



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Research and Information Service Briefing Paper

16 October 2026

NIAR 137-26

Review of Costs: Regional Balance Bill

RaISe – Public Finance Scrutiny Unit

Seeking to support Northern Ireland Assembly scrutiny, this Review of Costs addresses key potential “public purse” implications arising from the Regional Balance Bill, if enacted and implemented as introduced. The Bill seeks to establish a statutory framework requiring the Northern Ireland Executive to develop, implement and maintain a Regional Balance Strategic Framework aiming to reduce regional economic disparities and inequalities in living standards across Northern Ireland. The Paper should be read alongside RaISe Bill Paper [NIAR 143-2026](#) (dated 16 October 2026), which addresses policy considerations arising from the Bill.

This information is provided to a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) in support of their duties, and is not intended to address the specific circumstances of any particular individual. It should not be relied upon as professional legal advice, or as a substitute for it.

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Key Points

- On 8 June 2026, a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) introduced the Regional Balance Bill (the Bill) in the Northern Ireland Assembly. The Bill seeks to establish a statutory framework requiring the Northern Ireland Executive to develop, implement and maintain a Regional Balance Strategic Framework that aims to reduce regional economic disparities and inequalities in living standards across Northern Ireland.
- If enacted and implemented as introduced, the Bill would place new duties on all Northern Ireland Executive departments to give due regard to regional balance when developing their policies, strategies and plans, with the ultimate aim of creating a cross-government approach to address regional inequalities.
- On 8 September 2026, at Second Stage of the Bill, the MLA Bill Sponsor stated the Bill's successful implementation could generate longer-term economic benefits, including increased employment, enhanced regional economic performance, higher tax revenues and reduced expenditure associated with economic inactivity and unemployment. However, these outcomes remain contingent on the effectiveness of implementation and wider economic conditions.
- The Bill's accompanying Explanatory and Financial Memorandum (EFM) anticipates the Bill having financial implications that primarily relate to the Bill's specified administrative, analytical and reporting requirements, such as those associated with the Regional Plan Framework development, implementation, data collection and departmental coordination.
- The EFM suggests existing departmental resources would absorb many of the potential public purse costs that would arise from the Bill's implementation – if enacted as introduced. The precise scale of expenditure that would be required, the Regional Balance Strategic Framework would be determined by the ambition, complexity and resource requirements that eventually would be adopted pursuant to the newly enacted legislation.
- Currently, the Department for the Economy (DfE) undertakes substantial regional balance activity through its Regional Balance Unit, relying on that Unit and other related staffing and programmes, such as the Regional

Economy Fund and InvestNI regional initiatives. That existing “infrastructure” could reduce the need to introduce new structures if the Bill would be enacted and implemented as introduced. Additional workload nonetheless could arise under the Bill, potentially generating resource pressures.

- It appears costs also could arise from: developing and maintaining the proposed Regional Balance Strategic Framework; collecting and analysing specified data; producing the noted annual reports; reviewing framework effectiveness; providing guidance; and, undertaking or commissioning research.
- For example, new reporting and information-gathering duties could require additional staff capacity, analytical capability, software systems or revised data collection processes, particularly where new indicators would be required to measure regional disparities and progress against targets.
- As noted above, DfE currently operates a Regional Balance Unit, comprising 11 staff, at an annual staffing cost of approximately £799,509 and total expenditure of around £811,509, including administrative costs. Any expansion of those existing responsibilities, as proposed by this Bill, could require additional staffing and or reprioritisation of existing work.
- For example, the Bill seeks to empower DfE to undertake, commission or support research relating to regional disparities. Current departmental research programmes could be relevant when implementing this Bill, if enacted as introduced. It, however, is unclear at present as to whether that would be possible - and if so, the extent that it could be; and whether additional funding could be required.
- The Bill’s proposed statutory “due regard” duty could provide a basis for legal challenge; and such challenges would incur legal costs, impacting the public purse . Moreover, any such challenges also could impact policy implementation under the Bill, potentially introducing delays.
- The Bill does not create new grant schemes or direct spending commitments. Consequently, if any future expenditure associated with reducing regional disparities would be introduced by the Executive through its Regional Balance Strategic Framework, which would need to be agreed, along with any associated funding plans.

- MLAs consider this Bill within a challenging public finance context, as the Executive continues to face significant budgetary pressures, while the Draft Budget 2026-29/30 remains unagreed and departments face substantial resource challenges.
- A number of financial implications remain uncertain at this stage, particularly regarding future framework requirements, departmental resource needs, data collection arrangements, research activity and the extent of any legal challenges arising from the proposed statutory duties.

Introduction

This Review of Costs aims to support Northern Ireland Assembly Members in their plenary, committee and constituency capacities, when scrutinising key “public purse” implications that could arise from the [Regional Balance Bill](#) (the Bill), as introduced into the Northern Ireland Assembly (the Assembly) by a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) on 8 June 2026. The Bill aims:

... to impose a duty on the Executive to develop, adopt, maintain and implement a framework setting out how disparities in regional economic performance and living standards are to be addressed across government; to confer functions on the Department for the Economy in relation to the preparation of the framework, its reporting to the Assembly and providing guidance and research; and for connected purposes.¹

The Paper relies on sources available to the Public Finance Scrutiny Unit (PFSU) within the Assembly’s Research and Information Service (RaISe) at the time of writing. Those include: the [introduced Bill](#); its accompanying [Explanatory and Financial Memorandum](#) (EFM); the MLA Bill Sponsor’s public consultation on the Bill; and, the Bill’s [Second Stage debate](#). Its contents are presented as follows:

- [Section 1 – Recap of Introduced Bill](#);
- [Section 2 – Public Finance Context in Northern Ireland](#);
- [Section 3 – Key potential “public purse” considerations](#); and,
- [Section 4 – Concluding remarks](#).

Any discussion in the Paper about the prevailing law, including existing legislation, is not intended to provide legal advice or opinion. Instead, it seeks to orientate the Paper’s discussion. Please note that the identified key potential public purse implications are not intended to be exhaustive. Included throughout

¹ Regional Balance Bill [EFM - As Introduced](#)

are potential scrutiny points in blue boxes, which Members may wish to draw on, including those in the Committee for the Economy.

See RalSe Bill Paper [NIAR 143-2026](#) (dated 16 October 2026) for discussion about key policy considerations arising from the introduced Bill.²

1 Recap of Introduced Bill

The [Bill, as introduced](#), has 3 Parts, containing 8 clauses and no schedules, as follows:

Table 1: Summary of the Bill as introduced³

Part	Clause	Effect of Clause if enacted
1 – Requires the Executive to develop, adopt, maintain and implement a Regional Balance Strategic Framework and imposes a due regard duty on departments, supported by departmental information gathering	1	Places a statutory duty on the Executive to create and maintain a Regional Balance Strategic Framework aimed at reducing regional disparities. It requires measurable targets, funding plans, departmental roles, consultation with stakeholders, and consideration of cross-border economic data. The clause seeks to embed regional balance as a long-term cross-government policy objective.
	2	Requires all Northern Ireland departments to consider regional balance when developing or revising policies, strategies and plans. Departments must, where reasonably practicable, contribute to the Framework's outcomes and targets. The provision mirrors "due regard" duties found elsewhere in legislation and aims to ensure regional balance influences routine government decision-making.
2 – Provides for annual reporting to the Assembly, Departmental review and recommendations, and guidance and research functions	3	Establishes monitoring and accountability arrangements. Departments must gather evidence on how they have applied the regional balance duty and assess their contribution to Framework objectives. Information must be supplied to the Department for the Economy to support annual reporting. This creates an evidence base for measuring progress and departmental performance.
	4	Requires the Department for the Economy to publish annual assessments of the Act's implementation, the operation of the Framework, and progress in reducing regional disparities. Reports must be laid before the Assembly and followed by a ministerial statement. The provision strengthens transparency and enables ongoing Assembly scrutiny of Executive performance.

