



The
Executive Office

www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk

Stormont Castle

BELFAST

BT4 3TT

Tel: 028 9037 8228

Email: ps.ministers@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk

**Edwin Poots MLA
Speaker
Northern Ireland Assembly
Room 39
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Stormont
Belfast BT4 3XX**

26 May 2026

Dear Mr Speaker,

PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT ANNUAL REPORT 2025-2026

We wish to notify you of our intention to make a Written Statement on the publication of the Programme for Government Annual Report 2025-2026.

At the time of the launch of the Programme for Government 2024-2027 on 03 March 2025, a commitment was made in the Assembly to publish annual reports to ensure transparency about the progress that is being made.

We are pleased that we are now in a position to publish the Programme for Government Annual Report 2025-2026 following Executive agreement.

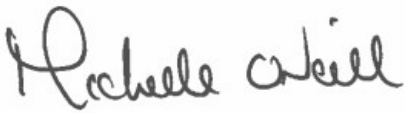
Due to the timing of the report launch, which will take place during the afternoon of 27th May, we request that the Written Ministerial Statement is embargoed until 1:30pm on Wednesday 27th May 2026.

A copy of the report and annexed Public Sector Transformation Fund Annual Report 2025-2026 will be placed in the Assembly Library for 1:30pm on Wednesday 27th May.

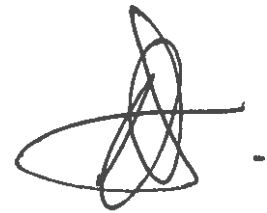
A copy of the Written Statement is attached for information.

PLEASE NOTE EMBARGOED TO 1:30PM WEDNESDAY 27 MAY 2026.

Yours sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Michelle O'Neill in black ink.

**Michelle O'Neill MLA
First Minister**

Handwritten signature of Emma Little-Pengelly in black ink.

**Emma Little-Pengelly MLA
deputy First Minister**

Written Statement to the Northern Ireland Assembly

PUBLICATION OF THE PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT ANNUAL REPORT 2025-2026

Wednesday 27 May 2026

EMBARGOED UNTIL 13:30 ON WEDNESDAY 27 MAY 2026

MICHELLE O'NEILL MLA
First Minister

EMMA LITTLE-PENGELLY MLA
deputy First Minister

The Executive Office

PUBLICATION OF THE PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT ANNUAL REPORT 2025-2026

We wish to update the Assembly on the publication of the Programme for Government (PfG) Annual Report for 2025-2026.

When the Executive agreed the Programme for Government (PfG) 2024–2027, Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most, we committed to working together to bring about real change that people here could see and feel in their everyday lives. We set an ambitious

programme to address the challenges that so many families face. These commitments centered around nine key priorities, underpinned by longer-term objectives that would build new foundations for the future. The PfG is not the totality of the Executive's ambition for people here. There is significant work going on across departments that is making a real difference in communities.

Today (Wednesday 27 May 2026), the PfG Annual Report for 2025-2026 has been published. We believe that this report demonstrates the tangible progress that has been made towards the nine PfG priorities across the Executive. Delivered through a shared ambition and despite the challenging financial context in which we are operating, the achievements made this year reflect a collective endeavour, with departments, local government, the voluntary and community sector, and businesses all playing vital roles. Of course, a Programme for Government is not just about the here and now, it has to build for the future. Work is also progressing on the longer term Missions of People, Planet, Prosperity, the cross-cutting commitment to Peace, and the Building New Foundations commitments.

We believe that as a result of the work that has been carried out to deliver on the commitments in the PfG, people are seeing a real difference. Local families have saved an estimated £26 million from the Childcare Subsidy Scheme and the £135 million invested in cutting health waiting times has meant that over 237,000 additional patients have been treated.

The £55 million invested in early learning and childcare provision has resulted in over 2,500 additional full-time pre-school education places and the £20 million invested in delivery of the Skills Fund from July 2024 is supporting 17,000 individuals to upskill and reskill.

Within our commitment to provide better support for children and young people with Special Educational Needs, improved outcomes are being delivered. One example of this has been the creation of an additional 157 classes for 1,374 pupils across 123 schools.

A range of work has also been carried out to speed up justice, which is supported by the £20.5 million funding secured from the Public Sector Transformation Board. This is part of our continued commitment to keep our communities safe.

Across the range of progress that has been made to date, much has been as a result of strong cross-departmental and partnership working. From enabling 5,300 additional properties to connect to wastewater infrastructure to investing £83.7 million in housing support services assisting 20,000 vulnerable individuals and families to live independently, we are clear that, by working together, we can deliver more for our people.

Of course, we recognise that there is still more to do and we are clear that many of the challenges we face cannot be resolved overnight. There can be no room for complacency. Over £5 million has been invested in the Local and Regional Change Funds to support vital, on-the-ground work to tackle violence against women and girls. Ending the scourge of Violence Against Women and Girls will remain a key priority for this Executive.

Reversing the damage caused to Lough Neagh is part of a longer-term plan, and good progress is being made in delivering the Lough Neagh Action Plan.

There is no doubt we are taking steps in the right direction.

As we move into the final year of the Programme for Government, we recognise that many challenges remain, not least the extremely difficult financial position. Quite simply, we have consistently been under-funded relative to our level of need. We will continue to press for a fair and sustainable funding model to enable us to invest in our public services, to ensure they can properly meet the needs of all our people.

However, we know that there is no simple fix for the strain on our public services, even with increased funding. This is why reform and transformation are central to the Programme for Government. The PfG Annual Report 2025-2026 demonstrates that we are already driving delivery on this front. This has included establishing an Office of AI and Digital to drive innovation and investing £129 million through the Public

Sector Transformation Fund across innovative projects in Health, Justice, Infrastructure and Education.

We agree as an Executive that our obligations do not end with this mandate. We will continue to encourage and support innovative and new solutions for the delivery of the PfG. The Public Sector Transformation Fund Annual Report 2025-2026, which is annexed to the PfG Annual Report, details further transformation projects which were announced by the Finance Minister yesterday. With significant potential to bring about visible and lasting improvements to the way frontline services are delivered, including to some of the most vulnerable in society, this is a welcome next step as we work to protect the sustainability of services in the longer term.

We remain committed to shaping a better, fairer and more prosperous future for everyone and we hope that this Annual Report gives confidence that we are moving collectively in the right direction to do what matters most for the people that live here.



Northern Ireland
Executive

www.northernireland.gov.uk

OUR PLAN:

Doing What Matters Most

Programme for Government
2024-2027

Annual Report
2025-2026



Programme for Government Annual Report 2025-2026

To find out more visit
northernireland.gov.uk/PfG
or scan:



Contents

Foreword of the First Minister and deputy First Minister	4
Overview of PfG Commitments	5
Progress Update on the Nine PfG Priorities	6–23
Building New Foundations	24–27
Missions	28–36
Our Impact	37–38

Foreword of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Over the past year, we have continued to do what matters most for the people that live here. When we launched the Programme for Government, we committed to working together, to deliver meaningful progress and improve everyday life for individuals, families, and communities.

That commitment has guided our work throughout the year and we believe that our 2025–26 annual report shows that the Executive has delivered significant progress across all nine PfG priorities and laid firmer foundations for the future, despite ongoing financial pressures.

The achievements in this Annual Report reflect a collective endeavour, with departments, local government, the voluntary and community sector, and businesses across Northern Ireland all playing vital roles. Through our Missions of People, Planet and Prosperity, underpinned by our commitment to Peace, we have strengthened public services, supported communities, invested in infrastructure and innovation, and taken action to protect our environment.

Central to this work is the Wellbeing Framework, which helps us to understand and take action to improve quality of life here. By recognising the social, economic, environmental and democratic factors that shape wellbeing, the Framework allows us to analyse long-term progress and continues to guide how we respond to the most pressing issues affecting our people.

As we move into the final year of our mandate, the current global context

presents undoubted risks, from ongoing conflict, mounting cost of living pressures and wider economic and geopolitical uncertainty. Whilst we recognise the challenges ahead and know that our financial position remains very difficult, we remain committed to improving wellbeing for everyone.

The progress that we have achieved this year demonstrates what can be delivered through partnership and shared ambition, and it is important to recognise that there have been positive developments despite the challenges. The local labour market performed strongly, and output in the local economy has performed well. Of course, the longer-term economic issues we face still remain, with economic inactivity, low productivity and ongoing economic and geopolitical uncertainty posing challenges. However, we remain committed to shaping a better, fairer, and more prosperous future for everyone. Whilst we know, that there is still some way to go and that financial constraints will set limits on what is possible, we are confident that we are moving collectively in the right direction.



Michelle O'Neill MLA,
First Minister



Emma Little-Pengelly MLA,
deputy First Minister

Overview of PfG Commitments



The Programme for Government for 2024–2027, 'Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most' outlined commitments for this mandate, aimed at making real improvements across society, both today and in the years ahead.

Our nine key priorities are focused on doing what matters most within this mandate:



These nine priorities are underpinned by a longer-term commitment to work towards 'Building New Foundations', by investing in our public infrastructure and reshaping how our public services are delivered.

There has been significant progress made across all priorities this year. These achievements demonstrate just some of the work happening every day as we strive for meaningful delivery that people can see and feel in their lives. Many

are as the result of working in partnership across departments, local government and the community and voluntary sector.

The Programme for Government is also underpinned by long term Missions that set our direction.

An update on progress across our nine key priorities can be found on pages 6–23, and updates on Building New Foundations and our Missions can be found on pages 24–36.



Grow a Globally Competitive and Sustainable Economy

Our Commitment:

To create an economy that works for everyone, we said we would address four key areas: **Productivity, Good Jobs, Decarbonisation and Regional Balance.**

Our Progress:

We have worked to support growth across the most innovative, productive and export-orientated parts of the economy through our Sector Action Plans, including significant investment in the Cluster Acceleration Programme. Streamlining the City and Growth Deals process has allowed smoother progression of business cases and faster transition of projects into delivery.

The Skills Fund supports upskilling in priority growth areas, with Tourism and Hospitality Careers Programmes and Childcare Skills Academies planned by the end of the mandate.

Progress has been made to improve job quality and work-life balance, including a package of proposed upgrades to our employment law framework.

Carbon reduction efforts are accelerating the transition to net zero, with work ongoing on the Renewable Electricity Support Scheme, to drive efforts towards a 40% increase in renewable electricity. We are on target to invest £15m for energy efficiency and £75m for public sector energy transition. Sustainability is also being advanced through the Marine Environment & Fisheries Fund, the £330m Sustainable Agriculture Programme and the approval of legislation in November 2025 to deliver the Farm Sustainability Payment Scheme and Farm Sustainability Standards in 2026.

Ensuring everyone has a fair chance to succeed remains a priority, delivering the Economy Department's Sub-Regional Economic Plan and putting in place Local Economic Partnerships with each local government district, continued progress on expanding the Ulster University Magee campus up to 10,000 students and our innovative Tourism Strategic Action Plan.

Key Achievements This Year:



Regional balance

£27m investment

for Ulster University **Magee Campus** with student numbers growing to **6,505** with a **21% rise** in applications

Continued investment in Further Education campuses:

£55m

new Northern Regional College **Ballymena Campus** opened September 2025



£15m

build for the new Southern Regional College **campus in Newry has started**, with operations commencing on site in March 2026



Tourism Strategic Action Plan

Funding for **7 projects** including: The Gobbins Phase 2, Destination Royal Hillsborough, Belfast Stories and the DNA Museum

11 Local Economic Partnerships

established during 2025/26





Productivity

City and Growth Deals: over **£490m** funding for **22** projects approved

- ▶ **£7.5m Digital Transformation Flexible Fund** provided 197 offers, totalling £3.2m to support small and microbusinesses to adopt advanced digital technologies in 2025/26
- ▶ Opening of the **£31m Studio Ulster** in June 2025
- ▶ **£22m** approved for flagship innovation and research facility, the **Centre for Food and Drug Discovery**
- ▶ **Advanced Manufacturing and Innovation Centre** construction completed in March 2026, while construction continues on **iReach Health** and **Momentum One Zero**
- ▶ **Regional Research and Innovation Strategy** call for evidence and pre-consultation with policy leads completed
- ▶ **Innovation Action Plan** launched October 2025
- ▶ **Apprenticeship Inclusion Challenge Fund**, launched April 2025 addressing under-representation across women, individuals with a disability, and people from disadvantaged areas



£11m

invested through the ten-year **Cluster Acceleration Programme**



£767k

allocated to **14 active projects** across priority sectors in this financial year



Decarbonisation

- ▶ **Renewable Electricity Price Guarantee** published September 2025
- ▶ Consultation on the first draft **Climate Action Plan** completed in October 2025
- ▶ **Enhanced Investment Zone:** a £150m programme to unlock advanced manufacturing potential, focusing on biotechnology and photonics. Endorsed by the Executive in January 2026, with UK Government Ministerial approval in March 2026



Good Jobs

£20m

invested in Skills Fund Delivery from July 2024, across **27 key schemes** with a focus on raising productivity and regional balance

Supported

- ▶ **17,000 individuals** to upskill and reskill, primarily online for those aged 25+
- ▶ and **1,100 employers** have accessed tailored training interventions
- ▶ The key programmes supported are: Skill Up, Union Learning Fund, SME Productivity Booster, Inclusive Futures, Green Skills, Post School SEN Reform and Apprenticeship Academies





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

Our Commitment:

By the end of this mandate, we committed to having a comprehensive Early Learning and Childcare Strategy in place. This will set out plans to transform early learning and childcare by supporting children’s development, easing financial pressures on working families and ensuring the early learning and childcare sector is stable and sustainable.

