

Running out of time

The performance of the Northern
Ireland Executive in 2026 so far

The background of the lower half of the page features three white, flowing, abstract lines that sweep across the frame from left to right, creating a sense of movement and depth.

pivotal

Pivotal is an independent think tank that aims to contribute to improved policy making in Northern Ireland. This report is offered on that basis.

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Executive summary

With around seven months until the Assembly is dissolved, it is timely to review the Executive's progress on Programme for Government priorities, passing legislation, and improving outcomes for people across Northern Ireland. While there have been improvements in some areas (which can be found on pages 18-48), the last eight months have been marked by a failure to agree a budget, an inability to work together on shared challenges, and increasing tensions and divisions between the parties.

The public are therefore struggling to feel that the Executive is making a difference in their lives. The lack of delivery continues to drive widespread apathy about the effectiveness of Stormont.

The multi-year funding settlement provided a rare opportunity to agree a longer-term budget, plan for the future, and embed the hard work of transformation across the public sector. Many would consider the Executive's failure to agree either a multi-year or single-year budget to be its single defining failure of this year. Without an agreed settlement five months into the financial year, departments cannot plan or transform, and will struggle to meet pay pressures while risking further deterioration in public services. Significant overspends look likely.

Beyond the budget, other long-term challenges remain without a plan. The Anti-Poverty Strategy and the decision to implement developer contributions for wastewater infrastructure have been

rejected by key stakeholders and sectors. While there has been progress in the Department of Health, patient flow in hospitals remains an issue, Emergency Departments are in "perma-crisis" and there is still no clear plan for hospital reconfiguration. The Investment Strategy has still not been published.

Many of the Executive's flagship policies and priorities in this mandate show little sign of progress: the Good Jobs Bill is stuck without Executive agreement and now faces a tight timeline to be passed, SEN reforms have been delayed, the expansion of Magee is in "jeopardy", Casement Park's redevelopment is stalled and blue-green algae continues to plague Lough Neagh.

An inability to take tough choices not only delays the decision, but makes it harder and more expensive to solve in future. This lack of action is unsustainable.

Opinion polls show discontent with the political parties and a lack of confidence in the institutions.

There has, however, been meaningful progress in a number of key areas. Some of the longest health waiting lists are beginning to fall and the Department has published its “Reset Plan” to drive community care forward. Significant reforms to education, examinations and the curriculum are well underway (although teachers have expressed concern at the pace of change). Transformation projects are showing early evidence of reducing the court

backlog through faster processing times. The revised Nutrients Action Programme was praised by agricultural and other key stakeholders. The Executive Office’s AI Strategy is out for consultation. A full consideration of each Department’s actions can be found on pages 18-48.

There are strategic and structural challenges facing the Executive. Whether it is reforming Stormont, stabilising the public finances and putting them on a sustainable footing, or tackling Violence Against Women and Girls, supporting childcare or reducing economic inactivity, the Executive needs to work together and show strong leadership. In these final months of the mandate, their focus should be on improving outcomes for people and showing that the institutions of government can deliver. This will

require tough but necessary choices to be made. Ministers should face these issues collectively and show maturity and responsibility for their actions.

As the election period approaches, parties will likely be tempted to deepen divisions and increase political point-scoring. Instead, we would urge them to use these final months to find common ground and work together to make a difference that improves outcomes on the issues that matter most to people.

“In these final months of the mandate, their focus should be on improving outcomes for people and showing that the institutions of government can deliver”

This report considers



01.

The effectiveness of the Executive so far in 2026

02.

Headline cross-cutting messages for the Executive

03.

What each Department has delivered and what their priorities should be

04.

The progress of Executive and non-Executive legislation in this mandate

05.

Data which track some of Northern Ireland's key challenges

How effective has the Executive been?

September 2026

The absence of a budget is the biggest failing of the Executive in 2026 so far. There has been a growing pattern of the parties blaming either a lack of funding or each other for all the challenges they face, rather than seeking to find answers themselves. Big issues remain stalled, either for budgetary reasons or because of difficulty in reaching a compromise or shared solution.

There has been important progress in some areas, but the public struggle to see the difference Stormont is making to improve their lives. The upcoming Assembly election is increasingly prominent day-to-day, with more obvious political point-scoring and growing divisions along party lines. Meanwhile time is running out to progress substantive issues before the end of the Assembly term, including passing key legislation.

Some progress has been seen in a number of important areas: some of the longest health waits are beginning to come down, significant education reforms have continued, and a shared way forward was found on the Nutrients Action Programme. Northern Ireland was the first part of these islands to introduce paid bereavement leave to parents who have suffered from a miscarriage. The Irish Language and Ulster Scots and Ulster British Tradition Commissioners have been in post now for almost a year, and are developing their work strands and portfolios. The Executive Office published its draft AI Strategy, which seeks to unlock the technology's potential while managing its risks.

The first [annual reports](#) into the Programme for Government (PfG) and Public Sector Transformation Board should have marked an important milestone, offering an opportunity to review the Executive's delivery of its key priorities. However, the PfG report lacked a detailed assessment of progress, and its publication was low-key and received limited attention. It is unclear how much the PfG is driving decision-making in departments and the Executive as a whole. Meanwhile, a [Lucid Talk poll](#) found that only 27% of respondents felt the return of Stormont had made a positive difference to their lives.

The Executive's [annual report on the Public Sector Transformation Fund](#) showed that the first tranche of transformation projects are progressing well, with over 1m citizens accessing Multi-Disciplinary Teams in their GP practices, early signs of reductions in Court processing times and additional supports for pupils with SEN. [A second tranche of transformation projects](#) was announced in May.

The Executive's failure to agree a budget for 2026-27 is a serious failing. The parties have united in their call for more funding from the UK Government, and discussions are ongoing. Deciding a budget is a basic element of good governance. Its absence means missed opportunities to plan for service delivery, pay awards, investment and reform.

It deepens uncertainty for public bodies and community groups, reduces business confidence to invest or grow here, and fuels a lack of confidence in Stormont among the electorate. The inability to agree health pay awards so far this year has led to the threat of industrial action. A 95% emergency budget would have devastating impacts on public service delivery.

