Department for
Communities
www.communities-ni.gov.uk

Departmental Business Plan

2026 - 2027

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Foreword

from the Minister for Communities

I am pleased to present the Department for Communities' Business Plan for 2026–27, which sets out the key priorities and actions that will be delivered in the year ahead.

It also highlights the landmark achievements over the last year. This includes Northern Ireland's first Sign Language Bill and Executive Strategies on Warm Healthy Homes and Disability and Work. It also features the reinvigoration of important initiatives that have been neglected for too long like the Northern Ireland Football Fund, the Anti-Poverty Strategy and the Disability Strategy.

My officials have innovated to make a significant difference to people at community level, with the Olympic Legacy, Musical Instruments and Community Infrastructure Funds.

Our landscape is being reimagined with major generation projects across Northern Ireland such as Bangor Marina and the Inner Walled City project in Londonderry.

There has been a strengthening of our cultural offer with the Reawakening and US250 partnerships. These give us new ways to link place, identity and create new opportunities for people here and farther afield to reconnect with their heritage.

I have also maintained a clear focus on delivering practical support to individuals and families, particularly in response to emerging pressures. I have taken decisive action to support households through ongoing cost of living challenges, including interventions such as Winter Fuel payments and targeted financial support in response to rising energy costs. These actions have provided timely assistance to those most in need, helping to protect vulnerable households and provide much-needed financial stability during a period of significant economic uncertainty.

Over the last two years I have driven efficiencies, embraced innovative solutions and modernised service delivery. This gives us a strong foundation to help us prepare for the highly constrained and challenging financial operating environment we face in 2026-27.

My focus remains firmly on affordability, sustainable delivery and ensuring that resources are used effectively and efficiently. This Business Plan reflects my commitment to ensuring that every pound of public money will deliver real, lasting outcomes for people and communities across Northern Ireland.

I will continue to push forward on housing, to do my part to achieve the Executive target of 100,000 new homes by 2039. This includes the roll-out of pioneering programmes like the Affordable Rent programme which

is using an innovative funding model that protects our social housing funding.

I will also keep pressing for the revitalisation of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, enabling it to access borrowing so that we can deliver more homes and maintain homes in a sustainable way for the future. Alongside this, I will continue to take action to address anti-social behaviour in housing.

Tackling poverty remains a core focus for me. At a strategic level I will lead delivery on a joined-up, robust, Executive Anti-Poverty Strategy. I will also be driving practical yet transformative measures to address fuel poverty including the roll-out of the Home Heating Oil Support Scheme and the launch of the Warm Healthy Homes Fund.

I will bring forward both the Disability and Disability and Work Strategies to open up opportunities, remove barriers, and ensure that Deaf and disabled people can play a full and active role in society.

A key part of this will be supporting more people into work, helping them to access, retain and progress in employment. It is clear that we need to do things differently to ensure that all those who can work are supported to do so.

My new Pathways to Work programme, including the Commission for Work and Wellbeing, funded through the Executive Transformation Fund, will support more people to enter and progress in meaningful employment and address the key drivers of economic inactivity in Northern Ireland.

Protecting public funds is of paramount importance. It is vital that we invest further to tackle benefit fraud and error, ensuring that the system is fair, robust and trusted, and that support is directed to those who need it most. I will continue to work with the Department of Finance and HM Treasury on a new approach to funding here in Northern Ireland.

I remain committed to investing in our communities. That includes progressing the modernisation of Neighbourhood Renewal, delivering the Community Infrastructure Fund, and supporting local organisations that make a difference every day on the ground.

My focus is not just on delivery, but on ensuring that these projects create lasting social and economic impact.

Within the available budget, I will continue to invest in sports infrastructure, including preparations linked to the International Cricket Council Men's T20 Cricket World Cup 2030, the Northern Ireland Football Fund and grassroots projects, to drive participation at all levels.

While this Business Plan outlines the key deliverables for the year ahead, it represents only part of the wider work of the Department. Delivery will require a continued focus on planning, prioritisation and collaboration. I am confident in the Department's ability to meet the challenges ahead.

I want to take this opportunity to welcome our new Permanent Secretary and to express my gratitude to the dedicated staff across the Department, our Arm's Length Bodies and delivery partners. I give my commitment to continued collaboration to deliver our shared priorities and make a meaningful difference to the people we serve.

Gordon Lyons MLA
Minister for Communities

Introduction

from the Permanent Secretary

At the start of this business year, I took up post as Permanent Secretary of the Department for Communities.

I am pleased to present my first Annual Business Plan for the Department which sets out in detail the Minister's strategic priorities and the implementation pathway that has been established by the Executive Leadership Team, working closely with colleagues across Government, our Arm's Length Bodies and delivery partners.

As we enter the last year of this mandate, we are collectively focused on delivering outcomes for the people we serve, and ensuring we meet the ambitions set out in the Programme for Government. This Plan sets out a series of measures to ensure continued delivery.

Crucially, it includes a strategic workforce plan to align people, skills and resources with current and future departmental priorities.

It also highlights the next stages of our Digital Transformation Programme. This will focus on improving the speed, reliability and accessibility of services for citizens as well as ensuring long-term sustainability and better use of public resources.

All business areas will embrace the use of new technologies, in line with our strategic digital programme, to create efficiencies and improved ways of working to maximise delivery. These include the rollout of new contact-centre technologies, exploring Artificial Intelligence-enabled improvements, and progressing digital and data initiatives across key services.

A key focus will be ensuring that the Department is equipped to deliver – through effective workforce planning and recruitment, strengthened digital and IT capability, and a continued emphasis on innovation to improve how we deliver services.

The Plan shows our ambition for the year ahead, underpinned by a strong focus on innovation, collaboration and delivery. Through the actions outlined, we will support individuals and families to access the financial support they need, improve access to good quality and affordable housing, and take forward initiatives to tackle poverty, disadvantage and social exclusion. Collectively, these actions will help improve living standards, increase opportunity, support people into sustainable employment, and contribute to stronger, more inclusive communities.

The Plan importantly also reflects on the key achievements for 2025-26. This Department has a strong track record of delivery and

plays a vital role in supporting individuals, families and communities across Northern Ireland. Following recent instances of race hate, our work to build cohesive communities has rarely been more important.

I would like to thank colleagues across the Department, and our delivery partners, for their professionalism, energy and continued commitment to public service. Our people are at the heart of our delivery, making a vital difference to lives, places and spaces.

I would also like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the leadership of my recent predecessors Colum Boyle and Emer Morelli who have ensured that this is a well-run, effective and efficient Department.

I will continue the focus on effective governance, financial management and the development of our core capabilities, so that the Department is well placed to deliver high-quality, efficient and responsive public services.

We will work collaboratively with all of our partners, with an agility to allow us to respond to emerging challenges in order to deliver our shared Ministerial priorities.

I am confident in the resilience and professionalism of our people, whose dedication ensures that the Department continues to deliver essential services and support to hundreds of thousands of households every day, providing stability and making a meaningful difference to people and communities across Northern Ireland.

Grainia Long
Permanent Secretary
Department for Communities

Section 1 – Our Responsibilities

The Department delivers a wide range of services to the public – both directly and indirectly through its Arm's Length Bodies – which continue to support people, build communities and shape places. In supporting and advising the Minister, the Department's main functions include:

- delivering social security, child maintenance and pensions
- providing advice and support for those seeking employment and for those who are unable to work
- ensuring the availability of good quality and affordable housing
- encouraging diversity and participation in society and promoting social inclusion
- promoting sport and leisure within our communities
- supporting local government to deliver services
- supporting the voluntary and community sector
- identifying and preserving records of historical, social and cultural importance to ensure they are available to the public and for future generations
- realising the value of our historic environment

supporting creative industries, and promoting the arts, language and cultural sectors

providing free access to books, information, IT and community programmes through our libraries

maintaining museums

regenerating town and city centres and developing communities

The Appeals Service

responding to climate change

addressing residential building safety

Section 2 – Key Achievements

The key achievements outlined in this section are a snapshot of the wide-ranging work that the Department delivered during 2025–26, making a tangible difference to the lives of our citizens and communities.