Our Progress:

Whilst we develop our longer-term approach, we committed to taking some immediate action to introduce a balanced package of measures. These actions have the interests of children at their core and are easing the current pressure on providers and families, as well as laying the foundation for the Early Learning and Childcare Strategy.

We also committed to taking action to give every child the best start in life, including

those children facing disadvantage or with additional needs. We said we would do this by supporting existing childcare and early years programmes which are focused on children facing disadvantage and creating solutions for early support for children with additional needs. We also know that in those early years, pre-school can have a positive impact on children’s social and emotional development and in preparing them for school. For this reason, we are taking steps to standardise our Pre-School Education Programme.

Key Achievements This Year:



Early Learning & Childcare Strategy

Public consultation on the **draft Early Learning and Childcare Strategy** completed on 24 March 2026



Investment in Immediate Action within Childcare and Early Years Provision

£55 million invested in childcare and early years provision



Tackling the Cost of Childcare

27,238 children and 20,206 families benefitted from the extension of the **15% Childcare Subsidy Scheme***

Families are estimated to have saved £26m through the scheme. When combined with Tax-Free Childcare, this amounts to a saving of approximately £57m

* Extended to children aged 0-11 and aged 16 for those with additional needs/disability



Standardised Provision of Full-Time Pre-School Places

105 settings transitioned to **full-time pre-school education** provision in September 2025, benefitting **2,500** children. Over **50%** of all funded pre-school places are now full-time



Enhanced Support for Children Facing Disadvantage and Children with Additional Needs/Disabilities

Sure Start programme expanded to an additional **22 areas**, increasing access to **2,500** children and their families. Furthermore, a new outreach model has meant an additional **1,800** children and families are also able to access Sure Start services



Pathway awards to settings supporting children at risk of educational underachievement increased from £30,000 to £40,000 maximum



Enhanced funding ensuring the Toybox project provides developmental support for **over 150** Traveller and Roma children



Additional funding to **support more children with a disability outside term-time** including the Fair Play Grant Scheme and Bright Start School Age Childcare Scheme



Funding for over **650** childminders and Approved Home Childcarers who provide targeted early years support



640 settings availed of Pre-School Inclusion funding in 2025-26 to **support children who have or may have SEN**



Pilot established to increase accessibility for children with additional needs/ disabilities through the enhanced **Approved Home Childcare Scheme**



A Stable and Sustainable Childcare Sector

- ▶ Research report published on the key issues impacting the **financial sustainability of childcare providers** and support required
- ▶ Ongoing data monitoring to determine effectiveness of the **Childcare Subsidy Scheme**
- ▶ **Increased funding rate for non-statutory pre-school sector** participating in the Pre-School Education Programme
- ▶ Funding provided to train **85 participants to become a registered childminder** or Approved Home Childcarer, in addition to skills academies, training and online micro-courses within the childcare sector



Cut Health Waiting Times

Our Commitment:

To tackle waiting times, we have invested £135m this year to treat additional patients and we are continuing to tackle the backlog of patients waiting by increasing elective care capacity through expansion of elective care centres and mega clinics.

Our Progress:

We also pledged to increase capacity within our Health and Social Care system through service reform and reconfiguration. This is ongoing through a detailed efficiency programme under the Elective Care Framework.

We wanted to develop a refreshed approach to improving health and addressing health inequalities. To this end, work is ongoing

through the Live Better Approach and Making Life Better Thematic Plan.

To meet our ambition to improve health through primary, community and social care, we have developed the Multi-Disciplinary Team Implementation Plan, supported by £61m Public Sector Transformation Board funding. We also commenced work to develop a new model for Neighbourhood Health and Wellbeing.

Key Achievements This Year:

 **Reduce waiting lists**

Invested £135m to treat additional patients with **over 237,000** additional outpatient, diagnostic and inpatient procedures delivered

100% reduction in waits of more than four years for a colonoscopy



reduction in numbers waiting over four years for:

- tonsillectomies **▶ 94%**
- primary hip replacements **▶ 92%**
- laparoscopic cholecystectomy **▶ 91%**
- knee replacements **▶ 90%**

87%



reduction in children waiting over a year for an endoscopic scope

50%



reduction in total outpatients waiting over four years

66%



reduction in endoscopy backlog since the 2022 peak

62%



reduction in total inpatients/day cases waiting over four years



Development of elective care centres and mega clinics

Invested **£6.5m** in 2025/26 to increase elective care capacity

Within this, **£2.7m** allocated for GP Federations to perform **additional procedures in primary care settings**

Nearly **11,000** additional procedures completed



Expansion of pre-operative assessment and increased clinical training places



Funding for grant schemes to the charity sector to support patients on waiting lists or receiving cancer treatment



Ongoing work

► Steady progress is ongoing to address **health inequalities**, with positive evaluation and recommendation reports published on **'Live Better'** which tests an approach to address health inequalities through targeted health support to communities which need it most

► 10-year **Reforming Adult Social Care and Support** Strategic Plan and 3 Year Delivery Plan have been published in March 2026

► Stakeholder engagement has supported development of the **Neighbourhood Model of Health and Wellbeing** with 183 responses received from a Call for Evidence. Findings from this, along with a policy Framework were published in March 2026



Service Reform and Reconfiguration

The **Elective Care Framework** sets out a detailed efficiency programme:

88%

theatre run time. Increased run times enabled patients to be treated and reduced waiting list backlogs



47,683 patients



were removed from a consultant-led outpatient waiting list of defined specialties following administrative or clinical validation

Work ongoing to improve number of 'Did not attend'/cancellations on the day. This year:



- 7.5% for newly referred outpatients
- 8.2% for outpatient review appointments

87%

average of weekly commissioned theatre sessions being delivered by both Regional Day Procedure Centres from April 2025 to January 2026, and continuing to improve



Multi-Disciplinary Teams

► **MDT Implementation Plan** published July 2025 and **1.1m** citizens are now accessing physiotherapy, social work or mental health services in their local GP Practice. There are now **over 412** whole time equivalent front-line staff working across 165 GP practices in 12 GP Federation areas in the Primary Care MDT programme, reducing hospital waiting lists



Ending Violence Against Women and Girls

Our Commitment:

Delivery continued on the first Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) Delivery Plan for 2024–2026, including 14 actions centred on prevention, protection, justice and partnership.

Our Progress:

To raise awareness of the issue of violence against women and girls (VAWG), we pledged to ensure strong, consistent messaging so everyone here understands the issue and knows how to help end VAWG. To this end, we are implementing campaigns such as ‘Power to Change’.

We have invested through Local and Regional Change Funds to provide on-the-ground support for the vital work of communities and the sector. This included Momentum Funding to allow councils to continue to

raise awareness of EVAWG using a locally informed approach, tailoring support and prevention efforts to the unique needs of their community.

The Challenge Fund was launched to invest in organisations to use technological innovation to improve understanding and prevention of VAWG, increasing and improving the physical and psychological safety of women and girls.

We are continuing to work collaboratively across departments and with external stakeholders to support delivery, communications and stakeholder networks.

Key Achievements This Year:



The Change Funds

Funding of over **£5m**

provided to support the Local and Regional Change Funds, including Momentum Funding

Local Change Fund



supporting 164 projects, including a diverse range of activities such as, awareness raising and the provision of information and training on causes of VAWG and what healthy relationships are

Regional Change Fund



supporting eight EVAWG expert organisations with regional reach



Awareness Raising Campaigns



The **Power-to-Change Campaign** launched in January 2025, challenging unacceptable attitudes and reducing harmful behaviours of men and boys

10m

campaign impressions, achieving a significant reach

500

teachers and safeguarding officers received Power to Change Toolkit training

Pilot phase of **Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes** coercive control campaign completed **December 2025**



Media campaign on **Coercive Control** and training initiative developed in partnership with Ulster University



A **training toolkit** delivered to 97 frontline service providers with training on how to support women and girls with cascade training reaching an additional 70+ professionals



Challenge Fund

- ▶ **Four suppliers have created products to improve safety of women and girls**
- ▶ A wearable safety device to enhance physical and psychological safety of women and girls
- ▶ An AI based application to address online violence against women and girls
- ▶ A digital application to support women and girls travelling during the hours of darkness
- ▶ An AI-powered, trauma-informed solution, to support professional training relating to women's safety



Stakeholder Engagement

- ▶ **Victims and Witnesses of Crime Strategy** published in March 2026 and an action plan has been developed. This Strategy seeks to increase confidence in the justice system for all victims and witnesses of crime, using a trauma-informed approach
- ▶ Implementation of a domestic abuse offence which covers **controlling or coercive behaviour and work continues on the introduction of Domestic Abuse Protection Notices and Orders**
- ▶ Working with delivery partners under the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy 2024-2031, significant progress has been made towards delivering a new multi-agency **Domestic Abuse Risk Response** and developing a model for piloting **Domestic Abuse Protection Notices and Orders** to enhance protections for victims. Alongside this there has been increased investment in behaviour change programmes and emphasis on promoting the **Domestic Violence and Abuse Disclosure Scheme**



Better Support for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs

Our Commitment:

Over the past decade, the number of children identified with Special Educational Needs (SEN) has risen steadily to almost one in five pupils, alongside increased expenditure on provision. However, this has not always been matched by clear improvements in outcomes for these children and young people. We are committed to transforming the education system to deliver high-quality, efficient and sustainable services that better meet these children's needs.

Our Progress:

Central to SEN reform is investment in the education workforce. Work is underway to identify SEN-specific training gaps for teachers and classroom assistants.

We committed to enhancing in-school support and resources so that child-centred interventions can be implemented at the earliest presentation of need. Work is ongoing on a number of targeted early intervention programmes.

The SEN Capital Investment Programme was developed to transform capital investment to support children with SEN. Capital plans for each special school have now been published. The collection, sharing and analysis of data is also essential to plan and design an effective system that meets our children's needs. Longer-term work is underway, including scoping a SEN data dashboard to support planning and early intervention, for completion by the end of this mandate.

Key Achievements This Year:



SEN Reform

£27.5m funding secured

from the Public Sector Transformation Board for SEN reform with delivery underway

- ▶ Graduated Response Framework to support children with SEN published
- ▶ New Local IMPACT Teams were launched in September 2025 providing expert advice and support to schools
- ▶ Inclusive Play programme commenced providing support and training to pre-school, primary and special schools in supporting inclusive play for children with SEN



Enhanced in-school support and resources to enable intervention at the earliest presentation of need

▶ **Programme to support 60 2–3 year-olds** with emerging SEN commenced in September 2025

▶ **£4.5m** investment in the **Pre-school Inclusion Fund** and **640** settings receiving support through expansion of the fund



Investment in our educational workforce

► **120 SEN training places** in Further Education Colleges offered to Early Years Assistants* through tailored training project

* in pre-school education and primaries 1 and 2



Strategic area planning and investment planning for the school estate

Circa **£65m capital** invested in SEN infrastructure



System to **Digitalise the Statutory Assessment and Review** process rolled out



Special Schools' Plans of Action published on 16 September 2025



Delivering improved outcomes for children, with **157 additional classes** created for **1,374 pupils**, across **123 schools**



Improved sharing and analysis of data

Working group established to consider data sharing arrangements to support strategic planning for school leavers with SEN



Enabling actions that better support schools



SEN Reform Outcomes Framework published



SEN Policy Statement to clarify policy and legislation published



Accessible version of the SEN Reform Agenda published



SEN Reform governance structures agreed and first meetings held in October 2025



Provide More Social, Affordable and Sustainable Housing

Our Commitment:

In response to an increase in social housing waiting lists and housing stress, we committed to transform housing supply and improve quality across the system, in a collaborative way. Work is underway on an Action Plan following the launch of the Housing Supply Strategy in December 2024, which provides a long-term framework for delivering thousands of new, good-quality homes.

Our Progress:

We committed to continuing our programme of reform of the private rented sector. Work is also ongoing to review grants, including those which deal with housing in the private sector, and the Disabled Facilities Grant in collaboration with health professionals.

To support increased investment in homes, we continue to engage with Treasury on negotiations to secure a full fiscal framework for Northern Ireland, including treatment of borrowing powers which will enable the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to invest.

We remain committed to ensuring that the planning system supports housing delivery. In collaboration with local governments, many actions in the Planning Improvement Programme have been completed, with most others on track. A cross-departmental approach is also helping to unlock wastewater connections, paving the way for building much needed homes.

We have taken steps to work collaboratively on solutions for those in need and to reduce the risk of young people leaving care becoming homeless.