When the Executive returned early in 2024, there was a commitment to working collectively to ensure delivery for the public and to tackle difficult policy challenges. But fault lines have grown as the 2027 election draws nearer. The Good Jobs Bill, a landmark piece of legislation and a Programme for Government commitment, remains stuck in a stand-off between the two

main parties in the current Executive. Flagship projects such as the A5 and Casement Park remain delayed and their future unclear. The critical Investment Strategy still hasn't been published, leaving long-term infrastructure in limbo. After racially-motivated riots again returned to Northern Ireland's streets, the Executive's Race Equality Bill has still not been introduced.

Conversations about the need for reform of the Belfast / Good Friday Agreement institutions have increased in recent months. Pivotal considered these issues in-depth in [our recent paper](#). Although there is not cross-party consensus about significant reforms, we suggested some changes to the Assembly and Executive which could help Stormont work better.

Key messages for the Executive



01. Agreeing a budget is overdue and urgent

It is unacceptable that there is no budget agreed five months into the financial year, let alone the opportunities that have been missed from not having a multi-year settlement. Having no budget is negatively impacting public services, businesses, voluntary sector organisations and public perceptions of devolved government. The Executive must work together, along with the new Secretary of State and Treasury Ministers, to agree a sustainable settlement which reflects both short- and longer-term issues. Northern Ireland needs to move on from annual budget crises towards a situation where the Executive is taking responsibility for its own financial decisions. As part of this, the Executive has to be more realistic about the need for necessary budgetary choices.

02. There is limited time remaining to progress shared priorities

The end of this Assembly mandate is only seven months away. Ministers should focus their attention on improving outcomes on the PfG priorities. Cutting health waiting times, improving childcare provision and SEN, protecting Lough Neagh, growing the economy and the other PfG goals should remain top of the agenda. While there has been some

real progress on the PfG over the last two-and-a-half years, there remains much to do. This will require the Executive to work together, negotiate and compromise.

03. Key Executive legislation needs to pass before the end of the mandate

There are a number of complex and significant Executive-sponsored Bills which are making their way through the Assembly, most notably the Water, Sustainable Drainage and Flood Management Bill and the Justice Bill. There are also many Bills listed in the Executive's legislative agenda which have not yet been introduced – the main example is the Good Jobs Bill. A last-minute rush through the system as seen in previous mandates should be avoided and a clear path provided to ensure meaningful and sufficient scrutiny before the Assembly is dissolved (for a full list of legislation, see Annex A).

04. The Executive lacks plans for many of the biggest long-standing challenges

There remain a number of key strategic areas where the Executive has not published credible plans. Its Anti-Poverty Strategy was rejected by the sector, industry groups have been critical of plans to introduce developer contributions to tackle wastewater infrastructure, and there is no clear plan to grow the economy. There is still no sign of the long-term Investment Strategy. These issues require a shared strategic vision and need leadership from the Executive. Often it feels that Ministers commit significant time and energy to issues that are much less consequential in comparison to these longer term problems.

05. Stop blaming others for problems and take responsibility for decision-making

Increasingly, Executive parties respond to problems by blaming others, in most cases a political opponent or the UK Government. They continue to avoid difficult or unpopular decisions which are nonetheless necessary. The constrained budgetary position further emphasises the need for leadership and decision-making on revenue raising, workforce planning, super parity measures, demographic change and public service transformation. There are also tensions between different policy areas which require joined-up working to resolve, like water quality and agricultural practices, or climate change mitigation and infrastructure. Without decisive and collective leadership, these issues will only get more expensive and harder to solve.

06. Parties should focus on big policy challenges in the pre-election period

The upcoming election in May 2027 will dominate political debate in the coming months. Rather than this just underlining party political divisions, we would urge the parties to focus on developing manifesto commitments that address issues of common concern, like growing the economy, improving public services, and tackling long-standing problems such as poverty, educational inequality, infrastructure and the environment.



Headline actions since January 2026:

- Investment in elective care and improvements to some of the longest hospital waiting times
 - Secured transformation funding for ePharmacy scheme and family support
 - Launch of Neighbourhood Health and Wellbeing framework
-

Priorities ahead:

- Continue delivery of Health and Social Care Reset Plan
- Control spending in order to manage within budgets while delivering acceptable pay awards
- Publish detailed plans for hospital reconfiguration

A [further £80m](#) of Programme for Government funding was invested to improve elective care. The department has seen some progress: [endoscopy waits have fallen by 68% since their peak](#) and projected waits for inpatient surgery of more than four years reduced by 67%. There has also been positive progress in theatre utilisation and productivity.

However, [over 510,000 people are still waiting](#) for a consultant-led outpatient appointment. Over 54% of patients were waiting over a year for treatment, despite a target of 0%. [In England](#), waits of over a year have dropped by over 69% since July 2024. The median wait time in Northern Ireland is over 60 weeks.

No Emergency Department (ED) has [met its targets](#) for seeing patients, with experts warning of a “[perma-crisis](#)” and overcrowding resulting in [1,032 excess deaths](#). A scheme which was supposed to speed up ED transfers and improve ambulance availability has reportedly made the situation worse, with conditions described by the Royal College of Emergency Medicine as “[utterly horrifying](#)”. The Mental Health Champion suggested that [community-led interventions could save up to £9m](#) annually by reducing ED attendances.

A core part of creating a more sustainable health service is the “shift left” to primary care. The Department’s [neighbourhood care model](#) focuses on prevention, integration and community care.

Integrated Neighbourhood Teams will tackle [inequalities](#), strengthen prevention, and manage demand. [New adult social care plans](#) are also part of this “shift left”. Effective delivery of this neighbourhood model will rely on [resolving the ongoing dispute with GPs](#) about their funding.

The Department received £42m from the [Public Sector Transformation Fund](#) for an ePharmacy scheme, delivering over 45m electronic prescriptions and supporting more efficient community care. The Fund also provided £29m for the Together for Families project, to deliver better outcomes for children and families. It is supported by £30m from the National Lottery Community Fund.

