



Public Accounts Committee

Report on Northern Ireland Energy Strategy

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Report: NIA 199/22-27 Public Accounts Committee



Northern Ireland
Assembly

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Powers and Membership

Powers

The Public Accounts Committee is a Standing Committee established in accordance with Standing Orders under Section 60(3) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. It is the statutory function of the Public Accounts Committee to consider the accounts, and reports on accounts laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The Public Accounts Committee is appointed under Assembly Standing Order No. 56 of the Standing Orders for the Northern Ireland Assembly. It has the power to send for persons, papers and records and to report from time to time. Neither the Chairperson nor Deputy Chairperson of the Committee shall be a member of the same political party as the Minister of Finance or of any junior minister appointed to the Department of Finance.

Membership

The Committee has 9 members, including a Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson, and a quorum of five members. The membership of the Committee is as follows:

- Mr Daniel McCrossan MLA (Chairperson)
- Mr Tom Buchanan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
- Mr Cathal Boylan MLA
- Mr Stephen Dunne MLA⁵
- Mr Colm Gildernew MLA
- Mr David Honeyford MLA
- Ms Áine Murphy MLA¹¹
- Mr Mike Nesbitt MLA^{1,2,3,6,10}

- Mr Gareth Wilson MLA

¹With effect from 5 March 2024 Mr John Stewart replaced Mr Robbie Butler

²With effect from 21 October 2024 Mr Colin Crawford replaced Mr John Stewart

³With effect from 31 July 2025 Mr Colin Crawford resigned

⁴With effect from 16 September 2025 Ms Diane Forsythe replaced Ms Cheryl Brownlee as Deputy Chairperson

⁵With effect from 23 September 2025 Mr Stephen Dunne replaced Ms Cheryl Brownlee

⁶With effect from 6 October 2025 Mr Jon Burrows replaced Mr Colin Crawford

⁸With effect from 2 March 2026 Mr Gareth Wilson replaced Ms Diane Forsythe

⁹With effect from 2 March 2026 Ms Jemma Dolan replaced Mr Pádraig Delargy

¹⁰With effect from 15 September 2026 Mr Mike Nesbitt replaced Mr Jon Burrows

¹¹With effect from 28 September 2026 Ms Áine Murphy replaced Ms Jemma Dolan

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms used in this Report

NI	Northern Ireland
NIAO	Northern Ireland Audit Office
NICS	Northern Ireland Civil Service
The Assembly	The Northern Ireland Assembly
The Chamber	Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry
The Committee	Public Accounts Committee
The Department	The Department for the Economy

Executive Summary

Introduction

1. The Public Accounts Committee met on 11 June 2026 to consider the Northern Ireland Audit Office's (NIAO) report "Northern Ireland Energy Strategy". The main witnesses were:
 - **Mr Ian Snowden**, Permanent Secretary, Department for the Economy;
 - **Mr Richard Rodgers**, Head of Energy, Department for the Economy;
 - **Ms Anne-Maire McConn**, Acting Director of Energy Strategy and Corporate Services, Department for the Economy;
 - **Ms Dorinnia Carville**, Comptroller and Auditor General, NIAO; and
 - **Mr Stuart Stevenson**, Treasury Officer of Accounts, Department of Finance.
2. The Committee heard oral evidence and received written updates from the Department for the Economy (the Department) on a number of matters.
3. The Committee considered the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry (the Chamber) report 'Powering Progress on Energy' published in January 2026 and wrote to some representatives of the business sector inviting written submissions on the Energy Strategy and its implementation. The responses received from a number of energy sector businesses and organisations were considered as evidence.

Background

4. The Energy Strategy for Northern Ireland, entitled '**The Path to Net Zero Energy**' is a Northern Ireland (NI) Executive strategy. It was published by the Executive in December 2021 and covers the period 2021–2030. The Department is the lead department for delivery. The long-term vision of the Energy Strategy is self-sufficiency and affordable net zero carbon energy that will support economic growth in Northern Ireland. To deliver that vision, Northern Ireland will need to reduce the amount of energy used, make sure that our energy comes from renewable sources and massively increase the size of our low-carbon and renewable energy economy.

