Northern Ireland Executive
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OUR PLAN:
Doing What Matters Most

Programme for Government
2024-2027



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Programme for Government
2024-2027

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Our Commitment to You and to Each Other



This Programme for Government is an ambitious agenda of change for Northern Ireland. We will make it happen by working in partnership.

We are committed to working together to address what matters most to you. Working together means providing collective leadership and enabling real collaboration across government to deliver your priorities. This Programme for Government, **Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most** is about doing what matters 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 **the Programme for Government** 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 MLA,
First Minister

Emma Little-Pengelly MLA,
deputy First Minister

Aisling Reilly MLA,
Junior Minister

Pam Cameron MLA,
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Andrew Muir MLA,
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Gordon Lyons MLA,
Minister for Communities

Dr Caoimhe Archibald MLA,
Minister for the Economy

Paul Givan MLA,
Minister of Education

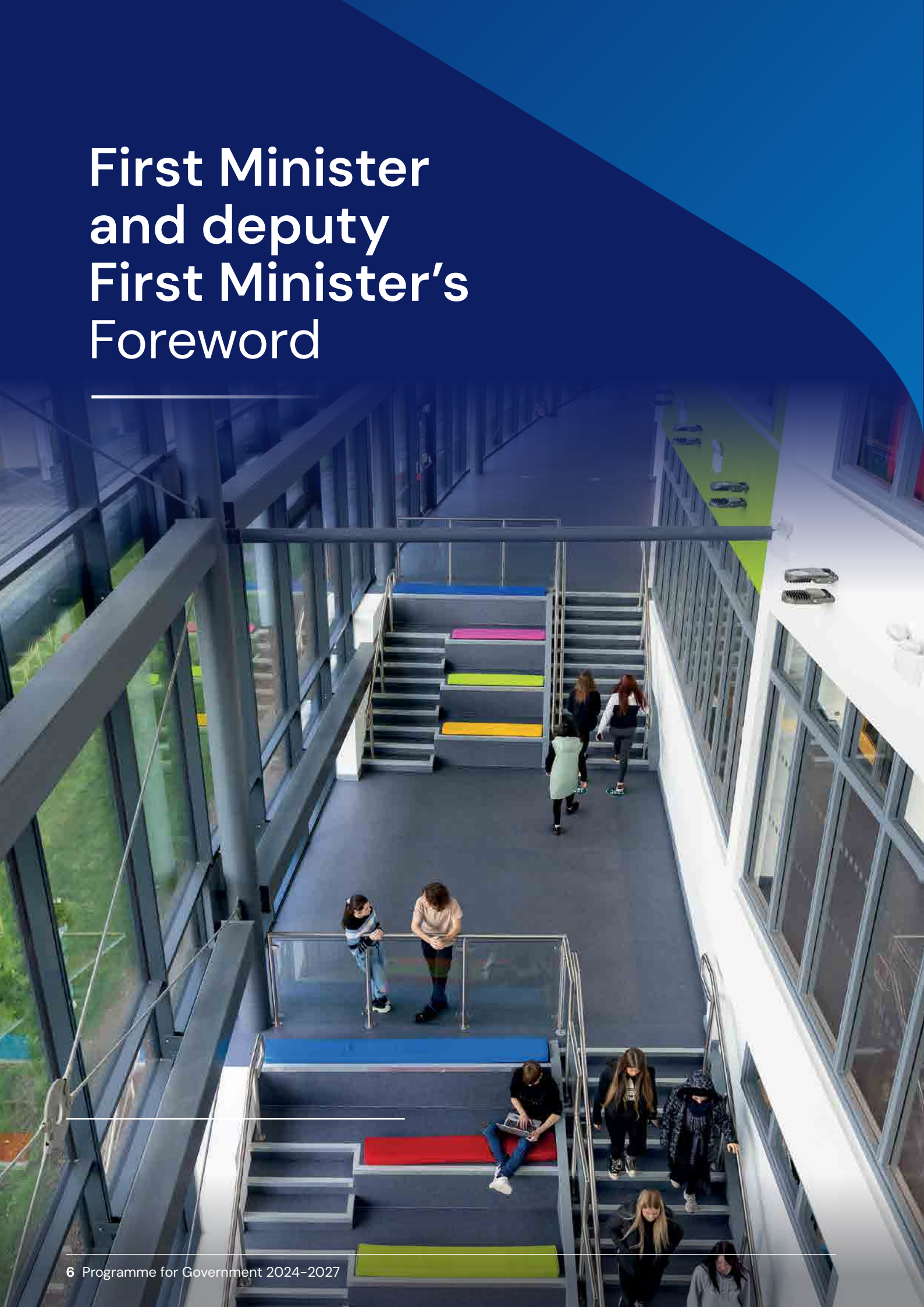
John O'Dowd MLA,
Minister of Finance

Mike Nesbitt MLA,
Minister of Health

Liz Kimmins MLA,
Minister for Infrastructure

Naomi Long MLA,
Minister of Justice

First Minister and deputy First Minister's Foreword





Michelle O'Neill MLA,
First Minister

Emma Little-Pengelly MLA,
deputy First Minister

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 also spoke of our ambitions for this mandate and a shared desire to work in partnership and move our society forward, to tackle the big issues, and to create a brighter future for everyone that lives here.

This **Programme for Government** is all about tackling those big issues. Working with our colleagues in the Executive, we have agreed a set of ambitious priorities which will make real improvements across society both today and in the years ahead.

We know there are challenges. We are working in a reduced mandate and there is not enough funding to meet the needs of people here. Our public finances and services are under pressure. We will continue to work together, speaking with one voice when engaging with the UK Government, to ensure a sustainable funding model in the future.

During the consultation period for this **Programme for Government,** we heard from more of you than ever before. We have listened and know it is vital for the **Programme for Government** to work for everyone. We will continue to work to tackle inequalities and make this an even better place to live, work, and visit.

Along with our colleagues in the Executive, we are determined that these challenges will not stand in the way of meaningful progress being made. Together, we have agreed that the **Programme for Government** will focus on three core areas.



Doing What Matters Most Today

In this mandate the Executive is committed to working together to deliver nine priorities with the goal of improving the wellbeing of everyone living and working here. We will strive to make sure that everyone has the best possible opportunity regardless of religious belief, political opinion, sexual orientation, gender, race, disability, age, marital status and dependants.