Issued awards under an **£8.3 million Community Infrastructure Programme** to over **240 community organisations,** sustaining vital community facilities, services and social connections.

Neighbourhood Renewal Programme

supported **c. 2,500 community groups, c. 5,500 adult volunteers,** and **c. 30,000 young people** to participate in projects.

£2.2 million

Invested in **placemaking initiatives** to enhance roads and footways, creating safer and more attractive places to live, visit and invest.

In Benefit Security, Fraud Outcomes resulted in **675 Criminal Investigations saving £9.1 million** and resulting in **60 prosecutions**.

Labour Market Partnerships allocated **£7.0 million** to deliver **local employability provision**.

Supported **sustained employment** outcomes, helping an average of more than **1,000 people each month** move into employment.

Universal Credit processed

102,149

new claims, handled **610,000 calls** and maintained **payment timeliness of 96%**, achieved **call response rates of 96%**, and managed caseload growth from **192,000 to 242,000**.

Commenced the

£70 million

Queen's Parade redevelopment in Bangor, creating **high-quality public spaces** that will enhance wellbeing, support regeneration and reconnect the city centre with the waterfront.

Approved the **first compulsory industry code of practice** relating to the sale and supply of alcoholic drinks in licensed premises and registered clubs in Northern Ireland.

In collaboration with the Special EU Programmes Body, **awarded £20.3 million in PEACEPLUS grants to 59 diverse projects** enabling thousands to engage in peacebuilding activities.

£880,000

of Civil Contingencies funding was awarded to enable the Local Government Regional Resilience Team to strengthen preparedness and coordination, **improving the effectiveness and speed** of multi-agency emergency responses and reducing impacts on communities.

Over **18,500 awards** made to the **Universal Credit New Claim Grant** totalling almost **£4 million**.

JobStart has **supported 1,251 unemployed and economically inactive** individuals get into the workplace.

Completed the Move to Universal Credit, delivering **the largest reform of the UK welfare system**, which streamlined and simplified six 'legacy benefits' into one.

Delivered Working Age benefits, providing support to over **376,000 customers**, with payments **exceeding £3.1 billion**.

£11.5 million allocated to support **4,500 disabled people and people with health conditions** to move closer, find or retain employment.

21,188 Social Fund loans awarded totalling **£9.3 million** to help individuals facing financial hardship.

Almost **370,000 books** were borrowed over the course of Libraries NI's "**Big Summer Read**", and more than **4,000 children** became new library members.

Successfully transitioned **Capita to the Department for Work & Pensions-owned Personal Independence Payment IT Managed Service**, delivering **c. £800,000 annual IT savings** for the Department.

Child Maintenance Service collected and arranged **£33 million** for **c. 25,000 children**, helping ensure more money flowed to children, supporting their everyday living costs and contributing to efforts to lift children in separated families out of poverty.

Over **4,500 Department for Communities staff** delivered vital services for citizens in Great Britain, generating an estimated **£182 million** for the Northern Ireland economy, **sustaining jobs**, supporting local communities and **creating opportunities**, particularly in areas with lower employment.

Make the Call service received **58,860 calls**, with **23,525** potential entitlements identified and connecting with **30,523** new customers, supporting more people to access **vital assistance** to benefits and other supports and services.

European Heritage Open Days attracted **64,000 people** who visited **370 historic buildings** and related events bringing continued growth in participation and public engagement in Northern Ireland's largest **celebration of heritage**.

82 projects supported through **£2.136 million Olympic Legacy** investment, providing much needed equipment, **improving sports facilities** and encouraging **participation in sport** across local communities throughout Northern Ireland.

Successful visit from the **America250 Commission** and signing of a **Memorandum of Understanding** recognising the contribution of Northern Ireland to the **USA 250th anniversary** commemorations, helping to reinforce shared connections by recognising cultural and heritage opportunities.

Successful delivery of the conversion of a **listed Cold War Nuclear Bunker** to a climate -controlled **records repository** for the Historic Environment Record of Northern Ireland, improving the management of and access to a huge wealth of **heritage records** held by the Department.

The **Scheme of Emergency Financial Assistance (Flooding)** was activated on **six occasions**, providing **immediate financial support** to householders who experienced severe inconvenience due to flooding.

National Museums NI was awarded **Full Accreditation for all four museums**, nationally marking the museums work in governance, management, and care of collections, and points to the quality of the museums work as an education and research institution and one of Northern Ireland's most popular attractions, hosting **730,155 visitors** in 2025/26 (an **increase of 4%** on 2024/25).

The Minister for Communities announced **The Northern Ireland Football Fund** Performance Programme prioritised cohort of **20 clubs** in September 2025 and launched the pilot scheme of the **Grassroots Facilities Programme** in March 2026. Both programmes will help clubs at performance and grassroots level to modernise football grounds and facilities across Northern Ireland.

Joint Department for Communities – America250 Commission Reception in Washington DC to celebrate the Ulster-American Connection and launch '**Ulster American Treasures: The Migration Story.**' The publication documents **250 years of shared stories**.

Implemented the **new Work Capability Assessment Scanning Solution** in line with Department for Work & Pensions standards, enhancing processing times and the claimant journey for **c. 40,000 Work Capability Assessment claimants**.

Published **46 official statistics reports** and progressed **17 research projects** enhancing evidence to support departmental decision-making and Programme for Government outcomes.

The launch of the **US-NI250 fund** resulted in grants totalling **c. £400k** being awarded to **4 strategic partners** and **17 community organisations** across Northern Ireland, supporting opportunities for people to engage in arts and cultural activities to commemorate the **250th anniversary** through a series of community-led events.

Achieved a **3% improvement in staff engagement scores** in the Northern Ireland Civil Service People Survey, contributing to a **positive organisational culture** that underpins **better service delivery and improved experiences for citizens**.

Led a **cross-departmental Climate Change Working Group**, strengthening collaboration across **Department for Communities and Arm's Length Bodies** contributing to the ongoing development of the **Departmental Climate Change Strategy** to ensure a long-term, coordinated response to climate action across the Department for the benefit of our communities.

£257 million

invested by Northern Ireland Housing Executive in improving and maintaining its homes, delivering **adaptations** to make homes more suitable for the needs of disabled tenants and **energy efficiency measures** that created warmer, healthier homes and helped reduce energy costs for tenants.

Invested over **£210 million** in **new social homes**, with 1,765 homes starting on-site and **1,538 completed** for allocation to people in housing need.

£38.25 million

provided to **Northern Ireland Co-Ownership Housing Association** to support more people into affordable home ownership. **940 homes** were delivered in **2025/26**, exceeding the target of 900.

Launched the **Warm Healthy Homes Strategy 2026–2036**, to reduce fuel poverty and address cold, damp housing conditions.

£3.3 million

has been awarded to **Housing Rights** for the **2025–2028** period to deliver independent housing advice, advocacy, and legal support focused on preventing homelessness. In **2025/26**, homelessness was prevented in **351 cases**.

Launched the **New Foundations Programme** in collaboration with other stakeholders, to prevent homelessness among young people leaving care.

Section 3 – People, Resourcing and Governance

3.1 People

As of 31 March 2026, the Department employed 11,403.1 full-time equivalent staff. This is made up of 7,434.4 full time equivalent permanent staff and 3,968.7 full time equivalent Agency staff.

- Communities, Place and Local Government Group: 389.5 (Agency 28).
- Corporate Services Group: 363.4 (Agency 11).
- Engaged Communities Group: 449.5 (Agency 133.8).
- Housing & Sustainability Group: 137 (Agency 2).
- Operational Delivery Group: 6656.2 (Agency 3092.9).
- Work & Health Group: 3407.5 (Agency 701).