5. The Energy Strategy has a key role in ensuring Northern Ireland meets its obligations in relation to net zero, energy efficiency and tackling climate change while also delivering affordable, secure energy for citizens and businesses. These are reflected in the Strategy's three key delivery targets:
- **Energy Savings:** 25% reduction in energy use from buildings and industry by 2030;
 - **Renewables:** at least 70% of electricity consumption from renewables (later increased to 80% by the Climate Change Act (NI) 2022); and
 - **Green Economy growth:** doubling turnover of the low-carbon and renewable energy economy to £2bn by 2030.
6. The NIAO's report concluded that, while the Department consulted a broad range of stakeholders in developing the energy strategy, there were significant flaws in its subsequent implementation. The Energy Strategy set three clear headline targets, but the annual Energy Strategy Action Plans did not align actions to these targets and many actions were vague, not time-bound, or lacked measurable outcomes. This represented a fundamental design weakness with the Department not demonstrating a clear line of progression from action planning to delivery. The report also highlighted the scale of underperformance in two of the three key Energy Strategy targets – energy efficiency and renewable energy – as well as issues around governance, monitoring and reporting.

Better communication and engagement are needed to improve stakeholder confidence in the delivery of the Energy Strategy and to educate and assist consumers

7. The Committee heard a clear message from business and energy sector stakeholders that confidence in delivery of the Energy Strategy is being undermined by a lack of clarity on what is being delivered, when key milestones will be achieved and how progress is contributing to the Strategy's 2030 targets. Stakeholders continue to seek greater certainty about the pathway to delivery.

8. The Committee is concerned that businesses, investors and consumers do not yet have the level of information required to make informed decisions and fully participate in the transition to a low-carbon economy. Uncertainty around future policies, support mechanisms and delivery timescales risk discouraging investment and slowing progress towards the Strategy's objectives. Businesses and other organisations that wrote to the Committee cautioned that potential investment in NI could be lost to Great Britain, Ireland or other European markets where policy support and delivery timescales are more predictable.
9. Members find it unacceptable that delays and a lack of certainty are adversely impacting the progression of new projects and investment in the NI economy.
10. Communication and engagement with energy sector stakeholders and consumers is a critical component of delivering the Strategy. Successful delivery of the Energy Strategy depends on the actions of consumers and multiple organisations outside the direct control of the lead department. Consumers and communities need clear, regular and effective communication and engagement to ensure buy-in and bring about behavioural change.
11. Departmental officials admitted that not enough has been done to help support people and businesses in Northern Ireland to assist the renewable energy economy and they accepted that there is a huge appetite among businesses to invest in energy efficiency measures. The Committee is very concerned that the current support and incentives provided to consumers and businesses are insufficient to drive the pace of change required and that more could and should be done in terms of promoting energy efficiency and decarbonisation measures.
12. Whilst the Committee acknowledges some recent improvements in reporting and transparency, including enhanced performance information and plans for an Energy Policy Statement, it considers that much more is required to provide stakeholders with confidence that delivery remains on track. The Committee believes stronger communication, more meaningful engagement

and clearer reporting will be essential to building trust, supporting investment and maintaining public confidence in the transition to low carbon and renewable energy.

The pace of delivery needs to accelerate significantly over the remaining four years to deliver on the 2030 energy savings and renewables targets

13. The Committee and stakeholders are clear in the message that the priority now must be action and implementation. The Committee heard evidence that significant challenges remain in achieving the Energy Strategy's headline targets by 2030. Written evidence from the Department notes that over £123 million has now been expended in relation to the Department's Energy Strategy. Despite this significant public expenditure, progress against the key energy savings and renewable energy objectives has not advanced at the pace needed to achieve the 2030 targets, raising concerns about whether delivery remains on track.

14. The Committee was particularly concerned by written evidence from stakeholders which highlighted significant issues in terms of infrastructure constraints, planning delays, grid limitations, delays to domestic retrofit, lack of support for the move to renewable energy, and policy slippage especially in areas such as biomethane. In addition, Departmental officials highlighted battery storage and delivery of the North/South Interconnector as significant dependencies. These issues continue to present significant barriers to increasing renewable electricity generation and reducing overall energy demand. With limited time remaining, the Committee considers there is little scope for further delay.

15. At the same time, the Committee recognises the significant economic opportunities associated with the transition to a clean, secure and affordable energy system. However, these opportunities will only be realised if government action, infrastructure development and private sector investment proceed at a considerably faster pace than has been the case to date. The Committee believes the final years of the Strategy must be

characterised by decisive delivery, stronger leadership and a clear focus on achieving measurable outcomes.

Better cross-departmental collaboration is needed to create the right market conditions to maximise economic investment and achieve the Energy Strategy targets

16. The Committee heard that successful delivery of the Energy Strategy depends on coordinated action across government. The Strategy reaches beyond the responsibilities of a single department and relies on effective coordinated action across multiple departments and public bodies.
17. Whilst examples of constructive partnership working were highlighted, the Committee remains concerned that departmental boundaries and competing priorities continue to impede delivery. Similar concerns have emerged across a range of previous Public Accounts Committee inquiries, reinforcing concerns that cross-cutting programmes still lack sufficiently strong collective ownership and accountability arrangements.
18. The Committee considers that creating the right conditions for economic investment and transition to cleaner energy requires stronger collective leadership, clearer accountability and more effective coordination across departments. Without this, there is a risk that opportunities for investment, economic growth and decarbonisation will not be fully realised.