The rollout of Multi-Disciplinary Teams (MDTs) has seen over [1.1m citizens access](#) at least one MDT role. Three-quarters of these were managed in primary care, reducing referrals to hospital.

The Department is forecasting an [£800m deficit](#) this year, driven mainly

by pay pressures. The previous [Minister committed to a pay uplift of 3.3%](#) but has a [budget increase of less than 1%](#). The main nursing union is [preparing to ballot members](#) on industrial action. [An NIAO report found that agency staff are being paid more per hour](#) here than in London.

Delivery of the [Reset Plan](#), including hospital reconfiguration, must be prioritised to ensure effective and sustainable health and social care. There has been little progress in the [hospital reconfiguration scheme](#) since its publication in October 2024. Recent controversy about removing Emergency General Surgery at Causeway Hospital highlights the need for proper consultation with communities and clinicians, effective communication and evidence-based decision-making.

The previous Minister [apologised for the “evil” carried out](#) at Muckamore Abbey Hospital and urged the recommendations from the report to be [implemented with pace and commitment](#).



Headline actions since January 2026:

- Progress on TransformED including consultation on new school curriculum
 - Progress on SEN reform
 - Published action plan on teacher workload
-

Priorities ahead:

- Deliver priorities within budget including pay awards
- Ensure buy-in from stakeholders on education reforms
- Delivery of SEN Reform Agenda

The Education Minister launched a [consultation on a new curriculum](#) for Northern Ireland schools, setting out what pupils should learn each year before they begin their GCSEs. He said it “places knowledge at its heart”. Following the [Supreme Court’s ruling](#), the [new Religious Education curriculum](#) consultation says Christianity will remain a “core element” but pupils will learn about other religions and “non-religious worldviews” from an early age.

These reforms are part of the wider TransformED programme. Its first [annual report](#) noted “tangible progress” on curriculum, assessment, qualifications, tackling disadvantage, professional development and more. A new delivery plan shifts the focus from design to delivery for the year ahead.

As part of TransformED, a [new assessment framework](#) was launched, comprised of “short, low-stakes” assessments throughout school which are automatically marked, reducing burden on teachers and providing consistent performance data. [Qualifications will also change](#), with modular A Levels replacing the AS Level, and reduced controlled assessment and coursework. The Minister announced an independent [review of school behaviour policy](#) by a newly appointed behaviour tsar which was [questioned by the Children’s Commissioner](#).

The TransformED agenda has been criticised for a lack of action on [academic selection, language learning and media literacy](#), while four in five teachers in Northern Ireland feel the

pace of the rollout has made their workload unmanageable. Despite the [Minister's action plan](#) to tackle teacher workload, the body representing the main teaching unions [balloted their members for industrial action](#).

There has been some progress on [SEN reform and transformation](#), including early years classroom assistant training and development of an enhanced support model. A number of [SEN capital projects](#) have been approved for planning and design. However, some [SEN regulations have been delayed](#) in Assembly scrutiny. The Education Authority accused some mainstream schools of “stonewalling” specialist provision. Once again, a number of SEN pupils [did not have a confirmed place](#) in school at the beginning of the summer.

The Department has faced significant budget pressures. Its 2025-26 allocation had a [£250m shortfall](#), while it estimated a £1.15bn shortfall by 2028-29. Its [five-year education budget strategy](#) proposed a [number of changes](#) to manage spending, many of which would be extremely contentious, highlighting the difficult financial position all departments are in.

There was criticism of the Department's School Uniforms Act for [not including provision to allow girls to wear trousers](#). The Education Committee therefore [introduced a Bill of its own](#) amending the Act to reflect this. An [Ad Hoc Committee](#) has been established to scrutinise it.



Headline actions since January 2026:

- Introduced Sentencing and Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bills
 - Launched Victims and Witnesses of Crime Strategy
 - Proposed way forward on legal aid fees
-

Priorities ahead:

- Ensure confidence in [front-line services in the face of budget cuts](#)
- Deliver on recommendations from Katie Simpson Review
- Support PSNI in delivering their workforce recovery plan

This year, the Department of Justice introduced two of its flagship pieces of legislation in the Assembly. The [Criminal Justice \(Sentencing etc\) Bill](#) is being scrutinised in the Justice Committee. It focuses on sentencing and creates a specific offence of assaulting a public worker. It also includes '[Charlotte's Law](#)' which creates provision for longer prison sentences for those convicted of murder or manslaughter who fail to disclose the location of the victim's body.

The [Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill](#) allows for the appointment of a victims and witnesses Commissioner. It has passed Second Stage. The [accompanying Strategy](#) reviews the use of victim personal statements in court, expands the use of remote evidence centres, and protects victims' personal

data in sexual offence cases.

The Justice Bill has completed Consideration Stage and has faced some challenges. The Minister wanted to include action to tackle online sexually explicit deepfakes [but was unable to do so](#). A provision to raise the Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility was [blocked by a Petition of Concern](#). Those in favour of the move said the amendment was "flawed", while those who opposed the Petition's use called it an "utter farce".

The review into the killing of Katie Simpson found ["institutional misogyny"](#) and ["systemic failures"](#) in the PSNI. It contains 16 recommendations including a framework to deal with coercive control and concealed homicide, and mandatory trauma-informed and victim

centred investigation models. Delivery of these will be a central part of the Department's plans to tackle Violence Against Women and Girls. The [second EVAWG delivery plan](#) was launched in April but some of its [funding is under review due to budget uncertainty](#).

The Minister [accepted the recommendations](#) of a review into legal aid fees and will take the steps needed to implement an 8.66% increase to all criminal legal aid fees. The Criminal Bar Association voted for an [end of the strike action](#) which allowed Crown Court trials to proceed.

An independent inspection found that the [PSNI remains significantly underfunded](#), restricting its capacity and ability to recruit. Its workforce

recovery plan seeks to raise officer numbers from 6,300 to 7,000 by 2028. The Police Federation has said this is in "[grave doubt](#)" due to funding constraints. Following the violent disorder in June 2026, the PSNI received [£4m in emergency funding](#) from the UK Government to cover overtime and mutual aid costs.