Our People Priorities Plan

The Civil Service People Strategy was published on 8 April 2025 and set out the ambition for a collaborative and skilled civil service focused on outcomes and delivering for all. The Department for Communities supports the delivery of the Northern Ireland Civil Service People Strategy through the delivery of our Departmental People Priorities Plan.

The key priorities are:

- **Skills and Capacity:** Ensuring we are equipped with the skills and capabilities to meet current and future demands.
- **Experience and Environment:** Creating a positive and supportive work environment that enhances the overall experience of the workforce.
- **Leadership and Inclusion:** Fostering a culture of strong leadership, inclusivity, and diversity to drive better outcomes for our workforce and the public we serve.

Department for Communities priority actions include:

- Develop a Strategic Workforce Plan that aligns people, skills and resources with current and future departmental priorities, providing a clear understanding of our workforce profile, critical capability gaps and the targeted actions required to meet operational and strategic demands over the next 3–5 years.
- Create a coordinated Learning and Development Plan that builds capability, supports performance, and develops talent, ensuring we have a confident, adaptable workforce capable of delivering now and in the future.
- Strengthen our oversight of our Arm's Length Bodies by enhancing governance, improving accountability and building the capacity, capability and systems required to ensure consistent and improved Arm's Length Body performance.
- Build an empowered digital workforce with improved digital skills, confidence, and readiness to adopt new technologies.
- Implement Northern Ireland Civil Service Human Resources policies and prepare for Integr8, ensuring Department for Communities can consistently and confidently embed new Human Resources processes, systems and ways of working across the organisation.
- Refresh the Department for Communities Wellbeing Framework to improve workforce health, wellbeing, resilience and engagement by providing insight into wellbeing needs, identifying gaps, and setting out targeted actions that improve engagement, reduce absence, and support better organisational performance over the next 3–5 years.
- Deliver a Culture and Behaviour Change Plan that identifies the Department's cultural strengths and areas for improvement, and implements actions that build an inclusive environment, improve staff engagement and belonging, and embed behaviours that enable strong organisational performance.
- Enhance leadership capability and staff experience, fostering a healthier organisational culture in which teams are supported to perform at their best and equipped to deliver high-quality services and outcomes for citizens.
- Advance an inclusive culture across the Department by implementing a Department for Communities Diversity Action Plan that improves access to reasonable adjustments, strengthens diversity capability, and expands flexible working opportunities, aligned with wider Northern Ireland Civil Service priorities.

3.2 Resourcing - 2026–27 Budget

The Budget Act (Northern Ireland) 2026, which received Royal Assent on 20 March 2026, together with the Northern Ireland Spring Supplementary Estimates 2025-26 agreed by the Assembly on 23 February 2026, provided the statutory authority for the Executive's final 2025-26 expenditure plans. The Act also provided a Vote on Account to authorise expenditure into the early months of 2026-27, under which the Department is currently operating.

This Vote on Account provides approximately 45% of the 2025-26 financial year's cash and resources, with the remaining balance for 2026-27 to be authorised through the Main Estimates and Budget Bill based on a future agreed Budget.

In the event of further delay, powers available to the Department of Finance Permanent Secretary under Section 59 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and Section 7 of the Government Resources and Accounts Act (Northern Ireland) 2001 may be used to authorise cash and the use of resources on an interim basis.

Given the lack of an agreed Executive Budget, Contingency Planning Envelopes have been issued by the Department of Finance Permanent Secretary to support financial planning; they have not been formally triggered and therefore remain indicative rather than a firm expenditure control or agreed budget.

Based on current forecasts the Department's 2026-27 minimum funding requirements exceed these envelopes by c. £50 million Resource and c. £132 million Capital, highlighting the scale of the challenge.

This position gives rise to a number of significant risks. Expenditure in the absence of an agreed Budget is technically irregular, creating potential audit and scrutiny implications. The limited and time-bound nature of the Vote on Account creates uncertainty over funding later in the year, while the indicative and constrained nature of the Contingency Planning Envelopes limits strategic planning and responsiveness to demand-led pressures.

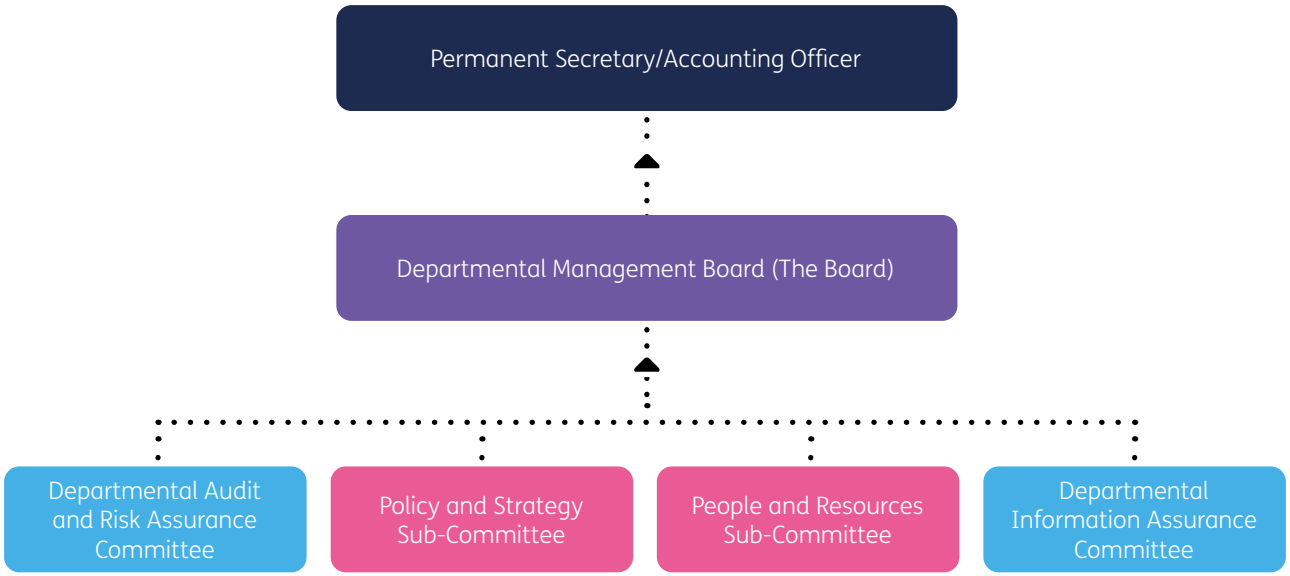
The absence of Reinvestment and Reform Initiative borrowing further heightens the risk of underinvestment, particularly in critical areas such as social housing. In response, the Department is exercising strict financial control, prioritising statutory and essential services, identifying and assessing savings options and closely monitoring expenditure, however, there remains a material risk to financial sustainability and service delivery until a Budget is agreed.

3.3 Governance

The functions of the Department are exercised at all times subject to the direction and control of the Minister in accordance with the Department's (Transfer of Functions) Order (NI) 2016. The Permanent Secretary, as administrative head of the Department, is responsible for strategic direction and advice to the Minister on departmental policy-making and implementation activities.

The Permanent Secretary is the Department's most senior official, principal advisor to the Minister, administrative head of the Department and the Departmental Accounting Officer. The Accounting Officer is personally responsible and accountable for the effective management and organisation of the Department, the efficient and effective use of its resources and the stewardship of its assets.

Department for Communities Board and Committee structure



The Accounting Officer is assisted by a Departmental Management Board which meets on a six-weekly basis.

The key aspects of the Board's role include:

- Setting strategic direction through the Strategic Business Planning Framework and Business Plans to achieve Ministerial objectives and Northern Ireland Civil Service Work Programme commitments;
- Agreeing and promoting the Department's vision and values;
- Financial planning and management, including allocation of resources to match delivery requirements and in-year monitoring and management of expenditure;
- Monitoring Departmental performance against objectives and targets and assessing the risks to delivery;
- Monitoring overall financial position of the Department;
- Monitoring progress against Programme for Government commitments;
- Risk management policies, registers, and the risk appetite of the Department;
- Finance, human resources and IT strategies affecting long-term capability of the Department;
- Budget allocation;
- Corporate governance arrangements within the Department and its Arm's Length Bodies; and
- Scrutiny of performance of sponsored bodies through established sponsor arrangements.