² Available at Northern Ireland Assembly, [Research and Information Service Publications 2026](#) (NIAR-143-2026)

³ [Regional Balance Bill](#); as introduced (8 June 2026)

	5	Provides for periodic strategic review. The Executive must assess the effectiveness of the Framework within five years and at least every five years thereafter. The Department may recommend revisions, new actions, or amended targets. By requiring structured review, the clause allows the Framework to evolve in response to evidence and changing circumstances.
	6	This clause gives the Department for the Economy supporting functions to aid implementation. It may issue guidance, commission research, provide advice, promote best practice, and fund relevant work. The provision recognises that reducing regional disparities requires evidence-based policymaking and capacity-building across government and wider public bodies.
3 – Contains ancillary, interpretation, commencement and short title provisions	7	Interpretation - defines key terms used throughout the Bill, including "regional disparities", "cross-border economic data", "regions" and "sub-regions". It identifies the indicators that may be used to assess disparities, ranging from economic performance and income levels to health, education, housing and public expenditure.
	8	Commencement and short title.

2 Public finance Context in Northern Ireland

To provide wider framing for subsequent discussion about the Bill's key potential public purse implications, key definitions and the challenging Northern Ireland public finance context are set out below.

2.1 "Public purse" defined

In Northern Ireland, the public purse encompasses the Northern Ireland Block Grant from His Majesty's (HM) Treasury; revenues raised regionally; and other funding sources. The Northern Ireland Executive is responsible for allocating those monies through the Executive Budget, which it is to do so in line with the financial arrangement under current devolution, including requirements specified in the Executive's [Budget Sustainability Plan](#) and [Budget Improvement Plan Roadmap](#), along with [Transformation Plans](#), which collectively aim to improve Northern Ireland public finances, while seeking to balance numerous competing priorities and demands for limited available funding.

If the Bill would be enacted, as introduced, DfE then would be responsible for covering costs arising when implementing the Bill, including the specified statutory duties. At the given time, DfE would do so using its budget and/or seeking additional monies from the Executive.

2.2 Budgetary Context – central and devolved

The central and devolved budgetary contexts remain challenging across the United Kingdom, due to a number of contributory factors that are relevant to Assembly consideration of this Bill. **Figure 1** below summarises the most significant developments from February 2024 to the time of writing.

Figure 1: Challenging budgetary context - Contributory factors dating from February 2024 to present

Implementation of Political Agreements (February 2024 - Present)

Since the restoration of the Executive in February 2024, Departments have been undertaking work to facilitate the Executive's implementation of political and financial agreements – such as the [Interim Fiscal Framework](#) (May 2024), the [Budget Sustainability Plan](#) (October 2024) and the accompanying [Budget Improvement Plan Roadmap](#) (December 2024), as well as the establishment of [Interim Transformation Board](#) (March 2025). These measures have been broadly targeted to improve the position of Northern Ireland's public finances

Budget Information Gathering Exercise (August-September 2024)

The Department of Finance (DoF) undertook a 2025-28 Budget Information Gathering Exercise, requesting returns from all Northern Ireland Departments, marking the start of the planning stage in the 2025/26 Northern Ireland Executive Budget cycle. The DoF found that “Departments identified a reported £767 million of unfunded pressures”, as [reported](#) to the Assembly on 23 September 2024.

UK Autumn Budget 2024 (October 2024)

The [Chancellor's Autumn Budget 2024](#) set out some of the multi-year competing pressures facing the United Kingdom Government, potentially adversely impacting the Government's spending power in certain areas, along with other decisions

relating to social security - see RaISe Briefing Paper 47/24 entitled "[Chancellor's Autumn Budget 2024: initial considerations for Northern Ireland](#)".

Departmental Bids Exceed Budget Allocation (December 2024)

Northern Ireland Departmental bids for 2025/26 [resource and capital](#) expenditure exceeded the [Northern Ireland Budget](#) allocated by the United Kingdom Government to the Executive.

Later that month, the [2025/26 Draft Executive Budget](#) and accompanying [Written Statement](#) by the Minister for Finance highlighted ongoing "pay and inflationary pressures" and "growing demands" on public services.

UK Spring Statement 2025 (March 2025)

The [Chancellor's 2025 Spring Statement](#) updated the House of Commons on the United Kingdom economy and public finances. Her Statement was accompanied by an Economic and Fiscal Forecast from the [Office for Budget Responsibility](#) (OBR). It also announced a number of policy decisions, which included reforms to the welfare system, increased defence spending and a £3.25 billion (b) ["Transformation Fund"](#) to reform public services. (Important to note this central government development, as the Northern Ireland Executive Budget is a sub-cycle within the United Kingdom Government's Budget cycle.) DoF officials thereafter explained during the Assembly Finance Committee [meeting](#) that:

.... on the allocations out of that fund, it will depend on which Whitehall departments get allocations from it so we don't get it on the £3.25 billion we'll get it on the allocations

Executive Agrees 2025/26 Budget (3 April 2025)

The Executive agreed the [2025/26 Executive Budget](#), which the Finance Minister [described](#) as "sets out a direction of travel" which "clearly prioritises its Programme for Government priorities".

US Trade Tariffs (4 April 2025)

The American President announced substantial international trade tariffs, resulting in: plummeting stock markets across the globe; a collapsing American bond market; the subsequent 9 April 90-day pause on some new US tariffs; other countries' similar pauses; further consideration of retaliatory tariffs on the US; and an international trade war arising between the US and China.

US-UK Trade Deal (8 May 2025)

A non-binding trade deal was agreed by between the US and UK Governments. The general terms of the new trade deal were subsequently published in the [UK-US Economic Prosperity Deal](#) (EPD); the deal non-binding, meaning on-going further negotiations to work through the detail of the deal.

Executive Spending Plans Published (24 June 2025)

The DoF published its [2025-26 Budget Factsheet](#), setting out the Executive's spending plans for the one-year period from 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026.

Finance Minister Written Statement (3 October 2025)

The Executive's Finance Minister provided a Written Ministerial Statement detailing [Treasury Funding Available 2026-2029/30](#).

UK Autumn Budget 2025 (26 November 2025)

The [Chancellor's Autumn Budget 2025](#) detailed the United Kingdom Government's resource spending plans up to 2028/29 and capital plans up to 2029/30.

NI Draft Multi-Year Budget (6 January 2026)

The Finance Minister published the [Draft Budget 2026-2029/30](#) (not Executive agreed) and announced an eight-week public consultation on the proposals.