The [Speeding Up Justice programme](#), funded by the Transformation Fund, has saved an estimated 4,000 policing hours and shown early evidence of reducing caseloads, helping to reduce pressure on the courts.



Headline actions since January 2026:

- Some progress on Good Jobs Bill
 - Published [Energy Strategy Action Plan](#)
 - Introduction of paid [miscarriage leave](#)
-

Priorities ahead:

- Find a way forward for the Good Jobs Bill
- Consider approach to Magee campus
- Action to tackle skills shortages and low productivity

The 'Good Jobs' Employment Rights Bill is one of the Executive's landmark pieces of legislation. It was first announced in 2024, but still has not been introduced into the Assembly for scrutiny. It has been held up in the Executive because of concerns voiced by [business leaders](#), particularly about trade union access. Others have also warned about the impacts of zero-hours contract changes to [agri-food and seasonal work](#). The Economy Minister then [exempted most businesses](#) from these arrangements, however the rules will still apply to around 80% of workers. For such a substantial Bill, time is running out for it to be scrutinised and passed within this mandate.

The Programme for Government target of reaching 10,000 students at

Ulster University's Magee campus by 2032 – despite [good progress](#) in recent years – is now "[under review](#)". The Taskforce has led successful growth of student numbers and progress towards redeveloping the campus in recent years, but Departmental officials have raised doubts about whether the £40m a year that is required will be provided. The University's Vice-Chancellor has said the expansion is in "[jeopardy without a sustainable funding model](#)".

Higher Education institutions are warning of a decline in student numbers, [staff redundancies](#) and fewer research opportunities due to "[catastrophic](#)" budget cuts. Universities say the lack of an agreed multi-year budget, the [cap on the number of "home" students](#), and the Minister's decision not to raise fees are

contributing to this problem. Meanwhile, maintenance loans and grants for students have been [raised by inflation](#).

The Department announced the rollout of [smart electricity meters](#) from 2028. These meters will give households up-to-date information about their usage and costs. The transition cost is expected to be over £500m, which will be reflected in electricity bills. The Minister also announced £2m for the [NI Sustainable Energy Programme](#) which will support energy-saving measures for 1,000 low-income homes.

23,000 16-24-year-olds are [not in employment, education, or training](#) (NEET) in Northern Ireland, 4,000 more than last year.

The Department is working with Health and Communities on a [Pathways to Work and Wellbeing](#) project, funded by the Transformation Fund.

The Department has also invested in [skills](#) and [research](#) for advanced manufacturing, to boost productivity in the sector. Invest NI has worked to attract investment into key industries including advanced manufacturing, digital technology and life sciences, however it is [still behind its target](#) of directing 65% of investment outside Belfast. The Executive Office's draft AI Strategy recognises the technology's potential to "[drive economic growth and prosperity](#)".



Headline actions since January 2026:

- Voluntary contributions for wastewater infrastructure announced
 - Approval of Graduated Driver Licences
 - Public transport fares frozen
-

Priorities ahead:

- Unlock wastewater capacity to build homes and support developments
- Continue to work on A5 appeal
- Reduce planning times

The Infrastructure Minister announced her decision to opt for [voluntary developer contributions](#) to increase wastewater capacity. This is one part of the 'three-pronged approach' which includes securing additional investment from the Executive and passing the [Water, Sustainable Drainage and Flood Management Bill](#) (which is currently in Committee). As the contributions are voluntary, there is a risk that [development is patchwork](#), driving up private house prices in some areas while affordable housing remains blocked. [Construction groups have criticised the decision](#), claiming voluntary contributions will be insufficient to tackle the £2bn deficit faced by NI Water.

Currently, around [40% of planned social homes are stalled](#) due to insufficient

wastewater capacity, while it is estimated that wastewater challenges will cost almost [£11bn in lost growth by 2040](#).

The Department's appeal of the High Court's decision to block the redevelopment of the A5 is ongoing. The Minister has reiterated her commitment to "[pursuing the appeal in full](#)" and building the road. The original judgment stated that the development was incompatible with targets in the Climate Change Act 2022. The First Minister has suggested that her party is [open to amending the Act](#) to allow for large infrastructure projects, particularly the A5, to proceed. The redevelopment has been repeatedly stalled since it was proposed in 2007.