The Department is organised into six Groups. Each Group is responsible for policy and service delivery for its areas of business. Individual Groups are led by a Deputy Secretary each of whom reports to the Permanent Secretary.

The Department's Corporate Governance Framework sets out the organisation's internal systems of control and assurance and the roles and responsibilities of those charged with governance. The Framework provides an overview of the Department's approach to risk management and the governance and assurance arrangements established to treat risks that threaten the successful achievement of departmental objectives and the effective delivery of public services.

The Department's governance arrangements include regular monitoring of the Departmental Business Plan, risk management and assurance reporting, robust financial management and control procedures. They also include the communication of Northern Ireland Civil Service and Department for Communities governance policies and arrangements, anti-fraud policies, Raising a Concern / Whistleblowing procedures and publication of the Department's Annual Report and Accounts.

Departmental Management Board is supported in its role by a Departmental Audit and Risk Assurance Committee. Its role is to support the Board on issues of risk and provide assurance on Departmental governance arrangements. It does so by reviewing existing and emerging risks, and by reviewing and challenging governance arrangements to meet the Board and Accounting Officer's assurance needs.

Departmental Management Board is also supported in its role by three further Sub-Committees. The Policy and Strategy Sub-Committee (oversees, scrutinises and monitors policy development, delivery and evaluation across the Department', in line with Programme for Government' and Ministerial commitments. The Policy and Strategy Sub-Committee acts as a Steering Group in relation to the work of the Department's Policy Excellence Group, agreeing and overseeing a Workplan which the Policy Excellence Group will have a role in taking forward. The remit of the Policy and Strategy Sub-Committee also includes monitoring progress of the Department's legislative programme, agreeing the professional support services required in support of evidence-based policy-making and ensuring that Department for Communities staff have access to information and support to allow them to develop the necessary policy-making skills. Policy and Strategy Sub-Committee formally reports in writing to Departmental Management Board after each meeting.

The Departmental Management Board's People & Resources Sub-Committee supports the Board and Accounting Officer in the strategic management of the Department's Human Resources planning and associated funding. The People & Resources Sub-Committee oversees strategic resource planning in the Department from a human resources, capability, staff engagement, office accommodation and digital perspective. It also provides oversight, scrutiny, and assurance to the work of the Department's People Strategy, the Diversity & Inclusion Action Plan, the Workplace Strategy and the Digital Strategy.

The Departmental Information Assurance Committee is the final Sub-Committee of the Board. Its role is to ensure that the Department has appropriate policies, management, and governance systems to effectively protect the considerable volume of information held. The Sub-Committee is chaired by the Senior Information Risk Owner and assists the Board and Accounting Officer with responsibilities relating to the use, processing, storage, sharing and transmission of information or data and the systems and processes used for those purposes.

Section 4 – Our Strategic Objectives and Activities for 2026–2027

The Department operates an annual Business Planning model, supported by an agreed set of strategic objectives spanning more than one financial year. This approach is outlined in the Strategic Business Planning Framework which sets strategic direction and governs business planning across the Department, outlining the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders. It also sets out the Department's approach to monitoring and reporting progress of activities in the Plan and outlines the strategic objectives the Department is aspiring to achieve. The Department's ten strategic objectives and linkages to the Department's common purpose are outlined in the following table:

Strategic Objectives	Common Purpose
Deliver social security, employment support, child maintenance and pensions to ensure everyone has access to the right (financial) support when they need it.	Supporting People
Promote residential building safety and the availability of good quality and affordable housing to offer individuals and families shelter and a place to feel safe.	Supporting People Building Communities Shaping Places
Recognise diversity, tackle poverty, encourage participation in society and promote social inclusion to create a society of respect and acceptance.	Supporting People Building Communities
Engage with and support, through improved collaboration, central and local Government and the Voluntary & Community sector to build more empowered, confident communities and reduce disadvantage.	Supporting People Building Communities Shaping Places
Identify, protect, conserve, promote and provide access to our historic environment and records of historical, social and cultural importance to inform and encourage understanding of how our rich and diverse cultural heritage shapes us now and in the future.	Shaping Places
Support our creative industries and arts sector, promote our language and cultural sectors, and foster knowledge including within our libraries and museums, to break down barriers, connect people and communities, shape our places and deliver economic and social value.	Building Communities
Provide strategic direction for our sports and physical activity sectors to encourage increased and diverse participation and high quality facilities, delivering an active, healthy, resilient and inclusive society which recognises and values both participation and excellence.	Supporting People Building Communities
Transform our towns and cities into safe, accessible and sustainable centres through growth in homes, retail, business and leisure; thereby creating places where people want to live, work and invest.	Supporting People Building Communities Shaping Places
To support a just transition to a more sustainable Northern Ireland, ensure all policies and functions of the Department reflect the statutory duties set out in the Climate Change (Northern Ireland) Act 2022.	Supporting People Shaping Places
Deliver effective governance, financial and people arrangements to support effective service delivery across the Department.	Supporting People Building Communities Shaping Places

This Business Plan sets out our key activities and milestones to deliver against the Department's strategic objectives until 31 March 2027. The key activities and supporting milestones for 2026–27 are outlined in **Annex A** of this Plan.

While the Departmental Plan includes some of the Department's key activities for 2026–27. Further activity, including business as usual, is monitored and reported at Group and Directorate level.

This year marks the final year of the Executive's 2024–27 Programme for Government. The Department plays a key role in delivering the priorities and commitments set out within the Programme for Government and activities and milestones in this Plan are aligned with those commitments for which the Department has a lead responsibility.

Monitoring & Reporting

The Department will monitor progress on the activities contained within the Business Plan at quarterly intervals throughout the year. A progress report will be presented to Departmental Management Board for review and consideration. Progress of the longer-term strategic objectives (outlined above) will be reported at year end (31 March 2027) using an aggregate of the Red-Amber-Green ratings of the activities that support each objective.

If material amendments to the Business Plan are required during the year, these will be brought to Departmental Management Board for consideration and approval through the next quarterly report, with the online Departmental Business Plan updated once approval has been granted.

Delivery Partners

Our Arm's Length Bodies, Councils and other Executive Departments perform many vital and significant functions, and it is through the strategic alignment of objectives and working with these strategic partners that the Department will deliver much of its work. The Department's Arm's Length Bodies, Statutory Advisory Bodies and Independent Statutory Office Holders are outlined below:

Arm's Length Bodies

Advisory Committees

- Charity Advisory Committee.
- Historic Buildings Council.
- Historic Monuments Council.
- Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture and the Built Environment.

Other

- The Discretionary Support Commissioner.
- Vaughan's Charitable Trust.

Annex A – Department for Communities Key Deliverables 2026-27

Objective: Deliver social security, employment support, child maintenance and pensions to ensure everyone has access to the right (financial) support when they need it.

Activity	Milestone	Group
Contribute to improved outcomes for children in separated families by ensuring parents fulfil their financial obligations through the delivery of a high-quality child maintenance service.	By 31 March 2027, supporting 9 out of 10 cases using the Child Maintenance Service statutory scheme are paying towards ongoing liability.	Operational Delivery
To minimise Fraud & Error loss across the benefit system by optimising use of resources to address the highest risks. This will ensure that public funds are protected and help strengthen trust in the benefit system.	By 31 March 2027, to have contributed to minimising Fraud & Error loss across benefits by completing 30,000 intervention reviews, focusing on high-risk cases, generating measurable financial impact through correction and prevention of incorrect benefit payments.	
Delivery of the Make the Call Wraparound Service which aims to ensure that all individuals and their families are receiving the benefits, supports and services they are entitled to claim.	By 30 April 2026, to have implemented a pathway for veterans to seek advice about Departmental benefit, employability, and housing services.	
	By 31 March 2027, the Make the Call Wraparound telephony and outreach teams will engage 30,000 new customers and deliver benefit entitlement assessments to help maximise their financial support.	
Strengthen partnership working with Department for Work & Pensions to modernise service delivery, secure inward investment and increase permanent employment in Northern Ireland, supporting economic growth, workforce sustainability and improved service delivery for citizens.	By 31 March 2027, to have achieved a net increase in permanent staffing through targeted recruitment, supporting progress towards the agreed 70% permanent / 30% agency mix.	