Key Achievements This Year:



Started Work on New Build Social Homes

£210.7m allocated to the Social Housing Development Programme

▶ **1,765** new build social homes started this year



Fuel Poverty

Warm Healthy Homes Strategy* launched in February 2026, with work ongoing on development of a 3-year Action Plan for the Strategy

* previously consulted on as the draft Fuel Poverty Strategy



Affordable Homes

940 Co-Ownership intermediate homes delivered



Planning system and wastewater network that supports appropriate supply of housing

5,300 additional properties able to connect to the **wastewater infrastructure** through investment in the network



Second Stage of the **Water, Sustainable Drainage and Flood Management Bill** completed in September 2025

Living with Water in Derry/Londonderry Plan published



Public consultation for **Sustainable Drainage Systems** in new housing developments completed

£15m Public Sector Transformation Funding secured for four-year **urban drainage transformation pilot** with work underway to develop nature-based drainage and flood interventions

Lowest processing times for major planning applications since the introduction of new system in 2017-18



Regional Trainee Planner Scheme launched to address workforce levels in January 2026 with eleven new trainee planners recruited

£3m Public Sector Transformation Funding secured towards the **Transforming Planning Programme**, to improve the systems and processes surrounding planning decisions such as 'Hear and Report'



Working collaboratively to prioritise housing solutions for those most in need

£83.7m provided in housing support services to help **20,000 vulnerable individuals and families** to live independently, via the **Supporting People Programme**



NI Housing Executive's draft '**Supporting People: Strategic Intent 2026-31**' consultation closed on 26 January 2026, setting strategic direction for the future development of the Supporting People Programme

£3m allocated to support delivery of the **New Foundations programme** launched in December 2025, to secure 30 homes with housing support to help young people leaving care avoid homelessness

£15.95m

allocated for 2025-26 delivery of NIHE-administered private sector grants, including the Disabled Facilities Grant



Reform of the Private Rented Sector

Through the Private Tenancies Act (NI) 2022:

- Implemented restrictions on frequency of rent increases
- Introduction of mandatory electrical safety checks in private rented accommodation
- Consultation on Notice to Quit regulations for private tenancies closed on 29 March 2026



Safer Communities

Our Commitment:

We are committed to keeping our communities safe and improving outcomes for those who engage with the justice system. Work is underway to speed up justice including consideration of enhanced sentencing powers for magistrates' courts and other potential reforms, alongside collaboration with criminal justice agencies to implement the second phase of committal reform.

Our Progress:

Recognising the levels of trauma in our post-conflict society, we are working across the Executive to embed trauma-informed, responsive systems. We also recognise that wider societal and economic challenges can increase vulnerability to crime and criminal exploitation, with clear links to paramilitary harm. We are therefore committed to tackling paramilitarism and organised crime, as well as preventing people from entering the justice system, and reducing reoffending.

This includes a focus on ensuring the youth justice system improves outcomes for affected children, families, victims, and communities. Work is ongoing with the Youth Justice Agency, PSNI and the Public Prosecution Service to deliver a pilot scheme aimed at diverting more children who commit low-level offences from the system without a criminal record.

To support these aims, we are seeking to ensure that justice agencies are adequately resourced and investing in much needed reform, including enhanced digital capability.

Key Achievements This Year:



Progress on Speeding Up Justice Programme

£20.5m funding secured from the **Public Sector Transformation Board** to help reduce delays and free up capacity in the courts for more serious cases



Strengthened governance arrangements for the **Speeding Up Justice Programme**



Consultation on use of out of court disposals completed in September 2025,

with secondary legislation being progressed

- ▶ The Out of Court Disposal – No File Decision pilot has been completed, with evaluation findings proving positive and focus now on mainstreaming this approach
- ▶ Pilot underway to support PSNI with implementing a digital approach to Community Resolution Notices via an app



Working to ensure adequate resources within our justice agencies

▶ **£7m** allocated to meet the full cost of Year 1 of the PSNI workforce recovery plan with recruitment underway

Digital transformation



£2m funding secured from the Public Sector Transformation Board to support electronic monitoring



Implementation of the Strategic Framework for Youth Justice Action Plan

Consultation on development of a single community order for children to simplify the community sentencing framework completed

Resources developed to support children and their families through the youth court process

Youth justice provisions included in the Justice Bill which aim to strengthen the automatic presumption of bail for children



Tackling Paramilitarism and Organised Crime

Executive agreement secured to extend the Executive Programme on Paramilitarism and Organised Crime until March 2027 and work is ongoing to consider post 2027 options

Creation of a Ministerial Advisory Group and refreshed Political Advisory Group to strengthen political oversight



Embedding Trauma-Informed systems

250

Training provided to over 250 Trauma-Informed trainers and lead trainers

Over 1,300

frontline workers trained in Trauma-Informed Practice

NI Trauma-Informed practice resources developed and training made available across the NI Civil Service



Reducing offending and reoffending

Strategic framework and action plan for reducing offending and reoffending developed for 2026-27



Protecting Lough Neagh and the Environment

Our Commitment:

Lough Neagh is a vital natural resource, providing drinking water, supporting fishing and eel industries, whilst contributing to tourism and recreation. Severe blue-green algae blooms have been driven by a range of factors including long-term nutrient pollution from agriculture, wastewater, septic tanks and industry. We committed to taking targeted action through implementation of the Lough Neagh Action Plan and are exploring innovative solutions to address and treat algae blooms.

Our Progress:

The issues at Lough Neagh are part of wider environmental and climate challenges. Tackling climate change and improving our natural environment is essential to prevent future crises. We also need to protect our wellbeing and economic opportunities. Work remains ongoing on delivery of the Environmental Improvement Plan and a proposed way forward following a review of our Environmental Governance. Engagement is also ongoing on the Third NI Climate Change Adaptation Programme.

We are committed to reaching net zero in a fair, just and affordable way for households and businesses, while ensuring environmental action supports economic growth. Our agri-food and fishing sectors are vital to our economy and play a key role in meeting climate obligations and protecting public health. We continue to implement an effective Sanitary and Phytosanitary regime to safeguard human, animal and plant health and support trade through promotion of our agri-food supply chain sustainability.

Key Achievements This Year:



20 of the 37 actions
in the Lough Neagh Action Plan
delivered with the remainder currently
being progressed

- ▶ Six Lough Neagh stakeholder forums held

To view actions,
the Lough Neagh
Report and
Action Plan can be
downloaded here:





Small Business Research Initiative to explore potential solutions to treat/reduce blue-green algae blooms

Up to £2m awarded across four suppliers in Phase 2 of the Small Business Research Initiative to refine and pilot solutions

The **Sustainable Utilisation of Livestock Slurry** project has facilitated slurry separation on over 70 farms with 6 anaerobic digestion plants using slurry solids as a feedstock. This research and development project is one year into the four-year project and is continuing to deliver learnings for the department to support this sector



Climate Action Plan

Consultation on the first draft Climate Action Plan completed in October 2025



Transition to Net Zero in a fair and balanced way

- ▶ Draft regulations to establish a **Just Transition Commission** progressing to the next stage of the legislative process, following Executive and Committee agreement
- ▶ Centre for Advanced Sustainable Energy engaged to support **biomethane policy development**, informing decisions on industrial decarbonisation as we work on plans to produce a community energy innovation project



Implementation of a Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) regime to protect public health, animal health and welfare and plant health, as well as to support trade and agri-food supply chain sustainability

Implementation of official **SPS controls** have ensured high standards of animal, plant and public health are maintained



International visits from USA and South Korea food hygiene and safety authorities to support and **expand market access** for our agri-food produce



Improving our natural environment

Draft Nature Recovery Strategy consultation underway and the first strand of the **Farming with Nature Package** launched



First Annual Progress Report for the **Environmental Improvement Plan** laid in the Assembly on 26 January 2026





Reform and Transformation of Public Services

Our Commitment:

We recognised the need for urgent reform and transformation of public services. Many sectors have been in critical need of investment and reform to improve the quality and efficiency of services.

Our Progress:

We committed to ensuring that our priorities got the focus needed to bring about lasting change and have set up a Delivery Unit at the heart of government to oversee this.

We committed to begin to deliver a range of new transformation projects to bring about real improvements in service delivery across the Executive's priority areas. £129m has been allocated to projects across Health, Justice, Infrastructure and Education.

Work continues to strengthen digital capability across the public sector. The Office of Science and Technology, led by the Chief Scientific and Technology Adviser continued to progress the Executive's Research and Innovation Strategy and Areas of Research Interest, strengthening coordination across science, technology and artificial intelligence.

We also pledged to bring forward a wider package of reform to help deliver the investment and transformation of our public services.

Following an agreement with Treasury on 11 June 2025, the needs-based adjustment factor of 124% was applied to the Barnett consequentials arising from the Spending Review announcement.

Engagement has also begun with Treasury on the process for progressing a full Fiscal Framework. Negotiations will include access to borrowing for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Professor Holtham's independent review of the Executive's relative need, which provided a central estimate of need at 128%, taking agriculture into account.

Key Achievements This Year:



Delivery Unit

A Delivery Unit has been established and the Executive agreed its initial priority was supporting work to tackle health waiting lists. The Unit has been focusing specifically on driving delivery of the health transformation projects.

The Unit is also overseeing all transformation projects, ensuring connections are made across the wider transformation programme, and assessing other opportunities to add value to discrete cross-cutting issues across the public sector.



Public Sector Transformation Projects

£129m allocated to projects, which are being monitored and supported by the Delivery Unit. Departments were encouraged to involve other sectors in the design and delivery of transformation projects, and there is already early evidence of impact. A full annual report has been annexed.



£61m

In **Health**, **£61m** provided to support the expansion of multidisciplinary teams in GP practices, allowing better access to preventative care and faster intervention



£22.5m

In **Justice**, **£20.5m** allocated to Speeding Up Justice aimed at reducing court delays and case backlogs and modernising the justice process. Just over **£2m** has also been allocated to Electronic Monitoring Modernisation



£18m

In **Infrastructure**, **£15m** is going towards the Natural Solutions Urban Drainage Programme, to reduce flood risk and **£3m** towards the Transforming Planning Programme, to improve the systems and processes surrounding planning decisions



£27.5m

In **Education**, significant investment of **£27.5m** is supporting the Special Educational Needs Transformation Programme

The Public Sector Transformation Board, supported by the **Delivery Unit**, has provided advice and recommendations on allocation of the remaining **£102.6m**

The Sustainability Plan



Publication of 'PfG Alignment to the 2025-26 Budget'

Departments have been provided with guidance and support to develop longer term financial sustainability plans

Digital Transformation



Work is ongoing to improve NI Civil Service (NICS) digital capabilities to enable wider reform and transformation

Office of AI and Digital established in June 2025 to lead on a collaborative AI Strategy to guide AI adoption across the public sector

A draft AI Strategy is in development with a clear focus on skills, collaboration across departments, strong human oversight and ethical integration of AI in public services

Building New Foundations

The “Building New Foundations” section of the Programme for Government sets out the structural reforms and enabling actions that underpin delivery of the nine immediate priorities. It focuses on creating the conditions for long-term transformation and resilience across public services, the economy, and society.

In addition, the Strategic Asset Management Unit is strengthening how our public sector land and property assets are planned, managed and used, supporting more efficient use of the public estate to enable public service transformation and deliver better value.

Boosting Housing Funds

Commitment

Revitalising the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) so that it can invest in its homes.

Progress Update

In June 2025, the UK Government’s Spending Review confirmed that the scope of the NI Executive Fiscal Framework negotiations would include NIHE borrowing. Engagement continues with Treasury on the treatment of NIHE borrowing and the need for an urgent solution to the NIHE’s investment need.

Improve the Planning System

Commitment

Implementing a planning improvement programme with local government and other stakeholders.

Progress Update

Collaborative working, both internally and externally, is ongoing to help identify challenges, blockages and delays.

Supported by £3m funding from the Public Sector Transformation Board, Phase 2 of the Planning Improvement Programme is underway. Several programme actions are completed and most others on track for delivery, including:

- A regional trainee planner scheme was launched in January 2026.
- Improvements to the pre-application community consultation process and streamlining of the pre-determination hearing process came into operation on 1 August 2025.
- Workshops and sessions facilitated on key planning topics to strengthen skills of professional staff.
- Year to date results for the second quarter of 2025–26 showed 78% of all statutory consultations returned on time, helping to improve efficiency.
- Revision to renewable and low carbon energy published within the Strategic Planning Policy Statement.
- Public consultation completed on introducing charges for planning services that are not currently subject to fees.



Deliver Better Public Services

Commitment

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

The Enabling Action Plan associated with the draft Investment Strategy for NI sets out actions to improve delivery and unlock persistent infrastructure challenges, including actions to streamline business case processes and focus on developing social license for major projects. Much of this work is already underway as good practice.

Progress Update

Aligning Spending with Priorities: A Comparison of Programme for Government with 2025–26 Budget Allocations published and ongoing internal engagement continues on longer-term financial sustainability.

Updated guidance within ‘Better Business Cases NI: Incorporating Environmental and Climate Considerations into Business Cases’ is embedding sustainability into decision making.

Delivery of the NICS People Strategy remains broadly on track, with 39 of 57 interventions progressing as planned. Key advances include:

- People Strategy Hub launched; NICS wide Comms & Engagement Network and a new workforce model of job families established.
- 30+ HR policies being reviewed and Senior Civil Service Strategy developed and out for consultation.
- Strategic Workforce Planning toolkit launched; Community of Practice established.
- Design and implementation of the HR Target Operating Model underway.
- Digital Capability Framework created, to define the digital skills and knowledge of NICS staff.



Support Our Net Zero Future

Commitment

Ensuring our long-term strategy for 2024–2035 delivers **smart investments and education and skills initiatives to maximise green economy opportunities** and move us towards a fairer, more sustainable net zero future.

Progress Update

- Delivering the Green Skills Action Plan to build the workforce needed for net zero sectors.
- Updating apprenticeship frameworks and Further Education curricula to embed green competencies.
- Promoting green career pathways to grow the talent pipeline for emerging low carbon industries.
- Working with industry, Further Education and Higher Education and government partners to align skills with future net zero needs.