These priorities are:

- Grow a Globally Competitive and Sustainable Economy
- Deliver More Affordable, Accessible, High-Quality Early Learning and Childcare
- Cut Health Waiting Times
- Ending Violence Against Women and Girls
- Better Support for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs
- Provide More Social, Affordable and Sustainable Housing
- Safer Communities
- Protecting Lough Neagh and the Environment
- Reform and Transformation of Public Services

Progress is already being made. The Executive has, for example, invested £25 million to support parents struggling with the cost of childcare, launched a £2 million Challenge fund to help address violence against women and girls, and launched a Lough Neagh Action Plan.

We are establishing a new Delivery Unit within The Executive Office to provide support to the Executive to Reform and Transform our public services. This work is underpinned by a £235 million Transformation Fund which will make the investments needed to establish better, more accessible, and efficient public services.



Building New Foundations

Improving our infrastructure will be vital to delivering our Priorities. By investing in water and wastewater, roads and transport, and sporting infrastructure we will encourage businesses to invest, enable house building, and support greater energy efficiency and affordability.

These investments will also improve our sporting infrastructure, helping to create a healthier society and attract world class events.

We know that public investment alone is not enough and will continue to implement a planning improvement programme in collaboration with local government and other stakeholders. Our goal is to make our planning system work for businesses, people, and the environment.



Shaping a Better Tomorrow

All of us in the Executive agree that our obligations do not end with this mandate. It is vital that we lay the foundations needed for longer term improvements.

That is why we have set out three long term Missions: People, Planet and Prosperity. These Missions are underpinned by a cross cutting commitment to Peace. These Missions provide us with a driving ambition for the future, and a lens through which to prioritise and ensure we deliver improved wellbeing, long term sustainability, and a thriving economy.

It is important that we use the best data available to understand the present and plan for the future. That is why we have developed a wellbeing dashboard and published it alongside this **Programme for Government.** The dashboard sets out the quality of life here and shows us how Section 75 groups and people living in different parts of Northern Ireland are doing.

Among these key challenges is our aging population. It is vital that the Executive works together to make sure that all of our priorities are designed with this in mind.

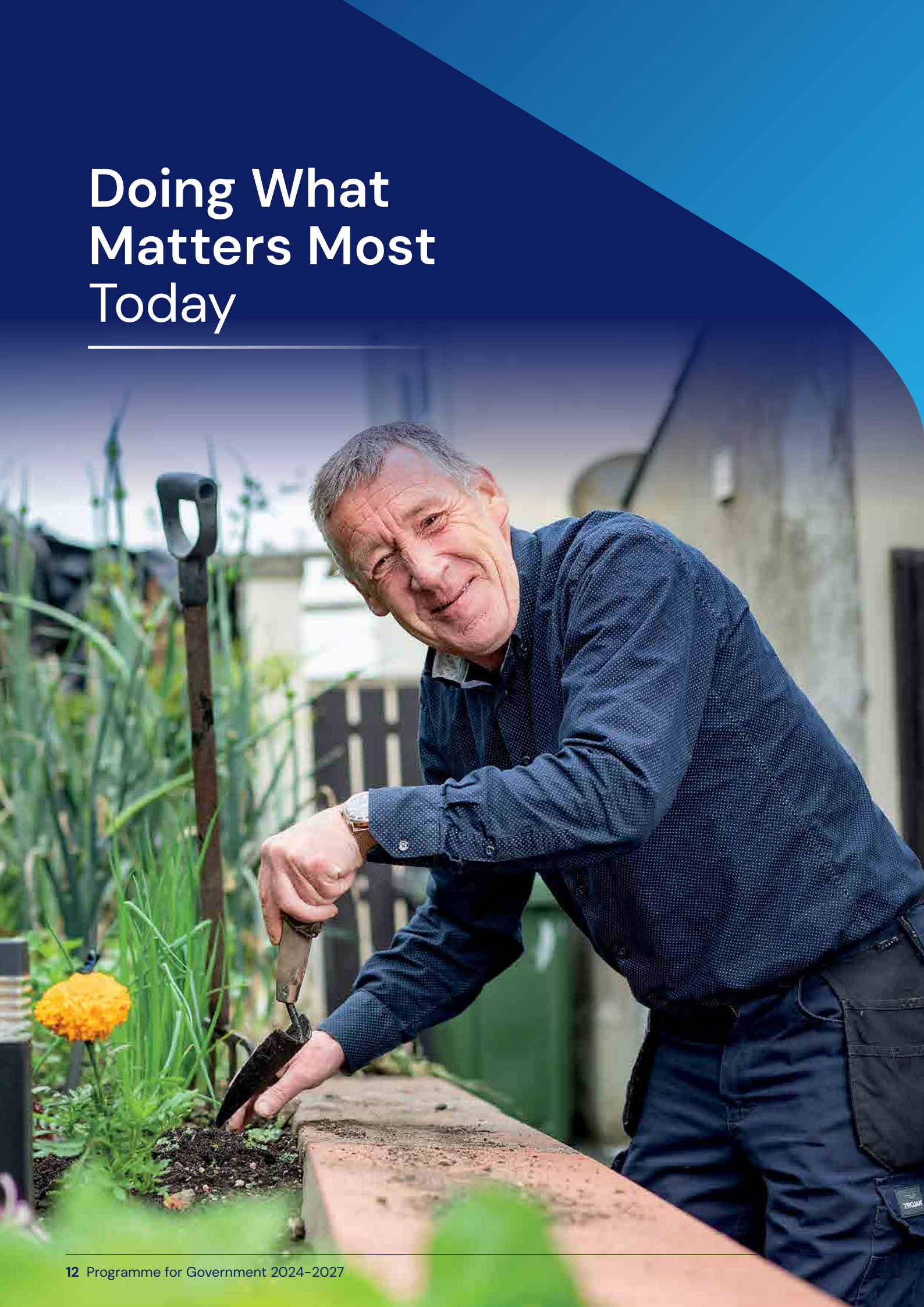
We will draw on the data contained within our **Wellbeing Framework** to ensure that we continue to address the needs of our changing population when developing and delivering our policies.

We want to thank everyone who engaged in the consultation process and helped us to ensure that our plan is everybody's plan.

As we develop these policies, we want to maximise input and consensus. This will mean we will co-design and consult on relevant issues and policy. Matters referenced in the Programme for Government should be considered by the Executive in the normal way. We know that our policies are stronger when we maximise collaborative development and wide consensus.