Activity	Milestone	Group
Delivery of social security payments to older people, children, and adults with disabilities, ensuring that those who require financial support receive the right benefit at the right time.	By 30 June 2026, to have delivered accurate and timely financial support for living costs in later life, and for the additional costs associated with disabilities for 608,000 older people, disabled children, within agreed claim clearance and financial accuracy standards.	
	By 30 September 2026, to have delivered accurate and timely support with living costs in later life, and for the additional costs associated with disabilities for 614,000 older people, disabled children, and adults, within agreed claim clearance and financial accuracy standards.	
	By 31 December 2026, to have delivered accurate and timely support with living costs in later life, and for the additional costs associated with disabilities for 619,000 older people, disabled children, and adults, within agreed claim clearance and financial accuracy standards.	
	By 31 March 2027, to have delivered accurate and timely support with living costs in later life, and for the additional costs associated with disabilities for 624,000 older people, disabled children, and adults, within agreed claim clearance and financial accuracy standards.	

Activity	Milestone	Group
To work towards the reduction of fraud and error and associated monetary loss within Universal Credit improving compliance, leading to increased caseload accuracy and improved customer outcomes.	Throughout 2026-27, improve productivity in the Universal Credit Review team to contribute to reducing fraud/error.	Work & Health
To deliver a high-quality service to over 300,000 Working Age customers and over 100,000 Finance Support applicants to ensure that they receive support to make and maintain their claim and are paid the right amount at the right time.	Throughout 2026-27, to deliver Working Age benefits within the specific targets set for timely processing and payment of claims, and to the standard of financial accuracy applicable to each benefit area.	
	Throughout 2026-27, to deliver a high-quality Finance Support services within the specific targets set for timely processing and payment of claims, and to the standard of financial accuracy applicable to each area.	
Set strategic direction and work in partnership with stakeholders to develop and deliver quality labour market provision (including health and work initiatives) that support more customers to move closer, find, retain and progress in employment, working in partnership with stakeholders.	By 31 March 2027, to provide comprehensive support to the Independent Commission on Work and Wellbeing to enable the delivery of its final report on disability- and ill health-related economic inactivity in Northern Ireland.	
	By 31 March 2027, under the Pathways to Work and Wellbeing Project, to co-design a strategic framework, alongside test-and-learn pilots that better integrate local employability, health, and community supports, creating clear, supported, and flexible pathways to support more people to enter and progress in meaningful employment and address the key drivers of economic inactivity in Northern Ireland.	
	By 31 March 2027, to deliver a range of employability and health and work support interventions to help more people overcome barriers and move into work or progress towards work. (Subject to budget).	
Supporting those circa 100 remaining legacy claimants through the Move to Universal Credit exercise to ensure their continued financial support.	By 31 December 2026, to have completed migration for those within the exception groups not subject to 31 March 2026 completion date.	

Activity	Milestone	Group
To ensure the relevant legislation is in place for social security, child maintenance, pensions and welfare mitigations.	By 31 March 2027, to have taken forward the relevant legislation in relation to social security, child maintenance, pensions and welfare mitigations through the legislative process within the prescribed timelines.	
To deliver upon a new Disability and Work Strategy for Northern Ireland, setting a 10-year commitment to support an additional 50,000 disabled people into employment.	By 30 September 2026, to have published the Consultation Report on the Draft Disability and Work Strategy for Northern Ireland.	
	By 31 March 2027, to have launched a new Disability and Work Strategy for Northern Ireland and establish a Disability and Work Council to oversee implementation and delivery of the Strategy.	
To deliver the Home Heating Oil Support Scheme to support people on income-related and disability benefits and low incomes exposed to the increased cost of heating oil.	By 1 August 2026, to establish a fully operational framework, encompassing legislation, funding, IT system, procurement, workforce, and governance processes to enable applications and for those eligible the award of a single home heating oil voucher per household.	
	By 31 March 2027, to have administered the Home Heating Oil Support Scheme in adherence with agreed timescales and accuracy targets.	
To deliver planned policy and operational improvements to enhance the scope and quality of services available through Discretionary Support.	By 1 January 2027, to have implemented the availability of Discretionary Support fuel grants.	
	By 28 February 2027, to have implemented a direct supply model for Discretionary Support items to support a more effective service which meets individual need.	
	By 31 March 2027, to have delivered system and operational readiness to support revised Discretionary Support Regulations.	

Activity	Milestone	Group
Continue the transformation of health assessment services used by c. 100,000 Northern Ireland citizens applying for Universal Credit, Personal Independence Payment and Employment and Support Allowance – implementing service improvements, digital enhancements and sustainable commercial delivery models to improve quality, timeliness and efficiency, and contributing to Programme for Government priorities on reducing inequality, tackling poverty and enabling people to live independently and participate fully in society.	By 30 September 2026, to have implemented the new contact centre telephony solution with cloud storage, known as Digital Channels Contact Centre subject to their successful delivery by the Department for Work & Pensions.	Corporate Services
	By 31 December 2026, to have implemented Health Information Share, a digital solution for claimants to share evidence, subject to their successful delivery by the Department for Work & Pensions.	
	By 31 March 2027, to work in tandem with the Department for Work & Pensions and the Functional Assessment Service Supplier to explore the feasibility of Artificial Intelligence Solutions and implement if feasible (subject to successful Department for Work & Pensions pilots).	
	By 31 March 2027, to have completed and obtained approval for the Northern Ireland Health Transformation Programme Business Case to deliver Personal Independence Payment operational transformation.	
	By 31 March 2027, subject to Department for Work & Pensions planning, to have commissioned the feasibility of conducting a pilot or test and learn exercise to help determine Northern Ireland's requirements for Health Assessment IT solution.	
	By 31 March 2027, to have ensured the successful implementation of any initiatives from the 2025 Pathways to Work Green Paper assigned to Health Transformation Project and relevant to health assessment services in Northern Ireland, subject to their successful delivery by the Department for Work & Pensions and them being within the control of the Department for Communities.	

Objective: Promote residential building safety and the availability of good quality and affordable housing to offer individuals and families shelter and a place to feel safe.

Activity	Milestone	Group
To develop a Residential Building Safety Policy for Northern Ireland to increase the safety of those living in High-rise residential buildings following the Grenfell fire in 2017.	By 28 February 2027, to have completed a public consultation of proposed Residential Building Safety Policy.	Housing & Sustainability
	By 31 March 2027, to have issued initial instruction to the Office of the Legislative Council to commence drafting of legislation.	
Increase housing supply and affordable options in line with the Housing Supply Strategy and its vision to ensure everyone has access to a good quality, affordable and sustainable home. This will include enabling all available forms of housing supply, including the Private Rented Sector and ensure that our communities have access to good quality, affordable and sustainable homes.	By 30 June 2026, to have awarded funding to the Intermediate Rent Operator to allow them to build the first tranche of new-build Intermediate Rent homes.	
	By 30 September 2026, to have initiated a pilot exercise in collaboration with 3 Local Government Districts to explore what potential policy interventions and options may exist to bring more empty homes back into use.	
	By 31 October 2026, to complete reviews into the funding and design standards as they relate to the Social Housing Development Programme.	
	By 31 March 2027, to be on track at year-end to deliver Social Housing Development end-of-mandate target within the Programme for Government.[1]	

1. Department for Communities' reports against this target will continue to include "starts" from the Social Housing Development Programme where an existing non-social home is purchased and will be refurbished to provide new social supply. They will also include all other actions started within the period that will provide additional social housing supply.