Manage Our Water

Commitment

Continuing to work to increase capacity, to ensure that investment can proceed across urban and rural communities without adverse environmental impacts.

Progress Update

- **5,300** additional properties able to connect to the **wastewater infrastructure** through investment in the network.
- **£15m** Public Sector Transformation Funding secured for four-year **urban drainage transformation pilot**.
- Second Stage of the **Water, Sustainable Drainage and Flood Management Bill** completed in September 2025.
- Published the **Living with Water in Derry/ Londonderry Plan**.
- Public consultation for **Sustainable Drainage Systems** in new housing developments completed.



Upgrade Stadia and Support Local Sports

Commitment

Continuing to work with the UK Government and other funders to **finish our regional stadia programme**, making progress on the redevelopment of Casement Park and initiating investments in The Northern Ireland Football Fund and grassroots sports.

Progress Update

In addition to capital allocations from the Executive, the Irish Government committed £43m in Shared Island Funding in February 2024 and in Spring 2025, the UK Government allocated £50m in Financial Transactions Capital.

Performance and Grassroots Strands of The Northern Ireland Football Fund are underway, with the first cohort of projects to be taken forward under the Performance Programme identified in September 2025. A call for applications for Grassroots was launched on 4 March 2026.



Retrofit Homes

Commitment

Facilitating the **retrofitting of existing housing stock** through sustainable funding and partnership models.

Progress Update

- Several retrofit pilots undertaken by NIHE to identify renewable energy and insulation solutions.
- Ongoing engagement with the NI Federation of Housing Associations to explore options to access Financial Capital Transaction funding for a potential 5-year retrofit programme for Registered Housing Associations.
- £2.2m additional support provided to the NI Sustainable Energy Programme with measures installed in 761 low-income households this year.
- Response to the Consultation on Support for Low Carbon Heating in Residential Buildings was published in January 2026. Learnings from this alongside work taken forward with consultants from the Energy Saving Trust have produced a design plan for a new Domestic Energy Efficiency and Low Carbon Heat Programme.
- Work is also ongoing to develop the skilled workforce needed for large scale home retrofit including strengthening training and apprenticeships and coordinating with stakeholders to ensure skills supply matches demand.



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

Commitment

Progress Update

Improving our road network to better connect on a North–South and East–West basis.

We have continued to deliver Structural and Essential Maintenance Programmes within available budgets and a new Road Maintenance Strategy has been published. Delivery is being progressed on the Major Roads Capital Portfolio, including City & Growth Deal Infrastructure Projects.

Progressing delivery of the A5 Western Transport Corridor.

Delivery of the A5 Western Transport Corridor is subject to legal challenge.

Publishing an annual Action Plan to support the Road Safety Strategy.

The Road Safety Action Plan to 2027 was published in January 2026.

Building upon the Union Connectivity Review, to improve transport connectivity, enhance quality of life and build economic opportunities across the UK.

In December 2025, Translink’s Shaping the Future document set out the feasibility study findings for four priority rail projects: reopening the Antrim–Lisburn line with a Belfast International Airport link; restoring the Portadown–Derry/Londonderry route with new intermediate stations; reinstating the Portadown–Armagh line; and advancing Phase 1 electrification of the Belfast–Border corridor. £1m has been allocated to progress priority development work and engagement with planning authorities to secure corridor protection.

Working with the Irish Government to **develop our rail networks and to provide more accessible public transport** for our rural and disabled communities, as well as considering the recommendations of the **All–Island Strategic Rail Review**.

Along with the Irish Government’s Department of Transport and supported by the European Investment Bank, a Rail Prioritisation Strategy was published in December 2025, setting out more detailed proposals on the adoption of the recommendations made in the All–Island Strategic Rail Review. A dedicated Rail Unit has been established in DFI to progress and bring together the relevant Regulation, Policy and Legislation work. Collaboration with the Irish Government is ongoing to agree on joint investments to modernise the Enterprise service, including the procurement of new trains.

Looking at how we can **develop new routes** and offer further support to our three airports.

We are engaging with Belfast International Airport to restore transatlantic flights and with the UK Government to explore pre-clearance, recognising its potential to support tourism, investment and innovation.

Missions

The Programme for Government is underpinned by long-term Missions that set the strategic direction for the Executive and shape our collective ambition: People, Planet, Prosperity, and our cross-cutting commitment to Peace. These Missions provide us with a lens through which we can ensure our policies, investments and actions contribute to sustained improvements in wellbeing and quality of life.

We have provided an update on commitments within our Missions but any achievements covered under our nine key priorities have not been included.



People

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

► Physical & Mental Health

Progress includes the draft **Making Life Better Thematic Action Plan**, continued implementation of the **Mental Health Strategy 2021–2031**, and development of a Mental Health in All Policies approach. The **Live Better** initiative has tested a place-based approach to addressing health inequalities, with positive evaluation informing the **Neighbourhood Model of Care** due to launch in 2026. A report on integrating the community and voluntary sector into mental health service delivery has been published and **Mental Health Workforce Review** recommendations have been implemented. The initial phase of a regional **Mental Health Outcomes Framework** has begun, as has work on a three-year action plan focused on early intervention and prevention.

► Fair & Inclusive Society

To promote a fair and inclusive society, work is ongoing in relation to updating the **Race Relations Order (NI) 1997** and a **Framework for Race Relations** has been drafted. Published in May 2025, the **Refugee Integration Strategy** supports integration and access to skills, employment and advice and a **Community Cohesion Group** has been established to reduce community tension.

▶ Truth Recovery Programme

We are progressing access to justice for those affected by Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses through the **Public Inquiry and Redress Scheme Bill**, which was introduced to the Assembly in June 2025, with Committee Stage concluded in January 2026. Support is already being provided, including through the Victims and Survivors Service and community partners, digitisation of historical records by PRONI, and the work of the Independent Panel in enabling individuals to share their experiences in a supported way.

▶ Animal Welfare

To maintain high standards of animal welfare and secure the ongoing supply of veterinary medicines, we have worked with the UK Government to progress long-term arrangements. These include the publication of **Protecting Animal Health: The Government's Approach to Veterinary Medicines in Northern Ireland** in June 2025 and the introduction of new veterinary medicine schemes from January 2026, alongside participation in UK-wide supply coordination to identify and mitigate emerging risks.

▶ Social Inclusion Strategies

Public consultation on the **Draft Executive Disability Strategy 2025–2035** closed in March 2026 and responses are being analysed, while engagement on the **Active Ageing Strategy** has informed work on a new Action Plan. Consideration is also underway on next steps for the further development of **Gender Equality and LGBTQI+ strategies**.

▶ Children's Social Care Reform

A programme is underway, focusing on early intervention, workforce challenges and strengthening cross-sector working. The **Together for Families** model is being developed to improve support for families and reduce the number of children entering care. Work is also well advanced on new regional residential and foster care plans.

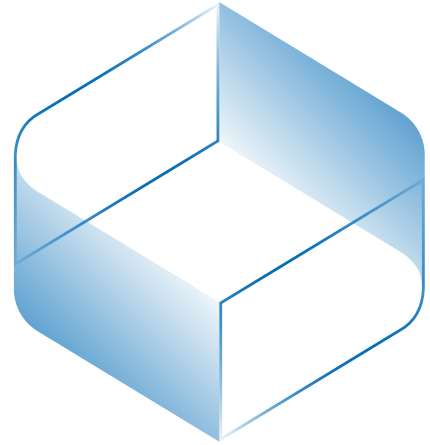
▶ Rural Communities

A forward-looking policy, **Rural NI: Our New Approach 2026–2041** has been produced through extensive co-design and is currently out to public consultation.



► Ageing Population

A baseline scoping exercise for adult palliative care is underway to assess current provision, population need and patient experience, with findings informing future commissioning within the **Neighbourhood Model of Health and Wellbeing**. This approach will support more people to receive palliative care in community settings, including at home. Financial support continues to be provided to bereaved families through the Pension Centre. An improved data-sharing process was introduced in January 2026, aimed at reducing overpayments to the Land and Property Service where the deceased was a homeowner or private tenant.



► Identity and Language (NI) Act 2022

New offices for the Irish Language, Ulster-Scots and Ulster British Tradition, and Identity and Cultural Expression have been established with the **Irish Language Commissioner, Commissioner for the Ulster Scots and the Ulster British Tradition** and **Director of Office of Identity and Cultural Expression** appointed. Work is progressing to develop the Ulster-Scots Language, Heritage and Culture Strategy and Irish Language Strategy.

► Sport & Physical Activity

Through delivery of the **Active Living Sport and Physical Activity Strategy**, we are supporting greater participation and community engagement within sports and physical activity and investing in shared and inclusive spaces. Targeted funding of **£5.1m** has been provided to Sport NI for the Olympic Legacy Fund and the Your School Your Club Programme. This work is complemented with alignment to the Healthy Futures Obesity Strategy to embed sport and physical activity within the wider health improvement agenda.

► Bovine Tuberculosis (TB) in Northern Ireland: Blueprint for Eradication

Bovine TB in Northern Ireland: Blueprint for Eradication was published in April 2025, with work ongoing to progress actions through stakeholder collaboration.

► Poverty

Consultation launched on the draft **Anti-Poverty Strategy**, with subsequent consideration ongoing to improve and finalise the draft Strategy. The draft **Making Life Better Thematic Action Plan** was developed to address health inequalities. Action under the **Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework** has supported an estimated 200,000 rural dwellers, with £10.4m invested through rural grant schemes and continued funding for key programmes. Partnership working with the **Consumer Council** and enforcement bodies is ongoing, aimed at targeting consumer exploitation, promoting fair markets, and tackling fuel poverty and wider cost-of-living pressures, particularly for vulnerable and rural households.

► Inequality

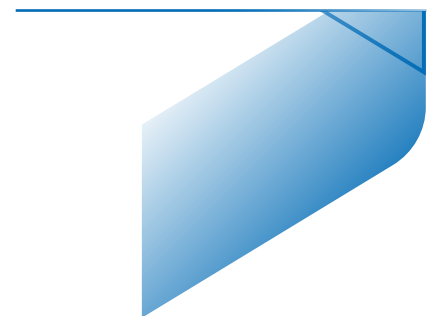
Joined-up action is addressing issues including poverty, crime, substance misuse, mental health and wellbeing. Delivery of the **Urban Villages** programme includes the updated Capital Plan approved in January 2026 and work continues on finalising the **Anti-Poverty Strategy**.

► Educational Disadvantage

Programmes such as **RAISE** operating in 18 localities aim to tackle educational attainment gaps. Funding also continues to be provided to schools through initiatives such as **Extended Schools** and **Targeting Social Need** as well as a range of other targeted programmes such as **Sure Start**. Through a review of the eligibility criteria for free school meals and uniform grants, the relevant income threshold for those in receipt of Universal Credit was increased to £15,390 in the 2025/26 academic year. The **School Uniforms (Guidelines and Allowances) Act (NI) 2026** aims to address affordability of school uniforms for parents/guardians.

► Food Action Plan

The **Food Action Plan** was launched in May 2025, following publication of the NI Food Strategy Framework in 2024, to recognise the interconnection between food, health, the economy and the environment.





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.

► Water Quality

To deliver sustained improvements, we have progressed key actions to strengthen evidence, planning and transparency. This includes publication of the third-cycle **River Basin Management Plan** in June 2025, the launch of a public consultation on **Significant Water Management Issues** in December 2025, and the introduction of the **Lough Neagh Water Quality Dashboard**, providing near real-time monitoring data to support informed action.

► Net Zero Infrastructure

We are removing barriers to low-carbon investment and strengthening the policy framework for net zero. November 2025 saw a decision to reform electricity grid connection charging, lowering costs for renewable generation and other low-carbon technologies such as electric vehicle charging. The Utility Regulator is implementing the required licence changes with NIE Networks. This work is complemented by the development of a **Net Zero Accelerator Fund** to support investment and emissions reduction, informed by an independent market needs analysis commissioned by Invest NI.

► Flood Risk Management

To respond to the impacts of climate change we have created an outline business case for a new **Flooding Forecasting Service** and commenced procurement for Phase 1 of the **Portadown Flood Alleviation Scheme**. We have also updated **Technical Flood Risk Guidance** to allow for climate change in the design of road drainage, storm drainage and river infrastructure.

► Affordable Renewable Energy

The **Mid-Term Review of The Path to Net Zero Energy**, published in December 2025, assessed progress against 2030 targets and refreshed the evidence base. Progress has also been made on energy efficiency, and we are on track to invest £15m through the **Energy and Resource Efficiency Support Scheme**. Legislative work is underway to implement the **Renewable Electricity Price Guarantee**, which will help our renewable energy self-sufficiency.



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.


► Global Investment

We are maximising the benefits of our unique global position to grow exports, attract Foreign Direct Investment and support higher productivity. Over the past year, we have deepened international relationships through extensive ministerial engagement and the work of our overseas offices in Washington DC, Brussels and Beijing. In parallel, we continue to represent our interests in London and Brussels to navigate the opportunities and challenges arising from our trading arrangements under the Windsor Framework.