Action planning and delivery discipline need urgent improvement

19. The Committee was disappointed and frustrated that fundamental weaknesses identified by the NIAO continue to affect the annual planning and reporting arrangements supporting the Energy Strategy. Five years into implementation, the Committee expected stronger evidence of delivery discipline, clearer accountability and greater focus on outcomes.
20. The Committee heard that previous Action Plans did not consistently provide measurable outcomes or clear timescales and actions were not clearly

linked to the Energy Strategy's three headline targets. Delays in publishing Action Plans and Annual Reports have further weakened transparency and reduced stakeholder confidence in delivery arrangements.

21. The Committee acknowledges that while some positive steps have been taken, more needs to be done. It is imperative that annual planning arrangements evolve from a process focused on activities, largely within the Energy Group, to one focused on delivery, performance, accountability and outcomes. Stakeholders need to be able to clearly understand what is being delivered, who is responsible and how success will be measured.

Governance landscape and reporting arrangements still require review

22. The Committee heard that weaknesses in governance, performance management and reporting have limited the effective oversight of the Energy Strategy. While the Department has taken steps to strengthen governance arrangements, the Committee remains concerned that scrutiny, challenge and accountability have not been sufficiently robust to provide assurance that delivery is progressing at the pace required to achieve the Strategy's ambitious objectives.

23. Whilst the Committee noted some recent improvements to reporting arrangements, concerns remain regarding the quality, timeliness and reliability of key performance information. Delayed data and changing performance baselines continue to make it difficult for the Department to assert with confidence the degree of progress made and to demonstrate value for money.

24. The Committee considers that the remaining years of the Strategy require stronger governance, clearer reporting and more robust accountability arrangements across government. Without reliable information and effective oversight, it will be difficult to demonstrate whether delivery is succeeding, whether public resources are being used effectively and whether the objectives of the Energy Strategy remain achievable.

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that, within the next six months, the Department develops and implements a comprehensive communication and stakeholder engagement strategy covering government departments, industry, local authorities, communities and consumers. This is vital if the Department is to build trust across both business and consumers and align cross-departmental delivery. Progress against this strategy should be published annually.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the Department progresses as far as possible the design of consumer and business support schemes linked to the achievement of Energy Strategy targets so that necessary approvals can be sought as soon as any emerging funding opportunities are secured and schemes introduced without delay.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the Department publishes the Energy Policy Statement within the current calendar year. The Statement must clearly set out for all stakeholders:

- what actions are required to deliver the Energy Strategy including key policy, legislative, regulatory and market interventions; and
- clear ownership, completion dates, and measurable milestones for each action to 2030 so stakeholders understand what will be delivered, when, how and by whom.

Recommendation 4

To demonstrate progress and strengthen accountability, the Committee recommends that the Statement is updated on a six-monthly basis outlining progress and explaining any delays and challenges. The Statement should be

reported through appropriate cross-government governance structures including the NICS Board and the Executive, to ensure collective oversight, accountability and delivery at pace.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that the Department, working with key stakeholders develops and publishes within six months a funded, time-bound plan to address grid capacity, transmission infrastructure and energy storage constraints.

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that progress against the Energy Strategy is reported annually to the NICS Board and the Executive to provide collective oversight, strengthen accountability and ensure that barriers to delivery are addressed promptly and on a cross-governmental basis.

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that the Department expedites the development of proposals for biomethane production and support mechanisms, and publishes progress within the next six months. Working closely with the Department of Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs, industry representatives and local communities, this work should balance energy security, environmental outcomes, value for money and community safety considerations.

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that the Department works with the Department for Infrastructure, local government and relevant stakeholders to identify and develop an action plan within six months to address planning and infrastructure barriers that are preventing timely implementation of renewable energy projects and achievement of the 2030 Energy Strategy targets.

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that the Department undertakes an urgent review of the effectiveness of its annual planning and reporting cycle. The review should consider the timing of the Department's annual report on the prior year's

actions as the primary measure of its performance in delivering the Energy Strategy for that year, with reporting improvements implemented immediately.

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that the annual Action Plan is compiled on a cross-departmental basis, with clear articulation of respective responsibilities for individual actions. It should be published in advance of the year to which it relates, with clearly articulated, measurable outcomes and defined milestones to assist in enhancing stakeholder confidence in the delivery of the Strategy. It should also explain where actions have not been delivered or need to be changed.