Activity	Milestone	Group
	By 31 March 2027, the Intermediate Rent Operator will have commenced letting the first of the Intermediate homes to eligible lower income households.	
	By 31 March 2027, to deliver 1,000 Co-Ownership intermediate homes to support more people into affordable home ownership.	
	By 31 March 2027, to have announced how Intermediate Rent can be expanded.	
Develop plans to secure, maintain, invest in, and add to the supply of Northern Ireland Housing Executive housing stock, based on sustainable financial plans which are supported by rent and borrowing (Subject to confirmation of the appropriate Consolidated Budgeting Guidance treatment which is specific to this target), ensuring that the Housing Executive's 83,000 tenants continue to benefit from safe, warm, affordable housing.	By 31 January 2027, to have approved a modern and sustainable rent scheme for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and to have plans in progress for its implementation.	
	By 31 March 2027, to provide strategic oversight and support to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in developing interim funding arrangements to enable essential investment in Northern Ireland Housing Executive housing stock, pending a satisfactory outcome from the forthcoming Fiscal Framework negotiations.	
	By 31 March 2027, to work with the Department of Finance and HM Treasury to secure agreement for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to access borrowing in order to invest in its homes, improve energy efficiency and contribute to new housing supply.	

Activity	Milestone	Group
Complete the annual programme of regulatory assessments on registered housing associations in Northern Ireland to ensure compliance with the Regulatory Framework.	By 30 September 2026, to have completed 100% of 2024/25 regulatory judgements.	Communities, Place & Local Government
	By 31 March 2027, to have completed 50% of 2025/26 regulatory judgements.	
Innovation in housing support services to increase focus on prevention & support, helping people to live more independently within their communities through the provision of housing related support.	By 31 March 2027, to support Northern Ireland Housing Executive to achieve the agreed targets set out in the Year 1 Action Plan of the Strategic Intent 2026-2031, towards a sustainable funding plan and greater financial efficiency and agility in the Supporting People Programme.	Housing & Sustainability
	By 31 March 2027, to improve Supporting People's effectiveness and maximise output for service users by ensuring evidence-based commissioning of housing related support services in partnership with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, aligning with the Programme for Government commitment to prioritise housing support for vulnerable people.	
	By 31 March 2027, to secure 30 units of accommodation along with tailored support packages, to prevent young people leaving care from becoming homeless.	
	By 31 March 2027, to have explored options for strengthening homelessness prevention through the introduction of a statutory duty and brought forward proposals to the Minister.	
Provide landlords with improved powers to address unacceptable behaviour and make communities better places to live by allowing landlords to address unacceptable behaviour more quickly and deal with serious cases more effectively.	By 30 September 2026, to introduce the Housing (Amendment) Bill to the Assembly (subject to Executive approval and agreement on Accelerated Passage).	
	By 31 March 2027, to progress the Housing (Amendment) Bill through the legislative process (subject to Assembly timetable and agreement on Accelerated Passage).	

Objective: Recognise diversity, tackle poverty, encourage participation in society and promote social inclusion to create a society of respect and acceptance.

Activity	Milestone	Group
Introduce the Breathing Space (Debt Respite) Scheme in Northern Ireland to provide statutory protections for people in problem debt, encouraging access to debt advice and helping individuals reach sustainable debt solutions, and contributing to Programme for Government outcomes on reducing inequality and supporting those in need.	By 30 April 2026, to secure Executive agreement in principle to extend the England & Wales Breathing Space scheme to Northern Ireland.	Communities, Place & Local Government
	By 31 December 2026, to support HM Treasury in the development and completion of the Breathing Space Scheme public consultation.	
	By 31 March 2027, to support HM Treasury in laying the draft Statutory Instrument and seek Northern Ireland Assembly approval within the current mandate (subject to HM Treasury agreement).	
Seek Executive approval to launch Neighbourhood Renewal People and Place Strategic Framework, which aims to tackle disadvantage in a collaborative place-based way, contributing to Programme for Government priorities of tackling poverty and place-based disadvantage and aligns with the emerging Anti-Poverty Strategy.	By 30 September 2026, to have secured Executive approval to commence public consultation.	
	By 31 March 2027, to have secured Executive approval to launch Neighbourhood Renewal People and Place Strategic Framework.	
Support the deaf community by completing the remaining legislative measures associated with the Sign Language Bill and deliver on the strategy to implement its requirements.	By 30 September 2026, to have agreed a timetable for the Statutory Rules to be made to implement the provisions of the Act.	Engaged Communities
	By 31 October 2026, to provide final draft Sign Language Framework (Strategy) ready for Ministerial approval prior to public consultation.	
	By 31 March 2027, to support Minister to progress the Bill through its remaining stages to Royal Assent and necessary Commencement arrangements (subject to Assembly scrutiny and timetable).	

Activity	Milestone	Group
Develop and publish the Executive Anti-Poverty Strategy to provide an overarching framework to address poverty based on objective need.	By 31 July 2026, to have prepared a revised draft Anti-Poverty Strategy and associated Programme Plans for consideration by the Minister.	
	By 31 December 2026, to have prepared a draft final Anti-Poverty Strategy and associated Programme Plans for submission to the Executive.	
	By 31 March 2027, subject to agreement by the Executive, to have published an agreed Executive Anti-Poverty Strategy and associated Programme Plans.	
Develop and publish a Disability Strategy providing an overarching framework to improve the lives of Deaf and disabled people so they can play an equal, full, and active role in all aspects of our society.	By 31 July 2026, to have analysed consultation responses and prepared a revised draft Disability Strategy for consideration by the Minister.	
	By 31 October 2026, to have prepared a draft final Disability Strategy for submission to the Executive.	
	By 31 December 2026, to have published an agreed Executive Disability Strategy.	

Objective: Engage with and support, through improved collaboration, central and local Government and the Voluntary & Community sector to build more empowered, confident communities and reduce disadvantage.

Activity	Milestone	Group
Deliver the Northern Ireland Community Infrastructure Fund pilot to support minor capital improvements to community buildings and spaces enabling them to remain safe, functional and fit for purpose.	By 30 June 2026, to have issued Letters of Offer to successful applicant organisations.	Communities, Place & Local Government
	By 31 March 2027, to have successfully delivered at least 100 capital projects.	
Develop longer term programme arrangements for a capital modernisation and refurbishment grant to the Voluntary & Community sector supporting minor capital improvements to community buildings and spaces enabling them to remain safe, functional and fit for purpose.	By 31 December 2026, to have developed a business case for the establishment of a longer-term programme of capital modernisation and refurbishment grants.	
	By 31 March 2027, to have launched a longer-term programme of capital modernisation and refurbishment grant funding for the Voluntary and Community Sector.	
Introduce the new Voluntary Community Sector Infrastructure Support Policy Framework - a streamlined, more strategic model of infrastructure support built around a regional and local consortia partnerships. The aim of which is to strengthen sector capacity and in turn improve outcomes for communities across Northern Ireland. A more coordinated and strategic model of infrastructure support will strengthen Voluntary Community Sector organisations, improve collaboration and enhance service delivery for communities.	By 30 April 2026, to publish the consultation outcome and the final Voluntary Community Sector Infrastructure Support Policy Framework.	
	By 31 October 2026, to have launched closed call (restricted bids) for the two strategic programme strands of Voluntary Community Sector Infrastructure Support.	
	By 31 December 2026, to have launched the competitive grant process for competitive programme strands of Voluntary Community Sector Infrastructure Support.	

Objective: Identify, protect, conserve, promote and provide access to our historic environment and records of historical, social and cultural importance to inform and encourage understanding of how our rich and diverse cultural heritage shapes us now and in the future.