► Boosting Productivity

We are boosting productivity across key industrial sectors by supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to adopt technology through the **Artificial Intelligence Collaboration Centre (AICC)**, **City and Growth Deal investments**, and a streamlined approach to progressing projects into delivery. Delivery of major innovation continues at pace, including approval of the £22m **Centre for Food and Drug Discovery** in Coleraine and progress across **Belfast Region City Deal** innovation projects, with Studio Ulster opening in June 2025 and further facilities nearing completion. Through its **Transformer Programme** the AICC has supported 68 SMEs to adopt AI, strengthened collaborative research and development, and expanded access to practical tools and skills to drive productivity and innovation across the region.





► **Strengthening North–South, East–West Relationships and Boosting Trade**

We continue to strengthen relationships North, South, East and West, through building on existing institutions such as the **North South Ministerial Council**, the **British–Irish Council** and **InterTradeIreland**, and through engaging with new institutions such as the **East–West Council** and **Intertrade UK**.


In much of this engagement, we work to support our SMEs in maximising trade with Great Britain (GB), Ireland and the rest of the European Union (EU) and beyond.

We also hosted the inaugural symposium for the PEACEPLUS-funded **Developing Irish Sea Cooperation** project in May 2025 and research has been commissioned on governance frameworks, barriers and opportunities for cooperation across the Irish Sea.

► **Social Enterprise Sector**

A one-year implementation update on the **Social Enterprise Action Plan** was published in February 2026. Key achievements include the appointment of social enterprise champions across all councils, Invest NI regional offices and InterTradeIreland, the launch of a bespoke leadership programme for the sector, and targeted work to raise awareness of social enterprises and their access to public procurement.

This aims to increase the commercial capacity of social enterprises and strengthen their overall impact, supporting their important role in society.





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.

► Sharing our Peacebuilding Experience Globally

Our peacebuilding experience continues to inform international engagement. This has recently included work with Western Balkan countries following a meeting with their Foreign Ministers as part of the 'Berlin Process' meeting in Hillsborough in October 2025. In the past year, we have supported over 80 official visits from more than 30 different countries, many of whom have been inspired by our story and want to learn how our experience can help them address challenges in their own countries.

► Good Relations

Investment totalled around £19m across **central and local programmes, T:BUC Headline Actions, the Community Relations Council and the Minority Ethnic Development Fund**, to positively impact those most in need.

► Race Relations

A public consultation on a draft Framework for an initial two-year Delivery Plan commenced in March 2026, building on the **Racial Equality Strategy 2015–2025** and setting a clear direction focused on removing structural inequalities, tackling racism and hate crime, ensuring fair access to public services, and strengthening community cohesion.

► PEACE PLUS

€110m has been allocated to councils to deliver co-designed **Local Area Action Plans**, with €16.37m match funding provided by TEO, while €34.4m has been allocated to 15 **Building Positive Relations projects**, supported by €5.12m in match funding, with all projects now at implementation stage.



► **Urban Villages**

In January 2026, the updated **Urban Villages Capital Plan** was approved, which will now deliver an estimated total investment of £132m up to March 2031. In 2025–26, two projects were completed, three started on site, one restarted following changes to the design and planning approval was secured for another. Collaboration is ongoing with the Community Academy to advise and support organisations managing capital facilities.

► **Trauma-Informed Public Sector**

We are progressing work to equip NICS staff at all levels with the skills needed to work in partnership and support people to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment. In February 2026, two trauma-informed e-learning packages were launched to all NICS staff, alongside an intranet article highlighting the importance of trauma-informed practice.

► **Together: Building a United Community**

This year approximately 118,500 people were engaged through delivery of the Central Good Relations Fund, District Council Good Relations Programme, and the T:BUC Camps programme. Across T:BUC Headline Actions, a further six shared housing neighbourhoods were completed, work progressed at another three interface sites, 2,000 participants commenced the UNITEDYOUTH programme, and work continued on three shared education campuses projects. A review of the T:BUC Strategy has been completed following extensive stakeholder engagement and is informing consideration of a refreshed strategic approach to Good Relations.

► **Communities in Transition**

Phase 3 began in April 2025, with 35 projects, across eight areas, focused on building resilience and reducing paramilitary influence, supported by regional programmes including personal transition and restorative practice.

Our Impact

The Wellbeing Framework

The Wellbeing Framework sits alongside the Programme for Government 'Doing What Matters Most' 2024–2027. The Framework provides a long-term view of the various elements that contribute to the wellbeing of our society.

Within the Framework, the four overarching Missions are broken down across ten strategic domains of wellbeing. These domains describe the overall state of wellbeing in Northern Ireland. Each domain is supported by a selection of indicators, all of which are high-quality official statistics. The Framework is comprised of 52 indicators, which are updated throughout the year as new data becomes available, and they are reported on via the Wellbeing Framework Dashboard, which is maintained by the NI Statistics and Research Agency.

52 indicators across 10 strategic domains, all linked to our four overarching Missions:



People



Planet



Prosperity



Peace

Wellbeing Framework Performance

As at the end of March 2026, of the 52 indicators in the Framework, 14 were improving, 22 were showing no change, 15 were worsening, and 1 had insufficient data to assess change.

For a detailed view of performance across each of the 52 indicators, download the Wellbeing Report March 2026 here:





Aligning Spending with Delivery of our Programme for Government

The 'Aligning Spending with Priorities: A Comparison of Programme for Government with 2025–26 Budget Allocations' report provided initial links between the PfG and high-level spending areas within departments.

Its findings indicated that the 2025–26 Executive budget was closely aligned to delivery of both the PfG Priorities and longer-term missions. Beyond the earmarked funding for specific PfG priorities within the 2025–26 budget, analysis showed that individual Ministers and their departments were also spending considerable general budget allocations across delivery of the PfG:

Around

42% of the **Resource Budget** and
78% of the **Capital Budget**

▶ was identified as directed towards the **9 PfG Priorities**

97% of the **Resource Budget** and
99% of the **Capital Budget**

▶ is directed towards our **Missions**

'Extract from Aligning Spending with Priorities: A Comparison of Programme for Government with 2025–26 Budget Allocations'

This indicates an overall connection between budget allocations and the Executive's PfG Priorities, Missions and long-term wellbeing goals.

There are caveats with this report as aligning budgets to PfG Priorities is not as straightforward as it may appear due to the complex nature of governance, fiscal constraints, and the limitations of budget classification systems. However, this report represents a significant first step in aligning budget allocations with the strategic objectives outlined within the PfG. It indicates a strong overall connection between budget allocations and the Executive's PfG priorities and long-term wellbeing goals.

A full copy of **Aligning Spending with Priorities: A Comparison of Programme for Government with 2025–26 Budget Allocations** can be downloaded here:





Northern Ireland
Executive

www.northernireland.gov.uk

Programme for Government Annual Report 2025-2026

To find out more visit
northernireland.gov.uk/PfG
or scan:





Northern Ireland
Executive

www.northernireland.gov.uk

Transforming Public Services:

Annual Report on the Public
Sector Transformation Fund
2025/26



**Public Sector
Transformation Fund
Annual Report
2025-2026**

To find out more visit
northernireland.gov.uk/public-sector-transformation-fund
or scan:



Contents

Introduction	4
Governance and Oversight	6
Overview of Funded Projects (2025/26)	9
<hr/>	
PROJECT SECTIONS	12
Primary Care Multi-Disciplinary Teams (MDTs)	12
Special Educational Needs Transformation	14
Speeding Up Justice and Transforming the Criminal Justice System	16
Transforming Urban Drainage	18
Transforming Planning – Independent Inspectors	20
Modernisation of Electronic Monitoring	22
<hr/>	
Digital Transformation	24
Overview of Funding – Commitments and Spend to Date	25
Looking Ahead: 2026/27 and Beyond	27
Building a Lasting Legacy	30

Introduction

Our public services are under increasing strain. Rapid growth in both the cost and demand for public services is placing huge pressure on public finances, is undermining service provision and all too often leading to poor outcomes for our population.

Recognising the urgent need for reform, as part of the financial package associated with the restoration of the Executive in February 2024, £235m was committed over a five year period, commencing in 2024/25, to support public sector transformation.

This report provides an update on the application and impact of this ringfenced public sector transformation funding to date. It provides an update on progress across the first six projects to receive funding (totalling £129m) in March 2025. More than £13m of this funding has been spent in Year 1, a foundational year for all the projects, as they focused on planning and designing delivery and recruiting the staff needed to implement changes on the ground. It was always expected that implementation activity would increase in future years of the fund, and the spend trajectory shown later in this report makes that clear.

Nevertheless, all of the funded projects are already delivering benefits. Over 300,000 more people now have access to a wider range of supports in their GP practice than at March last year. 114 student classroom assistants are availing of new training aimed at supporting children with additional needs in early years settings, and families of very young children are already availing of new supports aimed at identifying and responding earlier to their specific needs. 4,000 policing

hours have been saved and court time is already being freed up to focus on the most serious criminal cases. A 10% increase in the use of electronic monitoring is helping to make communities safer and providing a more cost-effective alternative to prison where it is safe to do so. The first natural flood management scheme has already commenced, with the potential to reduce flooding, improve water quality, and make our urban spaces greener; and there is already significant interest from individuals wishing to help speed up our planning system. A Digital Maturity Assessment of the NI Civil Service has been completed, and work is in train to appoint a Chief Digital Officer. These are just some of the early successes resulting from the fund and this report shows plans to scale up delivery and build on these benefits in future years.

£235m of funding, while significant, will not in itself address all of the challenges facing public services here. It is therefore all the more important that this funding is being used to test new ways of working and deliver sustainable improvements in services. The Public Sector Transformation Board has been established to make recommendations on how the funding should be utilised to have the greatest impact. As this report shows, since its inception the Transformation Board has had a positive impact in encouraging innovation, acting as a catalyst for change, identifying opportunities for cost savings, prioritising evidence and learning, and focusing on long-term sustainability as well as early progress. The Board is also providing an active challenge function, encouraging projects to be innovative and agile, to take managed risks and adopt new ways of doing business. Alongside the Board, the First Minister's

and deputy First Minister's Delivery Unit is also playing a key role in monitoring delivery of funded projects and helping to embed a reform and transformation mindset across the projects and more widely.

The next suite of transformation projects is due to commence early in 2026/27. Informed by recommendations from the Board, the Executive has agreed six further projects to receive funding totalling £102.6m. Building

on lessons learned from the first call for transformation proposals, the next tranche of projects go further in unlocking additional funding, encouraging cross-sectoral and cross-departmental collaboration, and will maximise the impact of transformation funding in driving improvements in service delivery, promoting prevention and early intervention approaches, delivering cost savings and placing public services on a more sustainable footing.

At a glance: Transformation Fund 2025/26

£235m

UK Government funding over five years – up to March 2029

£129m

committed to six transformative projects in March 2025

£13m

spent up to March 2026 with significantly increasing spend and activity forecast in future years

£103m

agreed for six further projects

First full year of delivery completed across six funded projects.

Early evidence of:

- ▶ improved access to services;
- ▶ time being freed up for frontline services; and
- ▶ stronger foundations for long term reform.

Governance and Oversight

Public Sector Transformation Board

The allocation of £235m public sector transformation funding was conditional on the establishment of a Public Sector Transformation Board. That Board was established, initially in interim form, in May 2024.

Public Sector Transformation Board Membership

Jayne Brady	Head of the Civil Service (Chair)
Julie Harrison	Permanent Secretary Northern Ireland Office (NIO)
Gareth Hetherington	Director, Ulster University Economic Policy Centre
Helen McCarthy	The Executive's Chief Scientific and Technology Adviser
Frances Ruane	Non-Executive Member NI Civil Service Board

In accordance with its Terms of Reference, the role of the Public Sector Transformation Board is to advise and make recommendations to the Finance Minister on how to utilise ringfenced transformation funding to improve public service outcomes. The Finance Minister, in consultation with Executive colleagues, will allocate funding based on the list of transformative proposals put forward by the Board.

The Board has a specific remit to assess funding proposals on their ability to:

- improve the **financial sustainability** of public services, and deliver **cost savings**;

- **transform the model of delivery** to meet increasing demands and improve outcomes for citizens; and
- shift the system towards **prevention and early intervention**.

In addition to assessing proposals' transformation potential and making recommendations on the application of transformation funding, the Board also has an important role in monitoring and evaluating progress of funded projects, to assess the extent to which they are delivering their objectives. Conditions of funding for all projects emphasise the importance of

identifying clear outcomes and benefits, and ensuring arrangements are in place to monitor progress against these. The Board has sought to encourage openness and transparency, and while it seeks to hold projects to account for delivery, it does so in a supportive and constructive way.

A key feature of the Board’s approach is the requirement for each funded project to appoint at least one independent, external

expert to act as a critical friend, strengthening challenge, bringing lessons based on national or international evidence and best practice, and improving delivery confidence. The view of these experts, including their assessment of each project’s progress to date, has been sought to inform this annual report and excerpts are included throughout.