Treasury Agrees £400m Reserve Claim (11 February 2026)

HM Treasury [agreed](#) a reserve claim for the Northern Ireland Executive, to provide £400 million for 2025/25, which is to be repaid over three years. The Finance Minister confirmed in a [written statement](#) that same day that the £400 million would be allocated as follows, as agreed by Executive:

- Department of Education - £214.6 million
- Department of Health - £185.4 million

Treasury Agrees £400m Reserve Claim (11 February 2026)

The [Chancellor delivered her Spring Forecast 2026](#)

Later that day, in an [Oral Statement](#) to the Assembly, the Finance Minister confirmed additional £390 million Barnett consequentials over the next three-year period, comprising: Resource DEL - £380 million; and, Capital DEL - £9 million

UK Spring Forecast 2026 (3 March 2026)

The Chancellor delivered her [2026 Spring Forecast](#). Later that day, in an Oral Statement to the Assembly, the Finance Minister confirmed additional £390 million Barnett consequentials over the next three-year period, consisting of £380 million RDEL and £9 million CDEL.

Update on Multi-Year Budget Discussions (16 April 2026)

Speaking publicly following a meeting of Executive Ministers, the deputy First Minister [stated](#) that the Executive wanted a multi-year Budget agreed "as quickly as we can". She added

...but the reality is that there is a very, very significant shortfall...the moment that Budget would be agreed, unless we secure additional resource from the Treasury, would simply lead to significant cuts and massive impacts in terms of our public services and on the people that we are here to serve.

The Finance Minister echoed these sentiments, stating that "to achieve the ambition of the Budget is going to take an injection of investment from the British Government."

Parties Meet SoSNI on Budget Progress (2 July 2026)

[Speaking](#) after the meeting, Hilary Benn MP said they had 'agreed a programme of work' that will 'look, first of all, at the pressures that the Executive's finances are facing'.

He said the work would also look at the Executive's plan for "fiscal sustainability, efficiencies and public service transformation".

Budget Act Deadline Passes (31 July 2026)

As the Executive were unable to pass a Budget by this deadline, an automatic departmental expenditure limit of 95% of last year's funding was triggered under prevailing legislation.

Executive Writes to PM on Financial Pressures (13 August 2026)

The Executive collectively [wrote](#) to PM Andy Burnham, calling for a 'fair funding envelope'. The letter said the current funding from Westminster 'does not provide a sufficient basis to fund public services' in NI.

SoSNI Statement on Budget Impasse (24 August 2026)

SoSNI Chris Bryant MP [said](#) the Executive will have to engage in 'self-help' and look at revenue raising to resolve Northern Ireland's budget issues. He further added "I understand the financial pressures that there are in Northern Ireland, and I'm very happy to take them very seriously."

PM confirms SoSNI talks on the Budget (2 September 2026)

In response to a question at PMQs, the PM stated:

Our first responsibility is to get Stormont government up and running and functioning properly with a budget. I have empowered the Northern Ireland Secretary to go into talks to resolve that issue, and we can continue the conversation on the broader issues about reform once we have got that in place.

SoSNI (2 September 2026)

Following discussions with the Executive parties the SoSNI [offered](#) a financial package of £350 million per year over the next three years. In response the Executive parties stated that the package did not meet the Executives funding requirements and negotiations would continue.

SoSNI updated funding offer (24 September 2026)

Following discussion with Executive parties, the SoSNI [announced](#) a further funding package. The package addresses issues raised in discussions, and includes:

- £1.25 billion extra funding for the Executive over three years
- £150 million for transformation of public services
- £100 million for social housing
- £75 million to address fraud and error in the benefit system

The SoSNI set a deadline of the 1 October for Executive parties to accept the offer.

Transformation Funding – Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service (HOCS) briefing to Finance Committee (30 September 2026)

The HOCS [appeared](#) before the Finance Committee to brief the Committee on the Public Sector Transformation Fund. Several issues were discussed including; progress on tranche 1 projects, funding for tranche 1 projects, spending profile for all transformation projects, governance matters and scrutiny of transformation projects.

2.3 Draft Budget 2026-29/30 – DfE allocations

This sub-section provides additional context to further highlight the extent of financial pressures facing individual Executive departments. It, however, does not comment on the sufficiency or otherwise of proposed departmental budgets, as provided in the [Draft Budget 2026-2029/30](#) public consultation document - published by the Northern Ireland Finance Minister on 3 January 2026 (and closed on 3 March 2026).

That document set out departments' proposed Resource Departmental Expenditure Limits (RDEL) and Capital Departmental Expenditure Limits (CDEL), as well as previous Executive commitments. As the identified lead Department in the Bill, as introduced, the proposed budget allocation for DfE is highlighted in sub-sections [2.3.1](#)- [2.3.2](#) below:

2.3.1 Proposed RDEL allocation

Table 2. Draft Budget 2026-2029/30 – DfE RDEL allocation

Department	£million		
	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
Economy	815.4	836.1	960.3

Source: [Draft Budget 2026-29/30](#)

2.3.2 Proposed CDEL allocation

Table 3. Draft Budget 2026-2029/30 – DfE CDEL allocation

Department	£million			
	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30
Economy	160.5	141.6	129.0	124.3

Source: [Draft Budget 2026-29/30](#)

At the time of writing, the Draft Budget 2026-2029/30 remains unagreed by the Executive, as noted by the Economy Minister in a briefing to Economy Committee in response to the Draft Budget on 21 January 2026. The Minister stated:

This year, I needed savings of 7.9% across the Department to live within budget. That was difficult, but, as the Minister, I have a duty to balance my budget and do the best that I can with the resources available to me whilst supporting Executive colleagues to deliver our shared Programme for Government priorities.⁴

The Minister concluded, stating:

The draft multi-year Budget will mean that my Department, like all Departments, continues to face huge financial pressures. Having a three-year Budget, however, will at least help us to plan and prioritise. I hope that a final Budget will be agreed. It is incumbent on the Executive, collectively, to do so.⁵

Due to the cross-cutting nature of the Bill, as introduced, it is foreseeable that all Executive Departments could be impacted to a lesser or greater extent, as such the proposed RDEL and CDEL allocations for all departments can be found at Appendix [1](#) and [2](#).

Potential scrutiny points:

⁴ [Official Report - Committee for the Economy \(21 January 2026\)](#)

⁵ See footnote 4 immediately above CHECK THIS in final

1. Facing serious budgetary challenges and competing pressures, how would the Economy Minister and all other Executive Ministers – given the cross-cutting nature of the Bill, ensure there would be appropriate resourcing to ensure the Bill’s full implementation, if enacted as introduced; while ensuring to factor in the Executive’s agreed Budget Improvement and Sustainability?
2. The Committee and Members may wish to seek the Department for the Economy and all other Executive departments – given the cross-cutting nature of the Bill, for their assessments of the potential financial impact the Bill could have on their finances, if the Bill is enacted and implemented as introduced?

3 Key potential “public purse” considerations

To address key potential public purse considerations about the Bill, this section draws on available information at the time of writing - namely the Bill as introduced, its accompanying EFM, and the related consultation on the policy proposals, as well as a the Bill’s Second Stage debate in the Assembly. It is presented as follows:

- [3.1 - Member’s Public Consultation on the Bill](#)
- [3.2 - EFM - Financial Effects of the Bill](#)
- [3.3 - Regional Balance Strategic Framework Development](#)
- [3.4 - Data Collection and Collation](#)
- [3.5 - Increased Departmental Workload](#)
- [3.6 - Reporting](#)
- [3.7 - Guidance and Research](#)
- [3.8 - Potential Legal Costs](#)

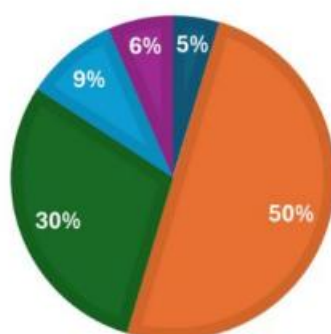
3.1 Member’s Public Consultation on the Bill

The MLA Bill Sponsor conducted a 12-week online public consultation on her legislative proposal between 25 November 2024 and 16 February 2025. A total of 115 responses were received. Subsequently, the [Regional Balance Bill Consultation Summary](#) document was published. The consultation included only one catch-all question inquiring about the proposal's potential financial impact. As shown in **Figure 2** below half of respondents believed the financial impact was “manageable”, whereas 5% considered it “prohibitively” expensive. The remainder consider it to be minimal, have no financial impact or other.

Figure 2. Pie-chart showing responses to the consultation question – *What do you believe the financial impact of the Bill's implementation will be on Government Departments?*

What do you believe the financial impact of the Bill's implementation will be on Government Departments?

■ Prohibitively expensive ■ Manageable financial impact
 ■ Minimal financial impact ■ No financial impact
 ■ Other



Source: [Regional Balance Bill Consultation Summary](#)

3.2 EFM – Financial Effects of the Bill

The financial effects of the Bill, as introduced, are considered at paragraphs 31 to 40 of the Bill's accompanying [EFM](#). Paragraph 31 states:

The Bill requires the Executive to develop, adopt, maintain and implement a Regional Balance Strategic Framework and imposes a due regard duty on departments, supported by departmental information gathering. It also provides for annual reporting to the Assembly, Departmental review and

*recommendations, and guidance and research functions. There will be administrative costs to the Executive, the Department for the Economy and other departments associated with preparing the Framework, compiling information, conducting analysis, reporting and consultation.*⁶

Paragraphs 32 and 33 then consider some of the provisions of the Bill in which these administrative costs may be incurred:

- **Framework development and cross-departmental implementation** – *are likely to generate administrative and analytical costs, even if largely absorbed within existing departmental baselines. The scale of these costs will depend on how ambitious, prescriptive and resource-intensive the Framework ultimately becomes.*⁷
- **Ongoing data collection, collation and reporting requirements** – *may require additional capacity, especially if new indicators, software systems or analytical processes are needed to implement the Bill provisions, evidencing progress against regional balance objectives.*⁸

Paragraphs 34 and 35 highlight the role of DfE, as the lead Department in the compilation of the Framework and its reporting. In addition, the EFM notes DfE's on-going work in the area of Regional Balance and the impact this may have in limiting the costs associated with implementing the Bill. The EFM states:

The Department for the Economy already undertakes substantial activity related to regional balance, including a dedicated Regional Balance Unit and significant programme expenditure through initiatives such as the Regional Balance Fund and Invest Northern Ireland regional programmes. This existing infrastructure could limit the need for entirely new structures. However, the Department could

⁶ Regional Balance Bill [EFM - As Introduced](#)

⁷ See footnote 6 immediately above

⁸ See footnote 6

face increased workload through the broader focus on regional balance.⁹

For example, the ancillary functions on the Department for the Economy to provide guidance and information, and to undertake, commission or support research on regional disparities could require additional expenditure.¹⁰

Paragraphs 36 and 37 reflects that the Bill itself does not create new spending or grants, rather it notes an assumed resource cost on Northern Ireland Executive Departments in framework implementation and reporting. The EFM states:

The Bill does not itself create new spending or grant programmes or impose direct costs on public bodies. The financial implications of the Bill are indirect and fall mainly in departmental resources. Any financial impact would be determined by what is required to fulfil the objectives of the Bill and whether those requirements could be absorbed into existing resources. Of course, downstream decision making on regional balance may incur direct expenditure, but that will flow from Executive agreement of the Framework and its ambition.

It is expected that Departments will incur financial costs as a result of the Bill through the allocation of Departmental staff resource in the Bill's implementation and in its reporting. The Bill Sponsor believes this is justified in order to address the challenge of regional economic inequalities and inequalities in living standards. If effective in addressing regional balance over time, the Bill Sponsor feels the Bill could even have a net positive impact on the public purse.¹¹

The EFM concludes that the proposal could yield both potential costs savings and potential revenue generation by contributing to improved economic

⁹ See footnote 6

¹⁰ See footnote 6

¹¹ See footnote 6

performance across Northern Ireland. At paragraphs 38 to 40, the EFM reasons that:

An assumed consequence of addressing regional imbalance is improving the economic performance of currently under-performing regions. A logical consequence of improving the economic performance of underperforming regions is increased economic activity in those regions, potentially resulting in increased corporate tax revenue. Furthermore, increased economic activity could lead to job creation, which could in turn lead to a decrease in expenditure on unemployment and inactivity, and increased personal tax revenue from greater employment. Whilst these are long-term objectives and will depend on the details of implementation and other factors, they represent the potential if the policy intent of the Bill is delivered well.

Assuming that the draft Bill would result in new economic activity and jobs, rather than displacing economic activity and jobs from better performing regions, that could lead to an increase in Northern Ireland's overall tax revenue through increased corporate, personal taxes and rates revenue, and a decrease in Northern Ireland's overall expenditure on unemployment and economic inactivity. Again, this will be dependent on a range of factors around implementation and broader economic conditions. This Bill is about creating the conditions to focus on improving regional balance and commit to continuous improvement in doing so.

A significant element of this hypothetical potential tax revenue increase – corporate and personal taxes – would of course be received by HM Treasury and could be returned to Northern Ireland through its Block Grant. An increase in rates revenue, however, would be more directly beneficial to the Executive's Budget. Decreased expenditure on departmental unemployment and inactivity programmes could also have a more direct impact on

Northern Ireland budgets, as money formerly spent on programmes to address these could be redirected elsewhere.¹²

3.3 Regional Balance Strategic Framework Development

Clause 1 of the Bill places a duty on the Executive to develop, adopt, maintain and implement a Regional Balance Strategic Framework. Notably, in relation to potential costs arising under the Clause's subsections (1-3):

(1) The Executive must develop, adopt, maintain and implement a strategic framework to be known as the Regional Balance Strategic Framework.

(2) The Framework must set out how the Executive proposes to reduce regional disparities in Northern Ireland.

(3) The Framework must in particular—

(a) state the outcomes which the Executive intends should be achieved and the period within which it is intended that the outcomes should be achieved;

(b) identify the roles of Northern Ireland departments in developing, adopting, implementing and revising policies, strategies and plans so as to reduce regional disparities;

(c) identify mechanisms to reduce regional disparities, including cross-departmental actions and funding plans;

(d) set out the criteria and methodology for assessing regional disparities;

(e) include provisions requiring Northern Ireland departments to recognise and consider cross-border economic data in policies, strategies and plans so as to reduce regional disparities; and

¹² See footnote 6

(f) include measurable targets to be achieved by specific dates (and any associated milestones) for reducing regional disparities, including—

(i) identification of a baseline year against which progress in reducing regional disparities is to be measured; and

(ii) targets and associated investments that will allow for greater convergence towards the Northern Ireland average.¹³

The accompanying EFM acknowledges the Bill's potential to increase departmental workload to have possible resource implications, stating:

Framework development and cross-departmental implementation are likely to generate administrative and analytical costs, even if largely absorbed within existing departmental baselines. The scale of these costs will depend on how ambitious, prescriptive and resource-intensive the Framework ultimately becomes.¹⁴

In October 2026, RaiSe-PFSU contacted the DfE, as the identified lead Department, seeking its view on the potential impact of developing the proposed Framework. The Department replied:

The Department is continuing its analysis of the Bill. The duty to develop the Strategic Framework is on the Executive and it is unclear how this would work in practice as the Executive is not a corporate body. In addition, the duties on DfE to provide guidance are problematic in practice. The Department does not have the knowledge or expertise to comment upon policy areas that are within the remit of other Departments.¹⁵

As the Bill has not been introduced by the DfE or another Executive Department, the work required to implement the provisions of the Bill are

¹³ [Regional Balance Bill – as introduced](#)

¹⁴ Regional Balance Bill [EFM - as introduced](#)

¹⁵ RaiSe-PFSU correspondence with DfE, received 6 October 2026

unlikely to have been captured in department's resource planning. As such, if the Bill would be enacted as introduced, a number of options are possible in relation to DfE and other Executive departments implementing the Bill, including:

- Absorbing new work arising from the Bill within existing resources
- Increasing resource capacity to implement the provisions of the Bill
- Reprioritisation – Deferring planned work to implement the Bill

Across these three scenarios, it is likely that if increased resources (for example – staff) would be required, that would result in additional costs arising from the Bill.

3.4 Data Collection and Collation

Clause 7 of the Bill provides a list of economic metrics that the proposed Framework and reporting have regard in setting targets and measure progress. Those metrics include:

“regional disparities” means disparities in economic performance and living standards between regions and sub-regions within Northern Ireland, having regard (amongst other things) to—

- (a) gross domestic product per head of population;*
- (b) average and median disposable household income per head of population;*
- (c) unemployment rates, employment rates and economic inactivity rates;*
- (d) productivity, including gross value added per employee;*
- (e) health data, including average life expectancy;*
- (f) education data, including attainment rates;*
- (g) indices of deprivation;*
- (h) affordable housing;*
- (i) access to airports; and*

(j) the regional distribution of public capital expenditure;¹⁶

The EFM further explains that the specified indicator list noting:

The list is placed on the face of the Bill to ensure transparency, while allowing methodological evolution through the Executive's Framework. Departments are free to have regard to considerations beyond this list as appropriate.¹⁷

At paragraph 33 of the EFM, when considering the financial implications of data collection, it acknowledges:

Ongoing data collection, collation and reporting requirements may require additional capacity, especially if new indicators, software systems or analytical processes are needed to implement the Bill provisions, evidencing progress against regional balance objectives.¹⁸

Potential scrutiny point:

3. Would new departmental datasets, monitoring arrangements or information systems be required under the Bill if enacted and implemented as introduced: and if so, has any assessment been undertaken to ascertain potential costs that could arise?

3.5 Increased Departmental Workload

As noted at Paragraph 34, the EFM, acknowledges that:

The Department for the Economy already undertakes substantial activity related to regional balance, including a dedicated Regional Balance Unit and significant programme expenditure through

¹⁶ See footnote 13

¹⁷ See footnote 6

¹⁸ See footnote 6

*initiatives such as the Regional Balance Fund and Invest Northern Ireland regional programmes. This existing infrastructure could limit the need for entirely new structures. However, the Department could face increased workload through the broader focus on regional balance.*¹⁹

The following sub-sections consider activity undertaken by DfE in relation to regional balance and the current costs associated with this activity, to help inform any potential additional work that would be required if the Bill would be enacted and implemented as introduced.

3.5.1 Existing departmental strategy and policy

Relevant in this context is the [DfE's Economic Vision](#) (the Vision) was launched by the Minister for the Economy on 19 February 2024. That Vision set out the Department's approach to the economy, focusing on four areas:

- Regional Balance
- Good Jobs
- Raising Productivity
- Decarbonisation

With respect to regional balance, the Vision seeks to ensure that:

*Everyone, no matter where they live, should have the same opportunity to earn a living.*²⁰

The DfE published a [Sub-Regional Economic Plan](#) (the Plan) in October 2024, which focussed on three core strands of activity:

1. The Formation of new Local Economic Partnerships (LEPs)
2. Enhancing Invest Northern Ireland's sub-regional role by introducing local targets

¹⁹ See footnote 6

²⁰ [Statement from Minister Murphy - economic vision | Department for the Economy](#)

3. The realignment of the DfE's "policies and programmes to drive local growth"²¹

3.5.2 DfE Regional Balance Unit

As noted in the EFM, the DfE has a Regional Balance Unit (RBU). That Unit employs 11 (full-time and part-time staff) at various levels, furthermore this is overseen by a departmental Grade 5 with other responsibilities beyond regional balance. As such, it has a total staffing cost of £799,509, with an additional £12,000 on non-salary-related costs, including hospitality and general administrative expenditure; bringing its total expenditure to £811,509.²² The Unit's organisational structure, including its staff roles and responsibilities, are:

*... two teams, headed by two [Grade Sevens]. Their responsibilities includes local economic partnerships, regional balance fund including finance and governance, entrepreneurship and collaboration with other Departments on rural development and anti-poverty strategies.*²³

3.5.3 Programmes contributing to regional balance

The following sub-sections consider existing programmes identified in the EFM and other areas in which regional balance activity is currently ongoing.

3.5.3.1 Local Economic Partnership - Regional Economy Fund

On 27 January 2025, the Finance Minister [announced](#) the allocation of a £45 million Local Economic Partnership – Regional Economy Fund over three years split £30 million capital and £15 million resource - to help form Local Economic Partnerships led by councils. In distributing the Fund, a formula was created, with the following methodology, as detailed in **Table 4** below:

- 30% - allocated equally to all councils
- 30% - based on productivity performance measured by output per job

²¹ [Sub-Regional Economic Plan](#)

²² Email correspondence with DfE 11 March 2026

²³ Email correspondence with DfE 11 March 2026

- 40% - based on peripherality, based on small area classifications as per the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)'s regional typology methods

Table 4. DfE allocation of Regional Economy Fund to local councils

Council Area	Base (30%)	Productivity (30%)	Peripherality (40%)	Annual Total	Total over 3 years of fund
Antrim and Newtownabbey	409	214	333	956	2,868
Belfast	409	214	333	956	2,868
Lisburn and Castlereagh	409	428	333	1,170	3,510
Mid Ulster	409	214	666	1,289	3,867
Ards and North Down	409	642	333	1,384	4,152
Mid and East Antrim	409	428	666	1,503	4,509
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon	409	428	666	1,503	4,509
Fermanagh and Omagh	409	428	666	1,503	4,509
Newry, Mourne and Down	409	428	666	1,503	4,509

Causeway Coast & Glens	409	428	666	1,503	4,509
Derry City and Strabane	409	642	666	1,717	5,151

Source: [DfE - Regional Economy Fund](#) (January 2025)

3.5.3.2 InvestNI

On 19 November 2024, InvestNI published its [Business Strategy 2024-2027](#), with InvestNI stating that it had a strategic objective, that:

By 2026/27, 65% of Invest NI’s Investments will be to businesses located outside of the Belfast Metropolitan Area (2019/20 to2023/24 5 Year average = 56%).²⁴

In addition, the InvestNI Business Strategy 2024-27 contained targets for Investment, partner delivery and business ownership in the Belfast Metropolitan Area and the rest of Northern Ireland. (More information is available at at [Appendix 3](#) of this Paper.)

In correspondence in March 2026 with RaISe-PFSU, the DfE provided fuller detail on the additional activity undertaken by InvestNI, ass summarised in **Table 5** below:

Table 5. Activity undertaken by InvestNI that support Regional Balance

Activity	Detail
Regional Marketing	<i>InvestNI has also revamped its approach to regional marketing, allocating spend in line with its ambition to increase activity in the regions. This has helped drive greater demand in the regions across key programmes. For example, 67% of applications in its latest Ambition to Grow call were from outside the Belfast Metropolitan Area.²⁵</i>

²⁴ <https://www.investni.com/sites/default/files/2024-10/business-strategy-invest-ni-2024-2027.pdf>

²⁵ Email correspondence with DfE 11 March 2026

Regional Property Programme	<i>Invest NI has developed and is implementing a new Regional Property Programme. This is designed to be a significant driver of regional balance and broadening and deepening its regional client base by increasing the availability of property at a regional level, supporting regional growth and helping local businesses meet their ambitions in their local area. Key immediate projects ²⁶identified, include the development of a new business park at Desertcreat, aimed at promoting green growth opportunities and addressing the shortage of industrial land in the Mid-Ulster area. Further development work is also targeted for Invest NI's Mandeville Industrial Estate in Craigavon.</i>
New staff	<i>Invest NI has appointed a Chief Development Officer and five new Heads of Regional Business who together, will lead the new five regional offices' network team structure. To complement the new office structure, Invest NI has committed to increasing its regional staffing by c40% over time and good progress is being made against this target.</i>
Regional engagement	<i>Since April 2025, 70 regional roadshow events have been run through Invest NI's regional office network involving nearly 800 local business representatives. 34 of the events have been business drop-in clinics, run in conjunction with its partners in InterTradeIreland, Councils, Enterprise NI and Further and Higher Education institutions. These events boost knowledge of the support that is available, raise key strategic priorities and stimulate demand in critical areas aligned with the Minister's objectives.²⁷</i>
Regional delivery	<i>Invest NI has increased regional delivery through its solutions teams. For example, its R&D Team undertook a series of Boosting R&D regional roadshows to promote its services in this area and engage face-to-face with regional businesses.²⁸</i>

Source: RalSe-PFSU relying on correspondence from DfE dated 11 March 2026

Potential scrutiny points:

²⁶ Email correspondence with DfE 11 March 2026

²⁷ Email correspondence with DfE 11 March 2026

²⁸ Email correspondence with DfE 11 March 2026

4. The Committee for the Economy may wish to ask DfE about what it believes would be the potential impact of the Bill on Departmental regional balance activity, if enacted and implemented as introduced?
5. If the Bill would increase departmental workload in the area of regional balance, the Committee for the Economy may wish to clarify whether that would require additional departmental resource within the existing Regional Balance Unit or other areas, and any potential costs arising from that both to DfE and other Executive Departments - given the cross-cutting nature of the Bill ?

3.6 Reporting

The Bill, if enacted and implemented as introduced, would require the DfE to publish an annual report on the progress and implementation of its provisions.

Clause 4 of the Bill states:

4—a) The Department must, for each reporting year, prepare and publish a report on—

(a) the implementation of the provisions of this Act,

(b) the operation of the Framework, and

(c) progress made by the Executive in reducing regional disparities in accordance with the outcomes and any targets set in the Framework.²⁹

Such reporting would require departmental resource to compile and produce. Currently, the DfE produce an annual business plan, and the current version ([DfE Business Plan 2025-26](#)) contains four key priorities. One of which is:

²⁹ Regional Jobs Bill – as introduced (accessed 13 August 2026)

To promote Regional Balance, ensuring that everyone shares in the benefits of prosperity³⁰

On 5 June 2026, the Department published its [Business Plan 2025-26 - Progress at Year End](#), which provided a status update against commitments and actions in relation to Economy Minister’s four priorities, as shown in **Figure 3** below shows the statuses against those commitments and actions:

Figure 3. DfE Business Plan – status

Green	Complete or on track for delivery
Yellow	Will be delivered but with short delay (1-6 months beyond target timescale)
Amber	Will be delivered but with significant delay (more than 6 months beyond expected timescale)
Red	Will not be delivered or issues which place delivery in significant doubt

Source: [Business Plan 2025-26 - Progress at Year End](#)

That would suggest the DfE already has established structures to report on Regional Balance. It is therefore conceivable that those structures could be adapted to produce the Annual Report that would be required by the Bill, if enacted and implemented as introduced.

However, if the reporting requirements could require new types of data and/or information to be collected, additional departmental resource then could be required to produce such an Annual Report.

Potential scrutiny points:

6. If the Bill would be enacted and implemented as introduced, the Committee for the Economy may wish to ask the DfE and all other Executive departments about resources they would need to expend on: 1) Reporting annually to the Assembly on progress, and; 2) Reviewing the operation of

³⁰ <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-06/Business%20Plan%202025-26%20-%20Final%2013.6.25.pdf>

the framework and to make recommendations on its delivery?

3.7 Guidance and Research

Clause 6 of the introduced Bill states:

(1) The Department may—

(a) provide guidance, advice and information about matters connected with addressing regional disparities and the operation of the Framework;

(b) undertake, commission or support (by financial means or otherwise) research into any matter relating to regional disparities; and

(c) promote awareness, engagement and best practice among Northern Ireland departments and other public bodies in relation to addressing regional disparities.

(2) The Department may from time to time revise any guidance issued under this section.

(3) The Department must publish any guidance issued or revised under this section³¹

3.7.1 Guidance

As noted above, the Bill provides that the Department “may”:

...provide guidance, advice and information about matters connected with addressing regional disparities and the operation of the Framework³²

³¹ [Regional Balance Bill](#); as introduced (29 June 2026)

³² See footnote 31 immediately above

As stated, that would not be an option that the Department has to undertake. However, it is an option that would be available to the Department - as provided in the Bill.

If the Department would decide to provide guidance, as detailed in [sub-section 3.5.2](#) of this Paper, there is an existing resource base which could be used to produce such guidance. If the option would be exercised by the Department to produce guidance, that could add to the workload of existing staffing resource: therefore, additional resource could be required to produce such guidance.

3.7.2 Research

The Bill provides for that the Department “may”:

...undertake, commission or support (by financial means or otherwise) research into any matter relating to regional disparities³³

As noted above, this would not be an option that the Department has to undertake. However, it is an option that would be available to the Department - as provided in the Bill.

On 11 July 2024, the DfE published [DfE Research Programme 2024-27](#), which the Department describes the aim of the 2024-27 programme as:

...to produce high quality economic research that will form an evidence-base for the Department for the Economy. The research will primarily inform the mission for an economy with Good Jobs, regional balance, high productivity, and with a reduction in carbon emissions.³⁴

In this document, the DfE provides detail on ways in which it delivers its research programme, these are **Working with Partners** and **In-house**. An overview of this research activity can be found at [Appendix 4](#).

3.7.2.1 Working with Partners

³³ [Regional Balance Bill](#); as introduced (29 June 2026)

³⁴ <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/dfe-research-programme-2024-27>

In regards working with partners, the DfE notes in its Research Programme that it:

.... works in partnership with a number of organisations which have a key role in terms of implementing and delivering the NI Executive's and the Minister's policies.³⁵

The DfE Research Programme 2024-27 also contained a list of those partners which include:

- InvestNI
- Ulster University
- Queen's University Belfast
- Northern Ireland Consumer Council
- Tourism NI
- InterTradeIreland,
- Health & Safety Executive Northern Ireland (HSENI)
- Labour Relations Agency (LRA)
- Utility Regulator
- Matrix
- Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency (NISRA)

3.7.2.2 In-house

It appears some ongoing in-house DfE research could be used or adapted to support the Bill, if enacted and implemented as introduced. Specifically, that research is in relation to “regional disparities” - Clause 7 of the Bill – such as

- **Linked NISRA Databases** – *Joint DfE / NISRA collaboration creating a linked database of business surveys which include those on annual earnings, trade and research and development. This has resulted in a suite of novel research on Business Capital Expenditure, Business Purchases, Business Subsidies and Business Profitability.³⁶*

³⁵ See footnote 34 immediately above

³⁶ See footnote 34

- **Economic Modelling** – *Hypothetical Extraction Model, Computed General Equilibrium (CGE) etc.*³⁷
- **Accessing and Utilising Innovative Data on the NI Economy** – *This can involve the use of new web-scraping software to better understand the current job market and to better understand the companies that operate in a modern economy.*³⁸
- **International Competitiveness** – *This involves analysing key indicators and performance metrics to benchmark Northern Ireland against other economies of interest in order to gain insights.*³⁹
- **Economic Monitoring** – *analysing short-term indicators, the performance of the labour market and business activity.*⁴⁰
- **Linking AppsNI Data to Earnings Data** – *This linked dataset and resulting analysis showed employment and earnings outcomes for ApprenticeshipsNI leavers who achieved their targeted qualifications.*⁴¹

As shown above, any future research arising from the Bill could be aligned with the current departmental research programme both externally and in-house could be carried out with existing departmental resource. However, if that would increase demand for research, additional funding could be required. The introduced Bill states at Clause 7 that the Department “may” undertake research and if they chose not to, the Bill then could have no effect in relation to research costs.

Potential scrutiny point:

7. If the DfE would increase its research activity examining regional balance – in line with the Bill if enacted and implemented as introduced - could existing departmental

³⁷ See footnote 34

³⁸ See footnote 34

³⁹ See footnote 34

⁴⁰ See footnote 34

⁴¹ See footnote 34

research budgets accommodate those requirements or could additional funding be necessary?

3.8 Potential Legal Costs

Clause 2 of the introduced Bill would create a statutory duty on Northern Ireland departments to have “due regard” to the specified Framework. The Clause states:

2.— (1) A Northern Ireland department, in developing, adopting, implementing or revising any policy, strategy or plan, must have due regard to the need to reduce regional disparity and to the Framework.

(2) A Northern Ireland department must, so far as is reasonably practicable, exercise its functions in a manner calculated to contribute to the outcomes and targets set in the Framework.

(3) This section comes into operation at the end of the period of 12 months after the date this Act receives Royal Assent.⁴²

With the creation of a statutory duty, potential legal challenges against DfE and other Executive Departments could arise under the Bill – for example, if an individual or a group would believe “due regard” had not be exercised in departmental decision-making.

On 8 September 2026, during the Bill’s [Second Stage](#) debate in the Assembly, the Economy Minister noted she had discussed the potential for legal challenge with the MLA Bill Sponsor. The Minister stated:

There needs to be an obligation on every Minister, and I am open to discussing how we bring that together to ensure that any new processes help officials to develop policy better and deliver better public services rather than slowing down public administration with

⁴² See footnote 33

*unnecessary bureaucracy or, worse, more scope for legal challenge, with all the cost and delay that that entails.*⁴³

The MLA Bill Sponsor responded to the Minister, acknowledging statutory duties can be open to legal challenge, such as Judicial Review, but she concluded:

*Any public authority exercising any statutory power can potentially be subject to judicial review. The threat of review should not prevent us taking forward legislation. It is about ensuring that we put in place as many safeguards as possible to prevent those reviews. However, if we fear judicial review, not one piece of legislation would come out of this place.*⁴⁴

The Economy Minister agreed, but further noted:

*...if we place statutory duties on any body, there is always the risk of judicial review, as there should be, because that is the whole point of putting legal duties on bodies...*⁴⁵

If such cases would arise, departments could face legal challenge that would need to be addressed, including a requirement of legal representation. Such incidents would incur public purse costs. In addition, if such legal challenges would occur delays to programmes and projects in themselves could present a further public purse cost.

In relation to these points, the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) report [The Judicial Review Process in Northern Ireland](#) – published 4 July 2023 – merits consideration. That report included an assessment of the cost to Northern Ireland departments of the judicial review process during the examined period.

⁴³ [Northern Ireland Assembly AIMS – Official Report](#) (8 September 2026)

⁴⁴ See footnote 43 immediately above

⁴⁵ See footnote 43

Potential Scrutiny Points:

8. What “safeguards”, as noted in the MLA Bill Sponsor’s response to the Economy Minister, have been considered in relation to the introduced Bill that could help to reduce the potential for legal challenges, if the Bill would be enacted and implemented as introduced?
9. Has there been any analysis or detailed consideration of the potential risk of legal challenges associated with the proposed statutory duties in the introduced Bill? If any, has an assessment of the potential costs that may arise to litigate such cases?

4 Concluding remarks

The Regional Balance Bill seeks to establish a statutory framework to address regional disparities in economic performance, employment opportunities, public service accessibility and wider socio-economic outcomes across Northern Ireland. While the Bill’s underlying policy objective of promoting more balanced regional development has received broad support, significant uncertainty remains about public purse implications if implementing the Bill.

The evidence reviewed for this paper suggests that a number of the Bill’s administrative functions may be capable of being delivered through existing departmental structures, particularly given DfE’s current Regional Balance Unit and related regional development activities. However, implementation of the Bill would create additional statutory duties for all Northern Ireland departments, including requirements relating to strategic planning, monitoring, reporting, data collection and policy assessment. The extent to which these duties could be absorbed within existing resources remains unclear.

The Bill itself does not establish specific funding programmes, regional investment schemes or spending commitments. Consequently, the most significant financial implications are likely to arise not from the Bill’s immediate

provisions, but from future Executive decisions taken in response to the Regional Balance Strategic Framework. The scale of any future expenditure will therefore depend on the nature of interventions selected to address regional disparities, the ambitions of the Executive, and the resources available within future Budget settlements.

Additional uncertainty exists regarding potential costs associated with research activity, analytical capacity, performance measurement, stakeholder engagement and possible legal challenges arising from the proposed statutory duties. As a result, it is difficult to quantify the full financial impact of the Bill at this stage.

Against a backdrop of continuing pressures on public finances, Members may wish to consider whether the Explanatory and Financial Memorandum provides sufficient detail on the expected costs of implementation, the availability of existing departmental resources to meet new statutory obligations, and the potential long-term financial consequences of future policy interventions designed to promote regional balance. They may also wish to consider whether additional information is required from the DfE regarding the resource implications of delivering the Bill's requirements and measuring progress towards its intended outcomes.

Ultimately, while the Bill is intended to support more balanced regional development and could contribute to improved economic and social outcomes over the longer term, the costs associated with achieving those outcomes are likely to be determined less by the Bill itself and more by the future policy choices and funding decisions made under the framework it establishes.

Appendix 1. Draft Budget 2026-29/30 - Proposed RDEL allocation

£millions

Department	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs	674.3	687.3	692.9
Communities	922.0	944.3	960.3
Economy	815.4	836.1	844.7
Education	3,244.6	3,313.0	3,393.1
Finance	284.6	306.2	302.2
Health	8,481.4	8,636.2	8,803.5
Infrastructure	654.9	680.0	694.4
Justice	1,575.4	1,497.2	1,525.7
The Executive Office	217.0	230.9	231.0
Food Standards Agency	17.7	18.3	18.5
NI Assembly Commission	63.1	66.6	65.3
NI Audit Office	11.7	12.3	12.8
NI Authority for Utility Regulation	0.3	0.5	0.5
NI Public Sector Ombudsman	5.5	5.8	6.0
Public Prosecution Service	41.8	42.3	42.3
Total Departmental Planned Spend	17,009.7	17,276.9	17,593.2

Totals may not add due to rounding

Source: [Draft Budget 2026-29/30](#)

Appendix 2. Draft Budget 2026-29/30 - Proposed CDEL allocation

Department	£million			
	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30
Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs	123.0	130.3	126.3	121.1
Communities	294.9	319.2	321.7	404.1
Economy	274.1	270.9	266.9	236.8
Education	355.2	283.7	291.4	290.9
Finance	40.0	38.0	30.3	30.3
Health	463.1	461.9	455.8	453.0
Infrastructure	941.5	1,042.5	1,081.2	961.7
Justice	118.2	116.5	113.5	122.3
The Executive Office	20.0	13.0	11.0	12.0
Food Standards Agency	0.1	0.7	0.1	0.1
NI Assembly Commission	1.3	2.4	1.8	1.5
NI Audit Office	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.1
NI Authority for Utility Regulation	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
NI Public Sector Ombudsman	-	-	-	-
Public Prosecution Service	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.9
Total Departmental Planned Spend	2,632.5	2,680.1	2,701.0	2,634.8

Totals may not add due to rounding

0.0m represents amounts less than/or equal to £50k

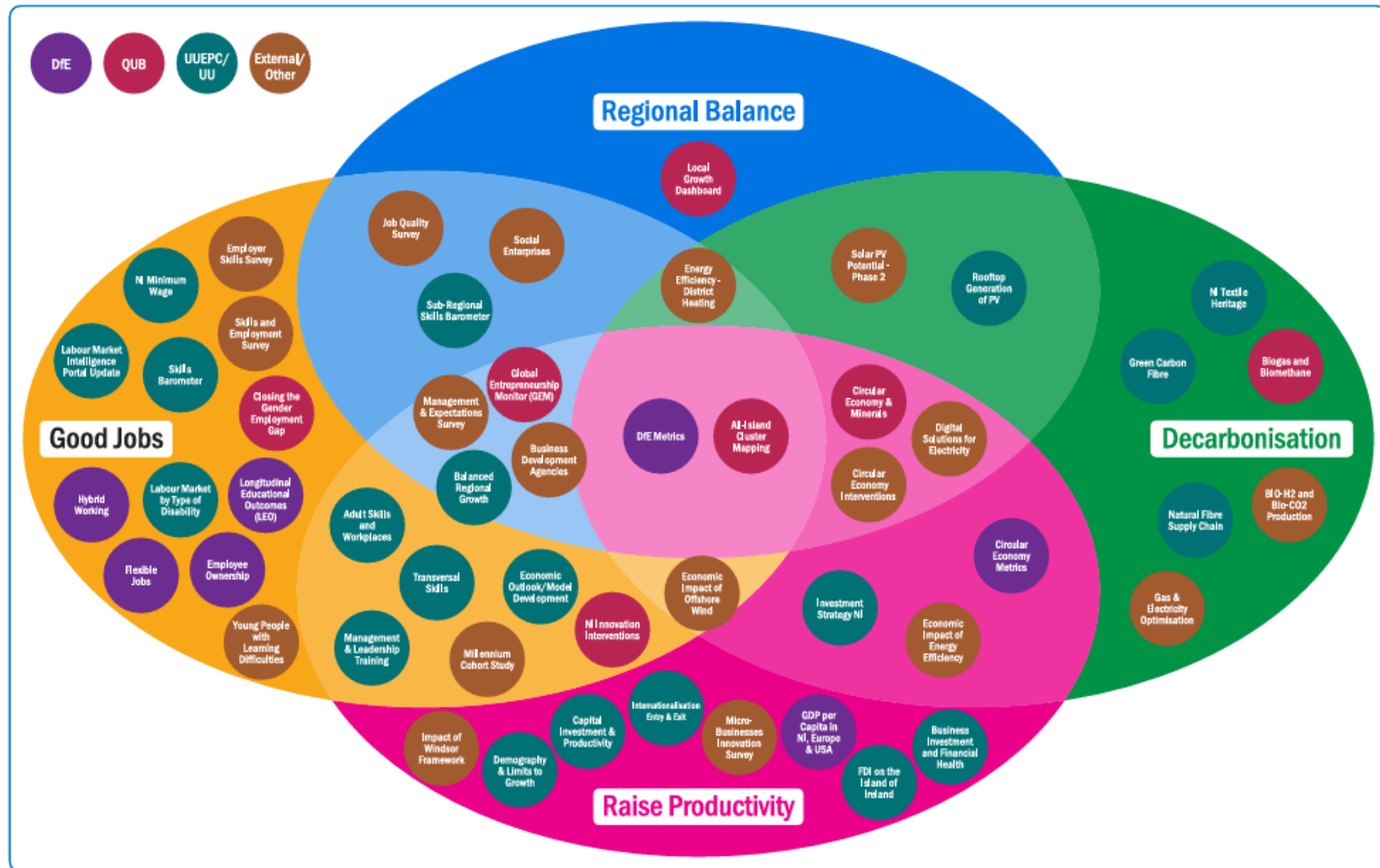
Source: [Draft Budget 2026-29/30](#)

Appendix 3. InvestNI Regional Targets

Promoting regional balance - Invest NI experimental regional targets													
Support balanced economic development across Northern Ireland for the benefit of all our citizens													
Invest NI Strategic Priority	Action	Belfast Metropolitan Area				Rest of Northern Ireland / NI Wide				Grand Total			
		2024-25 Target	2025/26 Target	2026/27 Target	3 Year Target	2024-25 Target	2025/26 Target	2026/27 Target	3 Year Target	2024-25 Target	2025/26 Target	2026/27 Target	3 Year Target
Regional Balance Investment Profiles	Support balanced Economic Development through NI by increasing Growth and Investment Projects across Invest NI Operating Regions :												
	No of Investments	600	619	647	1,866	900	1,031	1,203	3,134	1,500	1,650	1,850	5,000
	Value of Investment (£m)	302	316	342	960	223	259	308	790	525	575	650	1,750
	No of Jobs	1,800	1,898	2,035	5,733	1,200	1,403	1,665	4,268	3,000	3,300	3,700	10,000
Regional Balance Partner Delivery	Work with partners to identify companies with the potential to work with Invest NI to accelerate their growth through external markets.												
	No of Referrals from Regional Partners	29	29	29	87	56	56	56	168	85	85	85	255
Regional Balance Locally-Owned Businesses	Incentivise greater numbers of Indigenous Investors to establish and grow new enterprises and expansions across Invest NI Operating Regions to facilitate greater Regional Balance (No of Capital and Employment Related Investments).	115	126	135	376	200	224	250	674	315	350	385	1,050
Regional Balance Externally Owned Business	Incentivise greater numbers of Foreign Direct Investors to establish and grow across Invest NI Operating Regions to facilitate greater Regional Balance (No of Capital and Employment Related Investments).	18	23	27	68	12	17	23	52	30	40	50	120

Source: InvestNI [Business Strategy 2024-2027](#)

Appendix 4 – DfE Research-Programme-2024-27 - Proposed / Upcoming Projects



Source: [DfE Research Programme 2024-27](#) (11 July 2024)