Activity	Milestone	Group
Ensure that our culture and heritage sectors contribute to economic prosperity, drive inclusive growth and address disadvantage.	By 30 September 2026, utilising support from the Shared Island Fund, to have awarded the construction contract for the repurposing of Bellaghy Bawn as a writer's residence in partnership with Mid Ulster District Council to help position the village as a literary hub in a national and international basis.	Engaged Communities
	By 31 March 2027, to have substantially progressed the construction contract for the repurposing of Bellaghy Bawn towards the anticipated completion date of 31 October 2027.	
	By 31 March 2027, to support the delivery of the Belfast Region City Deal by completing the enabling works identified for 2026/27 at Carrickfergus Castle and Carrickfergus Town Walls and to have finalised the terms of the agreement for the future operations of Carrickfergus Castle with Mid and East Antrim Borough Council.	
	By 31 March 2027, to have secured the potential of Northern Ireland's 187 Monuments in State Care to deliver economic and social value through the completion of recruitment to the Department's Conservation Works Team, and the implementation of a cyclical preventative maintenance plan.	

Activity	Milestone	Group
	By 31 March 2027, to have helped to deliver the efficient management and reuse of our historic environment through responding to at least 75% of statutory planning and Listed Buildings Consent consultations within statutory timeframes.	
	By 31 March 2027, to have helped communities and owners to increase the potential of the historic environment to deliver economic and social value through the delivery of the 2026/27 Historic Environment Fund, the Village Catalyst Grant Scheme, and the development of other means of support with partners.	
Develop a business case to support the Digital Transformation of Public Record Office Northern Ireland to widen participation, access and engagement with archives and ensure long-term digital transfer and preservation of public records.	By 31 December 2026, to have completed a Business Case on scope and resources required for a Digital Transformation Programme.	
Contribute to the delivery of the The Executive Office Truth Recovery programme by providing information from archives to support victims and survivors of Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalen Laundries and Workhouses applying for redress.	By 31 March 2027, to have delivered our statutory obligations in supporting The Executive Office Truth Recovery programme including the Statutory Inquiry and Redress Scheme.	

Objective: Support our creative industries and arts sector, promote our language and cultural sectors, and foster knowledge including within our libraries and museums, to break down barriers, connect people and communities, shape our places and deliver economic and social value.

Activity	Milestone	Group
Develop and publish a suite of Heritage, Culture and Creativity policies (for Museums, Public Libraries, Arts, and the Historic Environment) that include activity to raise aspirations, build skills and inspire people.	By 30 September 2026, to have issued public consultations on all four policies.	Engaged Communities
	By 28 February 2027, to have published a cross-programme action plan for the policies.	
	By 28 February 2027, to have published final versions of all four policies.	
Develop an Ulster Scots Language, Heritage and Culture Strategy, and an Irish Language Strategy, with associated action plans which prioritise work to deliver social and economic value.	By 31 October 2026, to provide Minister with draft strategy narratives and action plans from the Cross Departmental Working Group.	
	By 30 November 2026, Minister to provide approved draft strategy narratives and actions plans to the Executive for consideration.	
	By 31 January 2027, to open public consultation on the strategies and action plans.	
Support National Museums NI to improve the Ulster Folk Museum's facilities, enhance access to collections and strengthen the museum's role in helping people connect with their heritage via the Reawakening project.	By 31 March 2027, to have supported National Museums NI in the delivery of the Reawakening project including through liaison on finance, commercial services and communications requirements.	

Activity	Milestone	Group
Deliver and promote a USA-NI250 programme to mark the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence in collaboration with local stakeholders and institutions in the USA to increase cultural and heritage participation.	By 30 June 2026, to have developed and launched the Public Records Office NI US Treasures publication.	
	By 31 October 2026, to have developed and launched Public Records Office Northern Ireland USA-NI250 exhibit.	
	By 31 March 2027, to have developed and promoted the programme developed by the USA-NI250 Steering Group.	
	By 31 March 2027, to have promoted and supported the events delivered through the USA-NI250 Fund Scheme.	

Objective: Provide strategic direction for our sports and physical activity sectors to encourage increased and diverse participation and high-quality facilities, delivering an active, healthy, resilient and inclusive society which recognises and values both participation and excellence.

Activity	Milestone	Group
Develop and implement plans for a new governance, finance and delivery model for the redevelopment of Casement Park to provide a modern, safe stadium that will increase participation and enhance local community facilities.	By 31 December 2026, to have collaborated with the Gaelic Athletic Association and other stakeholders to design and establish a Gaelic Athletic Association/Department for Communities Special Purpose Vehicle that can utilise available funding streams to deliver the project and realise the agreed sporting and societal benefits.	Engaged Communities
	By 31 March 2027, to have worked with the Gaelic Athletic Association to baseline their strategic need, in order to support development of a high-quality facility that can be demonstrated as sustainable, affordable, reasonable and value for money.	
Assist with delivery of sporting infrastructure with a view to Northern Ireland hosting international cricket matches as part of the joint UK and Ireland bid for the International Cricket Council Men's T20 Cricket World Cup 2030.	By 30 June 2026, to have determined the scale of, and agreed provision of, a Financial Transaction Capital loan to contribute to Northern Ireland Civil Service Sports Association capital works at their Stormont facility.	
	By 31 March 2027, to have supported Northern Ireland Civil Service Sports Association in progressing their capital project to the commencement of the construction phase.	

Activity	Milestone	Group
Develop and implement plans to progress The Northern Ireland Football Fund, improving access to safe, high-quality, accessible football facilities, supporting participation and active lifestyles, and contributing to healthier, more active communities.	By 30 July 2026, to have issued the Irish Football Association with a Funding Agreement for a National Football Centre, subject to business case approval.	
	By 30 September 2026, to have identified 6 projects for support under the Grassroots Facilities Pilot Programme, subject to minimum application requirements having been met.	
	By 31 March 2027, for Performance Programme projects which have achieved business case approval, to have project delivery structures in place and have capital grant Funding Agreements in place.	

Objective: Transform our towns and cities into safe, accessible and sustainable centres through growth in homes, retail, business and leisure; thereby creating places where people want to live, work and invest.

Activity	Milestone	Group
Support the delivery of the City and Growth deal projects for: • Belfast Region City Deal; • Derry City & Strabane City Deal; • Causeway Coast and Glens Growth Deal; and • Mid Southwest Growth Deal; to accelerate long term economic growth, creation of new job opportunities and boost regional productivity.	By 30 June 2026, to have supported Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council in achieving Financial Deal stage as lead Department for the Coleraine Leisure and Wellbeing Centre.	Communities, Place & Local Government
	By 31 July 2026, to have supported Newry Mourne and Down District Council to have commenced construction on the Newry Theatre/Conference, and City Deal funded surrounding public realm.	
	By 31 December 2026, to have supported Newry Mourne and Down District Council in progressing the Newry City Park project to Full Business Case approval and commenced construction.	
	By 31 March 2027, to support Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council in the signing of the Contract for Funding for the Coleraine Leisure and Wellbeing Centre project.	
	By 31 March 2027, to have supported Derry City and Strabane District Council in advancing the Strabane Canal Basin Public Realm & Site Enabling Works project including the completion of construction ready designs for the Car Park and the completion of design for the site-enabling works on the Northwest Regional College site.	

Activity	Milestone	Group
	By 31 March 2027, to support Derry City and Strabane District Council in appointing an Integrated Consultancy Team and progressing scheme designs for the Walled City Regeneration Public Realm and Lighting project.	Communities, Place & Local Government
	By 31 March 2027, to support Derry City and Strabane District Council in developing the Outline Business Case for the Walled City Regeneration - Tower Museum Repurposing project.	
	By 31 March 2027, to have supported Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council with the development and approval of the Outline Business Case, and to reach deal signing stage.	
Develop and launch the Shaping Sustainable Places Programme. The programme aims to arrest decline in village, town and city centres through a coordinated, place-based regeneration framework aligned with wider policy priorities including active travel, rural development and urban regeneration.	By 30 September 2026, to have secured Executive approval for the delivery of a Shaping Sustainable Places Programme.	
	By 30 November 2026, to have established delivery structures and launched the Shaping Sustainable Places Programme.	
	By 31 March 2027, all 11 councils to have confirmed place selections.	
To progress a range of major regeneration projects in line with agreed Plans in collaboration with the 11 Northern Ireland district councils, to revitalise public spaces, enhance placemaking and encourage economic investment.	By 30 September 2026, to have completed the Inner Walled City public realm project in Derry~Londonderry.	
	By 31 March 2027, to have agreed and issued one Financial Transactions Capital loan agreement.	
	By 31 March 2027, to have identified and progressed two further projects to benefit from the Northwest Regeneration Fund in Derry~ Londonderry.	