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

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



Deliver More Affordable, Accessible, High-Quality Early Learning and Childcare



Cut Health Waiting Times



Ending Violence Against Women and Girls



Better Support for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs



Provide More Social, Affordable and Sustainable Housing



Safer Communities



Protecting Lough Neagh and the Environment



Reform and Transformation of Public Services

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 amongst 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 Target for 2027:

By the end of this mandate, we will have supported industry to increase renewable electricity capacity by 40% and considered an Employment Rights Bill for introduction in the Assembly.

This year, we will:

- Support delivery of the 80% renewable electricity by 2030 target, within the Climate Change Act, by publishing a final design of a Renewable Electricity Support Scheme.
- Promote and protect the rights of all workers by consulting on proposals for a new Employment Bill and beginning to draft the legislation.
- Work towards expanding the campus at Magee up to 10,000 students as set out within New Decade New Approach, by working with the Magee Taskforce, and partners, to publish and begin to deliver on an Executive agreed action plan.
- The Economy Minister and Invest NI will have undertaken at least three overseas trade missions to promote NI's market access position to potential overseas investors and importers.



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 a **Northern Ireland Science and Technology Advisory Network** has been established. 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 through the development of a regional R&D Strategy, helping to support sectors including cyber security and software, advanced manufacturing and life and health sciences.

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 promote greater diversity in growth sectors.



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 £20 million investment from the Shared Island Fund 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.



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 **£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.

The Executive's **Green Growth strategy** will provide our framework for enabling the transition to a greener, sustainable future based on a low carbon, nature positive environment reaping the advantages of good green jobs and the health and wellbeing benefits of an improved environment. This strategy will show how we will work together to embed an approach that ensures Northern Ireland has an environment, society and economy which is resilient to the impacts of climate change. It will help drive the transformation needed to reduce emissions, meet our net zero obligations and provide clarity to local and international businesses and investors on our commitment and how we will do this.



Our agri-food and fishing sectors are a major component of our economy and play an important role in helping to deliver our climate change obligations and restore the natural environment, while also underpinning our collective health and wellbeing through the food we eat and how it is produced. We will continue to support these sectors through the Sustainable Agriculture Programme working with stakeholders to develop coherent policies and design schemes that drive improvements in our environment and in animal health and welfare while also supporting the sustainable production of quality, nutritious food that contributes to our economic wellbeing and enhances Northern Ireland's international image. The Marine Environment and Fisheries Fund will continue to provide support to fishers, processing and aquaculture businesses, port authorities, inland fishers and environmental stakeholders.

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.

We are fortunate to have excellent universities and university colleges, a highly successful College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise, and six Further Education colleges delivering vocationally relevant skills to benefit both learners and businesses 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, UU Coleraine, and Stranmillis and St Mary's University Colleges. 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 by producing an Executive agreed plan to support Higher Education and increase skills.

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, Accessible, High-Quality Early Learning and Childcare



The Issue:

We need to provide more affordable, accessible, high-quality early learning and childcare opportunities to support children's development and ease financial pressures for working families. 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 Target for 2027:

By the end of this mandate, we will have a comprehensive Executive agreed Early Learning and Childcare Strategy in place, delivering improved outcomes for children and parents.

This year, we will:

- Make sure that the parents of 13,500 eligible children to have benefited from a 15% childcare subsidy.
- Complete a scoping exercise of the business support needs of the early years and childcare sector.
- Provide enhanced funding for existing early years and childcare schemes to better support children facing disadvantage and those with additional needs.

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.



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** 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.



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.

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.

Our Target for 2027:

With Executive support, invest up to £135m a year to reduce waiting lists by treating an additional 70,000 patients and, a further £80m a year, to increase elective care capacity through expansion of elective care centres and mega clinics to remove the demand/capacity gap that causes waiting lists to grow.

This year, we will:

- Have invested £76m to limit further deterioration of cancer and time critical waiting lists. This will allow over 250,000 assessments, diagnostics and treatments appointments for patients with suspected cancer or with life, limb or sight threatening conditions.
- Have commenced the development of a refreshed approach to improving health and addressing health inequalities.

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 time.

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.

Focusing 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 Target for 2027:

By the end of this mandate, a minimum of 100,000 programme participants will have been engaged, there will have been three awareness raising campaigns, and our society will have significantly increased understanding and awareness of issues and will know how to take action to prevent violence against women and girls.

This year, we will:

- Launch the Power-to-Change campaign with partners in Justice and PSNI to challenge unacceptable attitudes and reduce harmful behaviours of men and boys.
- Deliver TEO EVAWG funding through councils to provide investment in grassroots communities from January 2025 onwards.
- Establish four key-sectoral working groups by Spring 2025, to improve outcomes for women and girls in education, workplaces, social and nighttime settings.

Our Proposed Action:

Last year we launched 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 grassroots 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 grassroots 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 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 Target for 2027:

By the end of this mandate, we will have a comprehensive Executive agreed SEN Reform Agenda and Delivery Plan in place, delivering improved outcomes for children with SEN, their families and the education workforce who support them.

This year, we will:

- Establish an Executive agreed SEN Reform Agenda and Delivery Plan which sets out the actions required to transform the education system for children and young people with special educational needs.

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 and will require significant investment 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 a clearly articulated SEN Reform Agenda and Delivery 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, Education and other professionals 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, sharing and analysis 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, Health and other 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 and review process to meet statutory timeframes and ensure timely confirmation of school placements for children with SEN. We will also commence a phased approach to the removal of supernumerary status for children with statements of SEN.

The Department of Education (DE) will work with the Department for the Economy (DfE), the Department of Health (DoH) and others, including the voluntary and community sector, 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.

Our Target for 2027:

By the end of this mandate, we will have started work on at least 5,850 new build social homes.

This year, we will:

- Deliver 847 shared ownership homes.
- Launch the Loan to Acquire Move on Accommodation (LAMA) fund of £10 million, helping homeless charities purchase properties as a route into housing for those who cannot afford access to permanent social housing or private rented accommodation.
- Complete a public consultation and publish an Executive agreed Fuel Poverty Strategy.

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 have agreed a Northern Ireland Housing Supply Strategy which provides 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 1,900 by the end of the mandate in March 2027. 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 abuse, gender-based violence, racism or hate crime, it is more likely to be suffered by people from deprived areas.

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 Target for 2027:

By the end of this mandate, we will have progressed a Speeding Up Justice Programme and have an Executive agreed approach to reducing offending and reoffending, contributing to delivering improved outcomes for those who engage with the justice system.