Recommendation 11

The Committee recommends that within three months of publication of the Energy Policy Statement the Department completes the recommended review of governance and performance reporting arrangements, and reports the findings to the NICS Board and the Executive. The review should assess whether the governance arrangements provide sufficient oversight, challenge, accountability and cross-departmental coordination to support collective delivery of the Energy Strategy.

Introduction

25. The Public Accounts Committee met on 11 June 2026 to consider the Northern Ireland Audit Office's (NIAO) report "Northern Ireland Energy Strategy". The main witnesses were:

- **Mr Ian Snowden**, Permanent Secretary, Department for the Economy;
- **Mr Richard Rodgers**, Head of Energy, Department for the Economy;
- **Ms Anne-Maire McConn**, Acting Director of Energy Strategy and Corporate Services, Department for the Economy;
- **Ms Dorinnia Carville**, Comptroller and Auditor General, NIAO; and
- **Mr Stuart Stevenson**, Treasury Officer of Accounts, Department of Finance.

26. The Committee also sought written updates from the Department for the Economy on a number of matters prior to the evidence session and also received subsequent written clarification from the Department on matters raised during its oral evidence session.

27. The Committee also considered the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry (the Chamber) report 'Powering Progress on Energy' published in January 2026 and received written evidence from a number of energy sector businesses and organisations.

Background

28. The Energy Strategy for Northern Ireland, titled '**The Path to Net Zero Energy**' was published by the Northern Ireland (NI) Executive in December 2021 and covers the period 2021–2030. The Department for the Economy ('the Department') is the lead department for delivery. The long-term vision of the Energy Strategy is self-sufficiency and affordable net zero carbon energy that will support economic growth in Northern Ireland.

29. The Energy Strategy has a key role in ensuring Northern Ireland meets its obligations in relation to net zero, energy efficiency and tackling climate

change while also delivering affordable, secure energy for citizens and businesses. These are reflected in the Strategy's three key delivery targets:

- **Energy Savings:** 25% reduction in energy use from buildings and industry by 2030;
- **Renewables:** at least 70% of electricity consumption from renewables (later increased to 80% by the Climate Change Act (NI) 2022); and
- **Green Economy growth:** doubling turnover of the low-carbon and renewable energy economy to £2bn by 2030.

30. The NIAO's report concluded that, while the Department consulted a broad range of stakeholders in developing the energy strategy, there were significant flaws in its subsequent implementation.

31. The Energy Strategy set three clear headline targets but the annual Energy Strategy Action Plans did not align actions to these targets and many actions were vague, not time-bound, or lacked measurable outcomes. This represented a fundamental design weakness with the Department not demonstrating a clear line of progression from action planning to delivery.

32. NIAO also highlighted the scale of underperformance in two of the three key Energy Strategy targets – energy efficiency and renewable energy generation – as well as issues around governance, monitoring and reporting.

33. The Department confirmed that expenditure since 2020 relating to Energy Group staffing costs and selected energy-related programmes led by the Department has now reached £123.8 million.

34. NIAO reported that in the absence of regular monitoring and reporting against the key targets and metrics, the Department was unable to conclude what degree of progress against these had been delivered by the actions it had undertaken and it was therefore difficult for the Department to assess whether progress was at a sufficient pace to meet its 2030 targets.

35. NIAO concluded that as it was not possible to assess the impact of the actions, expenditure could not be confirmed to be an efficient use of resources and represent good value for money.

Better communication and engagement are needed to improve stakeholder confidence in the delivery of the Energy Strategy and to educate and assist consumers

36. The Committee was concerned by the lack of transparency and accountability in the delivery of the Energy Strategy. Evidence from both the NIAO and stakeholders highlighted that businesses, consumers and wider stakeholders lack clarity on what actions are being taken, when they will be delivered and how they contribute to achieving the 2030 targets.
37. Communication emerged as a key theme during the evidence session. Officials acknowledged that they were not effectively communicating progress and accepted that stakeholders were unclear about what was being delivered, how it was being delivered and the progress being made. The Department highlighted that some improvements have been made since publication of the NIAO report including a public-facing dashboard, annual statistical reporting and also the proposed Energy Policy Statement. However, it considers that much more is required to improve stakeholder and consumer confidence in delivery of the Energy Strategy.
38. The Committee noted evidence from the Chamber report that businesses require greater certainty on policy direction, timelines and delivery plans to support investment decisions. The Chamber report also stressed the need for a clearer pathway for domestic, commercial and industrial heating. Furthermore, it highlighted concerns that uncertainty and delays are reducing investor confidence and slowing progress towards the Energy Strategy's objectives. Consumers similarly require clear information on the costs, benefits and implications of the transition to low carbon and renewable energy.
39. The Committee pressed officials on whether sufficient support had been provided to consumers and businesses. Officials accepted that more could and should be done and also highlighted that whilst there may be a huge demand and appetite to invest in energy efficiency measures, funding constraints are a significant barrier to expanding support for energy efficiency and decarbonisation measures. While the Committee recognises

the financial pressures facing the Department, it is concerned that current support is insufficient to drive the pace of change required.