A summary of the Board’s work to date, and its key milestones is shown below:

DATE	MILESTONE
May 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Board established in interim form First call for transformation proposals issued
June 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 47 proposals received in response to first call
July–November 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Board assessment of proposals and engagement with departments
November 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Board finalises its recommendations on outcome of first call
January 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Board recommendations agreed by the Executive
February 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UK Government agrees drawdown of funding
March 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding confirmed to first six successful projects NICS Digital Maturity Assessment commenced
May 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Substantive Terms of Reference and membership of Transformation Board agreed by Executive
June 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Second call for proposals issued Digital Maturity Assessment completed
August 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 25 proposals received in response to second call
September 2025–February 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Board assessment of second call proposals
December 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding confirmed for appointment of Chief Digital Officer
February 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recommendations on second call agreed by Executive
April 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding confirmed for six additional projects

“I was pleased to see the depth of collaborative working across different organisations/departments which gives me confidence that the project will be able to more fully maximise the multiple benefits of the interventions”

Independent Stormwater and Blue Green Infrastructure Expert, Urban Drainage project

Role of the First Minister’s and deputy First Minister’s Delivery Unit

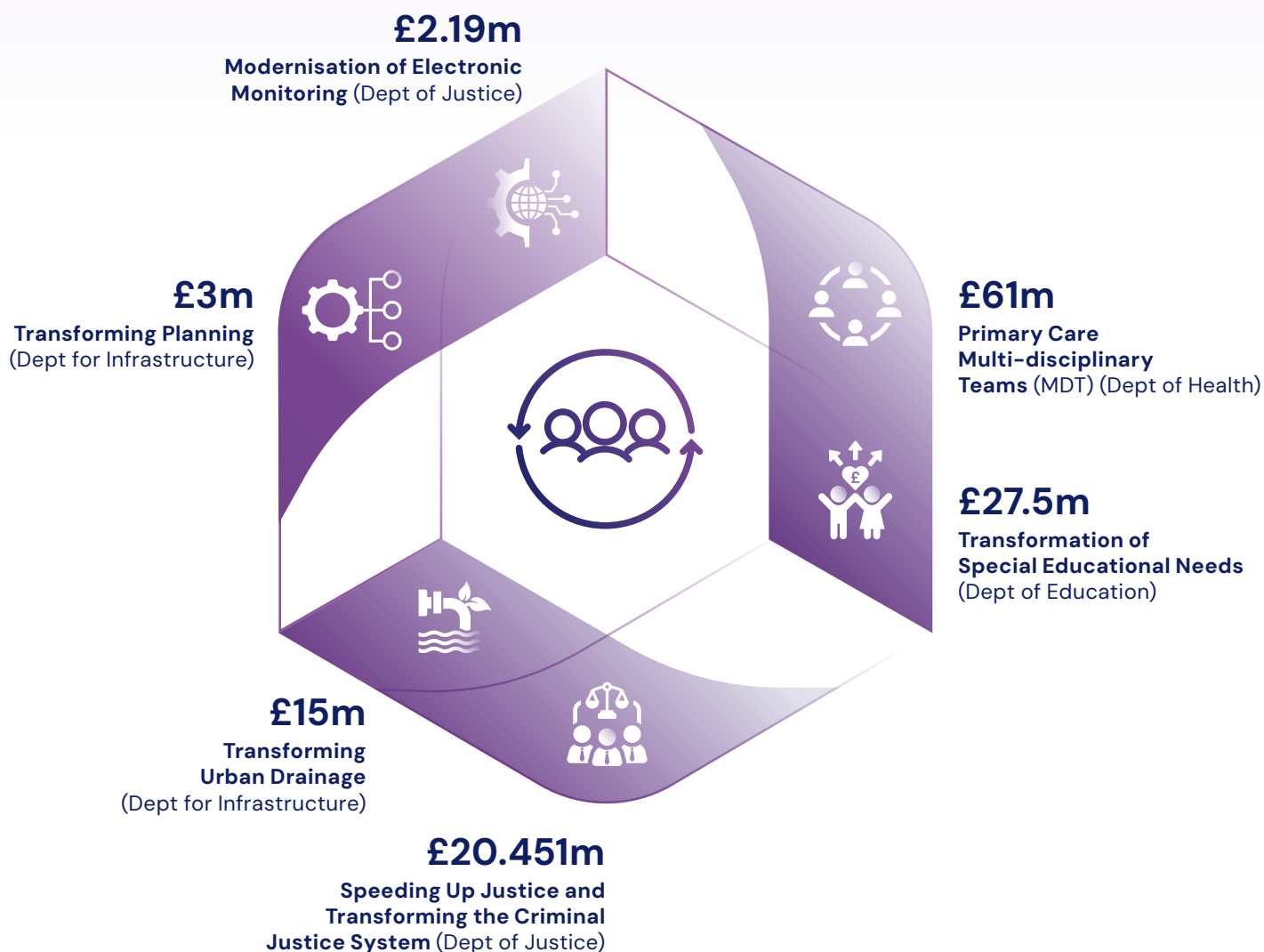
The First Minister’s and deputy First Minister’s Delivery Unit is playing a key role in driving the delivery of public sector transformation projects. This team is working across departments and with their delivery partners to ensure that sufficient progress is being made, providing constructive challenge on delivery, and identifying any areas where additional support may be required. The Delivery Unit provides advice to the Public Sector Transformation Board on the delivery status of individual projects, as well as emerging systems issues as appropriate. It has also played a key role in the recently concluded second call for proposals to utilise the remaining £102.6m of transformation

funding, assessing and providing advice to the Board on the proposals received. The Delivery Unit will continue to identify learning and good practice across the suite of transformation projects, help to make connections between funded projects and more widely, and create opportunities to share learning and embed a transformation and delivery mindset across the NICS and its partners.



Overview of Funded Projects (2025/26)

Following recommendations by the Public Sector Transformation Board, in March 2025 funding totalling £129.141m was agreed for six projects, spanning health, education, justice, infrastructure, and planning.



Overall delivery status (RAG)

To provide a clear, at-a-glance view of progress, each funded project is assigned a single overall RAG (Red/Amber/Green) status reflecting delivery confidence at the time of reporting:

Green – on track to deliver planned outcomes and milestones.

Amber – delivery risks or issues require active management to remain on track.






Red – significant delivery risks mean plans need material change and/or additional support.

The RAG status of each of the current tranche of projects is set out below. While this is based on each project’s own assessment of progress to date, it has been scrutinised and agreed by the Public Sector Transformation Board. Statuses are intended to provide an assessment of the overall delivery confidence rating for each project. Fuller detail on each project is provided in the following section.

 **Amber** (improving)

 **Amber** (stable)

 **Green** (stable)

Overall RAG (trend)	Funded project	RAG status explanation (summary)
	Primary Care Multi-Disciplinary Teams (MDTs) (DoH)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some slippage against recruitment plans. Expected that delays will be rectified in the first quarter of 2026–27.
	Special Educational Needs (SEN) Transformation (DE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some delay to the “go live” dates for elements of this project. Project expected to be fully operational from September 2026.
	Speeding Up Justice and Transforming the Criminal Justice System (DoJ)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delivery of some elements of the project constrained by challenges in achieving stakeholder buy-in and recruiting the necessary staff. Risks actively managed to minimise impact on the overall project.
	Transforming Urban Drainage (Dfl)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project on track for delivery.
	Transforming Planning – Independent Inspectors (Dfl)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project on track for delivery.
	Modernisation of Electronic Monitoring (DoJ)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delays in recruiting and releasing operational staff to join the multi-agency delivery team. As of March 2026, all organisations now represented on the multi-agency team.

Assessment of Independent Experts

Each project is required to appoint at least one independent, external expert to act as a critical friend and provide an additional layer of support and constructive challenge to help drive progress. Individuals appointed to the projects include a clinician, academics and other professionals with a wealth of experience in their particular fields.

In preparing this report, and to provide additional assurance to the Transformation Board and Ministers, staff from the First Minister's and deputy First Minister's Delivery Unit sought input from each of these experts. No areas of significant concern were raised at this stage, and experts welcomed the opportunity to engage with the Board via the Delivery Unit. While some have only been appointed relatively recently and have not therefore had sufficient opportunity to make a full assessment of progress and plans, others were positive about progress made to date, and future plans, and have made a number of recommendations to help improve delivery. The Transformation Board, supported by the Delivery Unit, will seek the views of these independent experts on a regular basis to ensure that their advice is being acted on.

Other funding allocations

In addition to the first six transformation projects, £300,000 of public sector transformation funding has been allocated for the purposes of completing a Digital Maturity Assessment of the NICS and £3m has been set aside to support the operation and administration of the Public Sector Transformation Board. This Digital Maturity Assessment has now been completed and work is underway to implement its recommendations. Further information on digital transformation, and how the £3m of support costs can help embed transformation across the NICS, is provided later in this report.

“The overall programme delivery appears well led, with robust programme management structures, clear decision making, and effective governance through quarterly steering group meetings that enable constructive challenge and high level oversight”

Independent Expert and NHS Clinical Lead,
Primary Care MDT Programme



Primary Care Multi-Disciplinary Teams (MDTs)

Lead Department:
Department of Health

The challenge

Primary care services are under significant pressure due to an ageing population, rising levels of chronic disease and increasing demand. The current system is overly reliant on hospital-based, reactive care, which is financially and operationally unsustainable. More care needs to be provided at local level to support patients in their communities to manage their health, yet capacity constraints in primary care are contributing to further system strain. At the start of 2024/25, only around 30% of the population had access to the full MDT model, creating regional inequalities and limiting the system's ability to shift towards prevention and early intervention.

What the project is doing

Through an investment of **£61m** of transformation funding, the MDT programme is expanding multi-disciplinary teams across GP practices, bringing together physiotherapists, social workers, mental health practitioners and others to provide care closer to home, shift the focus of care towards prevention and early intervention, and improve access for patients. At the advice of the Public Sector Transformation Board, the funding is being used to target implementation across

high-need areas to ensure the greatest possible impact and help build long-term sustainability.

Central to the MDT model is its capacity to deliver holistic, person-centred support tailored to the health and wellbeing needs of local practice populations. A critical enabler of this approach is the establishment of strong, effective partnerships between multi-disciplinary teams and the Voluntary and Community Sector. To support this, each area receives dedicated seed funding to empower MDT practitioners to deliver rapid, responsive, low-level interventions for service users. Over £300,000 has been invested in seed funding in 2025/26 to build on existing community strengths and resources, and enable the development of more integrated and preventative models of care shaped by local insight and patient need.

Why this matters

The MDT Programme will improve people's access to timely, local health and wellbeing support by expanding the range of professionals available in GP practices. As a result, more patients will receive the help they need – physiotherapy, mental health support, social work input and pharmacy advice – often without the need to see their GP first or having to wait for hospital appointments.

Key Achievements in 2025/26



Over **1.1m citizens** now have access to at least one MDT role locally – an increase of over 40% since March 2025.



More than **350,000 additional MDT consultations** delivered during the year.



Three quarters of patients managed within primary care, without the need for onward referral.



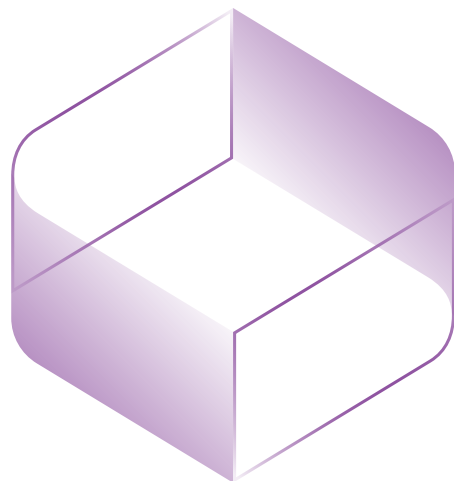
165 GP practices have at least one MDT service, an increase of over 40% since March 2025.

By March 2029, the programme aims to deliver almost 700,000 additional primary care consultations each year, reducing delays and ensuring that more people can be treated close to home. At least two-thirds of patients seen by MDT staff will have their needs fully met in primary care, avoiding unnecessary onward referrals and enabling faster, more convenient treatment.

What happens next

Focus will continue on recruiting to a range of MDT roles and expanding access to MDT services, in line with the MDT Implementation Plan. By March 2027, it is anticipated that more than 460,000 additional MDT consultations will have been provided, increasing to almost 700,000 by March 2029. This will have a significant benefit for patients, with many more people able to access the care they need more quickly and closer to home than is currently the case, and will also deliver more sustainable primary

care services. In addition, by the end of the transformation funding period, it is expected that MDT services (as one element of a wider shift to a model of neighbourhood health) will also have a tangible impact on acute services, with more people having their needs met in a primary care setting without onward referral to secondary care services.



PROJECT 2



Special Educational Needs Transformation

Lead Department:
Department of Education

The challenge

The current system of support for children with special educational needs (SEN) and their families is under unprecedented strain. Built on a statutory framework that has remained largely unchanged since its inception, the system is struggling to meet the needs of a growing and increasingly complex pupil population. Despite significant increases in funding and staffing, outcomes for children and young people with SEN remain disproportionately poor, particularly for those with the most intensive needs. At the same time, the financial trajectory of SEN expenditure is unsustainable, with projections indicating a rise to £1.2 billion by 2027/28 if no action is taken.

What the project is doing

Transformation funding of **£27.5m** is supporting a range of measures – as part of the Department of Education’s wider SEN Reform Agenda and Delivery Plan – focused on early intervention; transforming the model of support for children with a statement of SEN; building a skilled education workforce confident in meeting children’s needs; and creating a more inclusive education system.

The cornerstone of the planned reforms is the development and implementation of an **Enhanced Support Model** for children with a statement of SEN. This new model will enable schools to adopt a more flexible, child-centred approach, that respects professional

judgment and allows schools to make decisions that best meet the needs of pupils.