This year, we will:

- Explore options for expanding the use of Out of Courts Disposals including Community Resolution Notices to speed up the time taken to dispose of those cases, and help to reduce pressure on Courts and other justice agencies.
- Develop a robust business case that will seek to stabilise, and begin to grow, police officer numbers.
- Secure Executive agreement for an extension of the Tackling Paramilitarism Programme until March 2027.

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 Service 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 New Decade New Approach 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 and diversion. In addition, we will seek to strengthen 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 sought to address the root causes of violence and demonstrated the links between vulnerability and paramilitary harm.



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 improving 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 Target for 2027:

We will deliver the actions in the Lough Neagh Report and Action Plan, including education, regulation, enforcement, incentivisation, all underpinned by science as per targets set out in the Report and Action Plan.

This year, we will:

- Establish robust accountability mechanisms to allow monitoring and reporting of progress on the Environmental Improvement Plan for Northern Ireland and consult on a draft Climate Action Plan and publish the third NI Climate Change Adaptation Programme.
- Complete a review of Environmental Governance and following receipt of the findings of the independent panel, DAERA will present a proposed way forward to the Executive for consideration and agreement.
- Implement an effective Sanitary & Phytosanitary (SPS) regime across NI and deliver official controls on behalf of the Food Standards Agency (FSA), to protect public health, animal health & welfare, plant health and to support trade and agri-food supply chain sustainability.

Our Proposed Action:

Our First Environment Strategy

We will continue to implement Northern Ireland's first Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) which includes a range of commitments to improve our natural environment. The EIP, in conjunction with other strategies, provides a determined and coherent response by the Executive to the global challenges of biodiversity loss and climate change. We will publish a Nature Recovery Plan to ensure Northern Ireland is in line to achieve the Global Biodiversity Framework aim to halt and reverse biodiversity loss and ensure 30% of land and sea is effectively managed for nature.

Climate Action

Addressing climate change requires us to work together like never before. Working across government, collectively with our stakeholders and civic society we will ensure we take action in a just, and fair way, as we transition to a net zero society and economy.

We have set our first three carbon budgets and will develop an Executive agreed Climate Action Plan, detailing cross-cutting steps to reduce carbon emissions and deliver across energy, transport, agriculture, land use, land use change and forestry, buildings, waste and fisheries, setting out how we will adapt to changing weather patterns, and work towards net zero. This plan will recognise the need to deliver nature based solutions to tackle the twin challenges of biodiversity loss and climate change.



Reaching net zero will be done in a fair and just way that is 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. Alongside reducing emissions and working towards net zero we will seek to adapt to changing weather patterns as we prepare and improve our resilience to the impacts of increased frequency and severity of extreme weather events through the publication of our Third Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme which have resulted in flooding and damage to property and infrastructure. Setting our first three carbon budgets, consulting on the first Climate Action Plan and publishing our Green Growth Strategy will act as the springboards to drive forward further emissions reductions, and to begin to realise the economic, health, social and wellbeing outcomes for all of our communities.

Lough Neagh Action Plan

The Lough Neagh Action Plan has been agreed by the Executive. We will implement this action plan across the four pillars of education, incentivisation, regulation and enforcement, with the work supported by scientific evidence and requiring collaborative working across DAERA and with other stakeholders.

Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI)

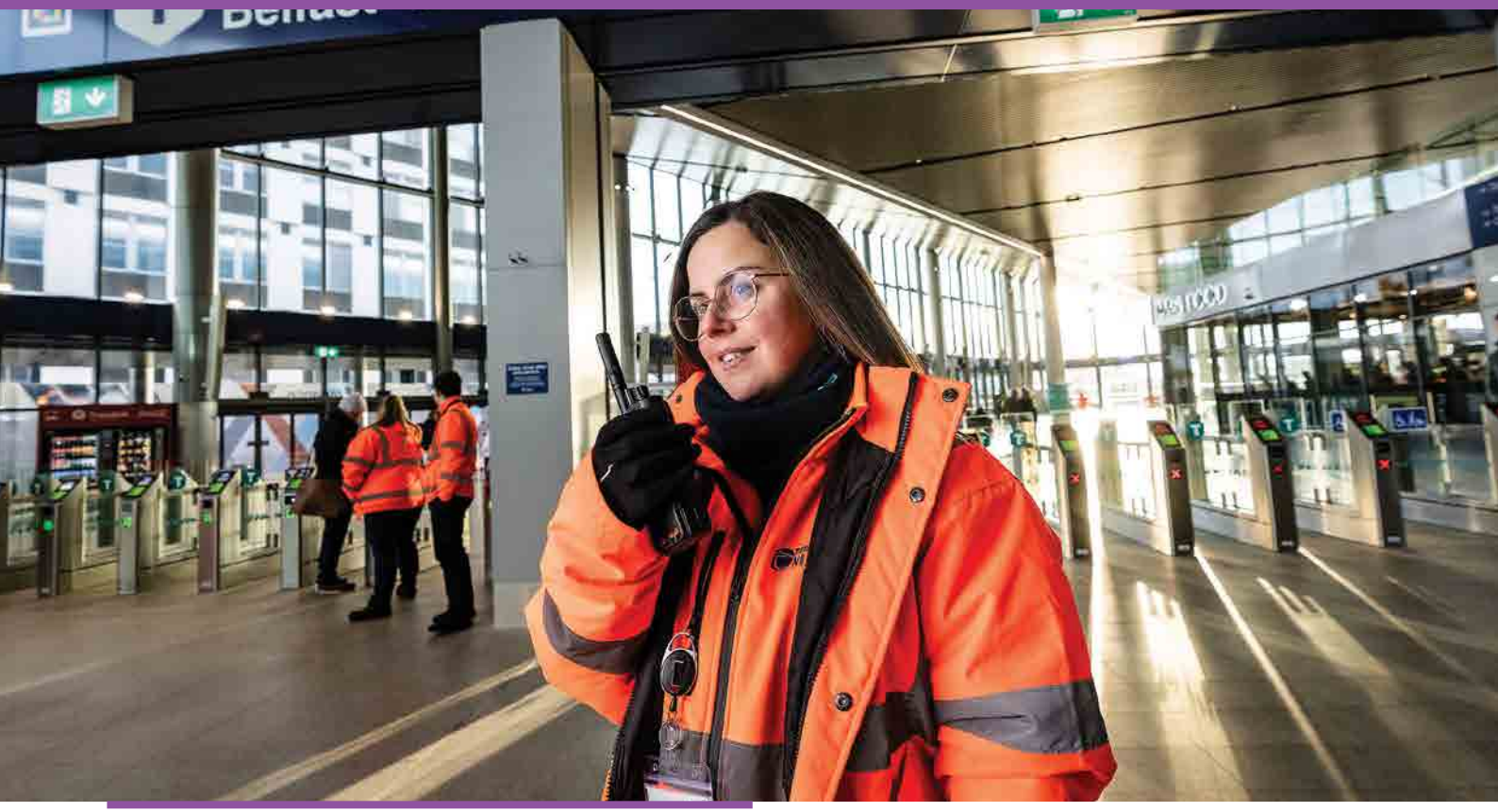
With financial support from DfE, DAERA has launched an SBRI to explore potential solutions to treat/reduce blue-green algae blooms without impacting the natural environment of Lough Neagh and associated Northern Ireland waterways. The competition process is being managed on behalf of DAERA by the Strategic 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 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, the 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. At 31 March 2024, 22,450 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. Police 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.