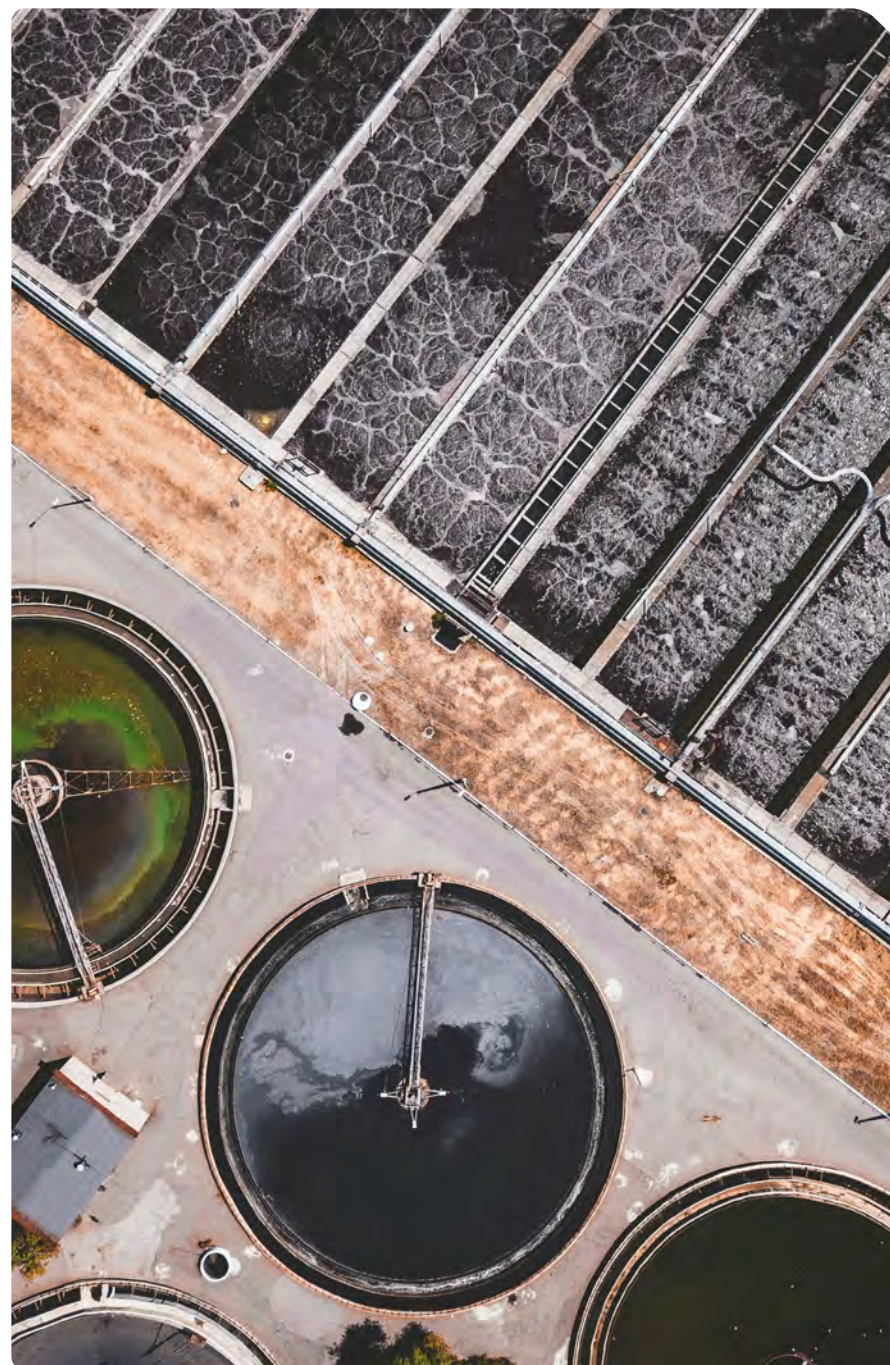
The Infrastructure Minister froze Translink

fares for the second consecutive year to make public transport an “[affordable commuting option](#)” in the context of rising oil prices. However, Translink claimed it has been underfunded by the Department by £23m in recent years, with [consistent fare freezes costing over £20m](#). As a result, Translink is [consulting on reducing services and fare discounts for young people](#) and increasing the cost of promotional fares.

[Graduated driver licences](#) will be introduced in October to reduce accidents among new and young drivers. There will be a mandatory six-month learning period, a 24-month restricted driving period and age-related restrictions for drivers

and passengers for nighttime driving. The scheme is part of a [Road Safety Strategy Action Plan](#). The Minister is also consulting on [reducing speed limits](#) to make roads safer and [published a Road Maintenance Strategy](#) to improve the quality of road repairs and resurfacing.

As part of planning reform and transformation, the Department launched an [appointment process for independent planning inspectors](#). These inspectors will be able to support the progression of planning applications and reduce backlogs in the Planning Appeals Commission. [Processing times](#) for both local and major applications remain above the target waits.



Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

September 2026

Headline actions since January 2026:

- Nutrient Action Programme (NAP) consultation launched
 - Just Transition Commission legislation approved
 - Bovine TB Transformation funding
-

Priorities ahead:

- Continued action on Lough Neagh
- Ensure the Environmental Improvement Plan is effectively delivered and on track
- Work to minimise economic and agricultural impacts of bovine TB

Relations between the Department and the Ulster Farmers' Union (UFU) have significantly deteriorated, with calls for the [Minister, Permanent Secretary and Chief Veterinary Officer to resign](#) following a controversial cull of 51 cattle in Fivemiletown. The UFU voiced a lack of confidence in the Department's independent review. The [Minister has responded strongly](#).

Following significant opposition and challenge from stakeholders, a Task and Finish Group successfully co-designed a revised [Nutrients Action Programme](#) (NAP). The draft NAP includes changes to inspection frequency for more intensive farming in return for compliance with nutrient management rules. The UFU [praised the Task and Finish Group process](#) as a way of reaching consensus and understanding among stakeholders.

An Office for Environmental Protection review of the Environmental Improvement Plan found that [“ambitions, targets and outcomes are largely off track”](#). Of 38 targets and outcomes, good progress is being made towards two, mixed progress towards six and limited progress towards 27. Three could not be measured. The OEP said many of these measures are [“within the reach”](#) of the Executive, and recognised some progress on climate change mitigation efforts. Any future changes to climate legislation to support major infrastructure projects could prove to be an additional challenge in tackling climate change.

The regulations to establish a Just Transition Commission were [approved by the Assembly in April 2026](#), which will oversee the net zero energy transition to ensure it is fair for different sectors and

communities. A process was undertaken to appoint the [16-member commission](#).

Over £49m has been invested in a [Lough Neagh Catchment Area Water Quality programme](#), including €33m from the Shared Island Initiative and €10.5m from the Irish Government's Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. This aims to improve water quality and cross-border knowledge sharing.

Other actions to tackle water quality and pollution include the withdrawal from the [Statement of Regulatory Principles and Intent](#), the [Fisheries, Aquaculture and Water Environment Bill](#) and committing [£380,000 to projects to improve water quality](#). Despite these actions, environmentalists have warned that Lough Neagh is "[becoming a dead lough](#)".

The Department received transformation and Shared Island funding for [cross-border research into bovine TB](#) (bTB).

The project will focus on interventions across wildlife, cattle and people. The Department is also [consulting on wildlife interventions](#) including culls, vaccinations and capture methods. It is believed that bTB is [costing farmers £96m per year](#) as well as significant [emotional impacts](#).

A number of key strategies have been published or opened for consultation, including on [Waste Management](#), [Marine Protection](#), [Nature Recovery](#) and a new approach to [rural communities](#). The Department is [encouraging nature-friendly farming](#) as part of its Sustainable Agriculture Programme.