Other specific planned actions aligned to this new support model include:

- A SEN Learning Support Model will be tested in **28 schools and pre-school settings**, to understand how schools can better support children without the need for a statement of SEN;
- Accredited SEN-specific training for Early Years Assistants will be offered to a minimum of **360 classroom assistants** working in pre-school and Foundation Stage to build their skills and confidence;
- An Inclusive Play Programme targeting education staff working with children with SEN will be delivered to **48 schools / pre-school settings over three years**;
- **Seven special schools will be established as Centres of Expertise**, collectively supporting **70 local mainstream schools** sharing best practice and training and providing a mentoring role to meet the needs of children with a statement of SEN.

Overall, the programme aims to build an evidence base of what works to improve outcomes for children with SEN; strengthen the support provided to them, their families, schools and the education workforce; and build a more sustainable service model in the longer term.

Key Achievements in 2025/26



Early Years Classroom Assistant SEN Training – **114 students** participating in a range of SEN-specific accredited courses across **5 Further Education Colleges**.



Transforming Inclusive Play Environments – Playboard has been engaged as the delivery partner for this programme. Recruitment of staff has been completed with in-school delivery commencing later this academic year.



2-3 year-old programme – **60 children** with additional needs in the Belfast area commenced programme in September 2025.



Enhanced Support Model developed and published for consultation in March 2026.

Why this matters

This programme is focused on improving outcomes for children and young people with additional needs, and on reducing the pressure and uncertainty they, their families and schools can face when support is hard to access. Taken together, the different elements of the programme are intended to help needs be identified earlier, to strengthen the skills and confidence of staff across early years and school settings, and to enable more flexible, child-centred support. Over the funding period, several components will operate on a pilot ('test and learn') basis and implementation will be phased, so the programme will not resolve all system challenges immediately. However, it is expected to build practical capacity in services, improve consistency and timeliness of support, and generate a stronger evidence base for wider reform and more sustainable SEN provision in the longer term.

What happens next

From 2026/27, all projects will move into active delivery, with a phased rollout across schools and early years settings and a strong focus on evaluation and learning. An interim evaluation will be completed in December 2027, with a final evaluation report in December 2028 to inform next steps. Children and young people, their parents and carers, teachers and other school staff, and healthcare professionals will continue to be closely involved in the design, delivery and evaluation of the project.

PROJECT 3



Speeding Up Justice and Transforming the Criminal Justice System

Lead Department:
Department of Justice

The challenge

Delays within the criminal justice system have significant and wide-ranging impacts, undermining confidence in the delivery of justice and causing harm to victims, witnesses and accused persons alike. Prolonged case processing times can exacerbate trauma for victims and witnesses, leaving cases unresolved for years and making it more difficult for individuals to move on, while also reducing confidence in reporting crime. For those accused, lengthy delays can mean extended periods on remand, contributing to pressure on an already overstretched prison system and, in some cases, resulting in individuals being released having served time without access to rehabilitation. System-wide delay also places strain on courts, legal practitioners and criminal justice agencies, diverts resources from the most serious offending, and weakens public trust in the fairness and effectiveness of the justice system as a whole.

What the project is doing

£20.451m of transformation funding is supporting targeted reforms, focused on improving early engagement and expanding Out of Court Disposals, as part of a wider Speeding Up Justice programme. These

initiatives aim to resolve cases earlier where appropriate, improve the quality and timeliness of decision making, and reduce unnecessary progression through the courts.

Why this matters

Improved early engagement between criminal justice agencies and enhanced use of Out of Court Disposals are central to addressing delay. Early engagement tackles delay by reducing avoidable “back-and-forth” between justice agencies, speeding up decisions on whether to prosecute, and supporting earlier disclosure and clarity on the direction of investigations. Out of Court Disposals reduce system demand by providing a proportionate response to lower-level offending and increasing non-court outcomes. Together, these interventions will free capacity to focus on serious offending, help reduce end-to-end delay, and support better outcomes for victims and all those who come into contact with the criminal justice system.

What happens next

In 2026/27 the focus will be on evaluating pilots and scaling these where successful, embedding changes into business as usual processes, and continuing to monitor system wide impacts.

Key Achievements in 2025/26



Over 4,000 cases diverted through a No File Decision pilot (seeking to reduce the number of case files submitted by the PSNI to the Public Prosecution Service) **saving an estimated 4,000 policing hours** and reducing unnecessary demand on prosecutors and courts. Work is ongoing to mainstream this approach.



Public consultation completed on the expansion of the use of Out of Court Disposals.



Early indicators of reduced case volumes and improved processing times from the March 2025 baseline:

- a 4% reduction in the number of cases in the Crown Court and processing times reduced by 4%;
- Magistrates' court cases reduced by almost 5%;
- Stage 3 case processing times (the time from file submitted to PPS and PPS decision) reduced by almost 9%.



PROJECT 4



Transforming Urban Drainage

Lead Department:
Department for Infrastructure

The challenge

Urban drainage systems are struggling to cope with more intense rainfall, ageing infrastructure and a reduction in permeable surfaces. This has led to more frequent surface water flooding, sewer overflows and associated environmental impacts.

What the project is doing

The Urban Drainage transformation project is testing an integrated, catchment based approach using sustainable drainage systems, natural flood management and nature based solutions. The project is supported by £15m of public sector transformation funding, as well as additional investment by the Department for Infrastructure.

Why this matters

Nature-based drainage solutions aim to sustainably manage stormwater at source, reduce flood risk, limit pollution and improve water quality. The project is designed to build an evidence base for the potential of

collaborative, nature-based solutions to enhance resilience, improve environmental outcomes and provide a scalable model to inform future investment and policy decisions.

What happens next

Construction activity will commence from 2026/27, alongside continued evidence gathering to support wider adoption of sustainable drainage approaches. Key evaluation measures will include the volume of rainwater diverted from the sewer network, any reductions in surface-water flooding during significant rainfall events, changes in peak flows, and improvements in local water quality and biodiversity enhancement.

The programme will also gather feedback from residents, businesses and stakeholders on perceived improvements to local amenity areas, environmental quality, and reduced nuisance flooding, alongside observations on increased biodiversity and better use of public spaces.

Key Achievements in 2025/26



First natural flood management project commenced in partnership with the National Trust.



Initial sites identified and progressed for sustainable drainage schemes.

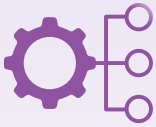


Ground investigations completed for priority locations.



Strong collaboration established across councils, NI Water and environmental partners.

PROJECT 5



Transforming Planning – Independent Inspectors

Lead Department:
Department for Infrastructure

The challenge

Independent examinations of local development plans and public local inquiries/hearings for certain planning applications are an important aspect of the planning system. In recent years, constraints on capacity within the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) to undertake this “hear and report” work have contributed to delays and uncertainty. Prolonged timescales can reduce confidence in planning decisions and create uncertainty for people waiting on major proposals that affect housing, jobs, transport and the environment.

What the project is doing

This project is increasing capacity in the planning system by appointing a pool of independent inspectors to carry out “hear and report” work. In practice, this means an independent person holds an independent examination, public local inquiry or hearing to consider evidence and then produces a written report of their findings (and, where appropriate, recommendations) to inform the final planning decision. This includes independent examinations of local development plans and public local inquiries/hearings for regionally significant and called in planning applications. The Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 provides

the Department with the power to appoint a person to undertake this work; the project will enable the Department to use that provision for the first time as an additional option to the PAC, while maintaining clear safeguards around independence.

Why this matters

A more timely “hear and report” process will help people and organisations get decisions sooner. For citizens, this can mean less uncertainty about developments that affect daily life—such as new homes, local regeneration, road schemes or environmental protections. For councils and applicants, it supports better planning decisions and helps reduce delay-related costs. Over time, improved timeliness and clarity can strengthen confidence in the planning system and support sustainable economic growth and investment.

What happens next

In 2026/27 the focus will shift from preparation to implementation – appointing inspectors, allocating initial workstreams, and putting in place proportionate monitoring so that performance, quality and value for money can be demonstrated transparently. It is anticipated that inspectors will be appointed in Q1 of 2026/27 with work allocated in Q2.

Key Achievements in 2025/26



Appointment process initiated to identify and appoint suitably qualified independent inspectors. This has included preparatory work on eligibility criteria, terms of appointment and appointment routes.



Early market interest generated: within the first week of the awareness launch, **over 20 expressions of interest** in the forthcoming application process were received.



Public awareness launched, including a dedicated webpage, events information and a short video to explain the new inspector role and encourage applications.

PROJECT 6



Modernisation of Electronic Monitoring

Lead Department:
Department of Justice

The challenge

There are core challenges in the criminal justice system relating to the management and monitoring of individuals on bail or probation in a way that balances public safety, accountability, and rehabilitation while also providing a viable alternative to remand. Currently, electronic monitoring is limited to radio frequency curfew monitoring and work is required to modernise the current service by increasing available technologies to support the work of the judiciary, police and probation and reduce pressures on the prison system while protecting public safety.

What the project is doing

Supported by £2.19m of transformation funding, and by employing a multi-agency delivery model, this project will provide a more accurate, real-time way to track individuals' movements and compliance with agreed conditions through the introduction of GPS monitoring. The availability of continuous location data will enable authorities to enforce exclusion zones and respond more quickly to potential violations.

Why this matters

Modernised electronic monitoring enhances the effectiveness of the criminal justice system by providing a cost-efficient, community-based alternative to custody that maintains public safety while supporting rehabilitation, delivering better outcomes at lower cost.

What happens next

During 2026/27 the project will move into further pilots and phased implementation, with a focus on legal robustness, operational readiness and evaluation of impact. Pilots planned for 2026/27 will focus on supervision of individuals on temporary release from prison and those on probation, with further pilots planned for 2027/28. A full evaluation of the pilots, including consideration of wider rollout, will be completed by the end of the funding period.

Key Achievements in 2025/26



Multi-agency delivery team fully established across justice partners.



10% increase in the use of traditional electronic monitoring over the year as a result of awareness raising activity.



GPS electronic monitoring proof-of-concept pilots successfully completed to test operational use.



Digital Transformation

Digital transformation is a critical enabler of sustainable public service reform. It supports more efficient and resilient organisations, improves the experience of citizens accessing services, and helps staff to work more effectively by making information, processes and decision making easier, faster and more consistent.

To support a sufficiently strategic, system-wide approach, £300,000 of public sector transformation funding has supported an independent Digital Maturity Assessment of the NI Civil Service. This assessment provided an objective view of current capability and identified the key barriers and opportunities for progress. It also informed the second call for transformation proposals and is shaping the direction of digital transformation more broadly across the NICS. In response to its findings and recommendations, recruitment of a Chief Digital Officer has been agreed and is progressing – this will be a critical role in providing system-wide leadership for digital transformation.

Digital transformation is closely linked to the Executive's wider ambitions on Artificial Intelligence. The Office of AI and Digital has been established as a Programme for Government commitment. It is supporting the development of an AI Strategy to guide responsible and ethical adoption of AI in the public sector, contributing to modern, efficient and citizen-focused public services. In parallel, officials are working across departments to map interdependencies, opportunities, risks and capacity requirements that will help shape a detailed AI Action Plan. This work is

aligned with the Public Sector Transformation Board's focus on evidence, outcomes and long-term sustainability.

Up to £3m of transformation funding has been set aside to support the administration and operation of the Public Sector Transformation Board, and to help embed transformation more widely. Ministers have been clear that administration and operation costs should be kept to a minimum, and to date none of this £3m has been allocated. Options are being developed to utilise this funding to strengthen the conditions for sustained digital progress and delivery across the NICS.

Looking ahead, the next tranche of Transformation Fund projects will lay important foundations for wider digital transformation, including creating a secure, modern foundation for the safe use of AI and freeing up resources to support a more resilient, cost-effective and digitally sustainable public sector that delivers better outcomes for citizens.

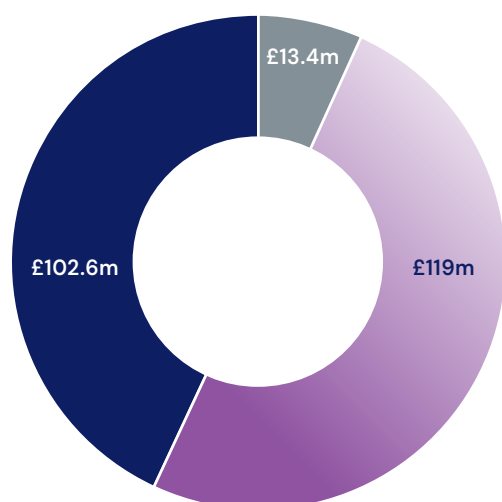
Overall, the Digital Maturity Assessment, the forthcoming appointment of a Chief Digital Officer and the emerging pipeline of enabling projects provide a clear opportunity to accelerate progress and embed digital as a core part of how the public sector delivers. This will require continued focus on delivery, adoption and benefits realisation, supported by strong governance and challenge; where progress is not meeting expectations, issues will be escalated and action taken to keep digital transformation on track and aligned to outcomes for citizens.

Overview of Funding – Commitments and Spend to Date

Following recent agreement to the second tranche of projects, all of the £235m ringfenced public sector transformation funding has now been fully committed. A summary of the overall fund position is shown below:

Fund position – Summary (£'000s)	
Total agreed funding	235,000
Agreed commitments (March 2025)	
• Tranche 1 Projects	129,141
• NICS Digital Maturity Assessment	300
• Administration and Support Costs	3,000
Total commitments (March 2025)	132,441
Committed for Tranche 2 Projects	102,559
TOTAL COMMITMENTS	235,000

Spend to date across the first six projects is £13.115m (just over 10% of the £129.141m funding agreed for those projects). The overall spend to date, including the NICS Digital Maturity Assessment, is £13.415m.

