue to speak with one voice when engaging with the UK Government.

Our Plan is different to anything we have proposed before. All of the Executive has helped shape this vision and has pledged to make it a reality.

Our Plan will see meaningful change over the next year. It will also set direction for the remainder of our term in government through our Priorities, and lay the foundations for real transformation for future generations through our Missions. It is a blueprint for shaping a better tomorrow: one where everyone has a fair chance, can participate equally, and where the rights of all are respected and upheld.

Our Plan is focused on doing what matters most for you today: transforming our public services, supporting businesses, and improving the lives of employees, families, and communities. We want to make this an even better place to live, work and visit and **Our Plan** will help make this a reality.

We have already acted in these areas. We have approved a much-needed public sector pay award, agreed an interim Fiscal Framework and allocated funds for urgent needs like early years and childcare. We have also agreed a legislative programme for 2024.

We are working hard to attract new investment and build new partnerships. We have showcased internationally the best of what we do, highlighting our outstanding tourism offerings and cutting-edge businesses, academia, and talent.

We are working tirelessly to tackle inequalities and make sure that everyone has the best possible opportunity to succeed in life and can feel at home in our society. That is why **Our Plan** makes sure that you will get the support you need at every stage of your life by removing barriers to education and employment, taking action to address poverty, and improving access to the services people depend upon.



We know there are challenges, but there are also opportunities, and with **Our Plan** we have a way forward. Together, the Executive has agreed to focus on three core areas:

Doing What Matters Most Today

Our immediate priorities for this year and throughout our mandate including supporting your wellbeing and those close to you. This will be achieved by providing better support for our children and young people, enabling affordable childcare, growing our economy, increasing housing supply and tackling homelessness, taking care of everyone by improving Health and Social Care services, protecting our environment and cleaning up our water, and making our communities safer, including a particular focus on women and girls.

We will continue to grow a globally competitive, sustainable, and inclusive economy which benefits everyone. We will focus on high-potential sectors, where we have established strengths, and the potential to be globally competitive.

With outstanding sectors like cyber security, net zero, screen, financial technology, regulatory technology and health and life sciences already thriving, **Our Plan** will build on this success, upgrade our infrastructure, grow our economy, and protect our environment. That is why **£150 million** will be invested in the new Enhanced Investment Zone and we will continue to progress UK Shared Prosperity projects.

We will work to make sure everyone has the best possible opportunities regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, disability, who they are, or where they live, and to enable people to live with dignity in safe communities. We are opening doors through proposed initiatives to deliver more affordable childcare, new skills funds, and apprenticeship programmes. **Our Plan** also supports the delivery of high-quality education for all children and champions better support for children and young people, especially those with special educational needs, so that all children are happy, learning and succeeding.

We know our public services need urgent reform. Rapid growth in both the cost and demand for public services is placing a huge pressure on public finances and is undermining service provision.

In **Our Plan**, we set out how we will begin this Reform and Transformation programme underpinned by new structures, external expertise, and a **£235 million** Transformation Fund to make our public services better, more easily accessed, and more efficient.

Building New Foundations

We will upgrade our public sector infrastructure to strengthen our communities and create opportunities for businesses, entrepreneurs, communities, and innovators.

We will deliver upgrades to our sports stadia and increase opportunities for local sports; improve our transport infrastructure for safer, more active and sustainable travel, connected communities and inclusive economic growth, and deliver an ambitious programme decarbonising all housing

stock in NI, includes reducing carbon emissions in existing and new homes, engaging with consumers throughout the transition, while supporting various initiatives for energy efficiency and affordability.

We will introduce fresh thinking and new ideas that deliver the high-quality public services you deserve and pursue opportunities to improve and grow our public infrastructure, such as water services and planning.

Shaping a Better Tomorrow

While there is a lot to do now, we also need to build a foundation for the longer-term. We face challenges shared everywhere through global geo-political tensions, environmental deterioration, the cost of living crisis, but also suffer from unique local problems arising from our past, such as low economic productivity and poorer wellbeing outcomes.



That is why we have set three Missions both for now and the future:



People: Working to support everyone at all stages of their life to ensure they have the chance to succeed by improving life opportunities.



Planet: Harnessing the potential of a green growth economy while ensuring we provide an equitable transition to a sustainable and affordable society as we take responsibility for decarbonising our economy and society.



Prosperity: Improving our economic productivity while making sure that we have an economy that works for everyone and our story continues to be an inspiration to others.

In addition to the Missions, we have a cross-cutting commitment to:



Peace: Our cross-cutting commitment will make sure that everyone feels the benefit of a growing economy, improved environment, and a fairer society.

These Missions are our driving ambition and our lens for prioritisation to ensure we deliver better wellbeing, long-term sustainability, and a thriving economy. Each Mission is connected and when delivered together, will make a real and positive difference to the lives of people here.

It is important that from the outset of this plan we are open and honest with you; we cannot afford to do everything that needs to be done. Tough decisions will be needed and so we are encouraging you to tell us what matters most to you by making your voice heard through the public consultation. Help us shape our actions for this mandate and set the direction for the years ahead.

Following consultation, we will have a final and agreed Programme for Government, which we will implement in collaboration with communities, business, local government, and anyone who has an interest in making Northern Ireland thrive.

Our Plan is for all of us and so we all have a stake in making it happen.

As your First Minister and deputy First Minister, and on behalf of the Executive, we look forward to working with you and for you. Together we can make this an even better place, now, and for generations to come.



Michelle O'Neill

Michelle O'Neill MLA,
First Minister

Emma Little-Pengelly

Emma Little-Pengelly MLA,
deputy First Minister



Doing What Matters Most Today

These are the immediate priorities which we will work to this year and throughout the duration of this mandate:



Grow a Globally Competitive and Sustainable Economy



Provide More Social, Affordable and Sustainable Housing



Deliver More Affordable Childcare



Safer Communities



Cut Health Waiting Times



Protecting Lough Neagh and the Environment



Ending Violence Against Women and Girls



Reform and Transformation of Public Services



Better Support for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs

Together, these cross-cutting priorities will help us deliver our Missions.





Grow a Globally Competitive and Sustainable Economy

The Issue:

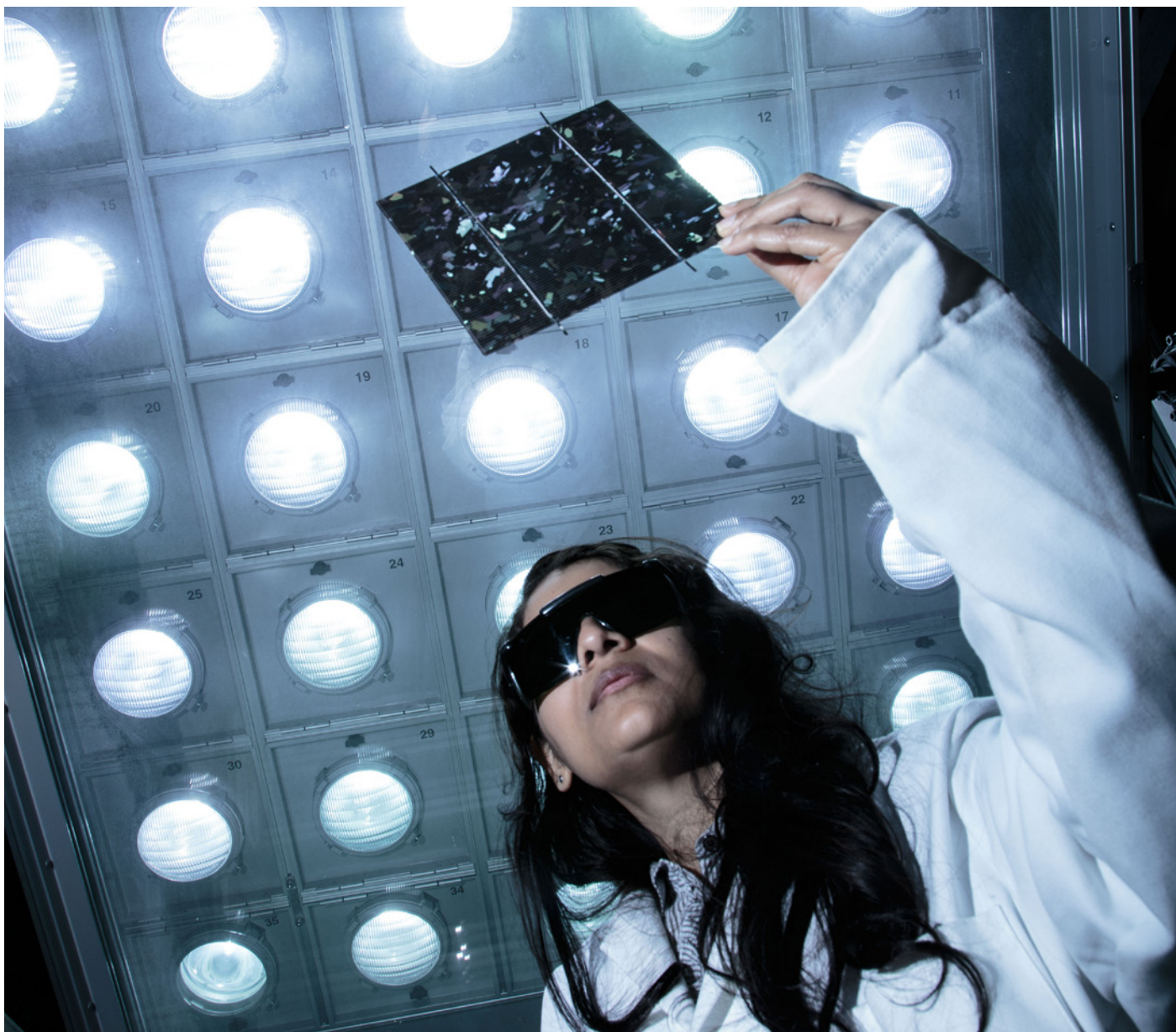
Our economy continues to grow, and we now boast a growing reputation on the world's economic stage, backed by our leadership in key sectors and underpinned by our skills and technology. But not everyone here is feeling the benefit of that growth and there is still a long way to go.

Productivity has been below the UK average for decades and is the lowest across these islands. We need to provide better support to businesses and help grow a globally competitive and sustainable economy. We also need to help improve the quality of available jobs so more people can be involved in and proud of what we design, make, and build here.

We also need the right infrastructure which will create the foundations for a more productive and prosperous economy; for better rural and urban communities; and for healthier and greener lives.

To create an economy that works for everyone, we will address four key challenges: productivity, good jobs, decarbonisation, and regional balance.

Prioritising these areas will transform our economy, ensuring rewarding work for everyone, regardless of background, and spread economic prosperity across all areas. We will tackle low productivity to help businesses thrive and boost employees' wages through trade, innovation, and our key sector strengths. We will also move to decarbonise our economy and become self-sufficient in affordable renewable energy.





Our Proposed Action:

Through a series of multi-million-pound committed investments, we will make this a more vibrant and inclusive place to live, work, invest and visit. Central to every part of our plan for a globally competitive and sustainable economy will be employers and workers.

Supporting them to build the skills needed both now, and in the future, will be vital if we are to harness our economic potential.

Productivity

We will prioritise the development of high-productivity sectors through specific programmes to support cluster development and we will continue to streamline City and Growth Deals processes and approvals to accelerate delivery of these transformational projects.

We will support greater investment in Research and Development by enhancing engagement between universities and business, and through additional investment in the **Higher Education Innovation Fund** and similar programmes, and by focusing on increasing the uptake of European and UK-based funding programmes.

The availability and utilisation of skills is one of the key drivers which boost productivity performance. Through the new Skills Fund, a range of initiatives (including Skill Up, SME Productivity Booster, Women Returners) will be introduced to ensure individuals have the right training to adapt to new technologies and new ways of working.

We will improve management practices to boost productivity and job quality through support to business and by encouraging more systematic interaction across leadership.

The public sector will be a key enabler of this change. As part of our commitment to transformation, we have appointed a new **Chief Science and Technology Adviser** and will establish a **Northern Ireland Science and Technology Advisory Network**. Together, these will provide the Executive with expert advice on supporting our innovation investment and will prioritise helping industry unlock new Research and Development funding into Northern Ireland.

Employees and businesses will benefit from a new **Apprenticeship Inclusion Challenge Fund**. This will help people in our communities, including disabled people and women returning to the labour market, find meaningful opportunities in local businesses. Through initiatives like these, we will level the playing field and ensure greater diversity in sectors like engineering and technology.

Good Jobs

We will set up a new **Skills Fund** to assist sectors struggling to recruit into vital roles. This will include a new **Tourism and Hospitality Careers Programme** and a new **Skills Academy** for the childcare sector. This will complement the Executive's £20 million investment in delivering innovative and community informed approaches to raising achievement and reducing educational disadvantage in Northern Ireland.

These schemes will help individuals address barriers into employment. We will build on our experience through Urban Villages of delivering programmes that are rooted within communities to create thriving places.

Subject to Executive approval, we propose to introduce new **Employment Rights Legislation** and a **Good Work Charter** to ensure better quality jobs and promote a healthy work-life balance. These initiatives aim to make workers feel valued and supported in their workplace.



The Executive's proposed Green Growth strategy will provide our framework for tackling the transition to a greener, sustainable future. A future in which society enjoys a low carbon, nature rich existence reaping the advantages from jobs and opportunities from the expanding green sector and the health and wellbeing advantages of an improved environment.

Decarbonisation

We will seek to achieve self-sufficiency in our own clean and affordable energy. We have the natural resources including wind, biomethane, and geothermal to break the link with global energy prices, and not only supply our own consumers' energy needs, but also to become a net exporter of renewables. This will unlock carbon emissions reduction and economic growth here.

The **Energy Strategy for Northern Ireland** is continuing to create the right market conditions to deliver investment in our low carbon and renewable energy economy, whilst aiming to protect consumers from cost shocks, and ensuring that communities also benefit from a just transition.

We will help local businesses cut their energy bills by investing **£15 million** in the **Energy and Resource Efficiency Support Scheme**. We will also invest a further **£75 million** via the **Invest to Save Fund** into the public sector's transition to net zero.

Recognising the opportunity for economic growth, including in green growth technology which allows us to achieve net zero, harnessing new innovations in technology, Foreign Direct Investment growth, and supporting local businesses to scale up and improve productivity, we will realise the ambition of the proposed **£150 million Investment Zone**.

It will offer incentives and funding to help our industries and communities seize the many opportunities including those that arise as we transition towards net zero as part of our commitment to tackling climate change.

We will publish a **Circular Economy Strategy** with responsible production and consumption at its core. The Strategy will have three key principles of designing out waste, keeping products in circulation at their highest value for as long as possible and regenerating natural systems.

Regional Balance

We want to build an economy where everyone has a fair chance, can participate equally, and has the best possible opportunity to succeed. We will therefore create opportunities for businesses, entrepreneurs, communities, and innovators. To do this we need to invest in our economic infrastructure working more closely and importantly more constructively with local stakeholders.

A thriving Further and Higher Education sector is critical for a strong, regionally balanced economy. We are fortunate to have excellent universities and university colleges, and a highly successful College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise, as well as a modern college infrastructure situated across the region. A rolling programme of significant investment continues to provide state of the art further education campuses.

We will continue to build on, and support, our established Higher Education campuses at QUB, UU Belfast and UU Coleraine. In addition, as outlined in New Decade New Approach, the Executive will continue to implement

the commitment to expand Ulster University's Magee Campus so that it can accommodate up to 10,000 students. To achieve this, the **Magee Taskforce** will develop and oversee an action plan for campus expansion, set to be published before the end of this year.

The Executive will boost tourism's sub-regional impact through an innovative **Tourism Strategic Action Plan** that will showcase Northern Ireland as a great place to visit, making our visitors feel welcome while at the same time generating sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

The Executive will work with Councils and local partners to deliver a **Sub-Regional Economic Action Plan**. This will include enhancing the role of Invest NI and providing increased support for entrepreneurs. Over the next few years **£1.3 billion** will be invested with the aim of stimulating regeneration and tourism across Northern Ireland.