Headline actions since January 2026:

- [Leading Commission on Work and Wellbeing](#)
- [Published Warm Healthy Homes Strategy](#)
- [Announced home heating oil support for low income households](#)

Priorities ahead:

- [Meet housebuilding target in Housing Supply Strategy](#)
- [Find a way forward on Casement Park](#)
- [Publish Anti-Poverty Strategy](#)

The Department for Communities is leading a cross-departmental [£16m Transformation project](#) to support people with ill health and disabilities to enter and remain in employment. The Commission on Work and Wellbeing is being chaired by Alan Milburn, who recently [authored a report](#) into economic inactivity for the UK Government. Northern Ireland's economic inactivity levels are amongst the highest in the UK at [over 26%](#). Disability and ill-health is the main factor in over a third of these cases.

The Department published its [Warm Healthy Homes Strategy](#) to tackle fuel poverty which affects almost one in four households in Northern Ireland. It will focus on low-income owner-occupiers and renters. A core part of it is the [Warm Healthy Homes Fund](#) which the

Department consulted on. It is designed to modernise energy inefficient homes through a £150m investment in its first five years.

The Minister has claimed that this will tackle the “root causes of fuel poverty”, along with the Anti-Poverty Strategy. However, a revised plan for the latter has not emerged after campaigners said last year it is “[more harmful to have a strategy that will not address poverty, than no strategy at all](#)”.

The Communities Minister also [led the Executive announcement](#) of a £36.4m targeted package to support 300,000 households on low incomes with the high cost of home heating oil. However, there have been [significant delays administering the payments](#), reducing

the positive impact of the scheme as oil prices fluctuate.

1,765 new social homes were started in 2025-26, marking a 17% increase in delivery. Despite this progress, [housing bodies have expressed concern](#) that targets will not be met. The 2025-26 capital budget was expected to support [less than half of the Department's housebuilding target](#). Wastewater infrastructure challenges have also [stalled over 40%](#) of planned social housing developments. This comes as the [social housing waiting list in Northern Ireland has surpassed 50,000](#) – a 30% increase over the last ten years – and [statutory homelessness has increased by 156.5%](#) since 2014. The Communities

Minister is [continuing to press for borrowing powers for the Housing Executive](#) to increase housing supply.

As [rents continue to rise](#), the [Co-Ownership property value limit](#) has been increased by £5,000, and over £60m has been invested to deliver [300 private rental homes](#) at affordable prices through the Intermediate Rent scheme.

Casement Park has yet again faced setbacks, as the [GAA plans to scale back its plans](#) for redevelopment, due to concerns about funding. The Communities Minister should work with the GAA, the Government, and his Executive colleagues to find a way forward on this PfG priority.



Headline actions since January 2026:

- [Proposed draft multi-year budget published \(but not agreed\)](#)
 - [Reserve claim loan to cover overspend in 2025-26](#)
 - [New discussions with UK Government about NI's finances](#)
-

Priorities ahead:

- [Agree a budget for 2026-27 as soon as possible](#)
- [Ensure sustainability of NI's finances with an end to annual crises](#)
- [Negotiate with the Treasury to seek a fair and sustainable settlement](#)

Despite hopes of a multi-year allocation, a budget for 2026-27 has still not been agreed. In January, the Finance Minister published a proposed multi-year budget for 2026-29/30, which was immediately rejected by other Executive ministers as being devastating for public services, with particular concerns about how they would afford to make pay awards. Total funding available has barely risen in cash terms from last year.

Agreement was reached with the UK Government in February to cover the 2025-26 overspend through a [£400 million reserve claim loan](#), to be repaid over three years. A subsequent Treasury-led '[Open Book Review](#)' pointed to multiple areas where NI departments could make annual savings of up to £3bn, although it was

roundly rejected by the Executive because of serious questions about the methodology.

In the absence of an agreed budget, Departments are operating via emergency powers which would allow them to spend up to 95% of last year's budget. It is unlikely this limit will ever be implemented in practice however, since to avoid it either the NI Executive or the UK Government will step in to set a budget instead.

At present, another significant overspend this year seems likely. Current pressures are [reported to be £1.5 billion](#).

Ministers have been united in calls to the UK Government for more funding. New discussions at Hillsborough in July

suggested some softening of the UK Government's approach. The NI parties are focused on making the case for funding above NI's assessed level of relative need, pointing to the funding that Scotland and Wales receive.

The Fiscal Council has warned that the recurring pattern of UK Government 'rescue packages' for Northern Ireland [risks weakening the requirement on the Executive](#) to manage within its own budget properly.

Agreeing a budget for 2026-27 is overdue and urgent. Not having a budget means less effective financial management and fewer opportunities to plan strategically for service delivery, investment, transformation, and workforce. It

generates considerable [uncertainty for organisations funded by departments](#).

Recent years have seen recurring budget crises. Any new financial deal with the UK Government must put Northern Ireland's finances on a sustainable footing for the longer term, rather than just another short-term fix. Responsibility for budget management in future needs to sit clearly with the NI Executive. A more realistic approach to difficult (and potentially unpopular) choices will be required, on public sector pay, size of the public sector, revenue raising, super parity measures, and longer-term transformation. The UK Government should ensure that conditions attached to any deal are effective.

Progress of legislation in the 2022-27 mandate

Table key:

- Awaiting or Granted Royal Assent
- First Stage (ongoing or complete)
- Second Stage (ongoing or complete)
- Committee Stage (ongoing or complete)
- Consideration Stage (ongoing or complete)
- Further Consideration Stage (ongoing or complete)
- Not yet introduced

Note: There are no Bills at an ongoing or complete Second Stage: any Bills which have passed Second Stage are now at Committee Stage.

Note: The Executive Bills are sourced from both the Legislative Programme and Assembly website's legislation page. There may be more non-Executive Bills introduced when the Assembly returns but this information is not yet publicly available.