It is essential that people here have access to services that meet their needs, that are effective, efficient and sustainable. Achieving this will take time, and will require a whole systems approach to reform. However, we need to dramatically increase the pace of change, and drive forward improvements more quickly than has been the case to date.





Our Target for 2027:

Through the Transformation Fund, we will have successfully delivered a range of service improvements across the Executive's priority areas and commenced digital transformation.

This year, we will:

- Establish a Delivery Unit to drive reform and transformation across government and wider public services.
- Address the significant opportunities in emerging technologies such as AI, and better leverage the powers of digital and data, by establishing the Office of AI and Digital. The new Office will sit alongside the Office of Science and Technology and work with the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) and other data and digital leaders across the NICS, to advise the Executive.
- Have an agreed budget sustainability plan and engaged with HMT, aiming to agree a detailed methodology for calculating NI's relative funding per head.



Our Proposed Action:

We will set up a new Delivery Unit at the heart of government. The Delivery Unit will ensure the Executive's priorities get the focus needed to bring about lasting change and improvement. Working across government and the public sector, in partnership with other sectors, and learning from best practice globally, we will take decisions to ensure a relentless focus on innovation and efficiency in service delivery and build a culture where reform and transformation can thrive. We will also seek to harness new technologies to speed up delivery and lower costs, so that our services are better able to meet user needs.

Supported by a £235m Transformation Fund, we will begin to deliver a range of new Transformation Projects to bring about real improvements in service delivery across the Executive's priority areas. These projects will be identified based on their potential to improve the financial sustainability of public services; transform the model of service delivery; promote prevention and early intervention; and deliver improved outcomes for citizens.

We will also bring forward a wider package of reform, this will include a Fiscal Framework and the key commitments outlined in the Sustainability Plan. The **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. Our actions will span several years and we will provide regular reports 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 1:
Our Missions



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

Scan here to visit the Wellbeing Dashboard

northernireland.gov.uk/wellbeing

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.

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 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 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.

Understanding Performance

Alongside the dashboard, which tracks long-term wellbeing at a population level, the Executive will be keeping track of delivery and publishing a delivery report each year for the nine priorities. 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. These projects and programmes will also be linked to our wellbeing domains, to allow us to analyse them in relation to our long-term progress.

Our Wellbeing Dashboard has been developed based on learnings from international best practice and its adoption will help us achieve a better and more sustainable future for all.

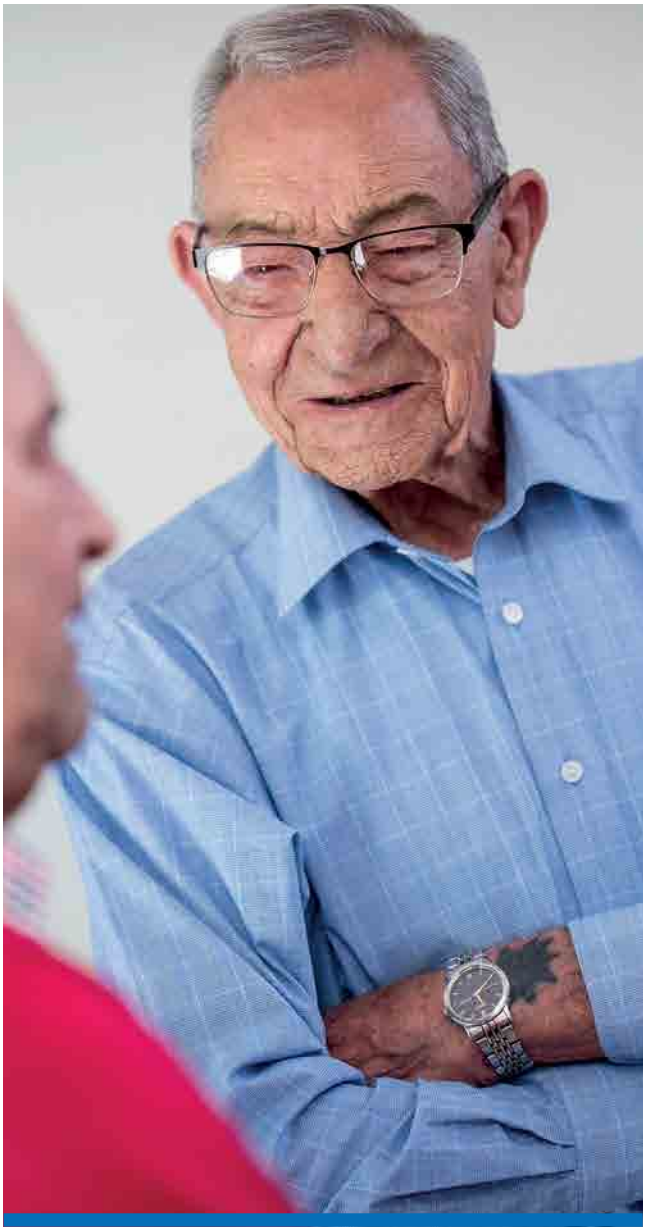


Making Things Better

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 equip our public sector staff to make smarter, informed, value for money spending decisions, that consider environmental and climate impacts 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 water and 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.