These changes will mean everyone feels the benefit of our growing economy, regardless of where they live.



Deliver More Affordable Childcare

The Issue:

We need to make childcare more affordable for parents to support employability and ease financial pressures. This must complement existing support available through Universal Credit and tax-free childcare. We also need to ensure that our childcare sector is stable and sustainable.

We know that early years intervention provides the best long-term outcomes for our children, particularly those facing disadvantage. Early years intervention can make a long-term difference to a child's communication skills and their educational and health outcomes.

Our Proposed Action:

We have already started to develop a long-term approach which will make childcare more affordable and help parents stay in or return to work.

We know support cannot come soon enough, and that is why we are taking steps to introduce a balanced package of measures this year. This has the interests of children at its core and will ease current financial pressures on providers and families. It will also lay the foundation for an Early Learning and Childcare Strategy.





Investing Today

As we develop the **Early Learning and Childcare Strategy**, we are also taking immediate action. We are **investing up to £25 million this year**.

We will introduce a 15% childcare subsidy for parents in receipt of tax-free childcare who have children below primary school age. Currently, families where both parents (or a lone parent) are working and earning at least the National Minimum Wage for an average of 16 hours per week, can access 20% contribution towards their childcare costs under the Tax-Free Childcare (TFC) scheme. The new Northern Ireland Scheme will pay a subsidy directly to providers to enable them to provide a 15% discount on childcare fees charged for eligible children. Parents can then claim the 20% TFC reduction on their residual bill.

We will also be supporting existing childcare and early years programmes, such as Sure Start, Pathway and Toybox, which are focused on children facing disadvantage, and will consider how best to support childcare providers, including those in financial difficulty.

Currently, our Pre-School Education Programme, which impacts positively on social and emotional development and preparing children for school, is not standardised. All children in their pre-school year should be provided with a full-time place of 22.5 hours. We will invest in taking steps to ensure we can deliver long-term change and to stabilise core services. This will lead to a standardised provision of 22.5 funded pre-school hours a week.

We will also collect more robust and comprehensive data from the sector so we can more effectively evaluate the 2024/25 interventions to inform the future longer-term development of the strategy.

We know that the sector needs support. We will work across the Executive to put in place the training needed to build a skilled, valued and happy workforce, including a new **Skills Academy**.

This package of measures will mean there is urgent support for parents, particularly mothers, to join or remain in the workforce, boosting productivity and promoting gender equality. We will also work with parents and families, childcare providers, and sector experts, to create a solution focused on child-centred, developmental approaches and early support for children with additional needs.





Early Learning and Childcare Strategy

The Executive will develop an **Early Learning and Childcare Strategy** which improves provision and includes two high-profile targets: **supporting the development of our children** to give every child the best start in life, while **supporting more affordable childcare**. This will ensure that parents and carers can access more affordable childcare that meets their needs.

To make sure our policies work and meet families' needs, we will gather administrative and survey data to help us better understand childcare usage, costs and the impact of childcare on parents' labour market decisions. This will be part of our commitment to use better evidence to help deliver better outcomes.





Cut Health Waiting Times

The Issue:

We have the longest hospital waiting times in the UK, with people struggling to get the treatment they need. In recent years, pressure has increased due to both a rise in demand but also the impact of the pandemic on the Health and Social Care system. These have combined adding to the backlog of patients awaiting care. This backlog is unacceptable.

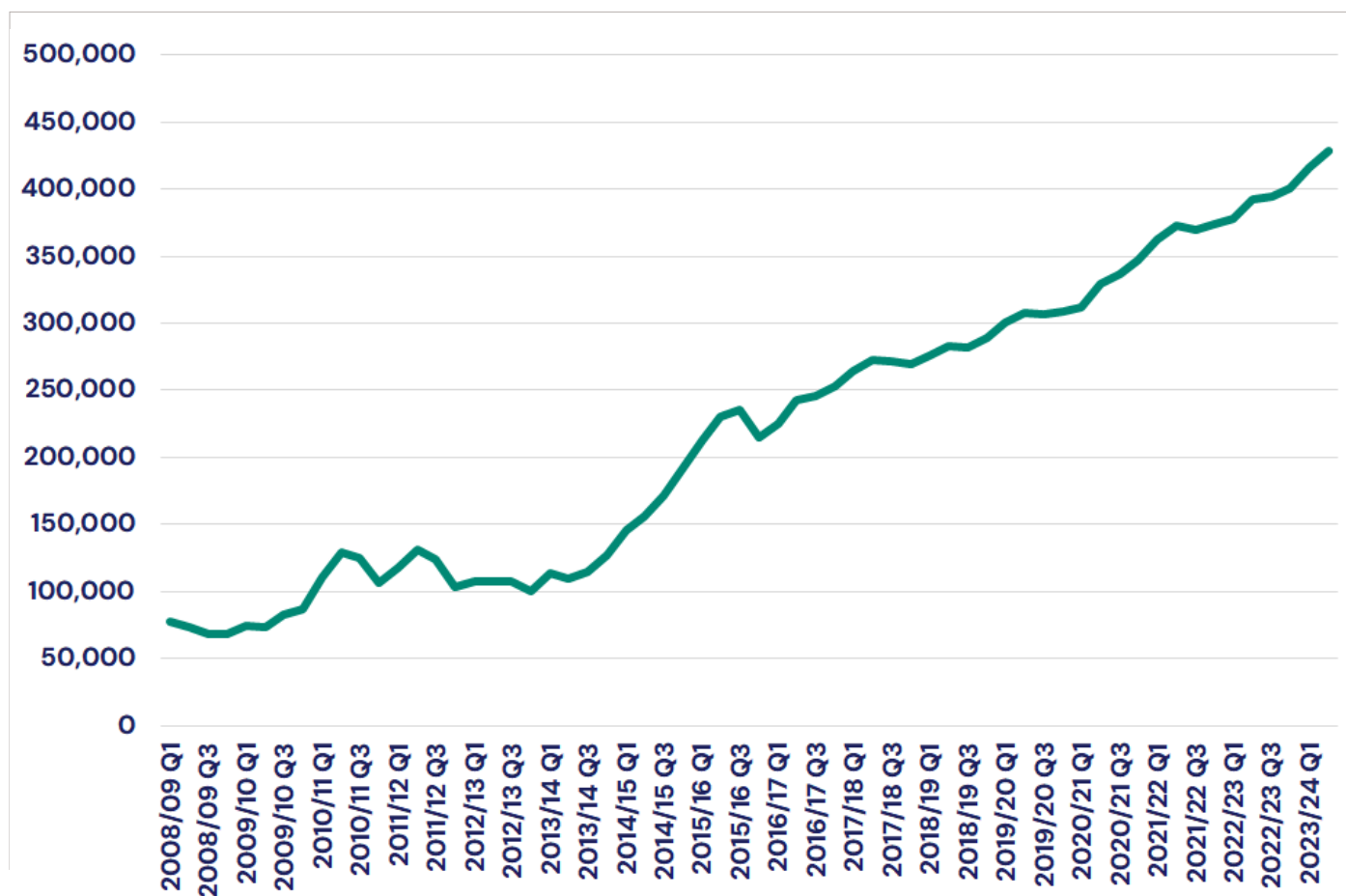
Tackling waiting times requires solutions across our entire Health and Social Care system. We know that long-term solutions are required to close the gap between growing demand and what we can deliver. This requires increasing capacity within our Health and Social Care system through service reform and reconfiguration. It also requires addressing health inequalities and helping to improve the long-term health and wellbeing of our population.

This will mean moving to a model of care that is not purely focused on acute interventions provided by our hospitals, to one that is centred around patient needs, and taking proactive steps to cure, care for, and prevent illness.

This will mean investing in primary, community, and social care. All of the Executive is engaged in making this a healthier society.

We also know that these sorts of changes will take time, and long-term investment.

Figure 1: Patients Waiting for a First Consultant-led Outpatient Appointment
(Source: DoH)



The number of patients waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment has increased from 77,091 in Q1 2008/09 to 428,858 in Q2 2023/24.



Our Proposed Action:

The need to improve performance, increase productivity, and improve the quality and consistency of care is well understood. We know that we need to accelerate the transformation and reconfiguration of services to deliver that, and progress has and is being made to tackle the backlog of patients waiting. For example, through the development of elective care centres, rapid diagnosis centres, service reviews, and mega clinics.

In addition, officials are working with Trusts to increase productivity and efficiency through a wide range of best practice service improvements, and the Social Care Collaborative Forum is working across all social care sectors to reform the commissioning and delivery of adult social care.

Given the importance of addressing waiting lists, investments of **£76 million** have been approved for 2024/25.

Last year we delivered 263,000 assessments, treatments and diagnostics with this funding. This is, however, significantly less than what is required to reduce waiting lists and, as such, our focus will be on supporting those on cancer and time-critical waiting lists. It will not be possible to reduce our lengthy waiting times within the funding currently available. We will prepare for future investments that will provide improvements and efficiencies that help us reduce waiting times.

Injecting more money grows short-term capacity but will not solve the long-term challenges faced by our healthcare services. For that reason, the journey of reform must continue. This includes investing in our workforce, delivering digital capability and innovation, taking the difficult decisions about reconfiguration, and supporting a move to addressing health inequalities and improving health through primary, community and social care.

It is, however, the case that with the pressure on public finances and the available health budget, the pace and impact of reform and access to additional capacity will continue to be negatively impacted for longer than any of us would like.

Focussing on reforming Health and Social Care will be instrumental in increasing efficiency to improve our waiting times. This coupled with actions that help people remain healthy and tackle health inequalities will improve the lives of all our citizens and relieve pressures on the Health and Social Care System.





Ending Violence Against Women and Girls

The Issue:

We must work together to end the epidemic of violence, abuse, and harm against women and girls.

Despite the work undertaken to date, there have been over 20 domestic homicides with a female victim since January 2020 and these numbers continue to rise. Evidence shows that most women and girls here have experienced at least one form of gender-based violence, ranging from everyday misogyny and sexual harassment to extreme physical and sexual violence.

This must stop.

It is vital to tackle the root causes of violence against women and girls to help stop this violence before it starts. Victims and survivors of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) need to be supported and have access to effective services, and perpetrators need to be held to account.

This requires a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach – there is something everyone can do.

Our Proposed Action:

This year we will launch our first delivery plan.

The delivery plan will strengthen existing, and mobilise new, partnerships and networks across government, and all sections of our society. It will drive and enable the necessary change, embracing the vital roles of our community and voluntary sector and grass roots organisations.

We have co-designed, with a wide range of stakeholders, including those with lived experience, a **Strategic Framework** which sets out an ambitious roadmap for generational and systemic change. This will be supported by a series of action plans over a period of seven years.

Our long-term focus is on early intervention and prevention of violence against women and girls. We will take strategic action to tackle damaging attitudes and behaviours so everyone can have healthy, respectful relationships and a chance to thrive. Immediate action is also required to improve the outcomes for victims and survivors of VAWG.

Raising Awareness

We will lead and work with partners to develop **campaigns** to ensure that there is strong, consistent messaging so that everyone here, including our children and young people, understands the issue and knows how to help end violence against women and girls.

Change Fund

We will invest through a **Change Fund**, providing on-the-ground support for the vital work of communities and the sector in the delivery of the first-year delivery plan. Projects will support local communities to raise awareness of the significance of VAWG in everyone's lives, while building capacity to take action and equip people to have safe and healthy relationships.

We will act to help victims and survivors of VAWG, working with grass roots support, and criminal justice agencies. We will introduce better access and support for victims and survivors in the criminal justice system and more ways to hold perpetrators to account, preventing further harm and building confidence in the justice system.



Challenge Fund

We will also invest in organisations to explore two key challenges that have been identified through our co-design; using technological innovation to improve understanding and prevention of VAWG, and increasing and improving the physical and psychological safety of women and girls everywhere. Working with partners, we will find innovative solutions supporting the protection and safety of women and girls.

Joined-Up Approach

We will work collaboratively to support delivery, communications, and stakeholder networks and advise on innovation, measurement, and good practice, improving and joining up data.

A number of programmes across the Executive deliver early intervention work using a trauma-informed and public health approach. We will lead in connecting and supporting collaborative working across the public sector and with Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) sectoral stakeholders to mainstream EVAWG across policy development and service delivery to maximise impact.

Officials will continue to work with the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), and across departments, to ensure collaborative working and alignment with other strategies where there are clear shared outcomes, such as the Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse strategy.





Better Support for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs

The Issue:

Over the last decade, the number of children identified with Special Educational Needs (SEN) has risen steadily to almost one in five pupils alongside an increasing level of expenditure on SEN provision, not always matched by a demonstrable improvement to the outcomes for children and young people with SEN and disabilities.

The current education system is struggling to keep pace with the changing pupil profile and the model of support for children and young people needs significant transformation which requires additional investment. Over 200 recommendations exist from various reports evidencing the need for systemic reform, a focus on early intervention, and prompt access to effective supports to improve the experience of children, their families, and the educational workforce.

Our Proposed Action:

We will work to transform the Education system to provide high-quality, efficient and sustainable services for children with SEN and disability. Systemic transformation will take time but it is vital that we respond meaningfully to make sure our education system works for all learners.

Enabling Actions

Children and young people with SEN and disabilities and their families will be placed at the heart of this significant programme of reform. It is imperative that we rebuild trust and confidence in and within the system.

We have developed a set of enabling actions to better support schools. These include clear communication of the policy ambition for Every CHILD; earlier identification of SEN to create earlier opportunities for support; building evidence informed practice across the system; supporting our education workforce to build confidence and capability; identifying opportunities for using technology and

cross-system working; embedding effective, efficient practice through a continuous improvement process to enable a high-quality and financially sustainable system of support.

Cross departmental collaboration is key. This will mean access to the appropriate data to inform planning of the schools' estate, workforce requirements and type of supports needed. It will also ensure that we are developing the learning opportunities and skillsets of our young people in line with Northern Ireland's economic objectives and ambitions, ensuring clear pathways of opportunity for further training, education or employment at post 16 and post 19.

Rebuilding trust will require clear and ongoing communications with children and young people with SEN and disabilities, and their supporting networks.





The Right Support from the Right People, at the Right Time, in the Right Place

We will prioritise providing the Right Support, from the Right People, at the Right Time and in the Right Place, through the proposed transformation implementation plan.

Right Support: We will set out plans to enhance in-school support and resources to empower teachers and support staff to implement child-centred, effective, evidence-based interventions that can assist at the earliest presentation of need, reducing the need for external support.

Right People: We will invest in our educational workforce to ensure they are highly skilled, equipped, and empowered to build supportive learning environments for pupils with SEN where needs can be met at the earliest opportunity. Health and Education will work together to ensure children who need it can access appropriate support from Allied Health Professionals, regardless of their education setting.

Right Time: We will make sure that central to any programme of reform is the system's ability to identify needs early and respond effectively at the earliest opportunity. Critical to this is the collection of data in order to plan and design an effective education system to meet children's needs. A range of Early Intervention programmes will be developed, involving Education and Health professionals, which will ensure timely access to child-centred effective intervention.

Right Place: Children should be educated in a learning environment which is appropriate to their needs and within their locality to maintain a sense of community inclusion. We will ensure strategic area planning delivers sufficient capacity across the education system to meet the changing needs of our pupil population.

We will develop an investment plan across the school estate which sets out the changes needed to make sure that all pupils have access to learning environments that are inclusive, safe and able to support pupils of

different backgrounds, abilities, and cultures. We will seek to streamline the statutory assessment, statementing and annual review process to meet statutory timeframes and ensure timely confirmation of school placements for children with SEN.

The Department of Education (DE) will work with the Department for the Economy (DfE) and the Department of Health (DoH) to improve pathways to appropriate opportunities and improve protections for young people with Special Educational Needs when they leave school.