Executive Bills



Bill	Status
16-18s in Education or Training Bill	Not yet introduced – in Legislative Programme
Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill	Awaiting Royal Assent
Adult Protection Bill	Committee Stage completed
Agriculture Bill	Royal Assent received
Budget Bill (2024)	Royal Assent received
Budget (No. 2) Bill (2024)	Royal Assent received
Budget Bill (2025)	Royal Assent received
Budget (No. 2) Bill (2025)	Royal Assent received
Budget Bill (2026)	Royal Assent received
Charities (Amendment) Bill	Committee Stage
Child Support Enforcement Bill	Royal Assent received
Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc.) Bill	Committee Stage
Deaths, Still-Births and Baby Loss Bill	Royal Assent received
Defective Premises Bill	Royal Assent received
Dilapidation Bill	Further Consideration Stage completed
Education Inspections Bill	Committee Stage
'Good Jobs' Employment Rights Bill	Not yet introduced – in Legislative Programme
Fisheries, Aquaculture and Water Environment Bill	Committee Stage
General Teaching Council Bill	Committee Stage completed
Harbours Bill	Committee Stage
Hospital Parking Charges Bill (2024)	Royal Assent received
Hospital Parking Charges Bill (2026)	Royal Assent received

Bill	Status
Housing Miscellaneous Bill	Not yet introduced – in Legislative Programme
HSC (Control of Data Processing) Bill	Not yet introduced – in Legislative Programme
Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill	Awaiting Royal Assent
Insolvency (Amendment) Bill	Royal Assent received
Justice Bill	Consideration Stage completed
Marriage and Civil Partnership Bill	Committee Stage
NI Debt Respite Scheme Bill	Not yet introduced – in Legislative Programme
Northern Ireland Fiscal Council Bill	Awaiting Royal Assent
Pension (Parity) Bill	Not yet introduced – in Legislative Programme
Pensions (Extension of Automatic Enrolment) Bill	Royal Assent received
Petroleum Exploration and Licensing (Repeal) Bill	Committee Stage
Public Authorities (Fraud, Error and Debt) (Parity) Bill	Not yet introduced – in Legislative Programme
Race Equality Bill	Not yet introduced – in Legislative Programme
Renewable Electricity Generation Bill	First Stage completed
RHI (Closure of Non-Domestic Scheme) Bill	Royal Assent received
Safe and Effective Staffing Bill	Not yet introduced – in Legislative Programme
School Uniforms (Guidelines and Allowances) Bill	Royal Assent received
Sign Language Bill	Royal Assent received
Utility Regulator (Support for Decarbonisation Preparation) Bill	Committee Stage
Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill	Committee Stage
Water, Sustainable Drainage and Flood Management Bill	Committee Stage

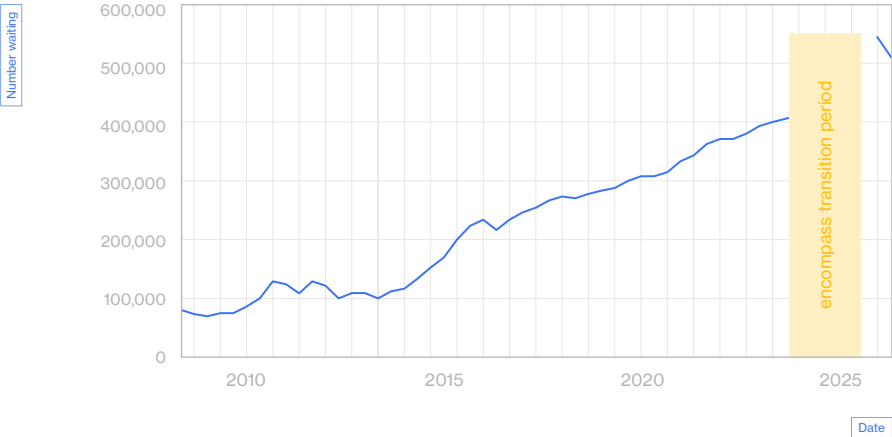
Non-Executive Bills



Bill	Status
Age Discrimination (Goods, Facilities and Services) Bill	First Stage completed
Areas with Natural Constraints (Payments) Bill	Committee Stage
Assembly Members (Independent Remuneration Board) Bill	Royal Assent received
Conversion Practices (Criminalisation) Bill	First Stage completed
Display of Flags and Emblems Bill	First Stage completed
Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill	Committee Stage completed
Housing (Amendment) Bill	First Stage completed
Hunting with Dogs Bill	Committee Stage
Irish-medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill	Committee Stage completed
Regional Balance Bill	First Stage completed
School Uniforms (Trousers) Bill	Committee Stage
Tree Protection Bill	First Stage completed

Tracker Data

Health - Chart 01



Health - Chart 01

Patients waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment (2008-2026)

Actions to reduce waiting lists are showing some signs of progress. 510,678 patients were on the waiting list at the end of March 2026, down 3.1% from the end of 2025.

Source: [Department of Health: Northern Ireland Outpatient Waiting Time Statistics 31 March 2026](#)

Health - Chart 02



Health - Chart 02

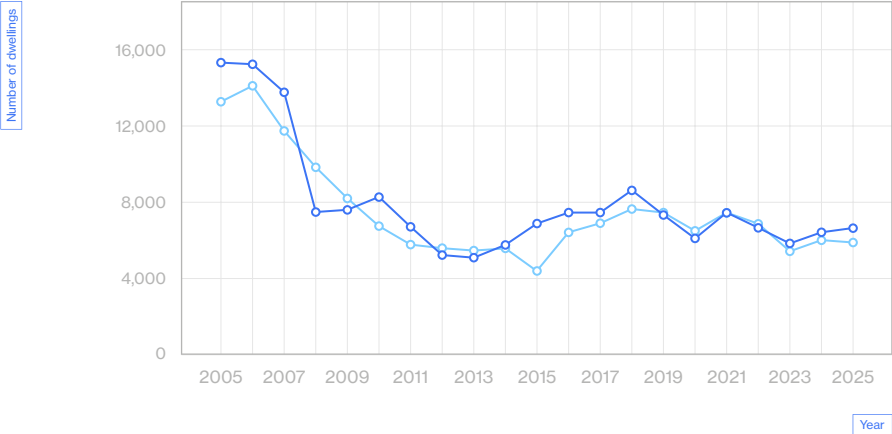
Performance against 4 hour target at Type 1 Emergency Departments (2008-2026)

Only 31% of people are seen within the four hour target in EDs, compared to almost 69% ten years ago.