40. The Committee learned from officials that there were a number of potential sources of government funding available from the UK government. For example, there is an allocation of about £33 million per year from the UK Treasury to decarbonise heat for businesses. Whilst closure of RHI will use up part of that money, a reasonably substantial sum per year will remain available for other uses. The Department also told the Committee that they have secured the agreement of Treasury that it will work with them on a proposal for the use of money for biomethane in industrial settings. That will allow a funding stream to develop a viable support system in conjunction with industry, that will help industrial biomethane production.
41. The Committee noted that there is a significant opportunity to access funding and potentially develop incentive and support schemes for businesses and consumers. It is crucial therefore that the Department secures any emerging funding opportunities without delay and is planning ahead to ensure that potential schemes can be up and running as quickly as possible when the funding becomes available.
42. The Committee was frustrated by the lack of clarity around progress, delivery timescales and expected outcomes. Committee Members repeatedly struggled to obtain clarity from officials on what actions remained outstanding and whether delivery remained on track to meet the 2030 targets. Unexplained changes to baselines and performance metrics also risk undermining stakeholder confidence in reported progress.
43. The Committee is concerned that businesses have advised that they are ready to invest in renewable energy and low-carbon technologies but they continue to face uncertainty arising from policy delays, infrastructure constraints and the absence of clear implementation timelines. Businesses require certainty, coordinated leadership and timely delivery of enabling policies and support if Northern Ireland is to maximise investment opportunities and achieve its renewable energy ambitions.

44. The Committee also expressed concern that the negative legacy of RHI may have contributed to reduced public and business confidence in government energy interventions. Whilst officials emphasised the importance of applying lessons learned from RHI and avoiding poorly designed support schemes, the Committee considers that caution must not become a barrier to timely decision-making and delivery.

45. Communication and engagement with all stakeholders including consumers is a critical component of delivering the Strategy. Programmes involve significant changes not just in terms of how electricity is generated, transported, and regulated but also how it is consumed. Delivery against targets therefore depends on the actions of multiple organisations and consumers outside the control of the lead department. Consumers and communities need strong, clear, and effective ongoing communication and engagement to ensure buy-in.

46. The Committee considers that the Department must significantly improve how it communicates, engages and reports on delivery of the Energy Strategy. Greater transparency, clearer reporting and a more visible delivery pathway to 2030 are essential to strengthen public confidence, support investment decisions and demonstrate progress towards the Strategy's targets.

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that, within the next six months, the Department develops and implements a comprehensive communication and stakeholder engagement strategy covering government departments, industry, local authorities, communities and consumers. This is vital if the Department is to build trust across both business and consumers and align cross-departmental delivery. Progress against this strategy should be published annually.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the Department progresses as far as possible the design of consumer and business support schemes linked to

the achievement of Energy Strategy targets so that necessary approvals can be sought as soon as any emerging funding opportunities are secured and schemes introduced without delay.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the Department publishes the Energy Policy Statement within the current calendar year. The Statement must clearly set out for all stakeholders:

- what actions are required to deliver the Energy Strategy including key policy, legislative, regulatory and market interventions; and
- clear ownership, completion dates, and measurable milestones for each action to 2030 so stakeholders understand what will be delivered, when, how and by whom.

Recommendation 4

To demonstrate progress and strengthen accountability, the Committee recommends that the Statement is updated on a six-monthly basis outlining progress and explaining any delays and challenges. The Statement should be reported through appropriate cross-government governance structures including the NICS Board and the Executive, to ensure collective oversight, accountability and delivery at pace.

The pace of delivery needs to accelerate significantly over the remaining four years to deliver on the 2030 energy savings and renewables targets

47. The Committee is concerned that, despite significant public expenditure, limited progress has been made against the Energy Strategy's key targets. The NIAO highlighted that insufficient attention had been given to whether progress was at the pace required to achieve the 2030 targets and identified particular concerns around energy savings and renewable electricity generation. The Department's own Mid-Term Review of the Energy Strategy

published in December 2025 similarly acknowledged that significant delivery challenges and barriers remain. The Committee is therefore concerned that the Department cannot demonstrate that progress is on track to achieve the 2030 targets and that expenditure to date does not represent value for money.