Provide More Social, Affordable and Sustainable Housing

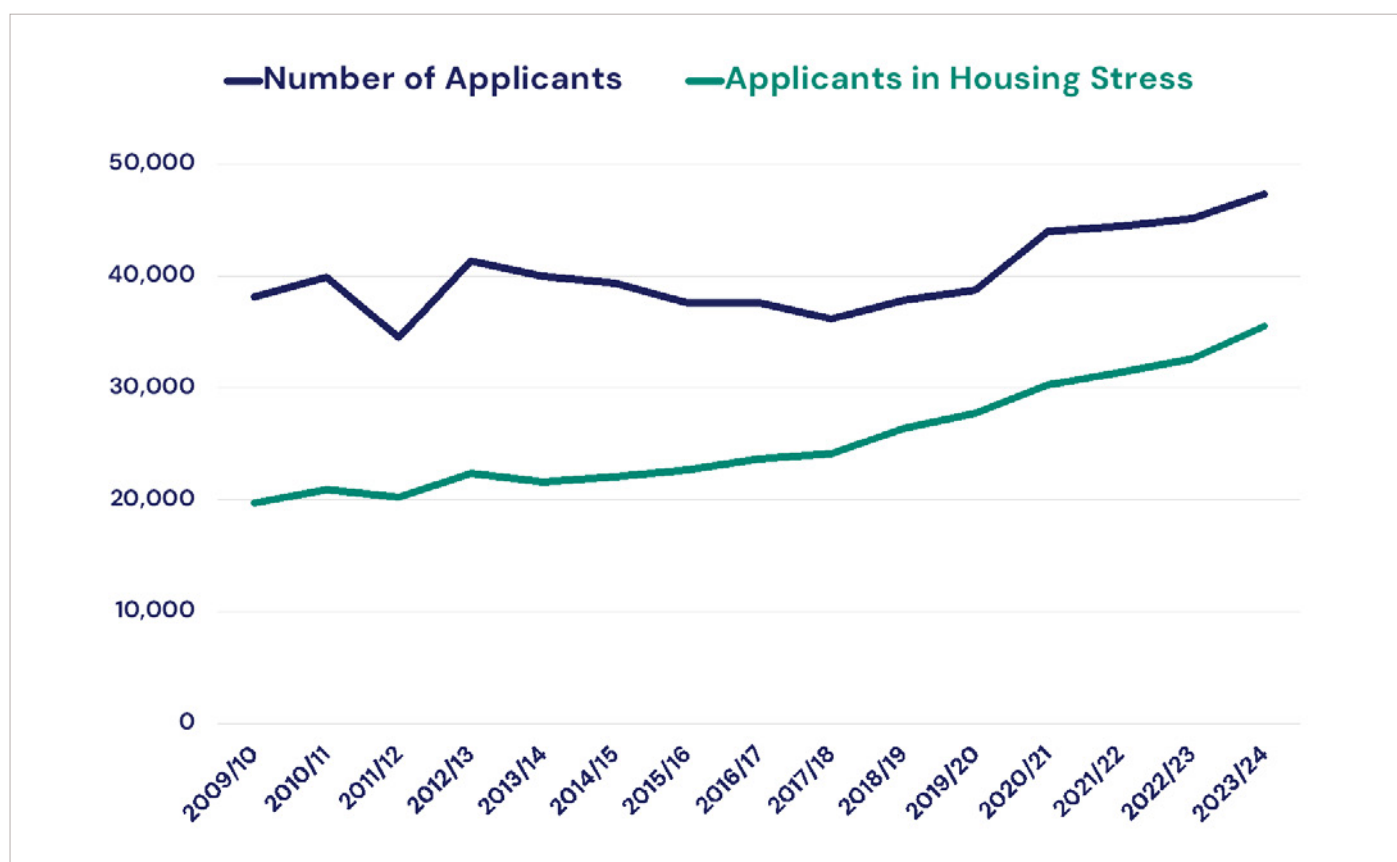
The Issue:

Good housing is essential to our health and wellbeing. We want everybody to have access to affordable, sustainable and quality housing that meets their needs within thriving and inclusive communities. The challenge we face is evidenced by the social housing waiting list, which currently stands at over 47,000 households, including 35,000 experiencing housing stress.

These numbers are on the rise, indicating a pressing need for action to uphold the basic right to a good home. The Executive has not been able to deliver on its ambition of 2,500 new social homes a year, and we therefore want to commit to the long-term public subsidy required to deliver more social homes, while at the same time innovating to develop new funding models for the delivery of more Affordable Homes to make this achievable.



Figure 2: Social Housing Waiting List (Source: DfC)



A household in housing stress is defined as an applicant on the waiting list (with no existing NIHE/Housing Association tenancy) having 30 or more points under the Common Selection Scheme. The number of households in housing stress has steadily increased in the last 5 years.



Our Proposed Action:

We will unlock the combined skills and resources of government, the private and third sectors, finding solutions and creating opportunities to transform supply and improve quality across the whole housing system.

We will ensure that the planning system supports the delivery of the appropriate supply of housing, creating sustainable and inclusive spaces, and work with NI Water to help facilitate housing growth.

We will deliver a Northern Ireland Housing Supply Strategy to provide a long-term framework for the policies and actions required to increase the supply of homes across all tenures and reduce housing stress.

We are seeking Treasury agreement for appropriate treatment of borrowing to enable the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) to increase investment in its homes, improve energy efficiency, and contribute to new supply.

We will focus on preventing homelessness, making it brief, rare and non-recurrent by working collaboratively, prioritising housing solutions for those most in need and developing innovative funding models with third sector partners to purchase homes.

One such initiative is the Department for Communities (DfC), through the NIHE, working with DoH and the Department of Justice (DoJ), to embed permanent systems change to prevent homelessness among young people coming out of care. In doing so, we will bring forward a pilot programme that will support young people leaving care and help to prevent this group from the risk of homelessness.

We will continue to prioritise housing support for vulnerable people across our society through NIHE's three-year **Supporting People Strategy**.

By 2025, we will launch a new **Fuel Poverty Strategy** to support those struggling with the cost of living.

We know we also need to make progress now, so we will help people get a foot on the housing ladder by continuing our investment in **shared ownership homes**, supported by low-cost loans to deliver 800 per year. The selection of a new intermediate rent operator will help increase access to affordable homes.

We will continue our programme of **reform of the private rented sector** and **review the Northern Ireland Housing Executive Private Sector Grants**, including the **Disabled Facilities Grant**, to ensure they effectively meet the needs of those they aim to help.





Safer Communities

The Issue:

A central role of government is to protect its citizens. By keeping communities safe we enable them to have the confidence they need to live productively and engage fully in society.

Through research and experience, we know more about different types of harm experienced by our people and our communities, although the true extent of violence is thought to be around ten times higher than justice and policing figures suggest. Whether this harm manifests as organised crime, child criminal exploitation and child sexual exploitation, domestic violence, gender-based violence, racism or hate crime, it is more likely to be suffered by people from deprived areas.

These are the same people who are more likely to experience poor physical and mental health, are less likely to be active in their community, and are more likely to be the **victim of a crime**. We also know that harm results in elevated levels of **trauma** and that it is these same underlying societal issues and economic challenges that often lead people into crime, as well as making them vulnerable to criminal exploitation.

Domestic abuse accounts for around 20% of recorded crime in Northern Ireland, with one report to police every 16 minutes.

Paramilitary harm continues to affect too many adults and young people; this rises significantly in communities where **paramilitary gangs** continue to exert coercive control. The estimated cost to our economy is a minimum of **£750 million per year**.





Our Proposed Action:

We are committed to keeping our communities safe and to making sure you feel confident and secure to live your life to its fullest.

Acknowledging the levels of trauma in our post-conflict society, we will work across the Executive to embed trauma-informed, responsive systems; systems that help people to easily navigate and access the support they need, when they need it, and for however long they need it for.

We will seek to drive forward a **Speeding Up Justice Programme** to reform the way in which cases are handled. That includes getting the most serious cases to court more quickly, looking at the jurisdiction of the courts and enhanced digital capabilities to deliver efficiencies, and removing demand from the court system, such as less serious motoring offences.

We will seek to invest to drive much needed reform at a system level, underpinned by investment in **digital** capabilities – supporting digital transformation across Criminal Justice Organisations including the PSNI, the NI Courts and Tribunals Services and Public Prosecution Service (PPS), driving efficiencies through enhanced electronic communication between those organisations, and improving citizen interfaces e.g. enhanced communication with victims and witnesses.

It will also be important to ensure adequate resources within our justice agencies to respond to and deal with crime. That includes actively seeking to achieve **a sufficient number of police officers in line with NDNA commitments, the necessary prosecution resources, and capacity within the courts and Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI)** to process cases and capacity in prisons to hold people safely and securely and support their rehabilitation.

We will work collectively to develop a **cross-governmental strategy to reduce offending and reoffending**. This will include the development and implementation of initiatives to tackle some of the wider societal issues that contribute to offending behaviour. In order to improve longer-term outcomes for everyone, we will also **focus on preventing people from entering the justice system**, where possible, through early intervention, diversion and the use of community sentencing.

We will continue to implement the **Strategic Framework for Youth Justice** to ensure the youth justice system improves outcomes for children, families, victims, and communities affected by crime. In doing so, we will seek to share best practice.

As an Executive, we remain committed to tackling paramilitarism and organised crime and we will continue to support the cross-Executive efforts aimed at addressing them. This will build on work to date that has demonstrated the links from vulnerability to paramilitary harm and other types of harm and violence, and we will seek to address the root causes of violence.





Protecting Lough Neagh and the Environment

The Issue:

Lough Neagh is one of our most important natural resources and is of huge economic significance for those who depend on it for drinking water, its fishing and eel industries. It is also of growing importance for recreation and tourism.

The significant blue-green algae blooms being witnessed in Lough Neagh and beyond are due to a combination of factors. This includes decades of pollution by nutrients from agriculture, wastewater, septic tanks, and industrial processes.

We must deal with the significant amount of pollution getting into the Lough by targeting interventions at the areas that will have the most impact.

We need to tackle the problems at Lough Neagh urgently, but they cannot be seen in isolation from the natural environment more generally. Tackling climate change and paying attention to our natural environment are critical for our wellbeing and our prosperity and can help unlock new opportunities. Unless we look after our natural environment, we are likely to see many more environmental crises, like Lough Neagh.

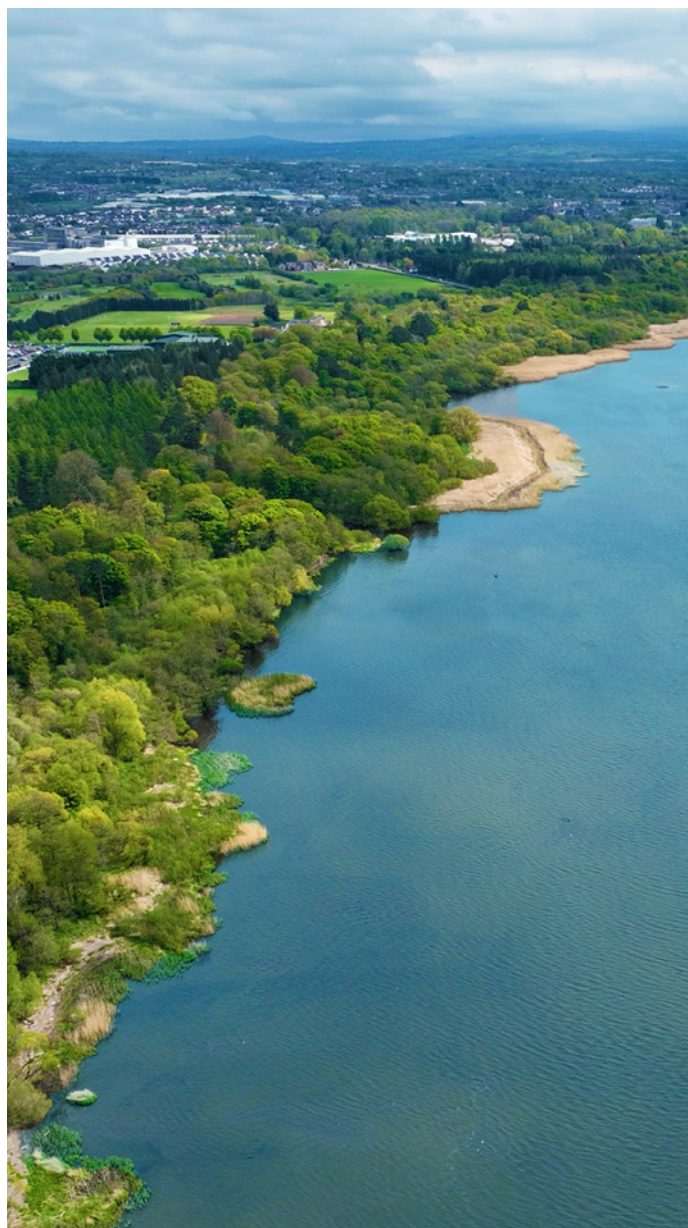
Our Proposed Action:

Our First Environment Strategy

We will publish a new environment strategy which will be adopted as Northern Ireland's first Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP). This plan will include a range of commitments to improve our natural environment. The EIP, in conjunction with other strategies, will provide a determined and coherent response by the Executive to the global challenges of biodiversity loss and climate change.

Climate Action

We will set our carbon budgets and develop our first Climate Action Plan, detailing cross-cutting steps to reduce carbon emissions, adapt to changing weather patterns, and work towards net zero. This plan will recognise the need to ensure that reaching net zero has to be affordable for households and businesses, providing a commitment to supporting the cost of this transition in a fair and balanced way. Greater energy independence and better-insulated homes will mean lower energy bills for everyone, including young families and our older people struggling with the cost of living.





Interagency Protocol

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) has led work with other government agencies to develop an Interagency Monitoring Protocol to clarify what monitoring will be carried out, and by whom, in response to future blooms of blue-green algae at any site.

The Protocol presents a categorisation of surface waters, with bathing waters representing the highest risk in terms of public health. It then presents the monitoring approach by water type, the use of appropriate thresholds for providing public health advice, and a tiered approach to monitoring, which is increased in the event of a bloom event.

The Group has included representation from all those involved in monitoring Lough Neagh: Northern Ireland Environment Agency, DAERA Marine and Fisheries, Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute, Food Standards Agency, NI

Water and has also included the Public Health Agency. DAERA is already using the Protocol, and has also developed messaging for the public, giving cautionary advice on blue-green algae. The Protocol can be used by councils and water business operators looking for advice on how to monitor sites being managed, and how to advise the public.

Lough Neagh Action Plan

The action plan has already been agreed and published by the Executive, and is set out against four key pillars:

- 1) Education**
- 2) Investment, Incentivisation, Innovation**
- 3) Regulation**
- 4) Enforcement**

Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI)

With financial support from DfE, DAERA has launched an SBRI to explore potential solutions to treat/reduce blue-green algae blooms without impacting the natural environment of Lough Neagh and associated Northern Ireland waterways. The competition process is being managed on behalf of DAERA by the Strategic Investment Board (SIB).

It is planned to use the first two phases of the SBRI process listed below:

- Phase 1 –
Up to six applicants selected to develop concepts.
- Phase 2 –
Two to three concepts selected and developed as potential solutions.

There is scope for physical, chemical or biological, or a combination of solutions. However, whatever solution is developed, it must not contribute to further environmental degradation. It must also comply with legislation and environmental designations.



Reform and Transformation of Public Services

The Issue:

We recognise the many compounding factors, set out below, which have resulted in the unsustainability of many of your public services and the need for urgent **Reform and Transformation**.

Unsustainability of Public Services

Many sectors are in critical need of investment and reform to ensure the quality and efficiency of services you quite rightly expect. The scale of the problem is enormous. Rapid growth in both the cost and demand for public services is placing huge pressure on public finances and is undermining service provision. The Interim Fiscal Framework, agreed with UK Government in May 2024, is a significant early milestone towards putting our finances onto a more sustainable footing.

However, the strain felt by services in recent years cannot be fixed simply, even with funding at a level of relative need. For this reason, transformative approaches need to be considered and taken forward in order to deliver the public services people rely on.

- **Education:** The number of pupils enrolled in schools and funded preschools has increased by 5.5% between 2014/15 and 2023/24. Between 2021/22 and 2023/24 the number of pupils with a statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN) has increased by 21.5%. The investment in SEN represents around 18% of the overall education budget.
- **Health:** In 2011, DoH was allocated 41% of the Executive's budget; this has risen to 52% today. In the same period, outcomes have declined significantly, with waiting lists rising by 216% between March 2014 and March 2023. Latest available statistics show that at 31 March 2023, 22,875 children in Northern Ireland were known to Social Services as a child in need and almost 4,000 children were in care. Services are struggling to meet this demand.

- **Justice:** In 2013/14, the average (median) time taken to process a case through the criminal justice system (from reporting to PSNI through to being resolved in court) was 143 days; by 2023/24, this had risen to 191 days. Over a five-year period, our prison population has increased by over 20%, with more offenders spending time on remand awaiting the outcome of their case with limited opportunities for rehabilitation. Policing officer numbers are at an all-time low. As the justice system is demand-led, scarce resources are allocated to inescapable demand first, meaning the scope for transforming the system to deal with increasing case complexity is challenging.
- **Demography:** By 2043, it is anticipated that the proportion of our population over the age of 85 will have more than doubled. This will result in further pressures on social care and a dramatically reduced working-age population. The pressures of regional imbalance are also likely to increase.
- **Enabling Infrastructure:** Our public infrastructure has deteriorated and needs to be properly maintained, and a range of issues are preventing progress. Additional funding for wastewater, for example, will increase our ability to build houses and enhance the economy while delivering improved environmental outcomes. Access to borrowing will enable the NIHE to increase investment in its homes.
- **Interconnected Problems:** In too many places and too many lives, people are dealing with a complex mix of health, justice, education, and employability issues. Our **Community and Voluntary Sector** is a key partner, but we recognise they have been significantly impacted by unpredictable funding arrangements along with increased demand. The problems are interconnected, so we will prioritise interconnected solutions and sustainable funding models.



- **Global Volatility:** The world has entered a period some describe as a ‘permacrisis,’ characterised by economic volatility, political polarisation, growing global tensions, and environmental deterioration. This has been compounded by the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and more locally in Northern Ireland by the underfunding of services. This trajectory is unlikely to change with the dramatic impact climate change is already having locally on communities and business with increased and more frequent flooding events.

Our Proposed Action:

We know that fiscal and service sustainability will require brave decisions, collaborative working, and a relentless focus on innovation and efficiency in service delivery. This can only be achieved through partnership working, and a willingness to accept change, challenge the status quo, and make long-term strategic decisions.

We will continue to explore options to deliver efficiencies, sustainability, and enhance borrowing powers. We also know that many of these challenges will not be achieved in one mandate and will require a long-term commitment, but we need to lay the groundwork now.

In the context of our reduced spending power, as a result of the loss of structural funds and other pressures, we will maximise any potential funding sources delivering in innovative ways for our community.

To ensure we lay the foundations for this scale of change, we will set up a new **Reform and Transformation Unit** at the heart of government.

Reform and transformation cannot just be about money and how it is allocated. Instead, the focus needs to be on **what we do, why we do it, how we do it**, and being held to account for the results we achieve.

The **Reform and Transformation Unit** will work across all departments, ensuring our priorities get the focus, resources, and efficient delivery they need. It will be one part of a **Reform Package** which will include a Fiscal Framework, a Sustainability Plan, and a Transformation Programme.

A central component of the package will also be a new **Public Sector Transformation Board**, through which £235 million will be invested from a new Transformation Fund.

The objectives of the Board include working to: Increase the financial sustainability of public services; transform the model of delivery of public services, to improve effectiveness and efficiency to meet increased demands and improve outcomes for citizens; and Prevention, Cost Savings, and Early Intervention.





Service Delivery Transformation

We will work on projects to change how we think about and deliver public services within departments, across departments, and in partnership with public, private and community sectors.

Productivity and Digital Transformation

We will harness new technologies to speed up delivery and lower costs. By designing services to meet user needs, we will simplify processes and improve performance.

Innovation and Research Transformation

We will investigate and learn from global best practices, integrating them into our own service delivery approach. This will mean taking a well-judged risk if needed to adopt new technologies and try new things.

A **Sustainability Plan** will be at the heart of this transformation, implementing new approaches to planning, spending money more wisely, funding vital public services, and delivering stable and sustainable public finances. We will work to maximise and make best use of our limited resources as we provide the services you deserve.

We cannot do everything at once. This investment will span several years, and we will partner with experts from industry, academia, the UK Civil Service, devolved administrations, the Irish Civil Service, and internationally to help us on our change journey.

All of this will take place openly and transparently. We will provide regular reports to both the Assembly and the public to make sure that you and your representatives are kept informed every step of the way.





Introducing Our Missions

The Executive is subject to significant financial constraints driven by a range of factors.

In the 2024/25 financial year, demand for services far outstripped the funding available. For every £1 we had to allocate for spending on day-to-day funding of public services we had three times as many demands. Similarly, for every £1 available to spend on capital, including money for hospitals, schools, and roads, we had one and a half times as many demands.

This makes it vitally important that we prioritise where money is spent.

To support us in setting our priorities, we have been working to develop an in-depth view of life here.

These Missions are People, Planet and Prosperity and they are underpinned by a cross-cutting commitment to Peace.

Figure 3: Our Missions



To help us keep track of these Missions, a set of metrics has been developed to help understand quality of life in Northern Ireland and these can be found here, in our Wellbeing Dashboard.



Understanding Missions by Tracking Wellbeing

Wellbeing is a combination of social, environmental, economic, and democratic factors which are essential for society to flourish. These factors align to People, Planet, Prosperity and Peace.

Scan here to visit the Wellbeing Dashboard.
northernireland.gov.uk/wellbeing



Our Missions have been broken down across ten strategic domains of wellbeing supported by a selection of indicators, each of which is a high-quality official statistic. Each project and programme contained within the draft Programme for Government can be linked to a Mission.

We will work across the Executive to understand why the indicators within these domains are improving, staying the same or getting worse and use this analysis to inform future iterations of the Programme for Government.

We have developed a Wellbeing Dashboard to help us do this. There will be ongoing development and iteration of these indicators to identify and address any potential gaps, and to improve or replace existing measures as necessary. We are already looking at how we report on pre-school readiness, court processing times, quality of jobs, labour productivity, and external sales. In future, we also want to make this product more interactive.

Understanding Performance

Alongside the dashboard, the Executive will be keeping track of delivery and publishing a delivery report each year. This will allow us to consider whether projects and programmes are being delivered on time and within budget, and what more we need to do, or what can be done differently, for projects to be effective and efficient.

Making Things Better

While this Programme for Government will be in place for the rest of this mandate, the Executive will need to be as agile as possible if it is to respond to the most pressing issues faced by people here. To do this, we will use the Wellbeing Framework to identify areas of concern and work across the Executive to bring forward solutions when issues are found.

To support this process, we have broken down as many indicators as possible by different demographic groups such as sex, age, marital status, religion, disability, ethnic group, sexual orientation, those with and without dependants, and political opinion. We have also provided geographic breakdowns to make sure that inequalities that exist between council areas, Assembly areas, between urban and rural areas and areas of multiple deprivation are clear for all to see.

This will help us understand if our projects and programmes are working for everyone. When that is not the case, we will work across the Executive to identify changes in approach which can help us to deliver the Programme for Government in a way that works for all.





Building New Foundations

We are committed to investing in our public infrastructure and reshaping how our services are delivered.

Together, we will work as hard as we can to continue taking care of your needs today while supporting your hopes and ambitions for tomorrow through the high-quality, sustainable public services you deserve.

We will:

- **Boost Housing Funds:**
We will revitalise the Northern Ireland Housing Executive so that it can invest in its homes. This will ensure its homes are warmer, greener, and based in thriving communities.
- **Improve the Planning System:**
We will implement a planning improvement programme with local government and other stakeholders. The goal is to ensure that the planning system works for businesses, people, and the environment.
- **Deliver Better Public Services:**
We will train and equip our public sector staff to make smarter, greener spending decisions. This will save public money and help protect our natural environment.

- **Support Our Net Zero Future:**

Our long-term strategy for 2024–2035 must deliver smart investments and education and skills initiatives to maximise opportunities for our green economy, job creation, and move us towards a fairer, more sustainable net zero future. This will change the lives of our people and communities for the better.

- **Manage Our Water:**

Historic underfunding in our wastewater infrastructure has been a persistent challenge. We will continue to work to increase capacity, to ensure that investment in homes and businesses can proceed across urban and rural communities without adverse environmental impacts.

- **Upgrade Stadia and Support Local Sports:**

Sport can be life-changing and has the potential to build strong relationships across communities. Building on our stadia and interest in sports here, we want to maximise sports' potential for community wellbeing and to support physical and mental health. That is why we will continue to work with the UK Government and other funders to finish our regional stadia programme. We will make progress on the redevelopment of Casement Park and initiate investments in sub-regional and grass roots sports.

These investments will ensure they act as focal points for our communities, both now and in the future, and make sure we can host events that draw in international audiences.



- **Retrofit Homes:**

We will facilitate the retrofitting of existing housing stock through sustainable funding and partnership models to help meet the net zero 2050 target. The proposed domestic retrofit programme has several aims: addressing fuel poverty to help our communities, decarbonising our homes, reducing emissions from the residential sector, and supporting green jobs for economic growth.

- **Improve Our Transport Infrastructure for Safer Travel, Connected Communities and Sustainable Economic Growth:**

We will deliver an improved road network that better connects on a North–South and East–West basis. This region–wide, reliable, and strategic road network will frame and open our towns and landscape while improving safety. Actions will include taking a statutory decision on the **Western Transport Corridor** and publishing a **Road Safety Strategy** and **Action Plan**.

Building upon the **Union Connectivity Review**, we will work with the Irish Government to **develop our rail networks** and to provide more **accessible public transport for our rural and disabled communities**.

The **All–Island Strategic Rail Review** offers an opportunity to reconnect our people and communities and continue the decarbonisation of our economy. This includes considering the recommendations of the **All–Island Rail Review**, which include the electrification of rail services, strengthening Belfast–Dublin rail services, and creating new services between Belfast and the Northwest, via Portadown and Omagh. This offers an opportunity to connect people and communities and continue the decarbonisation of our economy.

Our airports also play an important role in terms of connecting people, supporting our tourism offering and delivering economic growth. We will look at how we can develop new routes and offer further support to our three airports in terms of this wider agenda.

We are committed to investing £26 billion of public funding in the next decade. More detail on this will be provided in the upcoming Investment Strategy.





Shaping a Better Tomorrow

While making things better today is important to us, we also need to look at long-term issues.

Our commitments are based on a recognition of our duty and drive to do better for you, your family, our communities, and this place we all call home, now and for generations to come. Our focus will centre on three long-term Missions: People, Planet, and Prosperity, as well as a cross-cutting commitment to Peace.





People: Working to support everyone at all stages of their life to ensure they have the chance to succeed by improving life opportunities.



Planet: Harnessing the potential of a green growth economy while ensuring we provide an equitable transition to a sustainable and affordable society as we take responsibility for decarbonising our economy and society.



Prosperity: Improving our economic productivity while making sure that we have an economy that works for everyone, and our story continues to be an inspiration to others.

We are 25 years into our journey as an Executive, and we need to make sure that Peace means a prosperous Northern Ireland for everyone.



Peace: Our cross-cutting commitment to Peace will make sure that everyone feels the benefit of a growing economy, improved environment, and fairer society.



People

The Issue:

While we have some of the highest levels of life satisfaction in Europe, not everyone is able to have a positive experience of life.

People from more deprived areas are more likely to suffer from poor physical and mental health, are less likely to be active in their community and are more likely to be the victim of a crime.

Current delays in our criminal courts compromise confidence in the justice system and can lead to victims and witnesses experiencing further trauma. There are also impacts on reoffending, as opportunities for rehabilitation are often curtailed. Significant delays, particularly in the most serious cases, will deter the reporting of crime.



Our Proposed Action:

We are focusing on People, a long-term mission to make sure that everyone can live a long, healthy and happy life.

We want everyone to benefit from a fair and inclusive society where everyone flourishes, no one is left behind, and everyone is made to feel welcome.

It is important to be clear that the Executive does not have the power to change many matters relating to asylum and refugee policy, and that these are matters reserved to the UK Government. However, we are committed to bringing forward actions to address the issues of integration and racism.

As an Executive, we agree that the strength and success of our society depends on the wellbeing of each and every one of us. You deserve to have access to the best possible opportunities, so you can live, work, and enjoy a happy, healthy life, in a safe community where you have the confidence to reach your full potential.

That is why we are taking steps to help those who are struggling, especially in areas where inequality hits hardest or where issues like crime, poverty, addiction, poor mental health and other health challenges are most keenly felt. Through **joint working across departments, statutory agencies, and voluntary and community organisations**, we will work to keep people safe and allow them to achieve their potential.

We know that the cost of living crisis has made life harder for a lot of people. In addition to crucial policies on childcare, housing, the economy, and education, we will make sure that everyone can participate through the introduction of **social inclusion strategies**.

A significant programme of reform of children's social care services is underway. It is focused on early intervention, addressing workforce challenges, and strengthening cross-sectoral working between the statutory and voluntary and community sectors, to deliver meaningful improvements for children and families.



We will provide access to justice for those affected by Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses through the Truth Recovery Programme. This will include a robust investigation and a supported redress process.

These will make a tangible difference to people's lives. As part of this effort, we will deliver much-needed support to those experiencing poverty or at risk of it and continue work to ensure consumers are not exploited.

We will increase the skills and talent pipeline of public services in Northern Ireland through apprenticeship routes. An apprenticeship challenge fund will promote innovation in apprenticeships, to address inequalities by promoting collaborative projects with community organisations, employers and training providers.

To make life better for people of all ages and ease pressure on our health service, we will launch the NI Food Strategy Framework, along with initiatives like the Food Action Plan. These will recognise the interconnectedness between food, health, the economy and the environment. We will support farmers to help make healthy local food more

affordable and we will encourage food producers to reduce their environmental impact.

Our agri-food industry is vital to both our economy and our rural communities. We will work with our agri-sector to support primary production and ensure food security by providing clarity on ammonia controls within planning, promoting sustainable environmental practices, and prioritising eradication policies with appropriate compensation rates for Bovine Tuberculosis.

To ensure high standards of animal welfare for our domestic and non-domestic animals, we are seeking long-term arrangements to secure a veterinary medicine agreement that works for the sector.

We will build on the Executive's strategic framework for public health, Making Life Better, to tackle the wider determinants of health, and we will redouble our efforts to improve the physical and mental health outcomes of Northern Ireland's population and reduce inequalities, through continued implementation of, for example, the Mental Health Strategy 2021-2031.

In addition, the “Live Better” initiative will deliver and test a new place-based approach to addressing health inequalities by seeking to promote existing initiatives and programmes so that they can be delivered intensively in communities to make a real and lasting difference.

We will also prioritise sports and physical activity to tackle obesity, which currently costs our health service £500 million each year. These efforts will be tailored to reflect the needs of our increasingly diverse and aging population.

Our investments in new outdoor recreation and sporting facilities will help to ensure we provide quality and modern focal points for our communities and that we can help people to enjoy active social lives. Both now and in the future, these will be assets for everyone and help to ensure that we can host events which draw international audiences.





Planet

The Issue:

Our natural environment is vital to everyone's health and wellbeing, both now and in the future.

In recent years, we have begun to see the very real impact of climate change locally through increased and more frequent flooding events impacting local businesses and communities, and extreme heat contributing to longer lasting wildfires causing damage to wildlife and our countryside, as well as the increasingly evident biodiversity crisis, as seen at Lough Neagh.

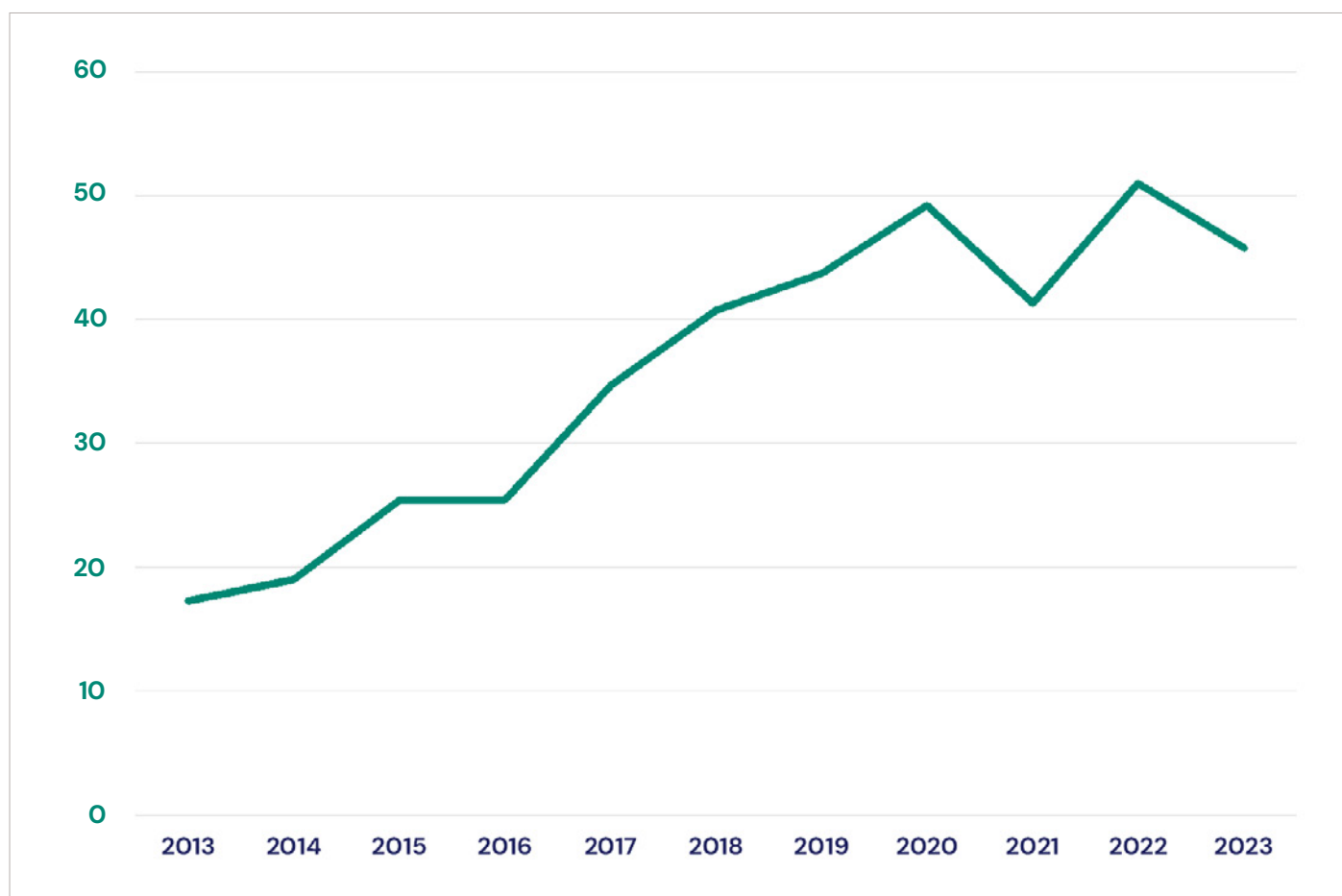
Our Executive stood together to pass a local Climate Change Act in 2022 that sets out ambitious commitments to achieving net zero that aligns with commitments in Great Britain, Republic of Ireland and the European Union, and also recognises the need to achieve a transformational transition to net zero in a way that is fair and balanced for everyone by supporting the cost of a 'just' transition.

As a region we have a strong history of innovation; if we can seize the challenge and take urgent action to reduce carbon emissions, and restore our natural environment, we will forge a sustainable path, protecting and improving this place for ourselves and future generations, whilst putting ourselves at the forefront of a global shift towards a greener economy.

We recognise the detrimental societal and economic impacts if we do not address these issues urgently. We are already taking action that recognises the need for greater collaboration to tackle climate change by commencing the development of a Northern Ireland Climate Action Plan across all government departments.

Through our commitment to work together, we have an opportunity to build on this work to drive real change that enables us to meet our carbon reduction targets, progressing towards a cleaner, greener society that protects and enhances our natural assets.

Figure 4: The Proportion of Electricity Consumption that is Renewably Generated (Source: DfE)



The growth in the proportion of electricity consumption that is renewably generated from 17.3% in 2013 to 49.2% in 2020 has not been sustained in recent years and has averaged 46.8% between 2020 and 2023.



Our Proposed Action:

The effects of a changing climate, including prolonged periods of rain, regional weather warnings, flash flooding, longer-lasting wildfires and rises in water temperatures, accompanied by a seasonal upsurge in blue-green algae, cause untold damage to our local communities, economy, infrastructure, housing, natural environment and health.

These issues serve as a timely reminder that **our natural environment** cannot be taken for granted. While solving these problems will not happen overnight, we are taking immediate action.

It is important we do right by this place for now and for the future. That is why we are taking steps to support a fairer, cleaner, healthier future for us all. Prioritising our wellbeing means thinking ahead and taking actions now to protect and preserve our environment and our natural resources for generations to come.

To ensure we protect our environment and tackle climate change in a way that is fair and balanced to everyone, the Executive will develop:

- **Climate Action Plan:** This plan will recognise the need to ensure that reaching net zero has to be affordable for households and businesses, providing a commitment to supporting the cost of this transition in a fair and balanced way. Greater energy independence and better-insulated homes will mean lower energy bills for everyone, including young families and our older people struggling with the cost of living.
- **Water Quality:** As set out in our Priorities, a collective, cohesive and integrated approach will be key for a meaningful and sustained improvement in our water quality, which will require changes in our behaviours and practices.

- **Flood Risk Management:** We need to respond to the impacts of Climate Change as well, and that is why we are completing work on Belfast Tidal Flood defences, taking forward a consultation on Living with Water in Derry–Londonderry, and seeking to develop a new flood forecasting system.
- **Environmental Improvement Plan:** This will form the basis for a coherent and effective set of interventions that can deliver real improvements in the quality of the environment for many decades to come and improve the health and wellbeing of all who live and work here; create opportunities to develop our economy; elevate Northern Ireland to an environmental leader; and enable us to play our part in protecting our natural environment for many decades to come.





- **Affordable Renewable Energy:**
In 2025, we will review the Energy Strategy to ensure the remaining 5 years to 2030 uses up-to-date data and insights, bringing a renewed focus on affordable renewable energy.
 - **Just Transition:** We will establish a Just Transition Commission and work with the UK Government to secure the funding needed to establish a Just Transition Fund for Agriculture. In the energy sector, we will take an all of Government approach to develop and deliver a plan to produce community benefit through a community energy innovation project.
 - **Renewable Electricity Support Scheme:** This will help both in the delivery of self-sufficiency in affordable renewable energy and in achieving our carbon targets.
 - **Facilitate Net Zero Infrastructure:**
A change to Electricity Grid Connection Charging policy will be delivered, lowering a barrier to connection for renewables and other low-carbon technologies such as electric vehicle charging; and, through the development of a **Net Zero Accelerator Fund**, we will make the region more attractive for net zero investment and also help cut greenhouse gas emissions in line with the Climate Change Act 2022.
- These actions, alongside retrofitting of homes, the Net Zero Enhanced Investment Zone and the Net Zero Accelerator Fund will create solid foundations for our economy, inward investment, health and social wellbeing both now and for future generations.





Prosperity

The Issue:

While our economic performance has improved dramatically in the past 25 years, it still lags far behind where it could and should be. Our GDP per capita remains stubbornly low and this is particularly true outside of Belfast.

Our levels of economic inactivity are too high, with a disproportionate number of people not in employment due to ill health or disability when compared to similar jurisdictions.

Our workers are also paid less than their peers elsewhere and we need to make sure that we are building the skills needed to attract investment which can grow our economy and benefit workers everywhere.



Our Proposed Action:

Our goal is to support social enterprises and businesses here to thrive and ensure that everyone, no matter where they live, can have well-paid and fulfilling jobs. We will build capacity in the Social Enterprise Sector and will prioritise areas that are vital to delivering on productivity and decarbonisation. This includes sectoral partnerships to improve pathways into good jobs, a focus on technical and vocational qualifications, and provide opportunities for those returning to the labour market.

To boost the productivity of our key industrial sectors, we will support **small-to-medium-sized** enterprises to adopt productivity-improving technology, through the **AI Collaboration Centre and City and Growth Deals** investments.

We will harness the UK Government Investment Zone policy to support our transition to net zero. This initiative is backed by a **£150 million** investment to bolster skills, local infrastructure, enterprise, business support, and planning and development efforts. Through the development of a **Net Zero Accelerator Fund**, we are developing a concrete way of attracting net zero investment and cutting greenhouse gas emissions in line with the Climate Change Act 2022.

We will maximise benefits from our unique place in the world to attract global investment, grow exports, and attract Foreign Direct Investment to support higher productivity.



This will be delivered through engaging business, promoting Northern Ireland's opportunities, leveraging the potential of our high-productivity sectors and clusters, undertaking trade missions, and boosting North-South, East-West, and international trade.

This will include building on our international relationships to advance our economic development and attract new investment opportunities.

We will build upon the existing institutions – the North South Ministerial Council, the British Irish Council and InterTradeIreland – to support our small and medium-sized enterprises in maximising trade with Great Britain (GB), Ireland and the rest of the European Union (EU) and beyond.

We are also strengthening relationships and establishing new institutions such as the East-West Ministerial Council and Intertrade UK. We will exchange information on best practices to make sure that we get the best possible advice to harness our place in the world.

We will work with the UK Government to support pre-clearance between the United States and Belfast International Airport, promoting international investment and innovation.





Peace

We will build on the successes of the past twenty-five years to make sure that our peace is meaningful and prosperous for everyone here. By focusing on People, Planet, and Prosperity, we will shape a fairer and more peaceful society.

We know that equality of opportunity and good relations are central to this goal, supporting our commitment to **Safer Communities**.

We will partner with international governments, investors, and philanthropists to embed a cross-cutting commitment to peace within **Our Plan** creating a fair and prosperous future for all, and ensuring our story continues to inspire others.

We will develop a **trauma-informed public sector**, equipping staff at all levels with the skills needed to work in partnership and support people as they rebuild a sense of control and empowerment in their lives.

Along with our ongoing support for the PEACE PLUS programme and **Safer Communities**, we will refresh our **Good Relations Programme, Communities in Transition, Together: Building a United Community, Urban Villages, and Tackling Paramilitarism, Criminality and Organised Crime**, and the introduction of a strategic approach to racial equality. These initiatives will create better opportunities for everyone by bringing the public sector together in partnership with community groups to solve problems and shape services in local communities.





Funding the PfG

Funding Our Plan

The demands on our finances outstrip the funding available. That is why we have had to prioritise where we invest our money today.

We know that we need to reform and transform. We will want to look at all options to deliver efficiencies, sustainability, enhance borrowing powers and examine fiscal devolution. Financial sustainability will require brave decisions and collaborative working, as well as innovation and efficiency in the delivery of services. We are committed to working in partnership to make that happen.

We will continue to work with the UK Government to secure a fair funding settlement based on need, and to advocate for multi-year budgets which can enable planning for the future and the effective delivery of the changes set out in this Programme for Government.

The Programme for Government and the Budget

Despite additional funding, the Executive faced significant challenges in setting a budget for 2024/25 and the financial position remains very difficult for this year, and for the near future. Departments are facing tough decisions to manage their budgets and live within their funding allocations. Furthermore, while we would like to work to a multi-year budget, the Executive's overall budget envelope is set by Treasury as part of its Spending Review. We know that for 2024/25 and for 2025/26, we must work within single-year funding envelopes.

This year, we had to agree a budget ahead of the Programme for Government to make sure departments had the certainty needed to run public services. That is why we are incorporating the budget as it is today, which breaks down as follows:

Departmental Budget Outcome 2024-25

£ Millions	Non Ring-fenced Resource DEL	Capital DEL (Net)	FT Capital
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs	577.3	95.0	
Department for Communities	856.0	133.4	29.8
Department for the Economy	766.6	221.9	3.7
Department of Education	2,874.4	254.3	
Department of Finance	208.1	38.9	
Department of Health	7,759.8	416.8	
Department for Infrastructure	559.5	820.1	
Department of Justice	1,262.5	91.9	
The Executive Office	183.2	10.5	7.3
Food Standards Agency	11.9	0.5	
NI Assembly Commission*	54.5	3.2	
NI Audit Office*	10.2	0.0	
NI Authority for Utility Regulation	0.3	0.1	
NI Public Sector Ombudsman*	4.4	0.0	
Public Prosecution Service	39.4	0.7	
Total Departmental Planned Spend	15,168.2	2,087.4	40.9

*Oversight Bodies

Totals may not add due to round
£0.0 million represents amounts of less than £50k

www.finance-ni.gov.uk



After consultation is complete and a final Programme for Government is put in place, the budget process will prioritise commitments made in the Programme for Government.

This will help departments plan ahead and get ready to deliver our joint priorities, but the Executive will still need to work together to develop and agree detailed policies before delivery begins.

We will keep you updated by publishing annual reports on the progress we are making. This will demonstrate how future budgets have supported the delivery of **Our Plan** and show that meaningful progress is being made to deliver the projects and programmes included in it.





With thanks to our Departments, Councils,
Arm's-Length Bodies, Higher Education
and Community and Voluntary Sector
partners for the use of their images.

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on FSC accredited paper stocks.



Northern Ireland
Executive

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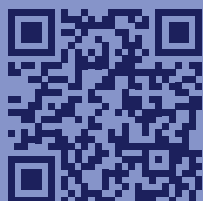
If this document is not in a format that meets your needs, please contact the Programme for Government Team:

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Subject:	Modern Slavery Act 2015: updated Modern Slavery Statement and updated corporate action plan
Date:	25 October 2024
Reporting Officer:	Nora Largey, City Solicitor / Director of Legal & Civic Services
Contact Officer:	Russell Connelly, Policy, Research & Compliance Officer

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted?

Yes

☐

No

☒

Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.

Insert number

1. Information relating to any individual
2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)
4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter
5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained
6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction
7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision

After Council Decision

Sometime in the future

Never

☐
☐
☐
☐

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?

Yes

☒

No

☐

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to provide Members with the updated annual Modern Slavery Transparency in Supply Chains Statement to meet the obligations of the Modern Slavery Act, 2015 and an update on the related corporate action plan.

2.0	Recommendation
2.1	<p>It is recommended that Members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note the updated annual Modern Slavery Transparency in Supply Chains Statement (the “Transparency Statement”). • Approve the addition of the Transparency Statement to the UK Government’s online registry. • Note the progress made on the action plan.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p>Background</p> <p>The Modern Slavery Act 2015 (the “Act”) aims to address slavery and trafficking by enhancing support and protection for victims, giving law enforcement the tools needed to target today’s slave drivers and ensuring perpetrators can be severely punished. It also includes a provision in Section 54 to encourage organisations to ensure their supply chains are slavery-free, known as the Transparency in Supply Chains arrangements (“TISC”).</p>
3.2	<p>Key Issues</p> <p>The Council has voluntarily published an annual Transparency Statement on its website since 2015. This sets out what the Council has done to ensure there is no modern slavery in its supply chains or any part of its business.</p> <p>This year, the annual Transparency Statement has been reviewed by Commercial and Procurement Services, the Council’s Safeguarding Officer, the Council’s Registrar for Births, Deaths, Marriages and Civil Partnerships and the Equality and Diversity Officer and has been refreshed to reflect current guidance on its content. An updated version for 2023-24 is set out in Appendix 1 which following Council ratification will be published on the Council’s website.</p>
3.3	<p><u>Recent changes to the Transparency Statement requirements</u></p> <p>The TISC provisions currently apply to commercial organisations, however, in recent years both the UK Government and the Northern Ireland Department of Justice have reviewed and consulted on these provisions and their potential application to the public sector:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In July 2018, the Home Secretary undertook an independent review of the Act and made recommendations, one of which was to strengthen Section 54 by extending the requirement to publish Modern Slavery Statements to government and the public sector. • In July 2019 the UK Government launched a consultation on measures to strengthen the TISC arrangements and published its proposals on how it planned to take this work forward. Many of the proposed changes will require legislative change which has not happened to date. The proposed changes would see a strengthening of the

	<p>TISC arrangements for commercial businesses, and would, for the first time, extend them so they apply to the public sector.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In January 2022, the Northern Ireland Department of Justice (“DOJ”) published its report, summary of responses and next steps in response to its consultation on TISC. It found that overall, there is widespread support for the strengthening of TISC arrangements.
3.4	<p><u>Approach to Modern Slavery in Northern Ireland</u></p> <p>In October 2022, the DOJ launched a public consultation on a new three-year draft Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Strategy. The public consultation closed in January 2023. On 10 July 2024, the Department of Justice launched a three-year Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Strategy 2024 – 2027. The strategy was developed under Section 12 of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2015.</p> <p>The Strategy groups actions and commitments under the strands of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pursue - enhance operational responses to pursue and disrupt offenders; • Protect - providing victims with necessary levels of protection and support and • Prevent - engagement, awareness raising and training. <p>The Strategy includes a measure under the ‘Protect’ strand to deliver training and awareness sessions to key sectors and professional disciplines, including district councils. Members will be aware that an initial awareness session for relevant Belfast City Council managers on recognising Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking was held by the Department of Justice on 17 November 2022.</p> <p>The Strategy notes that the UK Government plan to make additional changes to the TISC provisions in the Act when Parliamentary time allows. The additional changes include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reporting on specific topics; 2. Publishing the MS statement on a public registry; 3. Setting a deadline for submitting a statement annually; 4. Extending the requirement to publish a statement to public sector organisations with a turnover of over £36million; and 5. The introduction of financial penalties for those that do not publish a slavery statement. <p>In October 2022 the DOJ published a progress report on the commitments laid out in the 2021-22 Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Strategy for Northern Ireland. The Progress Report states in part that the DOJ “will engage further with public sector procurement leads</p>

	once the additional measures to strengthen TISC are progressed in legislation and will become mandatory for all businesses with an annual turnover of over £36million.”
3.5	It should be noted that the Legislative Consent of the Northern Ireland Assembly will be required to extend any UK Government changes to Northern Ireland.
3.6	<p><u>Online TISC Registry</u></p> <p>In March 2021, the UK Government launched an online modern slavery statement registry. Since its launch, over 7,000 statements have been submitted covering over 23,350 organisations on a voluntary basis.</p> <p>Members asked to approve the addition of the Belfast City Council Transparency Statement to this registry.</p>
3.7	<p><u>Action Plan</u></p> <p>In October 2021, Council approved an action plan to tackle modern slavery to be taken forward by various departments. This was based on guidance from NILGA. An updated version is set forth in Appendix 2.</p>
3.8	<p><u>Reporting</u></p> <p>The Policy, Research & Compliance Officer co-ordinates an annual report on progress to be brought to CMT and the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee.</p>
3.9	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>The implementation of the action plan will involve staff from City and Neighbourhood Services, Legal Services, Governance & Compliance Services, Commercial and Procurement Services, Corporate HR and Marketing and Corporate Communications.</p>
3.10	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>Any equality, good relations or rural needs implications will be identified using the council’s usual screening process.</p>
4.0	Appendices - Documents Attached
	<p>Appendix 1: Draft Modern Slavery Act Transparency Statement 2023 - 2024</p> <p>Appendix 2: Modern Slavery Action Plan</p>



Modern Slavery Act Transparency Statement for the period 01 April 2023 to 31 March 2024

Introduction

The Modern Slavery Act 2015 (the “Act”) places specific responsibilities on organisations to ensure slavery and human trafficking does not exist within their supply chains, and in any part of their own businesses. Organisations need to demonstrate accountability through transparency to protect workers, adults and children from abuse and exploitation.

Belfast City Council is committed to improving practices to prevent slavery and human trafficking. The Council expects suppliers, partners and third parties to adhere to the same values and principles to combat slavery and human trafficking.

This statement is made pursuant to section 54(1) of the Act and constitutes Belfast City Council’s slavery and human trafficking statement for the financial year ending 31st March 2024.

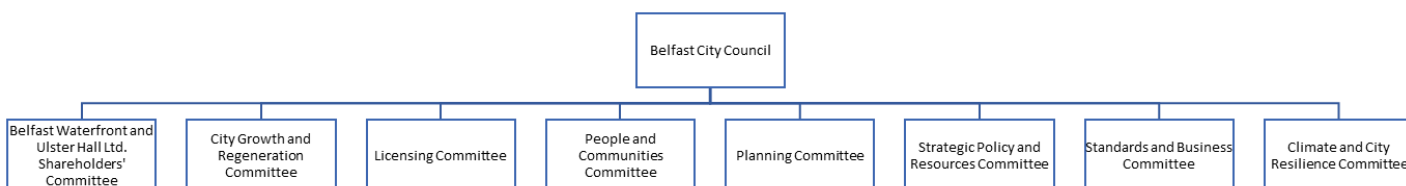
Our structure and our supply chains

The Council is the local authority for the Belfast area with responsibility for a wide range of services including local planning, economic development, tourism, street cleaning and parks, leisure and waste management.

The [Belfast Agenda](#) is the community plan that the whole city is working towards. Our vision is that by 2035 Belfast will be 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 and
- Where everyone fulfils their potential

Our political governance structure is set out below:



Belfast City Council procured goods, works and services from circa 2,400 suppliers during the last financial year with a supply chain mostly based in the UK and Ireland.

The Council has a responsibility to prevent slavery and human trafficking within its supply chain and in any part of the organisation. As the customer, the Council makes clear to our suppliers, and those wishing to do business with us, what is expected of them.

The Council's tender process require all applicable tenderers to provide confirmation that they are compliant with the Act. They are also required to confirm their subcontractors and suppliers comply with the Act.

Our policies in relation to slavery and human trafficking

Belfast City Council has the following policies or procedures in place, related to mitigating the risks of slavery and human trafficking:

Safeguarding

In February 2023, Belfast City Council launched our new Safeguarding All Ages Policy, which emphasises that safeguarding is everyone's business. Everyone has a fundamental right to be safe. Whatever the cause, and wherever it occurs, harm caused to children and adults by abuse, exploitation or neglect is not acceptable.

This policy is Belfast City Council's contribution to the fulfilment of a Northern Ireland Executive Programme for Government commitment to deliver a package of measures to safeguard children and adults who are at risk of harm and to promote a culture where safeguarding is everyone's business. It sets out the Council's responsibilities and details where support can be obtained.

The policy is in 2 parts: [Part 1 Safeguarding Policy Children and Young People \(belfastcity.gov.uk\)](https://belfastcity.gov.uk/part-1-safeguarding-policy-children-and-young-people) and [Part 2 Safeguarding Policy for Adults \(belfastcity.gov.uk\)](https://belfastcity.gov.uk/part-2-safeguarding-policy-for-adults).

Equality and Diversity

We are committed to Equality and Diversity and actively seek to eradicate discrimination and inequality when developing services and when goods and or services are provided on the Council's behalf. To this end we have developed an internal toolkit which integrates equality and diversity into everything we do from policy development to service planning and delivery. The Council's five-year Equality Scheme which has been drawn up in accordance with Section 75 and Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 was approved in January 2021.

We are an Equal Opportunities employer and welcome applications from all sections of the community. We are a Lead Partner and Member of Excellence of Employers for Disability NI with members of our recruitment team being accredited as "Disability Positive". We have a dedicated helpline for any applicants who require reasonable adjustments or whose first language is not English. We appoint strictly on the merit principle and our recruitment processes require the completion of relevant pre-employment checks which include eligibility to work in the UK and the uptake of suitable references, where required.

We operate a job evaluation scheme to ensure all employees are paid fairly and equitably.

Raising Concerns

We encourage workers to raise any concerns that they may have and there are established arrangements in place for handling these. Externally, members of the public and customers can use our [Complaints, Comments and Compliments](#) procedure to report concerns.

Fraud and bribery

We are committed to protecting the public money we look after and to making sure that the opportunity for fraud, bribery or any other financial impropriety is reduced to the lowest possible risk. We have policies and procedures to manage the risk of fraud, bribery and other financial impropriety, including arrangements for prevention and detection as well as arrangements for reporting and investigation.

Code of Conduct

We expect all employees and Councillors to demonstrate the highest standards of conduct and ethical behaviour. We require all Councillors and relevant officers to submit declarations of interests to record and declare personal and pecuniary interests.

Social Value Procurement Policy

Our [Social Value Procurement Policy](#) sets out our approach to delivering on the council's inclusive growth commitments and explains our social value objectives, the impact these changes will make and how we will work with suppliers using our social value toolkit to achieve our ambitions.

Due diligence in assessing modern slavery risk in operations or supply chains

Belfast City Council's Commercial and Procurement Services team operate a Category Management structure. A Category Management structure within the team enables greater transparency in the identification of risks associated with modern slavery on a category basis.

Risk Assessment and Management

All new suppliers, for new applicable contracts, are assessed as part of the Council's tendering process to ensure that they meet the requirements of the Act.

The Commercial and Procurement Services team complete CIPS Ethical Procurement training annually, achieving the professional standard of CIPS Corporate Ethics kite mark for the service.

An integral part of the risk management is the new Safeguarding All Ages policy, which was introduced in February 2023 and the associated updated training already in place, which includes Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking as topics.

Key performance indicators to measure effectiveness of steps being taken

We will communicate this policy to our staff to make them aware of the issue and the Council's obligations.

In October 2021, Belfast City Council approved suggested actions for various council departments based on guidance from the Northern Ireland Local Government Association. These actions include: providing Modern Slavery Awareness Training for all council personnel in public facing services; designating a point of contact to report modern slavery concerns and raise awareness of modern slavery among communities; and collaborating with other councils and agencies. This action plan is being taken forwards by officers.

The Northern Ireland Department of Justice is expected, at some point, to announce guidance on the new duty to report incidences of modern slavery. This may require further training and guidance being issued to staff.

Training on modern slavery and trafficking

The Commercial and Procurement Services team commit to retaining the professional standard of CIPS Corporate Ethics during 2023/24. Further Council officers involved in procurement activity will also be selected for this training.

This statement was approved by the Corporate Management Team of Belfast City Council on [date 2024].

Signed on behalf of Belfast City Council by:

Nora Largey
City Solicitor and Director of Legal and Civic Services
Date:

Policy Control

Organisation	Belfast City Council
Title	Modern Slavery Act Transparency Statement 2023-2024 v. 0.1
Author	
Owner	Nora Largey
Review date	
Location of document	Website home page
Approved by	Strategic Policy & Resources Committee and ratified at Full Council
Approval date	

APPENDIX 2 – SUGGESTED ACTIONS FOR COUNCILS

Action	NILGA Guidance and Suggested Council Actions	Suggested Lead	Estimated deadline	October 2024 Progress Update
1. Provide Modern Slavery Awareness Training for all council personnel in public facing services.	<p>NILGA Guidance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Department of Justice and the Department of Finance's Construction and Procurement Delivery can advise on TISC (Transparency in Supply Chains) training for public sector and council procurement leads. The guidance provides a list of voluntary and community sector organisations which can advise on modern slavery and provide training. <p>NILGA's suggested next steps for Councils:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver training for public sector procurement leads in respect of transparency in supply chains. Accessing "Train the trainer" sessions for Councils shared by the Department of Justice to provide Councils with the tools to deliver their own inhouse training on Modern Slavery. <i>(The Train the Trainers session will be built into NILGA's Regional Training Programme and further information will follow on an ongoing basis as appropriate).</i> Using Training Materials for Council Staff, available from the Department of Justice and PSNI. <i>(In April 2019, the Department of Justice and the PSNI wrote to all local Council CEOs to offer training materials for staff on modern slavery concerns.)</i> 	<p>Head of Commercial and Procurement Services</p> <p>Director of HR / Governance & Compliance Manager</p> <p>External provider to deliver approved training.</p>	Completed	<p>An initial corporate awareness session was delivered by the NI DOJ Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking branch to relevant managers (BDM&CP and Environmental Health) on 17 November 2022.</p> <p>Further training can be arranged if desired, subject to approval by SP&R and Council.</p>
2. Designate a point of contact to report modern slavery concerns and raise awareness of	<p>NILGA Guidance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Councils should designate a lead officer or team who can act as a point of contact and expertise on the issue. Council Community Planning, Good Relations or Policing and Community Partnerships (PCSP) teams are ideally placed to fulfil this role. A Lead Officer from either one of 	<p>Nora Largey</p> <p>To be agreed, at the relevant time, how we will embed /</p>	Ongoing	<p>CMT has discussed and agreed that Nora Largey will act as point of contact for modern</p>

Action	NILGA Guidance and Suggested Council Actions	Suggested Lead	Estimated deadline	October 2024 Progress Update
modern slavery among communities.	<p>these teams could be nominated as the “go to” person for other officers or council workers who have concerns that modern slavery may be happening in certain businesses or in the community.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Planning Partnerships should be harnessed to share information and to raise awareness of modern slavery with communities and the drive to eradicate it. • PCSPs are a key council resource in the drive to eradicate modern slavery in Northern Ireland. Intelligence which can be disclosed by the PCSP should be shared with the lead person / team in the council appointed as the “go to” for modern slavery concerns. 	promote through the Community Planning Structures, SCP and PCSP/DPCSP’s.		slavery and human trafficking concerns.
3. Establish clear procurement guidelines	<p>NILGA guidance: The modern slavery transparency statement required to be published by the Council under Section 54 of the MSA must include the steps the Council has taken during the financial year to ensure that slavery and human trafficking is not taking place in any of its supply chains, and in any part of its own business or; that the organisation has taken no steps in the financial year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transparency in supply chains is a process of continuous improvement. As stipulated in government guidance, the government expects organisations to <i>build</i> on their statements year on year • Guidance and resources include: Transparency in Supply Chains etc. A practical guide; Council Transparency Statements Portal; TISC Report Transparency Map; LGA’s Tackling Modern Slavery Guide <p>NILGA’s suggested next steps for Councils:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking account of any further government developments on proposals to extend the scope of Section 54 (TISC). 	Commercial and Procurement Services – N Bohill	Annually	Annual update to Modern Slavery Transparency Statement has been drafted and approved by CMT. It will be uploaded to the council website and the UK Government registry after SP&R and Council approval

Action	NILGA Guidance and Suggested Council Actions	Suggested Lead	Estimated deadline	October 2024 Progress Update
4. Collaborate with other councils and agencies	<p>NIGLA guidance: Opportunities for collaboration include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All-Council Professional Officers Groups (e.g. the Environmental Health Professional Officers Group, the Local Government Safeguarding Network and the Planning Professional Officers Group); • Cross-council project collaboration (e.g. Arc21); and • Council collaboration with the private sector: e.g. for Economic Development teams to provide guidance to new and existing businesses in their districts on developing modern slavery transparency statements to enhance their competitiveness when bidding for new, or when renewing goods / services contracts. 	All Directors to raise with relevant officers	Immediate / ongoing	This can be started following the roll-out of training to staff

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Belfast
City Council

Subject:	Women's Night Safety Charter
Date:	25 October 2024
Reporting Officer:	Damien Martin, Strategic Director, Place and Economy
Contact Officer:	Jamie Uprichard, Business Research and Development Manager

Restricted Reports									
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>								
<p>Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.</p> <p>Insert number <input type="checkbox"/></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information relating to any individual 2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) 4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter 5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained 6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction 7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime 									
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After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>								
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>								
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>								

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	To advise members about the Women's Night Safety Charter which is spearheaded by Hospitality NI (as part of the Safer Socialising initiative) and supports the campaign to End Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG), led by The Executive Office (on which a

	separate report will be considered by the committee); and seek approval for the council to sign-up to the Charter.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approve Belfast City Council's involvement with the Safer Socialising initiative and agree to the council signing the Women's Night Safety Charter.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p>At its meeting on 12th December 2018, the Licensing Committee considered a motion which had been brought by former Councillor Peter McReynolds to the Council meeting on 3rd December 2018. The final (amended) motion read as follows:</p> <p><i>"This Council is concerned at the number of people in Belfast that feel they have been the victim of sexual harassment. Accordingly, the Council will undertake to meet with our universities, hospitality sector and the PSNI to explore any industry led initiatives that we can support, to tackle sexual harassment within our nighttime economy, keeping in mind that this is a global societal issue that needs tackled."</i></p>
3.2	<p>After discussion, it was agreed that Building Control would undertake research and report back to Committee, inviting Hospitality Ulster (HU) and any other stakeholders keen for an industry-led initiative to deter sexual harassment to the meeting. Due to resource constraints and then the Covid-19 pandemic followed by the closure of hospitality venues, progress on the motion was delayed. Nevertheless, at its meeting on 12th April 2023, the Licensing Committee welcomed Mr. C. Neill (HU) and Detective Superintendent L. Fisher (PSNI) to provide further information on a range of initiatives to address safety within the night-time economy, particularly for women and girls. These initiatives included Ask for Angela, White Ribbon NI and the Women's Night Safety Charter.</p>
3.3	<p><u>Ask for Angela</u></p> <p>The PSNI, in partnership with Hospitality Ulster are providing training to registered bars in Northern Ireland to help people enjoy even safer nights out in public spaces. Ask for Angela is a support mechanism aimed at informing and educating hospitality industry staff about customer welfare and vulnerability. Through a code phrase that can be used by customers to discretely seek help, 'Ask for Angela' reassures customers that support is available.</p>
3.4	<p><u>White Ribbon NI Charter</u></p> <p>White Ribbon NI was launched in Northern Ireland in November 2021. Through awareness raising and education, White Ribbon NI seeks to end violence against women in all its forms. White Ribbon believes that giving everyone the information they need to challenge the ideas and attitudes which have perpetuated violence against women and girls is a step we can all</p>

	<p>take towards being part of the solution. The Lord Mayor, Councillor Ryan Murphy signed the White Ribbon NI Charter on behalf of Belfast City Council on 5th December 2023.</p>
3.5	<p><u>Women's Night Safety Charter (WNSC)</u></p> <p>Hospitality Ulster and White Ribbon NI have joined forces to adopt the Women's Night Safety Charter and support its rollout in Northern Ireland. The charter is a commitment by organisations and businesses operating at night to support the campaign to End Violence Against Women and Girls. Initially established in London and now operating in several regions across the UK, the WNSC includes support from White Ribbon NI via a 'Listen, Learn, Lead' toolkit, offering simple ideas, inspiration, information, resources, and guidance on potential actions to create safer environments for women across all venues and workplaces. The Charter's seven pledges include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Nominate a champion in your organisation / business who actively promotes women's night safety; 2. Demonstrate to staff and customers that your organisation takes women's safety at night seriously, for example through a communications campaign; 3. Remind customers and staff that Northern Ireland is safe, but tell them what to do if they experience harassment when working, going out or travelling; 4. Encourage reporting by victims and bystanders as part of your communications campaign; 5. Train staff to ensure that all women who report are believed; 6. Train staff to ensure that all reports are recorded and responded to; and 7. Design your public spaces and workplaces to make them safer for women at night.
3.6	<p>The Charter forms part of the Safer Socialising initiative and supports the campaign to End Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG), which is led by The Executive Office (TEO). Hospitality Ulster have previously corresponded with councils via SOLACE encouraging all local authorities in Northern Ireland to sign the Charter. The Solace NI representative on the Safer Socialising Steering Group and EVAWG has advised that nine councils and a number of other public sector organisations have committed to signing the Charter.</p>
3.7	<p>Should members agree to sign-up to the Charter, the Deputy Chief Executive and Strategic Director of Corporate Services has agreed to champion the initiative within council and actively promote women's night safety and will oversee and lead a cross-departmental programme of work to implement and deliver the remaining pledges. This work is aligned to a number of council notices of motion and work overseen by the City Centre All-Party Working Group linked to the evening and nighttime economy.</p>

3.8	<u>Financial and Resource Implications</u> Any additional costs associated with the Charter's pledges will be met from existing departmental budgets.
3.9	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u> There are no equality or good relations implications associated with this report, however should members approve the council's sign-up to the Charter, the initiative will be subjected to an equality screening.
4.0	Appendices - Documents Attached
	None



Subject:	Physical Programme Update
Date:	25 October 2024
Reporting Officer:	Sinead Grimes, Director of Property & Projects
Contact Officer:	Shauna Murtagh, Portfolio Manager

Restricted Reports									
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>								
<p>Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.</p> <p>Insert number <input style="width: 40px; height: 20px;" type="text"/></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information relating to any individual 2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) 4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter 5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained 6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction 7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime 									
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After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>								
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>								
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>								

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues
1.1	<p>The Council's Physical Programme currently includes over 200 capital projects with investment of £150m+ via a range of internal and external funding streams, together with projects which the Council delivers on behalf of external agencies. The Council's Capital Programme forms part of the Physical Programme and is a rolling programme of investment which either improves existing Council facilities or provides new facilities. This report presents requests for stage movement approvals under the Capital Programme, along with updates on capital letters of offer and contracts awarded.</p>
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note that St Comgall's won the National RICS Award for Best Refurbishment / Revitalisation Project 2024. • Capital Programme: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ IT Programme – Grants Management System – Note that a satisfactory tender return has been received and that the Director of Finance has confirmed that this project is within the affordability limits of the Council and agree that a maximum of £60,000 be allocated. ○ IT Programme – Palo Alto Firewalls – Agree that the project is moved to <i>Stage 3 – Committed</i> and held at Tier 0 – Scheme at Risk pending further development of the project and a satisfactory tender return; and that necessary procurement processes (including the invitation of tenders and/or the use of appropriate 'framework' arrangements) be initiated with contract to be awarded on the basis of most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver. ○ IT Programme – Complex Lives CMS - Agree that the project is moved to <i>Stage 3 – Committed</i> and held at Tier 0 – Scheme at Risk pending further development of the project and a satisfactory tender return; and that necessary procurement processes (including the invitation of tenders and/or the use of appropriate 'framework' arrangements) be initiated with contract to be awarded on the basis of most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver. ○ Innovation Factory Access Control - Agree that the Innovation Factory Access Control project is added to the Capital Programme at <i>Stage 1 – Emerging</i> to allow a business case to be developed. • Pitch provision - to authorise officers to discuss opportunities with partners across the city to facilitate opportunities for additional/enhanced pitch provision with further detail to be brought back to Committee as required in respect of potential opportunities.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Capital Letters of Offer – to note the update in relation to capital letters of offer in Q2 2024/25.• Contracts awarded – to note the update in relation to contracts awarded in Q2 2024/25.															
3.0	Main report <u>Key Issues</u>															
3.1	Awards and recognition Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) Awards - Two of the Council’s physical projects were successful at the regional RICS Awards this year. Members may have noted that earlier this month St. Comgall’s also went on to win at the RICS National Awards for Best Refurbishment / Revitalisation Project 2024. Construction Employer’s Federation (CEF) Awards 2024 – Shankill Shared Women’s Centre won the Social / Community Construction Project of the year (above £2m).															
3.2	Capital Programme - Proposed Movements Members will be aware that the Council runs a substantial Physical Programme. This includes the rolling Capital Programme – a multimillion regeneration programme of investment across the city which improves existing Council assets or provides new council facilities. Members are advised that the Property & Projects Department is happy to arrange a site visit to any projects that have been completed or are underway.															
3.3	Members have agreed that all capital projects must go through a three-stage process where decisions on which capital projects progress are taken by the Committee. This provides assurance as to the level of financial control and will allow Members to properly consider the opportunity costs of approving one capital project over another capital project. Members are asked to note the following activity on the Capital Programme: <table><tr><th>Project</th><th>Overview</th><th>Stage movement</th></tr><tr><td>IT Programme – Grants Management System</td><td>Procurement of a replacement Grants Management System</td><td>Stage 3 – Committed: With a maximum budget allocation of £60,000</td></tr><tr><td>IT Programme – Palo Alto Firewall</td><td>Procurement of replacement firewall hardware</td><td>Move to Stage 3 – Committed</td></tr><tr><td>IT Programme – Complex Lives CMS</td><td>Procurement of a case management system for the Complex Lives initiative</td><td>Move to Stage 3 – Committed</td></tr><tr><td>Innovation Factory Access Control System</td><td>Procurement of a replacement for the access control system at the Innovation Factory.</td><td>Add to Stage 1 – Emerging</td></tr></table>	Project	Overview	Stage movement	IT Programme – Grants Management System	Procurement of a replacement Grants Management System	Stage 3 – Committed: With a maximum budget allocation of £60,000	IT Programme – Palo Alto Firewall	Procurement of replacement firewall hardware	Move to Stage 3 – Committed	IT Programme – Complex Lives CMS	Procurement of a case management system for the Complex Lives initiative	Move to Stage 3 – Committed	Innovation Factory Access Control System	Procurement of a replacement for the access control system at the Innovation Factory.	Add to Stage 1 – Emerging
Project	Overview	Stage movement														
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Innovation Factory Access Control System	Procurement of a replacement for the access control system at the Innovation Factory.	Add to Stage 1 – Emerging														
3.4	IT Programme – Grants Management System Members will be aware that the Grants Management System was approved at SP&R Committee in November 2023 to move to <i>Stage 3 – Committed</i> on the Capital Programme. Members agreed that the necessary procurement processes be initiated as required with															

	<p>contracts to be awarded on the basis of most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver.</p> <p>Members are asked to note that a satisfactory tender return has now been achieved and it is recommended that a maximum of £60,000 is now allocated to this project. The Director of Finance has confirmed that this is within the affordability limits of the Council.</p>
3.5	<p>IT Programme – Palo Alto Firewall</p> <p>This project is part of the overall IT Programme and will replace and licence new firewall hardware. The licencing on the current Palo Alto firewall ends in March 2025. Replacement is required before this date. Palo Alto Firewall is used to protect the Council from internet based attacks and provides web filtering, VPN services to suppliers including the new E5 finance system as well as the Global Protect service which allows staff and Members to work remotely.</p> <p>Members are asked to agree that the project is moved to <i>Stage 3 – Committed</i> and held at Tier 0 – Scheme at Risk pending further development of the project and a satisfactory tender return; and that necessary procurement processes (including the invitation of tenders and/or the use of appropriate ‘framework’ arrangements) be initiated with contract to be awarded on the basis of most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver.</p>
3.6	<p>IT Programme - Complex Lives Case Management System</p> <p>The Complex Lives initiative was established under Community Planning. It provides joined up support for some of Belfast’s most vulnerable people who have fallen into a cycle of rough sleeping, addiction, poor mental and physical health and offending behaviour. It is a multi-agency commitment across the statutory, voluntary and community sectors which brings together nine key organisations to address chronic homelessness in Belfast.</p> <p>This project can be delivered via Digital Services and involves the procurement of a case management system for the initiative to collate data on performance and impact. The system will be accessible to Council staff and to users in six external organisations. The Council will continue to act as the lead partner. The project has received funding from NIHE for this financial year which it is anticipated will meet the costs of the IT project.</p> <p>Members are asked to agree that the project is moved to <i>Stage 3 – Committed</i> and held at Tier 0 – Scheme at Risk pending further development of the project and a satisfactory tender return; and that necessary procurement processes (including the invitation of tenders and/or the use of appropriate ‘framework’ arrangements) be initiated with contract to be awarded on the basis of most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver.</p>

3.7	<p>Innovation Factory Access Control</p> <p>The project is for the replacement of the access control system at Innovation Factory. The current system is no longer fit for purpose. This project is expected to come forward at pace. The Innovation Factory opened in 2016 and is operated by Oxford Innovation. The facility is currently operating at 83% occupancy with a range of businesses availing of the space and wrap around support through the centre. Flexible access to the centre is essential to the success and appeal to existing and potential tenants. The access control system has been an issue for several years with various mitigating steps taken over the years to try and repair the current system to ensure it is fit for purpose. All other options to fix the current system are exhausted and there is a requirement to upgrade the system which includes new door controllers, readers, and associated software.</p> <p>Members are asked to agree that the Innovation Factory Access Control project is added to the Capital Programme at Stage 1 – Emerging to allow a business case to be developed.</p>
3.8	<p>Pitch provision</p> <p>Members will be aware that the provision of additional pitches across the city has been identified as a priority and that a piece of work is currently underway on developing a strategy for Belfast on Pitches and Outdoor Sports Facilities. Officers are currently looking at all options within the Council's own estate however Members will recognise that available land for additional and/or enhanced pitch provision within the Council estate is limited. However, officers are aware that there may be opportunities to work with partners across the city in terms of looking at sites for additional provision either via unutilised or under utilised land that is not suitable for other purposes, existing provision that is not being fully maximised in terms of community use, land that is surplus to requirements or where there is the potential to work with partners to ensure that pitch provision is fully developed within any new proposal (e.g. a new school development.).</p> <p>Members are asked to authorise officers to discuss opportunities with partners (including the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the Education Authority, Belfast Met, Department for Communities and Department for Infrastructure) across the city to facilitate opportunity for enhanced pitch provision with further detail to be brought back to Committee as required in respect of potential opportunities.</p>
3.9	<p>Capital Letters of Offer</p> <p>Members are asked to note the update in relation to capital letters of offer accepted in Q2 2024/25 at Appendix 1.</p>
	<p>Contracts Awarded</p>

	Members are asked to note the award of tenders for capital works including services related to works in Q2 2024/25 at Appendix 2.
3.10	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p><i>Financial Implications</i> – IT Programme – Grants Management System - a maximum of £60,000 is now allocated to this project. The Director of Finance has confirmed that this is within the affordability limits of the Council.</p> <p><i>Resource Implications</i> – None</p>
3.11	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>All capital projects are screened as part of the stage approval process</p>
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	<p>Appendix 1 - Capital Letters of Offer in Q2 2024/25 – July to September 2024</p> <p>Appendix 2 – Contracts Awarded in Q2 2024/25 – July to September 2024</p>

Appendix 1

Capital Letters of Offer 01 July – 30 September 2024

Project	Funder	Amount
<i>Ballysillan Playing Fields - Supplementary LoO (Amendment)</i>	TEO	£7,893,228
Household Waste Recycling Collaborative Change Programme	DAERA	£802,000
<i>Donegal Pass Community Centre Solar Panels (Amendment)</i>	CCAF	€46,620

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Appendix 2

Schedule of Contracts Awarded (Works and Works Related) for Notation (July – September 2024)

Contract Awarded	Supplier	Date of Award
NRF_ Integrated Consultancy Team for Fitzroy Former School of Music Refurbishment	RE Quinn Architects	09/07/2024
New floodlighting Grosvenor Road Activity Centre	BI Electrical Services Ltd	14/08/2024
NRF_ Integrated Consultant Team for Cliftonville Community Enterprise	RPP Architects	16/08/2024
Flat roof repairs and replacement roof lights at Cecil Ward Building	David Jameson Roofing	21/08/2024
Henry Jones Car Park CCTV & Floodlighting Installation	Braham Electrical	02/09/2024
NRF_ Integrated Consultant Team for Glencairn Community Hub	Collins Rolston Architects	09/09/2024
NRF_ Integrated Consultant Team for the Heart of the Rock/ Croí na Carraige (Glór na Móna)	Paul McAlister Architects	17/09/2024

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Language Strategy Working Group

Friday, 18th October, 2024

LANGUAGE STRATEGY WORKING GROUP MINUTES HELD IN PERSON AND REMOTELY

- Members present: Councillor Walsh (Chairperson); and
Councillors Brooks and Groogan.
- In attendance: Ms. N. Largey, City Solicitor/Director of Legal and
Civic Services;
Mr. E. McConville, Director Of External Affairs,
Communication and Marketing;
Mr. R. Connolly, Policy, Research And Compliance Officer;
Mr. M. Johnston, Language Officer;
Mr. C. McGuigan, Irish Language Officer;
Ms. M-T McGivern, Client Manager (Physical Programme);
Mr. B. Flynn, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

There were no apologies reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 8th August, 2024 were taken as read and signed as correct.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Update on Draft Irish Language Policy Public Consultation and Engagement Process

The Working Group considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of report or summary of main issues

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the working group on the progress in the public consultation and Equality Impact Assessment on the Council’s Draft Irish Language Policy.**

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Working Group is asked to:**

- **Note the contents of this report.**

3.0 Main report

3.1 Background

Belfast City Council launched the public consultation and Equality Impact Assessment on the Draft Irish Language Policy on 22nd August 2024. The consultation will run for a 14-week period.

Members of the public are invited to respond to the consultation online in either English or Irish. The public are also free to make individual written submissions. The Council have also organised a range of in-person and online consultation sessions where the public can make their opinions known.

To date the Council have held the following public events:

- 5th September - St. Mary's University College
- 2nd October – Online event
- 8th October – Online event
- 9th October - An Droichead

There will be a further public event in 2 Royal Avenue on 30th October.

3.2 The policy has also been discussed at a meeting with the Irish Language Stakeholder Forum which was held in Irish with an interpreter. The Ulster Scots Stakeholder Forum and the Council's Equality Consultative Forum were also asked to give feedback on the draft policy.

3.3 The Council are also conducting a separate staff consultation. Staff can respond online in English or Irish or make written submissions. To date the Council have held the following consultation events for staff:

- 25th September – City Hall
- 10th October – Duncrue Industrial Estate

The draft policy has also been the subject of discussion with Trade Union representatives at JNCC.

3.4 Next steps

The consultation will run until 28th November.

Members will be provided with a consultation report and an Equality Impact Assessment Final Decision Report in early 2025.

4.0 Monitoring and Reporting

- 4.1 The working group will be provided with a further update at its next meeting.
- 5.0 **Financial and Resource Implications**
- 5.1 None associated with this report.
- 6.0 **Equality, good relations or rural needs implications**
- 6.1 The Draft Irish Language Policy is the subject of an Equality Impact Assessment and a Rural Needs Impact Assessment. These are out for public consultation.”

The City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services outlined the principal aspects of the report and provided feedback on the public and staff consultation events which had taken place, together with an overview of the submissions and responses received.

During discussion, it was suggested, given that the draft policy, if and when adopted, would be applied corporately on a city-wide basis, that a further public consultation event should be held specifically at a venue in east Belfast.

The Working Group agreed to note the information provided within the report and it was agreed also that a further public consultation event be held at a venue in east Belfast.

Update on Implementation of the Language Strategy Action Plan

The Working Group considered the following report:

- “1.0 **Purpose of report or summary of main issues**
- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the working group on the progress made by officers in implementing the Language Strategy Action plan.
- 2.0 **Recommendations**
- 2.1 The Working Group is asked to note the contents of this report and provide feedback as necessary.
- 3.0 **Main report**
- 3.1 **Background**
- Belfast City Council agreed a Language Strategy Action Plan in June 2024.
- This Action Plan contained agreed actions to continue the implementation of the Council’s Language Strategy from 2024 – 2027.
- 3.2 Since the agreement of the Action Plan, officers have completed the following actions:

- There will be Irish-language content relating to the ongoing consultation on the Draft Irish Language Policy in the next edition of City Matters;
- Officers have begun work to set up a gaeilge@BelfastCity.gov.uk email address and publicise its availability;
- Officers have developed an initial draft Ulster Scots Policy. The Ulster Scots Stakeholder Forum have been asked to provide comments on the contents of the Policy.
- Event arrangements are taking place to celebrate Ulster Scots Leid Week on 21st November 2024, International Day for People with Disabilities on 3rd December 2024 and Burns on 24th January 2025.
- The 'Making Communications Accessible' guide is currently being added to Interlink to support council officers on how to deal with language and communication requests. There will also be other content added to a Language section on Interlink, outlining information and links to the Language Strategy, the current Language Action Plan, and relevant policies.
- A 12-week British Sign Language Level 1 course was completed by Council officers in June 2024. The Council officers are keen to progress in their learning by completing a Level 2 course. We are currently looking at progression options.

Other actions from the Action Plan will be rolled out in Quarter 4 of this year and members will be kept updated on progress in relation to these.

3.3 Next steps

Members are asked to note the contents of this report and give any feedback they feel necessary.

4.0 Monitoring and Reporting

- 4.1 The working group will be provided with a further update on progress at its next meeting.

5.0 Financial and Resource Implications

None associated with this report.

6.0 Equality, good relations or rural needs implications

The Language Strategy Action Plan was the subject of a Section 75 Equality Screening, a Rural Needs Impact Assessment and these were made available during the public consultation. It is not envisioned that any of the actions will need separate screenings.”

A Member requested that further information be provided regarding the provision of visual communication tools on display boards at the Council playparks. In response, the City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services undertook to liaise with the Director of Property and Projects in this regard and provide an update at the next meeting of the Working Group.

The Working Group noted the information provided and the course of action outlined by the City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services.

Chairperson

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All-Party Working Group on the City Centre

Friday, 27th September, 2024

MEETING OF THE ALL-PARTY WORKING GROUP ON THE CITY CENTRE

Members present: Councillor Long (Chairperson);
Aldermen Rodgers and McCullough; and
Councillors de Faoite, Groogan and Maskey.

In attendance: Ms. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration and
Development;
Mr. E. McConville, Director of External Affairs,
Communication and Marketing;
Ms. D. Kelly, Programme Manager;
Mr. J. Uprichard, Business Research and Development
Manager;
Ms. W. Kane, Tourism Development Officer; and
Ms. C. Donnelly, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

No apologies were reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 7th June, 2024 were agreed.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Presentation

Food and Drink Tourism Network

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. P. Kane, Belfast Whiskey Week and Co-Chair, Mr. A. Duggan, Hospitality Belfast and Co-Chair, Ms. K. Dittmar, Oui Poutine, Mr. N. McKenna, Waterman House/James Street South, Ms. C. Thompson, Thompson's Tea and Ms. L. Goodall, Goodall Consulting, to the meeting.

Mr. P. Kane and Mr. A. Duggan delivered a presentation to the Working Group and explained the following key areas:

- Background to the Food and Drink Action Plan;
- Developing a Network for Belfast;
- Current Macro Challenges;
- City Challenges; and
- Key Opportunities;

Mr. Duggan stated that, to ensure the continued growth and impact of the Food and Drink Tourism Network, it would require the following support:

- Increased budget and annual growth with a commitment to Years 2 and 3 of the Action Plan;
- Assistance to develop internal cross-departmental support on issues relating to economic development, employability and skills, environmental health, Planning, Licensing, sustainability and climate, accessibility, waste management, Belfast Stories, Tourism and Events; and
- Nomination of Elected Members from each party with interest in support on specific issues.

Ms. Goodall concluded the presentation by explaining that, through engagement with the Network, members would gain robust knowledge and understanding of the sector and access to key stakeholders and their support would help to protect and sustain more than 12,000 jobs in the city and assist in positioning Belfast as a world class food and drink tourism destination.

During discussion, a number of Members expressed their willingness to provide support to the Network and to gain an understanding of what contributions the Council could make to the success of the Food and Drink Tourism Network.

The Chairperson (Councillor Long) and Councillors de Faoite, Groogan and Maskey agreed that they would act as ambassadors, on behalf of their respective political parties, for the Food and Drink Tourism Network.

The Chairperson thanked the deputation for their presentation, and they retired from the meeting.

The Working Group noted the presentation.

Future City Centre Programme Council led Activity Update

The Director of City Regeneration and Development provided the Working Group with an overview of a range of recent activity across the pillars of the Future City Centre Programme, with updates from June to September, 2024 in the following key pillar areas:

- Regeneration and Connectivity,
- Business and Investment;
- Animation and Distinctive Offering;
- Clean, Green, Inclusive and Safe; and
- Vulnerability.

She provided a comprehensive overview of the work that was being led across the Council, and that it provided a useful tool of reference for the Members. She also highlighted that the development of a robust evidence base, that was demonstrated in the Future City Centre Framework Performance Dashboard, provided objective data on the indicators and

measures that measured the impact of activity in the city centre, and that further developmental work was required on the operational indicators linked to the Council led activity.

The Working Group noted the update.

Future City Centre Programme Performance Dashboard

The Business Research and Development Manager presented the Working Group with the recently updated Future City Centre Programme Performance Dashboard. He provided an update on the following strategic indicators which reflected the city's overall performance, for which all stakeholders were accountable:

- Footfall levels;
- Dwell time;
- Unique visitors;
- Catchment area;
- Rates income;
- Cleanliness and safety,
- Air quality;
- Employee jobs;
- Development;
- Vacancy rates;
- Independent retailers;
- Consumer spend; and
- Tourism spend.

The Business Research and Development Manager provided the Working Group with an overview of different footfall and visitor behaviour indicators, that included street level and density heatmaps, international visitors and catchment areas, which highlighted recent performance, compared with similar periods the previous year.

He concluded by providing an update on the city centre residential population, stating that NISRA had recently released its 2022 Mid-Year Population estimates which indicated that there was an estimated 14,793 people living in the city centre in 2022, up 8.5% from the 2021 Census.

The Working Group noted the update.

City Centre News and Communications Digest

The Director of External Affairs, Communications and Marketing updated the Working Group on recent city centre news and communications. He provided an overview of recent coverage that included the opening of Grand Central Station, Belfast PRIDE, Mela, Villa Vie cruise ship passenger reception and the opening of The Ivy.

He outlined future releases, that included the Augmented Reality City Hall exhibition experience, in partnership with BT, further Vacant to Vibrant success stories, the autumn consultation on Belfast Stories concept designs and Cathedral Gardens future development plans.

He explained that briefing sessions would be held for relevant key journalists to explain context, promote understanding of the Council's role and responsibilities and highlight positive developments and future priorities.

He concluded by outlining a proactive strategy to consistently amplify positive city centre messages.

Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy **10 Year Stocktake**

The Director of City Regeneration and Development provided the Working Group with an update on a recent stocktake on a ten-year review of the Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy (BCCRIS).

She explained that the strategy was built on the following core principles/policy areas:

- Increase the Employment Population;
- Increase the Residential Population;
- Manage the Retail Offer;
- Maximise the Tourism Opportunity;
- Create Regional Learning and Innovation Centres;
- Create a Green, Walkable, Cyclable Centre;
- Connect to the City Around; and
- Shared Space and Social Impact.

She stated that the stocktake involved looking back at what had been envisaged and taking stock in order to assist in a focus to looking forward and was not intended to be an in-depth analysis of all elements of the strategy. She highlighted that the delivery of policies, projects and plans in BCCRIS sat across the public private and third sectors.

She outlined the key points and areas of focus, and she explained that the emerging findings would be presented to the next meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee, followed by a BCCRIS Summit event in November, 2024.

The Working Group noted the update.

Following a suggestion from a Member, the Working Group agreed to extend an invite to Mr. M. Stewart, who had recently been appointed as the Belfast Night Czar, to attend a future meeting of the Working Group.

Chairperson



Belfast
City Council

Subject:	Aisling Awards Sponsorship Opportunities
Date:	25 October 2024
Reporting Officer:	John Walsh, Chief Executive
Contact Officer:	Lynsey Cameron, Executive Manager (Acting)

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.</p> <p>Insert number <input style="width: 40px;" type="text"/></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information relating to any individual 2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) 4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter 5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained 6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction 7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime 	
<p>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div> <p>After Committee Decision</p> <p>After Council Decision</p> <p>Sometime in the future</p> <p>Never</p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 40px; height: 40px; position: relative;"> <div style="position: absolute; top: 0; bottom: 0; left: 0; right: 0; border: 1px solid black;"></div> </div> </div>	

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	Correspondence has been received from the Aisling Awards for Belfast City Council representatives to attend their Awards Ceremony on 22 November 2024.

1.2	Party Leaders considered this request on 17 October and asked that a report be brought to SP&R committee outlining the options discussed in relation to proposed attendance.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - note the correspondence received from the Aisling Awards - consider the sponsorship opportunities outlined - consider BCC attendance at the Awards
3.0	Main Report
	<u>Key Issues</u>
3.1	Operating for 27 Years, the Aisling Awards celebrate the best of Belfast in the private, voluntary and community sectors. Previous honorary guests have ranged from Special Olympians to the Rev. Jesse Jackson and the family of Daithí Mac Gabhann.
3.2	The 2024 event will be held at the Europa Hotel on 22 November.
3.3	<p>Various sponsorship opportunities for the event have been received by the Council. Those to be considered include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Table for 10 at the Banquet £1500 + VAT • A pair of tickets for the banquet £300 + VAT • A single ticket for the banquet £175 + VAT
3.4	Members are also asked to consider appropriate representation at this event such as Committee Chairs and Party Leaders.
	<u>Financial and Resource Implications</u>
3.5	Associated spend, to be determined, to be covered by existing budgets.
	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u>
3.6	None associated with this report.
4.0	Appendices - Documents Attached
	Appendix 1 - Copy of correspondence received.

AISLING AWARDS

GRADAIM NA hAISLINGE

#AISLINGAWARDS

PREMIER PARTNER



EUROPA HOTEL FRIDAY 22 NOVEMBER 2024

For 28 years, the Aisling Awards have epitomised the very best of Belfast – that generous, gritty and unbeatable spirit which characterises a city on the rise. Making the Awards possible have been some of the biggest business names in the city – from the Ulster Bank and PwC to NIE and Belfast International Airport.

In the Europa Hotel on 22 November we will have an opportunity to salute the courage and resilience of civic leaders across multiple fields of endeavour and from every corner of the city.

These are the people who are constantly focused on the future; leaders who look outwards for inspiration; beacons of Belfast who understand that more unites us than divides us.

Over two decades and more, honorary guests at the Aisling Awards have ranged from our Special Olympians to the Rev. Jesse Jackson, the family of little Oscar Knox to the courageous family of Harry Holland.

We're delighted, therefore, to invite your company to team up with our premier partner Open University to raise a glass at the 28th annual Aisling Awards to the next exciting chapter in the Belfast story.

Fad saoil agus sláinte.



Business Partner Table:
£1500 + VAT

Contact: **Conla McCann, Director, Aisling Awards**
c.mccann@aisling-events.com Mobile: 07841 101274

Page 105

AISLING

AWARDS

GRADAIM NA hAISLINGE

#AISLINGAWARDS

PREMIER PARTNER



SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES 2024

Premier Partner GONE

- Title sponsorship: Event Name in association with...
- Included in pre-event launch publicity and on the day event publicity
- Your logo positioned alongside the event logo on all assets including
 - Digital and outdoor marketing campaign
 - All awards
 - Website
 - Magazine Cover
 - Stage graphics and all venue branding
 - Social Media visuals and videos
 - Event programme/Menocard
 - Speaking opportunity
 - Back page ad in the event magazine
 - Foreword in the event magazine
 - Post-event dedicated Mailchimp sent to our mailing list and will include images and a video
 - Table for 10 at the banquet
 - Two seats at the top table

Titanic Partner £3000 + VAT

- Table for 6 at the banquet
- Your logo branded as Titanic Partner on the following assets:
 - Website
 - Magazine Cover
 - Stage graphics and all venue branding
 - Event programme/Menocard
 - Full page ad in the event magazine

Event Partner £5000 + VAT

- Included in pre-event launch publicity and on the day event publicity
- Your logo branded as Event Partner on all assets including
 - Digital and outdoor marketing campaign
 - The award you're sponsoring
 - Website
 - Magazine Cover
 - Stage graphics and all venue branding
 - Social Media visuals and videos
 - Event programme/Menocard
 - Opportunity to present your award
 - Full page ad in the event magazine
 - Post-event dedicated Mailchimp sent to our mailing list and will include images and a video
 - Table for 10 at the banquet

Table for 10 at the banquet:	£1500 + VAT
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A Pair of tickets for the banquet:	£300 + VAT
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A Single ticket for the banquet:	£175 + VAT
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www.aisling-events.com

Contact: Connla McCann
 Director
 Aisling Awards
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 Mobile: 07841 101274

Page 196

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