Source: [Department of Health: Urgent and Emergency Care Waiting Time Statistics for Northern Ireland January-March 2026](#)

Tracker Data

Housing - Chart 03



Housing - Chart 03

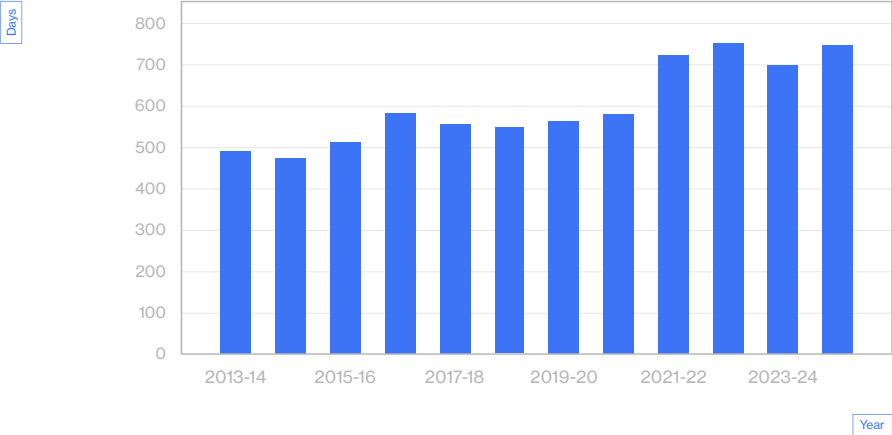
Annual new dwelling starts and completions (2005-2025)

Housebuilding has increased but still falls below what is needed to meet the target of 100,000 homes by 2039.

- New dwelling starts
- New dwelling completions

Source: [Department of Finance: New dwelling statistics Quarter 1 2026](#)

Justice - Chart 04



Justice - Chart 04

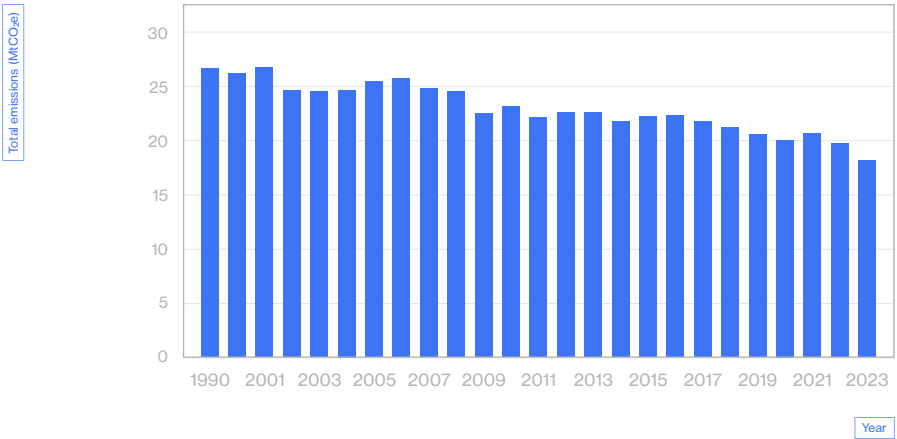
Average time taken to complete criminal cases in Crown Court (2013-14 to 2024-25)

While Crown Court times remain significantly higher than pre-Covid, the Speeding Up Justice programme has shown some early indications of reduced case volumes.

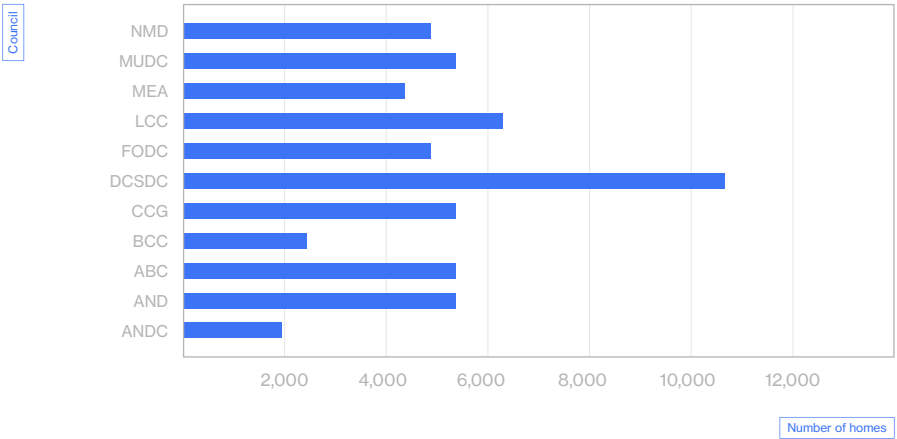
Source: [PfG Wellbeing Dashboard: Processing times for criminal cases](#)

Tracker Data

Environment - Chart 05



Infrastructure - Chart 06



Environment - Chart 05

Greenhouse gas emissions compared to 1990 baseline (2000-2023)

Emissions have reduced but progress is behind the rest of the UK. The Office for Environmental Protection was critical of the delays in publishing carbon budgets and targets.

Source: [Office for Environmental Protection: Progress in improving the natural environment in Northern Ireland 2024/25](#)

Infrastructure - Chart 06

Indicative distribution of homes impeded by wastewater capacity constraints

The Wastewater Infrastructure Group warned that insufficient wastewater capacity could cost almost £11bn in missed growth by 2040.

NMD	Newry, Mourne and Down	CCG	Causeway Coast and Glens
MUDC	Mid Ulster	BCC	Belfast City Council
MEA	Mid and East Antrim	ABC	Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon
LCC	Lisburn and Castlereagh	AND	Ards and North Down
FODC	Fermanagh and Omagh	ANDC	Antrim and Newtownabbey
DCSDC	Derry City and Strabane		

Source: [Wastewater Infrastructure Group: Wastewater constraints and the cost of delay in Northern Ireland](#)

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