48. The Committee noted that officials were least confident about achieving the target of 80 per cent electricity consumption from renewables by 2030. Witnesses identified significant dependencies including major grid investment, grid optimisation, battery storage solutions and delivery of the North/South Interconnector, which is now not expected until 2031. Whilst officials contended that progress would accelerate as enabling infrastructure and support mechanisms come into effect, the Committee remains concerned about whether sufficient time remains to deliver the level of change required.

49. In relation to the energy savings target, officials maintained that progress was stronger than originally reported and highlighted that reporting arrangements are subject to significant time lags, with some data up to two years in arrears. However, the Committee remains concerned that delivery of future savings is heavily dependent on a range of interventions, many of which have yet to be implemented at scale including substantial investment in heat decarbonisation, retrofit schemes and smart technologies.

50. The Committee welcomed the Department's confidence that the £2 billion Green Economy target is likely to be achieved and potentially exceeded by 2030. It was noted that the energy transition to cleaner, more secure and affordable renewable energy sources brings the potential for significant economic opportunities for Northern Ireland businesses.

51. Written evidence from the Chamber report concluded that Northern Ireland is not moving at the pace required to deliver the Energy Strategy. It also highlighted policy delays, legislative bottlenecks, infrastructure constraints, planning challenges and a lack of investment certainty as major barriers to progress.

52. In evidence submitted to the Committee by a number of energy sector business and organisations, concerns were highlighted that businesses are ready to invest in low-carbon technologies and renewable energy projects in Northern Ireland, but they continue to be discouraged by policy uncertainty, delays in support mechanisms and inadequate market signals. Members were repeatedly told that investors require clear timelines, predictable policy and stronger government leadership to support investment decisions and accelerate implementation of energy solutions.
53. Whilst the Committee acknowledges that some progress has been made, it remains concerned about the achievability of the headline 2030 targets. The Committee was advised that renewable electricity consumption was 50 per cent in the year to June 2026, having recovered from 43 per cent in the year to January 2025. However, this remains significantly short of the 80 per cent target by 2030 and therefore considerable progress is still required in energy efficiency, heat decarbonisation and renewable generation. Infrastructure constraints, planning delays, grid limitations and policy slippage all present significant risks to successful delivery.
54. Witnesses heard from officials about the importance of ‘grid optimisation’ and the need for investment. Some of the barriers cited most consistently by energy sector businesses and other organisations in their written submissions related to infrastructure planning and regulation around issues such as grid capacity, transmission infrastructure, connection times and uncertainty about when the necessary network works will be completed. Limited storage capacity solutions were also a key concern. The Committee was told how lengthy planning and consenting processes, delays involving statutory consultees and legal challenges, not only increased project costs but can prevent mature projects from proceeding. The written submissions also called for better alignment between planning, grid development and economic policy so that projects and enabling infrastructure progress together. They also emphasised the importance of land access, early community engagement and appropriate community benefits in securing public support for major infrastructure.

55. The Committee is not assured that sufficient urgency has been demonstrated to date to address these risks. The Committee considers that greater public sector leadership and clearer implementation timetables are required if private sector investment is to be unlocked at the scale necessary to achieve the Energy Strategy ambitions.

56. The Committee considers that the final years of the Energy Strategy require a much stronger focus on delivery. A clear roadmap to 2030, stronger partnership working across government and industry, and decisive action to address infrastructure, investment and policy barriers will be essential if Northern Ireland is to have any realistic prospect of achieving its Energy Strategy targets.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that the Department, working with key stakeholders develops and publishes within six months a funded, time-bound plan to address grid capacity, transmission infrastructure and energy storage constraints.

Better cross-departmental collaboration is needed to create the right market conditions to maximise economic investment and achieve the Energy Strategy targets

57. The Programme for Government highlights the importance of collective leadership and collaboration across departments to deliver priorities such as energy savings, renewable energy, decarbonisation and economic growth. The Committee notes that the Energy Strategy is not solely a Department for the Economy programme but a whole-of-government programme that depends on coordinated action across multiple departments and public bodies.
58. The NIAO found that, whilst cross-departmental governance structures were in place, these did not always result in effective delivery. The Committee is concerned that departments can choose not to progress previously agreed actions, creating a risk that Energy Strategy commitments could be delayed, altered or abandoned without sufficient challenge, transparency or accountability.
59. Officials highlighted that individual departments ultimately retain responsibility for decisions within their own areas and that delivery is dependent on individual departmental priorities. The Committee remains concerned that this limits collective accountability and can weaken delivery of cross-cutting programmes such as delivery of the Energy Strategy.
60. The Committee was exasperated that the issue of individual departmental responsibilities continues to be cited across a range of inquiries as a reason for limited progress on cross-cutting issues. The Committee considers that this reflects a continuing silo mentality within government and reinforces the need for stronger collective leadership and accountability arrangements.
61. Officials highlighted examples of positive collaboration, particularly between the Department and the Department for Communities on issues such as domestic energy efficiency and fuel poverty interventions. The Committee

notes these examples of partnership working but expects greater progress in translating collaboration into delivery.

62. Witnesses highlighted biomethane as a key example of why collaboration matters and an area where coordinated action between the Department and the Department of Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs could deliver multiple benefits simultaneously supporting both energy transition and environmental objectives. Members also highlighted that meeting the needs and concerns of communities should be addressed.
63. Biomethane was an issue raised in written submissions from energy sector business and other organisations who felt that the absence of a dedicated policy, commercial support mechanism and route to market were identified as the main barriers. Written submissions welcomed the re-established interdepartmental working group but called for timely policy, legislation and financial and regulatory support. They warned that projects for production of renewable gas could otherwise move to jurisdictions with established support arrangements.
64. Committee Members expressed profound dissatisfaction about planning delays, infrastructure constraints and the responsiveness of the planning system. Whilst planning decisions often sit with local councils and broader planning policy responsibilities rest elsewhere, the Committee considers that closer working between the Department, the Department for Infrastructure, local government and other stakeholders will be essential if renewable energy ambitions are to be realised.
65. A very clear message taken from the evidence was that delivery of the Energy Strategy cannot be achieved by the Department acting alone. Key enablers sit across a range of departments, including planning, housing, transport, infrastructure, agriculture and environmental regulation. Without effective coordination there is a risk of fragmented delivery, duplication of effort and reduced value for money, limiting the economic, environmental and social benefits that the Strategy is intended to achieve.

66. The Committee considers that stronger cross-departmental governance, clearer accountability arrangements, shared milestones and transparent reporting are essential to ensure that departments work collectively towards achieving the Energy Strategy targets. Whilst examples of collaboration exist, the Committee is not yet convinced that sufficient arrangements are in place to ensure delivery at the pace required.

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that progress against the Energy Strategy is reported annually to the NICS Board and the Executive to provide collective oversight, strengthen accountability and ensure that barriers to delivery are addressed promptly and on a cross-governmental basis.

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that the Department expedites the development of proposals for biomethane production and support mechanisms and publishes progress within the next six months.

Working closely with the Department of Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs, industry representatives and local communities, this work should balance energy security, environmental outcomes, value for money and community safety considerations.

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that the Department works with the Department for Infrastructure, local government and relevant stakeholders to identify and develop an action plan within six months to address planning and infrastructure barriers that are preventing timely implementation of renewable energy projects and achievement of the 2030 Energy Strategy targets.

Action planning and delivery discipline need urgent improvement

67. The Committee was very frustrated that, five years into a ten-year strategy, annual action planning, reporting and accountability arrangements remain inadequate. The Committee was particularly disappointed that the most recent Action Plan and Annual Report did not fully address the NIAO's concerns regarding timescales, measurable outcomes and accountability.

68. NIAO found that the Annual Energy Strategy Action Plans (ESAPs) contained significant design weaknesses. Actions were not clearly linked to the Energy Strategy's three headline targets, were often vague, lacked measurable outcomes and were not sufficiently time bound. These weaknesses limited transparency, reduced accountability and made it difficult to assess whether actions were contributing to delivery of the Strategy's objectives. The NIAO also identified weaknesses in oversight and scrutiny arrangements.

69. The Committee was concerned that progress against actions and targets was further undermined by delays in publishing Action Plans and Annual Reports and by a lack of continuity between successive plans. The 2026 Action Plan was not published until 26 May 2026, almost halfway through the year. Officials advised that this was partly due to efforts to reflect the NIAO's recommendations within the revised plan.

70. Witnesses acknowledged weaknesses in the earlier Action Plans and accepted that the 2026 Action Plan was still not "perfect", advising that the Department was continuing to learn and improve its approach. The Committee also noted officials' acknowledgement that stakeholders remain unclear about what actions are being delivered, how they are being delivered and what progress is being achieved.

71. The Committee was not convinced that the 2026 Action Plan sufficiently addressed the concerns raised by the NIAO. Members highlighted that it was unclear how individual actions contributed to achievement of the

Energy Strategy targets. The Committee was also concerned by the absence of clear completion dates and measurable milestones against many actions, making it difficult to assess whether delivery is on track or whether further intervention is required.