Activity	Milestone	Group
	By 31 March 2027, to have supported Council in the delivery of the Strabane town centre public realm project in line with agreed plans.	
	By 31 March 2027, to have progressed the Grosvenor Road and Sandy Row Public Realm Project by submitting a planning application.	
To progress commitments given in Departmental response to the Independent Review of Liquor Licensing in Northern Ireland including the surrender principle with intention of enhancing liquor licensing regime's ability to balance responsible consumption of alcohol with the interests of public health, safety and order.	By 30 June 2026, to have launched consultation on need for cultural venue licences and review of phase 2 of the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Act (NI) 2021 to inform consideration on local producer's licences.	
	By 31 December 2026, to have produced reports and recommendations on cultural venues and local producers for consideration by Minister.	

Objective: To support a just transition to a more sustainable Northern Ireland, ensure all policies and functions of the Department reflect the statutory duties set out in the Climate Change (Northern Ireland) Act 2022.

Activity	Milestone	Group
To have developed a new Climate Change Strategy for the Department to support obligations under the Climate Change Act (NI) 2022. This will give leadership and ensure a long-term, coordinated response to climate action across the Department for the benefit of our communities.	By 30 September 2026, to have secured Climate Change Working Group sign-off on the Strategy.	Housing & Sustainability
	By 31 December 2026, to have secured Departmental Management Board approval on the Strategy and submitted to Minister for endorsement.	
	By 31 March 2027, to have developed a 2027-28 Departmental Climate Action Plan to deliver the new Strategy.	
To have designed and secured approval for a new Warm Healthy Homes Fund to support fuel poor households.	By 31 October 2026, to have published Warm Healthy Homes Fund consultation response report.	
	By 31 December 2026, to have laid new Domestic Energy Efficiency Grants Regulations before the Assembly.	
	By 31 March 2027, to have submitted the Warm Healthy Homes Fund for consideration by Minister.	

Objective: Deliver effective governance, financial and people arrangements to support effective service delivery across the Department.

Activity	Milestone	Group
Develop and implement a new Collaboration and Delivery Agreement with local Government to strengthen joint working, reduce duplication and improve outcomes for communities through more integrated and coordinated delivery aligned to Programme for Government priorities.	By 30 June 2026, to establish a Task & Finish Group, agree Terms of Reference and governance arrangements, and complete stakeholder mapping and a landscape review to support the development of a coordinated, outcomes-focused Central-local Government approach.	Communities, Place & Local Government
	By 30 November 2026, to produce a draft Collaboration and Delivery Agreement aligned to Programme for Government priorities, including stakeholder engagement and validation, and complete internal, legal and policy assurance processes.	
	By 31 March 2027, to secure Ministerial/ Executive approval for the Agreement to enable more joined-up, efficient delivery and improved outcomes for communities (subject to scheduling).	
Develop stronger, collaborative partnership with Sport NI to drive delivery on Ministerial and Departmental priorities.	By 31 December 2026, to have worked with Sport NI to implement the outcomes of the Sports Councils' review of their Recognition Policy.	Engaged Communities
	By 31 March 2027, to have worked collaboratively with Sport NI to implement and embed good governance practices and processes within the organisation.	

Activity	Milestone	Group
	By 31 March 2027, to have worked with Sport NI, members of the Strategic Implementation Group, and the Active Living No Limits Forum to commence delivery of the Active Living Action Plan and progress agreed actions.	
	By 31 March 2027, to have worked with the Equality and Governance Oversight Group to implement as many of the recommendations as practicable contained within the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland's Equality Review of the governance, practices and procedures applicable to Ulster Boxing.	
Maximise opportunities to secure and strategically manage Resource and Capital budgets, while leading the Department's financial management in the absence of a Budget and providing robust strategic advice to the Accounting Officer and Minister, ensuring alignment with Departmental priorities.	By 31 March 2027, to have planned and coordinated all Departmental Budget Exercise submissions (including efficiency exercises and Monitoring Rounds) in a timely manner, to ensure the Department can deliver a balanced budget.	Corporate Services
	By 31 March 2027, to have managed the Departmental budget to ensure financial outturn of no less than 98% resource and capital (a) Annually Managed Expenditure & (b) Departmental Expenditure Limits.	
Initiate and implement a Department for Communities 5-year People Priorities Plan that seeks to build capacity and capability in our people to ensure the efficient and impactful delivery of services to the public.	By 31 July 2026, to launch the 5-year People Priorities Plan.	
	Throughout the reporting period, to provide quarterly updates on the progress on the People Priorities Plan to Policy & Resources Sub-Committee & Departmental Management Board.	

Activity	Milestone	Group
Ensure corporate cyber and information management risks are actively managed through strengthened governance, leadership awareness and Departmental training, reducing the risk of service disruption or data loss, protecting citizens' information and maintaining trust in how critical services are delivered.	By 30 June 2026, to have communicated the outcome of the GovAssure independent audit report to Departmental Information Assurance Committee.	
	By 31 October 2026, to have completed a Departmental Management Board cyber security awareness exercise.	
	By 31 October 2026, to have commenced the rollout of the Department for Communities Security Awareness training to all staff.	
Deliver digital transformation by identifying and prioritising digital opportunities, implementing a coordinated delivery plan, addressing legacy system risks and strengthening governance, improving the speed, reliability and accessibility of services for citizens while ensuring long term sustainability and better use of public resources.	By 30 June 2026, to engage with business areas to assess digital needs and requirements.	
	By 31 July 2026, to assess all Department for Communities legacy systems using the Central Digital & Data Office Legacy IT Risk Assessment Framework.	
	By 30 September 2026, to develop an approved digital delivery plan for 2026-27.	
	By 30 September 2026, to establish a new Digital Governance Forum to prioritise and oversee digital delivery.	
	By 31 March 2027, to deliver the approved digital delivery plan.	

Activity	Milestone	Group
Transformation: Develop a Strategic Workforce Plan that aligns people, skills and resources with the Department's current and future priorities in the delivery of public services that impact most people in Northern Ireland.	By 31 December 2026, to complete an analysis of current workforce data, including demographics, turnover, recruitment trends and skills gaps.	
	By 31 December 2026, to engage business areas to assess future workforce requirements and identify priority risk areas.	
	By 31 March 2027, establish and pilot a departmental skills audit approach across the Corporate Services Group (September to December 2026), assessing both generic grade-based competencies and specialist skills across all grades. The pilot will identify current skills gaps, future capability requirements, succession risks and workforce planning scenarios, informing the development and departmental rollout of a sustainable workforce planning model.	
	By 31 March 2027, produce a draft Strategic Workforce Plan, informed by departmental workforce planning activity, for approval through the People and Resourcing Sub-Committee and subsequent endorsement by the Departmental Management Board, including recommendations on workforce capacity, capability development, succession planning and talent management.	
Transformation: Develop a Departmental Strategic Asset Management Strategy & Plan to offer confidence to the public on the long-term sustainability and efficient use of public assets.	By 30 June 2026, to provide a paper to Departmental Management Board setting out recommended governance arrangements for Strategic Asset Management in the Department for Communities.	
	By 30 September 2026, to provide a methodology and Terms of Reference for procurement of external support to scope and develop an Asset Management Strategy and Action Plan.	
	By 31 December 2026, to present the Asset Management Strategy to Departmental Management Board for approval.	

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