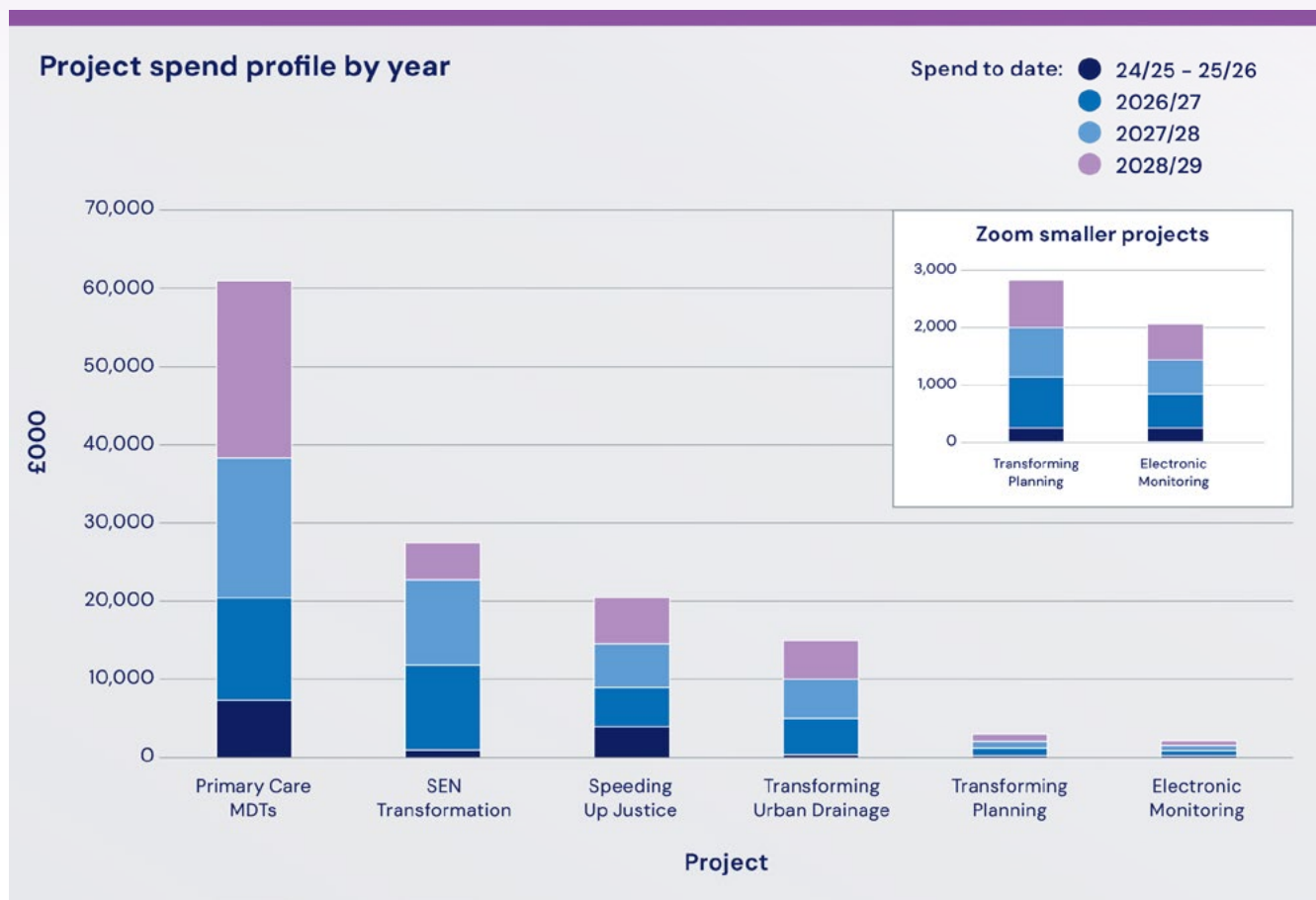


Fund position – Spend and Commitments

- Spend to Date
£13.4m / 6%
- Committed March 2025
£119m / 51%
- Committed April 2026 – Tranche 2
£102.6m / 43%

Overview of Funding – Commitments and Spend to Date *continued*

Further information on the spend profile for the six tranche 1 projects, including the planned spend trajectory over future years, is shown in the chart below. This clearly demonstrates the planned increases in spend and activity over the remaining years of the fund.



Looking Ahead: 2026/27 and Beyond

2026/27 marks a critical expansion phase for the Transformation Fund and the projects it is supporting.

“I look forward to increasing my engagement with project teams as the year progresses and seeing the MDT model in action. It will be important to maintain a clear focus over the next 6–12 months on meeting key recruitment milestones, budgetary delivery, communication, engagement, and wide stakeholder collaboration at all levels of the programme.”

Independent Expert and NHS Clinical Lead,
Primary Care MDT Programme

As shown in the preceding sections, implementation is expected to ramp up across the six tranche 1 projects, with all projects moving from planning and design phases into the delivery phase. The Public Sector Transformation Board, supported by the First Minister’s and deputy First Minister’s Delivery Unit, will provide oversight of projects to ensure that sufficient tangible progress continues to be made.

A further six projects have also been agreed for funding which have significant potential to bring about visible and lasting improvements to the way frontline services are delivered, including to some of the most vulnerable in society; embed prevention and early intervention to ensure that people can access the services they need, where and when they need them; establish promising new partnerships which, if successful, will lay the groundwork for real changes in how public services here are funded and delivered; address some of the most pressing public

sector challenges; and lay the foundations for system-wide reforms to improve the sustainability of services in the longer term.

A summary of these six additional projects is shown below and on the following page.

▶ **ePharmacy Primary Care Digital Reform Programme** (Dept of Health)

£42m investment will deliver:

- **Digitisation of the over 45m prescription items issued each year**, replacing paper prescriptions with a faster, safer electronic system capable of being available **24/7**, including evenings, weekends and bank holidays.
- **Over 500 community pharmacies across the region** providing more clinical services, improving access to care closer to home and reducing reliance on GP appointments.
- **Reduced waiting and travel for patients**, with no need to collect paper prescriptions from GP practices or out of hours centres, improving convenience and patient experience.
- **Reduced pressure on GPs, hospitals and emergency services**, supporting the shift of care into the community and allowing clinicians to focus on more complex cases.
- **£18m cash releasing savings over 10 years**, with **£3.5m recurring annually**, alongside reduced paper use and travel, contributing to more sustainable health services.

Summary of these six additional projects *continued*:

▶ **Together for Families** (Dept of Health)

£29.2m investment will deliver:

- **Earlier, easier help for families at scale:** strengthens **29 Family Support Hubs (region-wide coverage)** and adds new targeted neighbourhood support so families get timely, non-stigmatising help before problems escalate.
- **Fewer children entering care; more safe returns home:** intensive support aims to reduce care entry and support safe reunification, helping to curb projected growth of the looked after population.
- **Reduced pressure on crisis services:** addresses sustained demand including **~3,000 referrals per month** and **1,365 children** currently waiting to be allocated a social worker.
- **£30m investment from National Lottery Community Fund:** a transformative new partnership between DoH, the Fund and the Voluntary & Community sector.
- **Better value for the public purse by shifting spend “left”:** investment will focus on prevention and reduce reliance on high cost interventions.
- **Measurable efficiency and savings potential:** moderate estimate of **c. £34m** in savings over 10 years.

▶ **Pathways to Work and Wellbeing** (Dept for Communities)

£16m investment and a contribution from the department will deliver:

- **A redesigned Health and Work model:** Delivered in partnership with Department for Health and Department for the Economy, offering stronger integration between employability and health services to support more people to find and sustain employment.
- Support for **3,750 people to improve work and wellbeing outcomes**, working in partnership with local organisations and piloted in Belfast City Council and Derry and Strabane District Council.
- A **Commission on Work and Wellbeing**, bringing together independent experts across health and employability, to set a forward approach to tackling health and disability related economic inactivity, and shape long-term recommendations for scaling up interventions.
- **A shift to early intervention and prevention:** Responding to individual needs as early as possible, to prevent long-term economic detachment and higher cost Public Service Interventions in the long term.
- An estimated **long term financial benefit of £103m**, driven by reduced duplication, higher productivity, and lower long-term demand on public services.

► Digital Workplace (Dept of Finance)

£6m investment will deliver:

- Modernised records and information management across the NI Civil Service, replacing an ageing system used by **26,900 staff** and managing over **107m records (99TB)**.
- **Recurring savings of £399k per year from 2029/30**, once legacy support and infrastructure costs are removed.
- Reduced duplication and manual handling, supporting **faster access to information and freeing staff time for citizen-facing activity**.
- The secure foundations required for the future use of **AI-enabled tools** within government, **strengthening transparency, auditability and decision making** over the long term.

► NISRA Data Linkage Office (Dept of Finance)

£5.3m investment will deliver:

- **Two Data Pathfinder projects** in Education and Health to highlight the power of integrated data for policy making and address key Programme for Government priorities.
- **A stronger data-driven culture in government** to provide better outcomes for citizens by strengthening the data literacy, capability and confidence of policy teams.
- **Increased interoperability and wider sharing of public sector data** through established legal mechanisms.

► Bovine TB: A pilot for transformation of disease control delivery (DAERA)

£4m investment will deliver:

- A first of its kind **regionalised research pilot** to redesign the control of bovine tuberculosis.
- A preventative, evidence-led approach to target a disease programme currently costing over £60m per year.
- **Shared Island funding of €6.4m (c£5.6m)**.
- **Direct savings of c£274k by 2028/29**, with substantially larger savings expected as the model scales. Long term projections show that sustained reduction in disease prevalence could deliver **annual savings of up to £2.8m**, improving the financial sustainability of a programme that has cost **~£750m over the past 20 years**.

In addition, the Public Sector Transformation Board has also recommended that a further £66m of funding should be made available as soon as possible, to support another five projects which the Board has assessed as meeting the criteria for funding but which could not be funded from the £235m funding envelope currently available. Further announcements on these projects will be made as soon as possible.

Building a lasting legacy

The Transformation Fund is not an end in itself. Over the coming years, the focus of the Executive will increasingly be on embedding successful approaches into mainstream delivery and sharing learning and good practice across the NICS and more widely, to help embed a reform and delivery mindset across the public sector.

Across the first tranche of funded projects, sustainability planning is already under way. While each project has its own context, the approaches to building a lasting legacy are consistent and can be grouped around a small number of themes:

- **Mainstreaming what works:** using time-limited funding to test and prove new ways of working, with a clear route to embed successful approaches into business as usual beyond March 2029.
- **Evidence and evaluation:** strengthening data, monitoring and formal reviews so that decisions on scale, policy change and future investment are grounded in demonstrable impact.
- **Sustainable funding and affordability:** identifying how ongoing costs will be met—whether through recurrent departmental budgets, agreed contractual arrangements, or other sustainable funding mechanisms.
- **Capability, capacity and system change:** building the skills, workforce and processes needed to sustain improvement, and shifting effort upstream through prevention and early intervention where appropriate.
- **Wider adoption and learning:** designing approaches that can be replicated and scaled across places and services, supported by transparent reporting of lessons learned.



For example, the Primary Care MDT project is strengthening the data and evidence it will use to demonstrate benefits and support decisions on securing recurrent funding to complete rollout and embed MDTs as a core feature of primary care. The SEN transformation project is explicitly focused on building capability and testing early intervention approaches, with evaluation informing what should be sustained and scaled. In justice, both the Speeding Up Justice and the Modernisation of Electronic Monitoring projects are focused on embedding reforms and building operational models that reduce demand on the system over time and support long-term sustainability, including through agreed contractual and funding arrangements. In infrastructure and planning, the Urban Drainage and Transforming Planning projects are building practical evidence, governance and operational arrangements that can underpin longer term adoption, alongside consideration of how successful approaches can be and sustained beyond the life of the Fund.

The Public Sector Transformation Board, supported by the First Minister's and deputy First Minister's Delivery Unit, will continue to focus on ensuring that each project has a credible route to sustainability. This will include ongoing oversight of delivery and benefits realisation, promoting shared learning across projects, and supporting evidence-based decisions on where successful models should be embedded into mainstream

delivery and expanded to deliver lasting improvements for citizens.

This is the first of what will be a series of progress reports on the use of the Public Sector Transformation Fund. The first year of delivery has demonstrated the real potential of the Transformation Fund to improve services and strengthen long-term sustainability, with early progress already visible across a diverse portfolio of reforms. Over the coming year the expectation is that this momentum will build, delivery will be scaled, the evidence base will be strengthened and learning will be shared across funded projects and more widely, supported by robust governance and independent challenge.

Where progress is slower than planned or benefits are not materialising, the Public Sector Transformation Board and the Delivery Unit will escalate issues promptly and agree the actions needed to bring delivery back on track, ensuring that the programme remains focused on outcomes, value for money, and lasting impact for citizens.





Northern Ireland
Executive

www.northernireland.gov.uk

**Public Sector
Transformation Fund
Annual Report
2025-2026**

To find out more visit
northernireland.gov.uk/public-sector-transformation-fund
or scan:

