

Written Ministerial Statement

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The Executive Office

THE EXECUTIVE LEGISLATION PROGRAMME 2025-2026

Published at 9.30am on Friday 3 October 2025

Mrs O'Neill (The First Minister) and Mrs Little-Pengelly (The deputy First Minister): We have tabled a motion for a debate on the Executive Legislation Programme for the 2025-26 session of the Assembly. Due to the need for consideration of the proposals by the Executive Committee, we regret that this is later than the period set out in Assembly Standing Order 18C, Executive Legislation Programme.

The Executive Committee has now agreed a Legislation Programme consisting of those Bills which Ministers intend to bring forward in the 2025-26 session of the Assembly. In all cases, the introduction of these Bills has been or will be subject to the prior agreement of the Executive to the underlying policy proposals and to the legislative provisions themselves.

The programme consists of 21 Bills, including two which have been brought forward from the 2024-25 Programme. These Bills, and information on their purpose, are set out in the attached schedule.

This is an ambitious Programme but one to which Ministers individually have committed themselves to delivering. Recognising their ongoing work in scrutinising Bills from the previous session of the Assembly, we also acknowledge the significant commitment it represents for the work of Committees. The Executive looks forward to working with the Committees to deliver this legislation for the benefit of our community.

Executive Legislation Programme 2025-26

Dept	Bill Title	Purpose
Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs	Fisheries and Water Environment Bill	To give effect to modernised fisheries policies in Northern Ireland. It will introduce policies aimed at protecting fisheries and the aquatic environment, strengthening regulatory powers to enhance enforcement, deter non-compliance, and support the delivery of key initiatives such as the Lough Neagh Action Plan, the Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP), and the Programme for Government (PfG).
Department for Communities	NI Debt Respite Scheme	To establish and implement a NI Debt Respite Scheme and to ensure legal protections are in place for debtors requiring 'a breathing space' from credit enforcement.
	Housing Miscellaneous	To implement two proposals linked to anti-social behaviour arising from the Fundamental Review of Social Housing Allocations (eligibility for social housing or Full Duty homelessness status); and proposals relating to injunctions against unacceptable behaviour and Absolute Grounds for Possession arising from a cross-Departmental, multi-agency Delivery Group established by the Department of Justice (DoJ) to review anti-social behaviour legislation

Dept	Bill Title	Purpose
	Pension (Parity) Bill	The Westminster Pension Schemes Bill 2025 is intended to create a pensions landscape that offers better value and protection for members, with fewer, more effective schemes. The agreement of the Assembly will be sought to a LCM for the extension of certain provisions of the DWP Bill, including those relating to terminal illness and the Pensions Ombudsman. In order to maintain parity in accordance with section 87 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, and to help to maintain a single system of pensions across the UK it is intended to introduce a corresponding NI Bill to ensure that pension savers and providers in NI benefit from the other measures in the DWP Bill.
	Public Authorities (Fraud, Error and Debt) (Parity Bill)	A Westminster Bill will provide new powers to allow DWP to legislate for data gathering measures and enable them to conduct search and seizure activity in relation to fraudulent activity in the welfare system. It is expected that the Bill will not extend to NI and corresponding legislative provisions will therefore be required.
	Charities Amendment	To amend the Charities Act (NI) 2008 to implement a number of the recommendations made in the Report of the Independent Review of Charity Regulation published in January 2022 and other known legislative deficiencies.
Department for the Economy	Decarbonisation – Utility Regulatory Powers	To provide a new function for the Utility Regulator to enable it to support the Department for the Economy in delivery of the Northern Ireland Executive's Energy Strategy and targets under the Climate Change Act (NI) 2022.
	Non-Domestic RHI Closure	To give effect to the January 2020 'New Decade New Approach' intention that the scheme should close. It will allow the Department to close the Scheme and make an appropriate closure payment to eligible participants, in order to protect the interests of the legitimate participants and the taxpayer.
	Onshore Petroleum Licensing Bill	To enact the new policy on onshore petroleum licensing by amending the Petroleum (Production) Act (Northern Ireland) 1964.
	Renewable Electricity Support Scheme Bill.	To establish the legal framework for a renewable electricity support scheme for Northern Ireland.
	Employment Bill	To help deliver the objective of increasing the proportion of working-age people in Good Jobs. It will also help meet New Decade New Approach (NDNA) targets on protecting workers' rights.
Department of Education	Education (Inspections) Bill	To strengthen provision regarding the conduct of inspections under Article 102 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986.
	General Teaching Council Bill	To establish an effective and outwardly focused professional body for teachers in Northern Ireland.
	16-18s in Education or Training Bill	To progress legislation which will provide for all learners to participate in education, apprenticeship, or training until age 18.

Dept	Bill Title	Purpose
Department of Finance	Marriage and Civil Partnership Bill	To include belief marriage in marriage legislation and to reform the law relating to the age of marriage (and civil partnership).
Department of Health	Safe and Effective Staffing Bill	To ensure and assure provision of high-quality care, workforce planning and staff governance.
	HSC (Control of Data Processing) Bill	To amend and update legislation, to make statutory provision to protect the privacy of confidential patient information
Department for Infrastructure	Ports (Northern Ireland) Bill	To provide new and/or additional powers across several areas of harbours and trust port legislation.
Department of Justice	Sentencing Bill	To legislate as appropriate on decisions emanating from the department's review of sentencing policy, the consultation on "Charlotte's Law", and the statutory aggravator model for hate crime.
	Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill	To make provision for a number of measures to enhance the experience, protections and outcomes of victims of crime, particularly as they engage with the criminal justice system.
The Executive Office	Race Equality Bill	To ensure that racial equality legislation fully reflects and responds to the needs of our minority ethnic communities and offers them the best protections from racism and discrimination in the environments in which they live and work.