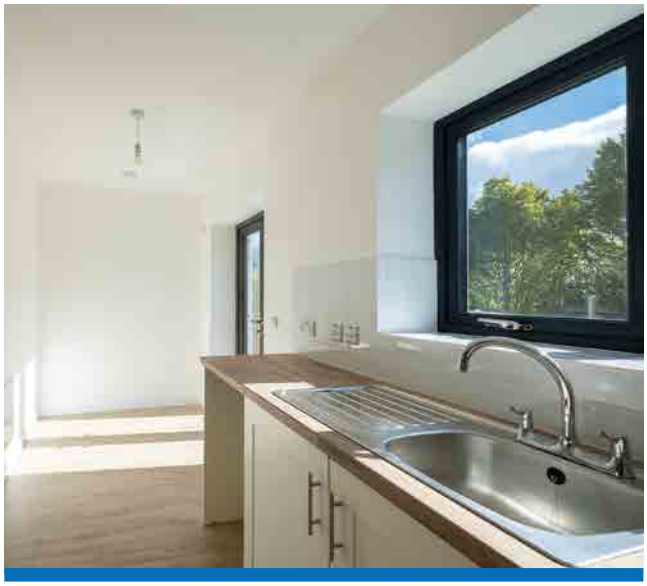
  We will make progress on the redevelopment of Casement Park and initiate investments in sub-regional and grass roots sports.

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. Retrofitting Homes 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 progressing delivery of the A5 **Western Transport Corridor** and publishing an annual Action Plan to support the **Road Safety Strategy**.

  We will build upon the **Union Connectivity Review,** which made recommendations to improve transport connectivity, enhance quality of life and build economic opportunities across the UK.

  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.



Peace:

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

We are 26 years into our journey as an Executive, and we need to make sure that Peace means a prosperous Northern Ireland for everyone.

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.

That experience is affected by risk factors that threaten individual development, limit social and economic opportunities, and increase the likelihood of mental and physical health problems, exploitation or abuse.

These risk factors exist in multiple places in our environment, at the individual and society level, partly because of the outworkings of existing policy or delivery across all departments. We recognise the societal impacts of not investing in our people and supporting them at all stages of their lives. Earlier intervention, however, helps reduce the risk factors; and to increase the protective factors in a child's life, so that everyone can reach her or his potential.

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, substance use, suicide prevention, 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.

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**. These strategies will begin to address the issues, barriers and disadvantages that prevent everyone from participating equally in our society.

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.



Poverty is a long-standing social issue in the daily lives of too many in our communities. Poverty can impact on health, education, living arrangements, employment opportunities and interaction with family, friends and wider society. People of all ages living in poverty often struggle to provide basic necessities for themselves and their families.

The Executive will bring forward an **Anti-Poverty Strategy**. This will benefit everyone struggling with the cost of living.

Dealing with poverty will also involve tackling issues such as educational attainment gaps and health inequalities. We will also ensure our society and economy provides opportunities for the future, providing high skilled and meaningful jobs, available for everyone.

Tackling Poverty will require all Northern Ireland Departments to work together with their Arms-Length Bodies and delivery partners in order to make a lasting change to our society. Poverty is not a matter for government alone to tackle, but for all public services, the voluntary and community sector and the wider population.

We will fulfil our duties under the Identity and Language (Northern Ireland) Act 2022 and establish three new offices for the Irish Language, Ulster-Scots & Ulster British Tradition, and Identity & Cultural Expression. Work is progressing on the development of the Executive's **Ulster-Scots Language Strategy, Heritage** and **Culture Strategy** and **Irish Language Strategy.**

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.

Our aim is to build stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural communities where people want to live, work, visit and invest and we will deliver a new **Rural Policy Framework**, developed collaboratively with our rural communities and across government that will help all policy makers and public service providers to better understand and engage with rural communities, enabling them to respond more effectively to the current and future challenges and opportunities they face.

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 including that 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 ageing 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.

It is vital that people are supported at all stages of their lives, and we are cognisant of demographic trends which will see our population growing older, with greater incidences of chronic illness and growing demand for palliative care. That is why we are committed to working across the Executive to identify opportunities to improve support to those coping with death, dying and bereavement.