72. The Committee notes the Department's subsequent update on progress in delivering the 2026 Action Plan. However, the Committee remains concerned that progress in completing individual actions does not in itself demonstrate that sufficient progress is being made.

73. The Committee considers that the current Action Plan remains focused primarily on the activities of the Department's Energy Group rather than on a whole-of-government approach to delivering the Energy Strategy. Successful delivery depends on coordinated action across multiple departments and organisations.

74. Annual Energy Strategy Action Plans are central to the successful delivery of the Energy Strategy. In order to facilitate transparency, accountability and effective performance management, Action Plans are required to be produced on a timely basis, contain clearly defined and measurable actions, include firm delivery deadlines and demonstrate how each action contributes to achievement of the Strategy's targets. This facilitates more effective scrutiny, strengthens accountability and provides stakeholders with greater confidence in the delivery of the Energy Strategy.

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that the Department undertakes an urgent review of the effectiveness of its annual planning and reporting cycle. The review should consider the timing of the Department's annual report on the prior year's actions as the primary measure of its performance in delivering the Energy Strategy for that year, with reporting improvements implemented immediately.

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that the annual Action Plan is compiled on a cross-departmental basis, with clear articulation of respective responsibilities for individual actions. It should be published in advance of the year to which it relates, with clearly articulated, measurable outcomes and defined milestones to assist in enhancing stakeholder confidence in the delivery of the Strategy. It should also explain where actions have not been delivered or need to be changed.

Governance landscape and reporting arrangements still require review

75. NIAO reported that governance arrangements were complex and ineffective in identifying, escalating and addressing weaknesses in delivery. It also found that performance reporting lacked clarity and raised concerns about the authority to pause, amend or abandon actions without sufficient oversight, creating risks to achievement of the Energy Strategy targets.

76. Witnesses told the Committee that lessons had been learned from the NIAO findings and that governance arrangements had been streamlined. Officials advised that a revised structure was now in place comprising an Energy Strategy Oversight Group supported by an Action Plan Working Group, with regular reporting and increased scrutiny of delivery against actions.

77. The Committee noted improvements to governance and reporting arrangements, including more frequent monitoring, enhanced reporting mechanisms, the introduction of a public-facing dashboard and annual statistical reporting. Officials also advised that an Energy Policy Statement will be published by the end of the year setting out future milestones and informing subsequent Action Plans.

78. The Committee heard, however, that significant challenges remain in relation to performance information. Key statistics are subject to delays of up to two years and can be revised retrospectively, limiting their usefulness

for performance management and reducing the Department's ability to identify issues and take corrective action on a timely basis.

79. Robust governance depends on reliable data, effective challenge and transparent reporting. The Committee considers that stakeholders must be able to understand what is being delivered, whether progress is sufficient and whether the Energy Strategy targets remain achievable. Clear performance information is also essential to demonstrate impact, support accountability and assess value for money.

80. Whilst recognising that steps have been taken to strengthen governance and reporting arrangements, the Committee is not yet convinced that sufficient assurance is available on the delivery of the Energy Strategy. The Committee remains concerned that weaknesses in performance reporting, delayed data and changing performance baselines continue to make it difficult for the Department to demonstrate progress and for those responsible for delivery to be held to account.

81. The Committee is disappointed that the formal review of the effectiveness of governance and performance reporting arrangements, as recommended by the NIAO, has not yet been completed. Given the limited remaining years of the Strategy, it is increasingly important that governance, accountability and performance management arrangements are efficient and effective.

Recommendation 11

The Committee recommends that within three months of publication of the Energy Policy Statement the Department completes the recommended review of governance and performance reporting arrangements and reports the findings to the NICS Board and the Executive. The review should assess whether the governance arrangements provide sufficient oversight, challenge, accountability and cross-departmental coordination to support collective delivery of the Energy Strategy.

Links to Appendices

Appendix 1: Minutes of Proceedings

[View Minutes of Proceedings of Committee meetings related to the report](#)

Appendix 2: Minutes of Evidence

[View Minutes of Evidence from evidence sessions related to the report](#)

Appendix 3: Correspondence

[View correspondence issued and received related to the report](#)

Appendix 4: Other Documents

[View other documents related to the report](#)

Appendix 5: List of Witnesses that gave evidence to the Committee

- **Mr Ian Snowden**, Permanent Secretary, Department for the Economy;
- **Mr Richard Rodgers**, Head of Energy, Department for the Economy;
- **Ms Anne-Maire McConn**, Acting Director of Energy Strategy and Corporate Services, Department for the Economy;
- **Ms Dorinnia Carville**, Comptroller and Auditor General, NIAO; and
- **Mr Stuart Stevenson**, Treasury Officer of Accounts, Department of Finance.

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