Planet

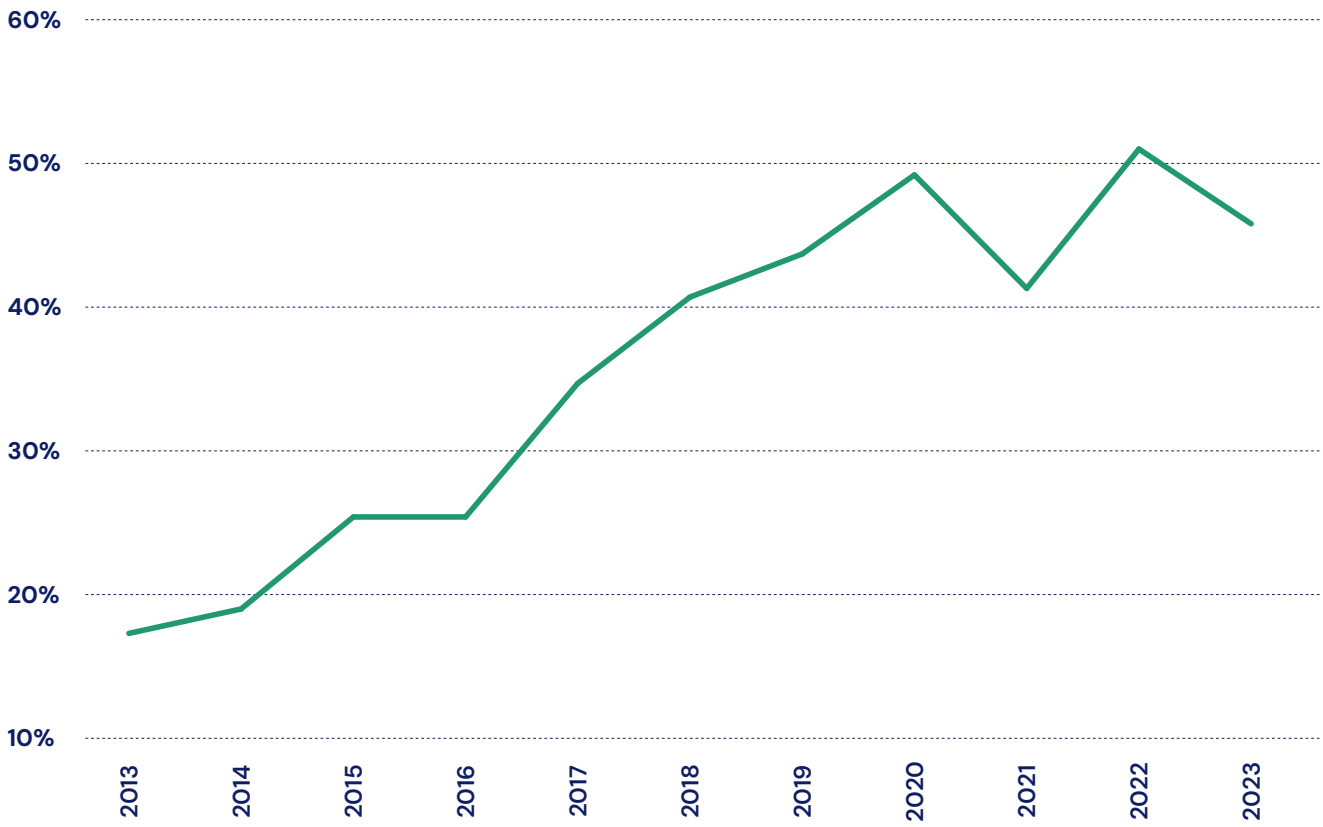


The Issue:

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.

Figure 2:
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 Executive and Assembly stood together to pass the Climate Change Act in 2022 that sets out ambitious commitments to achieving net zero and aligns with UK wider global commitments. The Climate Change Act (NI) 2022 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, environmental 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 finalising the development of our first Northern Ireland Climate Action Plan.

We have also worked across all government departments, with business and the private sector and with our partners in local government on developing our Third Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme (NICCAP3). We want a society focused on well-being with an economy that can grow sustainably whilst reducing our emissions and protecting our environment. Through our proposed actions we will take steps to support a fairer, cleaner, healthier future for all. We recognise that there needs to be collective ownership and a whole society approach to delivering just and fair climate action, reducing carbon emissions, restoring and protecting our environment and ensuring green growth is a catalyst for our economy. The public sector must lead the way and show our support for business and our communities that are already taking action to respond to climate change.

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 for current and future generations.

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 improve 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. We will consult on our draft Climate Action Plan in 2025 which will set out how we will deliver emissions reductions across all key sectors including energy, transport, agriculture, land use, land use change and forestry, buildings, waste and fisheries. Decarbonisation will bring 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.
- **Climate Change Adaptation Programme:** The impacts of climate change can be seen every day with the breaking of heat and rain records here, across Europe and beyond. We have also seen the devastating impacts of heatwaves, torrential rain and devastating flooding, and the threat to people's homes, to food production, to people's livelihoods and sadly with the tragic loss of life. We recognise that we need to prepare and adapt to the impacts of climate change that we are currently experiencing and are projected to experience. That is why in 2025 we will consult on and finalise our Third Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme (NICCAP3) which will set out an Executive agreed programme of climate resilience, how we will plan, prepare and build resilience, and incorporating key climate adaptation actions from right across every government department, councils and wider society.

- **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 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 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, 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 new institutions such as the East-West Ministerial Council and Intertrade UK have been established. 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-six 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 **the Programme for Government** creating a fair and prosperous future for all, and ensuring our story continues to inspire others.

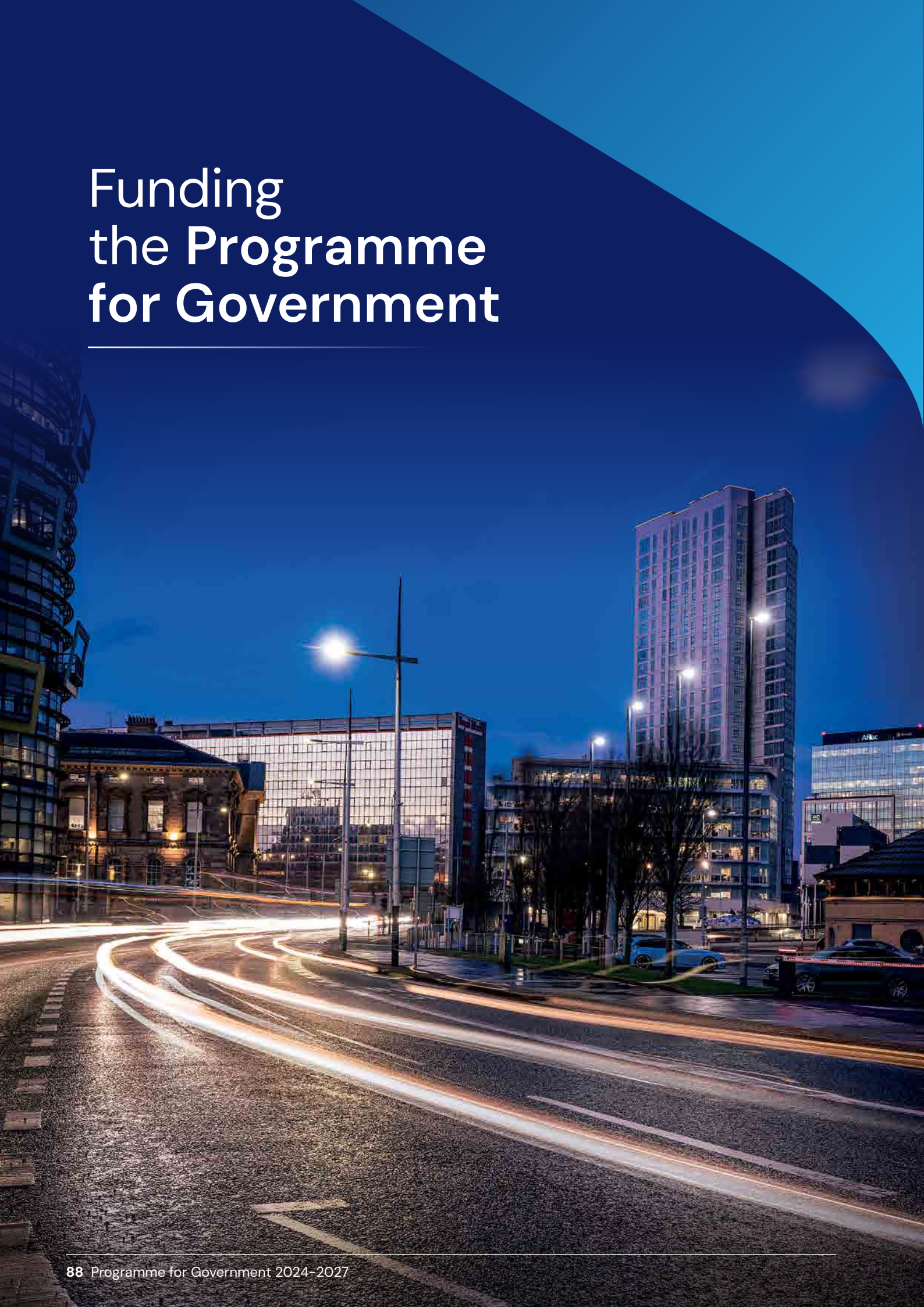
We will develop a **trauma-informed public sector**, equipping staff at all levels with the skills needed to work in partnership and support people as they rebuild a sense of control and empowerment in their lives.

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 **Programme for Government**



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 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. 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 2024/25 budget ahead of the Programme for Government to make sure departments had the certainty needed to run public services. This budget can be seen at this link www.finance-ni.gov.uk/news/executive-agrees-2024-25-budget

This will help departments plan ahead and get ready to deliver our joint priorities. The Executive will work together to develop and agree detailed policies as we move to delivery.

We will keep you updated by publishing annual reports on the progress we are making. This will show that meaningful progress is being made to deliver the projects and programmes included in the Programme for Government.

Annex




GRAND CENTRAL

Annex A

INDICATOR	SUBPOPULATION						
	NI Level	Assembly Area	Local Government District	Deprivation	Age	Sex	Urban Rural
Active travel – walking and cycling	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
Adult social care	✓						
Air pollution	✓						
Arts and cultural activities	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Availability of suitable housing[1]	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Children's social care	✓	✓	✓	✓	N/A	✓	✓
Coastal water condition	✓						
Community relations	✓				✓	✓	✓
Condition of protected sites	✓						
Crime prevalence rate	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cultural identity	✓				✓	✓	✓
Economic inactivity (excluding students)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Employment rate	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
External sales rate	✓		✓				
Good jobs[2]	✓		✓		✓	✓	
Greenhouse gas emissions	✓						
Healthy life expectancy (females)	✓			✓	N/A	N/A	✓
Healthy life expectancy (males)	✓			✓	N/A	N/A	✓

KEY: Indicators aligned to our Missions

✓ People ✓ Planet ✓ Prosperity ✓ Peace

INDICATOR	SUBPOPULATION						
	Marital status	Religion	Political opinion	Disability	Dependants	Sexual orientation	Ethnic group
Active travel – walking and cycling		✓		✓			
Adult social care							
Air pollution							
Arts and cultural activities	✓	✓		✓	✓		
Availability of suitable housing[1]	✓	✓		✓	✓		
Children's social care		✓		✓	✓		
Coastal water condition							
Community relations	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Condition of protected sites							
Crime prevalence rate	✓	✓		✓	✓		
Cultural identity	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Economic inactivity (excluding students)	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
Employment rate	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
External sales rate							
Good jobs[2]							
Greenhouse gas emissions							
Healthy life expectancy (females)							
Healthy life expectancy (males)							

KEY: Indicators aligned to our Missions

✓ People ✓ Planet ✓ Prosperity ✓ Peace

INDICATOR	SUBPOPULATION						
	NI Level	Assembly Area	Local Government District	Deprivation	Age	Sex	Urban Rural
Homelessness[3]	✓		✓		✓	✓	
Housing costs as a proportion of household income[1]	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Housing stress[3]	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
Income deprivation	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Income inequality	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
International reputation	✓						
Life satisfaction	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Life satisfaction among young people[4]	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
Loneliness	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mental health	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Ireland Composite Economic Index	✓						
Outdoor recreation	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Personal safety	✓						
Preventable deaths	✓	✓	✓	✓	N/A	✓	✓
Processing times for criminal cases[5]	✓				✓	✓	
Recycled waste	✓		✓				
Renewable electricity	✓						
Research and development	✓						
Respect	✓				✓	✓	✓

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INDICATOR	SUBPOPULATION						
	Marital status	Religion	Political opinion	Disability	Dependants	Sexual orientation	Ethnic group
Homelessness[3]		✓					✓
Housing costs as a proportion of household income[1]	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Housing stress[3]	✓	✓			✓		✓
Income deprivation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Income inequality	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
International reputation							
Life satisfaction	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Life satisfaction among young people[4]		✓		✓			✓
Loneliness	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
Mental health	✓	✓					
Northern Ireland Composite Economic Index							
Outdoor recreation							
Personal safety							
Preventable deaths							
Processing times for criminal cases[5]							
Recycled waste							
Renewable electricity							
Research and development							
Respect	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓

KEY: Indicators aligned to our Missions

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INDICATOR	SUBPOPULATION						
	NI Level	Assembly Area	Local Government District	Deprivation	Age	Sex	Urban Rural
River water quality	✓						
Safe towns and city centres	✓				✓	✓	✓
School leavers attainment gap[6]	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Self-efficacy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Self-efficacy among young people[4]	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
Shared community	✓				✓	✓	✓
Skills[7]	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Small for gestational age	✓						
Sport and physical activity	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sustainable travel – public transport	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
Trust in the media	✓				✓		
Trust in the NI Assembly	✓				✓		
Volunteering	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Worry about crime	✓						

[1] In addition to the subpopulation groups noted, tenure is provided for this indicator.

[2] In addition to the subpopulation groups noted, industry sector, occupation and work pattern are provided for this indicator.

[3] In addition to the subpopulation groups noted, household group is provided for this indicator.

[4] Age data is not available for this indicator, but data is provided by year group. In addition to the subpopulation groups noted, free school meal entitlement is provided for this indicator.

[5] In addition to the subpopulation groups noted, offence category and court type are provided for this indicator.

[6] Disability data is not of sufficient quality and so cannot be provided for this indicator. An additional breakdown is provided to show the figures by Special Educational Needs (SEN).

[7] In addition to the subpopulation groups noted, skills level is provided for this indicator.

KEY: Indicators aligned to our Missions

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INDICATOR	SUBPOPULATION						
	Marital status	Religion	Political opinion	Disability	Dependants	Sexual orientation	Ethnic group
River water quality							
Safe towns and city centres	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
School leavers attainment gap[6]		✓					✓
Self-efficacy	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Self-efficacy among young people[4]		✓		✓			✓
Shared community	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Skills[7]				✓			
Small for gestational age							
Sport and physical activity	✓	✓		✓	✓		
Sustainable travel – public transport		✓		✓			
Trust in the media							
Trust in the NI Assembly							
Volunteering	✓	✓		✓	✓		
Worry about crime							

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Northern Ireland Executive
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Programme for Government
2024-2027

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